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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. MPLADS scheme

Recently, the Union government announced the restoration of the Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS Scheme).

Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS Scheme)

Background:

- On December 23, 1993, the government launched the MPLADS (Local Area Development Scheme).
- This core sector project was established to enable parliamentarians to push for development projects in their constituencies based on locally identified needs.
- The majority of these development initiatives concentrated on national issues including drinking water, education, public health, sanitation, and roads, among others.
- The Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme was established by the late Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao (MPLADS).
- This initiative, which was previously administered by the Ministry of Rural Development, is now overseen by the Ministry of Statistics and Implementation.
- It was established in 1993 by the Narasimha Rao government, with each MP receiving a yearly payment of Rs. 50 lakh.
- In 2011-12, the UPA government increased the yearly entitlement to 5 crore rupees.

Fund Allocation and Utilisation:

- Every MP is entitled to 5 crore each year under the Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme, totaling 3,950 crore for the 790 MPs.
- The money will be used to “create long-term community assets and provide basic services, such as community infrastructure, based on locally perceived needs.”
- This money does not go straight to the MPs’ accounts. They are only able to suggest works. Following that, the district authorities are responsible for sanctioning, executing, and completing the works within the specified time frame.

- More money is issued only when the completion certificate is received.
- The system is overseen by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation.

Working of the MPLADS Scheme:

- Every member of the Lok Sabha must designate a district as the nodal district.
- The District Magistrate is in charge of managing the funding and overseeing the projects that have been approved under the plan.
- A Lok Sabha member can only approve projects in his or her own area, but a Rajya Sabha member can utilise the funds for projects throughout the state.
- In the event of a natural disaster, MPs from non-affected districts in both Houses of Parliament can suggest works in disaster-affected areas for up to Rs. 25 lakh each year.

Controversies over MPLADS Scheme:

1. **Misuse of Funds:** The scheme was first challenged in 1999 by Jammu and Kashmir National Panthers Party chief Bhim Singh and an NGO, Common Cause. They alleged that in the absence of any guidelines, the funds were misused by MPs.
2. **Challenge to Constitutional Validity:** From 1999 until 2005, the constitutional validity of MPLADS was contested in India's Supreme Court. In 2010, the Supreme Court issued a combined ruling on all of these cases, upholding the scheme's constitutional validity. The Supreme Court said in its judgment that mere allegations that the funds were prone to misuse could not be the ground for scrapping the scheme. It did, however, advise certain changes to the system.
3. **Suspension during COVID-19:** The plan was halted for two years on April 6, 2020, with the justification that money is required to combat the COVID-19 Pandemic. The scheme's budget of Rs 7,900 crore was to be absorbed into the Consolidated Fund of India over a two-year period. Opposition MPs slammed the action, claiming that the state governments were already cash-strapped and in desperate need of the money provided under the plan.

Improvements Suggested in MPLADS Scheme Post-Pandemic

- The MPLADS Scheme should be modified by the government to fit the post-pandemic environment and policy decisions.
- At the moment, the money may only be used for "durable assets." There is a requirement for expansion to other assets.

- There should be a constitution of a monitoring committee comprising MPs to oversee the scheme at the district level, apart from the issue of pending installments.

2. 'Travel bubble' policy

The Union Government is facing pressure from foreign embassies and the tourism industry to restore regular international flights.

Background: -

- Due to the COVID epidemic in March 2020, a number of flights have been cancelled.
- Only nations with which the Indian government has signed "Air Travel Bubble" agreements are allowed to operate flights.
- Furthermore, the agreements are only intended to be "end to end."
- Several embassies have called for an end to the Air Bubble, calling it a "unfair" arrangement.

Additional Information:-

Travel Bubble'

- During the COVID-19 epidemic, the term "Air Bubble Agreement" was developed.
- It implies that airlines from both nations participating in the agreement will be able to fly people in both directions.
- The 'Travel Bubble' or 'Air Bubble' is an agreement between countries to reduce the amount of quarantine and COVID-19 testing requirements at arrival destinations.
- Air bridges or Covid-safe travel zones are other names for travel bubbles.

Travel Bubble Proposal of India

- The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) negotiated the resumption of regular international passenger flights by establishing Air Transport Bubbles.
- It was successful in forming bilateral bubbles with the United States, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom.
- India has reached an agreement with 13 other nations to resume international flights.
- Italy, New Zealand, Australia, Israel, Kenya, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand are among these nations.

3. Zika virus outbreaks, an opportunity to improve healthcare in India

There is a need to optimally use the lab for COVID-19 to conduct testing for other emerging infections such as Zika virus.

Background: -

- In 1947, the Zika virus was discovered in rhesus monkeys in Uganda's Zika forest.
- In 2007, the first Zika virus epidemic was discovered on the Pacific island of Yap.
- The Zika virus epidemic was declared a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organization on February 1, 2016.

Additional Information

Zika Virus

- Zika virus is primarily a mosquito-borne illness which is transmitted by the Aedes Mosquitoes (which transmit chikungunya and dengue).
- Zika virus is transmitted from infected mother to fetus during pregnancy, through blood and other body fluids and organ transplantation as well as sexual contact.
- The symptoms are very similar to other common viral illnesses.
- This virus is an enveloped positive-sense RNA genome that can be translated into viral proteins
- It mutated into two strains called the Asian Strain and the African Strain
- A definitive treatment for Zika Virus has yet not been found and no vaccines have been approved.

Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)

- The International Health Regulation (2005) defines a PHEIC as an unusual occurrence that is determined to pose a public health risk to other States through the international transmission of illness and to need a coordinated international response.
- Public Health Emergency of International Concern refers to a scenario that is dangerous, uncommon, or unexpected and has public health ramifications beyond the affected State's national boundary and may necessitate prompt international response.
- Recent PHEIC declarations:

1. The 2009 H1N1 (or swine flu) pandemic
2. The 2014 Polio declaration
3. The 2014 outbreak of Ebola in Western Africa
4. The 2015–16 Zika virus epidemic
5. The ongoing 2018–20 Kivu Ebola epidemic, and
6. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

4. COP26 seals deal, after India intervenes

Recently, a COP26 UN Climate Summit was closed after the formal closure of an agreement.

Background:

- The 26th edition of the United Nations Conference of Parties (COP) in Glasgow, Scotland, came to a formal conclusion when 200 negotiators from various countries reached an agreement.
- The conference came to a close after all participants reached an agreement.

Important points of Discussion

Concerns over Coal: -

- China and India attempted to soften the summit text's stance on fossil fuels.
- India spoke out to express its dissatisfaction with the wording, particularly passages that recommended phasing out coal subsidies.
- Several countries, notably tiny island governments, expressed disappointment with the decision to "phase down" coal power rather than "phase out."

Glasgow Facility:

- The development of a "Glasgow Facility" has been a fundamental demand from various island states and African Union members.
- It would give money to nations who are already experiencing the effects of climate change.
- This money would be part of a "Adaptation Fund" that rich nations would fund.

Commitments of Developed countries

- Developed nations have agreed to provide \$100 billion every year by 2020.
- This provision was entrenched in 2009, but none of it has found its way to underdeveloped nations, and it remains a source of dispute.

Demands of Developing countries

- India has stated that if money is available, it will commit to attaining net zero by 2070.
- The plan urged wealthy nations to quadruple collective adaptation funding by 2025, compared to current levels.
- It also advocated the acceleration of greenhouse gas emission reductions, which should be announced by the end of next year at the latest.
- To address the issues posed by global warming, India has asked wealthy nations to contribute one trillion dollars over the next decade.

5. Stop misleading ads on crypto: Govt.

Recently, the Prime Minister chaired a meeting to consider the regulatory prospects for cryptocurrencies.

Details:

- A significant consensus was achieved during the conference to put an end to “attempts to mislead the youth by over-promising and non-transparent advertising.”
- Unregulated crypto markets must not be used as a conduit for money laundering or terror funding.
- Despite the lack of a defined regulatory framework, a number of investors, particularly the young, have been banking on cryptocurrencies for apparently quick profits.

Additional Information

Cryptocurrency

- Cryptocurrency is a digitised asset spread through multiple computers in a shared network.

- The decentralised nature of this network shields them from any control from government regulatory bodies.
- The term “cryptocurrency in itself is derived from the encryption techniques used to secure the network.
- The first type of crypto currency was Bitcoin, which to this day remains the most-used, valuable and popular.

6. Was it really a black hole that the EHT imaged in 2019?

A recently published paper provides an alternative explanation of the image of the Black hole (M87*) taken by the Event Horizon Telescope.

Background

- In 2019, researchers using the Event Horizon Telescope acquired the first photograph of a supermassive black hole (M87*) at the galaxy’s centre, Messier 87. (M87).
- Now, an article published in The European Physical Journal C proposes a new theory for the compact object observed by the Event Horizon Telescope.
- It (M87*) might be a “bare singularity with a gravitomagnetic monopole,” according to the scientists, rather than a black hole.

Additional Information

Black Hole:

- A black hole is a region of space in which gravity is so strong that even light cannot escape. Because matter has been crammed into such a small space, gravity is extremely powerful.
- When stars reach the end of their lives, they collapse under their own gravity, and the product of this collapse, most astronomers believe, is a black hole.
- A black hole has two parts:
 - **Singularity:** At its core is a singularity which is a point that is infinitely dense. The remnant mass of the star is compressed into this point.
 - **Event Horizon:** The event horizon is an imaginary surface surrounding the singularity, and the gravity of the object is such that once anything enters this surface, it is trapped forever. Not even light can escape the pull of the singularity once it crosses the event horizon.
- That is why, we cannot see the singularity at the heart of a black hole but only see points outside the event horizon.

Black Hole singularity

- A gravitational singularity is a one-dimensional point in the core of a black hole that holds a massive mass in an endlessly tiny space.
- Here the rules of physics as we know them cease to apply.
- The presence of a singularity is frequently viewed as proof that general relativity theory has failed.
- It is probably unsurprising given that it happens in situations when quantum effects should become significant.

7. Assam Rifles Commanding Officer, family, four jawans killed in Manipur ambush

Recently, four jawans and Assam Rifles Commanding Officer(CO) were attacked by militants in Manipur.

Background:

- The officer's convoy was attacked with Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) by militants.
- The People's Liberation Army(PLA) and the Manipur Naga People's Front(MNPF) jointly claimed responsibility for the ambush.
- The PLA and MNPF's targeted killing of a CO marked a major escalation in insurgent operations in Manipur.

Insurgency in Manipur

Background of insurgent Groups In Manipur:

- The **United National Liberation Front (UNLF)** was formed in the 1960s owing to resentment among a portion of Meitei society over Manipur's merger into the Union of India. This led to the beginning of the insurgency in Manipur.
- Later, various more insurgent organisations arose to demand independence of Manipur.
- The Meiteis were further radicalised by the creation of the People's Liberation Army.
- After separating from the UNLF in 1969, N Bisheshwar founded the **People's Liberation Army**.
- The goal was freeing the northeastern area via a meticulously organised revolutionary revolt. This was used as a basis for 'liberating' the rest of India."

- Bisheswar claimed to have built his organisation on **Marxism-Leninism and Mao's ideas**, as well as appealing to the Naga and Mizo groups to join the PLA.
- The Revolutionary People's Front (RPF), the PLA's political branch, was founded in 1979.
- The **Manipur Naga People's Front (MNPF)**, which claimed responsibility for the attack, claims it arose from a combination of two Naga underground organisations operating in Manipur.

Significant Work of Assam Rifles

- The battalion has carried out major seizures of drugs and several successful operations to disrupt illegal smuggling including narcotics along the Myanmar border.
- The battalion has also recovered several weapons and war-like stores which could have landed in the hands of anti-national elements thus avoiding major casualties.
- The battalion focused activities under civic action, student outreach and health campaigns, especially during challenging times of COVID-19 pandemic.

Challenges

- Manipur has a diverse ethnic population with Meitis controlling the Valley, Nagas on the surrounding hills and Kukis interspersed in between.
- **Multiethnic Communities:** There are a number of other smaller tribal groups with their own set of demands.
 - Naga inhabited areas of Manipur demand Nagalim or Greater Nagaland.
 - The Meitis aim to preserve a unique geographic unit that has existed for ages.
 - Kukis also seek their rights in the fragmented society.
- **Political Interests:** Insurgent groups are also linked to political parties, resulting in a set of relationships between weapons and political power, as well as finance. As a result, there are inherent interests in maintaining the insurgency.
- **Economic Benefits of Insurgency:** Insurgency is increasingly viewed as a lucrative industry, and insurgencies have turned into criminal activities in reality.
- AFSPA is more of a perception problem than a legal issue involving alleged human rights violations.

What Is The Solution To The Insurgency Problem In Manipur?

1. People in the state should reject the state's fragmented political system by coming together to strive for a better life.
2. People will have to rise beyond petty local politics to guarantee that success in industry and tourism is achieved in a peaceful manner.
3. Given the high level of education, more people should enter the national mainstream through government work or private sector employment, bringing a fresh perspective to the area.
4. There is a need to ensure greater transparency in the local police system.
5. In addition, the legislation should be improved to incorporate the Supreme Court-approved guidelines.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. UP man dies in police station washroom

According to National Human Rights Commission, a total of 1,067 people died in custody in the first five months of 2021.

Custodial Deaths:

- Custodial deaths are events of the demise of persons who are detained by police during pretrial or after conviction. Custodial deaths can be broadly classified into three types -
 - Death in police custody
 - Death in judicial custody
 - Death in custody of army or paramilitary force.
- Besides death, **rape and torture** are two other forms of custodial violence.
- It can also be due to **natural causes** like illness or may also happen due to **suicide, infighting among prisoners** but in many instances, it is police brutality and torture that is the reason behind the death.

Difference between police custody and Judicial custody

Police Custody	Judicial Custody
The accused stays in the lock-up of a police station or at least in the physical	The accused is lodged in jail and is under the custody of a magistrate.

<p>custody of the investigating agency probing the concerned matter.</p>	
<p>Can be extended for a maximum period of 15 days.</p>	<p>Judicial custody can be extended to a maximum period of 90 days for offences punishable with more than 10 years of imprisonment, and 60 days for all other offences.</p>
<p>Soon after the arrest, an accused can be kept in police custody for up to 24 hours. Beyond that, the magistrate decides whether he/she should stay in police custody or be remanded to judicial custody.</p>	

Causes of Custodial Deaths:

Incompetence of State and Judicial Facilities:

- They **fail** to provide **proper healthcare and security** to the prisoners.

Improper Security:

- A lot of attacks happen inside the prison **between inmates** which often prove to be fatal.

Police Brutality:

- In order to achieve quick or forced confession, the police **resorts to torture**. This leads to **fatal injuries** or suicide in some cases.

Psychological Stress:

- There are **no adequate provisions** for inmates and under-trials seeking **psychiatric help** and this affects their mental health greatly.
- A person under custody loses most of his rights including the right of free movement and the right to choose their preferred medical care. This adds to their mental agony.

Overcrowding:

- Large number of prisoners confined in a single jail due to lack of infrastructure, results in **depletion of resources like food and water**, eventually causing malnutrition and natural death.

Safeguards against Custodial Deaths:

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 20(1)** provides that, no person shall be convicted of any offence except for violation of law in force.
- **Article 20(2)** states that no person shall be prosecuted and punished for the same offence more than once.
- **Article 21** (Right to Life and Personal Liberty) does not expressly say anything against custodial torture but its ambit is quite extensive. This right states that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law.
- **Article 22(2)** provides the arrested person with the opportunity of a quick trial. Any arrested person has to be produced before the nearest magistrate within a period of twenty-four hours

Indian Evidence Act:

- **Section 24** makes all confessions made under inducement, threat, or promise as inadmissible. The section gives the accused the right not to make any confession against his will
- **Sections 25 and 26** of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 provide safeguards to the accused on the same lines.
 - Section 25 states that no confession made to a police officer can be used to prove any offence against him.
 - Section 26 makes all confessions made during custody inadmissible unless made in the immediate presence of a Magistrate.

Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC):

- **Section 49** of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 is also a safeguard against custodial excesses. It states that an arrested person shall not be subjected to more restraint than is necessary to prevent his escape.
- **Section 163** of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 prohibits the investigating officers from making any inducement, threat or promise.
- **Section 164(4)** of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 provides for recording and signature of confessions in proper manner and endorsement of the confession by a magistrate to the effect that it has been made voluntarily.

Indian Penal Code (IPC):

- **Section 348** of Indian Penal Code, 1860, among others, lays down provisions relating to wrongful confinement and prohibits such confinement for extorting any confession or information for detecting any offence or misconduct.
 - Such wrongful confinement has been made a punishable offence with imprisonment up to three years is also liable for fine.

- **Section 376** have been amended to specifically address rape in custody by insertion of Section 376(2) in the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983.

International safeguards:

- This right against self-incrimination is in tune with **Article 14(3) (g) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** which calls on the member states to ensure that the accused is not compelled to testify against himself or to confess guilt.

Judicial Interventions:

- **Joginder Kumar v. State of UP (1994):** Supreme court ordered that no arrest can be made on mere allegation or suspicion.
 - It said that information of arrest and location of detention has to be given to friends or relatives and the entrusted magistrate shall ensure that these directives are being followed.
- In **Nilabati Behera v. State of Orissa**, paved way for structured formulation to grant **compensation** on cases of custodial death.
- In **Shyamsunder Trivedi v. State of MP**, the Supreme Court ordered for insertion of Section 114-B into the Indian Evidence Act 1872, to ensure that if the injury was caused during the custody, the court would presume that the police officer having custody of the person is responsible.
 - Thus, it reverses the burden of proof.
 - This recommendation was made by the Law Commission twice (in its 113th & 152nd report) but is yet to be made a law though the bill was introduced in 2017.

2. Over 55% donations to regional parties from 'unknown' sources: ADR report

25 regional parties collected 55.50% of their total income from unknown sources in the 2019-20 fiscal, according to an Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report.

After the introduction of Electoral bond scheme 2018, there has been an increase in the income of political parties from unknown sources.

Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR);

- The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) is an **Indian non-partisan, non-governmental organization** which works in the area of electoral and political reforms.

- It strives to **bring transparency and accountability in Indian politics** and reduce the influence of money and muscle power in elections.

Electoral Bond Scheme:

- It is an instrument of political funding aimed at **increasing transparency in the process**.
- It is a **debt instrument**.

Under the scheme:

- The donor can donate any amount of money, via cheque or digitally, **without revealing** his identity.
- There is **no upper limit** for a company to donate fund via electoral bond.
- The definition of foreign companies has been tweaked under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 2010 (FCRA), to enable them to donate via electoral bonds.

The anonymity provided to the donor has increased the funding available to the political parties from unknown sources.

Suggestions to stop political funding from unknown sources:

- **Full details** of all donors should be **made available** for public scrutiny **under the Right To Information**.
- Any party which does not submit its IT returns on or before the due date, their income should **not be tax-exempted** and **defaulting parties should be derecognized**.
- The principle of **anonymity** of the bond donor enshrined in the Electoral Bond Scheme, 2018 must be done away with as it **infringes the citizen's fundamental 'Right to Know'** by withholding crucial information regarding electoral funding
- All political parties which receive donations through Electoral Bonds should **declare** the total amount **in their Contributions Reports** the total amount.
- The procedures and reporting **framework** for the above must be **standardized** to ensure that a true picture of the financial position of the political parties is revealed to the general public.
- The ECI/Central Board for Direct Taxes/Comptroller and Auditor General or any **other relevant institution** should be entrusted with the responsibility to **oversee** that there is **no discrepancy** between the value of Electoral Bonds redeemed and the value of donations received through Electoral Bonds.
- All Political parties must provide all information on their finances under the **Right to Information Act**. This will only strengthen political parties, elections and democracy.

3. Supreme Court order paves way for legal riverbed sand mining in Rajasthan

The resumption of legal mining of riverbed sand in the Rajasthan after a gap of four years was approved by Supreme Court for implementation of most of the recommendations made by a Central Empowered Committee.

Background

- **November 2017:** Supreme Court ordered to stop all sand mining leases in Rajasthan from carrying out mining activities in the absence of environmental clearances and a scientific replenishment study.
- **February 2020:** Supreme court directed a Central Empowered Committee (CEC) to report on issues related to sand mining.
- **November 2021:** The supreme court approved few recommendations of Central Empowered Committee. One of them was to allow sand mining after obtaining all statutory clearances.

Sand Mining

- It is the extraction of sand, mainly through an open pit (or sandpit) and sometimes mined from beaches and inland dunes or dredged from ocean and river beds.
- Sand is often used in manufacturing, for example as an abrasive or in concrete.
 - It is also used on icy and snowy roads usually mixed with salt, to lower the melting point temperature, on the road surface.
- Sand mining presents opportunities to extract rutile, ilmenite, and zircon, which contain the industrially useful elements titanium and zirconium.
 - Besides these minerals, beach sand may also contain garnet, leucoxene, sillimanite, and monazite.

Adverse Effect of Sand Mining

- Excessive instream sand mining is a threat to bridges, river banks and nearby structures.
- Sand mining also affects the adjoining groundwater system and the uses that local people make of the river.
- Instream sand mining results in the destruction of aquatic and riparian habitats through large changes in the channel morphology.
 - Impacts include bed degradation, bed coarsening, lowered water tables near the streambed, and channel instability.

- Sand mining generates extra vehicle traffic, which negatively impairs the environment. Where access roads cross riparian areas, the local environment may be impacted.

Legal framework of sand mining in India

- *Sand mining* is defined under section 3(e) of **the mines and mineral development and regulation act, 1957 (MMDR act)**. This law has been implemented by the government to prevent illegal mining.
- Central Government notifies certain minerals as 'minor' minerals from time to time. The absolute powers for deciding on procedures of minor minerals for seeking applications for granting mineral concessions, fixing rates of royalty, dead rent etc. rest only with the **State Government. Ordinary sand is minor mineral.**

Suggestions to prevent illegal sand mining in India

- The prospecting mining operation should be under licence or lease- the lease conditions should be contrary to the rules.
- after the end of the lease period, there needs a renewal of the lease for continuing mining.
- Exceeding the lease area comes under illegal mining of this act.
- After a premature termination of the lease, there is a need for seeking permission from the **State Government for the operative mechanism of section 4(A)(1) of MMDRA, 1957.**
- Abandoned stream channels on terrace and inactive floodplains may be preferred rather than active channels and their deltas and floodplains. Replenishment of groundwater has to be ensured if excessive pumping out of water is required during mining.
- Mining below subterranean water levels should be avoided as a safeguard against environmental contamination and **overexploitation of resources,**
- Large rivers and streams whose periodic sediment replenishment capacity are larger may be preferred than smaller rivers.

4. New Zealand Hosts Annual APEC Forum Virtually

Recently, New Zealand hosted the first meeting of this year's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, which culminates in a leader's meeting.

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

- It is a regional economic forum **established in 1989** to leverage the growing **interdependence of the Asia-Pacific**.
- **Aim:** To create greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and secure growth and by accelerating regional economic integration.
- **Headquarters:** Queenstown, Singapore
- **Members:** Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; People's Republic of China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; The Philippines; The Russian Federation; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; United States of America; VietNam.
 - **India is NOT a member of APEC.**
- **Working and Functions:**
 - APEC cooperative process is predominantly concerned with trade and economic issues, with members engaging with one another as economic entities.
 - It ensures that goods, services, investments, and people move easily across borders.
 - Members facilitate this trade through faster customs procedures at borders;
 - It deals in aligning regulations and standards across the region.
- **Benefits of the Forum:**
 - APEC works to help all residents of the Asia-Pacific participate in the growing economy.
 - APEC projects provide **digital skills training** for rural communities and help indigenous women export their products abroad.
 - APEC members also implement initiatives to **increase energy efficiency** and promote **sustainable management of forest** and marine resources.
 - The forum adapts to allow members to deal with important new challenges such as disaster resilience, planning for pandemics, and addressing terrorism.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Can court override defence needs of country: SC on Chardham project

The Supreme court has addressed the environmental impacts and strategic importance of road expansion along the Chardham project, considering the army's request for upgradation.

Background:

- **2018:** The government published a circular stipulating **maximum road carriageway width of 5.5 metres to minimise the risk of landslides.**
- **September 2020:** The supreme court ordered the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to follow the 2018 circular on the Char Dham highway project.
- **November 2021:** Central government asked supreme court to modify the September 2020 order by allowing broadening of the road.
 - **Rational behind government's plea:**
 - The roads in the char Dham project are **strategic as it connects the India-China border** with the Army camps in Dehradun and Meerut where missile bases are located.
 - Thus, widening the road (i.e., carriageway width) will allow Indian military to **easily transport missiles across India-China border.**
- **Protest:** An NGO has protested against the widening of roads, **citing the felling of trees in the wildlife-rich area.**

Chardham project

- The Char Dham project is a **two-lane highway project** in Uttarakhand, taken up by the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.**
- **Aim:** To widen the road by 10 meters thereby improving the connectivity between the four important pilgrim towns of **Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri.**
- **All of these four sites are devoted to a specific deity. Gangotri - Goddess Ganga, Yamunotri**
- **- Goddess Yamuna, Kedarnath - Lord Shiva and is one of the 12 jyotirlingas, and Badrinath -**
- **Lord Vishnu.**
- It will **widen 900 km of highways** connecting the pilgrimage sites and the Tanakpur-Pithoragarh stretch of National Highway (NH125), a part of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra route.
- Implementing Agencies: Uttarakhand State **Public Works Department (PWD), Border Roads Organisation (BRO)** and the **National Highway & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL).**

- NHIDCL is a fully owned company of the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways.
- **BRO**, an executive force in India, develops and maintains road networks in India's border areas and friendly neighbouring countries.
 - BRO functions under the Ministry of Defence.
- Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has completed construction of a **440 m long tunnel** below the Chamba town on the Rishikesh-Dharasu road highway.
 - The construction of the **Chamba tunnel** is a part of the Char Dham Project.
- The project is being implemented in **Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) model**.
 - Under the EPC model, the project cost is completely borne by the government.

Environmental Concerns

- Environmentalists had pointed out that the **unregulated cutting** of trees and scooping up land at the base of the hills is irreversibly damaging the ecosystem
 - This resulted in making the regions **dangerously prone to landslides**.
 - The Supreme Court of India appointed a **Ravi Chopra committee** to look into the matter and it found that several norms were violated during the construction of the project.
 - The committee recommended the construction to be done without disturbing the ecological balance.

6. CBIC asks GST officers to block ITC on basis of evidence

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has come out with guidelines on blocking of tax credit on the basis of 'material evidence' and not just out of 'suspicion'.

Key Highlights:

Circumstances under which credit can be blocked are:

- Availment of credit without any invoice or any valid document **would be blocked by the senior tax officer**.
- Availing of credit on invoices by purchasers on which **1GST has not been paid by sellers**.
- The Input tax credit is availed by **the registered person on invoices**.

Rule 86A

- The officer should consider that the registered person's input tax credit obtained **fraudulently or is ineligible**.
- Disallowing such debit is necessary to **prevent from utilizing ineligible input tax credit**.
- The amount disallowed for debit from electronic credit ledger **should not be more than the amount of input tax credit**.
- The Commissioner may examine the matter and, if the input tax credit is no longer ineligible then one **may allow the use of the credit**.

Monetary Limit:

- **Principal commissioner or Commissioner** will take a decision for blocking of ITC when the monetary amount is above Rs 5 crore.
- **Additional commissioner or Joint Commissioner** will take a decision when the monetary amount is in the range of Rs 1-5 crore.
- **Deputy commissioner or Assistant Commissioner** will take decision when the amount is less than Rs 1 crore.

Input Tax Credit:

- It 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.
- The taxes include- **the central tax (CGST), State tax (SGST), integrated tax (IGST) or Union territory tax (UTGST)**.

Conditions necessary for obtaining ITC:

- A **person is in possession of tax invoice** or debit note or such other tax paying documents as may be prescribed;
- He has **received the goods** or services or both;
- The supplier has **actually paid the tax charged** in respect of the supply to the government;
- He has furnished the return under **section 39**.

Time Limit:

- Due date of return for **month of September of next financial year**.
- **Annual return filed** for relevant year.

How Input Tax Credit can be used?

- Credit of CGST **cannot be used for payment of SGST**.

- Credit of SGST **cannot be utilised for payment of CGST.**

7. New initiatives of Reserve Bank of India

The Prime Minister launched two customer-centric initiatives of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently.

The initiatives are: **Retail Direct Scheme** and **Integrated Ombudsman Scheme.**

About Retail Direct Scheme

- **Aim:** Enhancing access to government securities market for retail investors in both primary and Secondary market.
- The investors will **invest in securities** by opening a Retail Direct Gilt (RDG) account with the RBI.
- **Registered investors** can access the secondary market transaction to buy or sell government securities through NDS-OM (**Negotiated Dealing System-Order Matching**).
 - NDS-OM is a screen based electronic anonymous order matching system for secondary market trading in **Government securities** owned by RBI.

Importance of Retail Direct Scheme

- It will increase **retail participation in government securities** and improve ease of access in banking system.
 - The ease of investment and safety will develop the **wealth of the nation.**
- The retail direct scheme allows **more retail investor to buy bonds** and thus government can borrow **more money for developmental works.**
 - The rising inflation in India adds pressure on the RBI to adopt tighter monetary policy to decrease inflation which is likely to weaken the demand for bonds/securities.
 - Less demand for bonds means government can **borrow less money** from general people and hence the developmental works can't be fulfilled entirely.

About Integrated Ombudsman Scheme:

- **Aim:** Improving the grievance redress mechanism for resolving customer complaints against RBI's regulated entities.
- It has amalgamated the three existing ombudsman schemes:

- Banking ombudsman Scheme (BOS), 1995,
- Ombudsman for non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), 2018 and
- Ombudsman Scheme for Digital Transactions (OSDT), 2019.

Features:

- Customers will be able to **file complaints**, and give feedback through a single email address.
- The redressal will continue to be **cost-free** for customers of banks and members of the public.
 - The complaints that are **not covered** under ombudsman scheme will continue to be attended to by the **Customer Education and Protection Cells (CEPCs)** located in RBI's 30 regional offices.
- It also includes under its ambit **non-scheduled primary co-operative banks** with a deposit size of **Rs 50 crore and above**.
- Minimum investment: 10,000,
- Maximum investment: 2 crores.
- There will be **no income tax benefits** attached to this investment.

Importance of Integrated Ombudsman Scheme

- A common man **will not have to run around to lodge his complaints**.
 - No matter what the nature of the financial grievance, the complainant can lodge it online, and can easily track it.
- It will do away with **the jurisdictional limitations** as well as limited grounds for complaints.
- It will help in **preventing fraud**.
- It will **improve digital penetration** and **customer confidence** in the banking system.

8. Pollution levels in Delhi may trigger health emergency

Delhi, in November, reported an average Air Quality Index of 471 -- the highest reported in 2021.

Reasons for air pollution:

- Vehicular Emission
- Stubble Burning
- Lack of pollution control measures

Impact of Polluted Air:

- Pollutants affect a person's immunity; it can also cause **autoimmune disorders**.
- Exposure to pollutants can also lead to a condition called **vasculitis**, meaning inflammation of blood vessels that leads to narrowing of the vessels. This may cause stroke.
- The polluted air affects some vital organs of the human body.

Chokes lungs:

- **Particulate Matter (PM) 2.5 and PM 10** is considered dangerous because these are of respirable size, and can travel down to the lowest part of the lung where gas exchange takes place.
- The particulate matter formed due to diesel or kerosene burning can even **cause lung cancer**.
- The **ultrafine particles of 0.1 micron** or less penetrate the lung and **reach the blood stream**, and once in blood these can reach anywhere – the brain, the heart, kidneys etc.

Harms the heart

- Breathing in heavily polluted air can cause irreversible **damage to the cardiac arteries**.
- The fine particles that lungs aren't able to filter reach the blood stream, they get **attached to the walls of the arteries**.
- Over a period, it could lead to the formation of clots and may cause blockage.
 - There's sudden narrowing of the blood vessels that eventually can lead to a heart attack
- Respiratory diseases such as **chronic bronchitis** can also cause damage to the heart.

Impacts the brain

- When heart malfunctions, it automatically also affects the brain functioning by restricting the flow of blood or oxygen flow.
- Inhaling pollutants emits certain chemical responses within the body that can also cause stroke over a period of time.

Air Quality Index (AQI):

- National Air Quality Index was launched in **2014**.
- **Aim:** To disseminate information on air quality in an easily understandable form for the general public.

- It shows air quality of various pollutants into a **single number (index value), nomenclature and colour.**
- An AQI between zero and 50 is considered good, 51 and 100 satisfactory, 101 and 200 moderate, 201 and 300 poor, 301 and 400 very poor, and 401 and 500 severe.
 - According to **Graded Action Response Plan (GARP)**, the air quality is considered to be in the 'emergency' category if the PM2.5 and PM10 levels continue to be above 300 micrograms per cubic metre and **500 micrograms per cubic metre** respectively for 48 hours.

Government Initiatives to curb Air pollution:

- India has launched the **National Clean Air Program (NCAP)** to reduce PM concentrations by 20-30% by 2024, keeping 2017 as the base year. Under NCAP, 122 non-attainment cities have been identified based on Air Quality data from 2014-2018.
- The Central Government has notified a **Comprehensive Action Plan (CAP)** in 2018 identifying timelines for actions identified for prevention, control and mitigation of air pollution in Delhi and NCR.
- **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)** was notified on January 12, 2017, for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution in Delhi and NCR.
 - It identifies graded measures and implementing agencies for response to four AQI categories, namely, Moderate to Poor, Very Poor, Severe and Severe + or Emergency.

Awareness Campaigns:

- **SAMEER app** has been launched wherein air quality information is available to public along with provision for registering complaints against air polluting activities.
- **Crowd sourcing of innovative ideas/ suggestions/proposals** from public is done through Central Pollution Control Board website to strengthen efforts for improving air quality in Delhi-NCR.
- A **smog tower** has been installed in Delhi with a height of over 20m, is of downdraft type, i.e., polluted air comes in from the top of the tower and clean air comes out of the bottom is intended for localised reduction in air pollution (Particulate Matter).
- **PRAN portal:**
 - The PRANA portal will provide all information related to various policies/programmes/schemes/activities of the stakeholders along with the progress made towards improvement in air quality across the country.

- This portal will be a platform for monitoring and feedback on all efforts made for air quality improvement.

9. Centre agrees to grant permanent commission

The Central government agreed to grant permanent commission (PC) to 11 women Army officers who meet the eligibility criteria.

Permanent Commission:

- A Permanent Commission means a **career in the army till retirement**.
- It is a **compulsorily serve for 20 years** (if one has to avail pension), and then up to **the age of superannuation**.
- An officer who joined with Permanent Commission has **no option to switch over to Short Service Commission**.

Short Service Commission

- A Short Service Commission means a career in the Armed forces as a **Commissioned Officer for 10 or 14 years**.
- After the **end of 10 years**, one can **opt for Permanent Commission** or **opt-out** or have the **option of 4 years extension**.
 - They can resign at any time during this period of 4 yrs extension.
- No entitlement for facilities like Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme, pension etc.

Supreme court order

In February 2020, supreme court ruled that:

- Women officers of the Air Force and Army on SSC who had sought permanent commission but were not granted that status, **would be entitled to Permanent Commission**.
- Women officers who had not reached the age of superannuation for permanently commissioned officers would be **reinstated with all consequential benefits**.
- Government passed an order for **the grant of Permanent Commission to SSC women officers** in eight streams of the Army.
- After implementation of the judgement, a woman can **rise to the rank of Colonel** and above based on merit.
- It has also **removed the restriction of women officers** only being allowed to serve in staff appointments.

- Women officers will be **eligible to tenant all the command appointments** which would open avenues for further promotions to higher ranks for them.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Which of the following Rivers are west flowing?

1. Narmada
2. Mahi
3. Sabarmati
4. Luni
5. Tapi
6. Tawa
7. Sharavati

Options:

- a. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
- b. 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 only
- c. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7 only
- d. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7

Answer: d

Explanation:

- **Narmada** originates from the Maikal range near Amarkantak and it is a west flowing river.
- **Mahi** river originates from the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh and flows West through Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat.
- **Sabarmati** is a west-flowing river through Rajasthan and Gujarat. It originates from Tepur in the Udaipur district of Rajasthan.
- **Luni** is also known as the Sagarmati. It originates from the Western slopes of the Aravalli ranges near Ajmer.
- **Tapi** originates from the Multai reserve forest and flows west through the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat.
- **Tawa** rises from the Satpura Range of Betul in MP and flows to the west.
- **Sharavati** is an important river in the state of Karnataka flowing towards the west. The Sharavati River originates from the Shimoga district of Karnataka.
- **Hence Option D is Correct.**

2. With reference to the Red Sea, consider the following statements:

1. It is bounded by the Arabian peninsula, to the east.
2. It is connected to the Gulf of Aden, and the outer Indian Ocean, via the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : C

Explanation

- The Red Sea is a **semi-enclosed tropical basin**, bounded by **northeastern Africa, to the west**, and the **Arabian peninsula, to the east**. Hence, **statement 1 is correct**.
- The elongated and narrow-shaped basin extends between the Mediterranean Sea, to the north-west, and the Indian Ocean, to the south-east.
- At the northern end, it separates into the Gulf of Aqaba and the Gulf of Suez, which is connected to the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal.
- At the southern end, it is **connected to the Gulf of Aden, and the outer Indian Ocean**, via the **Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb**. Hence, **statement 2 is correct**.
- It is **surrounded by desert or semi-desert areas**, with no major freshwater inflow.
- **6 Bordering Countries**: Yemen; Saudi Arabia; Egypt; Sudan; Eritrea; Djibouti.

3. Which amongst the following statements is the best description of Tallinn Manual?

- a. It is a report which gives insights about climate change, its causes, potential impacts and response options
- b. It provides guidelines regarding the use of drugs to treat COVID-19
- c. It is an academic, non-binding study on how international law applies to cyber conflicts and cyber-warfare
- d. None of the above

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Tallinn Manual is an academic, non-binding study on how international law applies to cyber conflicts and cyber warfare.
- The Tallinn Manual has long been the flagship research initiative of the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE).
- The Tallinn Manual has become an influential resource for legal advisers and policy experts dealing with cyber issues.
- **Hence Option C is Correct.**

4. Which of the following can be termed as the components of Balance of payments:

1. Current Account
2. Capital Account
3. Errors and Omissions
4. Foreign Exchange Reserves

Select the correct code from the following options:

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

Answer : D

Explanation

Components of Balance of Payment (BoP)

- For preparing BoP accounts, economic transactions between a country and the rest of the world are **grouped under - Current account, Capital account**

and Errors and Omissions. It also shows changes in Foreign Exchange Reserves.

- **Current Account:** It shows export and import of visibles (also called merchandise or goods - represent trade balance) and invisibles (also called non-merchandise).
 - Invisibles include services, transfers and income.
- **Capital Account:** It shows a capital expenditure and income for a country.
 - It gives a summary of the net flow of both private and public investment into an economy.
 - **External Commercial Borrowing (ECB), Foreign Direct Investment, Foreign Portfolio Investment,** etc form a part of capital account.
- **Errors and Omissions:** Sometimes the balance of payments does not balance. This imbalance is shown in the BoP as errors and omissions. It reflects the country's inability to record all international transactions accurately.
- **Changes in Foreign Exchange Reserves:** Movements in the reserves comprises **changes in the foreign currency assets held by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and also in Special Drawing Rights (SDR) balances.**
- Hence, option D is correct.

5. With respect to Norovirus, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It is a form of a virus that causes encephalitis.
2. Wild animals typically thought to be carriers include raccoons, bats and foxes.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Norovirus is a form of a virus that causes gastrointestinal sickness, including stomach and gut lining irritation, severe vomiting, and diarrhoea. **Hence Statement 1 is incorrect.**
- Norovirus has little effect on healthy people, but it can be dangerous in small children, the elderly, and persons with comorbid conditions.

- Norovirus is easily spread by coming into close contact with sick persons or touching contaminated surfaces. (Not through Wild Animals). **Hence Statement 2 is incorrect.**

6. Consider the following statements with respect to Inflation:

1. It aims to measure the overall impact of price changes for a diversified set of products and services only.
2. Wholesale Price Index (WPI) is the indices used in measuring inflation by RBI.

Choose the correct option.

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

Answer : a

Inflation

- It is the decline of Purchasing Power of a given currency over time.
- A quantitative estimate of the rate at which the decline in purchasing power occurs can be reflected in the increase of an average price level of a basket of selected goods and services in an economy over some period of time.
- It is the rate at which the value of a currency is falling and, consequently, the general level of prices for goods and services is rising.
- Inflation aims to measure the overall impact of price changes for a diversified set of products and services, and allows for a single value representation of the increase in the price level of goods and services in an economy over a period of time.
- It can be classified into three types: Demand-Pull inflation, Cost-Pull inflation and Built-in inflation.
- The most commonly used inflation indexes are the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the Wholesale Price Index (WPI).
- RBI earlier used WPI to measure inflation and now uses CPI to measure inflation.

Mains Practice Questions

1. Though ordinances making power of President is given under Article 123 of the Constitution, yet its frequent use goes against the spirit of constitution. Examine. (150 words)

Approach

- Give brief idea of ordinance making power of President, its need and limits of its use
- Discuss how its arbitrary use undermines constitution
- List the limits set by Supreme Court in its various judgements for its use.

2. Internal migration can be driven by push/ pull factors. Highlighting the issues related with internal migration in India, discuss the need for a national policy on internal migration. (150 words)

Approach

- Define Migration and give its types
- While enumerating the issues faced by migrants also list down the benefits of migration
- Discuss how a national migration policy will help tackle migration issues.