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A. GS 1 Related

Category: INDIAN SOCIETY

1. Sarpanch Pati

Syllabus: Role of Women and Women's organizations

Mains: Women in Local governance and decision making

Context: Madhya Pradesh government is coming out with an advisory following reports of men from the families of elected women representatives taking oath instead of them in Madhya Pradesh panchayats.

What is 'Sarpanch Pati' or 'Pradhan Pati'?

- The term implies that where women are de jure elected, their husbands de facto run the local panchayats.
- During the campaigning for these panchayat elections too, the men had been projected as the future sarpanches with their faces featuring on the publicity material, many a time without the spouse who was actually contesting.
- This tendency of male relatives exercising power instead of duly elected female officials – constitutes the main hurdle to female-led government in rural India.

Reasons behind this phenomenon:

- Patriarchal gender norms within households in traditional societies that restrict the emergence of effective female leadership.
- Lack of capacity building and training for women to take leadership roles in local government.
- Poor social status of a woman with less education and economic independence.
- Absence of strong deterrence laws to punish men who take control in place of elected women.

Outcome:

- The 73rd Constitutional amendment act which provided for Panchayati Raj Institutions(PRI) also guarantees reservation for women in PRI.
 - Article 243 of the constitution provides for not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be reserved for women, further not less than one-third of the total number of offices for chairperson at all levels of the panchayat to be reserved for women.
- This Sarpanch Pati culture thrives in the hinterland which defeats the purpose of the exercise that is adequate representation for women and their empowerment.

Way Forward:

- Prime Minister Modi, taking cognizance of this issue, had called for an end to the practice.
- Proper training and orientation programmes to impart skills and instill confidence in women for taking up the leadership roles goes a long way in women empowerment and local governance.
- There should be harsh penalties for both elected women and sarpanch pati's and also debar them from any future contests.

***Nut Graf:** Even after 25 years of constitutional backing, women's chance at political representation is usurped by their husbands. Illiteracy and lack of economic freedom further inhibit their capacity to perform. It is essential to acknowledge the potential of women in ensuring inclusive democracy and the phenomenon of 'sarpanch pati' should be addressed with the backing of effective law.*

B. GS 2 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. Climate Change and Extreme Weather Events

Syllabus: Environment Pollution and Degradation

Mains: Weather forecasting in India

Context: Monsoon rainfall this year has been uneven across the country due to climate change which has severely affected the ability of forecasting agencies to accurately predict severe events.

Erratic Monsoon:

- Due to climate change, there has been an erratic pattern of monsoon rainfall in India which is making forecasting of severe weather events difficult.
- The number of light rainfall events had decreased and the number of heavy rainfall events had increased due to climate change.

Impact of Climate change:

- 2021 was the 05th warmest year since 1901 and the decade was also the warmest ever in India.
- Climate change has increased the instability in the atmosphere, leading to an increase in convective activity — lightning, thunderstorms and heavy rainfall.

- The severity of cyclones in the Arabian Sea is also increasing.
- Frequent and extreme heat waves are leading to longer and wider wildfires.
- Extreme and uneven rainfall in recent years is mainly because of late withdrawal of the monsoon, a higher-than-normal number of low-pressure systems during the period and the interaction of active western disturbances with low-pressure systems in October.
- The annual rainfall over states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh has shown significant decreasing trends in rainfall during the recent 30-year period (1989-2018).
- This extreme weather events will have a significant impact on agriculture – crop yields, input costs, safety of farmers etc
- Climate change is also increasing the fragility of the Himalayas. Glacier melting and increasing frequency of mini-cloud bursts in the Himalayas is leading to recurrent flash floods.

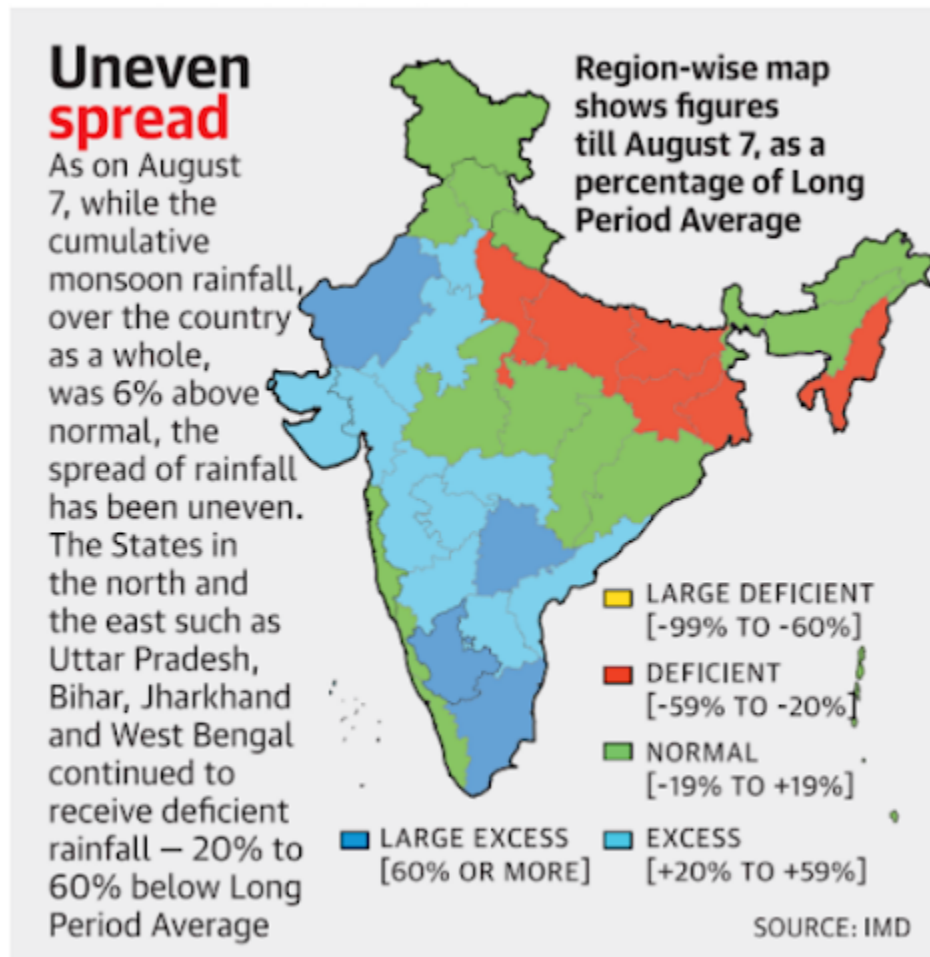


Image Source: The Hindu

How does this affect weather predictions?

- Increase in the frequency of extreme weather events is posing a challenge to forecasters.
- There is no significant trend in the monsoon pattern of India as a whole. But, parts of north, east and northeast India show a decrease in rainfall, while some areas in the west, such as west Rajasthan, show an increase.
- The monsoon pattern is random and it shows large-scale variations which makes accurate predictions of events difficult.

IMD's forecast accuracy:

- The IMD is augmenting its capacity with more radars, automatic weather stations and rain gauges and satellites to improve predictability.
- Its forecast accuracy had improved by about 30% to 40% for severe weather events in the past 05 years due to an improvement in the observational network, modeling and computing systems.
- The number of deaths due to cyclones and heat waves had also reduced over the years because of an improvement in the early warning lead time and preparedness, prevention, planning and mitigation approaches.
- IMD is aiming to give Panchayat level cluster forecasts in coming years.
- The Ministry of Earth Sciences also plans to upgrade its high-performance computing system to run more data at higher resolutions and greater precision.

Conclusion:

Climate change is a fact and we need to plan all our activities accordingly. According to a study by the World Meteorological Organization, these extreme weather events cost the global economy around \$200-300 billion yearly with millions of lives lost. Therefore, greater efforts are required to improve the prediction skill and utilize these much better predictions in catastrophe management.

***Nut Graf:** Extreme weather events because of Climate change is a cause of concern as they become more and more difficult to predict. Various organizations like IMD, Union Ministry of Earth Sciences are working towards augmenting their capacity to provide more accurate and timely predictions of these events.*

Category: ECONOMICS

1. Stablecoin regulation

Syllabus: Mobilization of resources

Mains: Opportunities and threats of Cryptocurrencies

Context: Major global regulators are working on regulations to enforce strict controls on the companies

distributing cryptocurrencies classified as stablecoins.

Introduction:

- After recent instabilities in the Cryptocurrency market, the [Financial Stability Board \(FSB\)](#) promised to push for stablecoin regulation and supervision.
- Recently, the European Commission and EU-based legislators decided on the Markets in Crypto-Assets, or MiCA law, to impose strict controls on the companies distributing cryptocurrencies categorised as stablecoins.

What are stablecoins?

- A stablecoin is a [cryptocurrency](#) whose value is usually pegged to a 'stable' asset, such as gold or the U.S. dollar .
- They are designed to be protected from the wild volatility that makes it difficult to use digital assets for payments or as a store of value.
- They form a link between old-world money and new-world crypto. They also promise to function like perfectly safe holdings.
- Stablecoins have a market cap of around \$170 billion, making them a comparatively small part of the overall cryptocurrency market(\$1.2 trillion).
- For a cryptocurrency trader, tracking stablecoin flows can help them gauge the state of the market.

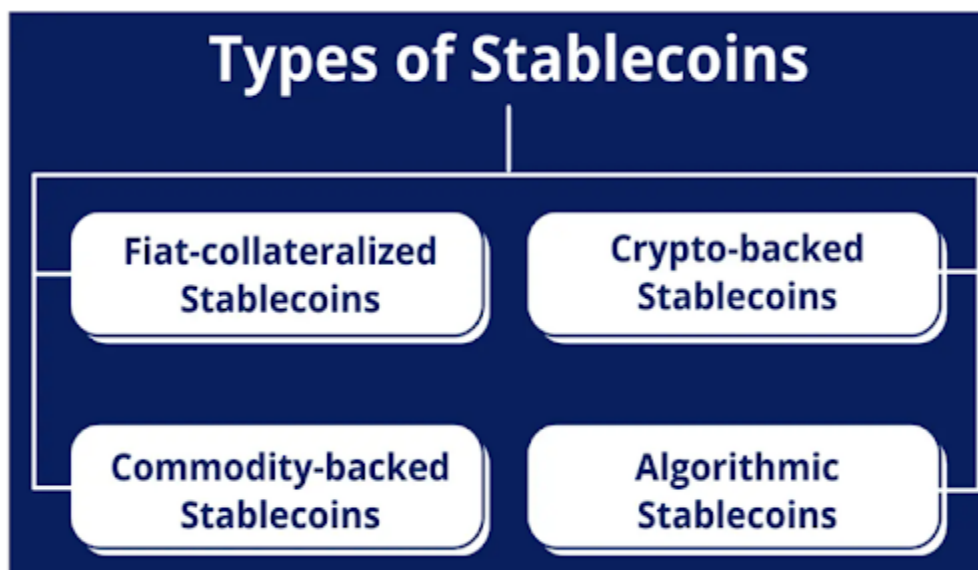
Types of Stablecoins:

Image Credit: 101 Blockchains

- The largest stablecoin today is Tether (USDT), whose market cap is close to \$66 billion, putting it below Ethereum, the second largest cryptocurrency.
- Tether also recently launched a stablecoin pegged to the British pound.

What are the use cases for stablecoins?

- Stablecoins makes moving small amounts of money across borders is often efficient and inexpensive.
- Payments in stablecoins circumvent the 2-3% transaction fees that come with the intermediary processing fees by financial institutions.
- Stablecoins have a value that is designed to be stable over any period which makes them an ideal safe haven asset especially because they have full custody of their assets.
 - This has recently been illustrated with the politico-economic crisis in Venezuela, where many citizens fleeing the country have stored their savings in Bitcoin to avoid confiscation of their fiat money.
- They can offer full transparency into the process by which they are backed through regular audits.
- In countries such as Nigeria, Argentina and Turkey where the local currency is losing value rapidly, converting funds to stablecoins is one way for residents to protect their earnings.
- In countries like Afghanistan and Iran where global sanctions have blocked remittance channels, stablecoin transfers have helped a few crypto users to secure their earnings.

How 'stable' are stablecoins?

- Stablecoins are not authorized for use by country regulations or central banks, which means that investors take on considerable legal and financial risk to hold them.
- Tether had surged from just \$4.1 billion at the start of 2020 to \$80 billion in April 2022 which potentially threatened the balance of the US dollar.
- Recent regulations and penalties on Tether by various American agencies resulted in the decrease of Tether's market cap from around \$80 billion in April 2022 down to around \$66 billion in July 2022.
- After the recent crash of TerraUSD(UST) which lost nearly 100% of its value due to various market factors and company failures, several other stablecoins like USDT also lost value temporarily as investors panicked.
- The U.S. Federal Reserve in its recent biannual financial stability report warned stablecoins are increasingly used to facilitate leveraged trading in other cryptocurrencies.
- For this reason, the crypto community does not want stablecoins to be controlled by centralized laws or standards

***Nut Graf:** Due to the recent cryptocurrency market crash and associated issues, various regulators across the globe have increased the scrutiny and are working towards more regulations on*

stablecoins. The risks within the stablecoin ecosystem are very high. And now, as regulators step in, the market is expected to make traders more fearful.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. The working of Supreme Court collegium

Syllabus: Structure, organization and functioning of Judiciary.

Mains: Collegium system.

Context: The forthcoming retirement of Chief Justice of India.

Evolution of Collegium System:

- The First Judges case: The court held that the consultation with the CJI should be “full and effective”.
- The Second Judges case(1993): It introduced the collegium system in 1993. It was ruled that the CJI would have to consult a collegium of his two senior-most judges in the apex court on judicial appointments. It was held that a “collective opinion” of the collegium would have primacy over the Government.
- The Third Judges case(1998): The collegium system ultimately evolved to its present form as a result of this case. It comprises the CJI and four of the senior-most judges in the Supreme court.

Working of Collegium System:

The collegium of the Supreme Court makes recommendations for appointments to the apex court and High Courts.

It can also veto the government if the names are sent back for reconsideration.

The basic theory behind the collegium system is that the judiciary should have primacy over the executive in matters of appointments/transfers in order to maintain independence.

Procedure of judicial appointments to the Supreme Court(SC):

- The appointment of the CJI/Judges of the SC is governed by a Memorandum of Procedure.
- Appointment of CJI:

- The CJI and the judges of the Supreme Court are appointed by the President under clause (2) of Article 124 of the Constitution.
- The appointment to the office of the CJI should be of the senior-most judge of the SC considered fit to hold the office.
- The Union Law Minister seeks the recommendation of the outgoing CJI on his successor. Once the CJI recommends it, the Law Minister forwards the communication to the Prime Minister who would advise the President on the appointment.
- Appointment of a Supreme Court judge:
 - The collegium recommends a candidate to the Union Law Minister prior to the vacancy.
 - The CJI ascertains the views of the senior-most judges in the Supreme Court, who hail from the High Court from where the person recommended belongs.
 - The opinions of each member of the Collegium and other judges consulted is made in writing and form part of the file on the candidate sent to the government.
 - If the CJI had consulted non-judges, he should form a memorandum containing the substance of consultation, which would also be part of the file.
 - After the receipt of the Collegium recommendation, the Law Minister forwards it to the Prime Minister, who would in turn advise the President for appointment.

Criticism of Collegium system:

- The system has been often criticized, even from within the judicial institution because of its lack of transparency.
- It has also been accused of nepotism.
- The government's efforts to amend the Constitution and bring a National Judicial Appointments Commission was struck down by a Constitution Bench adding to the controversy.

Has the increase in judicial appointments lowered pendency in the Supreme Court?

The increase in the number of judges has not translated into lower pendency of cases in the apex court over the years.

A steady rise in arrears regardless of the periodic increase in judicial strength has been a constant phenomenon since 1950.

The following table shows the pendency of cases with sanctioned strength of judges in SC (as per the article):

YEAR	NUMBER OF JUDGES(SC)	NUMBER OF CASES (Approx)
1950	8	100 plus
1960	14	3247
1978	18	14,000
1986	26	27,881
2009	31	50,000
2014	31	64,000
2021	34	69,855

Nut Graf: The retirement of the current CJI and other senior judges in the Supreme Court in the coming months has once again brought the limelight on the collegium system and the high pendency of cases in the highest level of judiciary. Also it is a now proven fact that there is need of other reforms apart from increasing the strength of judges as it has not had a significant impact on the number of pendency.

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. Tapping technology to check minor mineral plunder

Syllabus: Environment pollution and degradation.

Mains: Illegal sand mining.

Details:

- The demand for minor minerals like sand and gravel has crossed 60 million metric tons in India due to rapid development.
- It has thus become the second largest extractive industry on the planet, after water.
- The rampant and illegal mining of minor minerals continues unabated, even after stringent laws.

Provisions available against illegal mining:

- The administrative and regulatory powers to set rules, prescribe rates of royalty and mineral concessions alongwith enforcement are entrusted to the State governments exclusively.
- On the recommendation of the Supreme Court, the amended EIA of 2016 made environmental clearance mandatory for mining in areas even less than five hectares, including minor minerals.
- The 2016 amendment also had provisions for setting up of a District Environment Impact Assessment Authority (EIAA) and a District Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC).

Associated concerns with illegal mining:

- According to a State-wise review of EACs and EIAAs in States like Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the authorities review over 50 project proposals on a daily basis and the rejection rate stands at a mere 1%.
- As per United Nations Environment Programme, in 2019, India and China were top two countries where illegal sand mining has resulted in rampant environmental degradation.
- Moreover there is a lack of comprehensive assessment methodology for evaluation of the status of sand mining in India.
- The issue of illegal mining of minor minerals is often underestimated by the authorities, further accentuating environmental consequences.
- Regional studies by the Center for Science and Environment of the Yamuna riverbed in Uttar Pradesh has made following observations:
 - Rampant soil demands has severely impacted soil formation and the soil holding ability of the land
 - Severe loss to marine life.
 - An increased frequency of floods and droughts.
 - Degraded the water quality.
- Similarly, in a study of the Narmada basin it was found that the population of Mahseer fish reduced by 76% between 1963 and 2015 due to sand mining.
- Also in many cases it was found that gravel was being removed from agricultural lands or fallow lands of the government near major highways or construction projects due to its cost efficiency and accessibility.
- **Illegal mining** also causes extreme losses to the state exchequer. For example:
 - U.P. loses revenue from 70% of mining activities as only 30% of the area is legally mined.
 - The absence of royalty has resulted in a loss of ₹700 crore in Bihar.

- Karnataka suffered a loss of ₹100 crore as a result of non-payment of various cesses due to unregulated mining.

State response to judicial orders:

- According to a report of the Oversight Committee by the National Green Tribunal (NGT), Uttar Pradesh (where illegal sand mining has created a severe hazard) has either failed or complied partially with the orders issued regarding compensation for illegal sand mining.
- Judicial pronouncements were also neglected in West Bengal, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh.
- A State-wide review of the reasons behind non-compliance are:
 - Malfunctioned governance due to weak institutions.
 - Inadequate and scarce state resources to ensure enforcement.
 - Poorly drafted regulatory provisions.
 - Lack of adequate monitoring and evaluation mechanism.
 - Huge number of litigations that dampens state administrative capacity.

Use of technology to resolve the sand mining issues:

- Satellite imagery:
 - Satellite imagery can be used to assess the volume of extraction and also check the mining process.
 - Satellite pictures can also be used as evidence from the past 10 to 15 years to show the gravity of the issue and fix charges.
 - It was found that with well-planned execution of the directions of NGT to some states regarding use of satellite imaging the revenue from minor minerals mining increased considerably.
- Moreover drones, the internet of things (IoT) and blockchain technology can also be incorporated in monitoring mechanisms complemented by Global Positioning System, radar and Radio Frequency (RF) Locator.
 - Gujarat State governments and judicial directions by the High Court of Madras have highlighted the use of these technologies to check illegal sand mining.

Nut Graf: Protection of minor minerals requires not just investment in production and consumption measurement but also monitoring and planning tools. To this end, technology can be used as an enabler to provide a sustainable solution.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Alleged ISIS member held in Delhi

Syllabus: Role of External State & Non-State Actors in Creating Challenges to Internal Security

Prelims: ISIS, NIA

Context: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested an active ISIS member from Delhi claiming that he was collecting funds from sympathizers in India and other countries as well and sending these funds to Syria in the form of cryptocurrency to help ISIS activities.

G. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following pairs: (Level-Hard)

Caves	State
1. Borra	Andhra Pradesh
2. Lomas Rishi	Bihar
3. Mawsmai	Meghalaya
4. Mandapeshwar	Himachal Pradesh
5. Tabo	Maharashtra

Which of the pairs given above are correct?

- a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- b) 3, 4 and 5 only
- c) 1, 2, 4 and 5 only
- d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Answer: a

Explanation:

- **Pair 01 is correct,** The Borra Caves are located on the East Coast of India, in the Ananthagiri hills of the Araku Valley in Andhra Pradesh. They distinctly exhibit irregularly shaped stalactites and stalagmites and are considered the deepest caves in India.
- **Pair 02 is correct,** The Lomas Rishi Cave is one of the man-made in the Barabar and Nagarjuni hills of Bihar. It was built in the 3rd century BC, as part of the sacred architecture of the Ajivikas sect.



Image Credit: Wikipedia

- **Pair 03 is correct**, Mawsmai Cave is a limestone cave found near Cherrapunji, Meghalaya.
- **Pair 04 is incorrect**, The Mandapeshwar Caves an 8th Century rock-cut shrine dedicated to lord Shiva located in Maharashtra.
- **Pair 04 is incorrect**, Tabo Caves are located in Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh.

Q2. With respect to Mullaperiyar Dam, which of the following statements is/are correct? (Level-Medium)

1. It is a masonry gravity dam on the Periyar River
2. It is located in Kerala but is operated by the government of Tamil Nadu

Options:

- a) 1 only

- b) 2 only
- c) Both
- d) None

Answer: c

Explanation:

- **Statement 01 is correct**, It is a 126-year-old masonry gravity dam located on the confluence of the Mullayar and Periyar rivers in Kerala's Idukki district.
- **Statement 02 is correct**, The dam is owned, operated and maintained by Tamil Nadu.

Q3. Which of the following statements with respect to Nalanda University is/are correct? (Level-Medium)

1. It was founded by Kumargupta I of the Gupta dynasty in 5th century CE.
2. The archaeological site of Nalanda University in Bihar has been included in the UNESCO's World Heritage List
3. Xu Beihong was a Chinese buddhist monk who traveled to India during the reign of King Harsha Vardhan and studied at Nalanda.
4. Nalanda was ransacked and destroyed by Turkic invaders under Muhammad Ghori

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- **Statement 01 is correct**, Nalanda University was founded by Kumaragupta – I of the Gupta Dynasty in the 5th Century C.E. It was also supported by the famous ruler King Harshavardhana of Kannauj.
- **Statement 02 is correct**, Nalanda University got inscribed as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2016.
- **Statement 03 is incorrect**, Hiuen Tsang or Xuanzang, a Buddhist monk is said to have visited Nalanda in the 7th century. He studied for about 05 years at Nalanda. During his time at Nalanda, Hiuen Tsang studied logic, grammar, Sanskrit, and the Yogacara school of Buddhism.
- **Statement 04 is incorrect**, in 1193, Nalanda was destroyed by a military general of the Ghurid

Dynasty from Turk called Bakhtiyar Khilji.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Hansen's Disease:(Level-Easy)

1. It is an infection caused by Dhori virus
2. It can affect the nerves, skin, eyes, and lining of the nose (nasal mucosa).
3. Hansen's disease is not passed on from a mother to her unborn baby during pregnancy and it is also not spread through sexual contact.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- **Statement 01 is incorrect**, Hansen's disease/leprosy is an infection caused by bacteria called Mycobacterium leprae.
- **Statement 02 is correct**, it affects the skin, nerves, and mucous membranes (the soft, moist areas just inside the body's openings).
- **Statement 03 is correct**, It is not transmitted from a casual contact with a person who has Hansen's disease.
 - Hansen's disease is also not passed on from a mother to her unborn baby during pregnancy and it is also not spread through sexual contact.

Q5. The "Miyawaki method" is well known for (Level-Medium)(CSE Prelims-2022)

- a) Promotion of commercial farming in arid and semiarid areas
- b) Development of gardens using genetically modified flora
- c) Creation of mini forests in urban areas
- d) Harvesting wind energy on coastal areas and on sea surfaces

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Miyawaki Method is one of the most effective tree planting methods for creating forest cover quickly on degraded land that has been used for other purposes such as agriculture or construction.

The Miyawaki method for restoring tropical forests

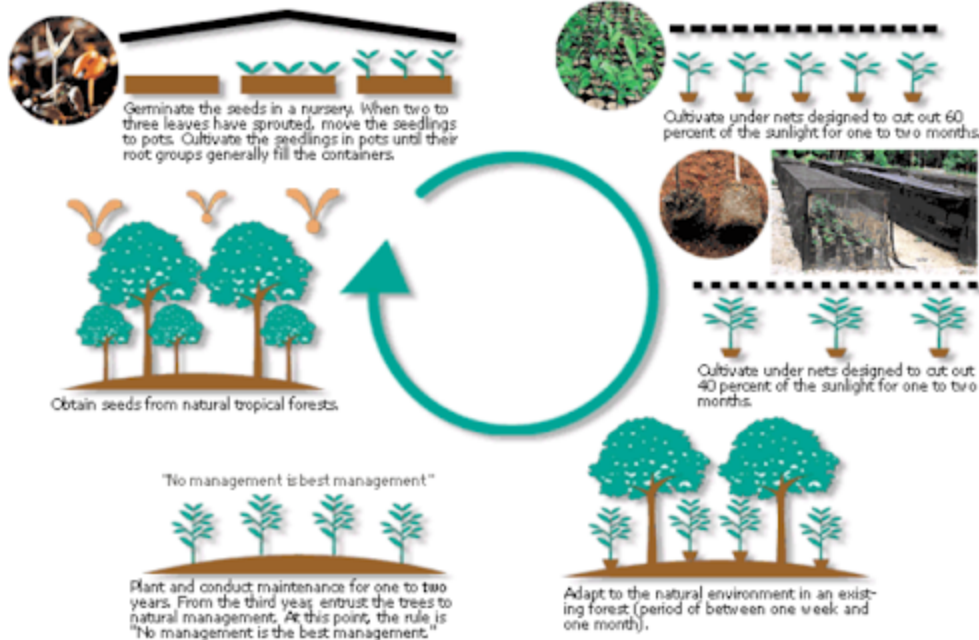


Image Credit: Pinterest

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Illegal mining of minor minerals continues unabated in many States in India. Discuss how technology can be used to provide a sustainable solution. (10 Marks, 150 Words) (Gs-3, Environment and Ecology)
2. Growing proxy politics in rural local body is diluting the ideas of decentralization and becoming one of the key factors in distorting rural democracy in India. Examine. (10 Marks, 150 Words) (Gs-2, Polity)