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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Unresolved constitutional cases

As 2021 draws to a close, a look at the Supreme Court of India's docket reveals a host of highly significant constitutional cases that were long-pending when the year began, and are now simply a year older without any sign of resolution around the corner.

How delay in judicial

process matters differently for the State and individual?

- While the violation of rights – whether through executive or legislative action – is **relatively costless for the state**, it is the individual, or individuals, who pay the price.
- **Making the Constitution effective:** Consequently, a Constitution is entirely ineffective if a rights-violating status quo is allowed to exist and perpetuate for months, or even years, before it is finally resolved.
- This point, of course, is not limited to the violation of rights, but **extends to all significant constitutional questions** that arise in the course of controversial state action.
- **Missing the accountability:** Issues around the federal structure, elections, and many others, all involve questions of power and accountability, and the longer that courts take to resolve such cases, the more we move from a realm of accountability to a realm of impunity.
- The longer such cases are left hanging without a decision, the greater the damage that is inflicted upon our constitutional democracy's commitment to the rule of law.

Significant cases that are unresolved

[a] Challenge to the dilution of Article 370

- There is the constitutional challenge to the Presidential Orders of August 5, 2019, that **effectively diluted Article 370 of the Indian Constitution**, and bifurcated the State of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories, controlled by the Centre.
- It raises the question of whether the Centre can take advantage of an Article 356 situation in a State – a time when no elected government and Assembly

is in existence – to make permanent and irreversible alterations in the very structure of the State itself.

- **Implications for federal structure:** The answer will have important ramifications not just for Jammu and Kashmir but for the entire federal structure:
- India has a long history of **the abuse of Article 356** to “get rid of” inconvenient State governments, and a further expansion of the power already enjoyed by the Centre will skew an already tilted federal scheme even further.
- **Power of the Parliament to alter convert State into UT:** The case also raises the question of whether, under the Constitution, the Union Legislature has the authority not simply to alter State boundaries (a power granted to it by Article 3 of the Constitution), but **degrade a State into a Union Territory**.
- If it turned out that the Union Legislature does have this power, it would essentially mean that **India’s federal structure is entirely at the mercy of Parliament**.

[2] Constitutional challenge to the electoral bond scheme ★

- **Opaque and structurally biased:** The electoral bonds scheme authorises limitless, anonymous corporate donations to political parties, making election funding both entirely opaque to the people, as well as being **structurally biased towards the party that is in power at the Centre**.
- **Impact on integrity and right of the citizens to informed vote:** In numerous central and State election cycles in the last four years, thousands of crores of rupees have been spent in anonymous political donations, thus impacting not only the **integrity of the election process but also the constitutional right of citizens to an informed vote**.
- However, other than two interim orders, the Supreme Court has refused to accord a full hearing to the constitutional challenge.

[3] Other significant cases

- **Statutory basis of the CBI:** As far back as 2013, the Gauhati High Court held that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was not established under any statutory authority.
- This verdict was immediately stayed when it was appealed to the Supreme Court, but in the intervening years, it has never been heard.
- **Challenge to the CAA:** More recently, constitutional challenges to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), filed in the immediate aftermath of the legislation’s enactment, remain unheard.
- **Challenge to the UAPA:** The challenges to the much-criticised **Section 43(D)(5) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act**, which makes the grant

of bail effectively impossible, and is responsible for the years-long incarceration of several people.

- The challenge to Section 43(D)(5) is perhaps the case that most directly affects civil rights, as **the section continues to be applied on a regular basis.**

Implications of the delay

- **Favouring one party:** The Supreme Court's inaction is not neutral, but rather, favours the beneficiaries of the status quo.
- In other words, by not deciding, the Court is in effect deciding – in favour of one party – but **without a reasoned judgment that justifies its stance.**
- **Impact on accountability:** Judicial evasion of this kind is also damaging for the accountability of the judiciary itself.
- The Court's inaction plays as significant a role on the ground as does its action, **there is no judgment – and no reasoning – that the public can engage with.**
- **Impact on the rule of law:** For obvious reasons, this too has a serious impact on the rule of law.

Conclusion

The current CJI has been on record stressing the importance of the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. One way of demonstrating that in action might be to hear – and decide – the important constitutional cases pending before the Court.

2. NDPS Bill, 2021

The **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Amendment) Bill, 2021** was recently introduced in Lok Sabha.

- It seeks to replace an ordinance promulgated on September 30 this year.

Objective of the Bill?

The bill was introduced by the government **to rectify an error** that made provisions in **Section 27 of the Act** – providing for punishment of those financing illicit trafficking – inoperable.

- This happened in 2014, when the Act was amended in 2014 **to ease access of narcotic drugs for medical necessities**, but the penal provision was not amended accordingly.

- In June 2021, the Tripura High Court found the oversight in the law and directed the Union Home Ministry to amend the provisions of Section 27.

What necessitated this amendment?

The drafting error was highlighted when an accused moved a special court in Tripura contending that he could not be charged for the offence as **Section 27 A** is referred to a blank list. The Tripura High Court subsequently asked the Centre to amend the law.

What was the error?

The anomaly crept in when the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act was amended in 2014 to allow better medical access to narcotic drugs, removing state barriers in transporting and licensing of “essential narcotic drugs”.

- Prior to the 2014 amendment, clause (viii a) of Section 2 of the Act, contained sub-clauses (i) to (v), wherein the term ‘illicit traffic’ had been defined.
- This clause was re-lettered as clause (viii b) by the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Amendment) Act, 2014, as a new clause (viii a) in section 2 defining ‘essential narcotic drugs’ was inserted. However, inadvertently consequential change was not carried out in section 27A of the NDPS Act.

Criticisms surrounding the Bill:

- Few experts have observed that the Bill violated the fundamental rights of a citizen as **it provides retrospective effect to offences starting 2014**.
- It also violates the fundamental rights in **Article 21** because you can be punished for an offence for which there is a law in existence at the time of commission of the offence.

NDPS Act:

- It prohibits a person from producing, possessing, selling, purchasing, transporting, storing, and/or consuming any narcotic drug or psychotropic substance.
- The NDPS Act has since been amended thrice – in 1988, 2001 and 2014.
- The Act extends to the whole of India and it applies also to all Indian citizens outside India and to all persons on ships and aircraft registered in India.

Indian Government has taken several policy and other initiatives to deal with drug trafficking problem:

1. The 'Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan' or a 'Drugs-Free India Campaign' was flagged off on 15th August 2020 across 272 districts of the country found to be most vulnerable based on the data available from various sources.
2. Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has begun implementation of a **National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR) for 2018-2025**.
3. The government has constituted **Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD)** in November, 2016.
4. The government has constituted a fund called "**National Fund for Control of Drug Abuse**" to meet the expenditure incurred in connection with combating illicit traffic in Narcotic Drugs; rehabilitating addicts, and educating public against drug abuse, etc.

3. India- Russia Annual Summit

21st annual **India-Russia** summit was held recently. It was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

- Alongside, **the inaugural 2+2 ministerial meeting** was also held.
- The meeting saw the signing of **28 agreements** across sectors from defence to energy to space exploration, science and technology, heavy engineering, to trade and investment.

Key takeaways:

1. Russia's President Vladimir Putin extended **an invitation to PM Modi to visit Russia for the 22nd India-Russia Annual Summit in 2022**.

2. The two leaders expressed satisfaction at the sustained progress in the **'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership'** between both countries despite the challenges posed by the Covid.
3. The role of connectivity through **the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** and the proposed Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor figured in the discussions.
4. The two leaders looked forward to greater inter-regional cooperation between various regions of Russia, in particular with the Russian Far East, with India's states.
5. They agreed that both countries share common perspectives and concerns on Afghanistan and appreciated the bilateral roadmap charted out at the NSA level for consultation and cooperation on Afghanistan.

Significance of the meeting:

The completion of 5 decades of **the 1971 Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation** and 2 decades of **Declaration on Strategic Partnership** is symbolic of the long standing and time-tested India-Russia relations characterized by mutual trust, respect for each other's core national interests and similarity of positions on various international and regional issues.

The 2+2 dialogue:

It is held between the foreign and defence ministers of two countries and is generally seen to be aimed at creating a mechanism under which the bilateral relationship takes a decisive strategic turn with greater integration of defence, security and intelligence apparatus.

Why is Russia Important for India?

- Even as India is diversifying its defense trade partners, Russia still dominates the Indian defense inventory to the tune of about 70 per cent.
- Russia remains the only partner that is still willing to give India critical technologies, such as a nuclear submarine.
- The emerging Russia-China strategic relationship has important security consequences for India.
- Russia also reaffirmed its "unwavering support" to India for a permanent seat in an expanded UN Security Council.

- Russia expressed its support for India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
- Both countries have mutual benefits in supporting struggle against terrorism, Afghanistan, climate change; organisations like SCO, BRICS, G-20 and ASEAN.

4. Facial recognition tech in Indian airports

- Under the **Digi Yatra initiative**, Varanasi, Pune, Kolkata and Vijayawada airports are going to implement a facial recognition technology (FRT)-based boarding system for passengers.

Digi Yatra initiative:

- Digi Yatra initiative aims to make air travel paperless and hassle-free in the country, and proposes to simplify passenger-related processes at various checkpoints at the airport by using **FRT-based biometric scanning**.
- Under this system, a camera scans the passenger's face, and takes measurements of their facial features to build a biometric profile of them.
- Air travellers won't have to show their tickets, boarding passes, or physical identity cards at several points at the airport. This in turn would reduce queue waiting time and accelerate processing time.
- As part of the initiative, the Ministry of Civil Aviation would build an identity management platform – '**Common Digi Yatra ID**' platform that will enable biometric-based scanning across all airports in India.

Concerns surrounding the biometric technology:

- The adoption of FRT raises concerns related to the possibility of the technology's potential to **undermine the right to privacy**.
- Notably, India's recently adopted **Personal Data Protection Bill (PDPB), 2019**, falls short of the standards set by the Justice Srikrishna Committee and also fails to build a legal structure on the landmark **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India judgment** on the **right of digital privacy**.
- The growing body of research shows that biometric scanning technologies coupled with AI have an **inherent bias** and are found to discriminate based on classes like race and gender.

Safety measures proposed for passengers' data privacy:

- Data shared by the passenger is to be used for the purpose defined and would not be shared with any other external stakeholders.
- Passengers' biometric information will be deleted 24 hours after flight departure.

- The FRT deployed will comply with India's data privacy and protection practices.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. CAMPA Funds

The **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA)** has so far disbursed ₹48,606 crore to 32 States.

- Chhattisgarh and Odisha have had the maximum amount transferred to them, or close to ₹5,700 crore each followed by Jharkhand and Maharashtra at around ₹3,000 crore.

What are CAMPA funds?

CAMPA funds are part of long-pending dues of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF), a ₹54,000-crore tranche collected for nearly a decade as environmental compensation from industry, which has razed forest land for its business plans.

About CAMPA:

The **CAF Act 2016**, which came into being more than a decade since it was devised, established an independent authority – **the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority** – to execute the fund.

- However, it was not until last August that the rules governing the management of the fund were finalised.

What is Compensatory Afforestation?

Compensatory afforestation means that every time forest land is diverted for non-forest purposes such as mining or industry, the user agency pays for planting forests over an equal area of non-forest land, or when such land is not available, twice the area of degraded forest land.

Fund sharing:

As per the rules, 90% of the CAF money is to be given to the states while 10% is to be retained by the Centre.

- The funds can be used for treatment of catchment areas, assisted natural generation, forest management, wildlife protection and management, relocation of villages from protected areas, managing human-wildlife conflicts, training and awareness generation, supply of wood saving devices and allied activities.

6. What is 'Greater Tipraland'?

Following the recent killings, several tribal outfits in Tripura have joined hands to push their demand for a separate state for indigenous communities in the region, arguing that their "survival and existence" was at stake.

The Demand:

The parties are demanding a separate state of 'Greater Tipraland' for the indigenous communities of the north-eastern state. They want the Centre to carve out the separate state under Article 2 and 3 of the Constitution.

What is Greater Tipraland?

'Greater Tipraland' is essentially an extension of the ruling tribal partner Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura - IPFT's demand of Tipraland, which sought a separate state for tribals of Tripura.

- The new demand seeks to include every tribal person living in indigenous area or village outside the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) under the proposed model.
- However, the idea doesn't restrict to simply the Tripura tribal council areas, but seeks to include 'Tiprasa' of Tripuris spread across different states of India like Assam, Mizoram etc. as well, even those living in Bandarban, Chittagong, Khagrachari and other bordering areas of neighbouring Bangladesh.

What's the issue?

Regional political parties say the call of 'Greater Tipraland' rose due to unfulfilled demands of revising NRC in Tripura and opposition to CAA in the past.

7. Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA)

Following the recent killings of 14 civilians in Nagaland, the Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio has demanded the repeal of **the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act**.

- Rio criticised the Union Government for extending the “disturbed area” tag for Nagaland every year.
- He reminded the Centre of the criticism India had earned globally for **the “draconian Act”**.

What’s the issue?

A group of daily wage workers who were returning to their village were killed by 21 Para Commando unit, reportedly after information that some NSCN(K) terrorists were travelling in the area.

Background:

The Ministry of Home Affairs had, in June 2021, declared the entire State of Nagaland as a “disturbed area” for six more months under the **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA)**.

- MHA said the area comprising the whole of Nagaland is in such a “disturbed and dangerous condition” that the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary.

What does the AFSPA mean?

In simple terms, AFSPA gives **armed forces the power to maintain public order in “disturbed areas”**.

Powers given to armed forces:

1. They have the authority to prohibit a gathering of five or more persons in an area, can use force or even open fire after giving due warning if they feel a person is in contravention of the law.
2. If reasonable suspicion exists, the army can also arrest a person without a warrant; enter or search premises without a warrant; and ban the possession of firearms.
3. Any person arrested or taken into custody may be handed over to the officer in charge of the nearest police station along with a report detailing the circumstances that led to the arrest.

What is a “disturbed area” and who has the power to declare it?

A disturbed area is one which is declared by notification under **Section 3 of the AFSPA**. An area can be disturbed due to differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.

- **The Central Government, or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory can declare the whole or part of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area.**

Has there been any review of the Act?

On November 19, 2004, the Central government appointed a five-member committee headed by **Justice B P Jeevan Reddy** to review the provisions of the act in the north eastern states.

- The committee submitted its report in 2005, which included **the following recommendations:** (a) AFSPA should be repealed and appropriate provisions should be inserted in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967; (b) The Unlawful Activities Act should be modified to clearly specify the powers of the armed forces and paramilitary forces and (c) grievance cells should be set up in each district where the armed forces are deployed.

The **5th report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission** on public order has also recommended the repeal of the AFSPA.

Naga killings point to AFSPA pitfalls:

The AFSPA gives the armed forces the licence to kill. And when they carry out such shameful operations without keeping the local police in the loop, as has been the practice for long, it gives the message that the Centre just does not care about the peace process.

Naga People’s Movement for Human Rights vs Union of India- SC’s 1997 verdict laid down guidelines for use of AFSPA:

- The 1997 judgment of a Constitution Bench held that the power under **Section 4(a) of the AFSPA** to use deadly force should be employed only under “certain circumstances”.
- The court noted that the “power to cause death is relatable to maintenance of public order in a disturbed area and is to be exercised under definite circumstances”.

- These preconditions include a declaration by a high-level authority that an area is “disturbed”. The officer concerned decides to use deadly force on the opinion that it is “necessary” to maintain public order. But he has to give “due warning” first.
- The persons against whom the action was taken by the armed forces should have been “acting in contravention of any law or order for the time being in force in the disturbed area”.

8. Highly invasive snail spotted in Kerala

- Researchers have spotted **acute bladder snail** *Physella acuta* in the Edappally canal in **Kochi**. This is the first time this snail has been reported in Kerala.
 - *Physella acuta* is considered native to North America but is now found in all continents except Antarctica.
- This snail has been globally branded as a **highly invasive species**. Its **rapid growth rate**, air-breathing capability, and **tolerance to pollution** makes the *Physella acuta* a potential competitor to native fauna and hence it could play havoc with native ecosystems.
- This snail species plays **host to worms that can cause food-borne diseases** and skin itches in humans.

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation 2.0 (AMRUT 2.0) scheme

In New The Government has launched Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation 2.0 (AMRUT 2.0) scheme.

- AMRUT 2.0 is designed to provide **universal coverage of water supply** to all households through functional taps in all statutory towns and coverage of sewerage/septage management in 500 AMRUT cities.
- Making the cities '**water secure**' and thereby enhancing ease of living of citizens is major objective of the Mission.
- AMRUT 2.0 will promote **circular economy of water** through development of city water balance plan for each city focusing on recycle/reuse of treated sewage, rejuvenation of water bodies and water conservation.
- It will help cities to **identify scope** for projects focusing on universal coverage of functional water tap connections, water source conservation, rejuvenation of water bodies and wells, recycle/reuse of treated used water, and rainwater harvesting.
- Mission also has a **reform agenda** on ease of living of citizens through reduction of non-revenue water, recycle of treated used water, rejuvenation of water bodies, augmenting double entry accounting system, urban planning, strengthening urban finance etc.

Other components of AMRUT 2.0 are:

- Pey Jal Survekshan to ascertain equitable distribution of water, reuse of wastewater, mapping of water bodies and promote healthy competition among the cities /towns.
- Technology Sub-Mission for water to leverage latest global technologies in the field of water.
- Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaign to spread awareness among masses about conservation of water.

2. MoU for Strengthening Waste Management Sector in India

Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) India to strengthen the waste management sector in India under the overall ambit of Swachh Bharat Mission- Urban 2.0.

- With the vision of making cities 'Garbage Free', SBM-U 2.0 is focused on achieving 100% waste processing along with bio-remediation of legacy dumpsites, construction and demolition waste and plastic waste management.
- The collaboration between MoHUA and UNDP India is another step towards realizing the vision of 'Clean Air, Clean Water, Clean Land' in urban India through a circular economy approach based on the 3R (reduce, reuse, recycle) principle.
- Will cover interventions in the areas of capacity building, digital interventions, research and development, monitoring and evaluation, and social and behavior change communication.
- Through this MoU, UNDP India will also be facilitating setting up of 75 Smart Swachhata Kendras across the country, working with local partners and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).
The model will also focus on integrating informal waste pickers – Safai Saathis – and linking them to various government welfare schemes.
- With digital technologies playing a critical role in driving Mission outcomes of SBM-U 2.0, the MoHUA- UNDP model will also make use of digital enablers such as Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to digitize the waste flow and streamline activities in the Swachhata Kendras.

3. India-Russia Annual Summit 2021: Key Takeaways

India and Russia share a longstanding and time-tested partnership and further development of this relationship has been a key pillar of India's foreign policy. Since the signing of "Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership" in October 2000 bilateral ties have acquired a qualitatively new character with enhanced levels of cooperation in almost all areas including political, security, defence, trade and economy, science and technology, and culture.

The Annual Summit

The Annual Summit meeting between the Prime Minister of India and the President of the Russian Federation is the highest institutionalized dialogue mechanism in the strategic partnership between India and Russia.

- 21st Annual Summit between the two leaders took place on 6th December during President Putin's visit to India.
- Both leaders reviewed various aspects of bilateral relations and discussed ways to further strengthen the all-encompassing partnership
- Defence and Foreign Ministers of both countries also held the **first ever 2+2 dialogue** between both countries and discussed several issues of common concern.
- Putin mentioned: Intends to discuss with Prime Minister Narendra Modi new "large-scale" initiatives on further developing "specially privileged" Russian-Indian relations. This partnership brings real mutual benefit to both states. Bilateral trade shows good dynamics; ties are actively developing in the energy sector, innovation, space, and the production of coronavirus vaccines and medicines. We continue to cooperate jointly on global agenda... our positions are quite similar...in the fight against terrorism, also fighting drug trafficking and organized crime

Key Takeaways

- India and Russia signed 28 MoUs across a wide range of sectors including trade, energy, culture and education.
- Signed an agreement for the procurement of 6,01,427 assault rifles AK-203 through Indo-Russia Rifles Pvt Ltd, under the military-technical cooperation arrangement for 2021-31.
- Signed protocols on amending a deal signed in 2019 on the cooperation in the manufacturing of the Kalashnikov rifles in India
- Signed an agreement to extend military technology cooperation for the next decade, from 2021 to 2031.

Conclusion

Where India and Russia have greater freedom is in the economic domain, but their failure to boost the commercial relationship has been stark.

- During the last 20 summits with Putin, the two sides have repeatedly affirmed the importance of enhancing trade and investment ties; but progress has been hard to come by.
- Despite political tensions, India's China trade continues to grow, while Delhi's commercial ties with Moscow are stagnant despite good political relations.

- The problem clearly can't be fixed at the level of governments. The Russian business elites gravitate to Europe and China. The Indian corporations are focused on America and China.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

4. Kazhuveli notified as bird sanctuary

Context The ecologically important Kazhuveli wetlands in Villupuram district, Tamil Nadu, was recently notified as bird sanctuary.

Key takeaways

- Kazhuveli wetlands is said to be the second largest brackish water lake in South India after Pulicat lake. It is a wetland of international importance
- **Significance:** The creation of the sanctuary will now ensure better protection of the wetlands.
 - The area has adequate ecological significance for the purpose of protecting, propagating and developing wildlife and its environment.
- The place is home to a diverse species of flora and fauna.
- It is a feeding ground for long-distance migrants from the cold subarctic regions of Central Asia and Siberia including **Black-tailed Godwits, Eurasian Curlew, White Stork and Ruff.**

5. Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act

After recent killings of Nagaland civilians by 21 Para Commando unit in Nagaland's Mon district, its Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio has called for scrapping of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA)

What is the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA)?

- It is a Parliamentary act that grants special powers to the Indian Armed Forces and the state and paramilitary forces in areas classified as "disturbed areas".
- **Objective:** To maintain law and order in the disturbed areas
- **Section (3)** – If the governor of a state issues an official notification in The Gazette of India then the Central government has the authority to deploy armed forces for assisting the civilian authorities.

- **Section (4)** – Special powers to army officers in disturbed areas to shoot any individual who violates law or is suspected to violate law. The only condition is that the officer has to give a warning before opening fire.
- Security forces can arrest anybody even without a warrant, and carry out searches without consent.
- Once a person is taken into custody, he/she has to be handed over to the nearest police station as soon as possible.
- Prosecution of the officer on duty for alleged violation of human rights requires the prior permission of the Central Government.

Demand for Revocation of AFSPA in the past

- BP Jeevan Reddy committee examining it in relation to the Northeast in 2005, and the Veerappa Moily report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission of 2007, recommended that the Act be repealed.

States and union territories under AFSPA

- Throughout Assam and Nagaland.
- In Manipur with the exception only of the municipal area of Imphal.
- AFSPA has been withdrawn from Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya.
- Operational in some areas of Kashmir valley.

6. Facial Recognition Tech in Indian airports

Union government said that four airports in the country will soon have facial recognition technology (FRT)-based boarding system for passengers.

- In a written response to a question in Lok Sabha Union, Civil Aviation Minister said that the Airports Authority of India (AAI) is working on a biometric boarding system at the Varanasi, Pune, Kolkata, and Vijayawada airports.
- This biometric boarding system is part of the first phase of the Digi Yatra scheme's implementation

What is the Digi Yatra scheme?

- Digi Yatra initiative aims to make air travel paperless and hassle-free in the country and proposes to simplify passenger-related processes at various checkpoints at the airport by using FRT-based biometric scanning.

- Once implemented, air travelers who choose to use the service won't have to show their tickets, boarding passes, or physical identity cards at several points at the airport.
- This in turn would reduce queue waiting time and accelerate processing time.

How does the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) plan to implement it?

- The MoCA plans to build an **identity management platform** that will enable biometric-based scanning across all airports in India. The platform will include passengers' digital identities, like Aadhaar, passport details or other identity cards.
- The '**Common Digi Yatra ID**' platform will be used to enrol passengers, authenticate their data, and share consenting passengers' profiles with other airport partners.
- The app-based interface will be built as a **shared national infrastructure**, which will provide APIs to airports.
- It will also allow other apps to be integrated with it, according to a 2018 MoCA policy paper on the scheme.

What's the status of implementation?

- The scheme was planned to be made operational in early 2019, with pilot rollouts in Bengaluru and Hyderabad airports. **Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport** successfully tested the biometric-based self-boarding facility by mid-2019.
- The AAI planned to launch the scheme at Kolkata, Varanasi, Pune and Vijayawada by April 2019. But the **roll-out was delayed**, possibly due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The MoCA is now rescheduling its roll-out plans, and has proposed that the **Digi Yatra system go live in March 2022**, and then be scaled up in a phased manner for adoption across various airports in the country.
- The AAI has engaged **NEC Corporation Pvt. Ltd.** to implement FRT at the four airports.

What about passengers' data privacy?

- Government has reiterated that data shared by the passenger is to be used for the purpose defined and **would not be shared with any other external stakeholders**.
- Passengers' biometric information will be **collected via an app, and deleted 24 hours after flight departure**.

- Also, the security of the Facial Recognition Technology (FRT) system will be tested independently. Government also stated that the FRT deployed will comply with the country's data privacy and protection practices.
- But India's recently adopted Personal Data Protection Bill (PDPB), 2019, falls short of the standards set by the **Justice Srikrishna Committee**.
- The Bill fails to build a legal structure on the landmark **Justice S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India judgment** on the right of privacy.
- It diverges from the Committee's 2018 draft, which proposed a judicial oversight in selecting members of the Data Protection Authority.

What are the concerns in using biometric scan at the airport?

- The use of iris scans, fingerprints and facial recognition to identify travellers has been operational in some international airports in the past few years. They use algorithmic systems to get a face grab of passengers at the first security checkpoint.
- A camera scans the passenger's face, and takes measurements of their facial features to build a biometric profile of them.
- And then, when the same person boards the flight, another camera takes a picture of their face and runs an algorithm to check whether the two images match with the boarding pass.
- Without a clear idea of where the biometric data will be stored, and who else will have access to it, some passengers prefer to keep their personal data private.
- A growing body of research shows that biometric scanning technologies coupled with **AI have an inherent bias**. A report by the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology noted that facial recognition technology found Black, Brown and Asian individuals to be 100 times more likely to be misidentified than white male faces.
- Studies have also found that machine learning algorithms discriminate based on classes like race and gender.

7. Hypersonic Weapons Arms Race

China tested a nuclear-capable hypersonic missile in August 2021 that circled the globe before speeding towards its target, demonstrating an advanced space capability that caught U.S. intelligence by surprise.

- However, China has denied that it was nuclear capable.

What are hypersonic weapons?

- They are manoeuvrable weapons that can fly at **speeds in excess of Mach 5, five times the speed of sound**.

- Ballistic missiles, though much faster, follow a fixed trajectory and travel outside the atmosphere to re-enter only near impact.
- On the contrary, **hypersonic weapons travel within the atmosphere** and can **manoeuvre midway**.
- The above capabilities combined with their high speeds makes their **detection and interception extremely difficult**.
- This means that radars and air defences cannot detect them till they are very close and little time to react.
- There are two classes of hypersonic weapons:
 - Hypersonic glide vehicles (HGV): These are launched from a rocket before gliding to a target
 - Hypersonic cruise missiles (HCM): These are powered by high-speed, air-breathing engines, or scramjets, after acquiring their target.
- Hypersonic missiles are a **new class of threat** because they are capable both of manoeuvring and of flying faster than 5,000 kms per hour, which would enable such missiles to penetrate most missile defences and to further compress the timelines for response by a nation under attack.

What is the status of Chinese and Russian programmes and where does the U.S. stand?

- In early October 2021, Russia announced that it had successfully test launched a **Tsirkon hypersonic cruise missile** from Barents Sea which hit a target 350 kms away.
- Talking of the test in November, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that the tests were almost complete and the Russian Navy would start receiving them in 2022.
- While the **S. has active hypersonic development programmes** but it was lagging behind China and Russia because most U.S. hypersonic weapons, in contrast to those in Russia and China, are not being designed for use with a **nuclear warhead**.
- As a result, U.S. hypersonic weapons will likely require greater accuracy and will be more technically challenging to develop than nuclear-armed Chinese and Russian systems.
- The U.S. is now looking to accelerate its own programmes, though it is unlikely to field an operational system before 2023.
- The Pentagon's budget request for hypersonic research for financial year 2022 is \$3.8 billion, up from the \$3.2 billion it requested a year earlier. The Missile Defence Agency additionally requested \$247.9 million for hypersonic defence.

What is the status of development by other countries?

- Number of other countries – including Australia, India, France, Germany, and Japan – are also developing hypersonic weapons technology.
- **India operates approximately 12 hypersonic wind tunnels** and is capable of testing speeds of up to Mach 13.
- Reportedly, India is also developing an indigenous, dual-capable hypersonic cruise missile as part of its **Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV) program** and successfully tested a Mach 6 scramjet in June 2019 and September 2020.
 - In a scramjet engine, air goes inside the engine at supersonic speed and comes out at hypersonic speeds.
 - DRDO had said after the test in 2020, many critical technologies such as aerodynamic configuration for hypersonic manoeuvres, use of scramjet propulsion for ignition and sustained combustion at hypersonic flow, thermo-structural characterization of high temperature materials, separation mechanism at hypersonic velocities have been validated.

Is Hypersonic a game changer in arms race?

- Debunking some of the claims surrounding hypersonic weapons, Physicists David Wright and Cameron Tracy argued that hypersonic weapons “may have advantages in certain scenarios, but by no means do they constitute a revolution.”
- According to these Physicists, many of the claims about hypersonic weapons are exaggerated or simply false.
- And yet the widespread perception that hypersonic weapons are a game-changer has **increased tensions among the U.S., Russia and China, driving a new arms race and escalating the chances of conflict.**

Conclusion

Given the rising tensions between the U.S., China and Russia as also the worsening geopolitical situation worldwide, the focus for hypersonic weapons is only set to accelerate more countries to invest significant resources in their design and development.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. With reference to the Indian Navy, consider the following statements:

1. Every Year, Navy day is celebrated on the aegis of success of Operation Trident.
2. It is headed by the President of India as its Supreme Commander.
3. Indian Navy's Motto is - Sam no Varunah.

Which of the above statements are correct?

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

Answer : D

Explanation

- Every year, **Indian Navy Day** is celebrated on **4th December** to respect the Indian Navy's counter-attack in **Operation Trident** during the **Indo-Pakistan war in 1971**.
 - It was a **counter-attack by the Indian Navy** on the Karachi harbour during the **Indo-Pakistan war in 1971**.
 - India used **anti-ship missiles for the first time** during this operation and destroyed the Pakistani destroyer ship PNS Khaibar. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- It is headed by the **President of India** as its Supreme Commander. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- **Indian Navy's Motto is - Sam no Varunah** that means that the God of water, Varuna, should be auspicious unto us.
- **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**

2. With respect to Mithi River, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It is a River flowing through the city of Mumbai
2. It is a confluence of tail-water discharges of the Tulsi and Vihar lakes

Options:

- a. 1 only

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Mithi River is a river on Salsette Island, the island of the city of Mumbai, India. It is a confluence of tail-water discharges of the Powai and Vihar lakes.
- The river is seasonal and rises during the monsoons. The overflowing lakes also contribute to the river flow, which is stopped by a dam at other times.

3. With reference to Sedition, which of the following is/are correct?

1. Sedition is a crime under Section 124A of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).
2. It is a non-bailable offence.
3. A person charged under sedition law is barred from a government job.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer :B

Explanation

- **Sedition** is a crime under **Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**. Hence, **statement 1 is not correct**.
 - The Section 124A IPC defines sedition as an offence committed when "any person by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government established by law in India".
 - Disaffection includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity. However, comments without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, will not constitute an offence under this section.
- **Punishment for the Offence of Sedition:** It is a **non-bailable offence**. Punishment under the Section 124A ranges from imprisonment up to three

years to a life term, to which fine may be added. Hence, statement 2 is correct.

- A person charged under this law is **barred from a government job**. Hence, statement 3 is correct.
- They have to live without their passport and must produce themselves in the court at all times as and when required.

4. Mount Semeru recently seen in news is in which country?

- a. Japan
- b. Philippines
- c. Indonesia
- d. Solomon Islands

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Mount Semeru is located on the Java Island of Indonesia.
- It is an active volcano in East Java. It is located in a subduction zone.

5. The World Programme of Action (WPA) initiative is related to?

- A Global strategy to enhance disability prevention.
- B Strategy to prevent spread of Covid infection.
- C Reduction of malnourished population.
- D Implementation of Paris Agreement.

Answer : A

Explanation

- **The World Programme of Action (WPA) is a global strategy to enhance disability prevention**, rehabilitation and equalization of opportunities, which pertains to full participation of persons with disabilities in social life and national development. The WPA also **emphasizes the need to approach disability** from a human rights perspective. Hence, option A is correct

6. Consider the following statements regarding the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan (PM-SYM) pension scheme?

1. It is a Central Sector Scheme administered by the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
2. An Unorganised Worker (UW) between 18 and 60 years of age is eligible for the PM-SYM scheme.

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

- According to the Ministry of Labour & Employment, nearly 46 lakh Unorganised Workers (UW) have been registered under the **Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan (PM-SYM) pension scheme.** ★
- PM-SYM is a **Central Sector Scheme** administered by the **Ministry of Labour and Employment** and implemented through Life Insurance Corporation of India and Community Service Centers (CSCs). **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - **LIC (Life Insurance Corporation)** is the Pension Fund Manager and responsible for Pension pay out.
- **Eligibility:**
 - Should be an Unorganised Worker (UW).
 - Monthly Income Rs 15000 or below.
 - **Entry age between 18 and 40 years. Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
 - Should possess a mobile phone, savings bank account and Aadhaar number.
 - Should not be covered under **New Pension Scheme (NPS), Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme** or **Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).**
 - Should not be an income tax payer.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. Social audits help in bridging the gap between policy objectives and outcomes. Discuss. (250 words)

Approach

- Describe Social audit as introduction.
- Highlight role of Social Audit in bridging gap between objectives stated in policy and desired outcomes.
- Give conclusion.

2Q. What do you understand by scheduled tribes? Examine the dilemma related to the development of the tribes in India. (250 words)

Approach

- Explain the term 'scheduled tribes' and 'tribals general characteristics' in India.
- List out some challenges faced while developing tribals in India in dilemmatic form.
- Give some suggestive steps to come out of such a dilemma.