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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Peace deal to end Karbi unrest

In News :

- A tripartite agreement among five insurgent groups of Assam, the Centre and the State government was signed recently.

About:

- As per the peace accord, more than 1,000 armed cadres who give up violence and join the mainstream would be suitably rehabilitated.
- The Centre will provide for a special development package of Rs. 1,000 crore over the next five years, to undertake development projects for the Karbi areas.
- The agreement proposes to give more legislative, executive, administrative and financial powers to the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC).
 - The Consolidated Fund of the State of Assam will be amended to meet the resources of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council
- The Government of Assam will set up a Karbi Welfare Council to focus on the development of the Karbi people living outside the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council area.

Importance:

- The agreement while proposing for greater autonomy for the Karbi Anglong region which will help protect the identity, language and culture of the Karbi people also ensures the integrity of Assam.
- This balancing of interests of all the stakeholders will help end years of violence in the Karbi Anglong region.
- Also this peace agreement along with the earlier peace accords like the one with National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), Bru accord, Bodo Peace accord will go a long way in ending the vicious cycle of insurgency and violence in North east India and enable the peaceful development of the region.

2. 'Breakthrough' infections a concern?

In News:

- In the light of the rise in daily COVID-19 infections in states such as Kerala and Maharashtra, which are among the States with a high rate of vaccination, there are growing concerns about the rise in 'breakthrough infections'.
- Internationally, too Israel and the U.S., despite high vaccination coverage, continue to report fresh cases.

Breakthrough infections:

- A case of Covid-19 that arises in someone who's been fully immunized – that is, 14 days after their final dose of the vaccine – is known as a breakthrough infection. The term implies that the virus "broke through a protective barrier provided by the vaccine."
- The two-week window is the time it takes for the body to produce necessary antibodies following a shot of the vaccine.

Role of variants:

- The new variants of the coronavirus- Delta variant, Delta-Plus and Kappa variant seem to be leading to the breakthrough infections. These mutations mostly help the virus escape detection by antibodies.

Concerns:

- Vaccines are being labelled as the ultimate tool against the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the breakthrough infections have led to questions on the efficacy of the vaccines.
- The bigger concern, however, is that those with a 'breakthrough infection', under the belief that they are fully protected, may be less stringent with using masks and could be carriers of infection.

Need for continued emphasis on vaccination:

- Notably, the infection rate is much higher in the unvaccinated population rather than the vaccinated population. Hence increasing vaccination coverage will no doubt help arrest the spread of the pandemic.
- There is evidence that vaccination may make illness less severe for those who are vaccinated and still get sick. The risk of infection, hospitalization, and death are all much lower in vaccinated compared to unvaccinated people. Breakthrough infections are not translating into serious disease requiring hospitalisation.

3. Nipah surfaces in Kozhikode

In News:

- Nipah has surfaced in Kerala for the third time after a gap of one year.
- Nipah virus is a zoonotic virus (it is transmitted from animals to humans—such as bats or pigs) and can also be transmitted through contaminated food or directly between people.
 - Fruit bats of the Pteropodidae family are the natural host of Nipah virus.
- Although Nipah virus has caused only a few known outbreaks in Asia, it infects a wide range of animals and causes severe disease and death in people, making it a public health concern.
 - In infected people, it causes a range of illnesses from asymptomatic (subclinical) infection to acute respiratory illness and fatal encephalitis. The case fatality rate is estimated at 40% to 75%.
- There is no treatment or vaccine available for either people or animals. The primary treatment for humans is supportive care.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

4. New I-T rules on PF savings

In News:

- The Finance Ministry has notified new Income Tax rules to impose a fresh tax on Provident Fund (PF) savings.
- This is in line with the 2021-22 Budget speech announcement wherein the Finance Minister had proposed taxing the income on PF contributions.

Background:

Employee provident fund:

- Employee provident fund (EPF) accounts are mandatory for employees earning up to Rs. 15,000 a month in firms employing over 20 workers, with

12% of the basic pay and dearness allowance deducted as employees' contribution and another 12% remitted by the employer.

- Government as well as private sector employees are allowed to make voluntary contributions over and above the statutory deductions into the General Provident Fund or the Employee provident fund respectively.

Impact of the proposal:

- EPF accounts managed by the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) and the General Provident Fund (GPF) will be impacted.
- Also the large companies that manage the retirement savings of their workforce in-house through 'exempt' EPF trusts, will also be impacted.
- Public Provident Fund (PPF) accounts or the retirement savings accumulated under the National Pension Scheme will not be affected by the new tax.

Government's rationale:

- Notably till year's Budget, all income on provident fund savings was exempt from tax. This provision was aimed at helping people retire with an adequate financial resource base.
- However this was being misused by high net worth individuals to evade taxation by availing tax concessions and was not the intended purpose of the PF savings scheme. This necessitated the proposal for taxing provident fund savings beyond a certain threshold.

5. Soil microbes can make for a greener revolution

Context:

- Given the increasing calls for sustainable agriculture practices, the use of microbes in improving crop quality and quantity is gaining traction. In this regard, the article discusses some important associated terminologies.

Rhizomicrobiome:

- Diverse microbial communities are symbiotically associated with plants as endophytes and epiphytes and rhizospheric communities.
 - Rhizosphere is the area around plant roots influenced by root exudates.
 - The rhizospheric (root zone) communities are called the rhizomicrobiome.

Rhizobacteria:

- Rhizobacteria are root-associated bacteria that form symbiotic relationships with many plants. Though parasitic varieties of rhizobacteria exist, the term usually refers to bacteria that form a relationship beneficial for both parties.
- Beneficial rhizobacteria have been utilized to improve water and nutrient uptake and function as growth promoters and also helps improve abiotic and biotic stress tolerance of plants.
 - Some rhizobacteria are able to enhance the recycling of plant nutrients and decrease the use of chemical fertilization.
 - Some rhizobacteria help plants ward off pathogens that cause diseases of the root. They may even trigger systemic resistance to a pathogen throughout the plant.

Mycorrhiza:

- A mycorrhiza is a mutual symbiotic association (mutualism) between a fungus and a plant. The term mycorrhiza refers to the role of the fungus in the plant's rhizosphere, its root system. Mycorrhizae play important roles in plant nutrition, soil biology, and soil chemistry.
- The root-invading fungus gains nutrients made by the plant, and the plants get difficult-to-find minerals like phosphorus from the microbe.

Additional information:

Hybrid vigour:

- A vast majority of commercially grown crops are hybrids, where two inbred lines are crossed, with their first-generation hybrid offspring exhibiting a vigour that is lacking in either of its parents. This property of hybrid vigour is called heterosis.

6. Punjab breathes innovation, finds gainful uses for paddy stubble

Background:

- To prevent stubble burning practice during the paddy harvesting season, Punjab state government is promoting paddy straw as a source of energy that can be used in mills, distilleries and breweries through fiscal and non fiscal incentives.
 - It is estimated that over 15 million tonnes of paddy straw is burnt in the open fields ahead of the winter sowing.

- The new measures envisages an ex-situ management strategy for paddy straw and thus promotes the paddy straw as a resource rather than a waste by product.

For detailed information on this topic and the significance of this intervention refer to the following article:

Challenges:

- Paddy straw contains a lot of mud and cleaning it will require considerable time and resources. Only a good price for the stubble will have the farmers interested in selling paddy straw to the prospective buyers.
- Also, the paddy straw contains silica, and hence the metallurgy for boilers needs to be chrome-based, which makes it costlier for industries to make use of the paddy straw as a fuel source.

7. INSPIRESat-1 primed for launch

- INSPIRESat-1 CubeSat, developed under the International Satellite Program in Research and Education (INSPIRE), is ready for launch.
 - A constellation of earth and space-weather observation satellites is envisaged under the INSPIRE programme.
- The small satellite will be launched aboard an upcoming Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) mission of the Indian Space Research Organisation.
- It is a collaborative effort by the Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics at the University of Colorado Boulder in the US, National Central University, Taiwan, Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology (IIST).
- The satellite, which will be placed in a low earth orbit, is equipped with a Compact Ionosphere Probe for studying the earth's ionosphere.

8. '28% of 1,38,000 assessed species face extinction'

- As per the assessment made by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for its survival watchlist, some 28% of the 1,38,374 species assessed by it are now at high risk of extinction.
- While habitat loss, overexploitation and illegal trade are the main threats to the global biodiversity, climate change is now coming up as a direct threat as well.

- The IUCN also officially launched its “green status” – the first global standard for assessing species recovery and measuring conservation impacts.

9. App store challenge

South Korean law on app-store operators:

- Recently, the South Korean Parliament passed an amendment to the country’s Telecommunications Business Act, aimed at regulating dominant app store operators like Alphabet’s Google and Apple. Some of the important provisions involve:
 - Prohibiting the app store operators from forcing app developers to use their in-store payment systems. The aim of this legislation seems to be to prevent Apple and Google from charging commissions on payments made in their app stores.
 - Google’s Play Store and Apple’s App Store strictly regulate how apps in their environment charge money from their users. They also charge a 30% commission on all purchases made through the app store.
 - The law empowers the government to intervene in payment disputes within app stores.
 - The new law also empowers the government to hold the app store operators accountable for delaying the publishing of apps or deleting them.

Significance:

- Dubbed the “anti-Google” law, the South Korean law is the first legal restriction on Google and Apple’s control over their app stores. This could become a template for the many countries that have been looking at ways to control the clout of these companies that charge a commission from the digital sales of almost everyone from the gaming industry to the online publishers.
- The new law will help regulate the monopoly of the two app stores and help level the playing field for smaller companies.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. India and Russia friendship has stood the test of time, says Modi

In News: Article talks about the changing contours of India Russia relations in the backdrop of growing closeness between China and Russia.

Russia - China and the Quad -

- Russia has been critical of the concept of Indo pacific and the Quadrilateral security dialogue.
- Russia's foreign minister had termed Quad as an Asian NATO.
- Russia thinks that Quad and Indo - pacific conception is primarily an American initiative designed to contain both China and Russia.
- It is in favour of the concept of Asia Pacific.

Asia Pacific and Indo Pacific -

- The 'Asia Pacific' relates to that part of Asia which lies in the Pacific Ocean.
- It is an idea proposed and supported by Asia's Pacific powers who sought a term to describe their common region.
- The Asia Pacific, therefore, has three major constituents: north-east Asia, south-east Asia and Oceania (South Western Pacific). India is not a part of the region.
- The Asia-Pacific is more of an economic conception, rather than a security related notion.

Indo - Pacific -

- The Indo-Pacific, on the other hand, is an integrated theatre that combines the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, and the land masses that surround them.

- Even though it is still an evolving concept, most analysts see it as an idea that captures the shift in power and influence from the West to the East.
- It is both a strategic as well as an economic domain comprising important sea-lines of communication that connect the littorals of the two oceans.
- Since it is primarily a maritime space, the Indo-Pacific is associated with maritime security and cooperation.

- Russian ambassador to India had recently advised India to take a “larger look at Chinese foreign policies”, while describing the Indo-Pacific strategy as an effort to revive the Cold War mentality.
- Russian foreign minister recently visited Pakistan. This is the first time a Russian Minister has done so.
- In this background India is concerned about Russia's uncritical advocacy of China's global Vision.

Emerging geopolitical issues and India - Russia relations -

Alignment with US -

- India aligning with US in the Quad in the Indo-Pacific strategy is one of the key issues between India and Russia.
- India insists that its Indo-Pacific initiatives seek a cooperative order, that the Quad dialogue (of India, Japan, Australia and the U.S.) is not the nucleus of a politico-military alliance.

Russia - China Bonhomie -

- India has raised concerns about Russia's China embrace, encompassing close political, economic and defense cooperation
- Russia accounted for 77% of China's arms imports in 2016-20.

- India has raised apprehensions about their technology- and intelligence-sharing.

- Further speculations are rife about a future Russia-China military alliance.

Russia - Pakistan angle -

- Russian foreign minister recently visited Pakistan. This is the first time a Russian Minister has done so.
- He highlighted that Russia would strengthen Pakistan's "counter-terrorism capability". This is being seen as a step to increase the Russian weapon supply to Pakistan.
- Russia is Pakistan's second largest defense supplier, accounting for 6.6% of its arms imports in 2016-20.
- Further both are cooperating on joint "counter-terrorism" drills and sharing perspectives on military tactics and strategic doctrines.

New cold war -

US is taking on both China and Russia thereby driving the two together .
And this accelerating the move to bipolarity towards a new cold war.

Concerns for India - Russia ties

- Russia supplied 49% of India's arms imports in 2016-20. The share although still high has been falling off late.
- Concerns have been raised regarding the potential technology secrets that can be shared with India's adversaries like Pakistan and China because of improving relations of Russia with Pak and China.
- Further the there is fear of attracting sanctions from America under its CAATSA law.

Geography in geopolitics -

- The Eurasian landmass to India's north is dominated by Russia and China.
- Strategic and security interests in Central Asia, West Asia and Afghanistan dictate our engagement with the region and the

connectivity projects linking it, like the International North-South Transport Corridor through Iran.

- For pursuing these interests, India will have to effectively manage its relations with Russia.

Way forward

- The real 'strategic triangle' in the maritime domain will be that between India, US and China.
- Russia is yet to realise that it will gain immensely from the multilateralism that the Indo-Pacific seeks to promote.
- Being China's junior partner will undermine Moscow's great-power ambitions.
- Russian policymakers are obsessively preoccupied with Russia's 'status' rivalry with the U.S. And this largely impacted Russia's view of India China relations.
- As such India is interested in a normalisation of relations between US and Russia, While diminishing Russia's propensity to coordinate its South Asian policies with China.



2. World Social Protection Report 2020-22

International Labour Organization (ILO) released the World Social Protection Report 2020-22 recently.

Major Highlights:

- 4.1 billion people (over half of all people in the world) were living without any social safety net of any kind.
- In 2020, only 46.9% of the global population benefitted from by at least one social protection benefit.
 - Social protection includes access to health care and income security measures related especially to old age, unemployment, sickness, disability, work injury, maternity or the loss of the main breadwinner in a family, as well as extra support for families with children.

- Only 30.6% of the working-age population are legally covered by comprehensive social security systems.
- There are significant inequalities across and within regions:
 - The coverage rates in Europe and Central Asia (83.9%) and the Americas (64.3%) are above the global average.
 - Asia and the Pacific (44.1%), Arab States (40%) and Africa (17.4%) have far more marked coverage gaps.

3. International Labour Organization (ILO):

- ILO was founded in October 1919 under the League of Nations.
- It is the first and oldest specialized agency of the UN.
- It is a member of United Nations Development Group, a coalition of UN organization aimed at helping meet the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Objective: To advance social and economic justice through setting international labour standards.
- The ILO's international labour standards are broadly aimed at:
 - Ensuring accessible, productive, and sustainable work worldwide in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity.

ILO works towards:

- Effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining
- Elimination of forced or compulsory labour
- Abolition of child labour
- Elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation

Members: 187 countries

Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland

4. CJI flags Communal Content in Media

The Supreme Court expressed serious concern over the fact that false news is spread through social media platforms and digital portals with few checks.

Major Highlights:

- The SC was hearing petitions highlighting how some media outlets aired communal content linking the spread of the coronavirus to a Tablighi Jamaat meet held at Nizamuddin in Delhi.

The Chief Justice of India remarked that:

- Certain sections of the media communalised everything and this would ultimately result in giving the country a bad name.
- There is a lack of accountability on the part of social media platforms.
- The social media platforms only responded to powerful people, while complaints made by ordinary people, institutions and judges over content were ignored.

Role of Media in promoting communal harmony:

- Media acts as a fourth pillar of the society. It reaches people widely and is the source of information for society regarding any issue be it local, regional or global.
- Media acts as an influential and instrumental tool with regards to building confidence or promoting mistrust among people on issues related to national security
- The primary responsibility of the Media is of creating an informed citizenry in order to empower society and strengthen democracy.
- It should play an active role in enhancing social, religious and communal harmony for the betterment of the community, the society and the nation.

Recommendations:

- Adopt appropriate language to raise awareness: Increasing awareness will likely deter manipulative behaviours and increase pressure on platforms to take action.
- Creation of media evaluation tools: Media evaluation tools can provide information on media bias and news quality. Information on bias/quality can help citizens make informed news-related choices.
- Training journalists: Journalists could be trained to reduce instances of inadvertent amplification or manipulation.
- Transparency of social media platforms: Increasing the transparency of social media platforms and fixing accountability in case of manipulation.

Key Facts:

- The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, provide a redressal mechanism and timely resolution of grievances of users of social media and over-the-top platforms.
- The rules require these platforms to appoint a grievance redressal officer who is a resident of India.

5. Durand Line

The Afghans have opposed the fence erected by Pakistan along the Durand Line.

The issue has sowed distrust between Afghans and Pakistan for decades, and is a potential flashpoint in relations between the Taliban and Pakistan.

Durand Line:

- The Durand Line is the international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- It was fixed by British civil servant Sir Henry Mortimer Durand and the then Afghan Emir Abdur Rahman Khan in 1893.
- The length of the Durand Line is 2670 km. It is internationally recognised as the western border of Pakistan.
- It was established in order to fix the respective spheres of influence and also to improve the diplomatic ties between the British establishment in India and the Afghan Kingdom.
- The line cuts through the Pashtun homelands of the region. The line divides ethnic Pashtuns and Balochs, who live on both sides of the border.
- The borderline is deemed as one of the most dangerous in modern times. The ongoing conflict in the Waziristan region, located on the Pakistan side of the Durand Line, has become a hub of drug trafficking, kidnapping and general lawlessness.

What is the issue?

- Pakistan started building a fence along the Durand Line in 2017.
- The \$500 million fencing is two sets of chain-link fences with a 6-ft gap, filled with concertina wire coils.
- It is 11.6 ft high on the Pakistani side, and 13 ft on the Afghan side.
- It is fitted with surveillance cameras and infrared detectors, and punctuated by 1,000 watchtowers.

- Cross-border movement will only be allowed through 16 formally designated points after the completion of the project.
- Pakistan believes that in the new situation in Afghanistan, the fence will help control any spillover from unrest and chaos there.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

6. Blue straggler

Indian researchers have carried out the first-ever comprehensive analysis of blue stragglers.

- Blue stragglers are a class of stars on open or globular clusters that are bigger and bluer than the rest of the stars at the main sequence turnoff point for the cluster.
 - Main sequence is the stage where a star spends most of its existence.
 - The turnoff point for a star refers to the point where it leaves the main sequence after the exhaustion of its main fuel.
- Blue stragglers were first discovered by Allan Sandage in 1953 while performing photometry of the stars.

Background:

- A bunch of stars born at the same time from the same cloud form a star cluster. As time passes, each star evolves differently depending on its mass.
- The most massive and bright stars evolve and move off the main sequence creating a bend in their track, known as the turnoff.
- Stars above this bend or brighter and hotter stars are not expected in a cluster, as they leave the main sequence to become red giants.
- But in 1953, it was found that some stars seem to be hotter than the turnoff of the parent cluster. These stars present in the clusters were straggling above the turnoff and termed Blue Stragglers.
- The only probable way these stars can still be present in these clusters is if they have somehow acquired extra mass along the way while on the main sequence.

Highlights of the study:

- The researchers compared the mass of blue stragglers to the mass of turnoff stars (which are the most massive 'normal' stars in the cluster) and predicted the formation mechanisms of blue stragglers.

- Blue stragglers stars are primarily present in the older and massive star clusters. Due to their large mass, they are segregated towards the centre of the clusters.

Scientists have found that:

- Half of the blue stragglers in their sample are formed through mass transfer from a close binary companion star.
- One third are likely formed through collisions of two stars.
- Remaining are formed through interactions of more than two stars.

Key Fact:

Main Sequence:

- The main sequence is the stage where a star spends most of its existence. Relative to other stages in a star's life, main sequence stage is extremely long.
- Our Sun took about 20 million years to form but will spend about 10 billion years as a main sequence star before evolving into a red giant.

7. New Development Bank (NDB)

The New Development Bank (NDB) has approved Bangladesh as its new member.

- The negotiation initiated to expand its membership in 2020 has approved the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and Bangladesh as its first new member countries.
- Since the beginning of its operations, NDB has approved about 80 projects totalling a portfolio of USD 30 billion.
- Projects in areas such as transport, water and sanitation, clean energy, digital infrastructure, social infrastructure and urban development are within the scope of the Bank.

8. PMI signals fastest rebound in services activity in 18 months SC

Details about PMI

Published by: PMI Data is published by Japanese firm Nikkei but compiled and constructed by Markit Economics (for the US, it is the Institute of Supply Management).

Source of Information:

- PMI is calculated on the basis of information received from companies on various factors that represent demand conditions. It is very different from IIP which is indicative of actual production. The PMI takes in responses from a company on a monthly basis on whether there has been improvement, deterioration or no change for a set of parameters relative to the previous month.
- It takes into account the following parameters for the calculation: new orders, output, employment, supplier's delivery and stock of purchases. This questionnaire is administered to 500 private sector companies and the comprehensive score is arrived at.
- The PMI is constructed separately for manufacturing and services sector. But the manufacturing sector holds more importance.

Understanding the Index Value:

- A figure above 50 denotes expansion in business activity. Anything below 50 denotes contraction. Higher the difference from this mid-point greater the expansion or contraction. The rate of expansion can also be judged by comparing the PMI with that of the previous month data.
- If the figure is higher than the previous month's then the economy is expanding at a faster rate. If it is lower than the previous month then it is growing at a lower rate.

Importance of PMI

The PMI is usually released at the start of the month, much before most of the official data on industrial output, manufacturing and GDP growth becomes available. It is, therefore, considered a good leading indicator of economic activity.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. With reference to the 'Blue Straggler Stars', consider the following statements:

1. These are unusually hot and bright stars.
2. They appear to violate standard theories of stellar evolution.

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

- **Blue Straggler Stars** are **unusually hot and bright stars found** in the cores of ancient star clusters known as **globulars. Hence statement 1 is correct.**
 - Most are located at least several thousand light-years away from the sun, and most are around 12 billion years old or more.
- Blue straggler stars **appear to violate standard theories of stellar evolution.**
 - Under standard stellar evolution, a bunch of stars born at the same time from the same cloud form a star cluster.
 - Star formation happens in interstellar molecular clouds: opaque clumps of very cold gas and dust.
 - As time passes, **each star evolves differently depending on its mass**, in which all stars born at the same time should lie on a clearly **defined curve in the Hertzsprung-Russell diagram.**
 - In the **case of a blue straggler star**, they evolve and move off the main sequence creating a bend in their track, **known as the turnoff.**
 - Since blue stragglers often lie well off this curve, they **may undergo abnormal stellar evolution.**
 - **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

2. Consider the following statements:

1. Terrapins are sea turtles.
2. Olive ridley turtles are the most abundant sea turtles found in the world.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer ; B

Explanation

- Sea turtles are larger in size compared to **terrapins (freshwater turtles)** and tortoises. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- There are five species in Indian waters i.e. Olive Ridley, Green turtle, Loggerhead, Hawksbill, Leatherback.
 - **Olive ridley turtles are the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles** found in the world, inhabiting warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
 - The Olive Ridley, Leatherback and Loggerhead are listed as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
 - The Hawksbill turtle is listed as 'Critically Endangered' and the Green Turtle is listed as 'Endangered'.
 - They are protected in Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, under Schedule I.

3. Consider the following statements:

1. Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) is a statutory body under the Ministry of Finance.
2. The Raghuram Rajan committee proposed the creation of FSDC.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : B

Explanation

- Recently, the Finance Minister chaired the 24th meeting of the **Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)**.
 - FSDC is a **non-statutory apex council** under the Ministry of Finance constituted by the Executive Order in 2010. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- The **Raghuram Rajan committee** (2008) on financial sector reforms first **proposed the creation of FSDC. Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
 - It is chaired by the Finance Minister and its members include the heads of all Financial Sector Regulators (RBI, SEBI, PFRDA & IRDA), Finance Secretary, Secretary of Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Secretary of Department of Financial Services (DFS), and Chief Economic Adviser.
- In 2018, the government reconstituted FSDC to include the Minister of State responsible for the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Secretary of Department of Electronics and Information Technology, Chairperson of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) and the Revenue Secretary.
 - FSDC sub-committee is headed by the Governor of RBI.
 - The Council can invite experts to its meeting if required.

4. Consider the following statements:

1. Bonn Challenge is a global effort to restore deforested and degraded land.
2. The LEAF coalition is a public-private effort to protect tropical forests.

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

- **“Bonn Challenge”** is a global effort to bring 150 million hectares of the world’s **deforested and degraded land into restoration** by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**

- LEAF (Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest Finance) Coalition was announced at the Leaders Summit on Climate, 2021.
 - The LEAF coalition will be one of the largest ever public-private efforts to protect tropical forests and intend to mobilize at least USD 1 billion in financing to countries committed to protecting their tropical forests.
 - It is a collective of the governments of the USA, United Kingdom and Norway. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

5. Consider the following statements with respect to Phytoremediation

1. It is an autotrophic system powered by solar energy.
2. It is the process of using green plants to treat and control wastes in water, soil, and air.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : c

Phytoremediation

- It is a plant-based approach, which involves the use of plants to extract and remove elemental pollutants or lower their bioavailability in soil.
- Plants have the abilities to absorb ionic compounds in the soil even at low concentrations through their root system.
- There are advantages of using phytoremediation, which include:
 1. It is an autotrophic system powered by solar energy, therefore, simple to manage, and the cost of installation and maintenance is low
 2. It can reduce exposure of the pollutants to the environment and ecosystem
 3. It can be applied over a large-scale field and can easily be disposed
 4. It prevents erosion and metal leaching through stabilizing heavy metals, reducing the risk of spreading of contaminants
 5. It can also improve soil fertility by releasing various organic matters to the soil.

6. Consider the following statements with respect to Singhori Wildlife Sanctuary:

1. It is located in Uttarakhand.
2. Project Tiger was launched in Singhori Wildlife Sanctuary.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Singhori Wildlife Sanctuary is located in Madhya Pradesh.
- Project Tiger was launched in Jim Corbett National Park of Uttarakhand in 1973.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1Q. The accounting of contribution of informal sector in the national economy is crucial, not only for the sector itself, but for the entire economy . Discuss (250 words)

Approach

- Define informal economy.
- Examine the contribution of informal sector and why its accounting is important.
- Give conclusion.

2Q. In shedding “hesitations of history”, India’s foreign policy seems to be moving away from “non-alignment.” Comment. (250 words)

Approach

- Briefly describe policy of Non alignment and its context.
- Talk about the historical stand India has taken over the years.
- Mention what led to the recent shift in the policy.

Give examples showing change not country specific – having broad contours.

Conclude by giving India's balanced approach.

