

03 Nov 2019: Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS2 Related

Category:POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. No light down the rabbit hole of online political advertising

Context:

With politicians and political parties increasingly embracing the digital advertisement platform to influence the voters, there is an urgent need to regulate these more effectively to ensure free and fair elections.

Details:

- The Election Commission and web platforms, including Facebook, Google and Twitter, agreed to a “voluntary code of ethics”, for the general elections of 2019 and all subsequent elections post 2019. Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) has agreed to coordinate with participants various steps mentioned in this code.
- The ‘Code of Ethics’ has been developed to ensure free, fair & ethical usage of Social Media Platforms to maintain the integrity of the electoral process for the elections.
- The main features of “Voluntary Code of Ethics” are as follows:
 - Social Media platforms will voluntarily undertake information, education and communication campaigns to build awareness including electoral laws and other related instructions among its users.
 - Social Media platforms have created a high priority dedicated grievance redressal channel or dedicated teams for taking expeditions action on the cases reported by the ECI.
 - Social Media Platforms and ECI have developed a notification mechanism by which ECI can notify the relevant platforms of potential violations of Section 126 of the R.P. Act, 1951 and other electoral laws. The Platforms have committed to process any violations reported under Section 126 of RP Act, 1951 within three hours as per Sinha Committee recommendations.
 - Platforms will ensure that all political advertisements on their platforms are pre-certified from the Media Certification and Monitoring Committees as per the directions of the Supreme Court.
 - Participating platforms are committed to facilitate transparency in paid political advertisements, including utilizing their pre-existing labels/disclosure technology for such advertisements. The Code of Ethics promises to facilitate transparency in paid political advertisements.

Concerns:

- In India, since February 2019, when the data became available, advertisers on social issues, elections or politics have spent ₹39.1 crore on Facebook; political advertisements on Google amounted to ₹29.3 crore. This shows the growing importance of digital advertising and money power which might impede smaller parties.
- Though the amounts spent in digital advertising might seem small compared to the election advertisement budgets of most parties, but the impact in the online space is exponential given the higher interaction rates possible. Interaction rate is the percentage of people that saw the advertisement and chose to click, like, share, or comment on it. The lack of a statutory backing to regulate this domain of electioneering is a concern.
- Since the digital advertising is highly decentralized and given that individuals can be hired to create perceptions and push one’s views on the social media platforms, Keeping tabs on election spending becomes an issue.
- Analysis of data on online advertising for the recent Maharashtra Assembly election suggests that identifying the sources of funds in digital political advertising is not easy. The details provided regarding the sources does not seem authentic. This seriously affects the transparency as agreed to in the code of ethics.
- The increasing use of essentially ‘attack ads’, which are generally Caricatures, modified video clips, morphed images, memes and pointed language to target rival parties and candidates. It is unclear whether these political advertisements had been pre-certified by the Media Certification and Monitoring Committees of the ECI as agreed to under the ‘voluntary code of ethics’.

Way forward:

- A statutory backing to the code of ethics would strengthen the code. There is a need to effectively enforce the provisions listed and the responsibility for it lies with both the ECI and the Digital media platforms.
- Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey's recent statement that his company would no longer accept political advertisements is a laudable step forward and needs to be considered by other platforms as well.
- Formulation of the Code augurs a good beginning but is essentially, a work in making. The stakeholders involved need to follow in letter and spirit the commitments made in the Code of Ethics.

2. New Indian map shows UTs of J&K and Ladakh

Context:

The President of India issued a notification to define the districts in the two new UTs of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir that came into being on October 31 as per the J&K Reorganization Act, 2019. The Survey of India has redrawn the map of India to depict these changes.

Details:

- The new UT of Ladakh consists of two districts of Kargil and Leh. The rest of the former State of Jammu and Kashmir is in the new UT of J&K
- The Survey of India has redrawn the map of India to depict the newly formed Union Territories (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Ladakh. Areas such as Gilgit, Gilgit Wazarat, Chilhas and the Tribal Territory of 1947 that have been occupied by Pakistan are included in the Ladakh UT.
- Other areas in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) such as Mirpur and Muzaffarabad have been included in the J&K UT.

MAP OF UT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR AND UT OF LADAKH



C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Unions upset over draft wage rules

Context:

The draft rules that would govern wages, including norms for minimum wages and fixing floor-level wages, were published by the Union Labour and Employment Ministry, leading some workers' unions to raise concerns about the potentially low floor wages.

Background:

- As part of the much needed labour law reform, the government introduced the Code on Wages, 2019 in Parliament and was subsequently passed.
- The code, subsumes four laws regarding payment of wages, equal pay, payment of bonus and minimum wages.
- The rules drafted under the code were published by the Ministry on Friday and opened up for public comments for one month.

Definitions:

Minimum wages

- Minimum wages can be defined as “the minimum amount of remuneration that an employer is required to pay wage earners for the work performed during a given period, which cannot be reduced by collective agreement or an individual contract.”
- The purpose of minimum wages is to protect workers against unduly low pay. They help ensure a just and equitable share of the fruits of progress to all, and a minimum living wage to all who are employed and in need of such protection.
- Minimum wages can also be one element of a policy to overcome poverty and reduce inequality, including those between men and women, by promoting the right to equal remuneration for work of equal value.

National Floor Level Minimum Wage

- National Floor Level Minimum Wage is the minimum wage below which no state Government in India can fix the minimum wage.
- Unlike the concept of “minimum wage” this is a non-statutory measure to ensure upward revision of minimum wages in different States/UT's. Thus, the State Governments are persuaded to fix minimum wages such that in none of the scheduled employments (those employments which are by law, liable for payment of minimum wages), the minimum wage is less than the National Floor Level Minimum Wage.
- There is disparity in rates of minimum wages in various regions of the country. This is due to differences in socio-economic and agro-climatic conditions, prices of essential commodities, paying capacity, productivity and local conditions influencing the wage rate.

- The regional disparity in minimum wages is also attributed to the fact that both the Central and State Governments are the appropriate Government to fix, revise and enforce minimum wages in scheduled employments in their respective jurisdictions under the Act.
- This method has helped to some extent in reducing disparity among different rates of minimum wages existing in various states. Rates are revised periodically.
- This is the minimum wage fixed irrespective of any kind of schedule of employment both at Centre and state level.

Details of the draft rules:

- In the rules drafted for coming up with minimum wages, the criterion would be a standard working class family of one earning worker, a spouse and two children — equivalent to three adult consumption units that would have a net intake of 2,700 calories per unit per day.
- Under the criterion, the family would be entitled to 66 metres of cloth per year; housing rent expenditure of 10% of the food and clothing expense; fuel, electricity and other miscellaneous items of 20% of the minimum wage; and 25% of the minimum wage for expenditure on children's education, medical needs, recreation and contingencies.

Concerns raised:

- While the code will extend minimum wage protection to a large section of workers, including those in the unorganized sector, it will not provide for a single minimum wage. This might lead to unnecessary confusions and subjectivity in determining the local or regional minimum wages. Leading to multiple minimum wage structure at different geographical zones.
 - Currently, there are around 2000 categories of minimum wages in India. For example, Tamil Nadu has 76 category of minimum wages, ranging from ₹132 to ₹419.
 - The economic survey had mentioned that a national mandatory minimum wage is a requirement and, if the government wishes, it can create five wage zones and have five different national minimum wage. This recommendation was neglected.
- The worker's unions have lamented the fact that even after 70 years of independence, the reference for wages continues to be floor-level wages, instead of moving on to the more progressive ideas of minimum wage and living wages. This seems to be in divergence the Supreme Court's guidelines on need-based wages.
- The worker's unions claim that the floor-level wage mentioned in the rules is unscientific and inhuman. The national floor wage being recommended by the ministry is less than half of what was suggested by an internal committee set up to deliberate on an appropriate minimum wage.
 - Labour ministry has indicated that states will not be allowed to pay less than the minimum national wage of ₹178 which was an increase by just two rupees from the previous ₹176. This seems like a huge devaluation of the idea of a national mandatory wage floor.
 - A reference level of ₹178 will not serve the purpose, as the current minimum wage across India, barring five states, are over this threshold.

Way forward:

- The economic survey has repeatedly stressed about the need for decent wages and how it could better condition of workers and reduce poverty.
- Wage code bill provides the government a good opportunity to facilitate a decent pay to the workers which will help tackle larger issues like poverty, malnutrition and growing inequality and their associated problems.
- The concerns of all the stakeholders need to be addressed before finalizing the rules.

2. Focus on enforcing contracts, land administration

Context:

The World Bank's Doing Business 2020 study, showed that India improved 14 places from 77 to 63 out of 190 countries in the Ease of Doing Business (EODB) rankings.

Doubts regarding the approach to EODB rankings:

- The ability of the Doing Business indicators to portray the overall economic situation in India. The EODB rankings have improved considerably over the years but the economic growth has been decreasing.
- The report measures regulations that are more at micro level and not at the macro level. So, there are little things that can impact the business environment of a country that are not covered by Doing Business.
 - Security, the level of education of workers in a given country, infrastructure etc are not covered under Doing Business. Business regulations that affect local, small companies are given primacy in the study.
- The process of reform that the government undertakes, takes years to fructify. Just big ticket government reforms might not lead to actual benefits given that there might be some lacunae's in their implementation. The failure of the EODB study to consider the actual results of the reforms initiated is a drawback.
- The study considers data collected from the largest and second-largest business cities in the country. There are questions on the representability of the two biggest cities for the country's business regulations.

Challenges for India:

- India has set itself an ambitious target of breaking into top 50 nations on the World Bank's ease of doing business ranking.
- India has considerably improved its rankings over the years but the higher you go, the more difficult it is to improve. The dual areas where India could do the most progress are maybe some of the most difficult ones to reform in the Indian context.
- Though India has made remarkable progress over the years in EODB rankings there is still potential for improvements given that India's rank is below 100 on five parameters: "starting a business" (137), "enforcing contracts" (163), "registering property" (166), "paying taxes" (121) and "resolving insolvency" (108).
- India's score in the Doing Business 2020 'enforcing contracts' indicator is one of the country's lowest scores. That's an indicator that looks at commercial disputes and the efficiency of courts. For example, in Mumbai it takes three times longer than in other cities of high income economies to solve commercial disputes through courts.
- Another area for improvement would be the land administration system, the registered property indicator, where India also ranks pretty low and where there is a lot of room for improvement. It takes 58 days and costs on average 7.8% of a property's value to register it, longer and at greater cost than among OECD high-income economies.

Way forward:

- There is scope for improvement for India especially with respect to two parameters of 'Enforcing contracts' and 'registering property'. Addressing these parameters would require some structural changes. The government needs to adopt a calibrated but time bound approach with respect to these parameters.

- By amending the Commercial Courts Act, the government facilitated the establishment of commercial courts in 250 districts. If these courts dispose of cases faster, India may rank higher on this parameter in the coming edition of EODB. Additionally digitization of the courts, increasing the judge: population ratio, better regulations to avoid intentional delays, judicial impact assessment of new laws and better framing of agreements in case of PPPs would also help.
- To improve on 'registering property' parameter, ownership and titles need to be online. This comes under the local government and the states have to chip in with effective laws and rules.
- Post the passage of the Insolvency and bankruptcy code India can accept improvement in the resolving insolvency parameter though the implementational challenges need to be taken care of.
- Considering that the EODB considers limited parameters, India apart from focusing on just these parameters must take the extra step of considering other potential factors which will ease the doing of business in India keeping in mind the local factors at play.

Category: AGRICULTURE

1. Relaxed norms may boost tea tourism

Context:

The West Bengal government has allowed the tea industry to use 15% of land in a tea garden for other economic activities, including tea tourism and horticulture.

Details:

- In 2015, the West Bengal Government had amended relevant schedules of the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act to allow tea estates to use leasehold land for horticulture, medicinal plant farming, dairy farms and micro hydel project besides tea tourism projects. However, this had capped the relaxation to certain fixed proportions for various uses at 20 acres.
- The West Bengal government recently allowed the tea industry to use 15% of land in a tea garden for other economic activities, including tea tourism and horticulture. However, it bars housing projects.
- Under the new rules the cap has been increased to 150 hectares. By not allowing housing activities, the government has communicated its resolve not to disturb the present ecosystem.

Significance:

- The tea industry has been plagued by rising costs of production and stagnant prices. In this scenario, many gardens have begun incurring losses. The Indian Tea is facing competition from other major producers like China and Sri Lanka.
 - Productivity and quality too have been an issue, especially in view of the ageing bushes, which many estate owners have failed to rejuvenate, leading to low yields and poor quality.
 - In this backdrop the present rules provide scope for **diversification of farmer's income**.
- The move may induce garden owners to promote tourism, horticulture projects and other allied economic activities. There are other profitable crops cultivable in West Bengal and the government's initiative would allow it on a commercial scale.
- The tea industry in West Bengal is witnessing a major boost to employment with the State government's relaxation of norms for use of leasehold land in a tea garden. This will help avoid rural urban migration issue and allow for balanced development of all the regions.

Way forward:

- Framing of a 'Tea and Tourism Allied Industry Policy 2019' would complement the initiative.
- The need of the hour is to employ a calibrated process to amend relevant state laws and rules to unshackle the constraining effect they have on the growth of agricultural sector.
- Need to open up all possible avenues for diversification of farmer's income to realize the aim of doubling the farmer's income.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Sequencing Indian genes

Context:

The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has finished conducting "whole-genome sequence" of a 1,008 Indians as part of a programme called "IndiGen".

What is Genome?

- A genome is the DNA, or sequence of genes, in a cell.
- Most of the DNA is in the nucleus and intricately coiled into a structure called the chromosome. The rest is in the mitochondria, the cell's powerhouse.
- Every human cell contains a pair of chromosomes, each of which has three billion base pairs or one of four molecules that pair in precise ways.
- The order of base pairs and varying lengths of these sequences constitute the "genes", which are responsible for making amino acids, proteins and, thereby, everything that is necessary for the body to function.
- It is when these genes are altered or mutated that proteins sometimes do not function as intended, leading to disease.

What is Genome sequencing?

- Sequencing a genome means deciphering the exact order of base pairs in an individual. This "deciphering" or reading of the genome is what sequencing is all about.
- It has been known that the portion of the genes responsible for making proteins — called the exome — occupies about 1% of the actual gene. Rather than sequence the whole gene, many geneticists rely on "exome maps" (that is the order of exomes necessary to make proteins).
- However, it has been established that the non-exome portions also affect the functioning of the genes and that, ideally, to know which genes of a person's DNA are "mutated" the genome has to be mapped in its entirety.

India's effort:

- While India, led by the CSIR, first sequenced an Indian genome in 2009, it is only now that the organisation's laboratories have been able to scale up whole-genome sequencing and offer them to the public.
- Globally, many countries have undertaken genome sequencing of a sample of their citizens to determine unique genetic traits, susceptibility (and resilience) to disease. This is the first time that such a large sample of Indians will be recruited for a detailed study.
- Under "IndiGen", the CSIR drafted about 1,000 youth from across India by organising camps in several colleges and educating attendees on genomics and the role of genes in disease. Some students and participants donated blood samples from where their DNA sequences were collected.

IndiGen project:

- Programme funded by the Department of Biotechnology will sequence at least 10,000 Indian genomes. The CSIR's "IndiGen" project, as it is called, selected the 1,000-odd from a pool of about 5,000 and sought to include representatives from every State and diverse ethnicities. Every person whose genomes are sequenced would be given a report.
- The project is and is also seen as a precursor to a much larger exercise involving other government departments to map a larger swathe of the population in the country.
- Anyone looking for a free mapping of their entire genome can sign up for "IndiGen". Those who get their genes mapped will get a card and access to an app which will allow them and doctors to access information on whether they harbour gene variants that are reliably known to correlate with genomes with diseases.
- The driving motive of the project is to understand the extent of genetic variation in Indians and learn why some genes — linked to certain diseases based on publications in international literature — do not always translate into diseases.
- Once such knowledge is established, the CSIR expects to tie up with several pathology laboratories who can offer commercial gene testing services.

Significance:

- Across the world, predictive diagnosis and precision medicine based on the genetic makeup of patients are emerging fields in the treatment of diseases such as cancer and other genetic disorders.
- Genome sequencing can provide information on one's susceptibility to disease. Preventive or precautionary measures can be suggested bringing down avoidable mortality or health complications. It will help advise people on health risks that are manifest in their gene. The Genome India project will aim to make predictive diagnostic markers available for some priority diseases such as cancer and other rare and genetic disorders.
- The participants would be informed if they carry gene variants that make them less responsive to certain classes of medicines. For instance, having a certain gene makes some people less responsive to clopidogrel, a key drug that prevents strokes and heart attack. Hence suitable or more effective medicines can be prescribed.
- It will also help understand the variation and frequency of certain genes that are known to be linked to disease. Will help humans develop suitable treatments.
- Through the project, India wants to become part of the global endeavour to chart out the complex human genetic map.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Why is the telecom sector under stress?

Context:

The Supreme Court of India upheld the Department of Telecom (DoT)'s interpretation of "adjusted gross revenue" (AGR), subsequent to which the telecom companies will have to pay an estimated ₹1.4 lakh crore to the government, within the next three months. This comes as a huge blow to the already distressed sector.

Why is adjusted gross revenue (AGR) important?

- The definition of AGR has been under litigation for 14 years. While telecom companies argued that it should comprise revenue from telecom services, the DoT's stand was that the AGR should include all revenue earned by an operator, including that from non-core telecom operations.
- The AGR directly impacts the outgo from the pockets of telecom companies to the DoT as it is used to calculate the levies payable by operators. Currently, telecom operators pay 8% of the AGR as licence fee, while spectrum usage charges (SUC) vary between 3-5% of AGR.
- Post the SC observations Telecom companies now owe the government not just the shortfall in AGR for the past 14 years but also an interest on that amount along with penalty and interest on the penalty.

Stress in the telecom sector:

- The telecom industry is reeling under a debt of over ₹4 lakh crore and has been seeking a relief package from the government. Even the government has on various occasions admitted that the sector is indeed undergoing stress and needs support.
- The government recently announced setting up of a Committee of Secretaries to examine the financial stress in the sector and recommend measures to mitigate it.

Concerns:

- The total amount to the government is owed by about 15 operators. However, 10 of them have either closed operations or are undergoing insolvency proceedings in the last 14 years. The government is unlikely to recover the entire amount of dues owed to it.
- The existing players in the telecom sector are presently under financial stress and the due amount will only burden their finances more.
- The failure of support at this crucial juncture for the telecom sector might lead to a loss of jobs and investments in the sector. The telecom sector accounted for 6.5% of India's GDP in 2015, or about ₹9 lakh crore (US\$130 billion), and supported direct employment for 2.2 million people in the country.
- Investment by existing operators into the new infrastructure that could power India's future such as 5G, looks unlikely in the near future.
- The failure of the telecom sector might come as a blow to the Government's Digital India Programme. A healthy telecom sector will form the backbone of the ambitious Digital India programme by providing sustainable and accessible services to all.
- The country's telecom sector has seen a lot of consolidation over the past couple of years as a result of intense competition. Recently, the government also announced plans to merge the two telecom public sectors units, BSNL and MTNL, leaving only four players in the market. There is a strong possibility that the Indian telecom market could eventually have only two private players which would not be good for the free market system.

Demands of the telecom industry:

- One of the long-standing demands of the industry includes granting a delay in payment of dues for spectrum for the next two financial years (2020-21 and 2021-22). This move alone is expected to help telecom companies avoid an immediate outflow of over ₹42,000 crores, thereby increasing short-term liquidity.
- The committee will also consider demands for a reduction in the spectrum usage charges (SUC) and universal service obligation fund levy.
- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) may also simultaneously examine the merits of a “minimum charge” that operators may charge for voice and data services. Currently, telecom tariffs are among the lowest globally, driven down due to intense competition following the entry of Reliance Jio in the sector. The bruising price wars resulted in slumping revenue and operating income.
- Top-level executives have in recent meetings with Telecom Minister sought government intervention to increase “unsustainable” tariffs. However, any decision on tariffs comes under the domain of sector regulator TRAI.

Conclusion:

- India’s growth this century has been fuelled by one sector above all: telecommunications. The connectivity revolution has powered India’s information technology behemoths and helped hundreds of millions of young Indians get onto the grid, giving them a chance to improve their prospects.
- Telecommunication has supported the socioeconomic development of India and has played a significant role to narrow down the rural-urban digital divide to some extent. It also has helped to increase the transparency of governance with the introduction of e-governance in India. The government has pragmatically used modern telecommunication facilities to deliver mass education programmes for the rural folk of India.
- If India is to become the sort of entrepreneurial superstar that its government hopes it will, then the telecom sector is obviously going to be central to that plan.
- There is a need to ensure the telecom sector remains healthy & competitive. The government should intervene if found necessary as all the hopes of the industry are now pinned on measures the government announces as part of the relief package for the sector.

F. Tidbits

1. Hong Kong protesters enter downtown

- Hong Kong has been upended by the huge, often violent, pro-democracy protests which have battered the financial hub’s reputation for stability and plunged the city into recession. Beijing has shown no willingness to meet protester demands for greater democratic freedoms and police accountability — and activists show no sign of leaving the streets. Hong Kong has seen 22 consecutive weekends of youth-led protests.

2. U.K. places moratorium on fracking

- The British government called a halt on Saturday to the controversial process of “fracking” due to fears it could trigger earthquakes. Fracking or hydraulic fracturing is used to release oil and gas locked deep underground.

3. India doing good on health indicators: Naidu

- The average life expectancy had increased to 69 years and India’s disease burden caused by communicable, maternal, neonatal, and nutritional diseases has dropped from 61% to 33% between 1990 and 2016.
- There have been noteworthy improvements in health indicators relating to infant mortality rate and maternal mortality rate due to increasing penetration of healthcare services across the country, extensive health campaigns and increase in the number of hospitals.
- India’s health sector has many advantages like the large pool of well-trained medical professionals; a flourishing pharmaceutical industry which excels in generic drug manufacturing; and cost-effective and quality medical procedures.

4. Heart disease risk high in rural area near Chennai

- Contrary to the general notion, cardiovascular disease is becoming an important preventable cause of events (heart attacks and stroke) and death even among the rural population in India, a study shows.
- Hypertension, tobacco usage and diabetes are huge risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Hypertension was a risk factor for both men and women. In the case of men, smoking turned out to be a big risk factor while it was central obesity and diabetes that were risk factors for women.
- With cardiovascular disease becoming an important preventable cause of death in rural areas, there is a compulsion to focus our attention on rural areas too. Early diagnosis, treatment and regular follow-up to ensure control of hypertension and blood sugar will help people through their lifetime.
- With an estimated burden of 200 million people in India, hypertension is the most important noncommunicable disease risk factor. In India, only about 45% of people with hypertension were even aware of their diagnosis, hardly 13% were under medication and a paltry 8% had hypertension under control.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Bru refugees in Tripura continue to stage blockade over deaths in relief camp

- Reang are among the 21 Scheduled Tribes of Tripura, known as Brus in the neighbouring Mizoram. 30,000 Reang people had fled from Mizoram to Tripura in 1997 in the wake of inter-community violence.
- Brus have been living in six relief camps in the area in north Tripura bordering Mizoram since 1997 and the government has been catering to their needs. People of the Reang tribe are set to be repatriated to Mizoram after a tripartite agreement was signed between the Centre, Tripura and Mizoram.

2. Yemen govt. to share power with separatists

- Yemen's internationally recognised government will sign an agreement with southern separatists Southern Transitional Council (STC), aimed at ending the country's long-running civil war. Official signing ceremony for the "Riyadh Agreement" would take place in Saudi Arabia.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statements are correct with respect to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)?

1. It is a specialized agency of the United Nations.
2. Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation, also known as the Chicago Convention, is the statute backing it.
3. It regulates the principles and techniques of international air navigation and fosters the planning and development of international air transport to ensure safe and orderly growth.
4. Its headquarters is located in Montreal, Canada.

Options:

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

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Answer: c

Explanation:

Self-explanatory.

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding Red Sanders. Which of them are wrong?

1. The Red Sanders species is endemic to north east India.
2. It is listed as an endangered species by IUCN.
3. The wood is aromatic in nature.
4. It is prohibited from export.

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

The tree is endemic to several districts in Andhra Pradesh and some parts of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), an international organisation for nature conservation, has now reclassified red sanders (*Pterocarpus santalinus*) as 'near threatened' from the earlier 'endangered'.

It is not aromatic.

The *Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)*, an agency of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, has revised its export policy to permit the export of red sanders if it is obtained from cultivated land.

Q3. Astrostat is a project of which country?

- a. USA
- b. UK
- c. India
- d. Japan

Answer: c

Explanation:

Astrosat is India's first dedicated multi-wavelength space telescope. *Astrostat* telescope has a unique feature of being capable to cover the full spectrum of wavelength, from visible light to the UV to X-ray bands, simultaneously. Indian astronomers who used to rely on international resources for X-ray and UV data are now empowered with the indigenous *Astrostat*.

Q4. Which of the following statements are correct with respect to shanghai co-operation organization?

1. It is headquartered in shanghai.
2. The organisation has expanded its membership to eight countries when India and Pakistan joined SCO as full members in 2017 at a summit in Astana, Kazakhstan.
3. The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) is a permanent organ of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which serves to promote cooperation of member states against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism.

Options:

- a. 1 and 2
- b. 2 and 3
- c. 1, 2 and 3
- d. None of the above.

Answer: b

Explanation:

The HQ is in Beijing.

Members include China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. With respect to the stated aim of doubling farmer's income, discuss the challenges in realizing it. Suggest suitable measures needed. (15 marks, 250 words)
2. A strong bilateral relationship is in the interests of both India and Thailand. Comment. Suggest suitable methods to enhance this relationship. (10 marks, 150 words)

