

17 Feb 2022: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>A. GS 1 Related</u>
<u>B. GS 2 Related</u>
<i>INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS</i>
1. NATO, U.S. sceptical of Russian troop pull-out
<i>POLITY</i>
1. Tribunal appointments being taken lightly: SC
2. Negative liberty
<u>C. GS 3 Related</u>
<i>ENVIRONMENT</i>
1. India lacks solar waste handling policy
<u>D. GS 4 Related</u>
<u>E. Editorials</u>
<i>POLITY</i>
1. A Case for a more Federal Judiciary
<i>ECONOMY</i>
1. The Budget's 'Crypto Signal'
<u>F. Prelims Facts</u>
1. Thousands of Crimson Rose butterflies fly across the ocean
<u>G. Tidbits</u>
1. Equitable energy access key of environmental policy: PM
2. 1,000 firms expected at DefExpo in Gujarat
3. Retail inflation easing sequentially
<u>H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions</u>
<u>I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions</u>

A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. NATO, U.S. sceptical of Russian troop pull-out

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Mains: De-escalation of Russian troops from Ukraine borders

Context

Russia's announcement of pulling back some of the troops from Ukraine's borders.

Background

- Russia has maintained that it has no plans to invade Ukraine, but the massive troop mobilisation on the three flanks of Ukraine, with combat aircraft, warships and S400 missile defence systems, had raised fears of war.
- The Russian move was aimed at building military pressure around Ukraine to gain diplomatic leverage in talks with the West.
- Recently, European leaders from Hungary, France and Germany visited Moscow. Their talks with Russia opened a diplomatic path towards de-escalation.

De-escalation

- Russia said that more of its forces surrounding Ukraine were withdrawing, but NATO with the U.S. said that they are not convinced about the pull-out.
- The Russian Defence Ministry published a video that showed tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and self-propelled artillery units leaving the Crimean peninsula.
- But the U.S. said more than 1,50,000 Russian troops are still stationed near Ukraine's borders and their analysts indicate that they remain in a threatening position.
- Russian President Putin said the West was ignoring Russia's main concerns but Moscow is ready to continue dialogue on security issues.

Russia's concerns

- It does not want its neighbours Georgia and Ukraine to be members of NATO.
- It wants NATO to roll back its military presence and drills from Eastern Europe and the Black Sea.
- It wants the Ukraine crisis (the civil conflict between Kiev and the Russia-backed separatists in Donbas) to be resolved through the Minsk process.

Read about [Normandy format talks and Minsk protocol](#) in CNA dated Feb 10, 2022.

NATO's Open door policy

- NATO's founding treaty commits to an "open door" policy for European countries that want to join, and a mutual defence clause guarantees that all members will come to the defence of an ally under threat.
- Ukraine, though, is not a member, but NATO considers it a partner and hence supports it.
- Russia poses no direct security threat to any NATO country, but the alliance is concerned about a surge of people fleeing fighting across European borders, possible cyber and disinformation attacks in case of conflict in Ukraine.
- Some of NATO's member countries, like the U.S., U.K. and Canada are helping Ukraine.

NATO bolster its defences

- At NATO headquarters in Brussels, Defence Ministers of various countries discussed dispatching troops and equipment to countries near Russia and the Black Sea region in case of an invasion of Ukraine.
- The U.S. has initiated to deploy 5,000 troops to Poland and Romania.
- The U.K. is mobilizing hundreds of soldiers to Poland and offering warships and planes.
- Germany, Netherlands and Norway are sending additional troops to Lithuania.
- Denmark and Spain are providing jets for air policing.

India's response

- India is said to support the basic principles of European security, and if there is an aggressive act, India is prepared to respond.
- It is also said that India has prepared a package of measures and any actions it takes will be a united action that will be severe and commensurate.
- In view of the rising tension, India has set up control rooms and emergency phone numbers for students and professionals based in Ukraine.
- Negotiations are also underway to increase the number of flights to help in evacuating the Indian citizens.

Read more about the [Russia – Ukraine Crisis](#).

Nut Graf

The military tensions seem to ease down a bit amid reports of Russia withdrawing troops from Crimea, but the crisis is far from over as the complex issue is rooted in Russia's security concerns and NATO's expansionary open-door policy with no quick solutions.

Category: POLITY

1. Tribunal appointments being taken lightly: SC

Syllabus: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

Mains: Vacancies and the current state of tribunals in India

Context

The Supreme Court said its judicial intervention saw the government make abrupt efforts to fill vacancies in tribunals and nothing after that.

Details

- A bench led by the Chief Justice of India remarked that they are getting requests for extension of time for NCLT matters and they do not have information on members as many are retiring.
- In September 2021, a Special Bench led by the CJI accused the Centre of “cherry-picking” names for appointments to tribunals, whose functions were impacted due to long-pending vacancies.
- The Bench had then held on initiating contempt proceedings against the government and gave the government two weeks to make appointments to “all the tribunals”.

Read more in CNA dated Sep 16, 2021 - [SC gives Centre two weeks to fill all tribunal vacancies.](#)

The state of Tribunals

- The CJI had termed the state of tribunals and the thousands of litigants waiting for justice “pitiable”.
- Cases are adjourned for months as there is no manpower to form Benches.
- Litigants are made to travel to other states where there are at least some tribunal members available to hear their cases.

Read about [Restructuring the tribunals system](#) in CNA dated May 17, 2021.

Nut Graf

Restructuring the tribunals system in India is important to address various issues plaguing the Indian judiciary as tribunals play a significant role in ensuring speedy justice that reduces the burden of the constitutional courts.

2. Negative liberty

Syllabus: Constitution of India — features and significant provisions

Mains: The concepts of Negative and Positive Liberties

Context

- Isaiah Berlin, in his essay, ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’, speaks of two senses of freedom.
- The notions of negative and positive liberty broadly determine how governments function.

<u>Negative Liberty</u>	<u>Positive Liberty</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revolves around the existence of a private sphere where individuals are free from any interference. • The political right and libertarians support negative liberty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refers to the act of taking control over one’s life and realizing its fundamental purposes. • The political left has supported positive liberty.

Arguments against Negative Liberty

- Early English philosophers believed that negative freedom could lead to social chaos.
- There could be no limit to what human beings may want and if they are allowed to achieve anything they want, the strong suppress the weak.
- Negative liberty must be restricted for the sake of other values, such as equality and justice.
- Berlin adds that “some people’s freedom must sometimes be curtailed to secure the freedom of others”.

Arguments against Positive Liberty

- Positive liberty has been abused by tyrannies, especially in the Soviet Union.
- The regime portrays its brutal governance as the empowerment of the people.
- If a Government taxes people and uses that money to provide subsidized food for others, it means that it is cutting down on the economic freedoms of some classes to access certain goods and services and have a certain amount of economic freedom.
- The ideas of positive freedom have been exploited to justify atrocities, such as the Holocaust.

Conclusion

Negative and positive liberty are not just seen as two kinds of liberty; they are often seen as rival and incompatible interpretations of the idea of liberty that can have major social and political implications.

Nut Graf

As everyone defends freedom: the freedom to speak, to move, to act, to eat, to practice religion, it is important to understand the concepts of positive and negative liberty for understanding how governments across the world use them to expand on or restrict freedoms.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. India lacks solar waste handling policy

Syllabus: Environmental pollution and degradation

Mains: The need for solar waste handling policy

Details

- The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) estimated that the global photovoltaic waste will touch **78 million tonnes** by 2050, with India being one of the top five generators of such waste.
- India currently considers solar waste a part of electronic waste and does not account for it separately.

India's solar energy capacity

- India has set a target of producing 100 GW of solar energy by 2022.
- The cumulative capacity of grid-connected solar photovoltaic (PV) installations is around **40 GW** and of the current capacity,
 - About **35.6 GW** is generated from ground-mounted plants
 - About 4.4 GW from rooftop solar panels

The need for a policy on managing solar waste

- Solar panels have an estimated life of 25 years, and given that most of the installed systems in India are early in their lifecycle, they are unlikely to generate a large quantity of solar waste.
 - However, according to the **Council for Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)**, end-of-life was only one of the possible waste streams for PV modules and there were several other stages where modules could get damaged.
- Modules could develop defects during the plant operations and be discarded even before their scheduled life span.
- According to CEEW, PV modules have generated a cumulative waste of nearly **2,85,000 tonnes**, as of FY21.

Way forward

- **Circular economy** - Minister for New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) said that a committee had been constituted to propose an action plan to evolve a “circular economy” in solar panels, through the reuse/recycling of waste generated.
- **Recovery of raw materials** - There was no commercial raw material recovery facility for solar e-waste in India, but a facility for material recovery had been set up by a private company in Gummidipoondi (Tamil Nadu).
- **Ramp-up domestic manufacturing** - Much of India’s solar PV manufacturing uses imported components with parts imported from China.

Nut Graf

As India looks to ramp up its solar power capacity and in turn becomes one of the top contributors of generating photovoltaic wastes, the government should come up with a firm policy for ensuring a sustainable waste management plan for the solar energy system to make solar energy truly a green source of energy.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY

1. A Case for a more Federal Judiciary

Syllabus: Structure, organisation and functioning of the Judiciary

Prelims: Salient features of federalism

Mains: Restoration of federal balance in the Judiciary

Context: The article examines the federal structure of the [Indian Judiciary](#) and discusses the necessity to strengthen it.

A Brief Perspective:

- The doctrine of federalism has been upheld by the Supreme Court as a part and parcel of the [basic structure of the Indian Constitution](#).
- It becomes extremely significant to embolden the federal feature of the India Judiciary.
- In order to retain the federal nature of the judiciary, the role of High Courts and their jurisdiction must be recognised and empowered.

Read more about [Federalism](#) in the linked article.

The federal characteristics of Judiciary:

- A robust federal judicial system forms the integral requirement of a federal state.
- This system of judiciary includes the Supreme Court and High Court that are entrusted to adjudicate the rights of the federal and central units and between the citizens and these units.
- The integrated judicial system functions as a single entity providing remedies in all the cases originating under constitutional law, civil law and criminal law.
- The Supreme Court is superior to the High Court only in the appellate sense. This was reiterated by the Supreme Court on many occasions.

The emerging imbalances:

- Despite the fact that the high courts are not subordinate to the Supreme Court, there have been multiple events that reflected considerable inclination towards the central court. This imbalance started increasing after 1990.
- A prominent rise in centralisation has been observed in the judicial set-up with the gradual progress of time.

Trends of imbalance in the judiciary:

- Appointment of the judges and chief justices of High Court and Supreme Court by the Collegium (consisting of supreme court judges).The collegium has the power to transfer judges and chief justices from one court to another.
- Bypassing the High Courts with the creation of parallel judicial systems that provide direct appeal to the Supreme Court.
- Intervention by the Supreme Court on trivial matters.



Also read about [Collegium System](#) in the linked article.

- A greater degree of centralization of the judiciary will pave the consequences of weakened federalism in the country.

Scenarios in other countries:

- According to a legal researcher in the United States, the [judicial review](#) by the centralised judiciary tends towards unitarism. It is observed in the US that the Supreme Court is far more likely to strike down a state statute as unconstitutional.
- In Nigeria which is also a federal country, it is seen that the Supreme Court supports the central government over the state units. Such centralising tendency has been exemplified through the recent event wherein there were litigations over mineral rights and subsoil rights where the Supreme Court favoured the central government.

The Concluding Remark:

- The central units have a tendency to aggrandise power to themselves from the state units believing that this would ensure better discharge of duties. This notion has been weakening the entire body of the state which will ultimately lead to an irreversible decay of federalism.
- Therefore, there is an urgent need to empower the High Courts with significant acknowledgement towards its effective role in the judiciary.

- The Supreme Court, as the custodian of the Constitution, is expected to play an active role to enliven the spirit of federalism.

Nut Graf

Recognising the role of high courts and empowering them will add essence to the cause of restoring the federal balance in the Indian judiciary. This will serve the larger interest of the people of this country.

Category: ECONOMY

1. The Budget's 'Crypto Signal'

Syllabus: Mobilisation of resources

Prelims: Cryptocurrency

Mains: Implications of introducing cryptocurrency and the reforms needed

Context: A 30% flat tax rate levied on the gains from the transfer of virtual assets including cryptocurrencies and Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), has been announced in the [Union Budget 2022-23](#). This leads to an assumption that cryptocurrency is legal in India or there might be a possibility emerging out of the 'crypto signal'.

About Cryptocurrency:

- Cryptocurrency consists of a digital denomination that is designed to work as a medium of exchange through distributed computer networks which is referred to as a blockchain.
- This blockchain network is not reliant on any central authority like the government or any bank for its regulation and maintenance.
- It employs blockchain technology that includes key features such as distributed ledger, near real-time updates, cryptographically sealed, programmable and enforceable contracts.

Read more about [Cryptocurrency](#) in the provided link.

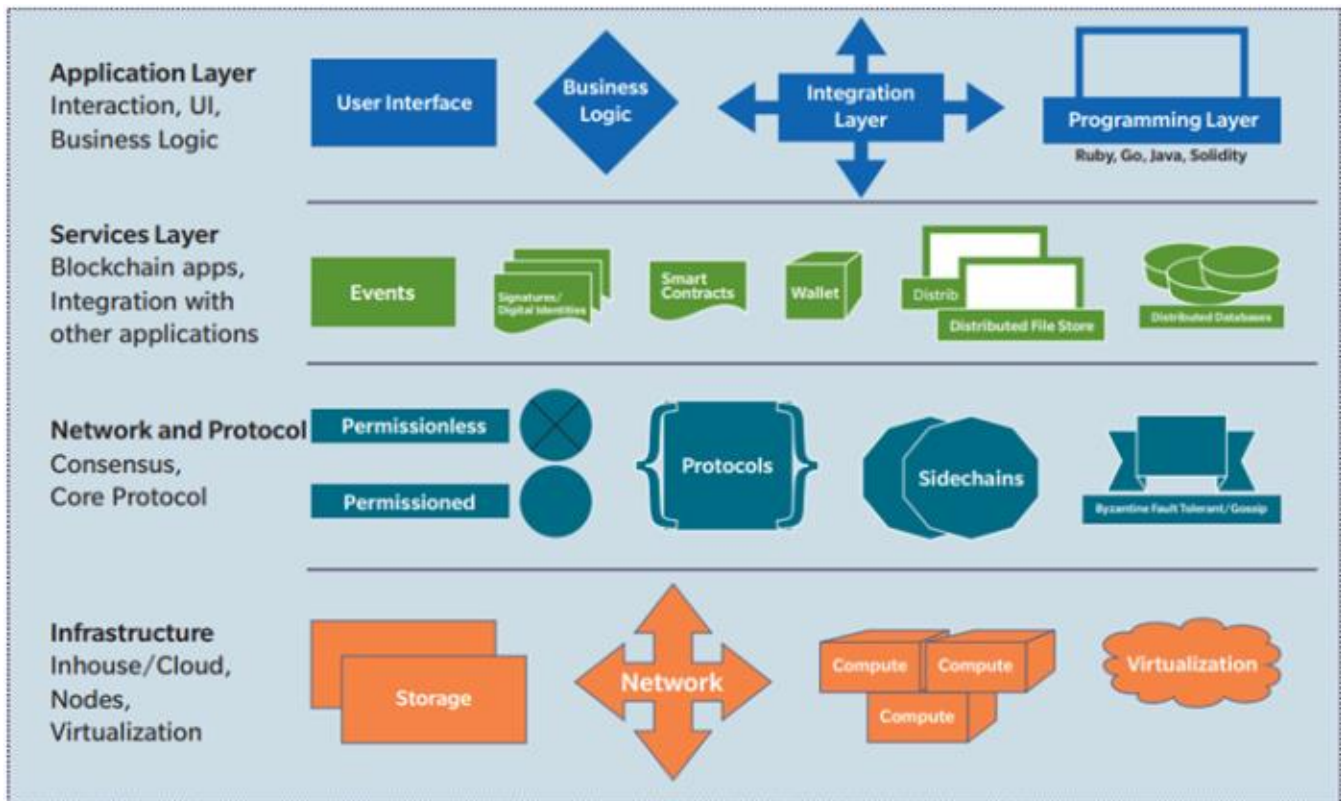


Image Source: National Informatics Centre

Positive Signals:

- Establishing a well-coordinated cryptocurrency set-up and creating rooms for new related technologies will open up avenues for crypto start-ups leading to a transformation in the financial and the economic system in the country.
- The budgetary announcement, denoting a crypto signal can be futuristic and innovative provided it is carefully managed.
- Cryptocurrency will facilitate innovation in decentralised finance activities like staking, lending and providing liquidity.
- With the assurance of decentralised finance, one can do most of the things that are supported by the banks. For example, earn interest, borrow, lend, buy insurance, trade derivatives, trade assets and much more.
- It is faster than the banks and does not require paperwork or a third party.
- The adoption of a crypto-financial ecosystem would make the transactions cheaper, smoother and would result in the creation of new forms of wealth without the involvement of centralised intermediaries.

What are the concerns?

- Critics point out that 30% flat tax is a harsh rate that might hamper the willingness of the investors to convert cryptocurrencies into national fiat.
- The innovative side of enabling the new form of currency must not mask the destructive outcomes that might evolve if there are no reforms to manage and regulate it.
- The community that is most likely to gain from the decentralised finance, will find it difficult to access due to barriers posed by the tax rates. This community includes the small and medium enterprises and other individuals who are willing to invest.
- There is an existing lack of clarity on India's crypto policy. The details can only be available once the Cryptocurrency Bill is passed.

Walking ahead with Crypto:

- Cryptocurrency is at the transition phase in the country and is yet to gather more interventions by the investors and innovators to become completely mainstream.
- The concerns associated with the mainstreaming of cryptocurrency must be addressed and there must be tight regulations and reforms to secure the interests of the stakeholders.
- Unless radical reforms are undertaken to liberalise the system through considerable incentives and infrastructural installation, it will add to the inability of the cryptofinance ecosystem to flourish and would make it difficult to benefit a large number of individuals and enterprises who aspire to participate in decentralised finance.
- The norms for the proper functioning of cryptocurrency must be well-communicated through effective legislation and policies.
- As India steps ahead with its vibrant and dynamic democracy, it must offer an objective of empowering the middle-class consumers, investors and individuals that harbour the aspirations to explore the world of cryptocurrency by enhancing flexibility to engage in economic activities. This would contribute to the social, economic and political betterment of the country.

Nut Graf

Systematic reforms are critical for India's advancement in the sphere of crypto finance and blockchain technology that can lead to a better and secure future for all individuals and investors.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Thousands of Crimson Rose butterflies fly across the ocean

Syllabus: Biodiversity

Prelims: Crimson Rose Butterflies

Context

The beach of Dhanushkodi has witnessed a rare phenomenon over the past few days.

Crimson Rose Butterflies



Image Source: Wikipedia

- Crimson rose is a large butterfly belonging to the **genus Pachliopta** (roses) of the **red-bodied swallowtails**.
- These are large butterflies with a mix of black, white and crimson colours on their wings and body.
- IUCN Status: **Least Concern**
- The species is legally protected under **Schedule I of the [Wildlife \(Protection\) Act, 1972](#)** in India.
- The butterflies are known for crossing the sea to migrate to Sri Lanka.
- The most interesting and visually stunning aspect of the migration is that the butterflies make small pit stops on flowering plants to fuel their journey.

G. Tidbits

1. Equitable energy access key of environmental policy: PM

Context

The Prime Minister's inaugural address at [The Energy and Resources Institute's \(TERI\) World Sustainable Development Summit](#) said that India had "walked the talk" by ensuring that equitable energy access to the poor remained a cornerstone of its environmental policy.

Various Initiatives

- **Ujjwala Yojana scheme** - 90 million households got access to clean cooking fuel.
- **PM-KUSUM scheme** - farmers being encouraged to set up solar panels and could use and sell surplus power to the grid, which would promote sustainability and equity.
- **LED bulbs distribution scheme** - the scheme for seven years has reportedly saved close to 220 billion units of electricity and prevented 180 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per year.
- **National Hydrogen Mission** - aims to tap into 'green hydrogen'.

2. 1,000 firms expected at DefExpo in Gujarat

Context

Defexpo 2022, to be held in Gujarat for the first time.

Defexpo 2022

- The Defexpo 2022 is expected to see the participation of about 1,000 companies, with over 100 foreign companies from 55 countries.
- Spread over 1 lakh sq.m, DefExpo 2022 will be the largest since its inception in 1996.
- Along with initiatives such as IDEX meant to boost start-ups, venture capitalists are invited to the expo to identify prospective projects for investment.
- Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) have been offered a 50% discount.

3. Retail inflation easing sequentially

- India's retail inflation had crossed 6% for the first time in six months in January 2022, but the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has moderated sequentially over the two months indicating a slowing momentum to price rise trends.

- January 2022's 6.01% retail inflation rate was primarily attributable to food and beverages, clothing and footwear, as well as an unfavourable base effect.
- Easing vegetable prices on account of the fresh winter crop, and better prospects for food grains output lead to an optimistic view on inflation.
- Global inflation and energy prices are likely to influence India's rate of inflation and the Government expects it to decline to obtain a GDP deflator of 3.0-3.5% assumed in the Budget.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to the New India Literacy Programme:

1. The scheme has been launched for the period FYs 2022-2027 to cover all the aspects of Adult Education.
2. It will cover non-literates aged 18 years and above in all states and UTs in the country.
3. Besides foundational literacy and numeracy, the scheme aims at imparting critical life skills and vocational skills development.

Which of the given statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct**, "New India Literacy Programme" for the period FYs 2022-2027 to cover all the aspects of Adult Education to align with National Education Policy 2020 and Budget Announcements 2021-22.
- **Statement 2 is not correct**, the scheme will cover non-literates of the **age of 15 years** and above in all states/UTs in the country.
- **Statement 3 is correct**, the objectives of the scheme are to impart not only foundational literacy and numeracy but also to cover other components which are necessary for a citizen of the 21st century such as critical life skills, vocational skills development, basic education and continuing education.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to "Pasuvula Panduga", recently seen in news:

1. It is the most important festival of the Bodo Tribe.

2. Hunting is mandatory as part of the festival.
3. The festival is dedicated to cows, bulls and other animals that are part of the agrarian economy.

Which of the given statements is/are incorrect?

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is incorrect**, Kanuma, also known as Pasuvula Panduga, is of great importance to the Telugu community and is not related to the Bodo Tribes.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect**, hunting is not mandatory as part of the festival.
- **Statement 3 is correct**, the festival is dedicated to cows, bulls and other animals that are part of the agrarian economy.

Q3. Which of the given statements with respect to Green Hydrogen is/are INCORRECT?

1. Hydrogen produced by electrolysis using renewable energy is known as Green Hydrogen.
2. Green Hydrogen is generated from natural gas, or methane, through a process called steam reforming.
3. Green Hydrogen production is the cleanest form of hydrogen generation since the by-products are just water and water vapour.

Options:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct**, Green Hydrogen is produced by electrolysis of water using renewable energy (like Solar, Wind) and has a lower carbon footprint.

- **Statement 2 is incorrect**, the hydrogen that is generated from natural gas, or methane, through a process called “steam reforming” is called **Grey hydrogen**.
- **Statement 3 is correct**, Green Hydrogen production is considered the cleanest form of hydrogen generation since the by-products are just water and water vapour.

Q4. Which of the given statements is/are INCORRECT?

- a. The interest rate that the RBI charges when commercial banks borrow money from it is called the repo rate.
- b. The rate at which RBI lends to commercial banks by buying the securities sold by the commercial banks is called the reverse repo rate.
- c. The interest rate that the RBI pays commercial banks when they park their excess cash with the central bank is called the reverse repo rate.
- d. The rate at which the commercial banks borrow money from the RBI by selling their securities to the RBI is called the repo rate.

Answer: b

Explanation:

- **Option b is the incorrect statement**, the rate at which RBI lends to commercial banks by buying the securities sold by the commercial banks is called the **repo rate**.

Q5. Who of the following had first deciphered the edicts of Emperor Ashoka? (UPSC CSE 2016)

- a. Georg Bihler
- b. James Prinsep
- c. Max Muller
- d. William Jones

Answer: b

Explanation:

- **James Prinsep**, a European scholar in 1837, first deciphered the edicts of Ashoka.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. For a robust judicial framework, the High Courts in India need to be empowered to fulfil their constitutional mandate. Comment. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, Polity]

2. While hailing solar energy as the future, we are overlooking the issues related to solar waste handling. Suggest some ways to address this problem. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-3, Environment]

