

20 May 2022: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis



The supreme art of war is to subdue
the enemy without fighting

- Sun Tzu



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A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY

1. SC says Centre, States have equal powers to make GST-related laws

Syllabus: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

Prelims: About Goods and Services Tax (GST) and GST Council

Mains: Functioning of GST Council and the powers of Union and State governments on the GST related laws.

Context

Supreme Court's ruling on the [Goods and Services Tax \(GST\)](#) related laws.

Details

- In a judgement that confirmed Gujarat High Court's ruling, the Supreme Court said that the Union government cannot levy Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) on ocean freight from Indian importers.
 - The judgment resolved a prolonged battle between the government and the companies on the implementation of IGST on ocean freight on a reverse charge basis.
 - This has provided relief for importers as they are not liable for paying GST on ocean freight and also can claim refunds for previous such payments.
- The apex court further said that the Union and State legislatures have "equal, simultaneous and unique powers" on GST related laws and the recommendations of the [GST Council](#) are not binding on them.

Supreme Court's ruling

- The SC bench opined that the GST Council recommendations are a result of collaborative dialogue involving the Union and the States and these are only recommendatory in nature and

making them binding would disrupt fiscal federalism as both the Union and the States have equal power to formulate laws on GST.

- While passing the ruling the court highlighted constitutional Articles such as
 - **Article 246A** - provides the States power to legislate on GST.
 - The court believed that the Constitution through Article 246 treats the Union and the States as equal units and conferred simultaneous power to the Centre and States for legislating laws on GST.
 - **Article 279A** - provides that a GST Council is to be set up by the President to govern GST and the Union Finance Minister will be its chairperson with ministers from the state governments as its members.
 - The Council will make recommendations to the Union and the States on important issues related to GST.
 - The SC bench interpreted that the Article foresees that neither the Union nor the States is dependent on the other.
- The Court further said that the Union and the States were autonomous, independent and competing units with respect to GST laws.
- The Court urged the Union and the States to operate in a harmonious manner as it is necessary for the well-being of the nation and that fiscal security can be achieved by collaboration and contestations between the two tiers of government.

Court's views on federalism

- Reiterating the importance of [federalism](#) the Court held that “the federal system is a means to accommodate the needs of a pluralistic society in a democratic manner and that democracy and federalism are interdependent. Federalism would only be stable in a well-functioning democracy. The constituent units of a federal polity check the exercise of powers of one another to prevent one group from exercising dominant power”.
- The SC bench also believed that the “Indian federalism is a dialogue between cooperative and uncooperative federalism where the federal units are at liberty to use different means of persuasion, ranging from collaboration to contestation”.

Response from the State

- Ministers from states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have welcomed the Supreme Court's ruling and say that it protects States' rights and strengthens [cooperative federalism](#).
- Kerala Finance Minister said that the ruling would have a large scale impact on the country's tax structure and Centre-State relations.
- The Tamil Nadu Minister alleged that the Centre had been arbitrarily imposing its decisions on the States, impacting State's revenue and expressed that the ruling would help the States to protect their rights and ensure financial stability.

Centre's response

- The Union Finance Ministry said that the Supreme Court ruling does not mandate any changes in the functioning of the GST regime.
- Regarding the GST Council as a remarkable example of collaborative and cooperative federalism, the Ministry asserted that the court had only elaborated on its functional mechanism.
- The minister further stated that the GST Council was a collaborative institutional framework, and the Union and States followed its recommendations that were made with consensus.

Nut Graf

The Supreme Court acknowledges that although the Centre has a larger share of power in certain instances, the States can still wield power by using provisions accorded to them by the Constitution. This observation by the Court has gained significance as it upholds the principles of democracy and cooperative federalism.

C. GS 3 Related**Category: ENVIRONMENT****1. Understanding India's ethanol blending policy**

Syllabus: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Prelims: About National Policy on Biofuels, 2018 and Ethanol Blending Programme of India

Mains: Details about the ethanol blending policy of India and its impact.

Context

The Union Cabinet approved amendments to the National Policy on Biofuels, 2018, which requires the fuel companies to increase the percentage of ethanol in petrol to 20% (E20) by 2025 (which was 2030 earlier).

Know more about - [National Policy on Biofuels, 2018](#)

Ethanol-blending

- Ethanol is an agro-based product, mainly produced from a by-product of the sugar industry, namely molasses.
- An ethanol blend is defined as a blended motor fuel containing ethyl alcohol that is at least 99% pure, derived from agricultural products, and blended exclusively with petrol.
- The Ethanol Blending seeks to blend Ethanol with motor fuel which helps in reducing pollution, conserving foreign exchange and increasing value addition in the sugar industry which ultimately helps farmers.
- As ethanol burns more completely than petrol, it prevents the emissions of carbon monoxide. However, studies have shown that there is no reduction in the emissions of nitrous oxides which is one of the key environmental pollutants.

History of ethanol-blending in India

- For the last 20 years, India is looking to develop an ecosystem to have more ethanol blended into petrol for the use of vehicles.
 - According to Government reports, about 75% of India's 22 crore vehicles are two-wheelers and 12% are four-wheelers.
- India has been examining the viability of using ethanol-blended petrol since 2001, wherein 5% ethanol blended petrol (95% petrol - 5% ethanol) was supplied.
- In 2002, the government announced the [Ethanol Blended Petrol \(EBP\) Programme](#) and started selling 5% ethanol blended petrol in a few States and Union Territories.
- However, until 2013-14, the percentage of blending did not cross 1.5%. Hence, in 2015, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways issued that E5 (blending of 5% ethanol) petrol and the rubber and plastic components used in gasoline vehicles produced since 2008 should be compatible with the E10 fuel (blending of 10% ethanol). In 2019, the Ministry notified the E10 fuel.
- The government has extended financial incentives for distilleries and other policy support which has resulted in average blending reaching 5%.
- The government has already laid Standards for E20, E85 and even E100 fuel.
- India intends to achieve 10% blending by the end of 2022 and 20% blending by 2030. The government has plans to achieve a 5% blending of biodiesel with diesel by 2030.

Switching to E20 blending

- India's net import of petroleum was estimated to be 185 million tons which cost around \$55 billion in 2020-21.
- Most of India's petroleum imports are used by automobiles and hence successful implementation of the E20 programme could help save about ₹30,000 crores per year.
- A report by [NITI Aayog](#) has provided a comprehensive framework of ethanol blending which includes challenges and a roadmap.

- To achieve E20 blending, the committee foresees ethanol demand of 1,016 crore litres and considering the increase in the number of electric vehicles there would be a demand of 722-921 crore litres of ethanol in 2025.
- However, India's current ethanol production is about 426 crore litres from molasses-based distilleries and 258 crore litres from grain-based distilleries.
 - This is expected to rise to 760 crore litres and 740 crore litres respectively out of which 1016 crore litres of ethanol would be required for blending purposes and 334 crore litres for other uses.
 - This would require about 6 million tonnes of sugar and 16.5 million tonnes of grains per annum in 2025.

Impact of E20 blending on vehicles

- With E20 blending it is expected that there would be a loss of 6-7% fuel efficiency in four-wheelers and about 3-4% for two wheelers developed for E0 and scaled for E10.
- However, vehicle manufacturers believe that modifications in engines can offset the loss in efficiency.
- And also the government should look at ways to compensate the consumers for a drop in efficiency and extend tax incentives on E10 and E20 fuel.

Experience of ethanol blending in other countries

- Flex Fuel Engine technology (FFE) which consists of vehicles that operate completely on ethanol has been implemented successfully in Brazil and accounted for about 80% of the total number of new vehicles in 2019.
- Based on the experience, it is estimated that the cost of flex fuel vehicles (four-wheelers) could be about ₹17,000 to ₹25,000 more than the current generation of vehicles.
 - The two-wheeled flex fuel vehicles would be costlier by ₹5,000 to ₹12,000 compared to regular petrol vehicles.
- The global production of fuel ethanol has reached 110 billion litres in 2019.
- The U.S. and Brazil produce about 84% of the global share which is followed by the European Union (EU), China, India, Canada and Thailand.
- The prices of ethanol produced in India are costlier compared to the U.S. and Brazil which is due to minimum support prices provided by the government.

Path ahead for India

- An Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) report suggests that for India to meet its target of E20 blending by 2025, it must include an additional 30,000 sq kms of land under maize cultivation.
 - Half that land is enough to produce more efficient power from solar energy.

- In India, sugarcane is the cheapest source of ethanol and on average, a ton of sugarcane could produce 100 kg of sugar and 70 litres of ethanol.
 - This means that nearly 2,000 litres of water are required to produce 1 kg of sugar, and one litre of ethanol from sugar requires about 2,860 litres of water.

Nut Graf

At a time when the fuel prices are skyrocketing, the advancement of the target of achieving 20% ethanol blending by five years is aimed at reducing the net imports of crude oil and inculcating environmental-friendly behaviour among the citizens.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: SOCIAL JUSTICE

1. Bridging the health policy to execution chasm

Syllabus: *GS II, Social Justice, Issues relating to health*

Prelims: *Public Health and Management Cadre, NHP 2017*

Mains: *Reforms in the health sector to ensure quality healthcare facilities in the country.*

Context: The Union Government has released a guidance document on the setting up of a public health and management cadre along with the revised editions of Indian Public Health Standards.

A Brief Overview:

- The National Health Policy ([NHP](#)) 2017 had recommended setting up a public health and management cadre to enhance the standards of public health facilities.
- The public health and management cadre envisaged creating a multidisciplinary system of healthcare services under the directives of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- The idea of a public health and management cadre in states was endorsed at the 13th Conference of the Central Council of Health and Family Welfare wherein the states and union territories participated.

- Model structures developed were presented to the states for consultations with the intent of expanding the idea of public health and management cadre.
- Presently, most Indian states (except Tamil Nadu and Odisha) have a teaching cadre of medical college faculty members and a specialist cadre of doctors involved in clinical services.
- This existing structure of public health experts has limited career opportunities for which public health is rarely chosen as a career path.



Image source: nhsrindia.org

Major Concerns:

- Lack of proper public health infrastructure has been costly for society with the supreme challenge of shortage of trained public health workforce.
- There is a huge gap in the management of public health
- Lack of proper communication with the patients
- Negligence at the policymaking level
- A considerable delay has been observed in the improvement of access to healthcare services and in the betterment of the quality of care.

Intervening Steps:

- The proposed public health cadre and the health management cadre have been perceived as potential recommendations of NHP 2017 to address the issues faced in the healthcare sector of the country.
- The release of the guidance documents has encouraged and directed the states to formulate the action plan, identify the cadre strengths and fill up the vacancies with a stipulated time frame (6 months to 1 year).
- With the regular revision of the Indian Public Health Standards, enormous attention has been offered to the quality of health care services.
- India has always experienced a feeble workforce in public health services and in such a scenario, the decision to establish the public health cadre will definitely draw a possibility to strengthen the workforce.
- This would also be a welcoming move to increase resilience towards pandemic-like situations in the upcoming days with the support of adequate, skilled and trained public health experts.

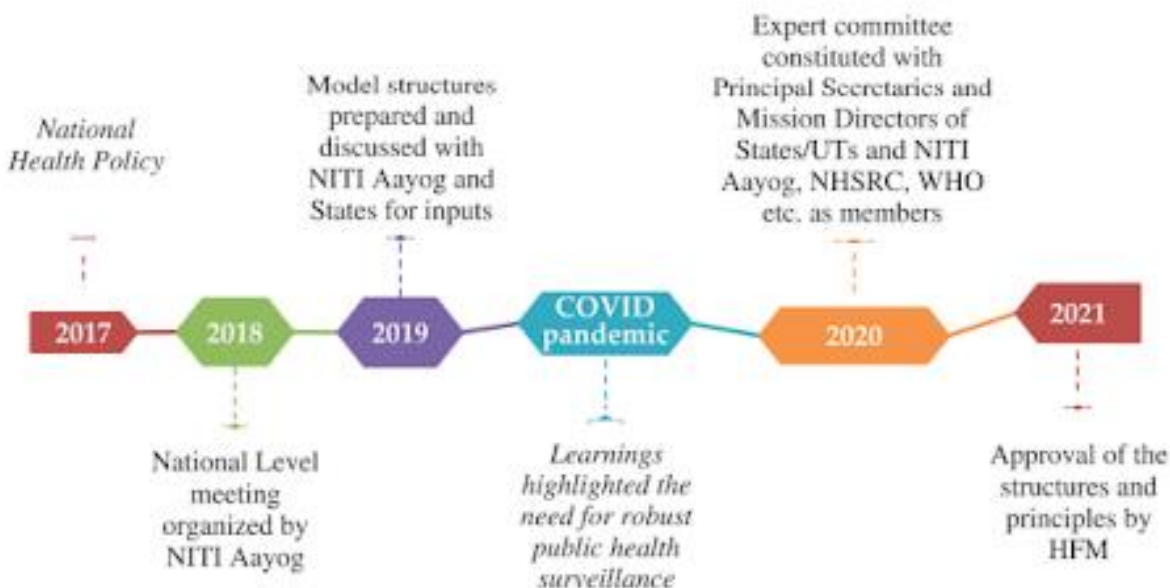


Figure-1: Journey of Public Health Management Cadre

Image source: nhsrindia.org

Reforms Ahead:

- It is necessary that any policy pertaining to public health must emphasise the advancements in the training of the health experts ensuring holistic delivery of preventive, promotive, curative and diagnostic services.
- There must be a precise understanding of the roles and functions of public health specialists and the relevance of such cadres at the district and sub-district levels.
- This approach might prevent confusion at the policymaking level regarding the functions of an epidemiologist and a specialist in public health.
- Special training must be provided to the professionals to make an appropriate decision in the line of treatment to tackle particular pathogenesis as witnessed during the COVID-19 infection period.
- The revised IPHS (Indian Public Health Standards) is an important development but not an end to all problems. Despite the release of revised editions of IPHS, only a small proportion of government healthcare facilities meet the standards. This needs to be addressed to upgrade the quality standards of public health management.
- The revision of IPHS should be independently assessed to determine its effectiveness in improving the quality of health services across the country.
- Making a structure both in the Public Health and Specialist Cadre based of IPHS norms in existing facilities is suggested.
- As states develop plans for setting up the cadres of public health, all potential challenges in securing a trained workforce should be identified along with active steps.
- The standardisation of the quality of public health in the states will be a time-consuming process that demands undisturbed cooperation and coordination between the Centre, states, union territories, administrators, medical practitioners, health experts and other stakeholders of the healthcare sector.

Nut Graf

In order to establish a healthier society, the Indian states are required to act effectively in setting up a public health and management cadre.

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. Pockets of Hope, linking nature and humanity

Syllabus: GS III, Environment, Conservation

Prelims: Biosphere Reserves in India, Ecosystems

Mains: Role of biosphere reserves in protecting and conserving the ecological fabric of nature.

Context: The article serves as a narrative on the importance of biodiversity and the need to protect and conserve the biosphere reserves to mitigate the risks of ecological disasters.

The perspective:

- Biodiversity is regarded as the living fabric of the planet and is an essential component of human well-being in the present and future.
- We are in an era wherein enormous damage has been done to nature that has resulted in significant devastation of biodiversity.
- According to Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, released by the Inter-governmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) at the [UNESCO](#) headquarters in Paris, the major causes of biodiversity loss include:
 - Climate Change
 - Invasive Species
 - Over-exploitation of natural resources
 - Pollution
 - Rapid unplanned urbanisation
- The ecological carrying capacity of Earth has largely exceeded the tolerance limit due to collective human activities that are dominated by the primary goal of economic growth.

Read about [Biodiversity Hotspots in India](#) in the link shared.

Challenges faced by wildlife:

- The neglect and collapse of basic wildlife protection capacity along with the inefficiency of forest administration have been underlying problems faced by the wildlife.
- A serious threat to the wildlife species is created by illegal poaching and hunting.
- Reckless developmental projects that include the construction of highways, mines and dams have detrimental effects on the habitats of wildlife.
- The illegal trade of wildlife has been prevalent and encourages the existence of criminal elements that result in the massive killing of animals and it is difficult to identify the practice of silent poaching and extremely challenging to educate the local community against poaching.
- A large chunk of human settlement in the protected areas represents an alarming situation which is commonly referred to as [human-wildlife conflict](#).
- The extraction of non-timber forest products has adverse effects on wildlife.
- A study published in the Nature journal that displayed the biggest threats to wildlife found that agriculture and overexploitation of resources are the major threats.
- The power line projects pose an enormous threat to the birds along with considerable interference with their habitats. For example, the [Great Indian Bustard](#) which is a native species of the subcontinent is almost on the verge of extinction due to the developmental projects that are life-threatening to them.

Legal framework for Wildlife in India:

- Section 2 (37) of the [Wildlife Protection Act, 1972](#) defined wildlife to include any animal, either aquatic or terrestrial and vegetation that forms a part of any habitat.
- The Wildlife Protection Act provides legal support for the protection and conservation of wildlife in India.
- The act was implemented to protect wild animals, birds and plants with the objective to ensure the environmental and ecological security of India.
- The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau has been established to eliminate the illegal trade of wildlife along with endangered species.
 - The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau is a statutory multi-disciplinary body established by the Government of India under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- The Constitution of India makes it a [Fundamental Duty](#) of the citizens to protect wildlife and have compassion for living creatures.
- According to Article 48A (a [DPSP](#)), it is the duty of the state to protect, safeguard and work for the improvement of forests and wildlife in the country.
- Wildlife is placed under the concurrent list (List III) of Schedule VII of the Constitution bringing it under the purview of both State and the Union governments.
- India is a part of many international conventions that intend to enhance the conservation of wildlife. Some of these conventions include the [UN Convention on Biological Diversity](#), Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

Present Scenario:

- The [IUCN Red List](#) of threatened species put forth an estimate that over 8400 species of wild fauna and flora are critically endangered and 30,000 more are anticipated to be endangered and vulnerable.
- According to the IUCN data, 239 faunal species in India are classified as endangered species which includes 45 species of mammals, 23 species of birds, 18 species of reptiles, 39 species of amphibians and 114 species of fish.
- India has a network of 733 Protected Areas that include 103 National Parks, 537 wildlife sanctuaries, 67 conservation reserves and 26 community reserves.

Ways need to be adopted:

- It should be the collective responsibility of the governments, people and stakeholders to work towards cleaner air, high-quality drinking water and enough food and healthy habitats to ensure the continuity of ecosystem services benefiting human beings without critically affecting the natural environment.

- Protecting, promoting and expanding the Biosphere reserves through conservation areas and signing of international conventions will serve as the pillars to retain the ecological balance and mitigate the biodiversity loss.
- A landmark initiative by UNESCO in the creation of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves in 1971, has been exemplary in the identification and conservation of areas of rich biodiversity. Such programmes need to be extended and given effect in a productive manner.
- South Asia is a hub of biodiversity with India, Bhutan and Nepal noteworthy of mention.
- These reserved areas represent pockets of hope and proof that we are not absolutely heading towards the ecological doomsday without active interventions. However, experts envisage appropriate actions to be taken by the authorities along the lines of the existing legislation that protects wildlife and biodiversity.

Read about [Biosphere Reserves in India](#) in the linked article.

Nut Graf

It is essential to increase the number of biosphere reserves in the South Asian region and to protect them from human activities to prevent further risks and possibilities of ecological disasters.

F. Prelims Facts

To be updated shortly!

G. Tidbits

1. Pangong bridge construction is in ‘occupied territory’: Centre

- It is said that a broad bridge connecting both sides of the Pangong lake was being constructed, which would reduce the time for the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to move troops while a smaller bridge was built to support the construction of the main one.
- Earlier, the PLA had to take a roundabout crossing the Rudok county, but the bridge is expected to provide direct access.
- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said that India is closely monitoring the construction of a bridge by China on the Pangong Tso (lake) in eastern Ladakh, which is in “occupied territory”.

2. ‘Made in India’ skin test for TB to be launched

- India is all set to introduce a newly approved “made in India” TB infection skin test called ‘c-TB’.
- This is said to be a cost-effective tool and will also be beneficial to other high burden countries as well.
- The Health Minister said that “Adopt people with TB” will be launched in 2022.

3. 'Ready to discuss Turkey's concerns'

- The President of Finland said that his country was open to discussing Turkey's concerns about its application to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).
- Finland and Sweden formally applied to join the organisation in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- Turkey had opposed Finland and Sweden's application to NATO accusing the countries of harbouring terrorists of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).
- The Finnish President said that the country will commit to Turkey's security, just as Turkey will commit to their security as a part of NATO allies.
- The Prime Minister of Sweden said that her country was in discussion with all NATO members including Turkey to address and resolve any issues.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the given statements best describes a Virtual Private Network (VPN)? (Level – Difficult)

- a. It is a service that helps internet users to stay private online and provides protection from viruses and malware.
- b. It is a private computer network of an organisation in which remote users can transmit encrypted information through the organisation's server.
- c. It is a private computer network which allows the users to access a shared pool of content that is not indexed by standard web search engines.
- d. It is a service that helps internet users to stay private online by hiding their (Internet Protocol) IP addresses.

Answer: d

Explanation:

- A virtual private network extends a private network across a public network and enables users to send and receive data across shared or public networks as if their computing devices were directly connected to the private network.
- It is a service that helps internet users to stay private online by hiding their (Internet Protocol) IP addresses.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Khangchendzonga National Park: (Level – Medium)

1. It houses Tholung Monastery, one of the most sacred monasteries of Sikkim.

2. The region is sacred to both the Buddhists and the Lepchas.
3. It is the only UNESCO mixed world heritage site in Asia.

Which of the given statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct,** The Tholung Monastery, one of the most sacred monasteries of Sikkim is situated inside the Khangchendzonga National Park
- **Statement 2 is correct,** The region is sacred to both the Buddhists and the Lepchas.
- **Statement 3 is not correct,** It was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage Sites list in July 2016, becoming the first "Mixed Heritage" site in India.
 - It is not the only UNESCO mixed world heritage site in Asia.

Q3. Which of the given statements is/are INCORRECT? (Level – Medium)

1. In 2020, the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister set up a Beekeeping Development Committee under the Chairmanship of Professor Bibek Debroy.
2. The National Beekeeping and Honey Mission was announced by the Union Government as part of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat package in 2020.
3. The National Beekeeping and Honey Mission being implemented by the National Bee Board (NBB) is a central sector scheme.

Options:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is not correct**, The Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister set up a Beekeeping Development Committee under the Chairmanship of Professor Bibek Debroy in 2018.
- **Statement 2 is correct**, The National Beekeeping and Honey Mission was announced by the Union Government as part of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat package in 2020.
- **Statement 3 is correct**, the National Beekeeping and Honey Mission being implemented by the National Bee Board (NBB) is a central sector scheme (100% funded by Central Government).

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to the Competition Commission of India (CCI):

1. It is a statutory body.
2. It is a quasi-judicial body.
3. It has the suo moto power to enquire whether an Anti-Competitive Agreement or Abuse of Dominant Position causes or is likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition.
4. The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) hears and disposes of appeals against any direction issued or decision made or order passed by the CCI.

Which of the given statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct**, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) is a statutory body established under the provisions of the Competition Act 2002.
- **Statement 2 is correct**, CCI is a quasi-judicial body which gives opinions to statutory authorities and also deals with other cases.
- **Statement 3 is correct**, Commission has suo moto power to enquire whether an anti-competitive agreement or abuse of dominant position causes or is likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition
- **Statement 4 is correct**, NCLAT is the Appellate Tribunal to hear and dispose of appeals against any direction issued or decision made or order passed by the Commission.

Q5. According to Portuguese writer Nuniz, the women in Vijayanagara Empire were expert in which of the following areas? (Level – Difficult) [UPSC 2021]

1. Wrestling
2. Astrology
3. Accounting
4. Soothsaying

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Vijayanagara Kingdom had women wrestlers, astrologers, soothsayers, clerks and accountants. Hence **option d** is correct.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. "Indian federalism is a dialogue between cooperative and un-cooperative federalism where the federal units are at liberty to use different means of persuasion, ranging from collaboration to contestation". Elaborate. (250 words; 15 marks) (GS II - Polity)
2. Identify the challenges and opportunities associated with India's Ethanol Blending Programme. (250 words; 15 marks) (GS III - Environment)