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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Govt pushes for a reset of India-ASEAN FTA

The Commerce and Industry Minister has called for a renegotiation of the India-ASEAN free trade agreement (FTA).

Why such move?

- The MCI aims to prevent its misuse by 'third parties' and remove trade restrictions as well as non-tariff barriers that he said had hurt Indian exports disproportionately since the pact was operationalized in 2010.
- The focus needed to be on new rules to eliminate misuse 'by third parties outside ASEAN', the minister said, hinting at China.
- India had to deal with several restrictive barriers on exports in the ASEAN region, particularly in the agriculture and auto sectors.

ASEAN

- **Members:**
- Officially the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN is an economic union comprising 10 member states in Southeast Asia.
- It promotes intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic, political, security, military, educational, and sociocultural integration between its members and other countries in Asia.

India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement

- The initial framework agreement for ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (AIFTA) was signed on 8 October 2003 in Bali, Indonesia.
- The FTA came into effect on 1 January 2010.
- The FTA had emerged from a mutual interest of both parties to expand their economic ties in the Asia-Pacific region.

Background of the AIFTA

- India's Look East policy was reciprocated by similar interests of many ASEAN countries to expand their interactions westward.
- After India became a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992, India saw its trade with ASEAN increase relative to its trade with the rest of the world.

- Between 1993 and 2003, ASEAN-India bilateral trade grew at an annual rate of 11.2%, from US\$2.9 billion in 1993 to US\$12.1 billion in 2003.
- Total Indian FDI into ASEAN from 2000 to 2008 was US\$1.3 billion.

Acknowledging this trend and recognising the economic potential of closer linkages, both sides recognised the opportunities to pave the way for the establishment of an ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (FTA).

Structure of the AIFTA

- The signing of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement paves the way for the creation of one of the world's largest FTAs – a market of almost 1.8 billion people with a combined GDP of US\$2.8 trillion.
- It sees tariff liberalisation of over 90 percent of products traded between the two dynamic regions, including the so-called “special products”.
- The products include palm oil (crude and refined), coffee, black tea and pepper.

Criticism

While there are many benefits to the ASEAN-India FTA, there is concern in India that the agreement will have several negative impacts on the economy.

- **Opening-up its market:** This FTA will allow them to increase the market access of their products.
- **No specific gains:** It is criticised, however, that India will not experience as great an increase in market access to ASEAN countries as ASEAN will in India.
- **Export driven ASEAN:** The economies of the ASEAN countries are largely export-driven. Considering India's expansive domestic market, the ASEAN countries will look eagerly towards India as a home for its exports.
- **Huge trade deficit:** Since the early 2000s, India has had an increasing trade deficit with ASEAN. It is feared that a gradual liberalisation of tariffs and a rise in imported goods into India will threaten several sectors of the economy.
- **Inaccessible Markets:** As a dominant exporter of light manufacturing products, ASEAN has competitive tariff rates that make it difficult for India to gain access to the industry market in ASEAN countries.
- **Cheaper imports:** The state of Kerala is an important exporter in the national export of plantation products. It fears that cheap imports of oil palm, rubber, coffee, and fish would lower domestic production, adversely affecting farmers and ultimately its economy.

2. Palk Bay Scheme

The Union Government is considering increasing the unit cost of deep-sea fishing vessels under the Palk Bay scheme to make it more attractive to fisherfolk.

Palk Bay Scheme

- The Palk Bay Scheme is the official scheme for diversification of trawl fishing boats from Palk Strait into deep sea fishing boats.
- It is aimed at encouraging fishermen to take up deep-sea fishing and put an end to disputes arising between the India and Sri Lanka.
- The project helps fishermen in the Palk Straits, who are not exposed to deep-sea fishing, to venture deep into the Indian Ocean, Arabian sea and other deep-sea areas to look for fish like tuna that are in high demand.

Why need such scheme?

- Bottom trawling, an ecologically destructive practice, involves trawlers dragging weighted nets along the sea-floor, causing great depletion of aquatic resources.

Key components of the scheme

- The project aims to replace all trawler boats and introduce over 2,000 deep sea fishing boats in a course of five years.
- The scheme, under the aegis of Blue Revolution scheme – is funded by the Centre – 50 per cent and state government – 20 per cent for a boat costing Rs 80 lakh.
- Of the balance 30 per cent, 10 per cent is contributed by the beneficiary (fisherman), and the remaining 20 per cent is funded by banks.

3. Consequences of growing digital divide:

In News :

The Supreme Court has flagged the consequences of **growing digital divide**.

- It observed, the digital divide caused by online classes will defeat the fundamental right of every child to education.

How have online classes impacted children?

- Little children whose parents are too poor to afford laptops, tablets or an “optimum” Internet package at home for online classes during the pandemic have dropped out of school and even run the danger of being drawn into child labour or worse, child trafficking.
- Even, **the right to education** has now hinged on who could afford “gadgets” for online classes and who could not.

What’s the issue?

The court was hearing a **petition filed by private school managements challenging a Delhi High Court order of September 2020**, directing them to provide their 25% quota EWS/DG students online facilities free of cost.

- The High Court had said the schools could get reimbursement from the government.
- The Delhi government had said it had no resources to reimburse the schools for the online gadgets.

Though the Supreme Court had stayed the High Court order in February 2021, the court said both **the Centre and States such as Delhi could not bow out of their responsibilities towards children.**

What next?

The Court asked the Delhi government to come out with a plan to effectuate **the ‘salutary object’ upheld in the High Court decision.** The court said the Centre should join in the consultation.

4. Digital Divide

It means discrepancy between people who have access to and the resources to use new information and communication tools, such as the Internet, and people who do not have the resources and access to the technology.

- It also means discrepancy between those who have the skills, knowledge and abilities to use the technologies and those who do not.

Where does it exist?

The digital divide can exist between those living in rural areas and those living in urban areas, between genders, between the educated and uneducated, between economic classes, and on a global scale between more and less industrially developed nations.

Status in India:

1. Although India has 220 million smartphone users and is the second largest smartphone market in the world, the overall penetration is still just about 30 per cent of the population.
2. There is a huge **rural- urban and inter-state digital divide in India**.
3. according to statistics, more than 75 per cent of the broadband connections in the country are in the top 30 cities.
4. Similarly, many states like north-eastern states, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Assam lag behind other states in the use and development of ICTs.
5. Globally 12 percent more men used the internet than women in 2017, while in India only 29% of total internet users are females.
6. Another important reason of digital divide in India is knowledge divide. Knowledge divide is directly related with digital divide.

Impact of Digital Divide:

1. **Low female representation:** Due to huge digital divide in gender, thousands of Indian girls in these far-flung areas are refused access to Information and Communications Technology (ICTs), which is a primary cause of low female representation in jobs.
2. **Denial to information/knowledge:** This lack of equal opportunities to access online services and information deprive people of higher/quality education and skill training that could help them contribute to the economy and become leaders on a global level.
3. **Non delivery of welfare schemes:** As many schemes have started using ICT in their delivery, at the same time due to digital divide it will create more problem.

5. Rohingya Crisis

In News :

Bangladesh is planning to send more than 80,000 Rohingya refugees to a remote island- **Bhasan Char**- in the Bay of Bengal after sealing an agreement for the United Nations to provide help.

- Some 19,000 of the Muslim refugees from Myanmar have already relocated from crowded camps on the mainland to Bhasan Char island, despite doubts raised by aid groups.

Background:

- **Bhasan Char** is an island specifically developed to accommodate 1,00,000 of the 1 million Rohingya who have fled from neighbouring Myanmar.
- While human rights groups have criticised the move and some are being forced to go against their will, the government has insisted that refugees moving to the island have done so voluntarily.

Rohingyas

- They are an Ethnic group, mostly Muslims. They were not granted full citizenship by Myanmar.
- They were classified as “resident foreigners or associate citizens”.
- Ethnically they are much closer to Indo-Aryan people of India and Bangladesh than to the Sino-Tibetans of the Country.

Described by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as “**one of, if not the, most discriminated people in the world**”.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

6. Air India Disinvestment Deal

After 68 years, Air India is all set to return to the Tata fold.

What is the deal?

- The Tatas will own 100% stake in Air India, as also 100% in its international low-cost arm Air India Express and 50% in the ground handling joint venture, Air India SATS.
- Apart from 141 planes and access to a network of 173 destinations including 55 international ones, Tatas will also have the ownership of iconic brands like Air India, Indian Airlines and the Maharajah.

History of Air India

- Prominent industrialist JRD Tata founded the airline in 1932 and named it Tata Airlines.
- As India gained Independence, the government bought 49% stake in AI.
- In 1946, the aviation division of Tata Sons was listed as Air India, and in 1948, the Air India International was launched with flights to Europe.
- In 1953, Air India was nationalised and for the next over four decades it remained the prized possession for India controlling the majority of the domestic airspace.

Why was Air India sold?

- **End of Monopoly:** With economic liberalisation and the growing presence of private players, this dominance came under serious threat.
- **Govt running an airline:** Ideologically too, the government running an airline did not quite gel with the mantra of liberalisation.
- **Continuous losses:** By 2007, AI (which flew international flights) was merged with the domestic carrier, Indian Airlines, to reduce losses.
- **Wastage of taxpayers money:** But it is the mark of how poorly the airline was run that it has never made a profit since 2007.

Why wasn't it sold earlier?

Ans. Fear over Operational Freedom

- The first attempt to reduce the government's stake – disinvestment – was made in 2001 under the then NDA government.
- But that attempt – to sell 40% stake – failed.
- In 2018, the government made another attempt to sell the government stake – this time, 76%. But it did not elicit even a single response.
- In the latest attempt started in January 2020, the government has been able to finally conclude the sale.

So how was it managed this time?

- **Govt gives up stakes:** The mere fact that the government retained a partial stake. In other words, as long as the government kept a certain shareholding of AI, private players did not seem interested.
- **Operational freedom:** That's because the mere idea of government ownership, even if it was as little as 24%, made private firms wonder if they would have the operational freedom needed.
- **Debt sharing:** In the past, the government expected the bidders to pick up a certain amount of the debt. This time, the government let the bidders decide the amount of debt they wanted to pick up.

Significance of the deal

[A] From the government's perspective: A success

- **Disinvestment:** It underscores govt commitment to reducing the its role in the economy.
- **Easing burden on taxpayers:** This claims to have saved taxpayers from paying for daily losses of AI.
- **Economic reforms:** Given the historical difficulties in AI's disinvestment, or any disinvestment at all this is a significant achievement.

[B] Business perspective: Still a failure

- **Missing the target:** Purely in terms of money, the deal does not result in as big a step towards achieving the government's disinvestment target of the current year.
- **Unresolved bankruptcy:** The assets left with the government, such as buildings, etc., will likely generate Rs 14,718 crore. But that will still leave the government with a debt of Rs 28,844 crore to pay back.

[C] Value perspective: Success for Tatas

- **Business success:** From the Tatas' perspective, apart from the emotional aspect of regaining control of an airline that they started, AI's acquisition is a long-term bet.
- **Investment boost:** The Tatas are expected to invest far more than what they have paid the government if this bet is to work for them.

Conclusion

- **Complete liberalization:** The privatisation of Air India is a message from the Government to the markets and global investors that it has the political will to bite the reform bullet.
- **Roadmap for economic reforms:** The govt had to shed the "over-conservatism" that is typical of bureaucracy.
- **Future disinvestments:** A transaction as "tough and complex" as Air India's in an open, transparent and competitive bidding process, will boost future privatisation.

Way forward

- Other loss-making PSUs continue to drain taxpayers' hard-earned money and get abused and fleeced in the name of social welfare.
- The govt should imbibe this experience gained in future disinvestment biddings.

7. RBI suspends G-Sec Acquisition Programme (GSAP)

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to halt its bond-buying under the G-Sec Acquisition Programme (GSAP).

Why such move?

- The GSAP had succeeded in ensuring adequate liquidity and stabilising financial markets.
- Coupled with other liquidity measures, it facilitated congenial and orderly financing conditions and a conducive environment for the recovery.

What is GSAP?

- The G-Sec Acquisition Programme (G-SAP) is basically an unconditional and a structured Open Market Operation (OMO), of a much larger scale and size.

- G-SAP is an OMO with a 'distinct character'.
- The word 'unconditional' here connotes that RBI has committed upfront that it will buy G-Secs irrespective of the market sentiment.

What are Government Securities?

- These are debt instruments issued by the government to borrow money.
- The two key categories are:
 1. Treasury bills (T-Bills) – short-term instruments which mature in 91 days, 182 days, or 364 days, and
 2. Dated securities – long-term instruments, which mature anywhere between 5 years and 40 years

Why G-Secs?

- Like bank fixed deposits, g-secs are not tax-free.
- They are generally considered the safest form of investment because they are backed by the government. So, the risk of default is almost nil.
- However, they are not completely risk-free, since they are subject to fluctuations in interest rates.
- Bank fixed deposits, on the other hand, are guaranteed only to the extent of Rs 5 lakh by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC).

Other decisions

- The RBI, however, remained ready to undertake G-SAP as and when warranted by liquidity conditions.
- It would also continue to flexibly conduct other liquidity management operations including Operation Twist (OT) and regular open market operations (OMOs).

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. There's an urgent need to clean up the World Bank and IMF

This article discusses some inherent issues with the international organizations (IOs) i.e., the World Bank (Bank) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) (aka Bretton Woods Twins). This comes in the backyard of the WB decision to scrap its flagship publication, the 'Doing Business' report.

Issue over chair: A monopoly of the West

- **Common individuals to head:** The individuals which are common to them: Paul Wolfowitz, Jim-Kim, David Malpass, Rodrigo Rato, Dominique-Strauss Kahn, Christine Lagarde, and Kristalina Georgieva.
- **Monopoly of US/EU:** They have all become heads via a dual monopoly selection procedure: Only an American can head the Bank and only a European can head the IMF.
- **Personal integrity:** This has been called into question, the most recent being the revelations of malfeasance at the World Bank where data was apparently massaged to make at least two major countries – China and Saudi Arabia – look better than they would otherwise have been.

Issues with these heads: Hypocrisy

- **Political accountability:** Within countries, we expect reasonable standards of integrity from heads of important institutions, and democratic political accountability mechanisms exist to ensure that.
- **Probity:** The effectiveness and legitimacy of these individuals and indeed of the international institutions they head require personal qualities of probity.
- **Non-virtuous preachers:** These heads often go around the developing world, preaching the virtues of good governance, from arguing against the scourge of corruption to improving data integrity.
- **Undue parameters:** There are even World Bank indices to rank countries on those metrics.
- It is not just the charge of hypocrisy, but also the effect on the morale and motivation of the staff of these institutions.

- Many of them chose to work here because of a commitment to public service.
- The recent letter by more than 300 former World Bank staff, expressing their anguish at the recent revelations on the Doing Business index, captures this sentiment.

Why such issues grapple these institutions?

- **Goal definition:** International institutions operate in a grey zone of neither clearly being in or outside the realm of formal politics and hence have weaker mechanisms of accountability.
- **Selection of heads:** The selection procedure for choosing heads of the Bank and the Fund has been a dismal failure. Compromised heads are potentially more biased.
- **Indoctrination:** Contrast this with the growing alarm and anxiety that characterizes the rise of China and its attempts to place its own nationals in existing IOs as well as creating new ones.

Chinese has intruded even into these

- Countries place their nationals to head these institutions, both for prestige and to pursue their national interests.
- China has its own nationals now head four of the 15 UN specialized agencies (it suffered a rare setback to head the World Intellectual Property Organisation last year).

Conclusion

- The contest between the West (and especially the US) and China to shape the global order is becoming manifest.
- China's efforts, its success, and more broadly its influence in IOs should certainly raise deep concerns, most notably the suppression of the inquiry into the origins of the coronavirus.
- Looking ahead, if the US and Europe do not hold themselves to the standards they exhort to the rest of the world, their credibility and legitimacy will continue to degrade.
- This will cede ground and soft power to geopolitical rivals.

Way forward

- So, global political leaders convening next week for the annual meetings of the Bank and Fund must act with urgency and conviction to stem the rot.
- They must open the selection of the heads of these institutions to the best candidate, regardless of nationality.

- And to pave the way, they should clear up the current mess over the Doing Business saga.

2. Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)

Context In the first such signal to New Delhi, visiting US Deputy Secretary of State has indicated that Washington might reconsider slapping sanctions on the Indian government when India takes delivery of five Russian-built S-400 Triumf anti-aircraft missile systems in a US\$5.5 billion deal later this year.

CAATSA

- Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)'s core objective is to counter Iran, Russia and North Korea through punitive measures.
- Enacted in 2017.
- Includes sanctions against countries that engage in significant transactions with Russia's defence and intelligence sectors.

What is S-400 Triumf anti-aircraft missile systems?

1. The S-400 Triumf is a mobile, surface-to-air missile system (SAM) designed by Russia.
2. It is the most dangerous operationally deployed modern long-range SAM (MLR SAM) in the world, considered much ahead of the US-developed Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD).

3. MoU for Capacity Building in Faecal Sludge & Septage Management

In News: National Mission of Clean Ganga (NMCG) has signed an MoU with Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Institute (WASH Institute) to conduct a series of trainings to enhance the quality of service of officials in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

- **Aim:** To efficiently address and improve preparedness towards FSSM (faecal sludge and septage management) and Wastewater Management in Indian towns and cities.
- The project will be funded by USAID and supported by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Background

In India, untreated faecal sludge and urban sewage are the primary source of water pollution, particularly in the cities around Ganges. Under Prime Minister's visionary initiative, the Swachh Bharat Mission, more than 62 lakh toilets are built. Half of these toilets rely on on-site sanitation system (OSS). Managing the waste collected from these toilets is the next big challenge for India. Considering these challenges, systematic capacity building initiatives need to be undertaken to build the skill and knowledge of the Government, Urban Local Body (ULB) officials, STP/FSTP Operators, Sanitary workers, entrepreneurs, NGO professionals and other stakeholders involved in the FSSM sector across India.

Do you know?

- Considering the importance of FSSM solutions, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs came up with the national policy on FSSM in 2017.
- More than 24 states have adopted it and 12 of them have come up with their own policies.
- Universal access to toilets was achieved in urban India with the construction of 66 lakh household toilets and more than 6 lakh community and public toilets.
- After achieving the target of 'Open-Defecation-Free' (ODF), India has now moved towards becoming ODF+ and ODF++.
- These targets go beyond the concept of access to sanitation and aim for safely managed sanitation systems, with adequate treatment and safe disposal of toilet waste.

4. E-shram portal

In News: More than 3 crore unorganized workers are now registered on E-shram portal.

- By Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE)
- It is the web portal for creating a National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW), which will be seeded with Aadhaar.
- It seeks to register an estimated 398-400 million unorganised workers and to issue an E-Shram card containing a 12-digit unique number.
- Registered workers will be eligible for Rs 2 Lakh on death or permanent disability and Rs 1 lakh on partial disability.

Significance of e-Shram portal - National Database on Unorganized Workers (NDUW)

- **Targeted identification of the unorganized workers** was a much-needed step and the portal which will be the national database of our nation builders will help take welfare schemes to their doorstep, who are the builders of our Nation.
- **Targeted delivery and last mile delivery**, has been a major focus of the schemes of government of India and the National Database of Unorganised workers (E-Shram portal) is another key step towards that.

Issues

- **Tedious Process:** Given the gigantic nature of registering each worker, it will be a long-drawn process.
- **Data Security issues:** Given the mega-size of the database, there is potential for its misuses especially in the absence of Data Protection legislation. The Union government would have to share data with State governments whose data security capacities vary.
- **Definitional issues:** By excluding workers covered by EPF and ESI, lakhs of contract and fixed-term contract workers will be excluded from the universe of UW.
- **Ever-changing identities:** Unorganised may have complex and ever-changing identities where they move between formal and informal sectors.
- **Gig workers** – Gig workers are included by the Labour ministry while they are excluded by the other three Labour Codes creating legal confusions over the classification of gig/platform workers.
- **Federal Challenges:** Union chalks out the plan but states have to implement it. Differences in state capacities can create hurdles in the implementation.
- **Corruption** – Middle service agencies such as Internet providers might charge exorbitant charges to register and print the E-Shram cards.

Way Ahead

- Involvement of surveillance agencies is crucial to address the issues of corruption.
- Government must publish statistics at the national and regional levels of the registrations to assess the registration system's efficiency.
- Triple linkage of One-Nation-One-Ration Card , E-Shram Card (especially bank account seeded) and the Election Commission Card can be done, for efficient and leakage-less delivery,

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. G-Sec Acquisition Programme

Context The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday said it was halting its bond buying under the G-Sec Acquisition Programme (GSAP).

- GSAP had succeeded in ensuring adequate liquidity and stabilising financial markets.

Government Securities Acquisition Programme (G-SAP)

- The G-Sec Acquisition Programme (G-SAP) is basically an unconditional and a structured Open Market Operation (OMO), of a much larger scale and size.
- **Objective:** To achieve a stable and orderly evolution of the yield curve along with management of liquidity in the economy.
 - A yield curve is a line that plots yields (interest rates) of bonds having equal credit quality but differing maturity dates.
 - The slope of the yield curve gives an idea of future interest rate changes and economic activity.
- By purchasing G-secs, the RBI infuses money supply into the economy which in turn keeps the yield down and lower the borrowing cost of the Government.

Government Securities?

- A G-Sec is a tradable instrument issued by the Central Government or the State Governments.
- Such securities are short term or long term.
- G-Secs carry practically no risk of default and, hence, are called risk-free gilt-edged instruments.

6. Javan Gibbon

In News : Indonesia is taking steps to protect the habitat of Javan Gibbon (*Hylobates moloch*), which is endangered by climate change and human encroachment.

- The species is also hunted for both meat and pet trade.

About Javan Gibbon

- The silvery gibbon or Javan gibbon, is a primate. They are found in groups only, usually in a pair of two.

- It is endemic to the Indonesian island of Java, where it inhabits undisturbed rainforests
- It helps in regenerating forest vegetation by dispersing seeds.
- There are around 4,000 Javan gibbons left.
- It was declared Critically Endangered in 2004 but since has recovered to status of Endangered as per IUCN criterion. However, the latest IUCN estimate shows that their population is decreasing.
- **Habitat:** Java, Indonesia.
- **Protection Status:**
 - IUCN: Endangered (EN)
 - CITES: Appendix I

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Which of the following security forces is responsible for securing India's border with Nepal?

- a. Indo Tibetan Border Police
- b. Sashastra Seema Bal
- c. Border Security Force
- d. Assam Rifles

Answer: b

Explanation:

The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), a central armed police force, secures the Nepal and Bhutan borders.

2. Ecological Threat Report (ETR) will be published by?

- a. World Wide Fund for Nature
- b. UN Environment Programme
- c. Institute for Economics and Peace
- d. International Union for Conservation of Nature

Answer : c

Ecological Threat Report (ETR)

- The Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP) has recently released the Ecological Threat Report (ETR).
- This is the second edition of the Ecological Threat Report (ETR), which covers 178 independent states and territories.
- The ETR is unique in that it combines measures of resilience with the most comprehensive ecological data available to shed light on the countries least likely to cope with extreme ecological shocks, now and into the future.
- It analyses risk from population growth, water stress, food insecurity, droughts, floods, cyclones, rising temperatures and sea levels.
- The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), a leading international think-tank, also produces indexes such as the Global Peace Index and Global Terrorism Index.

3. Guru Ghasidas National Park and Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary is located in?

- a. Jharkhand
- b. Chhattisgarh
- c. Uttar Pradesh
- d. Madhya Pradesh

Answer : b

- National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has recently approved the Chhattisgarh's proposal to declare the combined areas of the Guru Ghasidas National Park & Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary as a Tiger Reserve.
- The 11th Technical Committee of the NTCA approved the proposal under the Section 38V (1) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- [Section 38V (1) of WPA, 1972 (Tiger Conservation Plan) - The State Government shall, on the recommendation of the NTCA, notify an area as a tiger reserve.]
- The new tiger reserve is located in the northern part of Chhattisgarh, bordering Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand.
- Both Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary and Guru Ghasidas National Park were identified as **reserve forests**.
- Turning Guru Ghasidas into a Tiger Reserve is important as it provides a corridor for tigers to move between Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh) and Palamau Tiger Reserve (Jharkhand).

4. Consider the following statements with respect to Central Asian Flyway (CAF)

1. It covers a large continental area of Asia between the Pacific and Indian Ocean and the associated island chains.
2. There are 30 countries under the Central Asian Flyway including India.

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

- The Indian sub-continent is part of the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) that covers a large area of Eurasia between the Arctic and Indian Oceans.
- This flyway comprises several important migration routes of birds.
- Including India, there are 30 countries under the Central Asian Flyway.
- It covers at least 279 populations of 182 migratory water bird species, including 29 globally threatened species.

5. Harit Dhara Feed Supplement developed by ICAR can be used for which of the following purposes?

- a. Cut down cattle methane emissions
- b. Improve carbohydrate fermentation
- c. Promote digestion in Cattle
- d. Prevent microbial diseases in cattle

Answer : a

Harit Dhara Feed Supplement

- ICAR has developed an anti-methanogenic feed supplement 'Harit Dhara' (HD), which can cut down cattle methane emissions by 17-20% and can also result in higher milk production.
- HD decreases the population of protozoa microbes in the rumen, responsible for hydrogen production and making it available to the archaea (structure similar to bacteria) for reduction of CO₂ to methane.

- It has been made from tannin-rich plant-based sources, Tropical plants containing tannins, bitter and astringent chemical compounds, are known to suppress or remove protozoa from the rumen.
- Fermentation after using HD will help produce more propionic acid, which provides more energy for lactose (milk sugar) production and body weight gain.

6. With reference to Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. OPEC has its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.
2. Venezuela is the only country from South America which is part of OPEC.

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: b

Explanation:

- OPEC is an acronym for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. It is a permanent, intergovernmental organization, created at the Baghdad Conference in September 1960 by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.
- OPEC had its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, in the first five years of its existence. Due to Switzerland not extending diplomatic assurances, this was moved to Vienna, Austria, in 1965.
- Venezuela is the only country from South America which is part of OPEC.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. A better solution than privatization may well be giving Public Sector Banks autonomy to reform themselves and function free of political interference. Justify.

Approach

- Start the answer by mentioning the context of the need for privatization of banks.
- Mention the rationale of Privatisation of Banks followed by the arguments against it.
- Conclude Suitably.

2Q. The real challenge to India's food security is poor grain management rather than a shortage of grain production. Comment. (250 words)

Approach

- Highlight grain production (supply-demand) with some facts, is not a problem
- Highlight challenges in grain management i.e. supply chain. Consequently or simultaneously relate these issues with Food Security.
- Steps to resolve issues as way forward.