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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Conflation between duties and rights

There has been growing advocacy for the integration of duty with rights. On Constitution Day last month, many Union Ministers used the occasion to underline this proposal.

What do rights come with duty mean?

- It is a basic proposition that all rights come with duties.
- But those **duties are quite distinct from the meaning ascribed to them** in the popular discourse.
- When a person holds a right, she is owed an obligation by a duty-bearer.
- For example, when citizens are promised **a right against discrimination**, the government is **obliged to ensure that it treats everybody with equal care and concern**.
- Similarly, the guarantee of **a right to freedom of speech** enjoins the state to refrain from interfering with that liberty.

Integrating rights with duties

- Proponents of integration of duty with rights aim to treat otherwise **non-binding obligations** – the “fundamental duties” as Article 51A describes them on a par with, if not superior to, the various fundamental rights that the Constitution guarantees.
- In an inversion of the well-known dictum, they see duties, and not rights, as trumps.
- On Constitution Day last month, many Union Ministers used the occasion to underline this proposal.
- The government puts forward an idea that **our rights ought to be made conditional** on the performance of a set of extraneous obligations.

Issues with the proposal

- This suggestion is plainly in the teeth of the Constitution’s text, language, and history.
- To the framers of the Constitution, the very idea of deliberating over whether these rights ought to be provisional, and on whether these rights ought to be

made subject to the performance of some alien duty, was against the republic's vision.

- **Imposing duties a legislative prerogative:** The Constitution's framers saw the placing of mandates on individual responsibilities as **nothing more than a legislative prerogative**.
- For example, the legislature could **impose a duty on individuals to pay a tax on their income**, and this duty could be enforced in a variety of ways.
- If the tax imposed and the sanctions prescribed were reasonable, the obligations placed on the citizen will **be constitutionally valid**.
- In this manner, Parliament and the State legislatures have **imposed a plethora of duties** – duties to care for the elderly and for children; duties to pay tolls and levies; duties against causing harm to others; duties to treat the environment with care, the list is endless.
- **Against Constitution:** What is critical, though, is that these laws cannot make a person's fundamental right contingent on the performance of a duty that they impose.
- A legislation that does so **will violate the Constitution**.

Background

- The fundamental duties that are now contained in Article 51A were introduced through the **42nd constitutional amendment**.
- **The Swaran Singh Committee**, which was set up during the Emergency, and which recommended the insertion of the clause, also suggested that **a failure to comply with a duty ought to result in punishment**.
- Ultimately, the amendment was introduced after the binding nature of the clause was removed.
- In its finally adopted form, Article 51A encouraged citizens to perform several duties.

Way forward

- **Know the precise nature of duties the rights create:** The philosopher Onora O'Neill has argued with some force that we would do well to **discuss the precise nature of duties that rights create**.
- Unless we do so, our charters of human rights may not by themselves be enough.
- For example, we may want to ask ourselves if the **promise of a right to free expression** imposes on the state something more than a duty to forebear from making an unwarranted restriction on that liberty.
- Does it require the state to also work towards creating an equal society where each person finds herself in a position to express herself freely?

Conclusion

When we speak about the importance of obligations, it is these questions that must animate our discussions. Should we instead allow the language of fundamental duties to subsume our political debates, we would only be placing in jeopardy the moral principles at the heart of India's republic.

2. RBI allows Payments Banks, SFBs to conduct Govt agency business:

RBI allows **Payments Banks, Small Finance Banks** to conduct Govt agency business.

- It will be subject to the condition that the concerned bank is not under **the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework or moratorium.**

Power of accrediting an agency bank:

The choice of accrediting an agency bank (including scheduled private sector agency bank) for any particular government agency business rests solely with the concerned Central Government Departments / State Governments.

Implications:

- The Bank can now participate in government and other large corporations issued Request for Proposals (RFP), primary auctions, fixed-rate and variable rate repos, and reverse repos, along with participation in Marginal Standing Facility.
- Also, the bank would now also be eligible to partner in government-run financial inclusion schemes.

What are Small Finance Banks?

- Small finance banks are financial institutions that provide financial services to the country's underserved and unbanked areas.
- They are registered as a public limited company under the Companies Act, 2013.
- These banks, like other commercial banks, can engage in all basic banking activities, such as lending and accepting deposits.

- The NachiketMor committee on financial inclusion suggested SFBs.
- **Small Finance Banks can't** extend big loans. Cannot float subsidiaries or trade in high-tech products.

What are Payments bank?

Payment banks were established to promote financial inclusion by offering; 'modest savings accounts and payments/remittance services to migratory labour workforce, low-income households, small enterprises, other unorganised sector entities, and other users.'

- These banks can accept a restricted deposit, which is now capped at Rs 200,000 per person but could be raised in the future.
- These banks are unable to provide loans or credit cards. Banks of this type can handle both current and savings accounts.
- Payments banks can provide ATM and debit cards, as well as online and mobile banking.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

3. The price of food must figure in the policy

The essential challenge of public policy for agriculture- the high price of food remains unsolved.

Implications of high food prices

- **Increases poverty:** A higher price of food increases poverty, especially as the rice and wheat supplied through the PDS constitute only a part of the total expenditure on food of the average Indian household.
- **Reduces the expenditure on other item:** For the household, a high price of food crowds out expenditure on other items ranging from health and education to non-agricultural goods.
- This **prevents the market for non-agricultural goods** from expanding.
- This was one of the first discoveries in economics, made by the English economist David Ricardo about two centuries ago.

Rising food prices in India

- An indication of the elevation of the price of food in an economy is **the share of food in a household's budget**.
- In a global comparison we would find that this share is very large for India.
- Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2016) show that **this share ranges from over 30% for India** to less than 10% for the U.S. and the U.K.
- This is in line with Ricardo's understanding of how economies progress i.e., as food gets cheaper, growth in the non-agricultural economy is stimulated.
- Agricultural policy in India has remained quite unaccountable in the face of a rising relative price of food.
- **Impact on manufacturing sector:** Arguably, the high price of food has been a factor in the disappointing lack of expansion of the manufacturing sector in India despite repeated efforts to bring it about.

Changes needed in agricultural policy

- Both from the point of view of **food security for low-income households** and the **dynamism of the non-agricultural sector**, agricultural policy cannot ignore the price at which food is produced.
- **Focus on improving the yield:** The fact of low agricultural yield in India by comparison with the rest of the world has been known for long, and little is done about it.
- **Management of soil nutrients and moisture:** A superior management of soil nutrients and moisture, assured water supply and knowledge inputs made available via an extension service would be crucial.
- Raising yields will ensure profitability without raising producer prices, which will inflate the food subsidy bill.

How government intervention created problems

- Given the importance of food for our survival, this justifies public intervention in agriculture.
- The issue is the **design and scale of this intervention**.
- In the mid-sixties, when India was facing food shortage that could not be solved through trade, a concerted effort was made to raise domestic agricultural production.
- **Profitability through MSP:** It introduced the strategy of ensuring farm profitability through favourable prices assured by the state.
- Further, it entrenched the belief that it is the **farmer's right to have the state purchase** as much grain as the farmer wishes to sell to the state agency.
- **Created grain stockpile:** This has resulted in grain stockpiles far greater than the officially announced buffer-stocking norm.

- These stocks have often rotted, resulting in deadweight loss, paid for by the public through taxes or public borrowing.
- **Supply more than demand:** Finally, with all costs of production reimbursable and all of output finding an assured outlet, **supply has outstripped demand.**
- **Damage to natural environment:** This has led to unimaginable pressure on the natural environment, especially water supply.

Conclusion

India needs an agricultural policy that ensures that farming is profitable but this cannot be at the cost of a high price of food. The 'food problem' should no longer be seen only in terms of the availability of food from domestic sources.

4. Zero Budget Natural Farming

Zero budget natural farming (ZBNF) is back on top of the Government's agricultural agenda, with PM set to highlight it at a national conclave.

Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF)

- ZBNF is a set of farming methods, and also a grassroots peasant movement, which has spread to various states in India.
- **Subhash Palekar** perfected it during the 1990s at his farm in **Amravati district in Maharashtra's** drought-prone Vidarbha region.
- According to the "zero budget" concept, farmers won't have to spend any money on fertilisers and other agricultural inputs.
- Over 98% of the nutrients that crops require – carbon dioxide, nitrogen, water, solar energy – are already present in nature.
- The remaining 1.5-2% are taken from the soil, after microorganisms convert them from "non-

Four Wheels of ZBNF

The "four wheels" of ZBNF are 'Jiwamrita', 'Bijamrita', 'Mulching' and 'Waaphasa'.

- **Jiwamrita** is a fermented mixture of cow dung and urine (of desi breeds), jaggery, pulses flour, water and soil from the farm bund.
- This isn't a fertilizer, but just a source of some 500 crore micro-organisms that can convert all the necessary "non-available" nutrients into "available" form.
- **Bijamrita** is a mix of desi cow dung and urine, water, bund soil and lime that is used as a seed treatment solution prior to sowing.

- **Mulching**, or covering the plants with a layer of dried straw or fallen leaves, is meant to conserve soil moisture and keep the temperature around the roots at 25-32 degrees Celsius, which allows the microorganisms to do their job.
- **Waaphasa**, or providing water to maintain the required moisture-air balance, also achieves the same objective.

Astra's of ZBNF against pest attacks

- ZBNF advocates the use of special '**Agniastra**', '**Bramhastra**' and '**Neemastra**' concoctions.
- They are **based on cow urine and dung, plus pulp from leaves** of neem, white datura, papaya, guava and pomegranates – for controlling pest and disease attacks.

Is it organic farming?

- ZBNF uses **farmyard manure or vermicompost**.

Issues with ZBNF

- **Cost of labor**: The cost of labor for the collection of dung and urine, apart from the other inputs used in the preparation of Jiwamrita, Neemastra or Bramhastra is quit higher.
- **Bovine cost**: Keeping cows is also a cost that has to be accounted for. Farmers cannot afford to keep desi cows that yield very little milk.
- **Vulnerability to pest attacks**: ZBNF is scarcely practiced. The crop grown would be vulnerable to attacks by insects and pests have already become pest-immune.

5. Program for Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem in India

The Union Cabinet has approved a ₹76,000 crore scheme to boost semiconductor and display manufacturing in the country.

About the Program

- The scheme would provide financial support of up to 50% of the project cost for setting up semiconductor and display fabrication units.
- The scheme was aimed at making India a global hub of electronic system design and manufacturing, the statement noted.

- In addition, the Centre would work with the States to set up high-tech clusters with the necessary infrastructure such as land and semiconductor-grade water.

Components of the mission

[1] Semiconductor Fabs and Display Fabs

- This shall extend fiscal support of up to 50% of project cost to eligible applicants.
- The govt will work closely with the states establish High-Tech Clusters with requisite infrastructure in terms of land, semiconductor grade water, high quality power, logistics and research.

[2] Semi-conductor Laboratory (SCL):

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology will take requisite steps for the modernization and commercialization of the Semi-conductor Laboratory (SCL).
- MeitY will explore the possibility for the Joint Venture of SCL with a commercial fab partner to modernize the brownfield fab facility.

[3] Semiconductor Design Companies:

- The Design Linked Incentive (DLI) Scheme shall extend product design linked incentive of up to 50% of eligible expenditure and product deployment linked incentive of 6% - 4% on net sales for five years.
- Support will be provided to 100 domestic companies of semiconductor design for Integrated Circuits (ICs), Chipsets, System on Chips (SoCs), Systems & IP Cores.

[4] India Semiconductor Mission:

- In order to drive the long-term strategies for developing sustainable semiconductors and display ecosystem, a specialized and independent ISM will be set up.
- The ISM will be led by global experts in the semiconductor and display industry.
- It will act as the nodal agency for efficient and smooth implementation of the schemes on Semiconductors and Display ecosystem.

[5] Chips to start-ups Program

- This program would develop 85,000 well-trained engineers, he claimed. Semiconductor designers would be given the opportunity to launch start-ups.
- The government would bear 50% of the expense under the design-linked incentive scheme.
- The entire programme would lead to 35,000 high-quality direct jobs and 1 lakh indirect employment.

Significance of the scheme

- In the current geopolitical scenario, trusted sources of semiconductors and displays hold strategic importance and are key to the security of critical information infrastructure.
- The approved program will propel innovation and build domestic capacities to ensure the digital sovereignty of India.
- It will also create highly skilled employment opportunities to harness the demographic dividend of the country.
- Development of semiconductor and display ecosystem will have a multiplier effect across different sectors of the economy with deeper integration to the global value chain.

6. RBI introduces prompt corrective action framework for NBFCs:

The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has introduced **the prompt corrective action (PCA) framework for non-banking financial companies (NBFCs)**.

- The PCA framework for NBFCs will come into effect on October 1, 2022 on the basis of their financial position on or after March 31.

What is PCA framework?

The objective of the framework is to enable supervisory intervention at the appropriate time and require the supervised entity to initiate and implement remedial measures in a timely manner, to restore its financial health

Applicability:

- The framework will be applicable to all deposit-taking non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), all non-deposit taking NBFCs in the middle, upper and

top layers including investment and credit companies, core investment companies, infrastructure debt funds, infrastructure finance companies and microfinance institutions.

- However, it has excluded NBFCs not accepting/not intending to accept public funds, primary dealers and housing finance companies along with government-owned ones.

Indicators based on which PCA will be invoked for NBFC:

The central bank will track three indicators – **capital to risk-weighted assets ratio (CRAR)**, Tier I ratio and net non-performing assets (NNPAs) including non-performing investments (NPIs).

- In the case of **core investment companies (CICs)**, the RBI will track adjusted net worth/aggregate risk-weighted assets, leverage ratio and NNPA, including NPIs.
- A breach in any of the three risk thresholds under the above-mentioned indicators could result in invocation of PCA.

Need for:

The PCA Framework for NBFCs has been brought after four big finance firms – IL&FS, DHFL, SREI and Reliance Capital – which collected public funds through fixed deposits and non-convertible debentures collapsed in the last three years despite the tight monitoring in the financial sector. They collectively owe over Rs 1 lakh crore to investors.

What will happen once the PCA is invoked for an NBFC?

- Based on the risk threshold, the RBI may prescribe mandatory corrective actions such as restriction on dividend distribution/remittance of profits, requiring promoters /shareholders to infuse equity and reducing leverage.
- The RBI can also restrict the issuance of guarantees or take other contingent liabilities on behalf of group companies(only for CICs).
- Further, the central bank may also restrict branch expansion, impose curbs on capital expenditure other than for technological up-gradation within board-approved limits and restrict/ directly reduce variable operating costs.

7. Why India, Russia blocked move to take climate change to UNSC?

India and Russia have blocked a proposal that would have allowed **the UN Security Council to deliberate on climate-related issues.**

What's the issue?

The draft resolution, piloted by Ireland and Niger, sought to create a formal space in the Security Council for discussions on climate change and its implications on international security.

- It also asked that the UN Secretary-General provide periodic reports on how risks from climate change can be addressed to prevent conflicts.

What has India said?

India is second to none when it comes to climate action and climate justice. But UNSC is not the place to discuss either issue. In fact, an attempt to do so appears to be motivated by a desire to evade responsibility in the appropriate forum and divert the world's attention from an unwillingness to deliver where it counts.

Concerns over the proposal:

- Billing climate change as a threat to international security **diverts the council's attention from genuine, deep-rooted reasons of conflict** in the countries on the Council's agenda.
- Securitising climate change would be **largely convenient to countries that were actively helping engender conflicts or waged military activities in diversion from the Security Council's mandate** or simply don't want to provide the necessary help to developing countries.
- Action taken as part of the resolution can potentially range from sanctions on fossil-rich countries to UN military intervention in domestic conflicts perceived to have been caused by climate change.

What next?

The UN already has a specialized agency, the **UNFCCC**, for discussing all matters related to climate change.

- The parties to the UNFCCC – over 190 countries – meet several times every year, including at a two-week year-ending conference like the one at Glasgow, to work on a global approach to combat climate change.
- It is this process that has given rise to **the Paris Agreement**, and its predecessor **the Kyoto Protocol**, the international instrument that is designed to respond to the climate change crisis.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. A case for inclusion of Ladakh under Sixth Schedule

A ruling party MP from Ladakh has demanded that the region be included in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to safeguard land, employment, and cultural identity of the local population.

What is the Sixth Schedule?

- The Sixth Schedule under Article 244 provides for the formation of autonomous administrative divisions – Autonomous District Councils (ADCs).
- ADCs have some legislative, judicial, and administrative autonomy within a state.
- The Sixth Schedule applies to the NE states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram (three Councils each), and Tripura (one Council).

Composition of ADCs

- ADCs have up to 30 members with a term of five years.
- It can make laws, rules and regulations with regard to land, forest, water, agriculture, village councils, health, sanitation, village- and town-level policing, inheritance, marriage and divorce, social customs and mining, etc.
- The Bodoland Territorial Council in Assam is an exception with more than 40 members and the right to make laws on 39 issues.

Why does Ladakh want to be part of the Sixth Schedule?

- **Local aspirations:** There was much enthusiasm initially, mostly in Leh, after the repeal of Art. 370 which created two new UTs.
- **Negligence in erstwhile J&K state:** Buddhist-dominated Leh district had long demanded UT status because it felt neglected by the erstwhile state government.
- **Denial of Legislature:** The enthusiasm waned as it was understood that while the UT of J&K would have a legislature, the UT of Ladakh would not.
- **Inadequate representation:** The administration of the region is now completely in the hands of bureaucrats with only 1 MP.
- **New domicile criteria:** The changed domicile policy in Jammu and Kashmir has raised fears in the region about its own land, employment, demography, and cultural identity.
- **Statehood demands:** A coalition of social, religious, and political representatives in Leh and Kargil has demanded full statehood for Ladakh.

Cultural significance of Ladakh

- Ladakh is historically perceived as a cosmopolitan region with centuries of multiple cultural settings.
- It was an Asian pivot – the people here traversed diverse cultural boundaries and engaged with ideas.

Can Ladakh be included in Sixth Schedule?

- **NCST Recommends:** In September 2019, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes recommended the inclusion of Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule.
- **Distinct culture:** It was predominantly tribal (more than 97%), people from other parts of the country had been restricted from purchasing or acquiring land there, and its distinct cultural heritage needed preservation.

Legal hurdles

- **Fifth schedule as an alternative:** The Constitution is very clear, Sixth Schedule is for the Northeast. For tribal areas in the rest of the country, there is the Fifth Schedule.
- **Exclusive provision for NE:** Notably, no region outside the Northeast has been included in the Sixth Schedule.
- **Requires Constitutional Amendment:** It remains the prerogative of the government. For this, a constitutional amendment is required.

Government's response in this regard

- The Centre woke up to the anxieties of the region when, a year after the abrogation of Article 370, when all political parties announced a boycott of the LAHDC-Leh elections.
- The political factions in Ladakh were promised "Sixth Schedule-like" protections by the Home Minister.
- The MHA has in Jan announced that a committee under then MoS Home G Kishan Reddy would be formed to address the issues related to language of Ladakh, culture of Ladakh and conservation of land in Ladakh.
- It had assured representatives of Kargil and Leh that the government was committed to look into their concerns.

2. Cabinet clears push to raise marriage age of women from 18 to 21

The proposal to raise the minimum age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 was cleared by the Union Cabinet based on the recommendations of a task force headed by Jaya Jaitley.

Minimum Age for Marriage in India

- Personal laws of various religions that deal with marriage have their own standards, often reflecting custom.
- For Hindus, The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 sets 18 years as the minimum age for the bride and 21 years as the minimum age for the groom.
- In Islam, the marriage of a minor who has attained puberty is considered valid.
- Now, the govt will have to amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, the Special Marriage Act and personal laws such as the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955.

Reasons behind the decision

- **Gender-neutrality:** With this decision, the government will be bringing the age of marriage for both men and women at par.
- **Motherhood complexities:** An early age of marriage, and consequent early pregnancies, also have impacts on nutritional levels of mothers and their children, and their overall health and mental wellbeing.
- **Mother and Child Mortality:** It also has an impact on Infant Mortality Rate and Maternal Mortality Rate.

- **Women empowerment:** The decision would empower women who are cut off from access to education and livelihood due to an early marriage.
- **Protection from abuse:** This will essentially outlaw premature girls marriages and prevent the abuse of minors.

What is the Jaya Jaitly Committee?

- In June 2020, the Ministry of WCD set up a task force to look into the correlation between the age of marriage with issues of women's nutrition, prevalence of anemia, IMR, MMR and other social indices.
- The committee was to look at the feasibility of increasing the age of marriage and its implication on women and child health, as well as how to increase access to education for women.

Key recommendations

- The committee has recommended the age of marriage be increased to 21 years, on the basis of feedback they received from young adults from 16 universities across the country.
- The committee also asked the government to look into increasing access to schools and colleges for girls, including their transportation to these institutes from far-flung areas.
- Skill and business training has also been recommended, as has sex education in schools.
- The committee said these deliveries must come first, as, unless they are implemented and women are empowered, the law will not be as effective.

Criticism of the move

- **Illegal marriages:** Such legislation would push a large portion of the population into illegal marriages leading to non-institutional births.
- **Ineffectiveness of existing laws:** Decrease in child marriages has not been because of the existing law but because of an increase in girls' education and employment opportunities.
- **Unnecessary coercion:** The law would end up being coercive, and in particular negatively impact marginalized communities, such as the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, making them law-breakers.

3. Durga Puja gets UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage tag

UNESCO has inscribed 'Durga Puja in Kolkata' on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

What is Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)?

- ICH means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with them that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as a part of their cultural heritage.
- Furthermore, its importance is not in the cultural manifestation itself, but in the wealth of knowledge, know-how and skills that are transmitted from one generation to the next.

About Durga Puja

- Durga Puja, also known as Durgotsava or Sharodotsava, is an annual Hindu festival that reveres and pays homage to the goddess Durga.
- It is an important festival in the Shaktism tradition of Hinduism.
- It is celebrated because of Durga's victory over Mahishasur.
- It is particularly popular and traditionally celebrated in the Indian states of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Odisha among other states.
- It is a ten-day festival, of which the last five are of the most significance.

Citation for the UNESCO tag

- The UNESCO Committee commended its initiatives to involve marginalized groups, and individuals as well as women in their participation in safeguarding the element.
- The festival is also marked by scripture recitations, performance arts, revelry, gift-giving, family visits, feasting, and public processions.
- Durga Puja not only is a celebration of the feminine divinity but is a consummate expression of dance, music, crafts, rituals, practices culinary and cultural aspects.
- The festival transcends the boundaries of caste, creed and economic classes and joins the people together in its celebration.

Also read: National List for Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

Other ICH in India

- With the inscription of Durga Puja in Kolkata, India now has 14 intangible cultural heritage elements on the prestigious UNESCO Representative List of ICH of Humanity.
- In recent years, the ICH elements that saw inscriptions are Kumbh Mela (inscribed 2017), Yoga (inscribed 2016) among others.
- Also, India is a SIGNATORY of the 2003 UNESCO Convention which aims for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage along with traditions and living expression.

4. Special status for Bihar

Nitish Kumar has again raised his nearly 15-year-old demand for **the status of special category state (SCS) for Bihar**. Nitish has been seeking SCS for Bihar since at least 2007.

Bihar's development vis-a-vis other states:

- The latest report of the **NITI Aayog** puts Bihar among the bottom states in terms of growth rate and human development indices.
- Bihar's annual per capita income of Rs 50,735 lags the national figure of Rs 1,34,432 by a significant distance.
- According to the report, 51.91 per cent of the state's population – the highest in the country – lives below the poverty line.
- Bihar is also doing badly in terms of school dropouts, child malnourishment, maternal health, and infant mortality.

What is Special Category Status?

- There is **no provision of SCS in the Constitution**; the Central government extends financial assistance to states that are at a comparative disadvantage against others.
- This classification was done on the recommendations of **the Fifth Finance Commission in 1969**.

It was based on **the Gadgil formula**. The parameters for SCS were:

1. Hilly Terrain;

2. Low Population Density And/Or Sizeable Share of Tribal Population;
3. Strategic Location along Borders With Neighbouring Countries;
4. Economic and Infrastructure Backwardness; and
5. Nonviable Nature of State finances.

Some prominent guidelines for getting SCS status:

1. Must be economically backward with poor infrastructure.
2. The states must be located in hilly and challenging terrain.
3. They should have low population density and significant tribal population.
4. Should be strategically situated along the borders of neighboring countries.

Who grants SCS status?

Special Category Status for plan assistance was granted in the past by the National Development Council to the States that are characterized by a number of features necessitating special consideration.

- Now, it is done by the central government.

Benefits:

Besides tax breaks and other benefits, the State with SCS will get 90% of all the expenditure on Centrally sponsored schemes as Central grant. The rest of the 10% will also be given as a loan at zero percent interest.

Concerns associated:

Considering special status to any new State will result in **demands from other States and dilute the benefits further**. It is also not economically beneficial for States to seek special status as the benefits under the current dispensation are minimal. Therefore, States facing special problems will be better off seeking a special package.

Present scenario:

The **14th Finance Commission** has done away with the 'special category status' for states, except for the Northeastern and three hill states.

- Instead, it suggested that the resource gap of each state be filled through 'tax devolution', urging the Centre **to increase the states' share of tax revenues from 32% to 42%**, which has been implemented since 2015.

5. Programme for Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem

In furtherance of the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat and positioning India as the global hub for Electronic System Design and Manufacturing, the Union Cabinet has approved the comprehensive program for the development of sustainable semiconductor and display ecosystem in the country.

- The program will usher in a new era in electronics manufacturing by providing a globally competitive incentive package to companies in semiconductors and display manufacturing as well as design.
- This shall pave the way for India's technological leadership in these areas of strategic importance and economic self-reliance.
- Semiconductors and displays are the foundation of modern electronics driving the next phase of digital transformation under Industry 4.0.
- Semiconductors and display manufacturing is very complex and technology-intensive sector involving huge capital investments, high risk, long gestation and payback periods, and rapid changes in technology, which require significant and sustained investments.
- The program will give an impetus to semiconductor and display manufacturing by facilitating capital support and technological collaborations.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

6. Incentive Scheme for Promotion of RuPay Debit Cards and Low-Value BHIM-UPI Transactions (P2M)

The Union Cabinet has approved an incentive scheme worth ₹ 1,300 crore to promote RuPay Debit cards and low-value (upto Rs. 2,000) BHIM-UPI transactions (Person-to-Merchant (P2M)] in the country.

Key takeaways

- Under the scheme, the acquiring banks will be incentivised by the Government, by paying percentage of value of transactions (P2M) done through RuPay Debit cards and low-value BHIM-UPI modes of payments, for a period of one year (w.e.f. April 01, 2021).
- **Significance:**
 - Facilitate acquiring Banks in building a robust digital payment ecosystem
 - Promote RuPay Debit card and BHIM-UPI digital transactions, across all sectors and segments of the population
 - Deepen the digital payments in the country.
 - Help in making accessible digital modes of payments to unbanked and marginalized populations, who are outside of the formal banking and financial system.
- **Background:** The scheme has been formulated in compliance with the Budget announcements (FY 2021-22) by the Government to give further boost to digital transactions in the country.

7. Buxa Tiger Reserve

Recently, a Royal Bengal Tiger has been spotted in Buxa tiger reserve in West Bengal after at least 23 years. It was in 1998 that images of a Royal Bengal tiger were last captured at the reserve.

About Buxa tiger reserve

- It is a tiger reserve in Alipurduar district, West Bengal.
- Created in 1983 as the 15th tiger reserve
- Its northern boundary runs along the **international border with Bhutan.**
- The **Sinchula hill** range lies all along the northern side of BTR and the eastern boundary touches that of the Assam state.
- It represents the highly endemic Indo-Malayan region.
- The fragile "Terai Ecosystem" constitutes a part of this reserve.
- The **Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary** of Bhutan is contiguous to the north of BTR. **Manas National Park** lies east of BTR.
- BTR, thus, serves as an international corridor for Asian elephant migration between India and Bhutan.
- **Some of the rivers** flowing through this reserve are Jayanti, Sankosh, Raidak, Churnia, Turturi, Dima, Nonani, Phashkhawa.
- The forest of the reserve is classified as the Moist Tropical forest.

- **Rajabhatkhawa Vulture Breeding Center** at Buxa Tiger Reserve for the breeding and conservation of endangered Indian vultures was established as the second such center with the help of Bombay Natural History Society and British charity Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

8. Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana for 2021-26

Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP), Har Khet ko Paani (HKKP) and Watershed Development components have been approved for continuation during 2021-26.

- **Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme** - Aims for financial support to irrigation projects. Apart from focused completion of 60 ongoing projects including their 30.23 lakh hectare command area development, additional projects can also be taken up.
- **Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP)** aims for enhancement of physical access on the farm and expansion of cultivable area under assured irrigation. Under HKKP, surface minor irrigation and repair-renovation-restoration of water bodies component of PMKSY is targeted to provide additional 4.5 lakh hectare irrigation. In view of importance of rejuvenation of water bodies, the Cabinet has approved a paradigm shift in funding of their rejuvenation in both urban and rural areas, with significant expansion of their inclusion criteria, and enhancement of central assistance from 25% to 60% in general area.
- **Watershed Development** component focuses on development of rainfed areas towards soil and water conservation, regeneration of ground water, arresting runoff and promoting extension activities related to water harvesting and management. The approved Watershed Development component of Department of Land Resources envisages completion of sanctioned projects covering 49.5 lakh hectare rainfed/ degraded lands to bring additional 2.5 lakh hectare under protective irrigation, during 2021-26. A specific provision for development of spring sheds has been included in the program.

Background:

- Launched in 2015, PMKSY is an umbrella scheme, providing central grants to the State Governments for specific activities detailed below.
- It consists of two major components by Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, namely, Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (AIBP), and Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP). HKKP, in turn, consists of four sub - components, being Command Area Development (CAD), Surface Minor Irrigation (SMI), Repair, Renovation and Restoration

(RRR) of Water Bodies, and Ground Water Development. In addition, Watershed Development part is being implemented by Department of Land Resources.

9. Electronic Waste Management

Electrical and electronic equipments have become an essential part of everyday life. Its availability and widespread use have enabled much of the global population to benefit from higher standards of living. However, the way in which we produce, consume, and dispose of e-waste is unsustainable.

According to Global E-waste Monitor 2020, the world generated a striking 53.6 Mt of e-waste in 2019 which is an average of 7.3 kg per capita.

- The growing amount of e-waste is mainly fueled by higher consumption rates of Electronic equipments, short life cycles, and few repair options.
- Since 2014, the number of countries that have adopted a national e-waste policy, legislation or regulation has increased from 61 to 78.

In India

- Around 12.9 million women are working in informal waste sector expose themselves to toxic e-waste (like Nickel, lead and Mercury) and put them and their unborn children at risk.
- Children exposed to e waste are particularly vulnerable to the toxic chemicals they contain due to their smaller size, less developed organs and rapid rate of growth and Development.
- India is the third largest electronic waste generator after China and USA.
- In 2016 India enacted E waste (Management) Rules under which e Waste is categorised under two broad categories: Information technology and Telecommunications equipment and consumer electrical and electronic.

Unsustainable E-waste

- E-waste contains several toxic additives or hazardous substances such as mercury, brominated flame retardants (BFR), CFCs and HCFCs.
- The increasing levels of e-waste, low collection rates, and non-environmentally sound disposal and treatment of this waste stream pose significant risks to the environment and to human health.
- Improper management of e-waste also contributes to global warming.

The Way Forward

Government –

- Governments should set up regulatory agencies in each district, which are vested with the responsibility of co-ordinating and consolidating the regulatory functions of the various government authorities regarding hazardous substances
- Governments must encourage research into the development and standard of hazardous waste management, environmental monitoring and the regulation of hazardous waste-disposal.
- Governments should enforce strict regulations and heavy fines levied on industries, which do not practice waste prevention and recovery in the production facilities.
- Polluter pays principle and extended producer responsibility should be adopted.
- Governments should encourage and support NGOs and other organizations to involve actively in solving the nation's e-waste problems.

Industries:

- Generators of wastes should take responsibility to determine the output characteristics of wastes and if hazardous, should provide management options.
- All personnel involved in handling e-waste in industries including those at the policy, management, control and operational levels, should be properly qualified and trained.
- Companies can and should adopt waste minimization techniques (“reverse production” system) that designs infrastructure to recover and reuse every material contained within e-wastes metals

Citizens: While buying electronic products opt for those that:

- are made with fewer toxic constituents
- use recycled content and are energy efficient
- are designed for easy upgrading or disassembly
- utilize minimal packaging and offer leasing or take back options
- have been certified by regulatory authorities

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Who amongst the following was the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas of the Constituent Assembly?

- a. Jawaharlal Nehru
- b. Dr. Rajendra Prasad
- c. Vallabhbhai Patel
- d. GV Mavlankar

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas was headed by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

2. The "SAMEEEKSHA" platform recently seen in the news is?

- A A platform to offer ease of doing business.
- B One-stop access of elderly care products and services.
- C To track and monitor children who lost parents due to coronavirus.
- D Pooling the knowledge and experiences of organizations engaged in Small and Medium Enterprises.

Answer : D

Explanation

- The **Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) and the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** have together taken a number of initiatives to ensure the growth of this sector in an energy-efficient and environmentally-friendly way.
 - To ensure synergy among various players in the MSME sector, BEE and the Ministry of MSME have also promoted a collaborative platform--"SAMEEEKSHA" (**Small and Medium Enterprises Energy Efficiency Knowledge Sharing**).

- The platform aims to pool the knowledge and synergise the efforts of various organisations for the promotion and adoption of clean, energy technologies and practices.
- Hence, option D is correct.

3. Which of the following is issued by registered foreign portfolio investors to overseas investors who want to be part of the Indian stock market without registering themselves directly?

- a. Certificate of Deposit
- b. Commercial Paper
- c. Promissory Note
- d. Participatory Note

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Participatory notes also referred to as P-Notes are financial instruments required by investors or hedge funds to invest in Indian securities without having to register with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

4. With reference to the Maritime Zones, consider the following statements:

1. The territorial sea extends seaward up to 12 nautical miles (nm) from its baselines.
2. The contiguous zone is an intermediary zone between the territorial sea and the high seas.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : C

Explanation

- The **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982** divides marine areas into five main zones namely- Internal Waters, Territorial Sea, Contiguous Zone, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the High Seas.
- **Baseline** is the low-water line along the coast as officially recognized by the coastal state.
- Internal waters are **waters on the landward side of the baseline** from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured.
- The **territorial sea extends seaward up to 12 nautical miles (nm) from its baselines. Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - A nautical mile is based on the circumference of the earth and is equal to one minute of latitude. It is slightly more than a land measured mile (1 nautical mile = 1.1508 land miles or 1.85 km).
- The contiguous zone **extends seaward up to 24 nm from its baselines.**
 - It is **an intermediary zone between the territorial sea and the high seas. Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
 - The coastal state has the right to both prevent and punish infringement of fiscal, immigration, sanitary, and customs laws within its territory and territorial sea.
 - Unlike the territorial sea, the contiguous zone **only gives jurisdiction to a state on the ocean's surface and floor.** It does not provide air and space rights.
- Each coastal State may claim an **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** beyond and adjacent to its territorial sea that extends seaward **up to 200 nm from its baselines.**
- The ocean surface and the water column beyond the EEZ are referred to as the **high seas.**
 - It is **considered as "the common heritage of all mankind"** and is beyond any national jurisdiction.
 - States can conduct activities in these areas as long as they are for peaceful purposes, such as transit, marine science, and undersea exploration.

5. With reference to the Pinaka Missile, consider the following statements:

1. It was developed jointly by India and Israel.
2. It is supposed to be a inter continental missile of highest range.

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

- The **development** of the Pinaka multi-barrel rocket systems was **started by the DRDO in the late 1980s**, as an **alternative to the Multi Barrel Rocket Launcher systems** of Russian make called the 'Grad', which are still used by some regiments. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- The Pinaka, a **Multi-Barrel Rocket-Launcher (MBRL) system** named after Shiva's bow, can fire a salvo of **12 rockets over a period of 44 seconds.**
- The **existing Pinaka system**, which is already in the Army, has a range of up to **35-37km. Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**

6. SMILE Scheme has been recently in the news. It is formulated by which of the following ministries?

- A Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- B Ministry of Minority Affairs.
- C Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- D Ministry of Home Affairs.

Answer : A

Explanation

- **SMILE Scheme** is a new Scheme after the merger of existing Schemes for Beggars and Transgenders.
- The scheme provides for the **use of the existing shelter homes.**
- The focus of the scheme is extensively on **rehabilitation, provision of medical facilities, counselling, basic documentation, education, skill development**, economic linkages and so on.
- The Scheme is formulated by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
- **Hence, option A is correct.**

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. "Next to war, famine and pandemic the worst thing that can happen to agriculture is absentee-landlordism". Analyse this statement with reference to the land revenue system of Britishers in India. (250 words)

Approach

- In the introduction briefly explain the meaning of absentee landlordism.
- Establish the relationship of absentee landlordism with the land revenue system of Britishers.
- Highlight the implications of absentee landlordism on the agriculture sector.
- In the body, starting with the cause, analyse the effects of absentee landlordism under various headings in such a way that their implications are elaborated.
- Conclude by summarising the effects of absentee landlordism and with the future changes brought about by it.

2Q. Discuss the importance of public services reforms in ensuring good governance in India. (250 words)

Approach

- Briefly define public services reforms in the introduction and establish its relationship with Good Governance.
- Elaborate some of the important public services reforms initiated in India. Also, highlight their importance in achieving some of the components of good governance.
- Mention the challenges that impede these reforms.
- Conclude with some valid suggestions about what more efforts are needed to make public services reform ensure Good Governance.