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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. India-Maldives Relations in recent times

The Government of Maldives has said that it “strongly rejects attempts to spread false information” criticizing its ties with India, its “closest ally and trusted neighbor”.

The India-Out Campaign

- Maldivian protesters recently demanded the Solih administration to ‘stop selling national assets to foreigners’, implying India.
- ‘India Out’ campaign in Maldives had started sometime last year as on-ground protests in the Maldives and later widely spread across social media platforms under the same hashtag.
- It is not related to people-to-people conflict (Indian diaspora) but is discontent on close relationship between Maldivian government & India.

Causes for the anti-India sentiments

- **Political instability:** The anti-India sentiment is nearly a decade old and can be traced back to when Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom became president in 2013. He used anti-India sentiments for his political mobilization and started tilting China.
- **Controversy over helicopter gift:** Two Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopters (ALF) that were given by India to the Maldives for ocean search-and-rescue operations. Opposition tried to portray this as military presence in the country.
- **Confidential agreements:** Most agreements being signed between the Ibrahim Solih government and India are backdoor and has not been publicly discussed in the Maldives Parliament.
- **Alleged interference in domestic politics:** India being a big neighbour, there are unsubstantiated perceptions & allegations on Indian Diplomats stationed in Maldives interfering in Domestic affairs.

India-Maldives Relations: A backgrounder

- India and Maldives are neighbors sharing a maritime border.

- Both nations established diplomatic relations after the independence of Maldives from British rule in 1966.
- India was one of the first nations to recognize Maldives' independence.
- Since then, India and Maldives have developed close strategic, military, economic and cultural relations.
- Maldivians generally regard Indians and India as a friend and trusted neighbor in the field economic, social and political.

Restoration of ties

- Ibrahim Mohamed Solih who became President in 2018 has restored Maldives close ties with India.

Major irritants in ties

- **Political Instability:** India's major concern has been the impact of political instability in the neighborhood on its security and development.
- **Increasing radicalization:** In the past decade or so, the number of Maldivians drawn towards terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS) and Pakistan-based jihadist groups has been increasing.
- **Inclination towards terror:** Radicalism in the island nation has increased the possibility of Pakistan based terror groups using remote Maldivian islands as a launch pad for terror attacks against India and Indian interests.
- **Chinese affinity:** China's strategic footprint in India's neighborhood has increased. The Maldives has emerged as an important 'pearl' in China's "String of Pearls" construct in South Asia.

Recent gestures by India

[1] 2014 Malé drinking-water crisis

- In the wake of a drinking water crisis in Malé in December 2014, following collapse of the island's only water treatment plant, Maldives urged India for immediate help.
- India came to rescue by sending its heavy lift transporters like C-17 Globemaster III, Il-76 carrying bottled water.

[2] 2020 Covid-19 crisis

- During the COVID-19 crisis of 2020, India extended help to Maldives in the form of financial, material and logistical support.
- Also, the IAF airlifted 6.2 tonnes of essential medicines and hospital consumables to Maldives, as part of 'Operation Sanjeevani'.

[3] Greater Male Connectivity Project

- India has recently announced the signing of a \$500-million infrastructure project for the construction of the Greater Malé Connectivity Project (GMCP).
- This infrastructure project, the largest-ever by India in the Maldives, involves the construction of a 6.74-km-long bridge and causeway link.

Why is Maldives significant for India?

- **Increasing maritime cooperation:** As maritime economic activity in the Indian Ocean has risen dramatically in recent decades, the geopolitical competition too in the Indian Ocean has intensified.
- **Toll Gate in Indian Ocean:** It is situated at the hub of commercial sea-lanes running through the Indian Ocean. More than 97% of India's international trade by volume and 75% by value passes through the region.
- **Naval cooperation:** Maldives is an important partner in India's role as the net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region.
- **Important SAARC member:** Besides, Maldives is a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC).
- **People To People Contact:** There is a significant population of Maldivian students in India. They are aided by a liberal visa-free regime extended by India. There is also medical tourism.
- **Major destination for Tourists:** Tourism is the mainstay of the Maldivian economy. The country is now a major tourist destination for some Indians and a job destination for others.

Conclusion

- There is a significant Indian diaspora in the Maldives. Innumerable Indians work across the hospitality, education, and health-care sectors of the Maldives economy.
- India must use its Diaspora more extensively for strengthening its relations.

2. Privilege motion against CBI, ED in WB

The Trinamool Congress has moved a **breach of privilege motion** in the West Bengal Assembly against **the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED)**.

What's the issue?

It was moved for **not taking the sanction of the Speaker before filing the chargesheet in the Narada case.**

- The Central investigating agencies had filed the chargesheet against three members of the Assembly.

Need for Consent from the Speaker:

The matter was listed before the Calcutta High Court. The Calcutta High Court then gave a clear instruction to the CBI to take the consent from the speaker. However, the CBI went directly to the governor for his consent.

What are Privileges?

Privileges are certain rights and immunities enjoyed by members of Parliament/MLAs **individually and collectively**, so that they can “effectively discharge their functions”.

1. **Article 105 (Article 194 for State Assemblies) of the Constitution expressly mentions two privileges**, that is, freedom of speech in Parliament and right of publication of its proceedings.
2. **Apart from the privileges as specified in the Constitution**, the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, provides for freedom from arrest and detention of members under civil process during the continuance of the meeting of the House or of a committee thereof and forty days before its commencement and forty days after its conclusion.

Motion against breaches:

When any of these rights and immunities are disregarded, the offence is called a breach of privilege and is punishable under law of Parliament.

- **A notice is moved in the form of a motion by any member of either House** against those being held guilty of breach of privilege.

Role of the Speaker/Rajya Sabha (RS) Chairperson:

The Speaker/RS chairperson is the first level of scrutiny of a privilege motion.

The Speaker/Chair can decide on the privilege motion himself or herself or refer it to the privileges committee of Parliament.

- If the Speaker/Chair gives consent under relevant rules, the member concerned is given an opportunity to make a short statement.

Applicability:

1. The **Constitution also extends the parliamentary privileges to those persons who are entitled to speak and take part in the proceedings of a House of Parliament or any of its committees.** These include the **Attorney General of India.**
2. The parliamentary privileges **do not extend to the President who is also an integral part of the Parliament.** Article 361 of the Constitution provides for privileges for the President.

3. New Pak. law allows Jadhav to file appeal

Pakistan's Parliament has enacted a law to give Indian death-row prisoner **Kulbhusan Jadhav the right to file a review appeal against his conviction by a military court.**

Background:

Mr. Jadhav, a 51-year-old retired Indian Navy officer, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of espionage and terrorism in April 2017.

Developments so far:

- India approached the ICJ against Pakistan for denial of **consular access (Vienna Convention)** to Jadhav and challenging the death sentence. After hearing both sides, The Hague-based ICJ issued a verdict in July 2019, asking Pakistan to give India **consular access** to Mr. Jadhav and also ensure review of his conviction.
- It also ruled that Pakistan must undertake **an "effective review and reconsideration"** of the conviction and sentence of Jadhav.

Implications of 'Effective Review and Reconsideration' for India:

- Effective review and reconsideration is a phrase which is different from 'review' as one understands in a domestic course.
- It includes giving consular access and helping Jadhav in preparing his defence.
- It means that Pakistan has to disclose the charges and also the evidence which it has been absolutely opaque about uptill now.
- Pakistan would also have to disclose the circumstances in which Jadhav's confession was extracted by the military.
- It implies that Jadhav will have a right to defend whichever forum or court hears his case.

Vienna Convention:

- The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations is an international treaty that defines consular relations between independent states.
- Article 36 of the Vienna Convention states that foreign nationals who are arrested or detained in the host country must be given notice without delay of their right to have their embassy or consulate notified of that arrest.
- If the detained foreign national so requests, the police must fax that notice to the embassy or consulate, which can then verify the detained person.

4. Reading the forecast from China's sixth plenum

- The Sixth Plenary Session or Plenum of the 19th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

plenum

- A plenum is a meeting attended by all full and alternate members of the Communist Party's Central Committee.
- Those attending hold the country's most important offices and include members of the party leadership, ministers, regional party chiefs, senior generals and the executives of state-owned conglomerates.

Why are the plenums important?

- The plenums are a key venue for the party to display unity among the party leadership and indicate the direction of key policies.
- The meeting serves as a precursor for the introduction of important laws, regulations and economic plans, and discussions that continue beyond the plenum will almost certainly lead to the introduction of new policies.

Examples:

- At the conclave in 1978 overseen by Deng Xiaoping, China's economic reforms were initiated.
- At a plenum in 2013, China unwrapped its boldest set of economic and social reforms, relaxing its one-child policy and further freeing up markets.
- At the plenum in 2018, the party approved a plan to remove presidential term limits which meant Xi could stay in office until he dies.

Historic Resolution

It is a document that aims to consolidate the party's achievements and provides an ideological roadmap for its continued rule. It is only the third such resolution to be issued in the party's 100-year history.

- First by Mao Zedong in 1945 (Resolution of Certain Questions in the History of our Party).
- Second by Deng Xiaoping in 1981 (Resolution of Certain Questions in the History of our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China).
- Third by Xi titled 'Resolution of the CCP Central Committee on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party's Century of Struggle'.

Why does it matter?

Interpreting the contents of the 'historical resolution', the elevation of Xi Jinping and bringing him on par with Mao Zedong, and ahead of Deng Xiaoping, as the leader of China, to rule for life has huge ramifications.

- Xi Jinping's 'Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era' now appears to rank alongside Mao Zedong Thought, and eclipses 'Deng Xiaoping Theory'.
 - He is on a mission to redistribute the nation's wealth to build a fairer Marxist society.
 - The "common prosperity" campaign wiped about \$1 trillion off the value of Chinese stocks globally in July 2021, and impacted the business of everyone from delivery drivers and after-school teachers to tech giants and celebrities, with major fallout for global investors.
- With a historical resolution under his belt, Xi would be emboldened to execute more economic reforms.

Time for the West to ponder

- Having been crowned as the unchallenged leader, with no term limits, the leadership could provoke erratic behaviour.

- This is likely to occur if there are domestic issues arising in China because of an economic downturn after almost three decades of continuous growth.
- The unprovoked incidents of aggression that took place in Ladakh, may not be the right example but they can be a reminder of what can happen.
- Over centralisation of power can, no doubt, result in new fragilities, but the current policy followed by the West of ‘strategic confrontation and economic decoupling’ may not yield the kind of results they seek.
- The CPC further has wider support from the people in China than most governments headed by dictators who have seized power through various means, and also possibly more than many ruling parties in quite a few democracies.
- The reasons for the trust in the party is historical reasons of humiliation at the hands of the west prior to independence and ideological promise of ‘Common Prosperity’
 - The west, therefore, should avoid heavy criticism and its approach has to be nuanced if not there is a possibility where the Chinese people are likely to be reminded of their humiliation in the past and this would only bolster grass-roots support for the Communist Party leadership.
- Information collected from various studies also points out that a lack of liberalised policies has not undermined faith in the Beijing government among ordinary Chinese citizens.
 - This is something that the rest of the world needs to ponder over.
 - Consequently, the West may be making a grave mistake in believing that a mere lack of political freedoms – as understood in democracies – automatically translates into opposition to the leadership.

Strategy for India

- As America seeks to counter a rising China, America is drawing India closer, the question India should answer is
 - whether it has to hold to its present position to defend against Chinese aggression with the help of the USA or
 - take an independent stand against China’s misadventure
- Many countries from Asia have an option of leaning towards India or China.
- With the exception of Pakistan and Cambodia (which are near-client states of China), other countries may not have any specific liking towards China but are compelled by circumstances to lean more towards China than India.

Conclusion

- Therefore, India should take a hard look as to whether it should devise a different strategy to subserve India's best interests.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)

The Union Cabinet has approved the provisioning of mobile services in over 7,000 uncovered villages through the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF).

What do you mean by Universal Service?

- In the modern world, universal service refers to having a phone and affordable phone service in every home.
- It means, providing telecommunication service with access to a defined minimum service of specified quality to all users everywhere at an affordable price.
- In 1837, the concept was rolled on by Rowland Hill, a British educator and tax reformer, which included uniform rates across the UK and prepayment by sender via postage stamps.

USOF

- The Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) was formed by an Act of Parliament, was established in April 2002 under the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Act 2003.
- It aims to provide financial support for the provision of telecom services in commercially unviable rural and remote areas of the country.
- It is an attached office of the Department of Telecom, and is headed by the administrator, who is appointed by the central government.

Scope of the USOF

- Initially, the USOF was established with the fundamental objective of providing access to 'basic' telecom services to people in rural and remote areas at affordable and reasonable prices.
- Subsequently, the scope was widened.
- Now it aims to provide subsidy support for enabling access to all types of telecom services, including mobile services, broadband connectivity and the creation of infrastructure in rural and remote areas.

Funding of the USOF

- The resources for the implementation of USO are raised by way of collecting a Universal Service Levy (USL), which is 5 percent of the Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) of Telecom Service Providers.

Nature of the fund

- USOF is a non-lapsable Fund.
- The Levy amount is credited to the Consolidated Fund of India.
- The fund is made available to USOF after due appropriation by the Parliament.

6. Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act:

A Special Bench of the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana, recently protected two lawyers and a journalist booked under **the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)** from any “coercive action” by the Tripura police.

What’s the issue?

The lawyers had led a fact-finding mission and released a report on the “targeted political violence against Muslim minorities in the State” in October and the journalist had tweeted “Tripura is burning”. Following this a FIR was lodged against them.

What’s the concern now?

The petitioners have argued that the State of Tripura was “**monopolising the flow of information and facts emanating from the affected areas by invoking the UAPA** against members of civil society, including advocates and journalists, who have made the effort to bring facts in relation to the targeted violence in the public domain”.

Need of the hour:

The petitioners have asked the court to restrict the vague and wide definition given to what amounts to “**unlawful activity**” under the UAPA. The definition gave a free hand to the State to crush dissent and free speech with the threat of UAPA, it argued.

- Also, **Anticipatory bail** was barred under the UAPA and the possibility of bail was remote.

About the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act:

Passed in 1967, the law aims at **effective prevention of unlawful activities associations in India.**

The Act assigns **absolute power to the central government**, by way of which if the Centre deems an activity as unlawful then it may, by way of an Official Gazette, declare it so.

- It has death penalty and life imprisonment as highest punishments.

Key points:

Under UAPA, **both Indian and foreign nationals can be charged.**

- It will be **applicable to the offenders in the same manner, even if crime is committed on a foreign land, outside India.**
- Under the UAPA, **the investigating agency can file a charge sheet in maximum 180 days after the arrests and the duration can be extended further after intimating the court.**

As per amendments of 2019:

- The Act empowers the Director General of **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** to grant approval of seizure or attachment of property when the case is investigated by the said agency.
- The Act empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases of terrorism in addition to those conducted by the DSP or ACP or above rank officer in the state.
- It also included the provision of **designating an individual as a terrorist.**

Issues associated:

UAPA is criticized by the civil society as antithetical to constitutional freedom to dissent, rule of law and fair trial.

Associated Issues:

1. Vague Definition of Terrorist Act.
2. Denial of Bail.
3. Pendency of Trails.
4. State Overreach.
5. Undermines federalism.

7. Delhi High Court defines the contours of UAPA

In June 2021, delivering a judgment defining **the contours of the otherwise “vague” Section 15 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, (UAPA)**, the Delhi High Court laid down some important **principles upon the imposition of Section 15, 17 & 18 of the Act.**

Sections 15, 17 and 18 of UAPA:

1. S. 15 **engrafts the offence** of ‘terrorist act’.
2. S. 17 lays-down **the punishment** for raising funds for committing a terrorist act.
3. S. 18 engrafts **the offence of ‘punishment for conspiracy etc.** to commit a terrorist act or any act preparatory to commit a terrorist act’.

Key observations made by the court:

1. “Terrorist Act” Should not be used lightly so as to trivialise them.
2. Terrorist activity is that which travels beyond the capacity of law enforcement agencies to deal with under ordinary penal law (**Supreme Court’s decision in the case of Hitendra Vishnu Thakur**).

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. A collaborative tech vision for US, UAE, Israel and India

Last month's meeting between the foreign ministers of India, the US, Israel, and the UAE has set foreign policy circles in India abuzz with talks of the potential emergence of another quadrilateral grouping or as analysts term it, a "new Quad".

Significance of the new Quad meeting

- **Collaboration in various areas:** The grouping discussed technology collaboration along with the joint infrastructure projects in transportation, enhancing political and economic cooperation and maritime security matters.
- **Forum for economic cooperation:** They have agreed to set up an international forum for economic cooperation.
- **Collaboration on technology:** Amongst all the issues discussed, the technology dimension of this partnership promises a far greater potential for collaboration.
- The four countries are uniquely placed to shape an **innovation-based partnership**, which can conjoin the technology hubs of Silicon Valley, Dubai, Tel Aviv, and Bengaluru.
- Such potential collaboration can benefit from the existing robust cooperation between these countries.
- **Collaboration in fintech:** The agreement between Start-Up Nation Central, an Israeli non-profit that connects the tech ecosystem, and Dubai International Financial Centre, the UAE's financial hub, will create regulatory sandboxes and accelerators for start-ups and provide them with market access opportunities.
- India and the US have been separately working with the two countries on multiple projects.

New Quad's technology cooperation

- **Tech-based collaboration:** Given the synergies in the innovation and startup sector, it is logical that the "new Quad" works towards tech-based collaboration.

- The agenda for the new Quad's technology cooperation can begin by selecting three technologies – **quantum science, blockchain, and 3D printing.**
- **Collaboration in quantum technology:** Israel and the US, too, have made research on quantum technology a priority by allocating \$91 million and \$1.2 billion respectively to this sector.
- India is also fast catching up through its **National Mission on Quantum Technologies and Applications** and joining hands with countries like France to work on this technology.
- **Collaboration in the blockchain:** in blockchain, India and the UAE can leverage the American and Israeli expertise in cyber and cryptography to craft customised applications for use in banking, fintech and trade financing.
- **Collaboration in 3-D printing:** In 3D printing, which promises to transform the manufacturing process radically, Israel has taken the lead in manufacturing about 40 per cent of 3D printers worldwide.
- India, in contrast, has been slow in getting onto the 3D printing bandwagon. But it can certainly benefit from the expertise of the US, Israel and the UAE.
- **Opportunity for India:** From the Indian perspective, such partnerships can leverage Silicon Valley's venture capital funding, Tel Aviv's close-knit organic linkages between start-ups, industry, and academia, and UAE's funding and focus on innovation.
- To this mix, Bengaluru – and potentially Hyderabad – can add opportunities for scaling up and manufacturing.
- The startup community in the US, Israel and the UAE have already reached an advanced research and development stage providing an **opportunity for India to build expertise** and offer the scale to the development and applications of these technologies.

Way forward

- **Security cooperation:** The collaborative and customisation possibilities offered by these technologies and their dual-use nature offers the potential to give a technological edge to the four countries' militaries.
- This, in turn, can add the security cooperation element to the grouping's agenda.
- **Broaden the base:** If the four countries plug their innovation ecosystems in this collaboration to shortlist, fund and develop technologies, it will also help **to broaden the base of cooperation** for this grouping, rather than restrict it to the government-to-government domain.
- Government push will be the essential catalyst to unlock this space for cooperation through seed-funding, academic collaborations, industrial partnerships and MoUs.

- **China factor:** By collaborating with Russia, and domestic flagship initiatives like “Made in China 2025”, Beijing has pursued emerging technologies and successfully reduced the capability gap with Washington.
- These developments make it imperative for the US, Israel, UAE, and India to strengthen their newly established cooperation.

Conclusion

Each country with its unique advantage in the field of science and technology, innovation and start-ups can make a significant contribution to advance shared technological goals.

2. Rahul moves HC to quash defamation case

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi has moved the Bombay High Court seeking to quash a **defamation case** filed by a local BJP leader.

What’s the issue?

The case was filed by Mahesh Shrishrimal before the Girgaon magistrate court in 2018. It states that Mr. Gandhi called Prime Minister Narendra Modi ‘Commander in Thief’. Mr. Shrishrimal felt defamed since he was a member of his party.

- Gandhi has filed a petition to quash the case on the grounds that in a defamation case the party has to be aggrieved personally and directly.

What is defamation?

Defamation is the communication of a false statement that harms the reputation of an individual person, business, product, group, government, religion, or nation.

In India, defamation can both be a **civil wrong and a criminal offence**. The difference between the two lies in **the objects they seek to achieve**.

- A **civil wrong** tends to provide for a redressal of wrongs by awarding compensation and a **criminal law** seeks to punish a wrongdoer and send a message to others not to commit such acts.

Legal provisions:

Criminal defamation has been specifically defined as an offence under **section 499 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**.

Civil defamation is based on tort law (an area of law which does not rely on statutes to define wrongs but takes from an ever-increasing body of case laws to define what would constitute a wrong).

- **Section 499** states defamation could be through words, spoken or intended to be read, through signs, and also through visible representations.
- **Section 499** also cites exceptions. These include “imputation of truth” which is required for the “public good” and thus has to be published, on the public conduct of government officials, the conduct of any person touching any public question and merits of the public performance.

Section 500 of IPC, which is on punishment for defamation, reads, “Whoever defames another shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.”

Misuse of the law and concerns associated:

- The criminal provisions have often been **used purely as a means of harassment**.
- Given the cumbersome nature of Indian legal procedures, **the process itself turns into punishment, regardless of the merits of the case**.
- Critics argue that defamation law **impinges upon the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression** and that civil defamation is an adequate remedy against such wrongs.
- **Criminal defamation has a pernicious effect on society:** for instance, the state uses it as a means to coerce the media and political opponents into adopting self-censorship and unwarranted self-restraint.

What has the Supreme Court said?

1. In **Subramanian Swamy vs Union of India case 2014**, the Court approved the Constitutional validity of sections 499 and 500 (criminal defamation) in the Indian Penal Code, underlining that an individual’s fundamental right to

live with dignity and reputation “cannot be ruined solely because another individual can have his freedom”.

2. In August 2016, the court also passed strictures on the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa for misusing the criminal defamation law to “suffocate democracy” and, the court said, “public figures must face criticism”.

3. Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2021

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2021 was recently released.

- The ASER survey was facilitated by the NGO, Pratham.

Key findings of the report

- **Pandemic effect:** The percentage of rural children who were not enrolled in school doubled during the pandemic.
- **Increase in enrolment:** Government schools saw an increase in enrolment at the expense of private schools.
 - Government school enrolment spiked significantly from 64.3% in 2018 to 70.3% in 2021, while private school enrolment dropped from 32.5% to 24.4% over the same period.
- **Reasons for enrolment shift:** Financial distress, the closure of affordable private schools and the movement of migrants to rural areas
 - - **Never attended school:** Over a third of children enrolled in Classes 1 and 2 have never attended school in person.
 - **Lack of learning resources:** While 92% of children had textbooks for their grade, only one third of them had access to any other learning resources or support.
 - **Limited smartphone availability:** With smartphone availability and access limited, online learning was restricted to a quarter of students.
 - **Varied experiences:** 91% of students from Kerala and almost 80% from Himachal Pradesh had online education, but only 10% from Bihar and 13% from West Bengal.
- **Private tuition:** 40% of the school children are now opting for private tuition classes compared to 30% in 2018. This proportion has increased across both sexes and all grades and school types. The incidence of tuition has increased across all States except Kerala.

Suggestions

- Government schools and teachers are equipped and given the necessary resources for this surge in enrolment.

4. India to hold first 2+2 with Russia

India and Russia shall hold their first “2+2” format talks in December.

- A number of agreements on defence, science and technology and trade are expected to be announced.
- A “fundamental change” in the defence relationship since 2018 has taken bilateral contracts from \$2-3 billion per year to \$9-10 billion, making Russia India’s “top defence partner”.

Significance

- The 2+2 format is particularly significant since India conducts joint foreign and defence ministerial meetings only with its closest ‘Quad’ partners – the U.S., Japan and Australia.
- The 2+2 is also expected to look further afield in building India’s ties with Central Asia and Russia’s engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

Russian 2+2

- Russia thus far has the 2+2 format for “problem solving” with countries such as Japan, France and earlier with the U.S.

Defence deals awaiting conclusion

- Two major defence deals awaiting conclusion are the AK-203 assault rifles and the Igla-S very short range air defence systems.
- India and Russia are expected to sign the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Support Agreement and a Navy-to-Navy cooperation MoU.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Formal sector and fine print

A recent study by SBI has reported that the Indian economy witnessed accelerated formalisation under the distressed conditions of the pandemic and the lockdown last year. The study estimates that the share of the informal economy has fallen to a mere one-fifth of GDP – a figure comparable to many advanced economies.

Understanding informality

- **ILO definition:** The ILO's globally accepted framework for definitions is as follows: Informal sector enterprises are defined as private unincorporated enterprises owned by individuals (or households) that are not constituted as separate legal entities independently of their owners.
- They are not registered under specific national legislation (such as Factories' or Commercial Acts).
- **Definition of a formal worker in India:** Formal workers in India, on the other hand, are defined as those **having access to at least one social security benefit** such as a provident fund or healthcare benefits.

What explains the decline of informal sector in GDP

- **Significance of informal sector:** In 2017-18, as per the latest official statistics, India's informal sector accounted for approximately **52 per cent of its GDP, employing 82 per cent of the total workforce.**
- These ratios have broadly remained unchanged over the last decade.
- **Most affected due to pandemic:** As the informal (unorganised) sector bore much of the brunt of the economic contraction during 2020-21, a decline in its share in GDP is unsurprising.
- **Lack of financial strength:** The sector had neither the financial strength nor the technical wherewithal to face the Covid shock.
- **Inadequate policy support:** Additionally, policy support, mostly supply-side measures, was mainly focused on firms in the formal sector, with the informal sector left to fend for itself.

Issues with decline

- Undeniably, the informal sector's share in GDP is likely to have shrunk due to the Covid shock.

- However, alarmingly, the purported decline in the informal sector's share in GDP has **not been accompanied by an expected reduction in its employment share.**
- Data from the official annual **Period Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18 and 2019-20**, where the latter includes the period of the Covid shock from April to June 2020, shows that the **employment share in non-agricultural informal enterprises has increased from 68 per cent in 2017-18 to 69.5 per cent in 2019-20.**
- These figures do not include the agricultural sector, where employment is almost entirely in the informal sector.
- The increasing share of the formal sector in terms of GDP but declining share in employment only widens the schism (or dualism) between the two sectors.
- The increasing share of the formal sector in terms of GDP but declining share in employment only widens the schism (or dualism) between the two sectors.

Implications

- **Impact on investment and growth:** The lack of remunerative jobs for the vast majority of Indian consumers implies that eventually the lack of growth in demand will adversely impact investment and economic growth.
- After all, a mere **17-18 per cent of the workforce in the organised sector** cannot sustain growth of the economy in the long run.
- **Squeezing out informal enterprises:** The increase in the formal sector's share in GDP due to Covid-19 is a result of large, formal enterprises squeezing out informal enterprises.
- It is important to note here that the increase in formalisation is **not a consequence** of micro and small informal firms transitioning to formality.

Increasing productivity: A way forward to formalisation

- **Promoting formalisation:** Over the last five years, the economy has officially witnessed a significant drive towards formalisation.
- **Multiple reasons for avoiding formalisation:** It is crucial to recognise that firms exist **in the informal sector for various reasons** and not simply to evade regulations and taxation.
- **Significance of productivity:** Many own account enterprises and MSMEs cannot afford to survive in the formal sector **due to their low productivity.**
- It is essential to view the process of **formalisation as a development strategy** that requires stepping up investment in physical and human capital **to boost productivity** and the extension of social security benefits for all workers, not just a registration strategy on myriad portals.

Conclusion

The informal sector will come back to life as much of it represents the survival efforts of the working poor. Celebrating formalisation based on the misery and devastation of poor informal workers (and their meagre productive assets) is not just misplaced but also callous.

6. Langtang Project: Nepal's first hydropower from a glacial lake

Langtang Microhydro Electricity Project, Nepal's first hydropower from a glacial lake has become functional recently.

Langtang Microhydro Electricity Project

- The Project was built three years after the 2015 earthquake-avalanche that devastated the valley, with help from the Hong Kong-based Kadoorie Charitable Foundation.
- It has a weir and spillway at the moraine, and the water is taken through a fibre glass-insulated penstock pipe to a powerhouse that generates 100kW of electricity.
- It seeks to provide 24 hours of electricity to 120 households and tourist lodges in Kyanjin and Langtang.

Uniqueness of the project

- The project is the first-of-its-kind in Nepal to power a village and holds promise for other remote Himalayan valleys where the risk posed by expanding glacial lakes can be mitigated.
- At the same time, it provides electricity to tourism-dependent families.

7. Russian ASAT test and its implications

Russia has carried out an Direct-Ascent Anti-Satellite (DA-ASAT) test by shooting down an old satellite which has created a huge debris in the low earth orbit, according to the U.S. space command.

What is the test and its significance?

- According to the US space command, Russia has conducted the DA-ASAT test to shoot down an old Soviet Tselina-D SIGINT satellite, Kosmos-1408, which was launched in 1982 and had been dead for a long time.
- The test so far has generated more than **1,500 pieces of trackable orbital debris** and will likely generate hundreds of thousands of pieces of smaller orbital debris.
- While Russia has previously tested ASAT weapons, the **DA-ASAT is more advanced** and similar to the ones the US has in its inventory.
- ASAT weapon gives the capability to destroy satellites in orbit disrupting the communications and surveillance capabilities of adversaries.
- Only a handful of countries have successfully demonstrated ASAT capability – China, India, Russia and U.S.

What is the assessment and the reaction?

- **US condemned Russia's reckless test** of a direct-ascent anti-satellite missile against its own satellite, creating space debris that risks astronauts' lives, the integrity of the International Space Station, and the interests of all nations.
- The debris created by Russia's DA-ASAT **will continue to pose a threat to activities in outer space for years** to come, putting satellites and space missions at risk, as well as forcing more collision avoidance maneuvers.
- Initial assessment by USSPACECOM is that the debris will remain in orbit for years and potentially for decades, posing a significant risk to the crew on the International Space Station and other human spaceflight activities, as well as multiple countries' satellites.
- US also stated that **Space activities underpin our way of life** and such kind of behaviour is being considered as **irresponsible**.
- US attacked Russia by stating that Russia is developing and deploying capabilities to actively **deny access to and use of space by the United States** and its allies and partners.

What is the threat to the International Space Station?

- Due to the debris generated by the “destructive” Russian test, ISS astronauts and cosmonauts **undertook emergency procedures** for safety, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Administrator Bill Nelson said in a statement. There are currently seven astronauts on the ISS.
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Administrator stated that “With its long and storied history in human spaceflight, it is unthinkable that Russia would endanger not only the American and international partner astronauts on the ISS, but also their own cosmonauts”.

- Their actions are reckless and dangerous, **threatening as well the Chinese space station** and the taikonauts on board.
- However, Russian Astronaut Anton Shkaplerov currently on the ISS tweeted “Friends, everything is regular with us! We continue to work according to the program.”

8. Decarbonisation of India’s Power Sector

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s announcement of enhanced targets for climate action by India, particularly for achieving net-zero emissions by 2070, has highlighted the importance of long-term planning for decarbonising the economy.

What precautions needs to be taken to achieve net-zero emission goal by 2070?

- By 2070, there will be many changes in technology, environmental conditions, and the economy.
- The **planning horizon of about 50 years will need to be broken** up into shorter periods so that new knowledge about emerging technologies can be incorporated into plans.
- In addition, **plans will need to be monitored** so that the course can be corrected to respond to any unforeseen problems. Five years, as the UK has used, seems like a reasonable “Goldilocks ideal.”
- For setting interim targets and monitoring progress, an autonomous and technically credible agency, like the **Climate Change Committee (CCC)** in the UK, should be set up.
- The agency would provide **independent advice to the government** on setting and meeting both long-term and interim (five-year) targets that are ambitious but also achievable. It would also monitor progress and annually report and suggest mid-course corrections.

Decarbonisation of Power Sector

- Decarbonisation is the process of reducing the amount of carbon, mainly carbon dioxide (CO₂), sent into the atmosphere.
- The shorter-term targets announced by the PM to be reached by 2030 refer mostly to the power sector. This is appropriate because it is the biggest source of GHG emissions and also the **easiest one to decarbonise**.
- In order to decarbonise the power sector, it would be best to have a **single emissions-related objective** so that an optimal strategy can be developed to achieve the objective at the lowest cost.
- Reducing emission intensity is a good overarching objective; **increased use of RE** or non-fossil-fuel generation is a means to that end.

- **Setting permissible emission intensity** in terms of grammes of carbon dioxide equivalent per kWh of electricity sold, applied to all load-serving entities, would be a good option for targets in the power sector.
- There is a profusion of **separate targets** for almost every resource used to generate electricity. Such an approach **reduces the flexibility** of distribution companies to select resources to meet their loads, resulting in a non-optimal resource mix, and a higher cost of electricity.

Conclusion

The use of five-year interim targets for permissible emission intensity and the establishment of an autonomous and credible agency to advise the government on targets and policies and to monitor progress will greatly facilitate an effective, economic, and smooth transition to decarbonisation of the power sector first, and the Indian economy later by 2070.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Which of the following was a naval exercise announced by India at the Shangri La Dialogue, 2018?

- A SIAM BHARAT
- B SIMBEX
- C Bold Kurukshetra
- D SITMEX

Answer : D

Explanation

- Recently, the third edition of the trilateral naval exercise **Singapore-India-Thailand Maritime Exercise (SITMEX)** has been conducted in the Andaman Sea of the Indian Ocean.
 - It is conducted annually, and was **announced by India at Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018.**
 - The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Shangri-La Dialogue is Asia's premier defence summit. It was launched in 2002.

- It aims to strengthen mutual confidence and develop common understanding and procedures towards enhancing the overall maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region.
 - The exercise is in line with India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision.
- **Hence, option D is correct.**

2. What led to the latest crisis at Belarus-Poland border?

- a. Dispute over trade negotiations between EU and Belarus.
- b. Territorial conflict between Poland and Belarus.
- c. Belarus enabling migrants from the Middle East and Africa to enter the European Union through Poland.
- d. Dispute over water sharing of a trans-boundary river.

Answer: c

Explanation:

- At the Belarus – Poland border, there has been a sudden surge of migrants, including women and children, causing tensions to rise between the two countries.
- The migrants, estimated to be 2,000-4,000 in number, and mostly from West Asia, including Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, have made several attempts to cross over into Poland with the aim of seeking asylum in a European Union (EU) country. According to media reports, they were aided in their efforts by Belarusian border guards.

3. Which of the following best describes Cerberus?

- A It is a banking trojan
- B It is a Denial of Service (DoS) attack
- C It is an eavesdropping (Man-in-the-middle (MitM)) attack
- D It is a Cross-Site Scripting (XSS) software attack

Answer : A

Explanation

- **Cerberus is a Banking Trojan** primarily used to steal financial data, such as credit card numbers.
 - A Trojan is a type of malicious code or software to damage, disrupt, steal, or inflict harmful action on data or network.
 - Banking Trojan is a malicious program used in an attempt to obtain confidential information about customers and clients using online banking and payment systems.
- **Working of Cerberus:**
 - It takes advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic and sends SMS to lure a user to download the link containing the malicious software.
 - It deploys its malicious application usually spread via phishing campaigns to trick users into installing it on their smartphones.
 - The email or text message carrying a link appears to come from a trusted source like a bank.
 - The link takes to a fake website and once details like login name and passwords are entered, the login credentials reach the hacker.

4. If your fundamental rights have been violated, how can you seek remedy from the courts?

- a. By filing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) at the nearest court
- b. By filing a police complaint and then approaching the District Court with a contempt petition
- c. By filing a writ petition directly at the High Court or Supreme Court
- d. By filing a curative petition at the Supreme Court

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Judiciary has been assigned a very important role in the Indian democratic political system. It acts as the guarantor of the fundamental rights of the citizens and guardian of the Constitution.
- Any citizen whose fundamental rights have been violated can file a writ petition directly at the High Court or Supreme Court.

5. With reference to Cryptocurrencies, consider the following statements:

1. Fast and Cheap Transactions
2. Investment Destination
3. Anti-Inflationary Currency

Which of the above statements can be termed as benefits of cryptocurrency?

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

Answer : D

Explanation

Benefits Associated with Cryptocurrency

- **Fast and Cheap Transactions:** Cryptocurrencies are way cheaper to use to execute international transactions because the transactions don't have to be handled by a series of intermediaries before they reach their destinations. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- **Investment Destination:** There is a limited supply of cryptocurrency – partially like gold. Moreover, the last few years have seen the price of cryptocurrencies rising faster than other financial instruments.
 - Due to this, cryptocurrencies can become a preferred investment destination. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- **Anti-Inflationary Currency:** Due to high demand of cryptocurrency its prices have largely remained on a growing trajectory. In this scenario, people tend to hold more cryptocurrency than spending it.
 - This will cause a deflationary effect on the currency. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**

6. Lamkhaga Pass Trek was recently in the news, it lies in the state of -

- A Sikkim
B Arunachal Pradesh
C Uttarakhand
D Ladakh

Answer :C

Explanation

- Lamkhaga Pass is a **high altitude pass in Garhwal Himalayas (Uttarakhand) which connects with Sangla in Himachal Pradesh**. Due to its altitude and remoteness, it is considered **one of the toughest treks in the Himalayas (Uttarakhand)**.
- Hence, option C is correct.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. Discuss the term heat budget and how it impacts the temperature in the earth's atmosphere.

Approach

- Start the answer by defining what is the heat budget of the earth.
- Discuss the mechanism of the heat budget with a suitable diagram and how it impacts the temperature of the earth.
- Conclude Suitably.

2Q. Examine the potential of PM Kisan Yojana along with its shortcomings. Also compare it with other direct cash transfer schemes being implemented by State governments. (250 words)

Approach

- Write a brief about the PM-Kisan scheme in the introduction part.
- Discuss its potential and shortcomings.
- Compare it with other direct cash transfer schemes of State governments.