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THE HINDU

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. NEET Unending dilemma

The Tamil Nadu Assembly has passed a bill exempting the State from the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to undergraduate (UG) medical courses.

Permanent Exemption for NEET

- The Bill exempts medical aspirants in Tamil Nadu from taking NEET examination for admission to UG degree courses in Indian medicine, dentistry and homeopathy.
- Instead, it seeks to provide admission to such courses on the basis of marks obtained in the qualifying examination, through “Normalization methods”.
- The aim of the Bill is to ensure “social justice, uphold equality and equal opportunity, protect all vulnerable student communities from being discriminated”.
- It seeks to bring vulnerable student communities to the “mainstream of medical and dental education and in turn ensure a robust public health care across the state, particularly the rural areas”.

Why TN is against NEET?

- **Non-representative:** TN opposes because NEET undermined the diverse societal representation in MBBS and higher medical studies.
- **Disfavors the poor:** It has favored mainly the affordable and affluent sections of the society and thwarting the dreams of underprivileged social groups.
- **Exams for the elite:** It considers NEET not a fair or equitable method of admission since it favored the rich and elite sections of society.
- **Healthcare concerns:** If continued, the rural and urban poor may not be able to pursue medical courses.

Can any state legislate against NEET?

- Admissions to medical courses are traceable to entry 25 of List III (Concurrent List), Schedule VII of the Constitution.
- Therefore, the State can also enact a law regarding admission and amend any Central law on admission procedures.

Views of the stakeholders appointed by TN

- A majority of stakeholders were not in favor of the NEET requirement.
- NEET only worked against underprivileged government school students, and had profited coaching centres and affluent students.
- NEET had not provided any special mechanism for testing the knowledge and aptitude of the students.
- The higher secondary examination of the State board itself was an ample basis for the selection of students for MBBS seats.

A move inspired by a SC Judgement

- This thinking of the State may be due to the observation made by the Supreme Court in the selection process of postgraduate (PG) courses in medicine.
- The Medical Council of India (MCI) had prescribed certain regulations providing reservations for in-service candidates.
- The Supreme Court struck down regulation 9(c) made by the MCI on the ground of the exercise of power beyond its statute.

Not a similar case

- It must be remembered that the Supreme Court was only dealing with a regulation framed by the MCI.
- The requirement of NEET being a basic requirement for PG and UG medical courses has now been statutorily incorporated under Section 10D of the Indian Medical Council (IMC) Act.
- When the Tamil Nadu government issued an order in 2017 providing for the reservation of 85% of the seats for students passed out from the State board it was struck down by the Madras High Court.
- The introduction of internal reservation for government school students is under challenge before the Madras High Court. Similarly, NEET as a requirement is also pending in the Supreme Court.
- Unless these two issues are decided, NEET cannot be removed by a State amendment.

The bill cannot be passed

- The present move to pass a fresh Bill on the same lines is most likely to meet the same fate.
- The President refused to give his assent to this bill.
- It is significant that no other State in India has sought an exemption from NEET and, therefore, exempting Tamil Nadu alone may not be possible.
- Even among the seats allotted to the State, there is no bar for students from other States from competing or selecting colleges in Tamil Nadu.

The bigger question

- The question is not whether the State government can amend a law falling under the Concurrent List.
- The question is whether the State government can exempt Section 10D of the IMC Act, which is a parliamentary law that falls under the Central List (Entry 66).
- Moreover, the Supreme Court has also upheld NEET as a requirement.
- Mere statistics highlighting that a majority of the stakeholders do not want NEET in Tamil Nadu is not an answer for exempting the examination.

Again, it is State and Centre are at crossroads

- Normally, a Bill requires assent from the Governor to become a law. Stalin's contention is that this Bill deals with education, which is a Concurrent List subject.
- Admissions to medical courses fall under Entry 25 of List III, Schedule VII of the Constitution, and therefore the state is competent to regulate the same.
- Yet, as far as matters relating to the determination of standards for higher education are concerned, the central government has the power to amend a clause or repeal an Act.
- So, just the passing of the Bill doesn't enable the students to get exempted from writing NEET.
- Already, Union Higher Education Secretary Amit Khare has held that if any State wants to opt out of the exam, it has to seek permission from the Supreme Court.

Options for Tamil Nadu

- Data is necessary only when there is power to legislate on the subject concerned.
- Since the Bill, which will become an Act only after the President's nod, will come into effect only from the next academic year, the battle for and against the NEET requirement will continue in courts.
- Hopefully, the courts will determine the legality and have a definite solution to the question of medical admissions within the next year.
- Till such time, students who wrote NEET will fill the seats under the State quota.

Way forward: Preventing Commercialization of Medical Education

- The time may also have come to examine whether NEET has met its purposes of improving standards and curbing commercialization and profiteering.
- Under current norms, one quite low on the merit rank can still buy a medical seat in a private college, while those ranked higher but only good enough to get a government quota seat in a private institution can be priced out of the system.
- The Centre should do something other than considering an exemption to Tamil Nadu.

- It has to conceive a better system that will allow a fair admission process while preserving inter se merit and preventing rampant commercialization.

2. Hardly the India-China century Deng envisioned

In News:

Fifteen months after the India-China stand-off at the Galwan Valley, the relations between the two countries are at their lowest.

About:

- There have always been political tensions between the two countries over:
 - each country's territorial claims over land controlled by the other
 - such long-term problems as China's "all-weather" alliance with Pakistan
 - hospitality to the Dalai Lama, who was granted refuge in India as he fled Tibet in 1959

But neither country had allowed these tensions to overwhelm them.

China had declared that the border dispute could be left to future generations to resolve, and India had endorsed the One China policy, refusing to support Tibetan secessionism while limiting official reverence for the Dalai Lama to his status as a spiritual leader.

Trade Relations:

- India has always made an effort to relegate the border problem to enable trade relations with China to flourish. The bilateral trade is now worth close to \$100 billion.
- India has also made it clear that it was unwilling to join in any United States-led containment of China.
- Ironically, prior to the Galwan stand-off, 2020 was supposed to be a landmark year for the two countries' bilateral relations.
 - In October 2019 in Mahabalipuram, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had pledged to take bilateral relations to greater heights.
 - To mark the 70th anniversary of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries, they announced they would conduct 70 joint activities, including further improving their growing trade, supporting scholarly research into their ancient civilizational links, and even exchanging military delegations, in a grand show of Sino-Indian cooperation.

Both the countries had indeed developed multiple avenues of engagement. China had grown to become one of India's largest trading relationships.

Indian Prime Minister had lifted residual restrictions on bilateral Chinese investment in strategic sectors of the Indian economy (notably ports, airports, power generation and telecoms technology), so that by 2020, Chinese investment (current and planned) stood at about \$26 billion with infrastructure projects accounting for about half the total.

Multilateral Forums:

- India engages with China diplomatically in the BRICS (an association of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), as well as conducting annual summits of RIC (Russia-India-China).
- India is an enthusiastic partner in the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank (NDB).

Concerns:

- The People's Liberation Army has used the situation to repeatedly undertake minor military incursions, inflict small-scale military setbacks on India, take a few square kilometres of territory along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) for local tactical purposes, and then declare peace.
- Mutual disengagements are duly announced, both sides claim the crisis is over, but China establishes and fortifies its new deployment.
- These mini-crises always end with the Chinese in a better position on the ground than before with each incident establishing a new normal on the LAC.

The Chinese strategy:

- In the Galwan clash, the Chinese troops seem to have been engaged in a tactical move to advance their positions along areas of the LAC that it desires, in order to threaten Indian positions and prohibit patrols.
- China's strategy seems to be to consolidate the LAC where it wants it, so that an eventual border settlement that takes these new realities into account will be in its favour.
- After the recent incursions, the Chinese now reportedly control over 900 square kilometres of area in Ladakh along the LAC.
 - Rather than merely patrolling, they have established a fixed presence in these areas well beyond China's own 'Claim Line'.
 - Occupied the Finger Heights near Pangong Tso Lake.
 - Pitched hundreds of tents, constructed concrete structures and built additional kilometres of road along the LAC.

The objective seems to be to extend Chinese troop presence to the intersection of the Galwan river and the Shyok river, which would make the Galwan Valley off bounds to India.

The Chinese have constructed permanent structures in the area of their intrusion and issued statements claiming that sovereignty over the Galwan valley has always belonged to China.

India's options:

- India has reinforced its military assets on the LAC to prevent deeper incursions and hopes to press China to restore the status quo ante through either diplomatic or military means.
 - Chinese and Indian officials are currently engaged in diplomatic and military-to-military dialogue to ease tensions, but de-escalation has been stalled for months.

India has responded with largely symbolic acts of economic retaliation, banning Chinese apps in India on grounds of data security.

It is likely that Chinese companies will be barred from various lucrative opportunities in the vast Indian market.

- Huawei and ZTE have already been barred from the ongoing trials to build India's 5G telecom infrastructure.

India has also reimposed tighter limits on Chinese investment in projects such as railways, motorways, public-sector construction projects, and telecoms.

Yet, India is far too dependent on China for other vital imports such as pharmaceuticals, active ingredients to make them, automotive parts and microchips, all needed by Indian manufacturers.

- India's dependence on China for its non-consumption economy remains high.
- Imports from China have become indispensable for India's exports to the rest of the world.
- Various manufacturing inputs, industrial equipment and components, and even some technological know-how come from China; eliminating them could have a seriously negative effect on India's economic growth.

There are limits to the effectiveness of any Indian retaliation: trade with China may seem substantial from an Indian perspective, but it only represents 3% of China's exports.

Way Forward:

This range of considerations seems to leave only two strategic options for India.

- Reconciling itself to playing second to an assertive China in the region.

- Seeking strength and leverage by aligning itself with a broader international coalition against Chinese ambitions.

3. AUKUS Partnership for Indo-Pacific

The Biden administration has announced a new trilateral security partnership for the Indo-Pacific, between Australia, the U.K., and the U.S. (AUKUS).

AUKUS

- AUKUS, as the partnership is being called, will strive over the next 18 months to equip Australia with nuclear propulsion technology.
- As part of this, Australia will acquire nuclear-powered submarines with help from the UK and the US.
- It will also involve a new architecture of meetings and engagements between the three countries, as well as cooperation across emerging technologies (applied AI, quantum technologies and undersea capabilities).
- Australia's nuclear-powered submarines, when they deploy, will be armed with conventional weapons only and not nuclear weapons.

Why such an alliance?

- Tensions have been high between Australia and an increasingly assertive China, its largest trade partner.
- Australia banned Chinese telecom giant Huawei in 2018 and its PM called for an investigation into the origins of COVID-19 last year.
- China retaliated by imposing tariffs on or capping Australian exports.

Not to substitute Quad or others

- This alliance does not and will not supersede or outrank existing arrangements in the Indo-Pacific region such as the Quad, which the US and Australia form with India and Japan, and ASEAN.
- AUKUS will complement these groups and others.

Significance

- There has been only one other time that the US has shared as "extremely sensitive" submarine propulsion technology – more than 60 years ago, back in 1958, with Great Britain.
- The US is working to move past the 20-year war in Afghanistan and the chaotic U.S. exit from Kabul.
- The Biden Administration has put countering China at the center of his economic and national security efforts, describing it as the biggest challenge of this era.

4. Centre have two weeks to fill all tribunal vacancies: SC

In News:

- The Supreme Court has chastised the Central government for the **long delays in making appointments for the various tribunals in India** and warned it of initiating contempt proceedings against it.

Background:

Large vacancies in tribunals:

- The various tribunals in India are **suffering from a huge backlog of cases being mainly attributable to the long-pending vacancies in them.**
- Over 240 vacancies remain in key tribunals like the National Green Tribunal, Income Tax Appellate Tribunal and Central Administrative Tribunal among others with some tribunals even lacking presiding officers.
- The large vacancies have made the tribunals ineffective and redundant.

Details:

- Noting the pitiable state of tribunals and state of litigants waiting for justice from the severely under-resourced tribunals, the Special Bench of the Supreme Court has given the government a **two-week deadline to make appointments to all the tribunals.**
- The bench also observed how the **recommendations to the tribunals by the selection committees have been largely ignored** by the government and it has been “cherry-picking” names for appointments to tribunals even from the waitlist overlooking the names from the final ‘select’ list. **This practice, the CJI noted, goes against the democratic principles of working under a rule of law.**
 - The **search-cum-selection committees, headed by sitting Supreme Court judges** are tasked with interviewing and short-listing suitable candidates for tribunals.

5. NEP schools: the future

The pandemic has helped India realise the need for foundational literacy, preventing dropouts, to overcome the digital divide. The article talks about the shift in the physical mode of education to the online mode, facilitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Details:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has been the greatest disruptor in the education sector bringing future (use of digital technologies in education) sooner than ever imagined.
- Learners are now exposed to a huge variety of innovative content or digital formats of education in their own languages.
- With the shift, the essential role of schools and teachers ensuring the mental/physical/cognitive development of a child has been permanently established.
- The schools of the future and the future of schooling are now both subject to intense debate, in the backdrop of the National Education Policy 2020. But certain broad understandings have emerged that most agree upon.
 - There is already a discernible shift in the focus from physical infrastructure towards digital and virtual requirements.
 - Skill-building for the requirements of the 21st century has assumed great significance.
 - Accelerated and differentiated instructional interventions will be required to overcome and reverse the impact of the pandemic.
 - It is likely that there will be more pressure on the government schooling system to expand its intake.

Students of the future will have to struggle with the new set of capabilities needed, hyper-information becoming disinformation, virtual teams not seeing each other physically, and will constantly experience a swing between super speciality and cross-disciplinary skills.

Qualities that are likely to define the schools of the future:

- Schools will encourage extended networks rather than remain as closed classroom communities.
 - Future schools will take teaching-learning to informal settings such as topic circles, eco clubs, visits to the neighbourhood, museums or scientific laboratories, etc.

Schools will be proactive innovators.

- They will adopt innovative pedagogies and differentiated instructions as per the needs of the learners to enable them to become knowledge creators and job creators.

Future schools will promote innovation.

- They will utilise innovative methods of assessment to bring out the unique potential of every child, harness innovative technologies for teaching, learning and administration, and bring about a culture of innovation.

Future schools will be future-oriented and connected to the job market.

- They must be capable of empowering and building the skills of learners for jobs that are yet to be created and technologies that are yet to be invented.

The future schools will forge stronger and more trusting engagement with families and communities.

The future depends on the decisions made in the present. And the future of the country is enrolled in schools today. Future schools must be designed to build the character of the children and set them free to discover the world, shape it and contribute to make it just and equitable.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

6. Four-year moratorium for AGR dues

In big bang reforms, the Union Cabinet approved a relief package for the telecom sector that includes a four-year moratorium on payment of statutory dues by telecom companies as well as allowing 100% foreign investment through the automatic route.

AGR

- Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) is the usage and licensing fee that telecom operators are charged by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT).
- It is divided into spectrum usage charges and licensing fees, pegged between 3-5 per cent and 8 per cent respectively.

Why is AGR important?

- The definition of AGR has been under litigation for 14 years.
- While telecom companies argued that it should comprise revenue from telecom services, the DoT's stand was that the AGR should include all revenue earned by an operator, including that from non-core telecom operations.
- The AGR directly impacts the outgo from the pockets of telcos to the DoT as it is used to calculate the levies payable by operators.
- Currently, telecom operators pay 8% of the AGR as licence fee, while spectrum usage charges (SUC) vary between 3-5% of AGR.

Why do telcos need to pay out large amounts?

- Telecom companies now owe the government not just the shortfall in AGR for the past 14 years but also an interest on that amount along with penalty and interest on the penalty.

- While the exact amount telcos will need to shell out is not clear, as in a government affidavit filed in the top court, the DoT had calculated the outstanding licence fee to be over 92,000 crore.
- However, the actual payout can go up to ₹1.4 lakh crore as the government is likely to also raise a demand for shortfall in SUC along with interest and penalty.
- Of the total amount, it is estimated that the actual dues is about 25%, while the remaining amount is interest and penalties.

Is there stress in the sector?

- The telecom industry is reeling under a debt of over ₹4 lakh crore and has been seeking a relief package from the government.
- Even the government has on various occasions admitted that the sector is indeed undergoing stress and needs support.
- Giving a ray of hope to the telecom companies, the government recently announced setting up of a Committee of Secretaries to examine the financial stress in the sector, and recommend measures to mitigate it.

Issue of lower tariff

- Currently, telecom tariffs are among the lowest globally, driven down due to intense competition following the entry of Reliance in the sector.
- The TRAI examines the merits of a “minimum charge” that operators may charge for voice and data services.

7. PLI scheme for auto sector

In News : The Union Cabinet has approved a Rs. 26,058 crore production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme to enhance manufacture of advanced technology and green vehicles, auto parts and drones.

Key takeaways

- **Benefits:** It will attract Rs. 42,500 crore in fresh investment into the automobile and auto components industry over five years
 - It will help create more than 7.5 lakh jobs.
- The scheme has been devised for both existing automotive firms and new investors.
- The ‘sales value linked’ scheme includes a ‘champion OEM’ incentive applicable on battery electric vehicles and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.
- A ‘component champion’ incentive is for advanced automotive technology components.

PLI scheme

- The Product Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme aims to boost domestic manufacturing under the government's Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.
- It was introduced in March 2020 and is expected to result in a minimum production worth more than \$500 billion in five years.
- The scheme provides incentives to companies for enhancing their domestic manufacturing apart from focusing on reducing import bills and improving the cost competitiveness of local goods.
- PLI scheme offers incentives on incremental sales for products manufactured in India.
- Eligibility criteria for businesses under the PLI scheme vary based on the sector approved under the scheme.
- Some of the sectors for which PLI scheme has been approved are:
 - Electronic or technology products
 - Pharmaceuticals drugs
 - Telecom & networking products
 - Food Products
 - High-efficiency solar PV modules

8. Input Tax Credit (ITC)

In News : Recently, The Supreme Court said that refunds of tax credit cannot be claimed for input services under the Goods and Services Tax regime's inverted duty structure.

- The SC has confirmed a Madras High Court judgment which upheld a fiscal formula included in the Central Goods and Service Tax Rules to execute refund of unutilised Input Tax Credit (ITC) accumulated on account of input services.

Input Tax Credit (ITC)

- ITC is a mechanism to avoid cascading of taxes. Cascading of taxes, in simple language, is 'tax on tax'.
- Input Tax Credit refers to the tax already paid by a person at time of purchase of goods or services and which is available as deduction from tax payable.
- Input tax credit in relation to GST to a registered person means, the CGST, SGST/UTGST or IGST charged on any supply of goods or services or both made to him.
- It includes IGST charged on imports & tax payable under reverse charge mechanism.
- When one buys a product/service from a registered dealer we pay taxes on the purchase.
- On selling, we collect the tax.

- We adjust the taxes paid at the time of purchase with the amount of output tax (tax on sales) and balance liability of tax (tax on sales minus tax on purchase) has to be paid to the government.
- This mechanism is called utilization of input tax credit.
- If the tax paid on inputs is higher than the tax on the output, the excess can be claimed as a refund.
- **Exceptions:** A business under composition scheme cannot avail of input tax credit. ITC cannot be claimed for personal use or for goods that are exempt.

9. Debt of households surged between 2012 and '18: NSO

- The All India Debt & Investment Survey conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) notes that the **number of indebted households has risen sharply in rural India**, with the average debt shooting up by 84% between 2012 and 2018.
- Notably, the urban households' average debt increased by 42% in the same period.
- This is indicative of the **significant economic impact of the COVID pandemic on households**.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Hybodont Shark fossils found in Jaisalmer

In a rare discovery, teeth of new species of Hybodont shark of Jurassic age have been reported for the first time from Jaisalmer by a team of officers from the Geological Survey of India (GSI).

Hybodont Shark

- Hybodonts, an extinct group of sharks, was a dominant group of fishes in both marine and fluvial environments during the Triassic and early Jurassic time.
- However, hybodont sharks started to decline in marine environments from the Middle Jurassic onwards until they formed a relatively minor component of open-marine shark assemblages.
- They finally became extinct at the end of the Cretaceous time 65 million years ago.

Importance of the fossil

- The newly discovered crushing teeth from Jaisalmer represents a new species named by the research team as *Strophodusjaisalmerensis*.
- These sharks have been reported for the first time from the Jurassic rocks (approximately, between 160 and 168 million years old) of the Jaisalmer region of Rajasthan.
- The genus *Strophodus* has been identified for the first time from the Indian subcontinent and is only the third such record from Asia, the other two being from Japan and Thailand.
- It opens a new window for further research in the domain of vertebrate fossils.

2. Relief package for Telecom sector

The Union Cabinet has approved a much-needed relief package for the stressed telecom sector in India.

Major Highlights:

- **Aim:** To offer relief to telecom companies burdened by large regulatory dues and attract foreign capital into the telecom sector.

Telecom sector relief package:

- **Definition of adjusted gross revenue (AGR)** has been changed to exclude non-telecom revenue i.e., all non-telecom revenue will be removed from AGR.
- Relief on computing dues relating to AGR and **Four-year moratorium** on the AGR dues.
 - To protect government revenues, **companies availing of the moratorium** will have to pay interest.
 - This would be at the rate of marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (**MCLR**) plus 2%.
- Foreign ownership rules were liberalised by allowing **100% foreign direct investment (FDI)** through the **automatic route** with safeguards.
 - Currently, 100% FDI is allowed in the telecom sector, but only 49% was on the automatic route, any investment above that limit required government approval.
- Option for government to **convert dues into equity** in the companies after the moratorium period expires.
- Allow telcos to **surrender their spectrums** that have not been used so far.
- **Removal** of spectrum usage charges in future telecom auctions. The spectrum allocation would be of **30 years** instead of 20 years.
 - Businesses could surrender spectrum after a **10-year lock-in period** after paying a defined surrender charge.
- **Simplify KYC norms** by eliminating physical paperwork for customers and simplified the process of setting up telecom towers.

Significance:

- AGR-related benefit will provide telcos time to **re-strategize its business** and clear the **pending dues** in a longer period.
- It would help **save jobs in the sector** and ensure much-needed **competition** in the industry.
- It would ensure that the industry is able to **invest fearlessly** and support India's digital ambition.

3. National Crime Records Bureau report 2020

According to a National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report, there was a 28% increase in the registration of cases in 2020, primarily owing to the violations of COVID-19 norms across India.

Highlights of the Report:

- 8,272 cases were instituted for offences against **Scheduled Tribes**.
- Simple hurt (2,247) accounted for 27.2%, followed by rape with 13.7% and assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty with 10.7%
- The cases of **sedition** declined from 93 in 2019 to 73 last year, with Manipur reporting 15 cases, Assam 12, Karnataka 8, Uttar Pradesh 7, Haryana 6, Delhi 5, and Kashmir 2 cases.
- The States reporting high **charge-sheeting rate** under IPC crimes were Gujarat (97.1%), Kerala (94.9%) and Tamil Nadu (91.7%).

Cases of Disobedience against Government:

- A major increase was seen in the cases registered under disobedience to the order promulgated by public servant, **under Section 188 of the IPC**, to 6,12,179 cases.
- Under the Special and Local Laws category, more cases were registered under "**Other State Local Acts**," leading to a steep rise from 89,553 to 4,14,589 cases.

Offences affecting the human body:

- A total of 10,47,216 cases of offences affecting the human body were registered, accounted for 24.6%.
- “**Hurt**” as an offence accounted for maximum cases (55.3%), followed by causing death by negligence (12.1%) and assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty (8.2%).

Cases of murder and Kidnapping:

- It showed a marginal increase of 1% to 29,193.
- A total of 91,458 **kidnapped**, including both male and female were found alive and recovered, while 281 persons were found dead.

Crime against Women:

- There was an 8.30% decline in cases of crime against women.
- Most of the cases were related to “**cruelty by husband or his relatives**” (30.0%), followed by “**assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty**” (23.0%), “**kidnapping & abduction of women**” (16.8%) and “**rape**” (7.5%).
- The crime rate registered per lakh women population is 56.5 in 2020.

Cases against Juveniles:

- A total of 29,768 cases were registered against **juveniles**, showing a decrease of 7.8%.
- Most of the juveniles apprehended under the IPC and SLL crimes were in the 16-18 age group.

Economic Offences:

- 1,45,754 cases of economic offences were registered, showing a decrease of 12%.
- There was a decline of 27% in cases under the **Prevention of Corruption Act** from 4,244 to 3,100.
- With 50,035 cases, cybercrimes recorded an 11.80% increase.

Offence of Human Trafficking:

- Human trafficking cases declined from 2,208 to 1,714.
- The agencies rescued 4,680 victims and arrested 4,966 persons.
- The number of **missing persons** decreased by 15%. Over 3.32 lakh persons, including 2.24 lakh female and 142 transgenders, were traced, or recovered.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Groundswell report on Climate change induced migration

The World Bank's updated Groundswell report was released recently.

- It examined how the **impacts of slow-onset climate change** such as water scarcity, decreasing crop productivity and rising sea levels could lead to millions as "climate migrants" by 2050.

About the report:

- The Groundswell report is a stark reminder of the **human toll of climate change**, particularly on the world's poorest who are contributing the least to its causes.
- It also clearly lays out a **path for countries to address some of the key factors** that are causing climate-driven migration.

Highlights of the report:

Region specific:

- Up to 216 million people moving within their own countries across the six regions analyzed.
 - Those regions are Latin America; North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Eastern Europe and Central Asia; South Asia; and East Asia and the Pacific.
- In the most climate-friendly scenario, with a low level of emissions and inclusive, sustainable development, the world could still see **44 million people being forced to leave their homes**.
- In the worst-case scenario, **Sub-Saharan Africa would see the most migrants**, with up to 86 million people moving within national borders.
 - Sub-Saharan Africa is the most vulnerable region due to desertification, fragile coastlines and the population's dependence on agriculture.
- **North Africa** is predicted to have the **largest proportion of climate migrants**, with 19 million people moving, equivalent to roughly 9% of its population.
 - Due mainly to increased water scarcity in northeastern Tunisia, northwestern Algeria, western and southern Morocco, and the central Atlas foothills.
- **In South Asia**, Bangladesh is particularly affected by flooding and crop failures, accounting for almost half of the predicted climate migrants, with 19.9 million people, including an increasing number of women.
 - Total south Asia could see 40 million internal climate migrants.

- By 2050, East Asia and the Pacific could see 49 million; North Africa 19 million; Latin America 17 million; Eastern Europe and Central Asia 5 million internal climate migrants.

Other Facts:

- **Hotspots of internal climate migration** can emerge as early as **2030** and continue to spread and intensify by 2050.
- **Immediate and concerted action** to reduce global emissions and support green, inclusive and resilient development, **could reduce the scale** of climate migration by **as much as 80 per cent**.
- **Climate change is a powerful driver** of internal migration because of its impacts on people's livelihoods and loss of livability in highly exposed locations.

6. Centre and states must strike bargain on GST

In News :

After one and a half years of dispute, and with the economy showing signs of recovery, a path forward for the GST finally seems visible. This opportunity needs to be seized to strike the Centre-State bargain.

How GST performed so far

- The contributors are many but the critical one has been simply a lack of revenues.
- **Initially, the GST performed well**, with collections soaring to Rs **11.8 lakh crore** in the first full year of implementation in 2018-19.
- But in 2019-20, the growth rate decelerated sharply. And in 2020-21, **collections actually fell**.
- As **future collections became uncertain**, a gap opened up between the amount that the Centre felt it could afford to promise and the minimum that the states felt they needed and were entitled to.
- More recently, however, **confidence in GST has improved**.
- Collections have revived, **averaging Rs 1.1 lakh crore in the first five months** of the current fiscal year, exceeding even pre-pandemic levels.

What explains the weak revenue performance of the GST?

- **Slowing economy:** The GST's past performance now seems much better than it once did.
- We now know that after 2018-19, nominal GDP growth slowed from 10.5 per cent in 2018-19 to 7.8 per cent the next year and -3 per cent in 2020-21.

- **Effective rate cuts:** The RBI has pointed out, the **effective tax rate has fallen by nearly 3 percentage points** because of rate cutting in 2019, in which both the Centre and states were complicit.
- Thus the weak revenue performance of the GST now seems **attributable to wider economic difficulties** and policy actions, rather than problems with the tax itself.

Necessary changes: Opportunity for striking bargain for Centre and States

1) Principle of compensation must be re-cast: Create revenue buffer

- As the GST was a new tax, so states were guaranteed against the teething troubles that would inevitably arise for the next five years.
- Five years on, this logic is less compelling.
- The GST as tax reform has reached maturity, well understood by producers, consumers, and tax officials.
- At the same time, the last few years have exposed the **vulnerability of the states to shocks** such as Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Way forward:** To prevent this situation from recurring, the authorities should create a **revenue buffer** that could be tapped in a time of need.
- In sum, there is a bargain waiting to be struck: The states give up their **demand for an extension of the compensation** mechanism, while the Centre offers a **new counter-cyclical buffer**.
- As the figure shows, in good economic times, GST revenues will be robust but it is against downturns that states need protection.
- The shift to revenue insurance, in turn, should allow the **compensation cess to be abolished**.

2) The GST structure needs to be simplified and rationalised

- The GST structure needs to be simplified and rationalised, as recommended by the **Fifteenth Finance Commission and the Revenue Neutral Rate report**.
- **New rate structure:** A new structure should have one low rate (between 8 and 10 per cent), one standard rate (between 16 and 18 per cent) and one rate for all demerit goods.
- The single rate on demerit goods also requires **eliminating the cesses with all their complexity**.

3) The GST Council's working needs changes

- Consensus-based decision making in GST Council can be sustained only if there is a shared sense of **participatory and inclusive governance**.
- Nearly two decades ago, when the VAT was being introduced, Yashwant Sinha established a **culture of consensual discussions on indirect taxes**.

- He did this by requiring the **Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers** to be headed by a finance minister from an Opposition-run state government.
- The spirit of this idea could be translated to the GST Council.

Conclusion

Cooperative federalism is not a gesture or one-off outcome. It is, above all, a disposition, resulting from quotidian democratic practice. By rehabilitating cooperative federalism's finest achievement – the GST – the Centre and states can help restore India's broader economic prospects.

7. Tarballs on Mumbai Coast

A beach in South Mumbai, saw black oil-emanating balls lying on the shore.

Tarballs

- Tarballs are dark-coloured, sticky balls of oil that form when crude oil floats on the ocean surface.
- Tarballs are formed by weathering of crude oil in marine environments.
- They are transported from the open sea to the shores by sea currents and waves.
- Tarballs are usually coin-sized and are found strewn on the beaches. Some of the balls are as big as a basketball while others are smaller globules.
- However, over the years, they have become as big as basketballs and can weigh as much as 6-7 kgs.

How are tarballs formed?

- Wind and waves tear the oil slick into smaller patches that are scattered over a much wider area.
- Various physical, chemical and biological processes (weathering) change the appearance of the oil.

Why are tarballs found on the beaches during the monsoon?

- It is suspected that the oil comes from the large cargo ships in the deep sea and gets pushed to the shore as tarballs during monsoon due to wind speed and direction.
- All the oil spilt in the Arabian sea eventually gets deposited on the western coast in the form of tarballs in the monsoon season when wind speed and circulation pattern favour transportation of these tarballs.

8. Food poverty growing among older adults in India

According to a study by **Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI)**, food insufficiency among older adults aged **45** and above is a great concern.

Major Highlights:

- Of older individuals in India **aged 45 years and above**, studied:
 - Nearly 6% consumed smaller portions or skipped meals
 - 5.3% did not eat even when they were hungry
 - 3.8% went a full day without eating because the food was unavailable.
- A high percentage of older adults residing in **rural areas** reduced their meal size, were hungry but did not eat compared to their urban counterparts.
- In most of **east India** and **central states** and **Tamil Nadu**, more than 6% of older adults were hungry but did not eat.
- The proportion of older persons **who did not eat for a complete day** was less than 5% in most states/UTs, except in Madhya Pradesh (6.8%), Bihar (6.2%) and Uttar Pradesh.

Food insecurity & MDG goal:

- Food insecurity is defined as the **limited or uncertain availability** of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the limited or uncertain ability to get appropriate foods in socially acceptable ways.
- A 2015 report on progress towards **UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target 1** indicated that in developing world, food insecurity dropped to 12.9% in 2014-16 from 23.3% in 1990-91.
 - **MDG Target 1** aimed to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger between 1990 and 2015.

Concerns:

- The degree of food insecurity is **relatively high in South Asia** and the pace of **eradication** of food insecurity has been slow.
- India had the **second-highest** estimated number of **undernourished individuals** in the world from 2003-04 to 2012-13.
- Food insecurity among elderly would **exacerbate their existing health problems** and add to emotional and financial stress.
 - It is often linked with a higher risk of chronic diseases as well as disabilities.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Which of the following global efforts addresses climate change and migration challenges?

1. Cancun Adaptation Framework
2. Sendai Framework
3. Paris Agreement
4. Warsaw Mechanism

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A 1 and 2 only
B 1 and 4 only
C 3 and 4 only
D 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer :D

Explanation

- The **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** formally incorporates mobility in the context of climate change in the **2010 Cancun Adaptation Framework**, calling on countries for “measures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate induced displacement, migration, and planned relocation,” while “taking into account their common but differentiated responsibilities”
- The **Sendai Framework** outlines targets and priorities for action to prevent and reduce disaster risks, including through governance, investment in disaster reduction for resilience, and disaster preparedness, recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction.
 - The Sendai Framework articulates the **need to include migrants in disaster risk reduction and management in three places.**
- The Preamble of the **Paris Agreement** states that the “Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their **respective obligations on migrants**”.
- The UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement, established under the **Warsaw Mechanism**.
 - The **Warsaw International Mechanism** for Loss and Damage focuses on preparing for and addressing loss and damage from both sudden- and slow onset climate change impacts, including effects on mobility.

- The **COP24 Decision**, informed by a report from the **UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement**, invites UNFCCC parties to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility in the context of climate change, by considering the needs of migrants and displaced persons, communities of origin, transit and destination, and by enhancing opportunities for regular migration pathways, including through labor mobility.
- Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration recognizes the need to strengthen joint analysis and sharing of information to better map, understand, predict, and address migration movements, such as those that may result from sudden-onset and slow-onset natural disasters and the adverse effects of climate change, as well as develop adaptation and resilience strategies, taking into account the potential implications on migration.
- Global Compact on Refugees provides specific commitments to address the drivers of environmental mobility and develop policies aimed at ensuring greater protection for those affected by these movements.
- **Hence, option D is correct.**

2. The Vital-Vidhvansak, the first monthly journal to have the untouchable people as its target audience was published by

- a. Gopal Baba Walangkar
- b. Jyotiba Phule
- c. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi
- d. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

Answer: a

Explanation:

- In 1888, Gopal Baba Walangkar began publishing the monthly journal titled Vital-Vidhvansak (Destroyer of Brahmanical or Ceremonial Pollution), which was the first to have the untouchable people as its target audience.

3. Which of the following is/are the properties of Lithium?

- 1. Lightest solid element under solid conditions
- 2. Rare earth metal

3. Highly inflammable

Select the correct answer using the code given below?

A 1 and 2 only

B 2 only

C 2 and 3 only

D 1 and 3 only

Answer : D

Explanation

- Lithium is a soft, silvery-white metal with the symbol Li.
- **Under standard conditions**, it is the lightest metal and the **lightest solid element**.
- It is **highly reactive and flammable**, and must be stored in mineral oil.
- It is an alkali metal and a **rare metal**.
 - **Rare Metals (RM)** include Niobium (Nb), Tantalum (Ta), **Lithium (Li)**, Beryllium (Be), Cesium (Cs) etc.
 - **Rare Earth (RE) metals** include Lanthanum (La) to Lutetium (Lu) besides Scandium (Sc) and Yttrium (Y).
- **Hence, option D is correct.**

4. *Aedes aegypti* mosquito transmits which of the following viral disease/s?

1. Malaria
2. Dengue
3. Zika
4. Lymphatic filariasis
5. Yellow Fever

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- *Aedes aegypti* is known to transmit the dengue virus, yellow fever virus, chikungunya virus, and Zika virus.
- Malaria is transmitted to humans by female mosquitoes of the genus *Anopheles*.
- Lymphatic filariasis, considered globally as a neglected tropical disease (NTD), is a parasitic disease caused by microscopic, thread-like worms. The adult worms only live in the human lymph system. Lymphatic filariasis is spread by infected mosquitoes.
 - A wide range of mosquitoes can transmit the parasite, depending on the geographic area. In Africa, the most common vector is *Anopheles* and in the Americas, it is *Culex quinquefasciatus*. *Aedes* and *Mansonia* can transmit the infection in the Pacific and in Asia.

5. With reference to Quad Grouping, consider the following statements:

1. Quad comprises all democratic countries surrounding China.
2. Vaccine diplomacy, climate change, technological innovation are some of the objectives of Quad.
3. Quad is based on the principle of collective defence.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : B

Explanation

- **Quad Grouping** is a four-nation grouping of India, Australia, the USA and Japan which was established in 2007.
 - Quad member countries have also indicated a willingness to **expand the partnership through a so-called Quad Plus** that would include South Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam amongst others.
 - However, as of now, Quad members are restricted to these four countries only. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**

- In March 2021, the Quad leaders met virtually and later released a joint statement titled 'The Spirit of the Quad,' which outlined the group's approach and objectives.
 - According to the 'Spirit of the Quad', the group's primary objectives include maritime security, combating the Covid-19 crisis, **especially vis-à-vis vaccine diplomacy, addressing the risks of climate change, creating an ecosystem for investment in the region and boosting technological innovation. Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- Despite the potential for cooperation, the Quad remains a mechanism without a defined strategic mission.
 - The Quad is not structured like a typical multilateral organisation and lacks a secretariat and any permanent decision-making body.
 - Additionally, unlike NATO, the Quad does not include provisions for **collective defence**, instead choosing to conduct joint military exercises as a show of unity and diplomatic cohesion. **Hence, statement 3 is not correct.**

6. With reference to the Bhimbetka Caves, consider the following statements:

1. It exhibits the earliest traces of human life in India.
2. The Bhimbetka caves is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
3. It is located in the foothills of the Vindhya Mountains.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer :D

Explanation

- The Bhimbetka rock shelters are an **archaeological site in central India** that spans the prehistoric **Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods**, as well as the historic period.
- It exhibits the **earliest traces of human life** in India and **evidence of Stone Age** starting at the site in Acheulian times. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- It is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** that consists of **seven hills and over 750 rock shelters** distributed over 10 km. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

- The Bhimbetka rock shelters were found by **V S Wakankar in 1957**. It is located in **Raisen District** between Hoshangabad and Bhopal in **Madhya Pradesh**.
 - It is about **40 kilometres south-east of Bhopal** in the foothills of the Vindhya Mountains. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1Q. The tribunals perform an important and specialised role in justice delivery mechanism. Comment. (250 words)

Approach

- Start with an idea on tribunals, their role, definition etc.
- State the advantages of tribunals as justice delivery mechanisms to bring out their importance.
- Give conclusion.

2Q. What do you understand by Western Disturbances? Discuss its impact on Indian weather systems. (250 words)

Approach

- In general explain the western disturbances as a geographical phenomena and its main effect on Indian weather systems.
- Mention the areas of its origin and influence and briefly explain its mechanism, it can also be illustrated in a suitable diagram.
- Explain the impact of western disturbances on India in various dimensions like climate, agriculture and disasters associated with it.
- Summarise the answer and mention some of the measures to augment the preparedness to deal with the western disturbances