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NOVEMBER

23.11.2021

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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Global State of Democracy Report, 2021

The number of countries moving towards authoritarianism in 2020 was higher than that of countries going in the other direction, towards democracy, a/c to the Global State of Democracy (GSD) Report, 2021.

GSD Report

- The GSD report is released by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International-IDEA).
- The International-IDEA, is an inter-governmental organization supporting democracy, is chaired by Australia and includes India as a member-state.
- The report aims to influence the global debate and analyses current trends and challenges to democracy, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- It offers specific policy recommendations to spark new and innovative thinking for policymakers, governments and civil society organizations supporting democracy.

GSD framework

Highlights of the report

- The US and three members of the European Union (EU) [Hungary, Poland and Slovenia] have also seen concerning democratic declines.
- The pandemic has prolonged this existing negative trend into a five-year stretch, the longest such period since the start of the third wave of democratization in the 1970s.
- Democratically elected Governments, including established democracies, are increasingly adopting authoritarian tactics.
- This democratic backsliding has often enjoyed significant popular support.

India's performance

- The report highlighted the case of Brazil and India as "some of the most worrying examples of backsliding.
- India is the backsliding democracy with the most democratic violations during the pandemic.

- Violations include- Harassment, arrests and prosecution of human rights defenders, activists, journalists, students, academics and others critical of the government or its policies; internet obstructions etc.

Resilient democracies

- The report pointed out that many democracies had proved to be resilient to the pandemic.
- Despite pandemic restrictions on campaigning and media, the electoral component of democracy has shown remarkable resilience.
- Countries around the world learned to hold elections in exceedingly difficult conditions and they rapidly activated special voting arrangements to allow citizens to continue exercising their democratic rights.

2. JPC retains exemption clause, adopts personal data Bill:

The **Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on the Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill, 2019** has submitted its report.

- It has retained the controversial **exemption clause** that allows the Government to keep any of its agencies outside the purview of the law with minor changes.

Key recommendations made:

- **Stricter regulations for social media platforms:** The Committee recommended that all social media platforms, which did not act as intermediaries, should be treated as publishers and be held accountable for the content they host, and should be held responsible for the content from unverified accounts on their platforms.
- It said no social media platform should be allowed to operate unless **the parent company handling the technology sets up an office in India and that a statutory media regulatory authority**, on the lines of the Press Council of India, may be set up for the regulation of the contents on all such platforms irrespective of the platform where their content is published.
- **Some of the other recommendations** of the committee included development of an alternative indigenous financial system for cross-border payments on the lines of Ripple (U.S.) and INSTEX (European Union).

Clause 35- a Controversial provision in the Bill:

Clause 35, in the name of “public order”, “sovereignty”, “friendly relations with foreign states” and “security of the state”, allowed any agency under the Union Government exemption from all or any provisions of the law.

This was one of the widely debated clauses in the panel meetings.

Various suggestions in this regard:

- The members had argued that “public order” should be removed as a ground for exemption.
- They had also pressed for “judicial or parliamentary oversight” for granting such exemptions.
- The members had also suggested that “there should be an order in writing with reasons for exempting a certain agency from the ambit of the Bill”.
- Some of them had asked that only partial exemption should be given to the agency if needed.

However, none of these suggestions was accepted.

Rationale behind the retention of this clause:

- A secure nation alone provides the atmosphere which ensures personal liberty and privacy of an individual whereas multiple examples exist where without individual liberty and privacy, national security itself gives rise to autocratic regimes.
- The report noted that this clause was for “certain legitimate purposes” and also said there was precedent in the form of the reasonable restrictions imposed upon the liberty of an individual, as guaranteed under **Article 19 of the Constitution** and the **Puttaswamy judgment**.

Concerns raised against certain provisions:

The Bill did not provide adequate safeguards to protect the right to privacy and gave an overboard exemption to the Government. Clause 35 was open to misuse since it gave unqualified powers to the Government.

The Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill 2019:

The genesis of this Bill lies in the report prepared by a **Committee of Experts headed by Justice B.N. Srikrishna**.

The committee was constituted by the government in the course of hearings before the Supreme Court in **the right to privacy case (Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India)**.

How does the bill seek to regulate data?

The bill constitutes 3 personal information types:

1. Critical
2. Sensitive
3. General

Other Key provisions:

Data principal: As per the bill, it is the individual whose data is being stored and processed.

Social media companies, which are deemed significant data fiduciaries based on factors such as volume and sensitivity of data as well as their turnover, should develop their own user verification mechanism.

An independent regulator **Data Protection Agency (DPA)** will oversee assessments and audits and definition making.

Each company will have a **Data Protection Officer (DPO)** who will liaison with the DPA for auditing, grievance redressal, recording maintenance and more.

The bill also grants individuals **the right to data portability, and the ability to access and transfer one's own data**.

The right to be forgotten: This right allows an individual to remove consent for data collection and disclosure.

3. Authoritarianism is on the rise, says report:

The **Global State of Democracy Report, 2021** was recently released by the **International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance**.

- The reports refer to three main regime types: **democracies, hybrid and authoritarian regimes**. Hybrid and authoritarian regimes are both classified as non-democratic.

Highlights of the Report:

- The number of countries moving towards **authoritarianism** in 2020 was higher than that of countries going in the other direction, towards democracy. 20 countries moved in the direction of authoritarianism, seven countries moved towards democracy.
- The pandemic has prolonged this existing negative trend into a five-year stretch, the longest such period since the start of the third wave of democratisation in the 1970s.
- Democratically elected Governments, including established democracies, are increasingly adopting authoritarian tactics.

Performance analysis of various studies:

- The report highlighted **the case of Brazil and India** as “some of the most worrying examples of backsliding”. However, India remained in the category of a mid-level performing democracy as it has since 2000.
- The **United States and three members of the European Union** [Hungary, Poland and Slovenia] have also seen concerning democratic declines.

About the Report:

- The Global State of Democracy 2021 reviews the state of democracy around the world over the course of 2020 and 2021, with democratic trends since 2015 used as contextual reference.
- It is based on analysis of events that have impacted democratic governance globally since the start of the pandemic, based on various data sources, including International IDEA’s Global Monitor of Covid-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, and International IDEA’s Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices.

- The GSoD Indices provide quantitative data on democratic quality for the same countries, based on 28 aspects of democracy up until the end of 2020.

What is democracy?

The report defines democracy as based on five core attributes: Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement. These five attributes provide the organizing structure for this report.

4. Domestic workers' survey kicks off:

The first **All-India Survey on Domestic Workers** was recently flagged off.

About the Survey:

The survey is being carried out by **the Labour Bureau**.

- It is aimed at estimating the number of domestic workers at the national and State levels, those engaged in informal employment, and migrant and non-migrant workers; the proportion of domestic workers who stay at their employers' homes and those who do not; the wages of such workers; and other socio-economic factors.
- The survey would also include details of the number of households with "live-in and live-out" domestic workers and the average number of workers engaged by various kinds of households.

Draft National Policy on domestic workers:

A draft National Policy on domestic workers is under consideration of the Central Government. The policy, if finalised, will benefit 50 lakh domestic workers in the country including maids and drivers amongst others.

Salient features of the policy:

1. Inclusion of Domestic Workers in the existing legislations.
2. Domestic workers will have the right to register as workers. Such registration will facilitate their access to rights & benefits accruing to them as workers.
3. Right to form their own associations, trade unions.
4. Right to have minimum wages, access to social security, protection from abuse, harassment, violence.
5. Right to enhance their professional skills.
6. Protection of Domestic Workers from abuse and exploitation.
7. Domestic Workers to have access to courts, tribunals, etc.
8. Establishment of a mechanism for regulation of concerned placement agencies.

Measures already being taken:

- The Central Government has enacted the **Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008** for providing social security to all unorganized workers including domestic workers.
- **Social security schemes** like National Old Age Pension Scheme (Ministry of Rural Development); National Family Benefit Scheme (Ministry of Rural Development); Janani Suraksha Yojana (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare), Ayushman Bharat (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare).
- **Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana (AABY) with Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY)** provide life and disability coverage to the unorganised workers for the age group of 18 to 50 years depending upon their eligibility.
- **Domestic Workers Sector Skills Council** has been established under the Ministry of Skills Development to enable professionalization of domestic workers and enable their career progression.

5. Australia signs sub deal with U.S., U.K.

- Australian Defence Minister signed an agreement with diplomats from the U.S. and U.K. allowing the exchange of **naval nuclear propulsion technology know-how** between Australia, Britain and the United States.

Details:

- It is the first agreement on the naval nuclear propulsion technology to be publicly signed since the U.S., U.K. and Australia announced the formation of a **defence alliance, AUKUS**.

- Under the AUKUS deal, Australia would obtain eight state-of-the-art, **nuclear-powered but conventionally armed submarines** capable of stealthy, long-range missions.
- This agreement would improve the three countries' "**mutual defence posture**" and enable them to better deal with the **strategic tensions with China in the Indo-Pacific**.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

6. Co-op Societies are not banks, RBI cautions

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has cautioned members of the public not to deal with cooperative societies undertaking banking business by adding 'bank' to their names.

- It has also come to the notice of RBI that some co-operative societies are accepting deposits from non-members/nominal members/ associate members.
- This is tantamount to conducting banking business in violation of the provisions.

Who can use 'Bank' title?

- The Banking Regulation Act, 1949 was amended by the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Act, 2020, which came into force on September 29, 2020.
- Accordingly, co-operative societies cannot use the words "bank", "banker" or "banking" as part of their names, except as permitted under the provisions of BR Act, 1949 or by the RBI.

Cooperative Banking

- Cooperatives are people-centred enterprises owned, controlled and run by and for their members to realise their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations.
- Cooperative bank is an institution established on the cooperative basis and dealing in ordinary banking business.
- Like other banks, the cooperative banks are founded by collecting funds through shares, accept deposits and grant loans.
- They are regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and governed by the

1. Banking Regulations Act 1949
2. Banking Laws (Co-operative Societies) Act, 1955

Features of Cooperative Banks

- Cooperative banks are generally concerned with the rural credit and provide financial assistance for agricultural and rural activities.
- Such banking in India is federal in structure. Primary credit societies are at the lowest rung.
- Then, there are central cooperative banks at the district level and state cooperative banks at the state level.
- Cooperative credit societies are mostly located in villages spread over the entire country.

History of Cooperative Banking in India:

- The cooperative movement in India was started primarily for dealing with the problem of rural credit.
- The history of Indian cooperative banking started with the passing of Cooperative Societies Act in 1904.
- The objective of this Act was to establish cooperative credit societies “to encourage thrift, self-help and cooperation among agriculturists, artisans and persons of limited means.”
- Many cooperative credit societies were set up under this Act.
- The Cooperative Societies Act, 1912 recognised the need for establishing new organisations for supervision, auditing and supply of cooperative credit.
- The whole structure of cooperative credit institutions is shown in the chart given.
- There are different types of cooperative credit institutions working in India.
- These institutions can be classified into two broad categories- agricultural and non-agricultural.
- Agricultural credit institutions dominate the entire cooperative credit structure.

Various facets of cooperatives in India

- Cooperatives in India have grown exponentially.
- In the banking sector, according to the RBI, their contribution to rural credit increased from 3.1 percent in 1951 to an impressive 27.3 percent in 2002.

Importance of Cooperative Banks:

- The cooperative banking system has to play a critical role in promoting rural finance and is especially suited to Indian conditions.
- Various advantages of cooperative credit institutions are given below:

(1) Alternative Credit Source: The main objective of the cooperative credit movement is to provide an effective alternative to the traditional defective credit system of the village moneylender.

(2) Cheap Rural Credit: Cooperative credit system has cheapened the rural credit by charging comparatively low-interest rates, and has broken the money lender's monopoly.

(3) Productive Borrowing: The cultivators used to borrow for consumption and other unproductive purposes. But, now, they mostly borrow for productive purposes.

(4) Encouragement to Saving and Investment: Instead of hoarding money the rural people tend to deposit their savings in cooperative or other banking institutions.

(5) Improvement in Farming Methods: Cooperative credit is available for purchasing improved seeds, chemical fertilizers, modern implements, etc.

(6) Financial Inclusion: They have played a significant role in the financial inclusion of unbanked rural masses. They provide cheap credit to the masses in rural areas.

7. SBI lifts GDP growth view to 9.3%-9.6%

- State Bank of India (SBI) has upgraded its GDP growth projection for the ongoing fiscal to a 9.3% to 9.6% range, from 8.5%-9% forecast earlier, citing an improved pace of vaccination and lower incidence of COVID-19 cases in the country.
- This upward revision is based on the reference to **high-frequency indicators** factored into their '**Nowcasting**' model.
 - Nowcasting in economics is the prediction of the very near future based on the very recent past state of an economic indicator. Nowcasting models have been applied most notably in Central Banks, who use the estimates to monitor the state of the economy in real-time as a proxy for official measures.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Andhra Pradesh government repealed laws on 3 capitals

The Andhra Pradesh Assembly unanimously passed a Bill to repeal two laws that were cleared last year to set up three different state capitals.

Three Capitals Act

- The law was titled Andhra Pradesh Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Act, 2020.
- The incumbent govt had decided to reverse the previous government's decision to have an ambitious world-class capital city at Amaravati, which is located between Vijayawada and Guntur.
- Thus, it was decided that **Amaravati** was to be the Legislative capital, **Visakhapatnam** the Executive capital, and **Kurnool** the Judicial capital.

Why was it repealed?

- Over a hundred petitions challenging the government's move have been filed before the Andhra Pradesh High Court.
- Farmers of Amaravati, who let the government acquire their lands, wanted them to stick to the previous plan and build a world-class capital city in the same location.

Will Andhra Pradesh have only one capital now?

- It is not clear if the government will stick to Amaravati as the sole capital.
- Throughout his address, the CM stressed the need for decentralization for the equitable development of all regions.

What are the other examples of multiple capital cities?

- Among Indian states, Maharashtra has two capitals– Mumbai and Nagpur (which hold the winter session of the state assembly).
- Himachal Pradesh has capitals at Shimla and Dharamshala (winter).
- The former state of Jammu & Kashmir had Srinagar and Jammu (winter) as capitals.

2. Rani Gaidinliu

Union Home Minister has laid the foundation for 'Rani Gaidinliu Tribal Freedom Fighters Museum' in Imphal, Manipur.

Rani Gaidinliu

- Gaidinliu (26 January 1915 – 17 February 1993) was a Naga spiritual and political leader who led a revolt against British rule in India.
- At the age of 13, she joined the Heraka religious movement of her cousin Haipou Jadonang.
- The movement later turned into a political movement seeking to drive out the British from Manipur and the surrounding Naga areas.
- Within the Heraka faith, she came to be considered an incarnation of the Goddess Cherachamdinliu.

Meeting with Pt. Nehru

- Gaidinliu was arrested in 1932 at the age of 16, and was sentenced to life imprisonment by the British rulers.
- Jawaharlal Nehru met her at Shillong Jail in 1937 and promised to pursue her release.
- Nehru gave her the title of "Rani" ("Queen"), and she gained local popularity as Rani Gaidinliu.

Her legacy

- She was released in 1947 after India's independence and continued to work for the upliftment of her people.
- An advocate of the ancestral Naga religious practices, she staunchly resisted the conversion of Nagas to Christianity.
- She was honored as a freedom fighter and was awarded a Padma Bhushan by the Government of India.

3. ASEAN meet:

China has announced USD 1.5 billion development assistance for **the ASEAN** besides the elevation of the ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership to strengthen security cooperation with the 10-nation bloc, amid the US push into the resource rich Indo-Pacific.

- Xi made the remarks at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-China Special Summit to commemorate **the 30th Anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations**.
- He also said China would never seek hegemony nor take advantage of its size to coerce smaller countries, and would work with Asean to eliminate “interference”.

What is ASEAN?

The **Association of Southeast Asian Nations** is a regional organization which was established to promote political and social stability amid rising tensions among the Asia-Pacific’s post-colonial states.

The motto of ASEAN is “One Vision, One Identity, One Community”.

ASEAN Secretariat - Indonesia, Jakarta.

Genesis:

Established in 1967 with the signing of **the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration)** by its founding fathers.

Founding Fathers of ASEAN are: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

Ten Members: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Significance of ASEAN for India:

1. Against the backdrop of aggressive moves by China, including the Ladakh standoff, India placed the ASEAN at the centre of **India’s Act East policy** and held that a cohesive and responsive ASEAN is essential for security and growth for all in the region.
2. ASEAN is necessary for **the success of the Security And Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) Vision**.

3. The region is significant for **diversification and resilience of supply chains for post-Covid-19 economic recovery**.
4. It is **India's 4th largest trading partner with about USD 86.9 billion in trade**.

4. U.S.-India Trade Policy Forum (TPF)

U.S. Trade Representative was recently in India to revive the U.S.-India Trade Policy Forum (TPF) after a four-year break.

India's Regulatory norms as Key impediments to bilateral trade

- Market access restrictions
- High tariffs
- Unpredictable regulatory requirements
- Restrictive trade measures

Areas with huge potential for growth

- Digital economy
- Services
- Health-related trade
- Agriculture

Common challenges

- Climate change and sustainability
- Vulnerable supply chains
- Promoting market-oriented principles and structures

5. India's first Virtual Science Lab for children

In News: India's first Virtual Science Lab for children under CSIR Jigyasa programme, which will also connect students with scientists across the country has been launched.

- This will not only take science to all segments of students in every corner of the country, but it is also in tune with the National Education Policy (NEP), where students are allowed to choose any subject and the concept of streams has been disbanded

- CSIR has partnered with IIT Bombay to develop a Virtual Lab platform under CSIR Jigyasa programme, which facilitates classroom learning with laboratory research for school students.
- The main aim of the Virtual Lab is to provide quality research exposure and innovative pedagogy for school students to drive their scientific curiosity based on an online interactive medium with simulated experiments, pedagogy based content, videos, chat forums, animations, gaming, quiz, facility sharing, webinars etc.
- Will enable curiosity driven research based concepts, encourage higher order thinking skills, promote entrepreneurship and develop passion about science

6. India's Coal Usage under Scrutiny

Context: On the final day of the UN Climate Change Conference held in Glasgow, India's Minister for Environment read out a statement promising to "phase down" rather than "phase out" the use of coal.

- This caused many to raise questions about India's commitment to tackling climate change.

Why must dependence on coal be reduced?

- Since **carbon emissions are considered the main culprit** in global warming, countries have been committing themselves to turning carbon neutral by various dates.
- One key way to achieve **carbon neutrality**, wherein countries compensate for their carbon emissions by capturing an equal amount of carbon from the atmosphere, is to reduce dependence on coal.
- Coal is the **most polluting among fossil fuels**, and hence, its use in particular has come under scrutiny.

Why is it difficult?

- Coal is used to meet over 70% of India's electricity needs. Most of this coal comes from domestic mines.
- In FY 2020-21, India produced 716 million tonnes of coal, compared with 431 million tonnes a decade ago.
- Since FY 2018-19, **domestic production has stagnated** and has been unable to meet the rising domestic demand, leading to a rise in imports.
- Most of the country's coal production is limited to Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh with a total production of over 550 million tonnes, contributing to over 75% of the country's total coal production.

- The Prime Minister promised to **increase non-fossil fuel energy capacity to 500 GW** by 2030, meet 50% energy needs from renewable sources and reduce carbon emissions by 1 billion tonnes in a decade.
- According to an estimate by the Centre for Science and Environment, the promise to reduce emissions by 1 billion tonnes means that India would need to reduce its carbon output by 22% by 2030.
- India now meets about 12% of its electricity needs from renewable sources, and increasing it to 50% by 2030 will be difficult.
- While some renewable energy sources like solar are cheap, they are unreliable because of the intermittency problem. They thus require the **use of storage batteries, which adds to the cost.**
- Further, the damage that coal causes to commonly owned resources like the environment is **not factored into its cost.** So, there is not much economic incentive for countries to limit or to end their massive reliance on coal.

Is it fair to ask India to phase out coal?

- India has fought attempts by developed countries to impose a cap on its emissions.
- It has argued that adopting stringent steps to reduce carbon emissions **can drag down growth and affect efforts to reduce poverty.**
- It should also be noted that **per capita carbon emissions** of countries such as India and China are still lower than those of many developed countries. According to World Bank data of 2018, India produces 1.8 metric tonnes of carbon emissions per capita (15.2 for USA).
- Experts believe India's commitment to phase down coal and become carbon neutral may actually be a rather **generous commitment than what developed countries** have committed themselves to.
- Critics have also pointed out that the focus on ending the use of coal **deflects attention from other fossil fuels** such as oil and natural gas that are heavily used by developed countries.
- They also say developed countries have **not made good on their climate finance promise** made at COP15 in Copenhagen to offer \$100 billion every year to developing countries to achieve net zero emissions.

What lies ahead?

- It is highly unlikely that developing countries like India and China will reduce their coal consumption or even stop it from rising further.
- Coal, after all, is the **cheapest and most reliable way** to meet their rising energy needs. Further, the pledges made by countries at COP26 to reach net zero emissions or to phase down coal are not legally binding.

- Some leaders have proposed a **carbon tax as an alternative** to ensure that the price of coal reflects the cost of the damage it causes to the environment. This may turn out to be a more effective approach towards reining in carbon emissions.
- Coal on average is priced at \$2, while experts believe that it should be priced in the range of \$30 to \$70 to reflect its true cost.
- But such high carbon taxes can **cause a drastic fall in coal output** and severely affect living standards unless alternative sources of energy step in to fill the gap. India also faces its own set of structural problems in the power sector that will make the transition towards clean energy harder.
- The pricing of power, for instance, is influenced by **populist politics** which may hinder private investment in renewable energy.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

7. Farm distress and the demand for guaranteed MSP

Despite the announcement to repeal the three farm laws, farmers have decided to continue protesting for a legal mandate for Minimum Support Prices (MSP).

What is the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system?

- MSP is a form of market intervention by the Govt. of India to insure agricultural producers against any sharp fall in farm prices.
- MSP is price fixed by GoI to protect the producer – farmers – against excessive falls in price during bumper production years.

Who announces it?

- The govt. announces MSPs for 22 mandated crops and fair and remunerative prices (FRP) for sugarcane.
- MSP is announced at the beginning of the sowing season for certain crops on recommendations by Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
- It is announced by Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by the PM of India.

Why MSP?

- The major objectives are to support the farmers from distress sales and to procure food grains for public distribution.
- They are a guaranteed price for their produce from the Government.

- In case the market price for the commodity falls below the announced MSP due to bumper production and glut in the market, government agencies purchase the entire quantity offered by the farmers at the announced MSP.

Need for Guaranteed MSPs

- **No legal protection:** While the government does announce MSPs every year, it is not required to do so by law. The compulsion to procure on MSP is political, not legal.
- **Discretion of procurement:** But if there were to be a law backing the MSP regime, the government would lose its existing discretion in choosing not to procure.
- **Compulsion:** A legal mandate for MSP would force the government to purchase all the products that any farmer wants to sell at the declared MSP.
- **State-wide procurement:** It would also have to procure from all states, and all crops for which MSPs are announced.

Failures of MSPs

- A legally mandated MSP regime is likely to be neither feasible nor sustainable in the long run since Demand-side constraints are never accounted while procuring.
- Already grain stocks lying with the government are more than twice its buffer requirement, and sometimes end up rotting.
- At a fundamental level, the problem is there are just too many people involved in Indian agriculture for it to be truly remunerative.
- To a great extent, the solution to the economic distress of Indian farmers lies outside agriculture – in boosting India's industrial and services sectors.

Possible way forward

- It seems logical that instead of bypassing the market by using MSPs, the government should make efforts to enable farmers to participate in the market.
- The way forward is to ramp up investment in the agriculture sector.
- This means better irrigation facilities, easier access to credit, timely access to power, and ramping up warehouse capacity and extension services, including post-harvest marketing.
- The approach has to be to raise the farmers' bargaining ability and choices before them.

8. Matosinhos Manifesto for accelerated use of space in Europe

The European Space Agency (ESA) has approved a Matosinhos Manifesto to accelerate the use of space in Europe.

Matosinhos Manifesto

- At the Intermediate Ministerial Meeting that was held in Matosinhos, Portugal.
- The Council of Ministers unanimously adopted this resolution that lays down a vision for the continent in terms of maintaining and expanding its activities in space.
- The large-scale nature and fast pace of the climate crisis and other challenges means that no European nation will be able to effectively address them alone.

The manifesto defines three “accelerators” to further advance Europe’s space ambitions:

1. The first of these accelerators is for the ESA to start working towards the “Space for a Green Future”
2. The second accelerator is called “Rapid and Resilient Crisis Response” to support governments to act decisively on crises facing Europe, from flooding and storms to wildfires
3. The third accelerator mentioned in the resolution is “Protection of Space Assets”, whose objective is to safeguard ESA astronauts and assets from interference by space debris and space weather

A brief history of the ESA

- The ESA is an intergovernmental organization that was formed in 1975 with the aim of developing Europe’s space capabilities.
- The organization has 22 member states – Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.
- Slovenia, Latvia and Lithuania are Associate Members.

9. All-India Survey on Domestic Workers

The first All-India Survey on Domestic Workers was launched recently.

- **Ministry:** Labour and Employment Ministry

- First-of-its-kind survey in India

Key takeaways

- The survey would be completed in a year.
- **Carried out by:** Labour Bureau
- **Aim:**
 - - Estimating the number of domestic workers at the national and State levels
 - Those engaged in informal employment
 - Migrant and non-migrant workers
 - Domestic workers staying at their employers' homes and those who do not; their wages
- **Broad parameters to be covered:**
 - - **Household Characteristics** such as HH size, Religion, Social Group.
 - **Demographic Characteristics** such as Name, Age,
 - Age of entry, Social Group, Migrant status, Vocational Training/Education
 - Information on Employer Households

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Which of the following are the surface-to-surface missiles?

1. Prahaar
2. Prithvi
3. Shaurya
4. Spyder
5. Trishul

Options:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- A surface-to-surface missile is a missile that is launched from the ground to strike land or sea targets. They may be fired from hand-held or vehicles, from a ship or ground installations.
- There are different surface to surface missiles developed by India.
 - Prithvi series of missiles
 - Agni series of missiles
 - Nirbhay
 - Brahmos
 - Prahar
- Spyder and Trishul are surface- to- air missiles

2. Consider the following statements:

1. Amazon are the world's largest tropical rainforest occupying the drainage basin of the Amazon River and its tributaries
2. The Amazon includes parts of only five South American countries.

Which of the above statements are correct?

A 1 only

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

Answer : A

Explanation

- Amazon is the **world's largest tropical rainforest** occupying the drainage basin of the Amazon River and its tributaries in northern South America. **Hence statement 1 is correct.**
- Tropical forests are closed-canopy forests growing within 28 degrees north or south of the equator.
- They are very wet places, receiving more than 200 cm rainfall per year, either seasonally or throughout the year.
 - Temperatures are uniformly high - between 20°C and 35°C.
 - Such forests are found in Asia, Australia, Africa, South America, Central America, Mexico and on many of the Pacific Islands.
- The Amazon is a vast biome that spans **eight rapidly developing countries** – Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, and Suriname – **and French Guiana**, an overseas territory of France. **Hence statement 2 is not correct.**
- The Amazon rainforests cover about 80% of the Amazon basin and they are home to nearly a fifth of the world's land species and is also home to about 30 million people including hundreds of indigenous groups and several isolated tribes.

3. Consider the following statements regarding Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF):

1. It ensures universal non-discriminatory access to quality ICT services at economically efficient prices to people in rural and remote areas.
2. It became statutory by Indian Telegraph Act, 1885

Which of the statements given above is/are correct ?

- A 1 only
B 1 and 2 only
C 2 only
D None

Answer : B

Explanation

- Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) ensures that **there is universal non-discriminatory access to quality ICT** (Information and Communications Technology) services at economically efficient prices to **people in rural and remote areas. Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- All credits to this fund require parliamentary approval and it has **statutory support under Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Act, 2003. Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- It is a non-lapsable fund, i.e., the unspent amount under a targeted financial year does not lapse and is accrued for next years' spending.
- USOF is under the **Ministry of Communications.**

4. Merapi Volcano, sometimes seen in the news recently, is located in?

- a. Italy
- b. Japan
- c. Indonesia
- d. Philippines

Answer : c

- Indonesia's Mount Merapi volcano spewed avalanches of hot clouds recently.

Mount Merapi Volcano

- Merapi, a steep strato volcano north of Central Java's capital Yogyakarta, is Indonesia's most active volcano.
- Indonesia, an archipelago sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire and is prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

5. In which of the following battles was Porus defeated by Alexander?

- A Battle of Gaugamela
- B Battle of Hydaspes
- C Battle of Persian Gate
- D Battle of Issus

Answer : B

Explanation

Alexander Invasion of India

- In 326 BC, Alexander invaded India, after crossing the river Indus he advanced towards Taxila.
- He then challenged king Porus, ruler of the kingdom between the rivers Jhelum and Chenab. **The Indians were defeated in the fierce battle (Battle of Hydaspes).**
 - Alexander captured Porus and, like the other local rulers he had defeated, allowed him to continue to govern his territory.
 - Alexander remained in India for 19 months (326-325 B.C.), which were full of fighting in July 325 BC Alexander and his army returned westward for home.
- **Hence, option B is correct.**

6. With reference to National Council for Transgender Persons, which of the following is/are correct?

1. It is a constitutional body.
2. It aims to ensure that transgender welfare boards are set up in the National capital and the metropolitan cities only.

Choose the correct answer from the codes given below:

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

Answer : D

Explanation

- Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has constituted the National Council for Transgender Persons, under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. It is a statutory body. **Hence statement 1 is not correct.**
- It aims to ensure that transgender welfare boards are set up in all States and essential needs of the transgender community, like housing, food, healthcare and education are met. **Hence statement 2 is not correct.**

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. The condition of women in a society is an index of that society's place in civilization. Discuss. (150 words)

Approach

- Introduce by 'opening up' this statement a bit more to provide base for the main body of answer.
- Briefly elaborate the key words and substantiate the points keeping in mind the direction and intent of the answer.
- After putting across the rationale of the statement, move on to condition in India.

2Q. Discuss Kautilya's philosophy of "Yatha Raja Tatha Praja" (As the king is, so will be the people) in the context of today's political leadership in India. (250 words)

Approach

- Give brief introduction of Kautilya's idea of "Yatha Raja Tatha Praja".
- Provide illustration of "Yatha Raja Tatha Praja" in context of present political leadership in India by enlisting important characteristics of Indian political system and how it influences people.
- Give conclusion