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# CURRENT AFFAIRS

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## GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

### 1. Will U.S. sanction India for S-400 purchase?

The arrival of the \$5.4-billion Russian long-range surface-to-air missile defence shield “S-400” is expected next month, which is likely to generate more international headlines.

#### S-400

- The S-400 is known as Russia’s most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system, capable of destroying hostile strategic bombers, jets, missiles and drones at a range of 380-km.

#### US reservations against S-400 purchase

- The US has made it clear that the delivery of the five S-400 systems is considered a “significant transaction”.
- Such deals are considered under its Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) of 2017.
- It could trigger sanctions against Indian officials and the Government.

#### About CAATSA

- The CAATSA is designed to ensure that no country is able to increase **military engagement** with **Iran, North Korea** and **Russia** without facing deterrent punitive action from the US.
- The **sanctions are unilateral**, and not part of any United Nations decision, and therefore no country is bound to accept them.
- Section 231 says the **President shall impose** no fewer than five different sanctions on any Government that enters into a significant defence or intelligence deal with Russia.
- Section 235 lists 12 options, including stopping credit lines from US and international banks such as the IMF, blocking sales of licensed goods and technology, banning banks, manufacturers and suppliers, property transactions and even financial and visa sanctions on specific officials.
- However, the law also empowers the President to **waiver** sanctions or delay them if the waiver is in the US’s “vital national security interests”.

## Has the US used CAATSA before for S-400 sales?

- The US has already placed sanctions on **China and Turkey** for purchase of the S-400.
- The sanctions included denial of export licences, ban on foreign exchange transactions, blocking of all property and interests in property within the US jurisdiction and a visa ban.

## Types of sanctions laid

- In 2020, the US sanctioned its NATO partner Turkey, which it had warned about CAATSA sanctions for years, besides **cancelling a deal** to sell Ankara F-35 jets.
- The sanctions on Turkey's main defence procurement agency, also included a **ban on licences and loans**, and **blocking of credit and visas** to related officials.

## Likely impacts after India's purchase

- The Biden administration has **no firm indication** on where it leans on India's case.
- However, several senators (US parliamentarians) have called upon the Biden administration to consider a **special waiver for India**.
- This is on account of **India's importance as a defence partner**, and as a strategic partner on US concerns over China and in the Quad.
- Other US leaders think that **giving a waiver to India would be the wrong signal** for others seeking to go ahead with similar deals.

## Why is the S-400 deal so important to India?

- **Security paradigm:** S-400 is very important for India's national security considerations due to the threats from China, Pakistan and now Afghanistan.
- **Air defence capability:** The system will also offset the air defence capability gaps due to the IAF's dwindling fighter squadron strength.
- **Russian legacy:** Integrating the S-400 will be much easier as India has a large number of legacy Russian air defence systems.
- **Strategic autonomy:** For both political as well as operational reasons, the deal is at a point of no return.

## Conclusion

- The deal is a way for the Government to assert its strategic autonomy.
- India had earlier agreed to stop buying Iranian oil over the threat of sanctions in 2019, a move that caused India both financial and reputational damage.

- Not giving in to the US's unilateral sanctions would be one way to restore some of that.

## 2. Automatic job authorisation for spouses of H-1B visa holders

The United States has agreed to provide **automatic work authorisation permits to the spouses of H-1B visa holders** – a move that is likely to benefit thousands of Indian professionals based in the US.

- As per the latest amendments, while **L-1** spouses will be given the extension without applying for it, **H-4** visa holders will still have to apply for the extension after their employment permit expires.

### Significance of the move:

This policy amendment is likely to be particularly beneficial for Indian women whose spouses hold **H-1B or L-1 visas**, as they will now be allowed up to 180 days auto extension on work authorization.

### Need for:

The American Immigration Lawyers' Association had filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of immigrant spouses, many of whom have lost their jobs due to long processing delays for work authorization.

### H-4 and L2 visas: What's the difference?

**An H-4 visa** is issued to the immediate family members (spouse and children under the age of 21) of H-1B visa holders. Over 94 per cent of H4 visa holders are women, and of these, around 93 per cent are from India.

**L-1 visas** are non-immigrant visas that are valid for a relatively short time. With this visa, multinationals are able to shift foreign employees to their US offices for specialised positions on a temporary basis. The dependent spouse or unmarried children under 21 years of age of an L-1 visa holder are issued L-2 visas to enter the United States. L2 visa holders can acquire EAD (Employment Authorisation Documents) to find employment.

### What are H-1B work visas?

- In 1952, after the US started expanding its presence in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines, it felt the need to hire quality workers who could help the country achieve innovation in these areas at reasonable costs. The need to hire workers paved way for the introduction of the H-1 work visa system in US.
- This work visa system was further subdivided into H-1B, H-2B, L1, O1, and E1 visas, depending on the qualification required and the area for which workers were sought.
- Of these, the H-1B visa remains the most popular due to the relatively better wage chance it offers.

### 3. Increase in digital connectivity but there are many who are still left out

- Study on the **socio-economic impacts of COVID-19** with respect to services like healthcare and education. The focus of the study was on **digital technologies in healthcare, education and work**.

#### Details:

##### Increased internet connectivity:

- **Internet connectivity has increased over the last few years**, with most new users attributing their connections to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The study found that **47% of the population are Internet users**, a significant jump from the 19% who were identified as Internet users in late 2017.

##### Challenges/Concerns:

- The survey has found that despite increased internet connectivity, remote work, education and healthcare are still not equally available to all, even among those with digital access.

##### Education:

- The survey found that **80% of school-age children in the country had no access to remote education during pandemic induced school closure phase**.
- Lack of compatible digital devices, poor 3G/4G signal and high data cost have been the biggest hurdles in ensuring access to online education.

- Nationwide, **38% of households** said at least one child had dropped out of school due to COVID-19.

Work:

- **Only 10% of those employed during the lockdown were able to work from home.**
- There were significant geographical and sectoral variations.
- Availability of compatible and adequate number of digital device and **connectivity challenges** were the major challenges to the people working from home.

Healthcare:

- Although telemedicine and online doctor consultations surged during the pandemic phase, still **only 38% were able to access telemedicine services.**
- **Lack of awareness of internet, lack of access to devices and lack of skills** are the reasons why people do not go online.

#### **4. The Norovirus outbreak: prevention rooted in hygiene**

Norovirus:

- **Norovirus (stomach flu viruses)** are an important cause of **acute non-bacterial gastroenteritis** in children as well as adults.
- Infection is characterised by an acute onset of nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, and diarrhoea.
- **NoV is a highly contagious virus and transmission occurs at a rapid pace.**
- Transmission occurs predominantly by the **faecal-oral route**, directly or indirectly, through the ingestion of contaminated water or food or contact with infected surfaces.
- The **disease is self-limiting** and rarely dangerous. There is no specific treatment except rest and rehydration.
- Acute **diarrhoeal disease outbreak caused by Norovirus (NoV)** has been reported in Wayanad district of Kerala.

## GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

### 5. Creating safe digital spaces

Various reports have indicated increased incidence of cyberbullying and online child sexual exploitation by adults.

#### Tackling cyberbullying

- School closures as a response to the COVID-19 lockdowns have led to an unprecedented rise in unsupervised screen time for children and young people, which in turn exposed them to a greater risk of online violence.
- In India, an estimated 71 million **children aged 5-11 years access the Internet on the devices of their family members**, constituting about 14% of the country's active Internet user base of over 500 million
- There is growing scientific evidence which suggests that cyberbullying has **negative consequences** on the education, health and well-being of children and young people.
- Published in 2019 and drawing on data from 144 countries, UNESCO's report '**Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying**' highlighted the extent of the problem, with almost one in three students worldwide reporting being bullied at least once in the preceding month.
- Therefore, **cyberbullying prevention interventions** should aim at tackling all types of bullying and victimisation experiences at the same time, as opposed to each in silo.

#### Cyberbullying prevention interventions

- Although online violence is not limited to school premises, the education system plays a crucial role in addressing online safety.
- To prevent and counter cyberbullying, the information booklet brought out by UNESCO in partnership with NCERT on **Safe Online Learning in Times of COVID-19** can be a useful reference.
- Effective interventions also require **gender-sensitive and targeted approaches** that respond to needs of learners who are most likely to be the victims of online violence.
- Concerted efforts must be made **to provide children and young people with the knowledge and skills to identify online violence** so that they can protect themselves from its different forms, whether perpetrated by peers or adults.

- Teachers also play a critical role by teaching students about online safety, and thus supporting parental involvement.

## Conclusion

It is imperative that digital and social media platforms are free of cyberbullying, if learners have to access quality education. More importantly, confidential reporting and redress services must be established.

## 6. What is the Retail Direct Scheme for investors in G-Secs?

The RBI has announced proposals for the Retail Direct Scheme for investors in government securities and the Integrated Ombudsman Scheme.

### What is the Retail Direct Scheme?

- Under the scheme, **small investors can buy or sell government securities** (G-Secs), or bonds, **directly without an intermediary** like a mutual fund.
- It is similar to placing funds in debt instruments such as fixed deposits in banks.
- However, the same tax rules apply to income from G-Secs.

### Benefits of RDS

- With the government being the borrower, there is a sovereign guarantee for the funds and hence zero risk of default.
- Also, government securities may offer better interest rates than bank fixed deposits, depending on prevailing interest rate trends.
- For example, the latest yield on the benchmark 10-year government securities is 6.366%.

### How can individuals access G-Sec offerings?

- Investors wishing to **open a Retail Direct Gilt account directly with the RBI** can do so through an online portal set up for the purpose of the scheme.
- Once the account is activated with the aid of a password sent to the user's mobile phone, investors will be permitted to buy securities either in the primary market or in the secondary market.
- The **minimum amount** for a bid is **₹10,000** and in multiples of ₹10,000 thereafter. Payments may be made through Net banking or the UPI platform.



### Why was it necessary to introduce this scheme?

- **Broader investor base:** The scheme would help broaden the investor base and provide retail investors with enhanced access to the government securities market – both primary and secondary.
- **Institutional investment:** Accessing retail investors could free up room for companies to bring funds from institutional investors which may otherwise have been cornered by the government.
- **Diverse borrowing for government:** This scheme would facilitate smooth completion of the Government borrowing programme in 2021-22.
- **Structural reform:** It is a major structural reform placing India among select few countries which have similar facilities.

### Why is the RBI setting up an Integrated Ombudsman?

- Prior to the introduction of this scheme, the RBI had three different ombudsman schemes to aid dispute resolution with respect to banks, NBFCs, and non-bank pre-paid payment issuers (PPIs).
- They were operated by the RBI through 22 ombudsman offices.
- The RBI would now appoint the Ombudsman and a Deputy Ombudsman for three years.
- Complaints may be made either physically to the Centralised Receipt and Processing Centre or the RBI's offices; or electronically through the regulator's complaint management system.

## 7. Kaiser-i-Hind is Arunachal's State butterfly

An elusive swallowtail butterfly carrying 'India' in its name and found in next-door China will become the State butterfly of Arunachal Pradesh.

### Kaiser-i-Hind

**Protection status:** Schedule II of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972

- Kaiser-i-Hind (*Teinopalpus imperialis*) literally means **Emperor of India**.
- This butterfly with a **90-120 mm wingspan** is **found in six States along the Eastern Himalayas** at elevations from 6,000-10,000 feet in well-wooded terrain.
- The butterfly also flutters in Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and southern China.

- The move was made with a view to boosting butterfly tourism and saving the species from extinction in the State.

#### Other butterflies in news

- The **Malabar Banded Peacock** or the Buddha Mayoore which was recently declared the 'State Butterfly' of **Kerala** will have a dedicated butterfly park in Kochi.
- **Tamil Nadu** has also recently declared **Tamil Yeoman** (*Cirrochroa Thais*) as its state butterfly to symbolize its rich natural and cultural heritage.
- Other states to have state butterflies are **Maharashtra (Blue Mormon)**, **Uttarakhand (Common peacock)**, **Karnataka (Southern birdwings)**.

#### 8. Coal 'phase-down' is a right: Minister

- The **26th United Nations Conference of Parties** of the UNFCCC in Glasgow ended with the **Glasgow Climate Pact**.

#### The Glasgow Climate Pact:

- The 26th Conference of Parties adopted a resolution by member countries to **revisit and strengthen existing emission targets by 2022**.
- The final text of the agreement calls for **coal to be "phased down"** rather than "phased out" as demanded by developed countries.
- **The Paris Rulebook**, which specifies guidelines for how the Paris Agreement is to be delivered, was also finalized. The agreement has better **clarity on the Article 6 of the Paris Agreement**.
  - Article 6 of the Paris Agreement aims at promoting integrated, holistic and balanced approaches that will assist governments in implementing their NDCs through voluntary international cooperation.
- The Glasgow climate agreement creates a **'centralised hub' for bilateral carbon trade**, replacing the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism.
  - The **1997 Kyoto Protocol** validated carbon credit trading via a **Clean Development Mechanism**. This mechanism had expired in 2020.
    - Carbon credits allow companies in developed countries to indirectly pay for clean energy transitions in developing countries by accumulating credits.
- The new agreement also provides much needed **clarity on aspects of calculation of carbon accounts** by clearly laid guidelines with respect to **Certified Emission Reductions**.

- Certified Emission Reductions are a type of emissions unit issued by the Clean Development Mechanism Executive Board for emission reductions achieved by CDM projects and verified under the rules of the Kyoto Protocol.

### India's line of argument:

- India played an important role in the final text of the agreement that called for coal to be “phased down” rather than “phased out”.
- India's main line of argument has been that the unregulated use of fossil fuels has enabled developed countries to attain high level of growth and it cannot be expected of developing countries facing developmental challenges to give up usage of coal.
- Developing countries like India have a **right to their fair share of the global carbon budget** and are **entitled to the responsible use of fossil fuels** within this scope.
- Also despite arguments from the developed countries on the ill effects of coal, many developed countries have still not completely phased out coal.
- Notably, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) refers to mitigation of GHG emissions from all sources including coal, oil and gas. Whereas the developed countries tend to shift focus away from oil and gas only because of its relevance to their domestic economies.

**THE INDIAN EXPRESS**

## **GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations**

### **1. Highlights of the Glasgow Agreement**

The Glasgow Agreement was finally adopted after a last-minute intervention by India to water down language on “phasing out” coal to merely “phasing down”.

#### **Glasgow Agreement**

- The Glasgow meeting was the 26th session of the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, or **COP26**.
- These meetings are **held every year** to construct a global response to climate change.
- Each of these meetings produce a set of decisions which are given different names.

- In the current case, this has been called the Glasgow Climate Pact.
- Earlier, these meetings have also delivered two treaty-like international agreements, the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Paris Agreement in 2015.

## What was achieved?

### [1] Mitigation:

- The Glasgow agreement has emphasised that stronger action in the current decade was most critical to achieving the 1.5-degree target.
- Accordingly, it has asked/decided:
  1. To strengthen their 2030 climate action plans, or NDCs (nationally-determined contributions), by next year
  2. Establish a work programme to urgently scale-up mitigation ambition and implementation
  3. To convene an annual meeting of ministers to raise ambition of 2030 climate actions
  4. Annual synthesis report on what countries were doing
  5. To convene a meeting of world leaders in 2023 to scale-up ambition of climate action
  6. Countries to make efforts to reduce usage of coal as a source of fuel, and abolish “inefficient” subsidies on fossil fuels
  7. Phase-down of coal, and phase-out of fossil fuels. This is the first time that coal has been explicitly mentioned in any COP decision.

### [2] Adaptation:

- Most of the countries, especially the smaller and poorer ones, and the small island states, consider adaptation to be the most important component of climate action.
- They have been demanding that at least half of all climate finance should be directed towards adaptation efforts.
- As such, the Glasgow Climate Pact has:
  1. Asked the developed countries to at least double the money being provided for adaptation by 2025 from the 2019 levels.
  2. Created a two-year work programme to define a global goal on adaptation.

### [3] Finance:

- Every climate action has financial implications. It is now estimated that trillions of dollars are required every year to fund all the actions necessary to achieve the climate targets.

- Developed countries are under an obligation, due to their historical responsibility in emitting greenhouse gases.
- They need to provide finance and technology to the developing nations to help them deal with climate change.
- In 2009, developed countries had promised to mobilise at least \$100 billion every year from 2020.
- The 2020 deadline has long passed but the \$100 billion promise has not been fulfilled.
- The developed nations have now said that they will arrange this amount by 2023.

#### **[4] Accounting earlier failures**

The pact has:

- Expressed “deep regrets” over the failure of the developed countries to deliver on their \$100 billion promise.
- It has asked them to arrange this money urgently and in every year till 2025
- Initiated discussions on setting the new target for climate finance, beyond \$100 billion for the post-2025 period
- Asked the developed countries to provide transparent information about the money they plan to provide

#### **[5] Loss and Damage:**

The frequency of climate disasters has been rising rapidly, and many of these caused largescale devastation.

- There is no institutional mechanism to compensate these nations for the losses, or provide them help in the form of relief and rehabilitation.
- The loss and damage provision in the Paris Agreement seeks to address that.
- Thanks to a push from many nations, substantive discussions on loss and damage could take place in Glasgow.
- One of the earlier drafts included a provision for setting up of a facility to coordinate loss and damage activities.

#### **[6] Carbon Markets:**

- Carbon markets facilitate the trading of emission reductions.
- They are considered a very important and effective instrument to reduce overall emissions.
- A carbon market existed under Kyoto Protocol but is no longer there because the Protocol itself expired last year.

- Developing countries like India, China or Brazil have large amounts of carbon credits left over because of the lack of demand as many countries abandoned their emission reduction targets.
- The Glasgow Pact has offered some reprieve to the developing nations.
- It has allowed these carbon credits to be used in meeting countries' first NDC targets.

### Parallel Processes announced

A lot of substantial action in Glasgow happened in parallel processes that were not a part of the official COP discussions.

- India announced a **Panchamrita** (a mixture of five elements) of climate actions.
- Brazil would advance its net-zero target year from 2060 to 2050.
- China promised to come out with a detailed roadmap for its commitment to let emissions peak in 2030, and also for its 2060 net-zero target. Israel announced a net zero target for 2050.
- Over 100 countries pledged to reduce methane emissions by at least 30 per cent from present levels by 2030.
- Another set of over 100 countries promised to arrest and reverse deforestation by 2030.
- Over 30 countries signed on to a declaration promising to work towards a transition to 100 percent zero-emission cars by the year 2040, at least in the leading car markets of the world.

## 2. Five-year terms for CBI and ED chiefs

The Indian President recently promulgated (brought into effect) two ordinances that would allow the Union Government to extend the tenures of the directors of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) from two years to up to five years.

- The chiefs of the Central agencies currently have a fixed two-year tenure, but can now be given three annual extensions.

### The amended Acts

- **For CBI director:** The Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946 was amended

- The Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003 was amended with respect to the **ED Director's post**.

### About Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)

- The CBI is the premier investigating agency of India.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.
- **Role:** It was originally set up to investigate bribery and governmental corruption. In 1965, it received expanded jurisdiction to investigate breaches of central laws enforceable by the Government of India, multi-state organised crime, multi-agency or international cases.
- CBI is exempted from the provisions of the Right to Information Act.
- CBI is India's officially designated single point of contact for liaison with the Interpol.
- **The CBI headquarter:** New Delhi.

### About Enforcement Directorate (ED)

- Directorate of Enforcement (ED) is a law enforcement agency and economic intelligence agency responsible for enforcing economic laws and fighting economic crime in India.
- **Ministry:** Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance
- The **prime objective** is the enforcement of two key Acts:
  - The Foreign Exchange Management Act 1999 (FEMA)
  - The Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002 (PMLA)
- **Headquarters:** New Delhi
- **Five regional offices:** Mumbai, Chennai, Chandigarh, Kolkata and Delhi headed by Special Directors of Enforcement.

### 3. APEC summit, 2021

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) was hosted by New Zealand recently.

#### Key highlights of the summit

- The leaders concluded the 2021 APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting by adopting a declaration under the theme of '**Join, Work, Grow, Together**'.
- **Commitments:**
  - Accelerating economic recovery and achieving sustainable and inclusive growth

- Tackling climate change
- Empowering groups with untapped economic potential
- Addressing the digital divide.
- Leaders also endorsed the **Aotearoa Plan of Action**. It is blueprint to implement the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040, which was adopted at the 2020 APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting.
  - Aotearoa Plan of Action **aims** for an “open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific community by 2040
- APEC summit-2022 will be held in Thailand.

### About APEC

- It is an inter-governmental forum for 21 member economies in the Pacific Rim that promotes free trade throughout the Asia-Pacific region.
- It was started in 1989 in response to the growing interdependence of Asia-Pacific economies and the advent of regional trade blocs in other parts of the world.
- It aimed to establish new markets for agricultural products and raw materials beyond Europe.
- **Headquarter:** Singapore.
- The group represents approximately 60% of world GDP and 48% of world trade in 2018.
- **Official observers:** the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Secretariat (ASEAN), the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIF).
- **Its full members are:** Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; China; Colombia; Ecuador; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Peru; Philippines; Singapore; Pacific Islands Forum; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; USA; and Vietnam.
- India is not a Member.
  - India had requested membership in APEC, and received initial support from the United States, Japan, Australia and Papua New Guinea.
  - Officials have decided not to allow India to join as India does not border the Pacific Ocean, which all current members do.

### 4. Rani Kamlapati:

The name of Bhopal's Habibganj railway station has been changed to **Rani Kamlapati** station.



- The station has been redeveloped at a cost of around Rs 100 crore with private participation – **a first such large-scale PPP model in station redevelopment in India**, in the works for the past few years.

### Who was Rani Kamlapati?

- Rani Kamlapati was the widow of Nizam Shah, whose **Gond dynasty** ruled the then Ginnorgarh, 55 km from Bhopal, in the 18th century.
- Kamalati is known to have shown great bravery in facing aggressors during her reign after her husband was killed.
- Kamlapati was **the “last Hindu queen of Bhopal”**, who did great work in the area of water management and set up parks and temples.

### Who are Gonds?

The Gond are one of the largest tribal communities in India, spread across Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar and Odisha.

## 5. Norovirus

At least 13 people have been found infected with Norovirus in Kerala’s Wayanad district. The state government has asked people to remain vigilant, and stepped up measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

### Norovirus

Norovirus is a bug similar to the diarrhoea-inducing **rotavirus**.

- It is a group of viruses that causes **gastrointestinal illness**.
- It is **the most common pathogen implicated in outbreaks of gastrointestinal disease** (inflammation of the stomach and intestines), according to the World Health Organization.

### Symptoms:

Initial symptoms of Norovirus are vomiting and/or diarrhoea, which show up one or two days after exposure to the virus. Patients also feel nauseous, and suffer from abdominal pain, fever, headaches and bodyaches. In extreme cases, loss of fluids could lead to dehydration.

### Spread:

- Disease outbreaks typically occur aboard cruise ships, in nursing homes, dormitories, and other closed spaces.
- Norovirus is highly contagious, and can be transmitted through contaminated food, water, and surfaces. The primary route is oral-faecal. One may get infected multiple times as the virus has different strains.
- Norovirus is resistant to many disinfectants and can heat up to 60°C. Therefore, merely steaming food or chlorinating water does not kill the virus. The virus can also survive many common hand sanitisers.

### What is the treatment for Norovirus?

The disease is self-limiting – the infection, even though it takes a lot out of the patient, normally lasts only two or three days, and most individuals who are not very young, very old, or malnourished can ride it out with sufficient rest and hydration.

## GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

### 6. Why Glasgow Climate Pact disappoints

The Glasgow Climate Pact was adopted on Saturday and, as was to be expected, it is a mixed bag of modest achievements and disappointed expectations.

#### Transition away from fossil fuel

- The Pact is the first clear recognition of the need to transition away from fossil fuels, though the focus was on **giving up coal-based power altogether**.
- India introduced an amendment at the last moment to replace this phrase with “phase down” and this played negatively with both the advanced as well as a large constituency of developing countries.
- This amendment reportedly came as a result of consultations among India, China, the UK and the US.

- As the largest producer and consumer of coal and coal-based thermal power, it is understandable that China would prefer a gradual reduction rather than total elimination.
- India may have had similar concerns.

### Recognition of Adaptation

- There is a welcome recognition of the importance of Adaptation and there is a commitment to double the current finance available for this to developing countries.
- Since this amount is currently only \$15 billion, doubling will mean \$ 30 billion.
- This remains grossly inadequate.
- According to UNEP, **adaptation costs for developing countries are currently estimated at \$70 billion annually** and will rise to an estimated \$130-300 billion annually by 2030.
- A start is being made in formulating an **adaptation plan** and this puts the issue firmly on the **Climate agenda**, balancing the overwhelming focus hitherto on mitigation.

### Disappointment on the issue of finance

- The **Paris Agreement target of \$100 billion** per annum between 2005-2020 was never met with the shortfall being more than half, according to some calculations.
- There is now a renewed commitment to delivering on this pledge in the 2020-2025 period and there is a promise of an enhanced flow thereafter.
- But in a post-pandemic global economic slowdown, it is unlikely these promises will be met.
- In any event, **it is unlikely that India will get even a small slice of the pie.**
- The same applies to the issue of **compensation for loss and damage for developing countries** who have suffered as a result of climate change for which they have not been responsible.

### Initiatives on methane and deforestation

- Two important **plurilateral outcomes** could potentially develop into more substantial measures.
- The most important is an agreement among 100 countries to cut methane emissions by 30 per cent by 2030.
- India is not a part of this group.
- **Cutting methane emissions**, which is generated mainly by livestock, is certainly useful but there is a much bigger methane emergency around the

corner as the earth's permafrost areas in Siberia, Greenland and the Arctic littoral begin to melt due to global warming that has already taken place and will continue to take place in the coming years.

- Another group of 100 countries has agreed to begin to **reverse deforestation by 2030**.
- **India did not join the group** due to concerns over a clause on possible trade measures related to forest products.

### **Implications of US-China Joint Declaration on Climate Change for India**

- Declaration was a departure for China, which had held that bilateral cooperation on climate change could not be insulated from other aspects of their relations.
- The declaration implies a shift in China's hardline position.
- It appears both countries are moving towards a less confrontational, more cooperative relationship overall.
- This will have geopolitical implications, including for India, which may find its room for manoeuvre shrinking.

### **Conclusion**

As in the past, the can has been kicked down the road, except that the climate road is fast approaching a dead-end. What provides a glimmer of light is the incredible and passionate advocacy of urgent action by young people across the world. This is putting enormous pressure on governments and leaders and if sustained, may become irresistible.

### **7. DART Mission**

On November 24 NASA will launch the agency's first planetary defense test mission named the Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART).

#### **Key takeaways**

- DART is a planetary defense-driven test of technologies for preventing an impact of Earth by a hazardous asteroid.
- The main aim of the mission is to test the newly developed technology that would allow a spacecraft to crash into an asteroid and change its course.
- The spacecraft will be launched on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California.

- The target of the spacecraft is a small moonlet called Dimorphos (Greek for “two forms”). The spacecraft is expected to collide when it is 11 million km away from Earth.
- Dimorphos orbits a larger asteroid named Didymos (Greek for “twin”)

## 8. Retail Direct Scheme in government securities

The RBI had in February 2021 announced proposals for the Retail Direct Scheme for investors in government securities and the Integrated Ombudsman Scheme. The schemes were unveiled by the Prime Minister on November 12.

### What is the Retail Direct Scheme?

- Under the Retail Direct Scheme, small investors can now buy or sell government securities (G-Secs), or bonds, **directly without having to go through an intermediary** like a mutual fund.
- It is similar to placing funds in debt instruments such as **fixed deposits** in banks. However, the same tax rules apply to income from G-Secs. But, with the Government being the borrower, there is a **sovereign guarantee for the funds** and hence zero risk of default.
- Also, government securities may offer **better interest rates than bank fixed deposits**, depending on prevailing interest rate trends. For example, the latest yield on the benchmark 10-year government securities is 6.366%.
  - India’s largest lender, State Bank of India, offers 5.4% on deposits of less than ₹2 crore for a tenure of five to 10 years.

### How can individuals access G-Sec offerings?

- Investors wishing to open a Retail Direct Gilt account directly with the RBI can do so through an **online portal set up for the purpose** of the scheme.
- Once the account is activated with the aid of a password sent to the user’s mobile phone, investors will be permitted to buy securities **either in the primary market or in the secondary market**.
- The minimum amount for a bid is ₹10,000 and in multiples of ₹10,000 thereafter. Payments may be made through **Net banking or the UPI platform**.
- Retail participants would be bidding for the securities under the “non-competitive segment of primary auctions of Government Securities and Treasury Bills”, the RBI said in a November 12 notification.

### Why was it necessary to introduce this scheme?

- **Increases Investor base:** The RBI said the scheme would help “broaden the investor base and provide retail investors with enhanced access to the government securities market – both primary and secondary.”
- **Leads to success of Government Borrowing Programme:** RBI also said the scheme was a “major structural reform placing India among select few countries which have similar facilities”. This scheme, among others, would “facilitate smooth completion of the Government borrowing programme in 2021-22”.
  - The Government intends to borrow up to ₹12 lakh crore this year ending March 31, 2022.
  - The significant spike in borrowing – that is expected to spur infrastructure and social funding – follows a steep decline in the economy last fiscal.
  - The Union Government, hence, wishes to broaden the base of investors signing up for bond purchases.
- **Frees Institutional Investors:** The added benefit of the Government accessing retail investors could be the freeing up of room for companies to mop up funds from institutional investors; funds that may otherwise have been cornered by the government to fund its expenses.

### Why is the RBI setting up an Integrated Ombudsman?

- Prior to the introduction of this scheme, the RBI had three different ombudsman schemes to aid dispute resolution with respect to
  - Banks
  - NBFCs
  - Non-bank pre-paid payment issuers (PPIs).
- They were operated by the RBI through 22 ombudsman offices.
- Integrated Ombudsman is aimed to make **dispute resolution more simpler, efficient and responsive**. Hence the proposal to integrate the three ombudsman schemes and introduce the **centralised processing of grievances**.
- This enables redress of grievances easier by enabling customers to register their complaints under the integrated scheme, with one centralised reference point.
- The RBI would appoint the **Ombudsman and a Deputy Ombudsman for three years**.
- Complaints may be made either physically to the Centralised Receipt and Processing Centre or the RBI’s offices; or electronically through the regulator’s complaint management system (<https://cms.rbi.org.in/>).
- With the introduction of the integrated scheme, the earlier ones stand repealed.

- However, the RBI clarified that the adjudication of pending complaints, appeals and execution of the awards passed shall continue to be governed by the provisions of the respective Ombudsman Schemes and instructions of RBI.

## 9. FCRA Changes: Ease of Monitoring vs Crippling Curbs

The Supreme Court has reserved its judgment on petitions challenging the validity of amendments introduced in 2020 to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, aimed at tightening the curbs on NGOs allowed to receive foreign funds.

- While NGOs that have termed the amendments as harsh and arbitrary, the Government has argued that its intended to streamline the flow of funds and to enhance transparency and accountability.

### What is the background to the amendments?

- Foreign donations received by individuals and organisations in India have been regulated by law since 1976.
- The Act was since repealed and re-enacted with fresh measures and restrictions as the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010.
- The law sought to consolidate the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by individuals, associations or companies, and to prohibit such contributions from being used for activities detrimental to national interest.
- The FCRA was amended in September 2020 to **introduce some new restrictions**.
- The Government says it did so because it found that many recipients were wanting in compliance with provisions relating to filing of annual returns and maintenance of accounts.
- Many did not utilise the funds received for the intended objectives.
- It claimed that the annual inflow as foreign contributions almost doubled between 2010 and 2019.
- The FCRA registration of 19,000 organisations was cancelled and, in some cases, prosecution was also initiated.

### How has the law changed?

There are at least three major changes that NGOs find too restrictive.

- An amendment to Section 7 of the Act completely prohibits the transfer of foreign funds received by an organisation to any other individual or association.
- Another amendment mandates that every person (or association) granted a certificate or prior permission to receive overseas funds must **open an FCRA bank account in a designated branch of SBI** in New Delhi. All foreign funds should be received only in this account and none other.
- However, the recipients are allowed to open another FCRA bank account in any scheduled bank to which they could transfer the received funds for utilisation.
- The designated bank will inform authorities about any foreign remittance with **details about its source** and the manner in which it was received.
- In addition, the Government is also authorised to take the **Aadhaar numbers of all the key functionaries of any organisation** that applies for FCRA registration or for prior approval for receiving foreign funds.
- Another change is that the **portion of the receipts allowed as administrative expenditure** has been reduced from 50% to 20%.

#### What is the criticism against these changes?

- NGOs questioning the law consider the **prohibition on transfer arbitrary** and too heavy a restriction. One of its consequences is that recipients cannot fund other organisations.
- When foreign help is received as material, it becomes impossible to share the aid if the recipient NGO does not have the means to distribute on its own.
- Even the court wanted to know whether this means that one organisation funding other organisations for designated activities is completely prohibited.
- Lawyers have argued that there is **no rational link** between designating a particular branch of a bank with the objective of preserving national interest. It is also inconvenient as the NGOs might be operating elsewhere.
- They have also cited the recent Supreme Court judgment on the alleged use of Pegasus spyware to argue that '**national security**' cannot be cited as a **reason without adequate justification**.

#### What does the Government say?

- The Government has contended that the amendments were **necessary to prevent foreign state and non-state actors from interfering** with the country's polity and internal matters.
- The changes are also needed **to prevent malpractices** by NGOs and diversion of foreign funds. Preventing possible diversion of funds is also the reason cited for reducing the administrative expense component, as some organisations tended to inflate the actual expenditure incurred.



- The provision of having one designated bank for receiving foreign funds is aimed at making it **easier to monitor the flow of funds**. The Government clarified that there was no need for anyone to come to Delhi to open the account as it can be done remotely.

### 10. What is Punjab Land Preservation Act of 1900, how it was tweaked?

The **Punjab Land Preservation Act** was enacted by the then government of Punjab in 1900. Through the **Punjab Land Preservation (Haryana Amendment) Bill, 2019**, the state government has proposed many changes.

The original law provided for **the conservation of subsoil water and/or prevention of erosion** in areas found to be subject to erosion or likely to become liable to erosion.

- As per **Section 3** of the original act, the government has powers to bring any area 'subject to erosion or likely to become liable to erosion' under the ambit of the PLPA through a notification.
- But, a new section- **Section 3A**, has been inserted into the Bill to exclude certain areas from the ambit of the Act.

#### What are the concerns?

- Under its provisions, the PLPA won't apply to 'the lands included in the final development plans, any other town improvement plans or schemes' published under the provisions of many laws like Haryana Municipal Corporation Act, 1994, the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority Act, 2017.
- Environmentalists feel that the latest move by the government has exposed thousands of acres land falling on the hills and foothills of **Aravallis**, which cover over 26,000 acres in Gurgaon and Faridabad districts, to mining and real estate development.

#### Need for conservation:

According to a report in May 2019 by the Central Ground Water Board under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, 105 out of 138 blocks are in the dark zone. At current rates of depletion, good quality water in the first aquifer up to a depth of 100 m shall be

exhausted in 10 years, and the entire subsurface water resource could be finished in the next 22 years.

### Prelims Practice Questions

#### 1. Consider the following statements:

1. A mass extinction event is when species vanish much faster than they are replaced.
2. Earth has never witnessed a mass extinction event until now.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : A

Explanation

- A mass extinction event is **when species vanish much faster than they are replaced.**
  - This is usually **defined as about 75% of the world's species being lost in a 'short' amount of geological time** - less than 2.8 million years.
  - **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- Earth has witnessed five mass extinction events until now. They can be traced in the following periods of geological timeline:
  - **First Mass Extinction:** The **Ordovician mass extinction** that occurred about 445 million years ago killed about 85% of all species.
  - **Second Mass Extinction:** The **Devonian mass extinction** (about 375 million years ago) wiped out about 75% of the world's species.
  - **Third Mass Extinction:** The **Permian mass extinction** (about 250 million years ago) also known as the Great Dying caused the extinction of over 95% of all species.
  - **Fourth Mass Extinction:** The **Triassic mass extinction** (about 200 million years ago) eliminated about 80% of Earth's species, including some dinosaurs.

- **Fifth Mass Extinction:** This **Cretaceous mass extinction** (about 65 million years ago) is known for wiping out non-avian dinosaurs.
- **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**

## 2. Consider the following Pairs:

Tribe	State
1. Chenchus	Telangana
2. Kattupaniya	Tamil Nadu
3. Sherdukpen	Himachal Pradesh

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 3 only
- d. None

**Answer: a**

**Explanation:**

- **Chenchus:** Chenchus are a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group whose hamlets, or Pentas, dot the Nallamala forest region in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. **Hence Statement 1 is correct.**
- **Kattupaniya:** Kattupaniya is a nomadic tribal group of Kerala. The tribe was rehabilitated from caves near the South Wayanad-Nilambur Forest Division in Kerala a few years ago. **Hence Statement 2 is incorrect.**
- **Sherdukpen:** The Sherdukpen is an ethnic group in India's state of Arunachal Pradesh. Sherdukpen had their own writings and languages. **Hence Statement 3 is incorrect.**

## 3. Consider the following statements regarding Food Price Index:

1. It is released by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

2. It measures the monthly change in international prices of a basket of food commodities.

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 **Food Price Index** is released by the **United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)**. Hence, **statement 1 is correct**.
- It was introduced in 1996 as a public good to help in monitoring developments in the global agricultural commodity markets.
- The FAO Food Price Index (FFPI) is a **measure of the monthly change in international prices of a basket of food commodities**. Hence, **statement 2 is correct**.
- It measures changes for a basket of cereals, oilseeds, dairy products, meat and sugar.
- Base Period: 2014-16.

**4. With reference to TESS, which of the following statements is/are correct?**

1. It is a NASA Astrophysics Explorer mission
2. It is designed to search for exoplanets using the transit method

**Options:**

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

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

- NASA launched the Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) in 2018 with the hopes of discovering an exoplanet.
- The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) is the next phase in the hunt for life-supporting planets outside of our solar system.
- The mission will look for exoplanets that obscure some of the light from their home stars on a regular basis, a phenomenon known as transits.
- **Hence Both Statements are correct.**

**5. Which of the following are Mosquito-borne diseases?**

1. Chikungunya
2. Cholera
3. Dengue Fever
4. Yellow Fever
5. Zika

**Options:**

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

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- Mosquito-borne diseases are those that are transferred by a mosquito that has been infected. The **Zika virus**, West Nile virus, **Yellow Fever**, **Chikungunya**, **Dengue**, and Malaria are all diseases spread by mosquitoes. **Hence Option A is correct.**
- Cholera is a severe diarrheal disease caused by the *Vibrio cholerae* bacterium infecting the bowel.

**6. The 'Vienna Classification (VCL)', is related to?**

- A Figurative elements of marks.
- B Naming of planetary objects.
- C Classification of harmful pollutants.
- D Naming of tropical cyclones.

Answer : A

Explanation

- The **Vienna Classification (VCL)** is an international classification system established in 1973 by the **Vienna Agreement Establishing an International Classification of the Figurative Elements of Marks**, and administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).
- It consists of a hierarchical system that proceeds from the general to the particular, classifying the figurative elements of marks into categories, divisions and sections, on the basis of their shape.
- WIPO is one of the oldest specialized agencies of the United Nations. It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- **Hence, option A is correct.**

### Mains Practice Questions

**1Q. The double burden of undernutrition and obesity needs to be tackled as part of India's national nutrition strategy. Discuss (250 words)**

#### Approach

- State the facts related to double burden of malnutrition and obesity as introduction.
- What are factors responsible for double burden.
- Describe the consequences of double burden of malnutrition and obesity.
- Describe the national nutrition strategy to tackle double burden of malnutrition and obesity.
- Give conclusion.

**2Q. What do you understand by Moral Emotions and what is their role? How are they different from basic emotions? (250 words)**

#### Approach

- Define moral emotions and their role with examples.
- Differentiate between moral emotions and basic emotions with suitable examples.

