

www.vishnuias.com



DECEMBER

10.12.2021

CURRENT AFFAIRS

A MAGAZINE FOR CIVIL SERVICES PREPARATION

JOIN OUR TELEGRAM: <https://t.me/vishnuiasmentor>

Articles of the day
THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS

UPSC

General Studies

Test Series

Online &
Offline
classes

One-Stop
Solution

Free daily
materials

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Tobacco Consumption in India

Tobacco use is known to be a major risk factor for several non-communicable diseases in India.

Tobacco abuse in India

- In India, 28.6% of adults above 15 years and 8.5% of students aged 13-15 years use tobacco in some form or the other.
- This makes the country the second-largest consumer of tobacco in the world.

Concern: No action against Tobacco

- India bears an annual economic burden of over ₹1,77,340 crores on account of tobacco use.
- There has been no major increase in taxation of tobacco products to discourage the consumption of tobacco in the past four years since the introduction of GST.
- Only in 2020-21, the Union Budget had the effect of increasing the average price of cigarettes
 - by about 5%.
 - Yet, the excise duty on tobacco in India continues to remain extremely low.

A worrying trend

- **No increase in tax:** The absence of an increase in tax means more profits for the tobacco industry and more tax revenue foregone for the government.
- **Revenue losses:** This revenue could have easily been utilized during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Losses due to GST:** There has been a 3% real decline in GST revenues from tobacco products in each of the past two financial years.

Present governance of Tobacco

- **GST slab:** Tobacco at present is a highly taxed commodity. It is kept in the 28% GST slab (other than for tobacco leaves which is taxed at 5%).
- **Heavy cess:** Tobacco and its various forms are also subject to a heavy burden of cess, given that the commodity is seen as a sin good.

- **Statutory warning:** The government also uses pictures of cancer patients on the packages of cigarettes to discourage its use.

Federal issues

- Excise taxes on many tobacco products used to be regularly raised in the annual Union Budgets before the GST.
- Similarly, several State governments used to regularly raise value-added tax (VAT) on tobacco products.
- During the five years before the introduction of the GST, most State governments had moved from having a low VAT regime on tobacco products to having a high VAT regime.

Implication of such policies

- **Increased consumption:** The lack of tax increases in post-GST years might mean that some current smokers smoke more now and some non-smokers have started smoking.
- **Reverse trend in decline:** This could potentially lead to a reversal of the declining trend in prevalence.
- **Affordability:** Tobacco products are more affordable post-GST as shown in recent literature from India.
- **Missing up national target:** This might jeopardise India's commitment to achieving 30% tobacco use prevalence reduction by 2025 as envisaged in the National Health Policy of 2017.

Way forward

- Several countries in the world have high excise taxes along with GST or sales tax and they are continuously being revised.
- We must adhere to the WHO recommendation for a uniform tax burden of at least 75% for each tobacco product.
- The Union government should take a considerate view of public health and significantly increase excise taxes – either basic excise duty or NCCD – on all tobacco products.
- Taxation should achieve a significant reduction in the affordability of tobacco products to reduce tobacco use prevalence and facilitate India's march towards sustainable development goals.

2. The 'diplomatic' Olympic boycott

The US Government has decided not send any official representation to the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing announcing what is being called a “diplomatic boycott” of the games.

Diplomatic boycott'

- A “diplomatic boycott” means no US official will be present at the Winter Olympics in Beijing.
- This stops short of a complete boycott, which would have meant the non-participation by US athletes.
- As such, the absence of official representation will not impact the games as much as an athletic boycott would have.

What led to the US boycott?

Ans. Uyghurs Genocide

- The decision was taken because of China’s gross human rights abuses and atrocities in Xinjiang.
- This is the latest clash adding to a long list of differences on trade, Taiwan, human rights and the South China Sea.
- Xinjiang Uyghurs have been sent by Chinese authorities to “re-education” camps, a network of which were constructed beginning in 2016 to house thousands of detainees.
- Beijing initially denied the existence of the camps, but subsequently claimed the centres were for “vocational training”.

Who else is 'diplomatically boycotting' the games?

- So far, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand have also announced that their officials will not be present at the games.
- None, however, has said their athletes will not attend, which means the games themselves are unlikely to be impacted.
- It remains to be seen if the boycott will gain traction beyond US allies and partners.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin will travel to Beijing for the opening of the Winter Olympics.
- China has been garnering support from countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

How is China reacting to the boycott?

- Beyond the statements decrying the “politicization” of sports, there is certainly a domestic political undercurrent to the games.
- China’s media, meanwhile, has been largely playing down the reports of the boycotts, underlining how the authorities are going all-out to ensure the games are conducted without a hurdle.

What will be the impact on US-China relations?

- Much recently, the US and Chinese Presidents committed to “responsibly” managing their growing competition amid increasing conflicts.
- Both nations called common-sense guardrails to ensure that competition does not veer into conflict.
- China emphasized the “need to treat each other as equals” and warned against “drawing ideological lines”, calling on the US “to meet its word of not seeking a ‘new Cold War’”.

3. Constituent Assembly debates around Citizenship

This newscard is an excerpt from the ‘Letter and Spirit’ section in the print edition of TH, which is a new column that will focus on explaining and understanding basic Acts and Articles enshrined in our Constitution.

- With the contentious farm laws repealed, the discussions turn to the second most politically and legally resisted legislation of recent times, The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.
- The citizenship question finds its retro-reflection in the Constituent Assembly debates which serve as the undeniable autobiography of India’s basic law.

Debate over CAA, yet again

- CAA asserts that only people belonging to some faiths are victims of persecution and violence and the doors of the country can be legitimately shut to any other instance of persecution and ethnic violence.

A ‘headache’ for the Drafting Committee

- The citizenship question had been one of the most difficult tasks confronted by the drafting committee as admitted by Dr B.R.Ambedkar.
- He moved a set of consolidated amendments to the citizenship provisions of the original draft.

- He said that the task had given the drafting committee “such a headache” and multiple “drafts were prepared” and “destroyed” before arriving at a consensus.

The critics

- The draft did not satisfy all but to the most due to its secular and liberal provisions.
- It was fiercely contested on the floor of the Constituent Assembly on religious, ethnic and hyper-nationalistic considerations.
- The Article 5 of the draft constitution was criticized for its lack of exclusive and preferential provisions on religious lines regarding the declaration as to who shall be the citizen of India during commencement of the Constitution.
- Then Article 5A (today’s Article 7 of the Constitution) sought to grant citizenship rights to the migrants of Pakistan who had returned to India under a permit for resettlement granted by Indian authorities.

The ‘Jus Soli’ Principle

- This principle is premised on the automatic grant of citizenship based on the place of birth provided the person is domiciled in India, qualifying it with religious identity.
- It was in fact a proposal to ingrain religion into the bedrock of the Constitution.
- Dr P.S.Deshmukh from the Central Provinces and Berar proposed changes to Article 5 of the draft by proposing to replace the universally honoured “jus soli” principle by qualifying it with a religion.
- He went on to state that every person who is a Hindu or a Sikh by religion and is not a citizen of any other State, wherever he resides shall be entitled to be a citizen of India.

Issue over indiscriminate grant of citizenship

- The concern of Dr. Deshmukh justifying the exclusion of people belonging to other religions, as echoed in his question- Is it then wise that we should throw opens our citizenship so indiscriminately?
- It found fraternal support from members who opined that Hindus and Sikhs have no other home but India.
- This finds its resonance today in the presumptive base of the CAA.

The defenders

- Some highlighted the fact of panic driven migration without certain intention to settle down in Pakistan was left unanswered with precision.

- Some retorted that mentioning the name of some communities will make other communities feel that they were being ignored.

What did Nehru opine?

- Nehru stated that we cannot have rules for Hindus, for Muslims and for Christians only.
- He stressed upon the possibility of the second wave of migration including non-Hindus and non-Sikhs who were part of the first wave influx.
- Hence, in his view, foreclosing the doors fearing the influx of some may deprive others of exercising their choice.

Ambedkar on Pakistan returnees

- Ambedkar clarified that the principal thrust of Article 5A was to declare that persons who migrated to Pakistan after 1st of March 1947 due to internal disturbances.
- He declared that some migrants from Pakistan were allowed to return on the basis of the agreements between both the Governments and on the basis of an ordinance promulgated.

Conclusion

- The Constituent Assembly debates on citizenship showed that in the rousing of sentiments of ethnicity and distrust, sagacity had an upper hand, leading to the saner denouement of toleration.
- History is known to set examples.

4. Bills to Extend tenure of ED and CBI Chiefs

Amid strong objection from the Opposition, the Lok Sabha has passed two Bills allowing **the Centre to extend the tenure of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) chief and the CBI Director** up to five years from the current fixed tenure of two years.

- The Bills **replace the ordinances brought in last month.**

About the Ordinances:

The Union Government has brought in two ordinances allowing the service of the directors of **the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of**

Investigation (CBI) to be extended beyond their fixed tenure of at least two years up to a maximum of five years.

- The extension can be given only one year at a time. That is, after a fixed two-year tenure, they may get three annual extensions.

Laws amended:

1. The change in tenure of the CBI Director was done by amending **the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946**.
2. On the other hand, the changes to the tenure of the ED Director was brought in by amending **the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003**.

Plea in Supreme Court on new Ordinances:

Petitions have been filed in the Supreme Court urging the Supreme Court to quash the Ordinances, which allow the Government to extend the tenures of the chiefs of **the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Enforcement Directorate (ED)** “in a piecemeal fashion” up to a maximum of five years.

Issues:

- The petitioners said the Ordinances would leave the heads of the two top investigative bodies **insecure about their tenure and erode their professional independence**.
- Also, **no criteria has been provided save for a vague reference to ‘public interest’** which is based on the subjective satisfaction of the Respondents.
- The Government’s move has also drawn sharp criticism from the Opposition parties, which have accused it of taking the ordinance route despite the Parliament session beginning on November 29.

On what grounds have these ordinances been challenged?

About a year ago, the ED Director had been given a one-year extension retrospectively following the completion of a two-year fixed tenure. The move was challenged before **the Supreme Court, which upheld the government’s decision**. However, it said that such a drastic measure should be taken only rarely.

- The petitioners, who allege that the two ordinances are arbitrary and unconstitutional, cite **the judgment**, as well as the Apex Court verdict in **Vineet Narain vs Union of India (1997)** which held that the CBI and the ED chiefs should have a minimum tenure of two years.

5. Gold & Economy

As Currency: Gold was used as the world reserve currency up through most of the 20th century. The United States used the gold standard until 1971.

As a hedge against inflation: The demand for gold increases during inflationary times due to its inherent value and limited supply. As it cannot be diluted, gold is able to retain value much better than other forms of currency.

Strength of Currency: When a country imports more than it exports, the value of its currency will decline. On the other hand, the value of its currency will increase when a country is a net exporter. Thus, a country that exports gold or has access to gold reserves will see an increase in the strength of its currency when gold prices increase, since this increases the value of the country's total exports.

About the World Gold Council:

- It is the market development organisation for the gold industry.
- It works across all parts of the industry, from gold mining to investment, and their aim is to stimulate and sustain demand for gold.
- It is an association whose members comprise the world's leading gold mining companies.
- It helps to support its members to mine in a responsible way and developed the Conflict Free Gold Standard.
- Headquartered in the UK, they have offices in India, China, Singapore, Japan and the United States.

6. The 'diplomatic' Olympic boycott

- The US has announced a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics in China.

What does a 'diplomatic boycott' of the games mean?

- A **complete boycott** would mean that U.S. athletes and officials would not participate in the winter Olympics.
- However, a **diplomatic boycott** means no U.S. official will be present at the Winter Olympics in Beijing but athletes will still compete in the Games. It will not have an impact on the games.

Reasons given by the USA for the boycott

- It is aimed to highlight Chinese actions in Xinjiang which includes “genocide and crimes against humanity”.
- They have committed human rights violations against the ethnic minorities including mass detentions and forced use of contraception and sterilizations.

Support from other countries

- Australia, Canada, and New Zealand have also announced that their officials will not be present at the games. None, however, has said their athletes will not attend.

China’s reaction

- Chinese foreign ministry spokesman warned the Games were “not a stage for political posturing and manipulation” and said China will take resolute countermeasures.

Impact on U.S.-China relations

- The spat over the Winter Olympics is the latest clash between the U.S. and China, adding to a long list of differences on trade, Taiwan, human rights and the South China Sea.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

7. More Cyclones in Arabian Sea

An analysis of past data of **cyclones** over North Indian Ocean (Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea) during the period from 1891 to 2020 indicates that:

- The **frequency of “very severe cyclonic storms” has increased in recent years over the Arabian Sea.** However, this has not measurably increased the

threat to India's western coast, as most of these cyclones were making landfall in Oman and Yemen.

- The Eastern Coast remained far more vulnerable to "Extremely Severe Cyclones" than the Western coast, but there was nevertheless "no significant trend" in the frequency of Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storms (ESCS).
- The number of deaths due to cyclones has decreased significantly, as a result of the improvement in the early warning skill of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).
- The effective mitigation measures and response actions by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) have also improved.

Factors responsible for this:

1. Surface temperatures in the Arabian Sea have increased rapidly during the past century due to global warming. Temp. Now is 1.2-1.4 °C higher than the temperature witnessed four decades ago. These warmer temperatures support active convection, heavy rainfall, and intense cyclones.
2. The rising temperature is also enabling the Arabian Sea to supply ample energy for the intensification of cyclones.
3. The Arabian Sea is also providing conducive wind shear for cyclones. For instance, a higher level easterly wind drove the depression of **Cyclone Ockhi** from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea.

8. Does the Omicron variant make a case for booster doses?

- There is a rising conversation around the need for a booster dose of the Covid-19 vaccine due to the emergence of the new variant. The Health Minister of India has highlighted that the booster dose for the Covid-19 Vaccine is not on the Indian government's agenda, rather the priority is to get all adults vaccinated.

Facts:

- As of 30th November 2021, India has administered over 1.24 billion overall, including 1st and 2nd doses.
- Uttar Pradesh has administered the most number of doses.
- 80% of the adult population of India has been administered with at least one dose.
- 36.4% or 300 million of the population is fully vaccinated.

- At our peak, we administered 25 million doses in a day, a world record.

What is a booster dose?

In medical terms, a booster dose is an extra administration of a vaccine after an earlier primary dose. Shots of the same formulation or dose of different formulations or quantities may be used. Some countries like the USA are administering booster shots to certain sections of the population.

Purpose of booster dose-

Some experts state that the purpose of booster dose is to increase protection at the community level. By being fully vaccinated we are protected against severe illness and hospitalization. Expectation from booster dose is to increase protection against infection and transmission. Some others differ as they consider the purpose to be the same as vaccination programs i.e protection against hospitalization and death.

Case against Booster dose-

- There are not many studies that prove the effectiveness of the vaccine against infection and transmission.
- Also, evidence shows that protection against severe illness and hospitalization does not decrease with time.
- Also, India already has a vaccination campaign that is still incomplete. So, focusing on it is wiser.
- The new variant Omicron is said to be mild as of now.
- It may compromise the availability of doses for primary vaccination at the global level.

Case for Booster dose-

- The emergence of Omicron shows that corona is here to stay and makes a case for vaccination as well as a booster.
- Public health experts are starting to see reduced protection, especially among certain populations, against mild and moderate disease.
- It would be good to have a booster dose for identified categories, particularly vulnerable people.

Way forward

The question of booster dose requires more thinking. It demands an assessment of which population is more susceptible to severe disease, the duration between primary vaccination and booster doses as well as whether booster dose should be a homologous or heterologous booster dose.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Suspension of MPs for entire Winter Session is worrying

Twelve members of the Rajya Sabha were suspended for their alleged involvement in the grave disorder in the House on the last day of the previous session.

What do Rajya Sabha's rules of procedure say about the suspension of a member?

- **Rule 256** of Rajya Sabha's rules of procedure provides for the suspension of a member who **disregards the authority of the chair** or abuses the rules of the council by persistently and willfully obstructing the business of the House.
- **Persistent and willful obstruction** of the business of the House is the crux of the offence.
- **What is the maximum period of suspension?** Suspension can be **for a period not exceeding the remainder of the session.**
- This would mean that if the member is suspended on the last day of the session, the **period of suspension will be only a day.**
- So, even if a government would like to suspend such a member for a longer period. it would not be possible under the present rule.
- Unless the House itself revokes the suspension nothing can be done about it.
- **The decision of the House is final.**
- **Every legislature has the power to suspend its members** if they cause disorder and obstruct the business of the House.
- But the rule of suspension is rarely invoked in parliaments in **mature democracies.**

Whether the existing rules permit such a course of action?

- Rule 256 says that the chairman may, if he deems it necessary, name a member who either disregards the authority of the chair or abuses the rules of the House by **persistently and willfully obstructing the business of the House.**
- Sub Rule 2 of this rule is of very great importance in the context of the main question, namely, **whether a member can be suspended in the next session for creating disorder in the previous session.**
- **No adjournment is allowed:** It clearly says no adjournment is allowed, which means the matter of suspension cannot be adjourned to a later period.
- It needs to be decided then and there.

- A member who abuses the rules of the House by persistently and willfully obstructing its business needs to be **punished swiftly**.
- No adjournment is allowed at all.

The powers of the House to regulate its internal matters

- It can be said that the rule under which the members were suspended **does not actually permit it**.
- **Absolute power to interpret rule:** The House is supreme in these matters and the chair has **absolute powers to interpret the rules**.
- The judiciary has time and again clarified that the House has **absolute powers to regulate its internal matters**.
- Suspension of a member is such a matter.
- The judiciary will intervene only when a **patently unconstitutional act is done** by the House.

Conclusion

The solution to disruptions does not lie in suspension. That is the lesson we should learn from past experience.

2. Global Health Security Index, 2021

Countries across all income levels remain dangerously unprepared to meet future epidemic and pandemic threats, according to the new 2021 Global Health Security (GHS) Index.

About GHS Index

- The GHS Index is the first comprehensive assessment and benchmarking of health security and related capabilities across the 195 countries that make up the States Parties to the International Health Regulations.
- It is a project of the Johns Hopkins Centre for Health Security, the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) and the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) and was first launched in October 2019.
- It assesses countries across 6 categories, 37 indicators, and 171 questions using publicly available information.
- It benchmarks health security in the context of other factors critical to fighting outbreaks, such as political and security risks, the broader strength of the health system, and country adherence to global norms.

Parameters assessed

The report is based on a questionnaire of 140 questions, organized across 6 categories, 34 indicators, and 85 sub-indicators. The six categories are:

1. **Prevention:** Prevention of the emergence or release of pathogens
2. **Detection and Reporting:** Early detection and reporting for epidemics of potential international concern
3. **Rapid Response:** Rapid response to and mitigation of the spread of an epidemic
4. **Health System:** Sufficient and robust health system to treat the sick and protect health workers
5. **Compliance with International Norms:** Commitments to improving national capacity, financing plans to address gaps, and adhering to global norms
6. **Risk Environment:** Overall risk environment and country vulnerability to biological threats

Global performance

- In 2021, no country scored in the top tier of rankings and no country scored above 75.9, the report showed.
- The world's overall performance on the GHS Index score slipped to 38.9 (out of 100) in 2021, from a score of 40.2 in the GHS Index, 2019.
- This, even as infectious diseases are expected to have the greatest impact on the global economy in the next decade.
- Some 101 countries high-, middle- and low-income countries, including India, have slipped in performance since 2019.

Indian scenario

- India, with a score of 42.8 (out of 100) too, has slipped by 0.8 points since 2019.
- Three neighboring countries – Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives – have improved their score by 1-1.2 points.

Conclusion

- Health emergencies demand a robust public health infrastructure with effective governance.
- The trust in government, which has been a key factor associated with success in countries' responses to COVID-19, is low and decreasing, the index noted.

3. 75 yrs of Constituent Assembly's 1st sitting

The **Constituent Assembly** of India had held its first meeting 75 years ago on December 9, 1946.

- Distinguished people from different parts of India, different backgrounds and even differing ideologies came together with one aim- to give the people of India a worthy Constitution.

What do you need to know about the Constituent Assembly of India?

1. The idea of a constituent assembly was put forward for **the first time by MN Roy**.
2. In 1935, the Indian National Congress (INC), for the first time, officially called for a constituent assembly to frame a constitution for India.
3. In 1938, J Nehru made this emphatic statement regarding the constitution- 'The constitution of free India must be framed, without outside interference, by a constituent assembly elected on the basis of adult franchise'
4. The demand for a constituent assembly was **accepted for the first time by the British through their 'August offer' of 1940**.
5. Eventually, **a constituent assembly was established under the provisions of the Cabinet Mission plan**.
6. It was constituted in 1946.

Some of the important aspects related to this are:

- Total strength of the assembly: 389.
- 296 seats for British India and 93 seats to princely states.
- 292 seats allocated for British India were to be from eleven governor's provinces and four from Chief commissioner's provinces.
- Seats were allocated based on proportion to their respective population.
- Seats allocated to each British province were to be decided among the three principal communities- Muslims, Sikhs and general.
- Representatives of each communities were to be elected by members of that community in the provincial legislative assembly and voting was to be by the method of proportional representation by means of single transferrable vote.
- Representatives of princely states were to be nominated by head of these princely states.

Some observations regarding the composition:

- Partly elected and partly nominated.
- Indirect election by provincial assemblies who themselves were elected on a limited franchise.
- Though an indirect mode of election, it included representatives from all sections of the society.
- Muslim league did not participate in the first meeting.
- Constituent assembly held 11 sessions over two years, 11 months and 18 days.
- Last session of the constituent assembly was held on January 24, 1950.

Constituent assembly acted as the temporary legislature until a new one was to be constituted. Some of the functions it performed at this stage were:

1. Ratification of India's membership of the commonwealth.
2. It adopted the national flag.
3. It adopted the national anthem.
4. Adoption of National song.
5. Electing Dr Rajendra Prasad as the first President of India.

Criticism of the constituent assembly:

1. Not a representative body since members were not directly elected.
2. It was not a sovereign body since it was established based on British order.
3. It consumed unduly long time to make the constitution.
4. It was dominated predominantly by congress party.
5. It was dominated by lawyer-politician to a greater degree.
6. It was dominated by Hindus predominantly.

4. Bird Flu

Fresh cases of **bird flu** have been confirmed in the Kuttanad region of Kerala. Response teams have been formed for culling birds in affected areas.

- Samples have tested positive for the **H5N1 influenza virus**.

What is bird flu?

- Also called avian influenza.
- It is a disease caused by avian influenza **Type A viruses found naturally in wild birds worldwide.**
- Symptoms have ranged from mild to severe influenza-like illness.

Classification:

Avian Influenza type A viruses are **classified based on two proteins on their surfaces - Hemagglutinin(HA) and Neuraminidase(NA).**

- There are about 18 HA subtypes and 11 NA subtypes.
- Several combinations of these two proteins are possible e.g., H5N1, H7N2, H9N6, H17N10, etc.

Spread:

- There have been reports of avian and swine influenza infections in humans.
- The infection is deadly as it has a high mortality rate of about 60%.
- The most common route of virus transmission is direct contact. They can also be affected if they come in contact with contaminated surfaces or air near the infected poultry.

Can the virus transfer to humans?

There are no known cases of H5N8 in human beings. Risk to general public is very low. There is also no evidence that consumption of poultry meat or eggs could transmit the virus to humans. But necessary precautions are required while handling sick/ dead birds and contaminated material during control and containment operations. It is considered safe to eat properly cooked poultry products.

Control measures:

Culling is usually undertaken to control the infection when it is detected in animals. Besides culling, safe disposal of all such culled animals and animal products is also

important. The authorities also need to strictly enforce decontamination of infected premises and undertake quarantine of contaminated vehicles and personnel.

5. National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education And Research (Amendment) Bill, 2021

The Parliament has passed the National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (Amendment) Bill, 2021.

- The Bill seeks to amend the original act of 1998 to declare six additional National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPERs) as Institutions of National Importance.
- These institutes are located in Ahmedabad, Hajipur, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Guwahati and Raebareli.
- The Bill also provides for a Council to coordinate the activities among the institutes to ensure development of pharmaceutical education and research.
- The NIPERs are for strengthening and enhancing research in the Pharma sector, in the country.

What is the Meaning of the Institute of National Importance?

- The Central Government grants the status of 'Institute of National Importance' to premier higher educational institutions in India through an act of the Parliament.
- Such an institute "serves as a pivotal player in developing highly skilled personnel within the specified region of the country/state".
- Such institutes get special funding and recognition from the Government of India.
- It is observed that generally, such INIs operate outside the University Grants Commission's ambit and enjoy certain advantages related to taxes.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Education
- Some of the benefits that INIs enjoy are listed below:
 - Functional autonomy
 - Increased funding.
 - Better quality of education.
 - Faster decision-making capabilities.
 - Minimal interference from the political executive.

6. SAMPANN project

Over 1 lakh people getting pension directly into their bank accounts through SAMPANN project

SAMPANN - 'System for Accounting and Management of Pension' is an ambitious project of Government of India being implemented by Controller General of Communication Accounts, Department of Telecommunications, Ministry of Communications.

- A **seamless** online pension processing and payment system for Department of Telecommunications pensioners
- Provides **direct credit of pension** into the bank accounts of pensioners
- Helped the Department in **faster settlement** of pension cases, improved reconciliation/auditing and ease of accounting.
- Instrumental in **settling** close to 76000 BSNL Voluntary Retirement Scheme 2019 cases in a short span of 6 months.
- A system with a **flexible design** which enables it to accommodate ever expanding requirements
- Has improved the service delivery to pensioners by providing a single window setup ensuring the following benefits:
 - - Timely settlement of pension cases
 - Provision of e-Pension Payment Order
 - Login for each pensioner enables access to key information like payment history
 - Online submission of grievances and timely SMS alerts

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

7. What are Non-convertible Debentures?

Several companies have announced public issues to raise funds through non-convertible debentures.

What are Debentures?

- Debentures are long-term financial instruments issued by a company for specified tenure with a promise to pay fixed interest to the investor.

- They can be held by individuals, banking companies, primary dealers other corporate bodies registered or incorporated in India and unincorporated bodies.
- Their types include:
 1. **Convertible debentures (CDs):** They are a type of debentures that can be converted into equity shares of the company.
 2. **Non-convertible debentures (NCDs):** They are defined as the type of debentures that cannot be converted into equity shares of the company.

What are NCDs?

- Some debentures have a feature of convertibility into shares after a certain point of time at the discretion of the owner.
- The debentures which can't be converted into shares or equities are called non-convertible debentures (or NCDs).
- They are debt financial instruments that companies use to raise medium- to long-term capital.

Benefits offered by NCDs

- At a time when fixed deposit rates are in low single digits, these NCD offerings look lucrative.
- NCDs offer interest rates between 8.25–9.7%.

Risks posed

- Although NCDs are generally considered safe fixed-income instruments, some recent defaults have made investors cautious.
- NCDs can be either secured by the issuer company's assets, or unsecured.
- Certain issuers, with credit rating below investment grade, had in the past issued both a secured NCD and another unsecured one through the same offer document, with different credit ratings.
- The risk is high in the case of unsecured NCDs, even though they offer high-interest rates.
- Credit rating of the issuer is a key factor to consider before investing in any NCD.

8. Main Bhi Digital 3.0

Main Bhi Digital 3.0" campaign launched which is aimed at digital onboarding of Street Vendors who are provided loans under PM SVANidhi Scheme.

- Digital onboarding and training of Street Vendors (SVs) is an integral part of PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) Scheme.
- Lending Institutions (LIs) have been instructed to issue a durable QR Code & UPI ID at the time of disbursement and train the beneficiaries in conduct of digital transactions.
- **Jointly launched by:** Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY)
- PM SVANidhi Scheme is available to all street vendors across the country.

What is the scheme all about?

- It is a micro-credit facility that provides street vendors a collateral-free loan of Rs 10,000 with low rates of interest for a period of one year.
- The scheme is a part of the AtmaNirbhar Bharat package.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. PANEX-21 is a Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief exercise for the member nations of:

A Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)

B Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

C South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

D Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

Answer : A

Explanation

- Recently, a **Curtain Raiser Event for PANEX-21** for the member nations of **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** countries was held recently.
- It is a **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief exercise**.
 - It aims to foster joint planning and build regional cooperation for responding to natural disasters.
- It will be participated by subject matter experts and delegates from **India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand**.
 - A Multi-Agency Exercise (MAE) comprising a static display showcasing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HDR) equipment employed by the Indian Armed Forces and various civil agencies will also take place.
- **Hence, option A is correct.**

2. Under which Schedule of the Constitution of India can the transfer of tribal land to private parties for mining be declared null and void?

- a. Third Schedule
- b. Fifth Schedule
- c. Ninth Schedule
- d. Twelfth Schedule

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Fifth Schedule contains provisions in relation to the administration and control of scheduled areas and scheduled tribes.
- *Schedules of Indian Constitution*

3. With reference to cyclones, consider the following statements:

1. Middle latitude cyclones develop in the region between the Tropics of Capricorn and Cancer.
2. The World Meteorological Organization uses the term 'Extra-Tropical Cyclone' to cover weather systems in which winds exceed 'Gale Force'.

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 : D

Explanation

- **Cyclones** are rapid inward air circulation around a low-pressure area. The air circulates in an anticlockwise direction in the Northern hemisphere and clockwise in the Southern hemisphere.
 - They are usually accompanied by violent storms and bad weather.
- **Tropical cyclones** develop in the region between the Tropics of Capricorn and Cancer.
 - They are large-scale weather systems developing over tropical or subtropical waters, where they get organized into surface wind circulation.
 - The **World Meteorological Organization** uses the term '**Tropical Cyclone**' to cover **weather systems in which winds exceed 'Gale Force'** (minimum of 63 km per hour). **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
- **Extra Tropical cyclones** also called Temperate cyclones or **middle latitude cyclones** or Frontal cyclones or Wave Cyclones occur in temperate zones and

high latitude regions, though they are known to **originate in the Polar Regions**. Hence, **statement 1 is not correct**.

4. Which amongst the following appliances must have the BEE energy rating label mandatorily under Indian law?

1. Colour TV
2. Electric Geyser
3. Tubular fluorescent
4. Room Air-conditioners

Choose from the codes given below:

- a. 1 & 2 only
- b. 1, 2 & 3 only
- c. 3 & 4 only
- d. All of the above

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The following products have been notified under mandatory labelling.
 - Frost Free (No-Frost) Refrigerator
 - Tubular Fluorescent Lamps
 - Room Air Conditioners
 - Distribution Transformers
 - Room Air Conditioners (Cassette, Floor Standing Tower, Ceiling, Corner AC)
 - Direct Cool Refrigerator
 - Electric Geysers
 - Colour TV
 - Room Air Conditioners (Inverter type)
 - LED lamps

5. Which of the following is/are the cause of failure of Revolt of 1857?

1. The large princely states did not join the rebellion.
2. The leaders could not offer effective leadership to the movement as a whole.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer : C

Explanation

Cause of Failure of Revolt

- **Limited uprising:** The revolt was mainly confined to the Doab region.
 - The large princely states, **Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, and Kashmir**, as well as the smaller ones of **Rajputana**, did not join the rebellion. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - The southern provinces did not take part in it.
- **No effective leadership:** The rebels lacked an effective leader. Although Nana Saheb, Tantia Tope and Rani Lakshmi Bai were brave leaders, they could not offer effective leadership to the movement as a whole. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- **Limited resources:** The rebels lacked resources in terms of men and money. The English, on the other hand, received a steady supply of men, money and arms in India.
- **No participation of the middle class:** The English educated middle class, the rich merchants, traders and zamindars of Bengal helped the British to suppress the revolt.

6. Which of the following is/are not the outcome of the Revolt of 1857?

- A The revolt marked the end of the East India Company's rule in India.
- B The Governor General's office was replaced by that of the Viceroy.
- C The Doctrine of Lapse was abolished.
- D The ratio of Indian soldiers to British officers was increased.

Answer : D

Explanation

Outcome of Revolt

- **End of company rule:** The revolt marked the end of the East India Company's rule in India. **Hence, option A is correct.**
 - Lord Canning at a **Durbar in Allahabad** announced that Indian administration was taken over by Queen Victoria, which, in effect, meant the British Parliament.
- **Religious tolerance:** It was promised and due attention was paid to the customs and traditions of India.
- **Administrative change:** The Governor General's office was replaced by that of the Viceroy. **Hence, option B is correct.**
 - The rights of Indian rulers were recognised.
 - The Doctrine of Lapse was abolished. **Hence, option C is correct.**
 - The right to adopt sons as legal heirs was accepted.
- **Military reorganisation:** The ratio of British officers to Indian soldiers increased but the armoury remained in the hands of the English. It was arranged to end the dominance of the Bengal army. **Hence, option D is not correct.**

Mains Practice Questions

1. Climate change, overexploitation, and policy measures have combinedly turned India into a water-stressed economy. Discuss.

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly discussing about the condition of water scarcity in India.
- Discuss the reasons for water stress in India.
- Suggest some measures to address the problem of water scarcity.
- Conclude Suitably.

2. Hydrogen is being dubbed as the alternative fuel. However, there are many problems associated with the leveraging of hydrogen technology. Discuss.

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly discussing the context of using hydrogen as an alternate fuel.
- Discuss the pros and cons of hydrogen as a source of energy.
- Conclude suitably.