

Current Affairs MONTHLY



APRIL 2023

By
CivilsTap Himachal



**For HPAS & Other
Competitive
Exam in
Himachal Pradesh**

Mains

+91 7814622609

www.civilstaphimachal.com

Contents

CONTENTS	2	Scholarship schemes	42
GEOGRAPHY	4	Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act (AFSPA)	43
Making India earthquake prepared	4	Mode of execution in death penalty cases	45
Landslide atlas of India	6	Evergreening of patent	47
Even with 'moderate emissions', India's heat is set to get worse	7	Eliminating tuberculosis (tb) in India by 2025	48
Odisha reports 542 forest fires in last 7 days, highest in India: FSI	8	Healthcare in India has made great progress, but challenges remain	51
Changing western disturbances	9	Food security & national security	53
The Government Emphasizes A Holistic Approach To Disaster Management	10	civil society organizations require wholesome support	55
POPULATION AND ASSOCIATED ISSUES	12	Smart Pds scheme: a bold initiative in Digitisation	56
Women and men in India 2022	12	New India literacy Programme	56
POLITY AND CONSTITUTION	14	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	57
Right against self-incrimination and constitutional remedies	14	India should stick to the middle path in the new world disorder	57
Changes to the process of selecting election commissioner: significance and challenges	14	India Denmark cooperation	58
The anti-defection law is facing convulsions	17	Foreign contribution regulation act	59
Issues of local self-government	18	Japan's Asia energy transition initiative	60
Our e-courts project needs a big rehaul to assure us transparency	20	G-20 and need for multilateralism	61
Defamation law and disqualification of mps	21	Applying active non-alignment for Ukraine peace	63
OBC LISTING	23	Sri Lanka's recovery the significance of India's support	64
GOVERNANCE	24	India-Australia relations	65
Fixing the government schools issue	24	A 'Zeitenwende' in the India-Germany relationship	67
Civil society Organisations should count on their huge social capital	26	India – USA 5th Commercial Dialogue 2023 held	68
Centre-state relations and Punchhi commission.	28	A moment of reckoning for Aukus and Australia	69
Smart cities mission: with deadline looming, a status check	30	In Saudi-Iranian normalization, new challenges emerge in west Asia	70
Procedure for the inclusion in the scheduled tribes list	32	Doha political declaration on LDCS	72
Vibrant village programme & securing Himalayan borders	33	India-us pact on semiconductor	73
Women in public sector banks	35	India and the Aukus grouping	74
Supreme court asks for data on humane method of execution	37	China, India and the promise of the power	76
National security act	38	Us senate resolution for underlining backing India on McMahon line: what is the McMahon line?	77
Rejuvenating small water bodies	39	China, India and the promise of the power of two	78
GST APPELLATE TRIBUNAL	41	ICC issues arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin	80

India-Bangladesh friendship pipeline (IBFPL)	81	South Asia's human capital is the resilience it needs	124
China's Iran-Saudi deal is a wake-up call for India	82	CYBER SECURITY	126
India as a UNSC member: concluding on a high note, in Manhattan	84	Cyber warrior	126
IMF bailouts	85	DEVELOPMENT	128
Taiwan and one-China policy	86	India's sustainable development goals SDGS – performance so far	128
A shared g20 vision for the ocean commons	88	Will the national champions model of infrastructure development work?	130
Japan's official development assistance	90	The wide disparities in human development	131
Expansion of shanghai cooperation organization	90	TRANSPORT	133
SOCIAL ISSUES	92	Maritime India Vision (MIV)-2030	133
ILO-UNICEF JOINT REPORT ON SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN	92	SCIENCED AND TECHNOLOGY	135
Clean-tech as the next big thing in rural India	93	A sugar rush for emissions – on ethanol blending	135
The importance of women-led digital solutions	94	What is gpt-4 and how is it different from chatgpt?	135
Bridging the digital gender gap	94	Next-generation tech – on 6 g technology	136
safeguarding the rights of consumers	96	ENVIRONMENT	138
Women's underrepresentation in politics	98	Menace of plastic consumption	138
Inclusive development in education	101	Forest certification in India	139
Achieving universal health care	103	Unused funds, unsuitable land: the problems with compensatory afforestation in India	140
ECONOMY	106	Tourism in the Himalayas is not uniform; its impacts though are detrimental	142
A new trade strategy: India's performance on exports is a result of policy interventions	106	India misses renewable energy: parliamentary panel	143
Old pension system will take from the poor and give to the rich	107	Ipcc report on India's afforestation policy	145
Breaking barriers, building inclusion	107	Biotransformation technology	146
Doubling India's farmers income	109	Green hydrogen - substitute to fossil fuel	147
Silicon valley bank crisis: reasons and impacts - explained, pointwise	111	India's solar PV waste problem	150
Trade infrastructure for export scheme	113	ENERGY	152
Svb, signature bank collapse: what are 'too-big-to-fail' banks, and what makes indian banks safe	114	Clean energy transition of states and their challenges	152
India sees an increase in sugar exports	115	Powering the Amrit kaal through an integrated approach to ensure energy security	154
Banking: focus on new responsibilities and good governance	117		
Japan's pm Fumio Kishida writes: Japan and India renewing a pledge	119		
Mega textile parks	119		
India's digital public infrastructure (dpi)	121		
TOURISM	123		
Travel and tourism is poised for its own Amrit kaal	123		
DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND.	124		

GENERAL STUDIES 1.

GEOGRAPHY

MAKING INDIA EARTHQUAKE PREPARED

Context: The **destruction caused by earthquakes in Turkey** should be alarming for us as the geologists have warned of a **probable massive earthquake in the Himalayan state**.

India's Vulnerability:

- Earthquakes are a prominent danger in India's disaster profile which has caused huge loss of life and material.
- India has seen some of the greatest earthquakes in the last century.
- Nearly **58 percent of the Indian landmass** is vulnerable to earthquakes.
- **Frequent tremors:**
 - In recent period earthquakes in different parts of India, albeit of small magnitudes, have occurred. Few experts warn that frequent tremors were a matter of concern in the subcontinent, where several areas are prone to major seismic activities.
 - Whereas, according to others, India is witnessing micro tremors regularly which, in turn, is helping release tectonic stress and offering protection from the possibility of a devastating event.

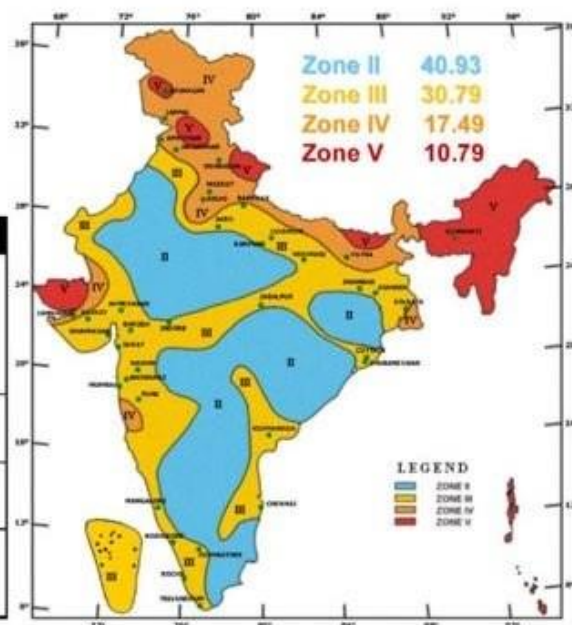
India's earthquake preparedness

- **Seismic Zones:**
 - Earthquake-prone areas of India have been identified on the basis of 3 factors, namely
 - Scientific inputs related to seismicity.
 - Earthquakes occurred in the past.
 - Tectonic setup of the region.
 - Based on these conditions, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) divided the country into four seismic zones, viz. Zone II, Zone III, Zone IV and Zone V.

Seismic Zone Map of India: -2002

About **59 percent** of the land area of India is liable to seismic hazard damage

Zone	Intensity
Zone V	Very High Risk Zone Area liable to shaking Intensity IX (and above)
Zone IV	High Risk Zone Intensity VIII
Zone III	Moderate Risk Zone Intensity VII
Zone II	Low Risk Zone VI (and lower)



- **India's policy on earthquake preparedness:**

- Currently, India's policy on earthquake preparedness operates primarily at the scale of structural details.
- Guided by the National Building Codes, this includes specifying dimensions of the structural members — columns, beams, etc. — and details of the reinforcements that join these elements together.
- While scientifically sound, this view on earthquake preparedness is criticised for being myopic.
- **National Seismic Risk Mitigation Programme (NSRMP):**
 - It is aimed at reducing the vulnerability of communities and their assets to natural disaster by taking appropriate mitigation measures and to strengthen the capacity of national and state entities to effectively plan for and respond to earthquakes.
- **Delhi High Court's recent action:**
 - Recently Delhi High Court has asked the state government to file a status report and action plan on the structural safety of buildings in Delhi.

Issues & Challenges

- **Shortcomings of India's policy on earthquake preparedness:**
 - The policy ignores the buildings that were constructed before such codes were published in 1962.
 - Such buildings form a large part of our cities.
 - It assumes infallibility in the processes of enforcement — relying only on penalisation and illegalities.
 - It treats earthquakes as a problem of individual buildings considering that they exist and behave in complete isolation from their urban context.
 - The truth is that buildings exist in clusters and in the event of an earthquake, behave as a system.
 - They collapse on nearby buildings and on the abutting streets — damaging buildings that might have otherwise survived and blocking evacuation routes.

Suggestions & way ahead

- Earthquake preparedness needs to act at the scale of building details and cities.
 - **Cities:**
 - At the scale of cities, the problem is more complex, massive, and unattended.
 - None of the urban renewal programmes — including the latest Smart Cities Mission — have devised an urban policy for earthquake preparedness.
 - **Building details:**
 - At the scale of building details, we need to create a system of retrofitting existing structures and enforcing seismic codes with more efficiency.
- **Need of a policy:**
 - We must look at Earthquake preparedness in the realm of policy and not just as legal enforcement. Such a policy should include two measures:
 - First, to create a system of tax-based or development rights-based incentives for retrofitting one's building up to seismic codes.
 - Such a system of incentives will enable the growth of an industry around retrofitting and will generate a body of well-trained professionals and competent organisations.
 - Second, by ensuring better enforcement of seismic codes through a similar model.
 - A step forward in this direction was the National Retrofitting Programme launched in 2014.
 - Under the programme, the Reserve Bank of India directed banks to deny loans for any building activity that does not meet the standards of earthquake-resistant design.
- **Urban-level policy:**
- An urban-level policy should start with surveys and audits that can generate earthquake vulnerability maps showing parts of the city that are more prone to serious damage.
- This should follow following criteria:

- The percentage of vulnerable structures in the area;
 - The availability of evacuation routes and distances from the nearest open ground;
 - Density of the urban fabric; and
 - Location of nearest relief services and the efficiency with which these services can reach affected sites.
- Using such maps, enforcement, incentives, and response centres can be proportionally distributed across the urban terrain.
 - **Utilizing Urban platforms:**
 - Programmes like the ongoing Urban 20 meetings are an excellent opportunity for international knowledge exchange on earthquake preparedness.

Global examples

- Cases like that of Japan and San Francisco are good examples of their Earthquake Preparedness.
 - **Japan:**
 - Japan has invested heavily in technological measures to mitigate the damage from the frequent earthquakes that it experiences.
 - Skyscrapers are built with counterweights and other high-tech provisions to minimise the impact of tremors.
 - Small houses are built on flexible foundations and public infrastructure is integrated with automated triggers that cut power, gas, and water lines during earthquakes.
 - **San Francisco:**
 - Another of the world's famous earthquake-prone cities San Francisco was devastated by an earthquake in April 1906.
 - The city saw more than 3,000 deaths and massive destruction of property.
- Following the disaster, San Francisco implemented policy changes similar to Japan's and when the next major earthquake hit in 1989, the city recorded just 63 casualties.

LANDSLIDE ATLAS OF INDIA

Context: All 12 districts of Himachal Pradesh have **figured on a list prepared by the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC)** of locations prone **to landslides**.

- The **Landslide Atlas** of India was released by **Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO)** at the “**National Meet on Disaster Risk Management — Trends & Technologies**” held at Hyderabad.
- The **NRSC, one of the centres of ISRO, manages data from aerial and satellite sources.**

About Landslide:

- A landslide is “**a movement of a mass of rock, earth or debris down a slope**”.

Types of flows

- **Debris flows:** It is a form of rapid mass movement in which a combination of loose soil, rock, organic matter, and slurry that flows downslope. They are commonly caused by intense precipitation or rapid snowmelt.
- **Earth flow:** It is a down-slope viscous flow of fine-grained material saturated with water.
- **Mudflow:** A mudflow is a wet or viscous fluid mass of fine and coarse-grained material that flows rapidly along drainage channels.
- **Creep:** Creep is the **slow, steady, downward movement of material** under gravity that occurs in a large area

Key Findings:

- India is among the **top four countries with the highest landslide risk**, where every year the estimated loss of **life per 100 km² is greater than one**.
- This Atlas provides risk assessment in **landslide locations during the period of 1998-2022 and covers vulnerable regions in 17 states and 02 UTs of India** in the Himalayas and Western Ghats.

- Northwest **Himalayas contribute 66.5% of landslides in India**, followed by Northeast Himalayas (**18.8%**) and **Western Ghats (14.7%)**.
- Top 5 districts based on their exposure to landslide: **Rudraprayag and Tehri Garhwal (Uttarakhand), Thrissur (Kerala), Rajouri (J&K), and Palakkad (Kerala)**
- The database includes three types of landslide inventory – **seasonal, event-based and route-wise**

About NRSC:

- National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) has the **mandate for the establishment of ground stations for receiving satellite data, generation of data products, dissemination to the users, development of techniques for remote sensing applications including disaster management support**, geospatial services for good governance and capacity building for professionals, faculty, and students.

EVEN WITH 'MODERATE EMISSIONS', INDIA'S HEAT IS SET TO GET WORSE

Context: The climate crisis is no longer a distant event that might happen in the future.

Indications of the impending climate crisis:

- Temperatures are rising, rainfall patterns are shifting, and **extreme events such as record-high temperatures**, etc.
- **For example**, the month of February (this year) in India was the hottest since 1901.
- According to a 2021 study (The Lancet), **more than five million people died** (between 2000-2019) on average each year worldwide because of extreme temperatures.
- **The IPCC 6th Assessment Report** states that **extreme heat events will grow** with increasing global warming.

The case of India:

- A study shows that the temperature in India has been **steadily increasing during both summer and winter**.
- The recorded increase in maximum and minimum temperature over 30 years (1990-2019) is up to **0.9° C and 0.5° C**, respectively.

Impact of increasing heat:

- A cause of suffering and **death** in extreme cases.
- It undermines systems such as **agriculture and other climate-sensitive sectors** that support the livelihoods and well-being of people.

Climate projections for the districts of India (2021-2050):

- **The summer maximum temperature will increase** (between 2° C – 3.5° C) even under a 'moderate emissions' scenario.
- **Even winter minimum temperatures are projected to increase** by 0.5° C to 3.5° C in the future.
- **The diurnal temperature range (DTR – variation between high and low air temperature during a single day)** is also changing.
 - A Department of Science and Technology study (2020) shows **an asymmetric increase in the minimum temperature** compared to the maximum.
- This will, in turn, increase the risk of **heat stress** → drought, deteriorating soil quality, crop failure, job loss, higher migration, morbidity, and mortality → can affect ecological systems, and the carbon economy.
- According to a 2019 ILO report, India is expected **to lose 5.8% of working hours in 2030 due to heat stress**.

Way ahead:

- Implement the **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction** through improved **early warning systems, public awareness, and formulation of heat action plans**.
- Prepare **district-level heat hotspot maps** to design long-term measures to reduce deaths due to extreme heat.

Best practices: Innovative strategies such as –

- Emergency cooling centres (similar to the ones in Toronto and Paris);
- **Survival guides** that are strategically displayed to survive extreme heat or heat waves (like in Athens);
- **White roofs** (Los Angeles);
- Green rooftops (Rotterdam);
- Self-shading tower blocks (Abu Dhabi); and
- Green corridors (Medellin).

ODISHA REPORTS 542 FOREST FIRES IN LAST 7 DAYS, HIGHEST IN INDIA: FSI

Context: Forest fires continued to remain unabated in Odisha after the state recorded 542 such cases in the last seven days making it the highest among all states in the country.

Forest fires in India:

Causes of a Forest fire:

- **Natural:** Such as **lightning**, high atmospheric temperatures, and dryness (low humidity) offer favourable circumstances.
- **Man-made:** When a source of fire like naked flame, cigarette, or bidi comes into contact with inflammable material.

Types of a forest fire:

- **Surface fire:** Spread along the surface litter (leaves, twigs, dry grasses) on the forest floor.
- **Ground fire:** Fires in the **subsurface organic fuels**, such as duff layers under forest stands, burn **underneath** and are often ignited by surface fires.
- **Crown fire:** A crown fire is one in which the crown of trees and shrubs burn, often sustained by a surface fire.

Good/bad:

- **Helps in the evolution of forests** (such as dry deciduous forests and savannahs),
- **Landscape/disease management** (indigenous people like the Soligas have used controlled forest fires to reduce incidences of tick-borne diseases),
- Controls the growth of **invasive species, etc.**
- However, forest fires can have **lasting negative impacts on biodiversity** (loss of flora, fauna, ecological services), the **economic stability** of many communities that live in forests, etc.

Vulnerability:

- ~**65%** of Indian forests are prone to occasional/frequent forest fire events.
- **Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh** were the most impacted states and **Gadchiroli, Kandhamal, and Bijapur** were the most impacted districts.
- The youngest mountain ranges of the **Himalayas**/chir (Pine) forests (Western > Eastern as E. Himalayas grow in high rain density) are the most vulnerable stretches of the world.
- There has been a **10-fold increase** in forest fire incidences in the last two decades.
- According to the MoEFCC, the country **reported 3,45,989 forest fire** incidents during (Nov 2020 and June 2021) and the state of Odisha reported 51,968 – the highest in India.

Impact of climate change:

- It might lead to more wildfire-inducing '**hot lightning**' strikes.
 - Hot lightning or **long continuing current strikes** (which can last up to a third of a second) are more likely to ignite wildfires than typical lightning strikes.

Preparedness and mitigation measures: Forest fires are usually **seasonal**. Hence, fires can be prevented in the summer –

- Through the removal of forest litter all along the forest boundary (“**Forest Fire Line**”).
- **By creating firebreaks/ ditches** in the forests.
- **The FSI is using satellite imaging technology** –
 - To set up fire alert systems (**MODIS, SNPP**) and analyse fire-affected forest areas
- **To better understand the ecology of forest fires** for restoration and fire prevention efforts.

CHANGING WESTERN DISTURBANCES

Context: According to recent studies, the **changing character of Western Disturbances** might be the primary cause of the abnormal **winter seasons** in India.

- India has **not experienced a normal winter season in the past three years**. The second wettest season in the country after the **monsoons** has remained unusually **dry and hot**.

How Western Disturbances Affected Winters in India Recently?

- The northwest region of India, which receives almost **30% of its annual rainfall during the winter season**, saw an **83% and 76% rainfall deficit in December 2022 and February 2023 respectively**.
- The absence of Western Disturbances caused the north Indian plains to **experience severe cold waves and cold days in December 2022** and most of January 2023 **due to the cold northern winds flowing down from the Himalayas**.
- Western Disturbances are also responsible for hailstorms that **damage standing crops, fog events that interrupt air, rail and road services** and cloud bursts that result in **flash floods**.

What are Western Disturbances?

- **About:**
 - Western Disturbances are a series of **cyclonic storms that originate in the Mediterranean region, travel over 9,000 km to bring winter rains to northwest India**.
 - A Western Disturbance **collects moisture from the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, and Caspian Sea** and traverses over **Iran and Afghanistan before hitting the western Himalayas**.
 - While the storm systems occur throughout the year, they travel to India mostly between **December and April because the trajectory of the subtropical westerly jet stream**, which transports them, shifts during the winter months to the rim of the Himalayas.
 - For the rest of the year, the jet stream travels from above the **Himalayas to the Tibetan Plateau and China**. Its trajectory changes as per the position of the Sun.
- **Significance for India:**
 - Western Disturbances are the **primary source of snowfall that replenishes the Himalayan glaciers** during winter.
 - These glaciers **feed major Himalayan rivers like the Ganga, Indus and Yamuna** as well as myriad mountain springs and rivulets.
 - These low-pressure storm systems **help farmers in India grow their rabi crop**.
- **Issues:**
 - The Western Disturbances are **not always the harbingers of good weather**. Sometimes WDs can cause **extreme weather events like floods, flash floods, landslides, dust storms, hail storms** and cold waves, destroying infrastructure and impacting life and livelihoods.

How Western Disturbances are Affected by Other Climatic Phenomena?

- **La Nina Event:**
 - For the past three years, the world has been in a La Niña phase, which refers to the **cooling of ocean surface temperature in the Pacific Ocean**.

- It **weakens the temperature gradient for the formation of Western Disturbances** as it reduces the temperature of the hot tropical air.
- **North Atlantic Oscillation:**
 - Western Disturbances are also influenced by the **North Atlantic Oscillation**, a **random fluctuation of air pressure over the North Atlantic Ocean** due to a high-pressure region above the **Azores Islands in the central North Atlantic** and a **low-pressure region over Iceland**.
 - Due to this, the weather system is currently in a negative phase, as both **low- and high-pressure systems are weak**, and it makes Western Disturbances **20% less frequent** and **7% less intense than a positive phase**.
- **Subtropical Jet Stream:**
 - The **northward shift of the subtropical westerly jet stream** not only reduces the chance of Western Disturbances **striking India** but also **increases the chance of them affecting higher latitudes such as the Tibetan Plateau** or even as far up as China and Russia.
 - This could indirectly affect the southwest monsoon, which accounts for **80% of India's annual rainfall**.
- **Interaction with Southwest Monsoon:**
 - The **warming of the Arctic region makes the polar front jet wavier**, causing **Western Disturbances to visit India more frequently during summers**.
 - Western Disturbances during **summer, monsoon, and post-monsoon periods increase the chances of them interacting with the southwest monsoon** and other associated local convection systems such as tropical depressions that travel northward from either the Bay of Bengal or the Arabian Sea.
 - Such interactions can cause catastrophic weather disasters.
 - For instance, In May 2021, a **remnant of the extremely severe cyclone Tauktae, which made landfall along the Gujarat coast**, travelled all the way to Delhi and **interacted with a Western Disturbance to cause heavy rainfall in Delhi and its vicinity**.

THE GOVERNMENT EMPHASIZES A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Context: The 3rd Session of the **National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (NPDRR)** has concluded in New Delhi.

About the Session:

- The session deliberated on 10-point agenda on Disaster Risk Reduction given by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and the Sendai Framework apart from other issues.
- **Organized by:** Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)+ National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)+ National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)+ National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM)
- **Theme:** "Building Local Resilience in a Changing Climate"

PM's 10-Point Agenda:

- **Importance of Local Resilience in Disaster Risk Reduction E.g.**
 - **Prime Minister's 10-Point Agenda:** Building local capacities and initiatives
 - **Kutch (Gujarat):** Bhunga houses of Kutch survived the earthquake to a large extent
 - **Kerala:** Traditional houses known as "Nalukettu," are built with sloping roofs to prevent waterlogging during floods.
 - **Local Disaster volunteers:**g. Apada Mitra, Yuvak Mandal and Sakhi Mandal
- Need for **Development Sectors to Imbibe Principles of Disaster Risk Management**
- Importance of **Risk Coverage for All**
- **Women's Leadership** and Greater Involvement in Disaster Risk Management
- Investment in **Global Risk Mapping**
- **Leveraging Technology** for Disaster Risk Reduction
- **Developing a Network of Universities** to Work on Disaster-Related Issues
- Utilizing **Social Media and Mobile Technologies** for Disaster Risk Reduction
- Learning from Disasters through **Post-Disaster Studies**

- **Need for Greater Cohesion in International Response** to Disasters E.g. in wake of the recent Earthquake in Syria and Turkey, **United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT)** activated its emergency GIS mapping service

What is Disaster Risk Reduction?

- Disaster risk reduction is **aimed at preventing new and reducing existing disaster risks and managing residual risk**, all of which contribute to strengthening resilience and therefore to the achievement of sustainable development.

Initiatives for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

- **Global:**

- Sendai Framework **(2015)**: Successor instrument to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)
- Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2022
- Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS) (Under the World Meteorological Organization): It provides access to early warnings in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
- **Sectoral Guide on Climate Information & Early Warning Systems** (by Green Climate Fund): It identifies investment opportunities in him impact sector for DRR

- **India's Initiatives:**

- **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure Society (CDRIS)**: To increase the resilience of infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks
- National Disaster Management Plan **2016 (NDMP)**: To coordinate response to natural or man-made disasters and for capacity-building in disaster resiliency and crisis response.
- **India aims to achieve zero mortality in all disasters** in collaboration with state governments and response agencies
- The Disaster Management Act, 2005, seeks to mainstream disaster risk reduction into development planning

CivilsTap Hlmachal

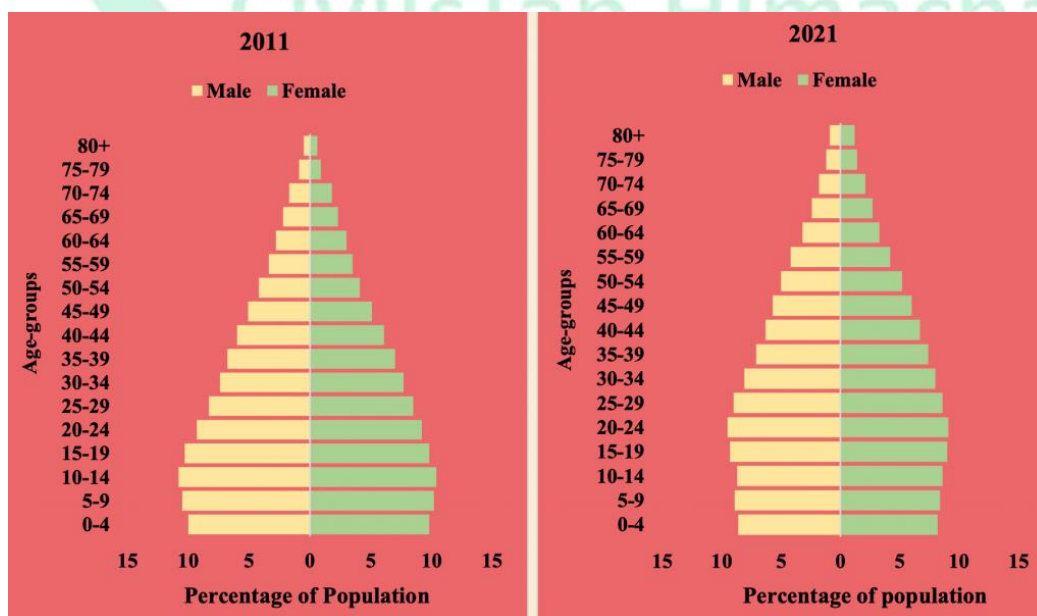
POPULATION AND ASSOCIATED ISSUES

WOMEN AND MEN IN INDIA 2022

Context: Recently, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has released **Women and Men in India 2022 report**.

What are the Findings of the Report?

- **Sex Ratio:**
 - The **sex ratio** at birth went up by three points to 907 in 2018-20 from 904 in 2017-19.
 - India's sex ratio (females per 1,000 males) is expected to improve to **952 by 2036**, up significantly from 943 in 2011.
- **Labour Force Participation:**
 - India's Labour Force Participation Rate for those above 15 years of age has been on the rise since 2017-2018. However, **women are severely lagging behind men**.
 - The rate was 77.2 for males and 32.8 for females in 2021-22, with no improvement in this disparity over the years.
 - Less participation is due to social **factors, educational qualifications and gender discrimination** in terms of wages and opportunities in the workplace.
- **Population Growth:**
 - The population growth, already **on a downward trend from 2.2% in 1971 to 1.1% in 2021**, is projected to fall further to 0.58% in 2036.
 - In absolute figures, this translates into 1.2 billion people with 48.5% female population as per **Census 2011** to an expected 1.5 billion in 2036 with a marginal improvement in the female population share (48.8%).
- **Age of Sex Structure:**
 - India's age and sex structure, as per which the population under 15 years of age is expected to decline and the **population above 60 years is expected to increase by 2036**.
 - Accordingly, **the population pyramid will undergo a shift as the base of the pyramid in 2036 would narrow down**, while the middle would be broadened.
 - The age and sex structure of a country's population can affect gender issues in a variety of ways. Age structure impacting various aspects of societies is determined primarily by trends in fertility and mortality.



- **Access to Health Information and Services:**

- Lack of access to resources and decision-making power, restrictions on mobility, etc make access to health **information and services more difficult for women** and girls than men and boys.

- **Fertility Rate:**

- The age-specific **fertility rate** for the 20-24 year and 25-29 years age group between 2016 and 2020 reduced from 135.4 and 166.0 to 113.6 and 139.6 respectively.
 - This is likely a function of **economic independence by attaining proper education** and securing a job.
- The same indicator for the 35-39 years age group increased from **32.7 in 2016 to 35.6 in 2020**.
 - The mean age for marriage has improved marginally up from 22.1 years in 2017 to 22.7 years in 2020.



CivilsTap Himachal

GENERAL STUDIES 2.

POLITY AND CONSTITUTION

RIGHT AGAINST SELF-INCRIMINATION AND CONSTITUTIONAL REMEDIES

Context: The **Supreme Court** refused to hear a bail plea by the Deputy CM of Delhi in the excise policy case, as he had approached the court directly under Article 32 of the Constitution instead of first seeking remedy in the High Court under Section 482 of the CrPC.

- SC argued that though in previous cases petitions were entertained directly under **Article 32**, those cases involved free speech issues while this case is about **Prevention of Corruption act**.

What is the Background?

- Previously, Special CBI Judge had granted **Central Bureau of Investigation(CBI)** custody of Deputy CM on the ground that he **'failed to provide satisfactory answers.'**
 - The court had rejected the argument that it was a violation of **right against self-incrimination**.

What is an Individual's Right against Self-incrimination?

- **Constitutional Provisions:**
- **Article 20** grants protection against arbitrary and excessive punishment to an accused person, whether citizen or foreigner or legal person like a company or a corporation. It contains three provisions in that direction:
 - It contains provisions related to **No ex-post-facto law, No double jeopardy, No self-incrimination.**
 - **No self-incrimination: No person** accused of any offence **shall be compelled to be a witness against himself.**
 - The protection against self-incrimination **extends to both oral evidence and documentary evidence.**
 - However, it **does not extend to**
 - compulsory production of material objects,
 - compulsion to give thumb impression, specimen signature, blood specimens, and
 - compulsory exhibition of the body.
 - Further, it extends **only to criminal proceedings** and **not to civil proceedings** or proceedings which are not of criminal nature.

CHANGES TO THE PROCESS OF SELECTING ELECTION COMMISSIONER: SIGNIFICANCE AND CHALLENGES

Context: In the case of Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India, a five-judge Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that a powerful committee must choose the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners. This committee has the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India as members (ECs).

About the case

What the Supreme Court said

Key highlights of what the apex court said in two separate, but concurring judgments that revamped the selection mechanism to appoint CEC and ECs.

1 "The right to vote is not just a statutory right but a constitutional right."

4 "Democracy is inextricably linked to the power of the people. Power of the ballot is supreme, capable of unseating the most powerful parties."

5 "A party in power will have an insatiable quest to continue in the saddle."

2 "The ballot is more potent than the most powerful gun."

6 "An EC that does not guarantee rule of law is against democracy."

3 "Parliament never intended the Executive to have absolute power to appoint CEC and ECs."

7 "Complete independence of ECs is paramount to ensure purity of electoral processes."



What are the changes introduced by SC regarding selecting Election Commissioner?

What the order says

■ The CEC and the election commissioners shall be appointed on recommendations by a three-member committee comprising PM, leader of the Opposition/leader of the largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha, and CJI

Existing practice

- The President makes the appointments on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers headed by PM
- Election commissioners have a tenure of 6 years or up to the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier

- **There are just five Articles (324-329)** in Part XV (Elections) of the Constitution which deals with CEC and ECs. The Constitution does not lay down a specific legislative process for the appointment of the CEC and ECs. Currently, the President makes the appointment on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister.
- The SC has now given the Opposition and the judiciary a say in the matter, ruling that the CEC and ECs must be appointed by the President on the advice of a committee comprising the PM, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India.

Other observations made by SC in respect of the election commission are:

- **Secured Tenure:** The SC noted that the conditions of service of Election Commissioners, after appointment, should not be "varied to their disadvantage". These directions hold that the tenures of the Election Commissioners should not be disturbed in any way. The Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991 requires that the CEC and Election Commissioners must hold the post for a period of six years.
- **Expenses from the Consolidated Fund of India:** The court has made an appeal to the Parliament and the Union Government to set up a permanent secretariat which draws its expenses directly from the Consolidated Fund of India and not the government.

What is the need for the change in selecting Election Commissioner?

- **To uphold the constitution:** Article 324(2) of the Constitution stipulated that the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners shall be appointed by the President subject to the provisions of any law made on that behalf by Parliament. It may not have happened in the last 70 years. This change will help make the constitutional requirement happen.

- **To ensure free and fair elections:** As a constitutional body vested with plenary powers of superintendence, direction and control over elections, the ECI is a vital component of the republic that requires functional freedom and constitutional protection to ensure free and fair elections.
- **To end monopoly:** To end the government monopoly and “exclusive control” over appointments to the highest poll body.
- **To bring uniformity:** The judgment also brings a certain uniformity in appointment procedures across institutions and statutory bodies responsible for independently maintaining democracy and institutional autonomy.
- **To fulfil the historical demand:** The demand for an independent system for the appointment of members of the Election Commission goes back nearly 50 years. It has been repeatedly recommended in various committees such as the Justice Tarkunde committee 1975; the Dinesh Goswami committee, 1990; the second administrative reforms commission, 2007, and by the Law Commission of India in its 255th report, 2015.

What are the advantages of the changes to the process of selecting election commissioners?

- **The** advantage of the neutral selection committee for selecting election commissioners are a) It addresses the conflict of interest inherent in the current selection process for election commissioners, b) Enforces the EC’s credibility and insulates the EC from political attacks, c) Can act as a constitutional lesson in India’s troubled times, and d) Recognises the fine distinction between conventional democracy and constitutional democracy.

What are the challenges associated with the changes to the process of selecting election commissioner?

- **Highlights “judicial activism”:** According to the government, “in the absence of a law, the President has the constitutional power.” Hence, Judiciary’s committee guidelines are seen as the era of judicial activism by some experts. Even the government has also asked the court to exhibit judicial restraint.
- **Note:** *The ruling cites past instances of the Court stepping in to fill a gap in the law, including the Vishaka guidelines to curb sexual harassment in the workplace, and the interpretation of the process of appointment of judges.*
- **Against the “doctrine of separation of power”:** The constitution has given powers to the Parliament to frame the law with respect to the appointments of the election commission. The Supreme Court’s intervention in this domain is regarded as a disregard for the doctrine of separation of powers. This is also against the “basic structure” of the Constitution.
- **Against the idea of “constitution is supreme”:** The words “subject to the provisions of any law made on that behalf by Parliament” mentioned in Article 324(2) have been included only after prolonged discussions in the Constituent Assembly. This highlights that the government can decide and frame any law.
- The debates made clear that **a)** The Parliament will step in and provide norms to govern the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioners, **b)** A law by Parliament is final and not the executive who exclusively calls the shots in the matter of appointments to the Election Commission.
- At this juncture, the involvement of the Court in the selection process has highlighted that the judiciary is the sole impartial body capable of ascertaining the best interests of the country.
- **Success is uncertain:** For the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), a similar panel for making appointments has been set up. There is no clear proof that the CBI Director maintains independence.

- Also, having the CJJ on appointing committees could give all appointments extra legitimacy and make it harder for judges to look objectively for mistakes or flaws in the process.

Way forward:

- **Extend safeguards to other Election Commissioners:**
- The procedural safeguards in place for effecting the removal of a Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) should be extended to the Election Commissioners under the first proviso to Article 324(5) of the Constitution. A CEC, like Supreme Court judges, can be removed from office only by way of a parliamentary process. However, no such protection of tenure is available to the Election Commissioners.
- The **retired member** of the Election Commission shall be **prohibited from taking any office of profit under the state.**
- Similarly, he shall be **prohibited from joining any political party for at least 10 years after relinquishing his office.**
- Constitutional functionaries have to be not just appointed fairly, but also held to account thereafter. So, the EC and other regulatory bodies should be **made autonomous of the executive and held answerable to designated committees of Parliament or committees of legislators.**
- The SC's attention to the functioning of EC is timely. The ruling examined a number of provisions in the Constitution, including the ones relating to the powers of the Supreme Court and High Court; establishing the SC, ST and Backward Classes Commissions, etc. But the judgement also raises questions about the selection process for the judiciary. The selection process for the judiciary needs reform.

THE ANTI-DEFECTION LAW IS FACING CONVULSIONS

Context: Parliament enacted the anti-defection law in 1985 to curb political defection. The promise of political stability provided by the law seems to be facing challenges, especially in the last five years.

Objectives of anti-defection law:

- **The first** was to curb the act of defection by disqualifying the defecting member.
- **The second** was to **protect political parties from instability.** Frequent defections from even well organised political parties leave them weak. Indian democracy is based essentially on a **party system.** Stable parties are **requirements of a stable democracy.**

How is the stability of parties the principal focus of the 10th schedule?

- It is clear from two provisions enacted in the 10th Schedule- the **provision of a split in a political party and that of a merger of two political parties.**
- 'Split' is no longer a **defence against disqualification** with the deletion of paragraph three of the Schedule. But, a closer look at this erstwhile provision is necessary for a proper understanding of the **true objective of this law.**
- Under this paragraph, if a **split in a political party** result in a faction coming into existence, and **one third of the legislators** move out of the party and **join that faction**, those members could get an **exemption from disqualification.**
- The point to note here is that one third of the legislators would get protection only if there was a **split in the original political party.** So, the split in the original political party is the precondition for exempting one third of legislators from disqualification.
- Paragraph four protects defecting members from disqualification. The condition is **merger of the original political party** with another party and **two thirds of the legislators agreeing to such a merger.**
- It can be analysed from paragraph three and four that the legislators do not have the **freedom to bring about a split or merger.** It is the original political party in both cases which takes that decision.
- The argument that the Speaker **cannot make inquiry into the split or merger** is not right. The Speaker takes the decision only after **ascertaining the fact of the merger.**

- This means that for exempting defecting legislators from disqualification, merger is taken into account only if two thirds of legislators have agreed to it.

What are the constitutional questions that arose in the Maharashtra case?

- The first question that should be decided by the Court is related to the **validity of whip**. The breakaway group of the Members of the Legislative Assembly chose its own whip. It also reportedly issued whips to all the MLAs of the Shiv Sena.
- But the question related to the validity of the whip should have been decided on the basis of the **explanation (a) to paragraph 2(1)(a)**. It says that an elected member of a House shall be deemed to belong to the **political party who made them candidate for election**.
- This explanation makes it clear that the party which can **legally issue the whip** is the Shiv Sena led by Uddhav Thackeray as this is the party which set them up as candidates in the last election.
- It should not be forgotten that the anti-defection law was enacted to **punish defectors, not to facilitate defection**.
- The Supreme Court by allowing the Election Commission of India to decide the **petition under paragraph 15 of the symbols order** has put the cart before the horse.
- The **10th Schedule** is a **constitutional law** and **paragraph 15 of the symbols order** is **subordinate legislation**. The disqualification proceedings under it should have been given primacy over the proceedings under paragraph 15.

ISSUES OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Context: 2023 is the 30th anniversary of the passing of the 73rd and 74th Amendments.

About 73rd and 74th Amendments

- **The Amendments:**
 - 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were passed by Parliament in December 1992.
 - The Acts came into force as the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 on April 24, 1993 and the Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992 on June 1, 1993.
 - Through these amendments, **local self-governance was introduced in rural and urban India**.
- **Addition of Part IX & Part IXA:**
 - These amendments added two new parts to the Constitution, namely, 73rd Amendment added **Part IX** titled **"The Panchayats"** and 74th Amendment added **Part IXA** titled **"The Municipalities"**.

Salient Features of the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts

- Panchayats and Municipalities will be **"institutions of self-government"**.
 - Basic units of the democratic system-**Gram Sabhas (villages)** and **Ward Committees (Municipalities)** comprising all the **adult members registered as voters**.
 - **Three-tier system of panchayats** at village, **intermediate block/taluk/mandal** and district levels except in States with **population is below 20 lakhs (Article 243B)**.
- **Composition:**
 - Seats at all levels to be **filled by direct elections [Article 243C (2)]**.
 - **SCs and STs:**
 - **Seats reserved** for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and **chairpersons** of the Panchayats at all levels also shall be reserved for SCs and STs in proportion to their population.
 - **Women:**
 - One-third of the total number of seats to be reserved for women.
 - One-third of the seats reserved for SCs and STs also reserved for women.
 - One-third offices of chairpersons at all levels reserved for women (**Article 243D**).
- **Duration:**

- Uniform five-year term and elections to constitute new bodies to be completed before the expiry of the term.
- In the event of dissolution, elections compulsorily within six months (**Article 243E**).
- **State Election Commission:**
 - Independent Election Commission in each State for superintendence, direction and control of the electoral rolls (**Article 243K**).
- **Functions:**
 - Panchayats to prepare plans for economic development and social justice in respect of subjects as devolved by law to the various levels of Panchayats including the subjects as illustrated in Eleventh Schedule (**Article 243G**).
 - 74th Amendment provides for a **District Planning Committee** to consolidate the plans prepared by Panchayats and Municipalities (**Article 243ZD**).
- **Funds:**
 - **Budgetary allocation** from State Governments, **share of revenue** of certain taxes, collection and retention of the revenue it raises, Central Government programmes and grants, Union Finance Commission grants (**Article 243H**).
- **State Finance Commission:**
 - Establish a Finance Commission in each State to determine the principles on the basis of which adequate financial resources would be ensured for panchayats and municipalities (**Article 243I**).

Significance of the Amendments

- **The 73rd and 74th amendments did achieve a lot.**
 - In some areas, they led to the **state acquiring a distinct presence** on the ground;
 - They gave millions of citizens **identities as representatives**;
 - They provided a conduit for **sharing power**;
 - They created **deliberative spaces**,
 - Led to the creation of new norms, especially around the **participation of women** and a churn in **local elites**.
 - They slowly **built-up local capacities**, and
 - Led to a wide range of **functions being devolved** to local government.
- **Apart from that,**
 - Panchayati Raj has also increased cooperation among people, their democratic participation and representation.
 - It has played an important role in decentralisation of power and has made India more **inclusive**.
 - Gram Panchayats **provide basic services** in villages and also plan for local economic development of the population.
- **Development plans & efficiency:**
 - **Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)** improves efficiency of public services.
 - It helps in ensuring Good Governance as the Panchayati Raj system works on the pillars of 'Consensus' and 'Participation' which form an important part of Good Governance.

Challenges

- Local government requires many **technical, administrative and financial fixes**.
- **Low spending:**
 - India has the lowest spending on local government as a proportion of resources.
 - The state at local levels is competent, it is just constantly being let down by lack of support and investment from the top.
- **Constraints:**
 - The constraints placed on them by a combination of **bureaucratic control** and **deliberate underinvestment in capacity**, and the **lack of political pathways** for successful panchayat performers to rise in their parties, limit their salience.
- **Obsolete distinction between Panchayats & municipalities:**

- There is a case to be made that the distinction between the 73rd and 74th amendments is now obsolete.
- There are opinions for the creation of a **unified district-level local government** rather than a distinction between urban and rural.
 - Many of the decisions consequential for India's urbanisation, like land use change, for example, are being made in "panchayats"; there is arbitrage over how a settlement gets classified, and rural and urban is now, at best, a continuum.
- **Lack of Computer-based knowledge and Infrastructure:**
 - The government initiated the e-panchayat project in about 360-gram panchayats.
 - However, most of these districts lack infrastructure, skills and have poor broadband internet connectivity.
- **Proxy Presence of female Gram Pradhans:**
 - Female pradhans are more likely to be influenced by the family members to stand for the polls and post winning; most of the work is handled by the male family members.
 - On the face, the women won the election but are indirectly being controlled by the male members.

Way ahead

- It is high time that **specific corrective action** should be taken to ensure a truly representative form of governance.
 - These issues can be combated, but it requires cooperation by the people to accept these changes.
 - **Funding must be adequate** in order to run these institutions effectively and smoothly.
 - There **must also be accountability at all administrative levels** in order to hold corrupt officials responsible.
 - The focus must be on the **training and development of human resources** to eliminate any conceptual inconsistency.
 - **Women's role in the panchayat** must be recognised and not taken over by the male family members.
- **The state would be better served by**
 - Decentralisation than centralisation,
 - Transparency instead of opacity (hence the rti act),
 - Public reason instead of administrative discretion (hence independent regulators),
 - Local capacity instead of concentrated authority,
 - Active participation instead of subject status.

OUR E-COURTS PROJECT NEEDS A BIG REHAUL TO ASSURE US TRANSPARENCY

Context: The Union budget for 2022-23 allocated ₹7,000 crore for the third phase of the e-courts project. The project is administered by the e-committee of India's Supreme Court in partnership with the ministry of law and justice.

About the E-court Project and E-committee

- The project has helped with easier availability of judgments and case progression updates online on the e-courts website. However, the achievements are not significant when compared to problems being faced by the project.

What are the concerns with the project?

- **Delay in Investments:** A parliamentary standing committee in December 2022 acknowledged that no money was spent on the project in 2022-23. It was due to a failure in getting necessary approvals by the department of justice and the e-committee.

- **Functioning of the e-committee:** There is a lack of transparency in the functioning of the e-committee of the Supreme Court because it does not release any minutes of its meetings. It is also not clear how the e-committee selects various outsiders for its expert panels.
- **Audit:** Neither the e-committee nor the e-courts project has ever been audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Even the parliamentary panels have not reviewed the performance of the project.
- **Lack of transparency:** An attempt was made by the author to get the information of the final proposal for the project's Phase III through RTI. However, the Public Information Officer of the Supreme Court refused to share the proposal. The reason given was that the final proposal is still under consideration of the government.
- It raises questions on the logic on which the ₹7,000 crore outlay provided by the government.
- **Centralization of the project:** The Supreme Court has ruled that **high courts are in charge of the administration of the district judiciary in Indian states**. However, when it comes to the e-courts project, the e-committee implemented Phase I centrally.
- In the **second phase**, the high courts were put in charge of procurement and implementation, but the e-committee was still responsible for planning and setting standards.
- Even though the SC has attempted to democratize the committee's composition by staffing it with high court judges, it still functions in the centralized manner.

What can be done going ahead?

- **Decentralization:** Decentralization can improve the efficiency of the e-courts project. It can facilitate a greater technological integration with the e-systems of state governments. It will also encourage competition between states to modernize their own judiciary.
- **New Structure:** The Government by law can also create a new legal structure for India's e-courts project.

DEFAMATION LAW AND DISQUALIFICATION OF MPS

Context:

Recently, an **MP (Member of Parliament)** was sentenced to two years in jail in a **2019 Defamation Case over his remarks about another political leader** by the Surat Court.

- The case was filed under **Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 499 and 500**, dealing with defamation.

What do IPC sections 499 and 500 say?

- **Section 499 of the IPC** elaborates on how defamation could be through words – spoken or intended to be read, through signs, and also through visible representations.
 - These can either be published or spoken about a person with the intention of **damaging the reputation of that person**, or with the knowledge or reason to believe that the imputation will harm his reputation.
- **Section 500 stipulates** imprisonment of up to two years, with or without a fine, for someone **held guilty of criminal defamation**.

What Is Defamation?

- **About:**
 - Defamation is the **act of communicating false statements about a person** that injure the reputation of that person when observed through the eyes of an ordinary man.
 - Any false and unprivileged statement published or spoken deliberately, intentionally, knowingly with the intention to **damage someone's reputation is defamation**.
 - History of defamation can be traced in Roman law and German law. Abusive chants were capital punishment in Roman.
- **Defamation Law in India:**

- **Article 19 of the Constitution** grants freedom of speech to its citizens. However, Article 19(2) has imposed certain **reasonable exemptions to this freedom such as - Contempt of Court, defamation and incitement to an offense.**
- In India, defamation can both be a civil wrong and a criminal offense, depending on the objective they seek to achieve.
 - **A Civil Wrong** sees a wrong being redressed with monetary compensation, while a criminal law seeks to punish a **wrongdoer and send a message to others not to commit** such acts, with a jail term.
 - In a Criminal Offense, defamation has to be **established beyond reasonable doubt** but in a civil defamation suit, damages can be awarded based on probabilities.
- **Free Speech v/s Defamation laws:**
 - It is argued that the defamation laws are a violation of **Fundamental Rights** guaranteed under **Article 19 of the constitution.**
 - The Supreme Court has ruled that the criminal provisions of defamation are **constitutionally valid and are not in conflict with the right to free speech.**
 - The SC has also held that it is valid to treat **defamation as a public wrong** and that criminal defamation is **not a disproportionate restriction on free speech**, because protection of **reputation is a fundamental right** as well as a human right.
 - The Court relied on the judgments of other countries and reaffirmed the right to reputation as a part of the **right to life under Article 21.**
 - Using the principle of ‘balancing of fundamental rights’, the court held that the right to freedom and speech and expression cannot be “allowed so much room that even reputation of an individual which is a constituent of Article 21 would have no entry into that area”.

What are the Previous Defamation Judgements?

- ***Mahendra Ram Vs. Harnandan Prasad (1958)***: A letter written in Urdu was sent to the plaintiff. Therefore, he needed another person to read it to him. It was held that since the defendant knew the plaintiff does not know Urdu and he needs assistance, the act of the defendant **amounted to defamation.**
- ***Ram Jethmalani Vs. Subramanian Swamy (2006)***: The High Court of Delhi held Dr. Swamy for defaming Ram Jetmalani by saying that he **received money from a banned organization** to protect the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu from the case of assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.
- ***Shreya Singhal Vs. Union of India (2015)***: It is a landmark judgment regarding internet defamation. It held unconstitutional **Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000** which punishes for sending offensive messages through communication services.

What Happens if a Lawmaker/MP is Convicted?

- The conviction may disqualify an MP if the offense for which he is convicted is listed in **Section 8(1) of the Representation of the People (RPA) Act of 1951.**
 - This section includes offences such as section 153A (offence of **promoting enmity between different groups** on ground of **religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc.**, and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony) or section 171E (offence of **bribery**) or section 171F (offence of undue **influence or personation** at an election) and a few others.
- **Section 8(3) of the RPA** mandates that an MP can be disqualified if convicted and sentenced to at least 2 years of imprisonment.
 - However, the section also states that the disqualification takes effect only “**after three months have elapsed**” from the date of conviction.
 - Within that period, the convicted MP can file an **appeal against the sentence before the High Court.**

Conclusion

- Intentional acts of defamation are also punished with imprisonment which prohibits defaming a person with malice intention. The defamation law is also constitutional and is a reasonable restriction on the right to free speech and expression.

- However, it is no defamation if the acts done fall within the exceptions provided. Over the seventy-one years of Independence, there have been numerous cases of defamation and the court has interpreted each and every case with utmost care and they serve as precedents.

OBC LISTING

Context: Recently, Odisha Government introduced an **OBC law** to include castes in the State list by notification.

About

- The State government has proposed an amendment in **Section 9 of the Odisha State Commission of Backward Classes Act 1993**, by inserting, “notwithstanding anything contained in sub-section (1), the State government, may, by notification, **include such backward classes** in the list, if the said backward classes **have been specified in the Central list in relation to Odisha.**”
 - This Law gives power to the State government to include any class of citizens as Backward Class in the State list **if the said class has already been notified by the Government of India as OBC for the State of Odisha.**

Origin: OBCs in India

- First defined in the **1980 Mandal Commission** report, OBCs among Hindus were identified based on socio-educational field surveys, lists of OBCs notified by various State governments, the 1961 Census report, and extensive touring of the country.
- Among non-Hindus, the caste system was not found to be an inherent part of the religion.
 - However, for equality, untouchables who converted from Hinduism and occupational communities known by their traditional hereditary jobs, such as the Gujjars, Dhobis, and Telis, were also identified as OBCs.

Listing:

- Even though there is **one SC & ST list** for reservation benefits, in the case of OBCs, States were empowered to maintain their own list of OBCs to provide necessary benefits. Thus, we have
 - **Union OBC list for reservation in Central government jobs & Central Educational institutions**
 - **OBC lists at the State level (varies with each state) for reservation in State government jobs & State Educational institutions.**
- **The Constitution (102nd Amendment) Act, 2018** granted constitutional status to the **National Commission for Backward Castes (NCBC)**. It further inserted:
 - **Article 338B**, which deals with the structure, duties, and powers of the NCBC.
 - It was tasked with monitoring safeguards provided for socially and educationally backward classes, giving advice on their socio-economic development, inquiring into complaints and making recommendations, among other functions.
 - **Article 342A**, which deals with the powers of the President to notify a particular caste as an SEBC and the power of Parliament to change the list.

Supreme Court's observations and 127th Constitution Amendment Bill, 2021

- **The Supreme Court (in the Maratha Reservation case)** had ruled that **only the Centre had the power to draw up the OBC list**, as per the above interpretation of Constitution (102nd Amendment) Act (Article 342A only mentions President & Parliament with no reference to states)
- To reverse the verdict and to restore the powers of the state governments to maintain state list of OBCs, Parliament passed **127th Constitution Amendment Bill, 2021**
 - Amendment in **Articles 366(26C) and 338B (9)**, after which states will be able to directly notify OBC and SEBCs without having to refer to the NCBC, and the “state list” was being taken out of the domain of the President and will be notified by the Assembly.

GOVERNANCE

FIXING THE GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS ISSUE

Context: According to the Annual Status of Education Report 2022 report, government schools saw a sharp rise in enrolment for the first time in 16 years; basic literacy levels of children have taken a big hit, with their reading ability as compared to numeracy skills worsening much more sharply and dropping to pre-2012 levels.

- Government schools in **many states are predominantly attended by children from vulnerable social groups**, where girls' education is often treated as a formality for marriage prospects. In addition to funding issues, **there is a need to improve governance in schools and renovate dilapidated facilities** due to **Covid-19** closures.
- As ASER 2023 confirms, boys and girls of elementary school-going age have all come back to schools, but the current education system is failing them. However, it is possible to make learning attractive for children with little effort.
- While a lot has been done to improve the schools on the supply side with **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan** and subsequent efforts, there is a **need for rejuvenating and re-imagining learning in schools**.

Issues with the Functioning of Government Schools:

- **Poor Infrastructure:**
 - Many government schools lack basic facilities such as proper classrooms, clean drinking water, toilets, libraries, and playgrounds. This affects the overall quality of education provided to the students.
- **Lack of Trained Teachers:**
 - A significant number of government schools do not have well-trained and qualified teachers. This results in poor quality of teaching and a lack of enthusiasm among students.
- **Outdated Curriculum:**
 - The curriculum followed by many government schools is outdated and does not provide relevant skills required in the current job market. This results in a lack of employability among students.
- **Inadequate Funding:**
 - Many government schools suffer from inadequate funding, which affects their ability to provide basic facilities and attract well-qualified teachers.
- **Lack of Accountability:**
 - There is often a lack of accountability among school administrators and teachers in government schools. This results in poor quality of education and a lack of motivation among students.
- **Poor Teacher-Student Ratio:**
 - The teacher-student ratio in government schools is often low, resulting in inadequate attention given to individual students.
 - According to a report, India has nearly 1.2 lakh schools with just one teacher each.
 - The **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009** in its Schedule lays down Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) for both primary and upper primary schools.
 - At primary level the PTR should be 30:1 and at the upper primary level it should be 35:1.

Constitutional Provisions and Laws related to Education in India:

- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - Part IV of Indian Constitution, **Article 45 and Article 39 (f) of Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP)**, has a provision for state-funded as well as equitable and accessible education.
 - The **42nd Amendment to the Constitution in 1976** moved education from the State to the Concurrent List.
 - The education policies by the Central government provides a broad direction and state governments are expected to follow it. But it is not mandatory, for instance Tamil Nadu does not follow the three-language formula prescribed by the first education policy in 1968.

- The **86th Amendment in 2002** made education an enforceable right under Article 21-A.
 - **Article 21A** of the Constitution makes it obligatory on the State to provide free and compulsory education to children between the age of 6 and 14 years.
- **Related Laws:**
 - **Right To Education (RTE) Act, 2009** aims to provide primary education to all children aged 6 to 14 years and enforces education as a Fundamental Right.
 - It also **mandates 25% reservation for disadvantaged sections** of the society.
- **Government Initiatives:**
 - **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Mid Day Meal Scheme, National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning, PRAGYATA, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, PM SHRI Schools**

Way Forward:

- **Making Local Government Responsible with Funds:**
 - Local governments and women's collectives **should be given the responsibility for elementary schools with funds and functionaries.**
 - They must be **authorised to fill any vacancy by rationalisation or recruiting a community volunteer** who has cleared the Teacher Eligibility Test.
 - The devolved funds should be sufficient to meet the needs for basic learning and support. The school should become a community institution rather than be a government entity, which **can draw on voluntarism/donations and get the support of gadgets** to ensure healthy learning outcomes.
- **Training Teachers:**
 - All teachers and teacher educators (block and cluster coordinators, State/District resource persons) **should be trained in the use of gadgets and course material** that can facilitate learning.
 - Every classroom **must have a large TV and a good sound system to provide online lessons** that supplement what is taught in class.
- **Utilising SHGs:**
 - The **Mid-Day Meal** responsibility must be handed over to the village level **Self-Help Group (SHG)** of women.
 - The **Panchayat and School Management Committee** shall be the supervisors of the SHG.
 - Teachers should not have any role in the Mid-Day Meal scheme, except teaching.
- **Developing Public Libraries:**
 - Public libraries **should be developed where youths in the village can study and prepare for jobs and admissions** to good institutions.
 - Such community institutions attract volunteers.
 - **Karnataka has done outstanding work on strengthening its public libraries** and this has gains for school learning outcomes as well.
- **Using Innovating Methods:**
 - Sound boxes, video films, play-way learning items, indoor and outdoor sports, cultural activities for learning on a scale can be used.
 - With support from **Integrated Child Development Services, toys-based learning in early childhood can be started.**
 - The **New Education Policy 2022** mandates a continuum from ages 3 to 8 to ensure this important early beginning in life.
- **Healthcare Management:**
 - The **school leadership should take responsibility for the nutrition challenge** as too many committees can weaken concerted efforts.
 - It is important to assign accountability for the well-being of children to field functionaries such as Aanganwadi Sevikas, **Ashas, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMS)**, and Panchayat Secretaries.
 - **Collaborating with the local government is crucial for effective healthcare management** and to make a positive impact.
- **Promoting Community Campaigns:**
 - There **should be community campaigns and regular school level interactions with parents.**

- Teachers must build a relationship with every household to ensure children's care and learning.
- The **Nipun Bharat Mission** to ensure oral and written literacy and numeracy, should become a people's movement like the Total Literacy Campaign.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS SHOULD COUNT ON THEIR HUGE SOCIAL CAPITAL

- **Context:** The challenges that civil society organisations (CSO) in India face are new and enduring.

About the Civil Society Organizations in India

- **About:**

- India has a long history of civil society based on the concepts of *daana* (giving) and *seva* (service).
- **Civil society organization (CSO) or non-governmental organization (NGO)** are the organizations that are voluntary in spirit and without profit-making objectives—have been active in cultural promotion, education, health, and natural disaster relief.

- **Data on NGOs:**

- Today, about **1.5 million NGOs work in India** (i.e., nonprofit, voluntary citizens' groups organized on a local, national, or international level).
 - According to a survey conducted by **Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)**,
 - 26.5% of NGOs are engaged in **religious activities**,
 - while 21.3% work in the area of **community and/or social service**.
 - About one in five NGOs works in **education**,
 - while 17.9% are active in the fields of **sports and culture**.
 - Only 6.6% work in the **health sector**.

About Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA)

- **Background:**

- The FCRA was enacted during the Emergency in 1976 amid apprehensions that foreign powers were interfering in India's affairs by pumping money into the country through independent organisations.
- These concerns were, in fact, even older; they had been expressed in Parliament as early as in 1969.

- **Aim:**

- The law sought to regulate foreign donations to individuals and associations so that they functioned in a manner consistent with the values of a sovereign democratic republic.

FCRA regulations for the Civil Society Organizations in India

- **Tighter control:**

- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) **Act was amended** by the current government **in 2020**, giving the government **tighter control and scrutiny** over the **receipt and utilisation of foreign funds by NGOs**.

- **Designated FCRA account:**

- All NGOs seeking foreign donations have to open a designated FCRA account at the SBI branch.
- The NGOs can retain their existing FCRA account in any other bank but it will have to be mandatorily linked to the SBI branch in New Delhi.

- **Only banking channels allowed:**

- Foreign contribution has to be received only through banking channels and it has to be accounted for in the manner prescribed.

- **OCI or PIO:**

- Donations are given in Indian rupees by any foreign source including foreigners of Indian origin like OCI or PIO cardholders" should also be treated as foreign contributions.

- **Sovereignty and integrity:**

- It requires NGOs to give an undertaking that the acceptance of foreign funds is not likely to prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of India or impact friendly relations with any foreign state and does not disrupt communal harmony.

Challenges & criticisms

- **Related to FCRA regulations:**
 - **No voice for NGOs:**
 - FCRA laws are criticised for throttling voice of NGOs and ending the scope for popular **global causes such as environmental issues**, ensuring rights for forest dwellers or capacity building of most marginalised.
 - Advocacy-based institutions are most likely to be hit by new laws.
 - **Joblessness in SCOs:**
 - **Thousands working** in the social sector, **particularly in grassroots organisations**, have already been rendered jobless as the ban on sub-granting has caused **resource starvation** for these organisations.
 - **Draining of resources:**
 - There are also talks doing the rounds that civil society should collectively challenge the new laws.
 - But most of them are **wary of fighting this long battle** legally as many of them who have **lost their licenses** have already **drained their resources** and are finding it **difficult to pay the pending salaries of their staff**.
 - **Challenge of localisation:**
 - In the current scenario, the prominent challenge is localisation. The initiation of the fight for rights is strongly rooted in the factors at the local level. It requires local leadership.
- **Other Challenges:**
 - **No depiction of vulnerable children:**
 - Recently, the government has **warned CSOs** against using **representative visuals for fundraising activities** concerning development issues such as malnutrition.
 - **The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)** issued a directive to non-profits not to depict vulnerable children.
 - So, **every new directive is a new challenge** for civil society.
 - **Structural deficiencies:**
 - Many CSOs need to ramp up clear governance structures and policies. Without these structures, it can be difficult to maintain accountability and ensure that resources are used effectively.
 - Many CSOs lack the skills and resources to create and maintain professional management systems.
 - **Societal misinterpretations:**
 - CSOs often face misconceptions about their role in society. They are the targets of political interference and manipulation, which can limit their ability to operate.

Suggestions

- **For government:**
 - The governments should also realise that **some of its prominent acts or laws**, such as the Right to Information Act, The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and the National Food Security Act, among others, **will remain relevant if the foundations of civil society are strong**.
 - **Any attempt to disturb civil society will be tantamount to diluting these laws**.
 - **Any stringent measures would also adversely impact the monitoring of the implementation of various government schemes**, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, etc.
- **For NGOs:**
 - **Alternate ways of funding:**
 - Post new FCRA laws, many organisations have already started looking up to **local resource mobilisation (LRM)** and are largely focused on corporate funding through **corporate social responsibility (CSR)**.
 - **Charitable funding:**

- Civil society should explore **how to encourage more collective giving**, a form of charitable giving where groups pool their donations to create larger funds to tackle problems.
- **Utilizing technology:**
 - There is increasing awareness that increased use of data and digital technology can make charities stronger and even better at what they do.

Way ahead

- The collectivisation of national-level forums for supporting marginalised communities through the articulation of their needs, empowering identity or voices and deconstructing the old arrangements that have failed in performance and ideation is the way forward.

CENTRE-STATE RELATIONS AND PUNCHHI COMMISSION.

Context: Recently, the government's reply to an unstarred question revealed that the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has decided to start the process of seeking the states' comments on the Punchhi Commission's report on Centre-state relations. This is to obtain updated comments of the State Governments/ UT Administrations on the recommendations.

About Punchhi Commission

- India's federalism has been shaped by the complex interactions between the political actors at the Centre and the state level. Sarkaria Committee and the Punchhi Commission were the most important commissions established to reduce the government's complexity and streamline its operations.
- In April 2007, the government set up a three-person commission led by former Chief Justice of India M.M. Punchhi to look at the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government and how they work together. In 2010, this group submitted its report to the then-Home Minister.

Reason behind the non-implementation of the recommendations of Punchhi Commission on Centre-State relations:

- The central government wants to implement the recommendations, but before that, it wants to develop consensus among the states. The standing committee of the Inter-State Council (ISC) met three times in 2017 and once in 2018 to talk about the Punchhi commission's suggestions.
- The recommendations of the Standing Committee were finalized in the two meetings. But, the Centre has now decided to go back to the states for another round of feedback on the report. Hence, the implementation will be delayed further.

Challenges at present in Centre-State relations:

Political federalism:

- The Inter-State Council has met only once in the last seven years, while the National Development Council has not met at all.
- The constitutional office of the governor has come under scrutiny several times for encroaching on the powers of state executive and legislature.
- Many important and politically sensitive decisions are taken without reference to, and consultation with, the concerned states. For instance,
 - Article 370 was removed without consulting the state legislature.
 - Parliament legislated on "agriculture", entry no. 14 in the state list, to enact the three contentious farm laws, overstepping its jurisdiction and imposing a law on the states.
 - The BSF's jurisdiction was extended in Assam, West Bengal and Punjab without any consultation with the concerned states.
 - The New Education Policy has been flagged as encroaching on the federal nature of the polity.

- Students in Tamil Nadu have committed suicide over the discriminatory nature of the NEET examination. Other centralised examinations are also indifferent to languages spoken in different parts of India and education boards of different states.
- Recently, the rejection of the Republic Day tableaux of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal by the Centre prompted protests by the respective states.

Economic federalism:

- **Revenue sharing concern:** When it comes to sharing revenue, the states are upset with the Center. In an effort to provide economic relief and fulfil the GST shortfall, the Centre announced in 2020 two alternatives for borrowing to be returned through an extension of the compensation cess beyond June 2022. Some states agreed to look at the ideas, but others didn't want to "borrow from the market at a higher interest rate.
- **Vertical and horizontal revenue imbalances:** Two main challenges in the fiscal transfer system pertain to tackling the vertical (transfer of Union taxes to states) and horizontal (distribution between countries) imbalances. So far, the share of the states emanating from the combined revenues has remained more or less stable, thus taking care of the vertical balance. As far as horizontal balance is concerned, some Finance Commissions have addressed the issue of equalisation.
- **GST concern:** The GST has already taken away much of the autonomy available to states and has made the country's indirect tax regime unitary in nature.
- The tenure of the 15th Finance Commission was mired in controversy, and many states expressed apprehensions about devolution.
- NITI Aayog witnessed a boycott: The recent meeting of the Governing Council of NITI Aayog witnessed a boycott and mounting criticism from some states.

Environmental federalism:

- The State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs) have suffered from a lack of specificity in design and inadequate financial support from the Centre, and rank low among governance priorities in state capitals.
- The Centre controls the major part of national revenue (in 2018-19 it raised 62.7% of the aggregate resources of the Centre and states) and plays a large normative role in defining state priorities, only the states can assess and respond to the political and physical implications of climate impacts and local energy transitions.

What are the major recommendations of the Punchhi Commission on Centre-State relations?

Issue related to Governor:

- **Appointment:** The appointment of the Governor must be done by a panel which among others also has the state Chief minister.
- **Removal of Governor:** The doctrine of pleasure should end and should be deleted from the constitution. Governors should not be removed at the whim of the central government. Instead, a resolution by the state legislature should be there to remove Governor. There should be provisions for the impeachment of the Governor by the state legislature along the same lines as that of the President by Parliament.
- **On Inter-State Council (ISC):** ISC needs to be "substantially strengthened. The council must meet at least thrice a year on an agenda evolved after proper consultation with states.

On economic federalism

- Handling the issues listed in the Finance Commission's terms of reference should be done between the Center and the States. The States should be involved in the Finance Commissions' work to come up with the final terms of the contract.
- The commission was worried about the growing amount of money that was being made through cesses and surcharges. It was suggested that the Central Government look at all of the current cesses and surcharges to lower the amount they add to the total amount of taxes collected.
- The Finance Commission and the Planning Commission (now NITI Aayog) should work much closer together.

On environmental federalism:

- The Punchhi Commission was formed before major climate initiatives like the Paris Agreement (COP 21), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), etc. However, the committee has a dedicated volume on environmental, resource, and infrastructural issues related to federalism. For example:
- On water sharing: The National Water Resources Council needs to play a greater role in integrating policy and programmes on a continuous basis.
- **On forest:** A National Policy on 'Compensation' should be put together through consultation and consensus.
- **On mineral:** To determine royalty rates an independent statutory body comprising experts and representatives from Central, State, and industries and utilities need to be set up. The Central Government, if it differs from the recommendations or modifies them, would need to lay its reasons for the same, before Parliament.

What should be done to improve Centre-State Relations further?

- Apart from implementing the recommendations of the Punchhi Commission recommendations,
- The government should also work on economic federalism and a coordinated reform process at all levels of government to speed up growth, reduce poverty, get rid of inequality, and make sure that people develop. This will help make up for the disadvantages and problems that come with new and smaller states.
- There is a need to find a workable solution by making big changes to the way resources are given out. The Finance Commission's structure can also be changed so that it has more members and advisory bodies.
- The GST Council's job could be expanded so that it could talk about how resources should be used and make suggestions, even though these suggestions are not binding.
- In China and Indonesia over the last 20 years, having a strong political centre was good for everything except the economy. China had to split up its economy and change how it handled money with the states. When it comes to how to handle economic issues with the states, India can learn from how a strong Union government runs a decentralised economy.
- There is a need to evolve institutional mechanisms that will not only align resources, competencies, and capabilities of the governments at all levels but also engage civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector in the policymaking implementation process.
- There is a need to go beyond the concept of cooperative federalism and create a new federal architecture for collaborative engagement of the appropriate levels and actors in the policy-making and implementation process.

SMART CITIES MISSION: WITH DEADLINE LOOMING, A STATUS CHECK

Context: As the June 2023 deadline for completing the Smart Cities Mission approaches, the government has asked 20 of the worst-performing cities to buck up.

- These 20 cities are the ones that have completed the fewest projects under the mission.

Smart Cities Mission (SCM)

- **About:**
 - The Smart Cities Mission is an initiative of the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry that was launched by the Prime Minister on June 25th 2015.
 - Cities across the country were asked to submit proposals for projects to improve municipal services and to make their jurisdictions more liveable.
 - Between January 2016 and June 2018, the Ministry selected 100 cities for the Mission over five rounds.
- **Four pillars:**
 - Social Infrastructure,
 - Physical Infrastructure,
 - Institutional Infrastructure,
 - Economic Infrastructure.
- **Need:**

- India is the world's second-most populous nation.
- 31% of India's present population and contribute around 63% of GDP (Census 2011).
- Urban areas are anticipated to house 40% of India's people and contribute around 75% of India's GDP by the year 2030.
- **Objective & Significance:**
 - To promote cities that provide core infrastructure and give a decent quality of life to their citizens, a clean and sustainable environment and application of 'Smart' Solutions.
 - The project proposals ranged from making certain stretches of roads more accessible and pedestrian-friendly to more capital-intensive ones like laying water pipelines and constructing sewage treatment plants.
 - Make Cities liveable, inclusive, and sustainable (Area-based development).
 - Create employment opportunities.
- **Integrated Command and Control Centres:**
 - All 100 cities have also constructed Integrated Command and Control Centres to monitor all security, emergency and civic services.
 - During the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, these centres were converted into emergency response units by many of the cities.

Deadlines under the mission

- The projects were supposed to be completed within five years of the selection of the city, but in 2021 the Ministry changed the deadline for all cities to June 2023.
 - As of March 2023, the 100 cities have issued work orders for 7,799 projects. Out of these, 5,399 projects have been completed, and the rest are ongoing.
 - Only around 20 cities are likely to meet the June deadline; the rest will need more time.
 - Among the laggards are six cities from the Northeast, five Union Territories, and three state capitals.
- The government has asked 20 of the worst-performing cities, ones that have completed the fewest projects under the mission to buck up.

Challenges

- **Smart cities mission is a challenging project.**
 - Every city has its own set of challenges ranging from infrastructure, city dynamics, behavioral practice, etc.
- **Infrastructure development:**
 - A lot of challenges come up when a large scale infrastructure development is done.
 - The legal set-up, inconsistency in policies and regulatory norms are the major challenges in a country like India. They affect the actual execution of projects.
- **Technical Constraints & Technological Obsolescence:**
 - The smart city mission aims to harness the smart technologies to develop the city into a smart one.
 - However, most of the urban local bodies have a limited technical capacity to ensure the development of the smart cities.
 - These technical and technological limitations hinder the cost-effective and timely implementation of the smart steps.
- **Financing For Project:**
 - Keeping the funds and finances flowing in for the smart cities mission is a challenge. Most ULBs are not even financially self-sustainable.
 - Getting the right finances flowing in for the completion of the project and later the maintenance of the technological developments in the smart cities can be a challenge.
- **Transport:**
 - Urbanizing the public transport for urban mobility is a challenge for the government due to the inadequate transport system currently persisting in the cities.

- Various factors like lack of investment, high population density, zoning, and poor urban planning have been making the transit system in Indian cities inadequate.

Government Initiatives to Support the SCM

- Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT):
 - It was launched in June 2015 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. It Aims:
 - To ensure that every household has access to a tap with the assured supply of water and a sewerage connection.
 - To increase the amenity value of cities by developing greenery and well maintained open spaces like parks.
 - To reduce pollution by switching to public transport or constructing facilities for non-motorized transport.
- **National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM):**
 - It will create a shared digital infrastructure for urban India.
 - It shall work across the three pillars of people, process, and platform to provide complete support to cities and towns.
- **National Urban Learning Platform (NULP):**
 - It aims to propagate solutions and innovations that are underway, and act as an enabler of the rapid development of diverse new solutions developed by cities and states.
- **Ease of Living Index (EoLI):**
 - The EoLI is an assessment tool by the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs that evaluates the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development in the city.
- **India Smart Cities Awards Contest (ISAC):**
 - It was launched to reward the cities, projects and innovative ideas promoting 'smart; development in cities.
- The Urban Learning Internship Programme (TULIP):
 - TULIP is a program for providing fresh graduates with experiential learning opportunities in the urban sector.
 - It would help enhance the value-to-market of India's graduates and help create a potential talent pool in diverse fields like urban planning, transport engineering, environment, municipal finance etc.

Way ahead

- As India continues its growth trajectory, the quality of its urbanisation will become paramount to ensure that this growth is sustainable and equitable.
- It is imperative that the government finds a solution to overcome these challenges to see the dream project of turning more than 100 Indian cities into smart cities.
 - The successful implementation of this mission requires a reinforced focus on building capacities at all levels to learn new approaches and technologies, and bring sensitisation towards new roles, responsibilities and attitudes.

PROCEDURE FOR THE INCLUSION IN THE SCHEDULED TRIBES LIST

Context: Recently, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs responded to a question in the Rajya Sabha, which raised concerns about the need for a revision in the criteria and procedure for inclusion in the Scheduled Tribes list.

The current procedure and criteria for inclusion

- According to the modalities, for inclusion first framed in 1999, the proposal for inclusion **must originate** from the **respective State or Union Territory government**.
 - Following this, the proposal is sent to the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry, which sends it to the Office of the Registrar General of India (ORGI).
- If the ORGI approves the inclusion, the proposal is forwarded to the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.

- the **ORGI continues** to follow the criteria set out by the **Lokur Committee** in **1965** to decide whether a community can be included in the ST list.
 - These criteria include indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness.
- Only after the concurrence of these institutions, will the proposal go forward to the Cabinet to bring in the appropriate amendment to the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950.
- The final decision rests with the President's office issuing a notification specifying the changes under powers vested in it from Articles 341 and 342.

Benefits of Inclusion in ST List / Constitutional Safeguards

- Reservation in educational institutions has been provided in Article 15(4) of the constitution while reservation in posts and services has been provided in Article 16(4), 16(4A) and 16(4B) of the Constitution.
- Specific safeguards have been provided in Article 244 read with the provisions contained in the Fifth and Sixth Schedules to the Constitution.
- Article 243D provides reservation of Seats for Scheduled Tribes in Panchayats.
- Article 330 provides reservation of seats for Scheduled Tribes in the Lok Sabha.

Criticism

- Both the procedure and criteria for the inclusion of communities had been strongly criticised by an internal government task force formed in February 2014, for being "obsolete", "condescending", "dogmatic" and "rigid".
- The committee, led by then-Tribal Affairs Secretary Hrusikesh Panda had also said that the procedure as it was being followed was "cumbersome" and "defeats the Constitutional agenda for affirmative action and inclusion".
- The task force had concluded that these criteria and procedures were resulting in the exclusion of or delays in the inclusion of nearly 40 communities across the country.

Government Stands

- The Tribal Affairs Ministry insisted that the current procedure for inclusion of communities in the Scheduled Tribes list was "adequate".

Supreme Court's Observations

- In March 2022, the Supreme Court said it wanted to fix fool-proof parameters to determine if a person belongs to a Scheduled Tribe. It referred this matter to a larger bench.

How many Scheduled Tribes are there officially?

- According to the Scheduled Tribes in India as revealed in Census 2011, there are said to be 705 ethnic groups listed as Scheduled Tribes under Article 342. Over 10 crore Indians are notified as STs, of which 1.04 crore live in urban areas. The STs constitute 8.6% of the population and 11.3% of the rural population.

VIBRANT VILLAGE PROGRAMME & SECURING HIMALAYAN BORDERS

Context: The recently launched **Vibrant Village Programme** is hailed as a right step towards securing Himalayan borders.

About the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP)

- **About:**
 - The **Vibrant Village Programme** is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** recently approved by the Cabinet for the Financial Years 2022-23 to 2025-26.
 - The scheme will provide funds for the development of essential infrastructure and the creation of livelihood opportunities in 19 Districts and 46 Border blocks 4 states and 1 UT along the northern

land border of the country which will help in achieving inclusive growth and retaining the population in the border areas.

- In the first phase 663 Villages will be taken up in the programme.

- **Aim:**

- The program aims towards the comprehensive development of villages of blocks on the northern border thus improving the quality of life of people living in identified border villages.

- **Key highlights:**

- The scheme aids to **identify and develop** the **economic drivers** based on **local natural human and other resources** of the border villages on the northern border and the **development of growth centres** on the “**Hub and Spoke Model**”
 - **This will be done through:**
 - Promotion of **social entrepreneurship**,
 - Empowerment of youth and women through skill development and entrepreneurship,
 - Leveraging the tourism potential through promotion of local cultural, traditional knowledge and heritage and
 - Development of **sustainable eco-agribusinesses** on the concept of “**One village-One product**” through community based organisations, Cooperatives, SHGs, NGOs etc.
 - **Key outcomes that have been attempted are:**
 - Connectivity with all-weather road,
 - Drinking water,
 - 24x7 electricity – Solar and wind energy to be given focussed attention,
 - Mobile and internet connectivity.
 - Tourist centers, multi-purpose centers and health and wellness Centers.
 - **Vibrant Village Action Plans:**
 - Vibrant Village Action Plans will be created by the district administration with the help of Gram Panchayats. 100 % saturation of Central and state schemes will be ensured.

Significance

- This initiative will soon transform our border villages neighbouring **China, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan** and **Myanmar**.
 - Border villages are being provided with all basic amenities including modern housing and good roads; water and electricity supply; good education, health and communication facilities; access to Doordarshan channels, etc.
- This will help in encouraging people to **stay in their native locations** in border areas and **reversing the outmigration** from these villages adding to improved security of the border.

Issues & Challenges faced by Himalayan states

- **Social:**

- In 2018, the Parliamentary Standing Committee pointed towards **illiteracy, backwardness** and **lack of basic facilities** in our border areas.

- **Issue of migration:**

- Migration is common in the Himalayas, with large numbers of males leaving the countryside to find work in urban centres.

- **Security threats:**

- For decades Himalayan border villages remained untouched by development. Sensing an opportunity, China increased its influence along our borders by rapidly developing its infrastructure and increasing the presence of its army.
- India also suffered similar setbacks along the Pakistan border due to serious lapses.
- Terror activities have also increased along the Myanmar border.

- **Unplanned Urbanisation:**

- The **unplanned and unauthorised construction** has led to the blocking of the natural flow of water, which eventually results in **frequent landslides**.

- **Himalayan slopes** have become extremely unstable in the last few decades due to **increased construction, hydroelectric projects**, and the widening of the **National Highway**.
- **Subsidence of towns:**
 - It has been reported that subsidence of the kind we have seen at Joshimath is **also evident in several other Himalayan towns**.
- **Ecology under stress:**
 - Due to **population growth, and industrial and commercial activity**, the fragile ecology is under great stress.
 - The common threats are **deforestation, soil erosion and pressure on restricted land**.
- **Climate change:**
 - The effects of climate change are particularly worrisome in mountain environments, especially the impact on the region's water supply, which serves over 1.3 billion people living downstream.
 - The frequency of floods and droughts seems to be on the rise, as is the demand for water, food and energy.

Other initiatives by the government to secure Himalayan villages

- **PM Gram Sadak Yojna:**
 - The PM Gram Sadak Yojna to connect remote villages with all-weather roads.
 - It started with the construction of concrete roads in all villages with over 250 inhabitants.
 - Remote villages were also connected with a robust optical fibre network.
- **PM Awas Yojna:**
 - Similarly, under PM Awas Yojna, pucca houses were constructed in remote villages. People were provided with water and electricity connections and given toilets.
- **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem:**
 - **About:**
 - National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem is among the **eight national missions in India's first-ever National Action Plan on Climate Change**.
 - **Ecological significance of Himalayas, as stated in the mission document:**
 - Himalayan ecosystem is vital to the **ecological security of the Indian landmass**, which includes
 - Preservation of rich biodiversity,
 - Providing water security as the world's third ice pole after the Arctic and Antarctica and
 - Influencing weather patterns throughout the sub-continent.
 - **The mission attempts to address some important issues concerning**
 - Himalayan Glaciers and the associated hydrological consequences,
 - Biodiversity conservation and protection,
 - Wildlife conservation and protection,
 - Traditional knowledge societies and their livelihood and
 - Planning for sustaining of the Himalayan Ecosystem.

Way ahead

- People living in border villages are the first line of our defence; they are our sentinels.
- The Vibrant Village Programme is an important and commendable initiative that will address all of the issues & challenges faced by the Himalayan states.
- This will not only make our borders safe and secure, it will also bring remote and border villages into the national mainstream, and make them more vibrant, developed and self-sufficient.

WOMEN IN PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS

Context: Recently, data shared by the government shows **increased participation of women on the payrolls of public sector banks**.

About

- According to data shared by the Minister of State for Finance, in the Lok Sabha
 - The proportion of women employees has **increased over the past year in most public sector banks.**
 - In **three public sector banks women employees constitute 30% or more of the total work force.**
 - **Indian Overseas Bank** had the highest share of female staffers in their total staff strength at **36%**
- **Cabinet committee on Empowerment of Women** in its **fourth report (16 th lok sabha)** considered the working condition of women in public sector banks. It had the following suggestions
 - It found representation of women in high grades low and asked the government to treat it as an issue of high priority.
 - It called on the government to revisit policies regarding posting /transfer of women to distant places.
 - It found low awareness among women employees regarding the venues available to them for prevention of sexual harassment at work place.

Women's Labour force participation

- Data from the **Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)** shows that India's Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) has fallen to just 40% from an already low 47% in 2016.

CHART 1

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION & EMPLOYMENT RATES

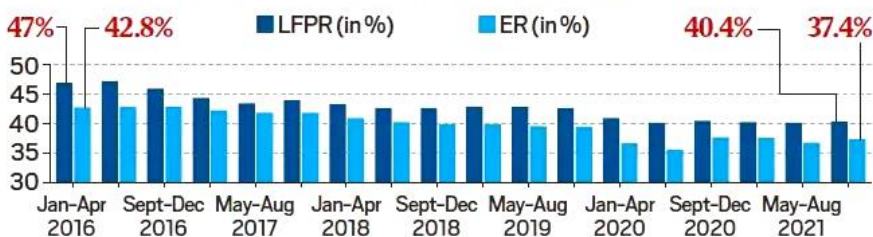
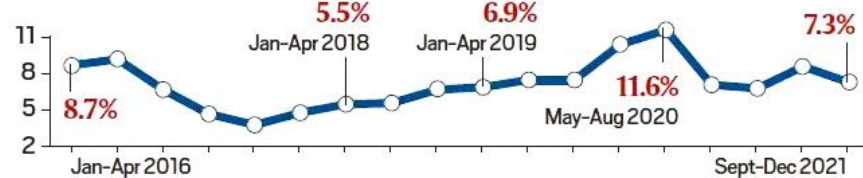


CHART 2

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



- The main reason for India's LFPR being low is the abysmally low level of female LFPR. **According to CMIE data, as of December 2021, while the male LFPR was 67.4%, the female LFPR was as low as 9.4%.**
- India ranks **135 among a total of 146 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2022**, which slipped from 112th position in 2020.
- According to the **World Bank. From 30.7% in 2006**, the proportion of working age women taking part in paid work dropped to **19.2% in 2021**,

Reasons for Low Participation

- **Lack of opportunities:** Rural distress has affected women the most as income-generating opportunities have disappeared. The lack of suitable job opportunities is acute for women in rural India.
- **Women education:** India is one of the most climatically vulnerable places. All the improvements done over decades could be erased in an instance by Natural calamity; the poor public infrastructure and limited state capacity make the task difficult.
- **Rising income among urban population:** It has removed the economic incentive for women to work.
- **Unpaid work:** Most Indian women are deeply engaged in running households, which is unpaid work, and does not count as being part of the workforce.

- **Demand-supply gap in employment:** The country has not created enough jobs and the demand-supply gap in employment opportunities results in women deciding to stay at home.
- **Working Conditions:** The non-availability of white-collar jobs, disproportionate long hours and lesser job security restricts the job opportunities for educated women in India.

Government Initiatives

- **The Maternity Benefit Act** entitles a woman working in the organized sector to 26 weeks of paid maternity leave. With regard to childcare, the Act has created a provision to provide for crèche facilities in every establishment having 50 or more workers.
- **The Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act**, defines sexual harassment at the workplace and creates an organisational mechanism for redressal of complaints.
- **Equal Remuneration Act, 1976; Factories (Amendment) Act, 1948** also seek to provide equality and fairness in women working conditions.

Way Forward

- Government policies should also start targeting women workers in the unorganised sector which houses the largest number of females and has little to no penetration of schemes.
- Apart from this Provision of amenities and basic infrastructure such as childcare facilities will go a long way in welcoming the entry of women into the labour force

SUPREME COURT ASKS FOR DATA ON HUMANE METHOD OF EXECUTION

Context: The Supreme Court of India has asked the Centre to provide data that may lead to a more **dignified, less painful, and socially acceptable method of executing prisoners** other than death by hanging.

- The court even suggested the **formation of an expert committee** to relook at India's current method of **putting criminals to death**.

What are the Arguments Around Execution of Prisoners?

- The court **clarified that it was not questioning the constitutionality of the death penalty but rather the method of execution**.
 - The government had said the mode of execution is a "matter of legislative policy," and the **death penalty is awarded only in the rarest of rare cases**.
- The court was hearing a petition challenging the constitutionality of death by hanging as a mode of execution.
 - **Section 354 (5) of the Code of Criminal Procedure** mandates that a person sentenced to death shall **"be hanged by the neck till he is dead"**.
 - It is argued that there is a need to evolve a **"humane, quick, and decent alternative"** and termed hanging as **"cruel and barbarous"** compared to lethal injection.
- However, the Centre had filed an affidavit in 2018 **supporting death by hanging and had not found the method of execution "barbaric, inhuman, and cruel"** compared to firing squads and lethal injections.

What is the Current Provision of Death Penalty in India?

- Certain offences under **Indian Penal Code**, for which the offenders can be sentenced to punishment of death are:
 - **Murder (Section 302)**
 - **Dacoity with murder (Section 396)**
 - **Criminal Conspiracy (Section 120B)**
 - **Waging war against the Government of India or attempting to do so (Section 121)**
 - **Abatement of mutiny (Section 132) and others.**

- The term **death penalty** is sometimes used interchangeably with **capital punishment**, though imposition of the penalty is not always followed by execution, it can be **commuted into life imprisonment or pardoned by the President under Article 72 of Indian Constitution**.

Where does the Death Penalty Exist in the World?

- According to **Amnesty International**, the **death penalty** continues to be quite widespread Asia, with **China, India, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia**, among others
 - The death penalty is **rare in Europe and the Americas** – with the notable exceptions of **Belarus, Guyana, Cuba and the United States**.
- 110 countries and territories around the world have abolished the death penalty, most recently **Sierra Leone, Papua New Guinea and Equatorial Guinea**

NATIONAL SECURITY ACT

Context: Recently, the **National Security Act** has been invoked in the case of self-styled Sikh preacher and on-the-run Waris Punjab De chief Amritpal Singh.

About National Security Act, 1980

- **About:**
 - The National Security Act was passed by the Parliament in 1980 and has been amended several times since then.
 - NSA “**empowers the state to detain a person without a formal charge and without trial**”.
- **Need of NSA:**
 - Under the Act, a person is taken into custody to **prevent them from acting** in any **manner prejudicial to “the security of the state”** or for “**maintenance of the public order**”.
- **Administrative order of District Magistrate:**
 - It is an **administrative order** passed either by the **Divisional Commissioner** or the **District Magistrate (DM)** and **not detention ordered by police** based on specific allegations or for a specific violation of the law.
- **Key highlights of NSA:**
 - **Even if a person is in police custody**, the District Magistrate can slap NSA against them.
 - Or, **if a person has been granted bail** by a trial court, they can be immediately detained under the NSA.
 - If the person has been **acquitted by the court**, the same person can be detained under the NSA.
 - The law **takes away an individual’s constitutional right to be produced before the magistrate within 24 hours**, as is the case when the accused is in police custody.
 - The detained person also **does not have the right to move a bail application** before a criminal court.
- **Grounds of detention:**
 - NSA can be invoked to prevent a person from acting in **any manner prejudicial to the defence of India, relations of India with foreign powers or the security of India**.
 - Among others, it can also be applied to prevent a person from acting in any manner **prejudicial to the maintenance of supply and services essential** to the community.
- **Period of detention:**
 - An individual **can be detained without a charge** for a **maximum period of 12 months**.
 - The detained person can be held for 10 to 12 days in special circumstances without being told the charges against them.

Protection available under the Act

- **Representation before an independent advisory board:**
 - The Indian Constitution allows both preventive detention and the right of protection against arrest and detention in certain cases, enshrined **under Article 22** of the Constitution.

- However, **Article 22(3)** provides that the rights available to an arrested person will **not be applicable in case of preventive detention**, thus an exception is carved out.
- One crucial procedural safeguard under the NSA is granted under **Article 22(5)**, where **all the detained persons have the right to make an effective representation before an independent advisory board, which consists of three members**; and the board is chaired by a member who is, or has been, a judge of a high court.
 - In a private investigation of 2021, it was found that in all the NSA cases before the Allahabad High Court in the previous three years, the independent advisory board upheld the detention.
- **The DM who passes the detention order is protected under the Act:**
 - No prosecution or any legal proceeding can be initiated against the official who carries out the orders. Therefore, the writ of habeas corpus is the available remedy under the Constitution against the state's power of taking people into custody under the NSA.

Criticism against NSA

- **Violation of Article 22:**
 - Human rights groups have been claiming that the Act **vitiates Article 22** of the Constitution and **various provisions under the CrPC** that safeguard the interest of an arrested person, namely that the arrested person should be informed regarding the ground of arrest and his right to consult a legal practitioner.
- **Not complying with CrPC:**
 - Under the CrPC, the arrested person has to be produced before the nearest Magistrate within 24 hours, but the NSA carves out an exception.
- **Misused by authorities:**
 - Some human rights groups argue that it is often misused by authorities to silence political opponents or those who are critical of the government.
 - There have been calls for the Act to be repealed or amended to prevent its abuse.

Way ahead

- The National Security Act is certainly a necessity to protect the nation from the abuse of democratic rights by certain anti-social elements.
- At the same time, questions about a conflict between human rights and national security will always arise. The need is to provide a balance between the two.
- The Act must also conform to the Constitutional spirit.

REJUVENATING SMALL WATER BODIES

Context:

- According to the **United Nations**, in the early to mid-2010s, **1.9 billion people of the global population lived in severely water-scarce areas**. But this number will increase to 2.7- 3.2 billion people by 2050.
- The **Water and Related Statistics (2021)**, published by the **Central Water Commission (CWC)** of India, mentions that **one out of three people will live in a water-stressed area by 2025**.
- But unfortunately, the **small water bodies (tanks and others) which have been supporting the agriculture** and domestic requirement of water for many years in India are fast vanishing now. **So, there is an urgent need to augment the water supply** wherever possible to avert the looming water crisis.

What are the Benefits Derived from Small Water Bodies?

- **Easy Access to Water:**
 - SWBs can **provide easy access to water for domestic needs, animal husbandry**, drinking water and agriculture particularly in rural areas. This can **help improve water security and reduce the burden of water collection for households**.

- SWBs are located in every village, reducing the distance women have to walk to fetch water for their drinking needs.
- **Low Maintenance Cost:**
 - Compared to large dams and reservoirs, SWBs are relatively low-cost to construct and maintain. This makes them an attractive option for small-scale water storage and management.
- **Helpful for Farmers:**
 - SWBs can be **used for irrigation and aquaculture**, providing a reliable source of water for farming activities. This can **help increase crop yields and support livelihoods for farmers**.
 - **Effective distribution of water without conflicts helps reduce poverty** among small and marginal farmers.
- **Helps in Groundwater Recharge:**
 - SWBs can also **help recharge groundwater resources, particularly in areas where groundwater depletion is a concern**. By capturing and storing rainwater, SWBs can help replenish groundwater aquifers and improve overall water availability.
- **Biodiversity:**
 - Small water bodies **support a diverse range of plant and animal species**, including many rare and endangered species. They **provide important habitat and breeding grounds for aquatic and semi-aquatic organisms**, such as fish, amphibians, reptiles, and birds.
- **Water Quality:**
 - Small water bodies can help to improve water quality by acting as natural filters, removing **pollutants and sediment from runoff water** before it enters larger bodies of water. They can also help to recharge groundwater and maintain water levels during droughts.
- **Flood Control:**
 - Small water bodies can help to reduce the risk of flooding by capturing and storing excess water during heavy rain events, and slowly releasing it over time.

What are the Issues Facing the Small Water Bodies today?

- **Continuous Encroachment on Catchment Areas:**
 - Small water bodies such as lakes, ponds, and streams are under constant threat due to encroachment on their catchment areas.
 - As urbanization expands, people are building houses, commercial buildings, and other infrastructure in and around the catchment areas of these water bodies.
 - This can lead to the destruction of natural vegetation, soil erosion, and pollution of the water body itself.
 - The urban agglomeration witnessed from the 1990s has severely impacted SWBs, turning many of them into dumping grounds.
 - The Standing Committee on Water Resources (2012-13) underlined in its 16th report that **most of the water bodies in the country were encroached upon by State agencies themselves**.
 - According to the **Standing Committee on Water Resources (2012-13)**, about **one million hectares of irrigation potential was lost due to encroachment** and other reasons.
- **Lack of Annual Maintenance:**
 - Small water bodies **require regular maintenance to keep them healthy and functional**. However, due to limited resources, **these bodies are often neglected and left to deteriorate**.
 - The **lack of maintenance can result in a build-up of sediment, debris, and pollutants**, leading to poor water quality and even the complete drying up of the water body.
- **Pollution:**
 - **Small water bodies are often exposed to pollution** from various sources, such as agricultural runoff, sewage, industrial waste, and urban development.
 - Pollution can lead to a **range of ecological problems, including eutrophication**, algal blooms, and fish kills.
- **Habitat Loss:**

- Small water bodies are **often threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation due to land use changes**, such as **urbanization, deforestation**, and agricultural intensification. This can lead to **declines in biodiversity** and ecological functioning.
- **Invasive Species:**
 - Small water bodies can be **vulnerable to invasion by non-native species, which can outcompete native species** and disrupt ecological processes.
 - Invasive species can also lead to declines in water quality and habitat quality.
- **Climate Change:**
 - Small water bodies are also **affected by climate change, which can lead to changes in water availability**, temperature, and quality. Climate change can also exacerbate the impacts of other stressors, such as pollution and habitat loss.
- **Overuse and Exploitation:**
 - Small water bodies can be **overused and exploited for a variety of purposes, such as irrigation, drinking water, recreation, and fisheries**.
 - **Overuse can lead to depletion of water resources**, degradation of water quality, and declines in biodiversity.

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Strong Legislation is Needed:**
 - Considering the ever-increasing encroachments, **strong legislation should urgently be enacted to make encroachment on water bodies a cognisable offence**.
 - In 2014, the **Madras High Court ruled that no approval should be granted for building plans or layouts on lands** situated along SWBs (Streams, Water Bodies, and Wetlands).
- **Creating a Separate Ministry for Small Water Bodies:**
 - Understanding the dying state of SWBs, a **separate Ministry for Small Water Bodies should be created with adequate funding** to conduct periodic repair and rehabilitation works.
 - Without the participation of farmers who are the main beneficiaries of SWBs, it is **difficult to improve the performance of these age-old oases**.
- **Setting up a Tank Users Organisation:**
 - **Farmers must voluntarily come forward to set up a tank users' organisation and undertake the repairing of SWBs**, as followed earlier under the age-old Kudimaramathu system.
 - Since corporates are increasingly using water for various purposes, **they should be asked to repair and renovate SWBs under the ambit of Corporate Social Responsibility**.
- **Avoid Contamination:**
 - Small water bodies are **vulnerable to pollution from runoff from agricultural fields**, industrial activities, and residential areas.
 - To protect them, **it is important to avoid the contamination of water bodies** by preventing the discharge of harmful chemicals and wastes into them.
- **Preserving the Surrounding Land:**
 - The **health of small water bodies is closely linked to the health of the surrounding land**. Protecting the surrounding land from development, deforestation, and other activities that lead to soil erosion can help prevent sedimentation and nutrient pollution in the water.
- **Control Invasive Species:**
 - Invasive species such as non-native plants and animals can disrupt the ecological balance of small water bodies. **Control measures should be implemented to prevent their introduction and spread**.
- **Raising Awareness:**
 - Raising public awareness about the **importance of small water bodies can help to generate support for their protection**. This can include activities such as organizing community events, distributing educational materials, and engaging with local stakeholders.

Context: Recently, **The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council**, approved the creation of a national tribunal for the **redressal of GST disputes**.

Need for the Tribunal

- In the absence of GST Appellate Tribunals, **taxpayers** are **filing writ petitions** to directly move the **High Court** these burdens **the already overburdened High Courts** and they may not have specialized benches for GST matters.
- The absence of the GST Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT) has led to a huge pile-up of cases
- Without a tribunal, taxpayers who feel aggrieved have no choice but to **wait for justice** while revenue authorities aggressively pursue their orders

About GST Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT)

- Section (109) of the **Goods and Service Tax Act, 2017 (CGST Act)** mandates the constitution of a GSTAT and its Benches.
- It is a specialized authority to resolve disputes **related to GST laws at the appellate level**.
- The **principal bench of the GSTAT will be located in New Delhi**, and each state can decide on the number of benches or boards they require, subject to GST council approval.

Composition

- The bench will consist of **two judicial members and two technical members**, with the selection panel including a senior judicial member from the State High Court.
 - The Tribunal is likely to **be headed by a former Supreme Court judge or a former Chief Justice of a High Court**

Powers of the Appellate Tribunal

- As per the **Code of Civil Procedure, 1908**, the GST Appellate Tribunal holds the same powers as the court and is deemed Civil Court for trying a case.
- It has been granted the powers to hear appeals and to pass orders and directions, including those for the recovery of amounts due, for the enforcement of its orders, and for the rectification of mistakes.
- It also has the power to impose penalties, revoke or cancel registrations, and take such other measures as may be necessary to ensure compliance with the GST laws.
- Its framework may permit the resolution of disputes involving dues or fines of less than Rs. 50 lakh by a single-member bench.

SCHOLARSHIP SCHEMES

Context: Recently, the **Parliamentary Standing Committee** on Social Justice and Empowerment highlighted the funds spent on the scholarship schemes by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

About

- In the first nine months of the financial year 2022-23, the Ministry was able to spend only 1% of its allocation for a **pre-matric scholarship scheme for Scheduled Caste students**.
- And less than half the amount allocated for a **post-matric scholarship scheme for SC students**.
- Under the **PM-YASASVI scheme** the Government spent just a little over 2% out of the total budget allocation for the scheme.
- **Government's Response:** Earlier, the scheme was split into two -- one for SC students and one for children of those engaged in hazardous occupations. It was **merged** into one and implemented as such from 2022-23.

- **Under the new system**, the Centre sends its **60% share of the funds** through a Direct Benefit Transfer to the Aadhaar-linked bank account of the beneficiary, but only after the concerned State government releases its **40% share** of the funds.

Pre-matric scholarship scheme

- Pre-Matric Scholarship for ST students (Class IX and X) is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** launched in 2006 and implemented through respective State/UT administrations.
- It is an open-ended Scheme covering all ST students studying in Std. IXth & Xth, whose parental annual income is up to **Rs. 2.50 lakhs**.
- The contribution from the Government of India is **75%** and the state contribution is **25%**.
- In respect of **North East states and hilly states**, the contribution from Government of India is **90%** and the state contribution is **10%**.
- In case of UTs like Andaman & Nicobar without Legislative Assembly and own grants, Govt. of India's contribution is **100%**.

Post matric scholarship scheme

- Post Matric Scholarship for ST students (Class XI and above) is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** implemented through respective Ste/UT administrations.
- This is an open-ended Scheme covering all ST students studying in in class XI and above, whose parental annual income is up to Rs. **2.50 lakhs**.
- The contribution from the Government of India is **75%** and the state contribution is **25%**.
- In respect of **North East states and hilly states**, the contribution from Government of India is **90%** and the state contribution is **10%**.
- In case of UTs like Andaman & Nicobar without Legislative Assembly and own grants, Govt. of India's contribution is **100%**.

PM-YASASVI scheme

- It is formulated by the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJ&E)** and known as **PM Young achievers Scholarship Award Scheme for Vibrant India (YASASVI)** for award of scholarships to Other Backward Class (OBC), Economically Backward Class (EBC) and Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes Denotified Tribe(DNT) students.
- The annual income of whose parents/guardian is not more than **Rs. 2.5 lakhs**, studying in identified Schools.
- The award of scholarships is at two levels:
 - For students who are studying in **Class IX**.
 - For students who are studying in **Class XI**.
- Selection of candidates for award of Scholarships under the Scheme is through a written test known as **Yasasvi Entrance Test (YET)** conducted by **National Testing Agency (NTA)**.

About National Testing Agency (NTA)

- MSJ&E, Government of India (GoI) has established the National Testing Agency (NTA) as an **independent, autonomous and self-sustained premier** testing organization under the **Societies Registration Act (1860)**.
- It is established for conducting **efficient, transparent and international standardized tests** in order to assess the competency of candidates for admission to premier **Higher Educational Institutions(HEI)**.

ARMED FORCES (SPECIAL) POWERS ACT (AFSPA)

Context: The Union government has extended the **Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act (AFSPA)** in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. At the same time, the AFSPA has been removed from several areas in Northeast India.

About

- In **Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Northeast India**, the **AFSPA** is a contentious and unpopular law as it allows security services to operate without the risk of prosecution or requirement of a warrant. There have been repeated calls to repeal the law over the years.
- It has long been alleged that **human rights violations and extrajudicial arrests** and killings take place under the garb of AFSPA. A **string of incidents** in recent years have highlighted these concerns, **ranging from the Mon killings to the fake encounter in Shopian in J&K**.
 - In **December 2021**, a total of 14 civilians were killed in and after a botched Indian Army operation, according to MHA.

What is Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act (AFSPA)?

- **Origin of AFSPA:**
 - The Act in its original form was promulgated by the British in response to the **Quit India movement in 1942**.
 - After Independence, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru decided to retain the Act, which was first brought in **as an ordinance** and then **notified as an Act in 1958**.
 - The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, **enacted in the year 1958**, grants **extraordinary powers and immunity** to the armed forces to bring back order in the “disturbed areas”.
 - The Act came into force in the context of increasing violence in the Northeastern States decades ago, which the State governments found difficult to control.
- **Meaning:**
 - Armed forces have the authority to prohibit a gathering of five or more persons in an area, can use force or even open fire after giving due warning if they feel a person is in contravention of the law.
 - If reasonable suspicion exists, the army can also arrest a person without a warrant; enter or search a premises without a warrant; and ban the possession of firearms.
 - Any person arrested or taken into custody may be handed over to the officer in charge of the nearest police station along with a report detailing the circumstances that led to the arrest.
- **Provisions:**
 - **Under Section 3**, the Central Government or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory can declare the whole or part of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area.
 - An area can be disturbed due to differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.
 - **Section 4** gives the Army powers to search premises and make arrests without warrants, to use force even to the extent of causing death, destroy arms/ammunition dumps, fortifications/shelters/hideouts and to stop, search and seize any vehicle.
 - **Section 6** stipulates that arrested persons and the seized property are to be made over to the police with the least possible delay.
 - **Section 7** offers protection of persons acting in good faith in their official capacity.
 - The prosecution is permitted only after the sanction of the Central Government.

Rationale behind imposition of AFSPA

- **Effective functioning of Security Forces:** Armed Forces are deployed in counter-insurgency / terrorist operations when all other forces available to the State have failed to bring the situation under control.
 - Armed forces operating in such an environment require certain special powers and protection in the form of an enabling law.
- **National Security:** The Act plays a crucial role in maintaining law and order in disturbed areas. Thus, protecting sovereignty and security of the nation.
- **Boosting morale of Forces:** AFSPA boosts the morale (mental well-being) of the armed forces for ensuring the public order in the disturbed areas as removal of the Act would lead to militants motivating locals to file lawsuits against the army.

Arguments against AFSPA

- **Violation of the Human Rights:** The exercise of these extraordinary powers by armed forces has often led to allegations of **fake encounters** and **other human rights violations by security forces in disturbed areas** while questioning the indefinite imposition of AFSPA in certain states.
 - Human rights violations in AFSPA areas are not inquired into and followed by adequate action. Thus, it is **against the principle of natural justice**.
- **Violation of the right to remedy:** Section 6 of the Act "immediately takes away, abrogates, frustrates the right to constitutional remedy which has been given in article 32(1) of the Constitution."
 - AFSPA was **outside the powers granted in the Constitution** since it was declaring a state of emergency without following the Constitutional provisions for such a declaration.
- **Ineffectiveness of the Act:** Critics argue that this act has failed in its objective of restoring normalcy in disturbed areas although being in existence for about 50 years.

Way Ahead

- **Compliance to Human Rights:** It needs to be emphasised that human rights compliance and operational effectiveness are not contrarian requirements. In fact, adherence to human rights norms and principles strengthens the counter insurgency capability of a force.
 - The Indian army has been recognised as an apolitical, secular and professional force by the country. The armed forces need to restructure their approach to operations in states where people are increasingly and rightly developing zero tolerance to human rights violations.
- **Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee Recommendation:** In 2005, this committee recommended that AFSPA be repealed, highlighting that the Act has become "a symbol of hate and an instrument of discrimination and high handedness".
- **Removing Ambiguity in Law:** The terms like "disturbed", "dangerous" and "land forces" need to be clearly defined to ensure greater clarity.
- **Development of Disturbed areas:** AFSPA is required to counter insurgencies and lack of development in the Northeast region is also a major reason for the insurgency therefore the Government should take urgent steps to create new opportunities for growth and development.
- **SC ruling on AFSPA:** The constitutionality of AFSPA was challenged in the Supreme Court in 1997. A five-judge Constitution Bench unanimously upheld the law. Although the court agreed that the Constitution did provide for deployment of armed forces in aid of civil power, it held that such deployment can be permitted for a "temporary period" and "until a situation of normalcy was restored".
 - The court said that while declaring a region as "disturbed area", the opinion of the state government must be taken and there must be a periodic review of the situation.
 - A complaint containing an allegation about misuse or abuse of the powers conferred under the Central Act shall be thoroughly inquired into

MODE OF EXECUTION IN DEATH PENALTY CASES

Context: Recent proceedings in the Supreme Court have put the spotlight on the mode of execution in death penalty cases.

Death penalty

- **About:**
 - It is the highest degree of punishment that can be awarded to an individual under specified penal law in force.
 - It is a legally backed instrument used by the state to take an individual's life.
- **Evolution in India:**
 - During the British raj, there were **countless instances** of Indians being hanged after trial or even before it.

- Post Independence, **India became a democratic state**, and the **system of awarding death penalties** too changed drastically.
- **Constitutional Validity:**
 - **IPC:**
 - The **Indian Penal Code** in accordance with the provisions enshrined in the Constitution of India provided for awarding of capital punishment for certain specific offences.
 - **CrPc:**
 - According to **Section 354(3)** in the **Code of Criminal Procedure**, while imposing the capital punishment, the judge should specify “the special reasons” for doing so.
 - **Supreme Court’s verdict:**
 - The constitutional validity of hanging was last considered and upheld by the Supreme Court in September **1983 (Deena v. Union of India)**.
 - **The Law Commission of India’s report:**
 - **The Law Commission of India** in its 187th Report (2003) recognised the **constitutional impermissibility** of death by **hanging** and recommended that **India consider using lethal injections instead**.

The recent debate on mode of execution

- **About:**
 - Historically, societies using the death penalty have moved towards **either carrying out executions in private** away from the public gaze (like India does in its prisons with very few people witnessing the execution) or **towards sanitising executions** to make them **look clean and without suffering** (like the lethal injection executions in the US).
- **The petition:**
 - The Supreme Court was recently called upon to **reconsider its September 1983 decision on whether India could continue using hanging for executions**.
 - The petitioner’s claim was that **we must move to lethal injection as a humane method of execution**.
 - The petitioners in the current instance seem to have approached the court with the **intention of wanting to reduce the pain of death row** prisoners during executions.
 - The most immediate question is whether there exists any mode of execution that can meet constitutional requirements.
- **Issues with “death by hanging”:**
 - There is now a strong body of evidence establishing that death by hanging is a cruel and barbaric form of execution that violates human dignity.
 - The immediate and the painless nature of death attributed to hanging is an exception rather than the rule.
 - Various courts including the **Privy Council, Supreme Court of Uganda** and the **High Court of Tanzania** have relied on the suffering caused by hangings to reject it as a humane method of execution.
- **Executions using lethal injections:**
 - **How does it work?**
 - Most states rely on a **three-drug combination** of **sodium thiopental, pancuronium bromide** and **potassium chloride**.
 - While sodium thiopental puts the prisoner to **sleep**, pancuronium bromide renders the prisoner **paralytic** and **unable to show any pain** before potassium chloride causes **cardiac arrest**.
 - Any suffering that the prisoner goes through as a result of the induced cardiac arrest is masked by the effect of pancuronium bromide.
 - **Issues:**
 - There is now incontrovertible evidence from the US that executions using lethal injections come with a **real and substantial risk of being botched** and **leading to immense suffering**.

- In fact, a study published by the British Journal of American Legal Studies (2012) found that executions using the lethal injection had a **higher rate of being botched than any other method**.
- While the US continues to use lethal injection as a mode of execution, the procedure has not been scientifically or medically studied on human beings.

Arguments in favor of Death Penalty

- **Favoured by various agencies:**
 - In the **35th Report of Law Commission of India (1962)**, which was presented in 1967, the Law Commission favoured retaining the death penalty in the Indian Judicial System.
- **Maintenance of law and order:**
 - It said that **maintenance of law and order**, absence of any empirical research and other similar factors, “India cannot risk the experiment of abolition of capital punishment”.
- **Acting as a deterrent:**
 - Death punishment serves as a **deterrent** and a “response to the society’s call for appropriate punishment in appropriate cases”.

Arguments against Death Penalty

- **Against the global trend:**
 - According to the Amnesty Report, at the end of 2021 more than two thirds of the world’s countries had abolished the death penalty in law or practice.
- **The poor are most affected:**
 - In India, the poor are most affected than the rich
 - The numbers of the uneducated and the illiterate sentenced to death outweigh those who are educated and literate.
 - The legal assistance received by the poor facing serious charges is far from satisfactory.
- **No reduction of pain:**
 - Neither of these options (hanging or lethal injection) are really concerned with reducing pain for the prisoner and neither can they really achieve that reduction of pain.

Way ahead

- It would be better for us to acknowledge that issues surrounding the methods of execution present yet another constitutional crisis point in the administration of the death penalty.
- The issues that need to be addressed are
 - the arbitrariness in death penalty sentencing,
 - the discriminatory and disparate impact of the death penalty on marginalised groups,
 - the brutal realities of life on death row, and
 - the mental health consequences of being on death row, etc.
- The constitutional infirmities with the method of execution is yet another reason to revisit the very administration of the death penalty in India.

EVERGREENING OF PATENT

Context: Recently, the **Indian Patent Office** rejected U.S. pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson’s (J&J) attempt for **Evergreening of Patent** on manufacturing of the anti-tuberculosis drug **Bedaquiline** in India beyond July 2023.

- Bedaquiline is a crucial drug in the **treatment of multidrug resistant TB patients** for whom the first-line drug treatment — using Isoniazid, Rifampicin, Pyrazinamide and Ethambutol — has stopped working.

Why was the Patent Application Rejected?

- J&J’s patent application was for a **fumarate salt of a compound** to produce bedaquiline tablets.

- It was argued that J&J's method to produce a "solid pharmaceutical composition" of bedaquiline **doesn't require an "inventive step"**.
 - According to the Indian Patent Act 1970 Section 2(1) (ja), an 'inventive step' is an **invention that is "not obvious to a person skilled in the art"**.
- The current application **drew significantly from a previous patent**, which discussed a **similar compound on which bedaquiline is based**.
- The **Patents Act, 1970** has imposed certain 'restrictions' on patentability.
 - A patent cannot be granted on 'mere use of a known process, machine or apparatus **unless such known process results in a new product or employs at least one new reactant'**.
 - Section 3(d) of the Act does not allow '**evergreening' of patents to prevent innovator pharma companies** from extending the patent beyond the stipulated period of 20 years, to ensure that the monopoly does not extend forever.
- As of now it is still a patented product and there are no generic versions. However, after the expiry of the Bedaquiline patent, the drug makers can make the generic versions per the law.

Why is the Rejection Notable?

- The rejection is expected to **lower the cost of bedaquiline by up to 80%**.
 - India has the largest population of people living with drug-resistant TB. J&J's patent on bedaquiline meant the **drug cost USD 400 (revised to USD 340 in 2020) per person**, plus the cost of other drugs.
- So far, the Indian government has directly procured the drug and distributed it through State-level TB programmes. After July 2023, **manufacturers of generic drugs in India will be able to produce generic versions of bedaquiline**.

What is the Evergreening of Patents?

- **About:**
 - The evergreening of patents is a practice of **tweaking drugs in order to extend their patent term** and thus their profitability.
 - The **Indian Patents Act 1970** introduced many provisions to prevent the mischievous practice of "evergreening" of patents.
 - This is to aid millions of people who can't afford the expensive modified drugs, as well as the **development of the domestic generic drug market**.
- **Concerns:**
 - The process does not produce any increase in the therapeutic efficacy of the drug. In many countries, minor reformulations can qualify for patent protection. The result is **that it prevents competition in the market and is considered harmful to the market and consumers**.
 - Companies extend the term of protection and **charge more for drugs** while defending costs incurred in research and development as no cost has been incurred for such compositions as it is only a minor combination or modification of existing drugs.
 - Due to the lack of generic drugs, the variety translates into an increase in the **cost of healthcare for consumers**.
 - The persistence of patents primarily affects consumers in underdeveloped and developing countries who cannot afford the brand name drugs that can save them from deadly diseases.

What is a Related Supreme Court Decision?

- A popular precedent in this regard is **Novartis vs Union of India case** in which the **Supreme Court (SC)** rejected an appeal filed by Novartis rejecting the patent and upheld that the beta crystalline form of Imatinib Mesylate was a new form of the known substance i.e., Imatinib Mesylate, wherein the efficacy was well known and rejected the patent.

Context: India has set an ambitious target to eliminate tuberculosis (TB) by 2025, five years ahead of the global target. The government, scientists, entrepreneurs and the community at large are working towards achieving this goal. Despite being the largest contributor to global TB cases, India has seen a decline in the number of cases in 2021, with improvements in reporting and a reduction in drug-resistant TB cases.

What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

- Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious airborne bacterial disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It most commonly affects the lungs but can also damage other parts of the body.

What is the current status of TB?

- In the decade between 2010-20, 1.5-2 million individuals died every year because of tuberculosis. TB disproportionately affects people in low-income nations, the poor and the vulnerable. According to WHO's Global TB report 2021, with 25.9 lakh TB cases, India is home to 25% of the global tuberculosis cases. India has reported more than 20% decline in case notifications. The country reported 18 lakh tuberculosis cases in 2020 as compared to 24 lakhs in 2019.

What is the need for Eliminating TB earlier in India?

- Eliminating TB earlier in India is crucial for a number of reasons, including:
- **Health:** TB is a major cause of illness and death in India, and eliminating the disease would significantly improve the health and well-being of the population.
- **Economic impact:** TB has a significant economic impact, as it can lead to loss of income and productivity for individuals and families. Eliminating TB would reduce this impact and help to boost the economy.
- **Poverty reduction:** TB disproportionately affects people living in poverty, and eliminating the disease would help to reduce poverty and promote economic development.
- **Global health:** TB is a global health concern, and eliminating the disease in India would contribute to the global effort to control and eventually eliminate TB.
- **Sustainable Development Goals:** Eliminating TB is an important target under the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and achieving this goal in India would contribute to overall progress towards the SDGs.
- **Social justice:** Eliminating TB would help to promote social justice by reducing the burden of the disease on vulnerable and marginalized populations, such as those living in poverty or with limited access to healthcare.

What are the government's steps for Eliminating TB in India?

- India has implemented a number of steps to eliminate tuberculosis (TB) as a public health problem in the country. Some of the key measures are:
- **Strengthening the healthcare system:** The government has increased healthcare facilities, employees, and TB diagnosis instruments. The government has increased access to more accurate molecular **diagnostic tests like CB-NAAT and TureNat**. The government has also implemented a **universal drug susceptibility test**, meaning that antibiotic susceptibility of the mycobacterium is determined for all newly diagnosed cases.
- **Improvements in treatment protocols:** Injectable kanamycin, which caused kidney failure and deafness, has been replaced by Bedaquiline and Delamanid. These new pharmaceuticals have also been included in the new National List of Essential Medicines, giving the government the authority to control their market pricing.
- Recently, the government also rejected U.S. pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson's (J&J) attempt to extend its monopoly on the manufacturing of the anti-tuberculosis drug Bedaquiline in India beyond July 2023.
- **Implementing the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program (RNTCP):** The RNTCP is a national program that provides free diagnosis and treatment for TB patients. The program has been expanded to cover the entire country.
- **Use of GeneXpert technology:** The government has introduced the use of GeneXpert technology, which allows for rapid diagnosis of TB and drug-resistant TB.

- **Engaging with private healthcare providers:** The government has engaged with private healthcare providers to improve the quality of TB care and ensure that TB patients receive appropriate treatment.
- **Targeting high-risk populations:** The government has targeted high-risk populations, such as people living with HIV/AIDS, migrants, and those living in poverty, to improve TB diagnosis and treatment. An online Ni-kshay portal has been set up to track the notified TB cases.
- **Target setting:** The national strategic plan 2017-2025 sets the target of India reporting no more than 44 new TB cases or 65 total cases per lakh population by 2025. It also aims to reduce the mortality to 3 deaths per lakh population by 2025. The plan also aims to reduce catastrophic costs for the affected family to zero.
- **Promoting TB awareness:** The government has launched public awareness campaigns to promote the importance of TB prevention, diagnosis, and treatment.
- **Adopting a patient-centric approach:** The government has adopted a patient-centric approach to TB care, with a focus on providing patient-friendly services and improving patient outcomes.
- **Community engagement programme:** The government launched the community engagement programme where Ni-kshay mitras can adopt TB patients and provide them monthly nutritional support.

What are the challenges in Eliminating TB in India?

- **High burden of TB cases:** India accounts for 28% of all TB cases in the world, according to the Global TB Report 2022. This makes it difficult to identify and treat all cases in a timely manner.
- **Drug-resistant TB:** India has a high burden of drug-resistant TB, which is more difficult and costly to treat than regular TB. Inadequate use of antibiotics and poor adherence to treatment regimens have contributed to the emergence of drug-resistant strains.
- **Limited access to healthcare:** Many people in India, particularly in rural areas, do not have access to quality healthcare facilities or cannot afford to seek medical care. This can result in delays in diagnosis and treatment, and may also lead to the spread of TB.
- **Stigma and discrimination:** TB is still stigmatized in India, and many people are reluctant to disclose their illness or seek treatment due to fear of discrimination or social isolation.
- **Poor living conditions:** Overcrowded living conditions, poor sanitation, and lack of access to clean water can increase the risk of TB transmission.
- **Limited awareness:** Many people in India are not aware of the signs and symptoms of TB or the importance of completing the full course of treatment. This can lead to delays in diagnosis and treatment and contribute to the spread of TB.
- **Insufficient funding:** Despite being a major health problem in India, TB often receives insufficient funding and attention from policymakers and healthcare providers.

What should be done for eliminating TB in India?

- **Implement a comprehensive TB control program:** The Indian government should develop and implement a comprehensive TB control program that includes early diagnosis, effective treatment, and follow-up care.
- **Expand access to healthcare:** Efforts should be made to expand access to healthcare facilities, particularly in rural areas where access is limited.
- **Increase funding:** TB prevention and treatment should be a priority for the government and policymakers, and funding should be increased to support research, prevention programs, and treatment efforts.
- **Targeted prevention programs:** Programs aimed at preventing TB in high-risk populations, such as healthcare workers, people with HIV, and people who are homeless, can help to reduce the overall burden of the disease.
- **Increase public awareness:** This can be done through mass media, community outreach, and social media.
- **Reduce stigma and discrimination:** This can involve working with community leaders, healthcare workers, and affected individuals to promote acceptance and understanding.
- **Improve living conditions:** Efforts should be made to improve living conditions, particularly in overcrowded and impoverished areas, to reduce the risk of TB transmission.
- **Invest in research and development:** Investment in research and development can help to identify new diagnostic tools and more effective treatments for TB. For example, The recent development of artificial

intelligence software for detecting hot spots in the lungs from digital chest X-rays is a promising tool for mass active case finding of TB in the community.

- **Collaborate with other countries and organizations:** Collaboration with other countries and international organizations can help to share best practices, knowledge, and resources for TB control.

HEALTHCARE IN INDIA HAS MADE GREAT PROGRESS, BUT CHALLENGES REMAIN

Context: Experts deliberate on the **progress of the Indian health system and the challenges** it still faces.

About

- Over the years, the Indian health system has overcome seemingly insurmountable problems, long considered hopeless.
- As per **National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)** even under the best-case scenario, India would achieve a **total fertility rate of 2.1** (replacement level) **only by 2041**.
- Healthcare in India is on the **cusp of significant transformation**, with its changing demographics, increasing consumer spending and rising lifestyle diseases.
- At a time when India is having the **youngest population for more than three decades to come**, there is a need to **confront health challenges** to redeem that advantage fully.

Healthcare Sector of India

- India's healthcare sector is **one of the largest in terms of revenue and employment**, encompassing hospitals, medical devices, clinical trials, outsourcing, telemedicine, medical tourism, health insurance, and medical equipment.
- The healthcare sector in India is **growing rapidly, driven by increased expenditure by public and private players**, and strengthening coverage and services.
 - The Indian healthcare sector is expected to **reach US\$ 372 billion in 2022**, recording a three-fold rise and **growing at a CAGR of 22% between 2016-22**.
 - India's **public expenditure on healthcare stood at 2.1% of GDP** in 2021-22 with a poor **doctor-population ratio of 1:854**.
 - The **hospital industry in India** is forecast to increase to Rs. 8.6 trillion (US\$ 132.84 billion) by FY22 from Rs. 4 trillion (US\$ 61.79 billion) in FY17 at a CAGR of 16–17%.
 - Premiums underwritten by **health insurance companies grew to Rs. 73,582.13 crores** (US\$ 9.21 billion) in FY22.
 - The Indian **medical tourism market was valued at US\$ 2.89 billion** in 2020 and is expected to reach US\$ 13.42 billion by 2026 while the **e-health market size** is estimated to reach **US\$ 10.6 billion by 2025**.
 - **FDI inflow for the drugs and pharmaceuticals sector** stood at **US\$ 19.90 billion** between 2020-22.

Major challenges of Healthcare Sector in India:

- India has made significant strides in its healthcare sector, however, there remain several challenges that need to be addressed.
- **Health Challenges:**
 - Five main interrelated challenges facing India's population: cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes, and obesity.
 - Rising obesity rates, particularly in Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Punjab, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka, increase the risk of other health issues.
 - Building awareness and promoting healthy lifestyles is necessary to save lives and prevent chronic medical conditions.
- **Infrastructure:**
 - The state of infrastructure varies across states with some having better arrangements than others.
 - Urban areas need to bridge the gap in hospital services between large urban areas and tier II and III cities.

- Standalone hospitals and nursing homes provide much-needed service but are unable to provide multi-speciality, leave alone tertiary and quaternary care.
- The gaps between services available in metros and big cities and in districts must be bridged.
- **Health Insurance:**
 - Over the past three years, more than four crore Indians have bought health insurance.
 - Ayushman Bharat insurance scheme for 10 crore poor families provides insurance against hospitalization for up to Rs 5 lakh per year per family.
 - Nearly 74 per cent of Indians are either covered or eligible for health insurance coverage, but millions remain uninsured.
 - Out-patient doctor consultation costs, diagnostics, and drugs remain a financial burden for many.

Steps taken by Government:

- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) **allocated Rs. 86,200.65 crores (US\$ 11.28 billion) in the annual budget 2022-23** for major health schemes including:
 - Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana, National Health Mission, Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) and PM-ABHIM to strengthen India's health infrastructure
- **E-medical visa facility** extended to citizens of 156 countries to promote medical tourism
- **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission** was launched to connect digital health solutions of hospitals across the country
- **'Medicine from the Sky' project** launched in 2021 for drone delivery of life-saving medicines and jabs in far-flung regions of the country
- The Ministry of Tourism established the **'National Medical & Wellness Tourism Board'** to promote medical and wellness tourism in India.
- The government introduced the National **Ayush Mission** for the development of traditional medicines in India, as a centrally sponsored scheme until 2026.

What more can be done?

- **Address lifestyle risk factors:** Promote awareness among the population about the need for a healthy lifestyle to prevent cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases, and diabetes.
- **Improve infrastructure:** Ensure that primary healthcare facilities are fully functional and equipped with basic facilities, and improve the provision of core health services in state-run district hospitals.
- **Bridge the gap in hospital services:** Ensure that private hospital chains, standalone hospitals, and nursing homes provide multi-speciality, tertiary, and quaternary care to the population, especially in tier II and tier III cities.
- **Increase health insurance coverage:** Encourage more people to buy health insurance, particularly the uninsured population, by expanding the coverage of the Ayushman Bharat insurance scheme and other state-run insurance schemes.
- **Use AI and digital technology:** Leverage the benefits of AI and digital technology in healthcare to improve clinical judgments, surgical procedures, and pandemic forecasting.
- **Implement policies and regulations:** Develop and implement policies and regulations to ensure the quality, safety, and affordability of healthcare services across the country.
- **Increase government spending on healthcare:** Increase the government's spending on healthcare to ensure that people can access quality healthcare services at affordable costs.

Way ahead

- India has successfully achieved its replacement fertility rate in 2020, much earlier than expected. However, there is a need to build awareness about healthy lifestyles and improving infrastructure can save millions from illness and premature death.
- India's healthcare sector is highly diversified and full of opportunities in every segment, including providers, payers, and medical technology and is a leading destination for high-end diagnostic services with tremendous capital investment for advanced diagnostic facilities.

- Rising income levels, an ageing population, growing health awareness and a changing attitude towards preventive healthcare is expected to boost healthcare services demand in the future.

FOOD SECURITY & NATIONAL SECURITY

Context:

- **Food security has been a long-standing concern for India**, given its large population and limited resources. **Access to safe and nutritious food has been considered a fundamental right for all citizens**, and successive governments have implemented policies to ensure food availability and affordability.
- However, **the link between food security and national security has become increasingly evident in recent years**. India's vulnerability to **climate change**, its dependence on food imports, and the growing threat of food-related conflicts have raised alarm bells about the country's food security.
- The connection between national security and access to food **was emphasized when the Norwegian Nobel Committee granted the World Food Program the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020**, acknowledging its endeavors to address hunger. The committee specifically acknowledged the correlation between hunger, peace, and conflict.
- A lack of food security can contribute to a variety of threats to national security, including civil unrest, political instability, and conflict. In this context, **it becomes crucial to explore the connection between food security and national security in India** and the measures required to strengthen the country's food system.

Why Ensuring Food Security is Important for India?

- **Meeting the Nutritional Needs of the Population:**
 - **India is home to a significant population that is malnourished or undernourished**, which affects their physical and mental growth. Ensuring food security means that people have access to nutritious food to meet their dietary needs.
 - According to the **Global Food Security Index 2022**, **India has a prevalence of undernutrition of 16.3%**. Further, **30.9% of children in India are stunted, 33.4% are underweight**, and 3.8% are obese.
 - According to the **Human Development Report 2021-22**, India's rank on the **Human Development Index (HDI) has slipped from 130 in 2020 to 132 in 2022**.
- **Supporting Economic Growth:**
 - **Agriculture is a crucial sector that contributes significantly** to India's economy. By ensuring food security, the government can support farmers and increase their income, which can help drive economic growth.
 - Agriculture is essential in ensuring that India achieves its national food security goal.
 - With over **70% of the population engaged in agriculture-related activities**, it is the backbone of India's economy.
- **Reducing Poverty:**
 - **Food security can play a vital role in reducing poverty levels**. By providing access to affordable and nutritious food, people can better manage their expenses, reduce their healthcare costs, and improve their overall quality of life.
 - According to **Global Multidimensional Poverty Index MPI 2022**, **India has by far the largest number of poor people worldwide at 22.8 crore**, followed by Nigeria at 9.6 crore.
- **Ensuring National Security:**
 - **Food security is also essential for India's national security**. A stable food supply can prevent social unrest and political instability, which can threaten national security.
- **Combating Climate Change:**
 - Climate change poses a significant threat to India's food security. By adopting sustainable farming practices and investing in climate-resilient crops, **India can better adapt to the changing climate and ensure food security** for its population.

- The International Food Security Assessment for 2022-2032 conducted by GFA-33 USDA, Economic Research Service indicates that **India's large population has a significant impact on food insecurity trends**. It is projected that around 333.5 million people will be affected in India during 2022-23.
- By the next decade, **the number of food-insecure people in India is projected to decrease to 24.7 million**.

What are the Related Initiatives taken?

- **National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013:**
- It ensures access to affordable and good-quality food by subsidizing food grains to those below the poverty line.
- **National Food Security Mission:**
- It was launched in 2007, as a **Central Sector Scheme (CSS)** to increase food production and productivity through area expansion and productivity enhancement interventions in rice, wheat, pulses, **oilseeds**, etc.
- **National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) Platform:**
- It is an online marketplace for farmers to trade their products without geographical boundaries.
- **National Food Processing Mission:**
- The Government introduced the National Food Processing Mission to promote agri-based industries for efficient use of farm produce and reduce post-harvest losses.

Other Policies:

- **Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for Agricultural products**
- **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)**
- **National Horticulture Mission**

What are the Challenges of Food Security in India?

- **Inadequate Infrastructure:**
 - Inadequate infrastructure such as **inaccessible roads, lack of modern storage technologies, and limited access to credit** make it difficult for farmers to transport their produce to the market and store them properly. This leads to high wastage and lower profits for farmers.
- **Poor Agricultural Practices:**
 - Poor agricultural practices like **over-cultivation, excessive use of pesticides, and improper irrigation techniques** have led to **decreased soil fertility** and reduced crop yields. This, in turn, affects food production and availability.
- **Extreme Weather Conditions:**
 - The **extreme weather conditions due to climate change** have also caused **crop failures and food shortages**. **Floods, droughts**, and **heatwaves** are becoming more frequent and intense, which affects food production and increases food prices.
- **Inefficient Supply Chain Networks:**
 - **Inefficient supply chain networks, including inadequate transportation, storage, and distribution facilities, also contribute** to food insecurity in India. This leads to higher prices for consumers and lower profits for farmers.
- **Poor Market Infrastructure:**
 - Poor market infrastructure, including a **lack of market information, low market transparency, and limited access to markets**, also contributes to food insecurity in India.
- **Fragmented Landholdings:**
 - **Fragmented landholdings, where farmers own small and scattered plots of land, make it difficult to adopt modern farming practices** and technologies. This, in turn, affects food production and availability.

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Investing in Agriculture Production Systems and Research:**

- The government **should invest in modern irrigation systems, agricultural research, and development of high-yielding crop varieties** to increase agriculture production.
- **Improving Storage Facilities for Perishable Commodities:**
 - The government **should develop adequate storage facilities to prevent post-harvest losses** and ensure the availability of food throughout the year.
- **Providing Efficient Transportation Networks:**
 - The government **should invest in transportation networks for distributing food products across the country** to ensure the timely distribution of food products across the country.
- **Practicing Modern Agriculture Techniques:**
 - The government **should conduct awareness campaigns to educate farmers about modern agriculture techniques** that can increase crop yields and improve their income.
- **Prioritizing Agricultural Development:**
 - The government should prioritize agricultural development by investing in improved market infrastructure, efficient transportation networks, and better storage facilities for food products.
- **Promoting Public-Private Partnerships:**
 - The government **should promote partnerships between the public and private sectors** to improve agricultural productivity and ensure the availability of food products.
- **Creating an Early Warning System:**
 - The government **should develop an early warning system to detect and respond to food shortages** before they become widespread.
- **Encouraging Sustainable Agriculture Practices:**
 - The government **should promote sustainable agriculture practices that preserve soil health and reduce the use of harmful pesticides and fertilizers.**

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS REQUIRE WHOLESOME SUPPORT

Context:

- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and other kinds of not-for-profit organizations are working for societal improvement.
- **What are the concerns associated with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)?**
- Donors want to support costs which are incurred for programs and activities that directly deliver the desired benefits or improvements to intended communities.
- However, they don't want to support other costs involved in the operation of the CSOs, known as **overhead cost**. It is impractical for a CSO to only focus on the outcome while neglecting other costs.
- **For example**, a CSO working with public schools to enhance learning will have team members who train and assist teachers. Their salaries and activity costs are just as essential as the teaching-learning-material and resources given to schools.
- The donors in this case, will be ready to support teaching material and not for the salaries and expenses for the staff of CSOs.
- Further, **donors expect CSOs to be strong and stable organizations** which have good processes, sound accounting and reporting, leadership succession and development, the capacity to scale up, and more.
- However, **a CSO can only become stable when it is being financially supported for these things.**
- Some donors provide support for **CSO overhead expenses ranging from 5-10% of the cost base**, which is very low given the enormous amount of expense needed by CSOs to function.
- Hence, a reasonable donation for overhead cost should range from 15%-25%.
- Moreover, **donors are also reluctant to commit long term funding for CSOs.** This has weakening effect on Indian civil society.

What can be the way ahead?

- Donors usually look for a strong, vibrant and high-capacity CSO ecosystem. This is only possible when they start supporting CSOs objectives along with their overhead costs wholeheartedly.

SMART PDS SCHEME: A BOLD INITIATIVE IN DIGITISATION

Context: The article explains the initiatives by the government to digitise the food grain distribution.

What are the benefits of Scheme for Modernisation and Reforms through Technology in Public Distribution

System (SMART-PDS)?

- It prevents **leakage of foodgrains**, **increases the efficiency** of the distribution chain and **ensures the availability of such provisions** for migrants.
- A lot of data is being generated and stored every day by states and UTs. **Data Analytics** on the TPDS ecosystem can be used to generate **critical information** about the beneficiaries, their food security needs and patterns of migration.
- It can implement **data-driven decision-making**. It can be leveraged for the delivery of many other central schemes and welfare programmes.
- **Convergence and integration with the use of AI** can really be a game changer for people as well as governments in bringing accountability across all programmes.

What are other successful initiatives for digitisation of food grain distribution?

- Today, nearly 93% of the total monthly allocated foodgrains are distributed through the **Aadhaar authentication** mode using **electronic Point of Sale devices**.
- This can be attributed to the **100% digitisation of ration cards**, **online management of beneficiaries' data**, **computerisation of foodgrains' allocation and supply chain management systems in all states**, and the **installation of ePoS devices**.
- The government has launched a Central Sector Scheme called **Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS)** To sustain the reforms brought in by the **End-to-end Computerisation of TPDS Operations scheme**.
- Its main objectives are: Implementation of **One Nation One Ration Card**, creation of a **national level data repository** for ration cards data; creation of **integrated data infrastructure** across ration card management.
- **One Nation One Ration Card** is seamlessly functional in all 36 States and UTs and is consistently recording over 3.5 crore monthly portable transactions. This count is steadily improving. It has so far recorded more than 100 crore portability transactions.
- The data generated during this process has now become a tool for many other central ministries and state governments. It includes benefits for the e-Shram Portal, Ayushman Bharat, and PM-SVANidhi Yojana. Agriculture ministry envisages family-based ONORC data to map the beneficiaries.

NEW INDIA LITERACY PROGRAMME

Context: Government has launched a new Centrally Sponsored Scheme namely, "New India Literacy Programme" (NILP) for implementation during five years from the FYs 2022-23 to 2026-27.

About

- The scheme aims to cover a target of 5.00 crore non-literates in the age group of 15 years and above.
- The Scheme has five components: (i) Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, (ii) Critical Life Skills, (iii) Vocational Skills Development, (iv) Basic Education and (v) Continuing Education.
- The beneficiaries under the scheme are identified through door-to-door survey on Mobile App by the surveyors in the States/UTs.
- The non-literate can also avail the benefit of the scheme through direct registration from any place through mobile app. The scheme is mainly based on volunteerism for teaching and learning.
- The scheme is based on technology and implemented predominantly through online mode. The teaching learning material and resources have been made available on the DIKSHA platform of NCERT and can be accessed through the mobile-apps.

Foundational literacy

- FLN is a person's ability to read basic texts and solve basic math problems (such as addition and subtraction).

- Issues
 - Improvement in school infrastructure, uniforms, toilet access, water and textbook availability, classroom processes remain a challenge.
 - Lack of direct funds to schools, teacher vacancies, allocation of non-teaching tasks to teachers negatively affects the education.
 - A systematic way of recruiting good teachers and establishing teacher development institutions is still absent.
 - Poor governance affects the effectiveness of face-to-face or digital teacher development initiatives like Nishtha, Pratham's Read India campaign, etc.
- Initiatives:
 - **Nipun Bharat:** it was launched with a vision to ensure universal literacy and numeracy for Class 3 children by 2026-27.
 - It envisaged a five-tier implementation mechanism, set up at the National- State- District- Block- School level in all States and UTs, under the aegis of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Samagra Shiksha.
 - **NEP 2020** - The National Education Policy (NEP): It has provisions for National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy for attaining universal foundational literacy and numeracy in all primary schools.
 - It also aims to identify state-wise targets and goals to be achieved by 2025.

Way ahead

- The foundational literacy can be further improved with use of technology, decentralization of funds and making the community a participant in the process.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIA SHOULD STICK TO THE MIDDLE PATH IN THE NEW WORLD DISORDER

Context: India should follow a **path of multi-engagement and not multi-alignment.**

Background: India has consistently resisted international pressure to criticise Russia and its actions.

- For example, India has once again **abstained from voting** on a UN General Assembly resolution that condemns Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The global order in international relations:

- **After the end of the 2nd World War:** A **bipolar** world, led by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, emerged.
- **Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union (1991):** **Unipolarity replaced bipolarity**, with the U.S. being its centre.
- However, there have been discussions about whether American unipolarity has passed and a **new world order** (multipolar) **has emerged.**

Signs of the new world order:

- China's rapid rise
- Russia's aggressive foreign policy – the invasion of Ukraine, **challenged the post-Cold War security equilibrium** in Europe.
- The **S.'s ability to shape geopolitical outcomes is clearly in decline** (withdrawal from Afghanistan).

Impact of this transition (from uni to multipolarity):

- **Leaving the world in flux.** Lack of clarity on which direction the world is headed makes **policy-making harder for middle powers like India.**
- While many governments (including India, Russia and China), welcome multipolarity, **the U.S. remains the world's most powerful military power.**

India and the Non-alignment success:

- When India became independent, **the Cold War** was in its early stages.
- India's non-alignment foreign policy doctrine (equidistant from both blocs) did well in managing most of its (ideological and geopolitical) challenges.
- Criticised as **too idealistic**, India has actually been **flexible** in readapting itself to the changes in the global and regional equations.
- In the 1970s, after China started moving closer to the U.S., **India started tilting towards the Soviet Union** but stayed out of any Soviet-led military alliances.
- **When the Soviet Union collapsed**, India sought to transform its ties with the U.S. and integrate itself with the global economy in the new era of globalisation.
- But it also maintained close **defence and strategic ties with Russia** and built a **vibrant economic partnership with China**.

A new set of challenges for India in the new global disorder:

- S.-China's great power contest in Asia is unfolding right in India's neighbourhood.
- **The power imbalance** between India and China, tempted India to join the American bloc.
- **Abandoning its strategic autonomy** and joining the U.S.-led bloc would limit India's options, besides provoking China.
- Border disputes between India and China.
- China has developed a **strategic partnership with Pakistan** and is raising its influence in other South Asian and Indian Ocean countries.
- So, on all fronts (including challenges to India's maritime influence), India faces the heat of China's rise.

Other challenges faced by India: U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban's return to power.

How Russia's invasion of Ukraine has complicated the situation for India?

- Russia is a traditional partner with which India has deep defence ties.
- As the West has moved to isolate Russia with heavy sanctions, India is under huge pressure **to take a more critical position on Russia's actions**.
- The West's move to isolate Russia in Europe would **push the country further into the Chinese embrace**.

Way ahead for India:

- **Learning from China.** In the 1970s, China broke away from the Soviet communist fold and built a **quasi-alliance with the U.S. and helped the 'imperialist bloc' defeat the Soviet communists**.
 - Once China acquired enough economic and military power, it started gradually challenging the U.S.
- Therefore, India's primary focus should be on **transforming itself economically and militarily**, bridging the gap with China.
- India should present itself as a **natural stabilising power** in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region, and a **source of prosperity**.
- To address its continental security challenges, **India has to work with Eurasian powers such as Russia and Iran**, both of which are at odds with the U.S.
- **Conclusion: India should opt for multi-engagement** (not multi-alignment) **for a multipolar world**, creating new pillars of the new global order through engagement and partnership with middle powers.

INDIA DENMARK COOPERATION

Context: Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change expressed that India and Denmark can jointly demonstrate the feasibility of achieving ambitious climate and sustainable energy goals during the '**India-**

Denmark: Partners for Green and Sustainable Progress Conference' in New Delhi.

- Since the launch of the **Green Strategic Partnership** in 2020, the bilateral cooperation is focused on promoting green and sustainable development.

What is Green Strategy Partnership?

- The **Green Strategic Partnership** is a mutually beneficial arrangement to **advance political cooperation, expand economic relations and green growth, create jobs, and strengthen cooperation on addressing global challenges** and opportunities; with a focus on an ambitious implementation of the **Paris Agreement** and the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**.
- Danish companies with niche technologies and expertise have offered to help India in meeting its **air pollution** control targets, including in the key area of tackling the problem of **burning crop stubble**.
- Other key points under the partnership include dealing with the **Covid-19** pandemic and **cooperation in water efficiency and water loss**.
- The creation of **India-Denmark energy parks** in areas with large numbers of Danish firms and an **India-Denmark skill institute** to train Indian manpower has been proposed.
- The Green Strategic Partnership will build on an existing **Joint Commission for Cooperation** and existing **joint working groups**.

State of India Denmark Cooperation:

- **Background:**
 - The diplomatic relations between **India and Denmark**, established in September 1949, are marked by **regular high-level exchanges**.
 - Both countries **share historical links, common democratic traditions and a shared desire for regional**, as well as international peace and stability.
 - Bilateral relations were elevated to the level of **“Green Strategic Partnership”** during the Virtual Summit held in 2020.
- **Commercial and Economic Relations:**
 - Bilateral trade in goods and services between India and Denmark has grown by 78%, from USD 2.8 billion in 2016 to **USD 5 billion in 2021**.
 - The **major export items from India** to Denmark are textiles, apparels and yarns related, vehicles and components, metal goods, iron and steel, footwear, and travel goods.
 - Major **Danish exports to India** are medicinal/pharmaceutical goods, power generating machinery, industrial machinery, metal waste and ore, and organic chemicals.
- **Cultural Exchange:**
 - India's 75th Independence Day was celebrated in Copenhagen with a great enthusiasm with a flag hoisting ceremony and vibrant **Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations, attended by a large number of the diaspora**.
 - Important streets and public places have been named after Indian leaders which include the **Gandhi Plaene (Gandhi Park)**, Copenhagen and a **Nehru Road** near Aarhus University in Aarhus.
- **Intellectual Property Cooperation:**
 - The MoU signed in 2020 aims at increasing IP co-operation between the two countries by way of, exchange of information and best practices on processes for disposal of applications for patents, trademarks, industrial designs, and **Geographical Indications**, and cooperation in the field of protection of Traditional Knowledge.
 - It will be a landmark step forward in India's journey towards becoming a major player in global innovation and further the objectives of the **National Intellectual Property Rights Policy, 2016**.

Way Forward

- India and Denmark must cooperate in multilateral fora like the **World Trade Organization, International Solar Alliance, Arctic Council** to advance democracy and human rights and promote a rule-based multilateral system.

Context: Recently, the **Ministry of Home Affairs** suspended the **Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA)** licence of the **Centre for Policy Research (CPR)**.

- **CPR (not-for-profit society)**, along with **Oxfam India** and the **Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation (IPSMF)**, was surveyed by the Income Tax department earlier.

What is the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act?

- **About:**

- **FCRA was enacted during the Emergency in 1976** amid apprehensions that foreign powers were **interfering in India's affairs** by pumping money into the country through independent organisations.
- The law sought to regulate foreign donations to individuals and associations so that they functioned in a manner consistent with the values of a **sovereign democratic republic**.

- **Amendments:**

- An amended FCRA was enacted in 2010 to **"consolidate the law" on utilisation of foreign funds**, and "to prohibit" their use for "any activities detrimental to national interest".
- The law was amended again in **2020**, giving the government tighter control and scrutiny over the receipt and **utilisation of foreign funds by NGOs**.

- **Criteria:**

- The FCRA requires every person or NGO seeking to receive foreign donations to be:
 - **registered under the Act**
 - to open a bank account for the receipt of the foreign funds in **State Bank of India, Delhi**
 - to utilize those funds only for the purpose for which they have been received and as stipulated in the Act.
- FCRA registrations are granted to individuals or associations that **have definite cultural, economic, educational, religious, and social programmes**.

- **Exceptions:**

- Under the FCRA, the **applicant should not be fictitious and should not have been prosecuted or convicted for indulging in activities** aimed at conversion through **inducement or force**, either directly or indirectly, from one religious faith to another.
- The applicant should also not have been prosecuted for or convicted of creating communal tension or disharmony.
 - Also, should not be engaged or likely to be engaged in the propagation of **sedition**.
- The Act prohibits the **receipt of foreign funds by candidates for elections, journalists or newspaper and media broadcast companies, judges** and government servants, members of legislature and political parties or their office-bearers, and organisations of a political nature.

- **Validity:**

- FCRA registration is valid for **5 years**, and **NGOs are expected to apply for renewal within six months** of the date of expiry of registration.
- The government can also **cancel the FCRA registration of any NGO if it finds that the NGO is in violation of the Act**, if it has not been engaged in any reasonable activity in its chosen field for the benefit of society for **two consecutive years, or if it has become defunct**.
- Once the registration of an NGO is cancelled, it is **not eligible for re-registration for three years**.

- **FCRA 2022 Rules:**

- In July 2022, the **MHA effected changes to FCRA rules** which increased the number of **compoundable offences** under the Act from 7 to 12.
- The other key changes were exemption from intimation to the government for contributions less than **Rs 10 lakh – the earlier limit was Rs 1 lakh** – received from relatives abroad, and **increase in time limit for intimation of opening of bank accounts**.

Context: Japan looks forward to supporting India's clean energy transition by including India in the Asia Energy Transition Initiative (AETI).

- Japan's AETI, launched in 2021, initially supported the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries towards achieving net zero emissions, including financial assistance of USD 10 billion for renewable energy.

What are the Major Highlights of India Japan Clean Energy Cooperation?

- The Clean Energy Partnership between India and Japan was published in March 2022.
 - It would work on the agenda covered in the India-Japan Energy Dialogue 2007 and will subsequently expand into areas of mutual benefit.
- India and Japan have taken over the presidency of **G20 and G7**, respectively.
 - In the context of environmental sustainability, India's Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) is one of the most important priorities during the G20 presidency.
 - Also, the **Feed-in Premium (FiP)** scheme by the government of Japan was implemented in April 2022 and is expected to improve the country's energy transition.
- Japan has set a goal of becoming net-zero by 2050, and the government issued an interim report on **Clean Energy Strategy in May 2022**.
 - India has also set an ambitious target of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070.
- The Indian subcontinent's massive renewable energy potential can boost green hydrogen (GH2) production and immense potential for a GH2 economy.
 - Nepal and Bhutan also have surplus hydropower potential, and green hydrogen electrolyzers can tap this in countries like India and Bangladesh.
- Events like the **India-Japan Environment week** would help create a roadmap to integrate variable renewable energy into the system through **technological, institutional, and personnel cooperation**.

What is Clean Energy Transition?

- **About:**
 - Clean energy transition refers to the **shift from traditional, fossil fuel-based energy sources** (such as coal, oil, and natural gas) to cleaner, more sustainable sources of energy that have a lower impact on the environment.
 - This transition is driven by the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, mitigate the effects of climate change, and address other environmental and public health concerns associated with the use of fossil fuels.
- **Clean Energy Sources:**
 - Clean energy sources include renewable energy sources like solar, wind, hydro, geothermal, and biomass energy, as well as energy storage technologies like batteries and hydrogen fuel cells.

Status of India -Japan Bilateral Relations:

- **Defense Ties:** India-Japan Defence and Security partnership has evolved over the years from bilateral and multilateral exercises including Dharma Guardian and Malabar respectively. And welcoming the participation of Japan for the first time in the MILAN exercise.
- **Health-Care:** In view of the similarities and synergies between the goals and objectives of India's AYUSHMAN Bharat Programme and Japan's AHWIN, both sides had been consulting with each other to identify projects to build the narrative of **AHWIN for AYUSHMAN Bharat**.
- **Investment and ODA:** India has been the largest recipient of the **Japanese Official Development Assistance(ODA)** Loan for the past decades. **Delhi Metro** is one of the most successful examples of Japanese cooperation through the utilization of ODA.
 - **India's Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC)** project is funded by a soft loan provided by **Japan International Cooperation Agency** under **Special terms for economic partnership (STEP)**.

Context: India's **G-20 Presidency** places multilateral reform as one of its top presidential priorities as India stated that its agenda would be **inclusive, ambitious, action-oriented, and decisive**.

- India also said that its primary objectives are to build **global consensus over critical development** and security issues and deliver global goods.

What is the Need for Multilateralism?

- Due to persistent deadlocks, multilateralism has **lost the majority's trust**. Multilateralism is facing a **utility crisis**, where powerful member-states think it is **no longer useful** for them.
- Moreover, increasing **great-power tensions, de-globalisation, populist nationalism**, the pandemic, and climate emergencies added to the hardships.
- This impasse led states to seek other arenas, including bilateral, plurilateral and Mini lateral groupings, which subsequently contributed to further polarization of global politics.
- However, cooperation and multilateral reform is the need of the hour. Most of the challenges nations face today are **global in nature and require global solutions**.
- Pressing global issues such as conflicts, **climate change, migration**, macroeconomic instability, and **cybersecurity can indeed only be solved collectively**.
- Furthermore, disruptions such as the **Covid-19 pandemic** have **reversed the social and economic progress that global society made in the past couple of decades**.

What are the Roadblocks to the Reforms?

- **Global Power Politics:**
 - Multilateralism is deeply entrenched in global power politics. As a result, any action in reforming multilateral institutions and frameworks automatically transforms into a move that seeks changes in the current distribution of power.
 - Modifications in the distribution of power in the global **order are neither easy nor normal**. Moreover, it may have **adverse implications if not done cautiously**.
- **Considers a Zero-Sum Game:**
 - The status quo powers see multilateral reforms as a zero-sum game. For instance, in the context of the Bretton Woods system, the U.S. and Europe believed **reform would reduce their influence and dominance**.
 - This makes decisions about reform in these institutions, by consensus or voting, hard.
- **Multiplex Global Order:**
 - Multilateralism **appears at odds with the realities** of the emerging multiplex global order.
 - The emerging order seems **more multipolar and multi-centred**.
 - Such a situation facilitates the formation of **new clubs, concerts and coalitions of the like-minded**, which makes the **reform of older institutions and frameworks more challenging**.

How can G-20 and India Promote Multilateralism?

- **Constitution of Engagement Group:**
 - Currently, the multilateralism reform narrative **lives only in elite circles and some national capitals**, particularly the emerging powers.
 - Therefore, the G-20 should first focus on **setting proper narratives of multilateral reform**.
 - G-20 may constitute an engagement group **dedicated to bringing the narrative to the forefront of global discourse**.
 - India should also urge the upcoming chairs of the grouping, **Brazil and South Africa, to place multilateral reforms as their presidential priorities**. Since both have global high-table ambitions, it would be an easier task for India.
- **Encouraging Minilateral Groupings:**
 - While supporting multilateral cooperation, G-20 should continue **encouraging minilateral groupings as a new form of multilateralism**.

- Creating networks of issue-based multilateralism, particularly in areas related to the **governance of the global commons** will be helpful in preventing competitive coalitions where other actors play the same game to their advantage, leading to a more fragmented world order.
- **Being More Inclusive:**
 - The group needs to be more inclusive without sacrificing efficiency. For example, **including the African Union as a permanent member** and the UN Secretary-General and General Assembly President as permanent invitees would be **helpful to enhance its legitimacy**.
 - Similarly, to address the crisis of trust and utility, G-20 should put all its efforts into solving one or two pressing global issues and showcase it as the model of new multilateralism.
 - Food, fuel and fertilizer security can be one such issue. On the one hand, it falls under the 'low politics of world politics, so cooperation is more achievable.

APPLYING ACTIVE NON-ALIGNMENT FOR UKRAINE PEACE

Context: The recently-held Munich security conference, a major concern of the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was the reluctance of the Global South to align itself with the G-7 on the war in Ukraine.

About the Conflict:

- **Contestation about post-Cold War** central European territoriality and resurrecting a burnished Russian past is at the core of the Ukraine crisis.
- **Ukraine's bid for NATO membership** and Russian interests in the Black Sea accompanied by the protests in the Ukraine are the major causes of the ongoing conflict.

Stand on war:

- **The vast majority** of countries across the world condemn the Russian invasion and wanted war to come to an end (as shown in the United Nations vote on the subject in February 2023),
- **Few countries** in Asia, Africa and Latin America support the political and economic sanctions on Russia imposed by the G-7.

The right side of history:

- **The developing world**, and especially Africa, Asia and the Middle East/West Asia, has been the site of many wars, including those of the proxy kind, in the course of the past 70 years.
- **India's External Affairs Minister:** "Europe has to grow out of its mindset that Europe's problems are the world's problems, but the world's problems are not Europe's."
- **The United States and Germany** tried to induce Latin American countries.
- **Ukraine's President to African leaders** to meet with him over a teleconference turned out to be a fiasco:
 - Only four out of 55 showed up.
- **The Foreign Minister of Ukraine:** Latin American and Caribbean nations should leave behind their neutrality and put themselves on the right side of history".

Active Non-Alignment (ANA):

- It originated in **2019** and was developed in **2020** in response to the U.S.-China struggle for primacy, in which Latin America was caught in the middle.
- **It was a bit of a manifesto calling** for Latin American countries not to give in to pressures from either Washington or Beijing and to stick to their own interests.
- **It took a page from the honorable tradition** of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)
 - **Adapted it to the imperatives of the new century**, impelled by the urgency of the Latin American crisis.
- **It turns out, more than a future-oriented proposal**, it is an approach that is already being applied in practice.

- **ANA has been referred to as** “the region’s most significant foreign policy development since the end of the Cold War”.
- **Foreign Policy Magazine** called it “**the year of Non-Alignment**”.
- **ANA** arose in the context of the U.S.-China spat.

Latin American governments:

- They participated in the **China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) ministerial** forum in Mexico City.
- **Democracies Summit** in Washington DC, seeing no contradiction in doing so.

India’s difficult balancing act:

- **India plays a key role** in it, having taken a clear stand of non-alignment on the war, despite its closer ties with the U.S. and its membership in
- **As host and chair of this year’s G-20:** India is managing the difficult balancing act of keeping this important informal group of developed and developing nations
- **Seventeen African countries** abstained in the UNGA vote to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- **South Africa:** It scheduled a naval exercise with the Russian Navy and China off the country’s Indian Ocean coast.

Way Forward

- The BRICS group embodies the New South that has emerged in the new century.
 - **It has the potential to play a critical role** in furthering some sort of a mediated solution to the Ukraine conflict.
- **Brazil, under the leadership of its President:** It has indicated its interest in promoting a peaceful solution.
- **China peace plan:** Because of its pivotal position, very much holding the balance in the international balance of power
 - **India is in a privileged position** to act as a peace broker.
- **Look for a mediated outcome**, a peace agreement that would necessarily entail a compromise solution acceptable to both parties.

SRI LANKA’S RECOVERY | THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIA’S SUPPORT

Context:

- Sri Lankan President announced that the country had cleared the last hurdles to be approved for a \$2.9 billion bailout from the IMF.
- **Background:** The country has been reeling from the **covid crisis, economic mismanagement** by the Rajapakse regime, **mounting debts** → soaring inflation → GDP/ Exports collapse → Currency collapse.

What the IMF bailout would mean for Sri Lanka?

- Brings a lot of **creditworthiness** to the entire system and **confidence**.
- A lot of other agencies like the **World Bank, AIIB, and ADB**, have lined up funds to come in.
- Debt becomes more sustainable → access to the capital market → stabilizing the economy.

How India supported its neighbor?

- Contrary to **China**, India’s support has come unconditionally, and more promptly.
- India’s support to Sri Lanka (worth a combined \$4 bn) includes –
 - Shipments of grain, fuel, essentials, medicines
 - Credit lines
 - Debt repayment relief
 - Support at the IMF to work on the bailout package
 - Support at the G20 and BIMSTEC

How did Sri Lanka respond to India's support?

- "India had really come to our rescue, **India had provided us with a lifeline** which allowed us to stay afloat during a very difficult time," Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka.
- In a speech on Women's Day, Sri Lankan President **thanked 3 women** – Nirmala Sitharaman, Janet Yellen, and Kristalina Georgieva for helping Sri Lanka.
- Sri Lanka is looking for **more investments from India** in IT, pharmaceuticals, the energy sector, education, etc.

Challenges ahead:

- **For India:**
 - **The controversy over Adani projects in Sri Lanka** (2 wind power plants in Mannar and Pooneryn areas of [northern] Sri Lanka, West Container Terminal at Colombo Port, etc).
 - The opposition had raised issues over the manner of choosing the company.
- **For Sri Lanka:** How can Sri Lanka balance its ties with China and India?
 - Sri Lanka has been a **very close friend of India** and doesn't want to hurt **India's security concerns**.
 - Despite all the problems China is also India's biggest [trading] partner.
 - Similarly, Sri Lanka also **wants to work with Indians and the Chinese, and the rest**.

Conclusion:

- Sri Lankan crisis and reversal is a good example for the region – it is about being more sensitive to a neighbor's needs rather than outspending rivals.

INDIA-AUSTRALIA RELATIONS

Context: Australian Prime Minister is visiting India for **India-Australia Summit** in March 2023, seeking to strengthen the new momentum in ties between the two countries through deeper trade, investment and defence relations.

How have been the India- Australia Relations so far?

- **Historical Perspective:**
 - Australia and India for the first time established diplomatic relations in the pre-Independence period, when the **Consulate General of India was first opened as a Trade Office in Sydney in 1941**.
 - India-Australia relations touched a **historic low** when the **Australian Government condemned India's 1998 nuclear tests**.
 - In 2014, Australia signed a **Uranium supply deal** with India, the first of its kind with a country that is a **non-signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty**, in recognition of India's "impeccable" non-proliferation record.
- **Shared Values:**
 - Shared values of **pluralistic, Westminster-style democracies, Commonwealth traditions, expanding economic engagement, and increasing high-level interaction** have underpinned the India-Australia bilateral relationship.
 - Common traits, including **strong, vibrant, secular, and multicultural democracies, a free press, an independent judicial system**, and English language, serve as the foundation for closer co-operation.
- **People-to-people Ties:**
 - India is one of the top sources of skilled immigrants to Australia. As per the 2021 Census, around **9.76 lakh people in Australia reported their ancestry as Indian origin**, making them the second largest group of overseas-born residents in Australia.
- **Strategic Ties:**
 - In 2020, Prime ministers of both the countries elevated bilateral relationship from Strategic Partnership to **Comprehensive strategic Partnership** during **India-Australia Leaders' Virtual Summit**.
 - In 2021, the prime ministers of both the countries **met during COP26 at Glasgow**.

- In 2022, there has been a **series of high-level engagements** and exchange of ministerial visits in 2022 and in 2023 including India-Australia virtual summit and Foreign Ministers meet. Several key announcements were made during **2nd India-Australia Virtual Summit** including:
 - **A Letter of Intent on Migration and Mobility Partnership Arrangement** to foster the exchange of skills.
- **Defence Cooperation:**
 - The **2+2 Ministerial Dialogue** took place in September 2021, and the Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister of Australia visited India in June 2022.
 - The **Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA)** was signed during the Virtual Summit in June 2020 to enhance defence cooperation.
 - **Joint military exercises:**
 - Australia will host the **"Malabar" exercises** in August 2023, with participation from India, Japan, and the US.
 - India has been invited to join the **Talisman Sabre exercises** in 2023.
- **China Factor:**
 - Australia-China ties became strained due to several reasons including Australia **banning Huawei from 5G network, call for enquiry into the origins of Covid-19 and Slamming china's human rights violations in Xinjiang and Hongkong.**
 - China responded by imposing trade barriers on Australian exports, and by cutting off all ministerial contact.
 - India is facing Chinese aggression along the border which has been highlighted by incidents such as **Galwan valley clash.**
 - Both Australia and India support a **rules-based international order** and they are seeking to forge regional institutions in the Indo-Pacific which are inclusive, promote further economic integration.
 - The countries' participation in **Quad** (India, Australia, US, Japan) is an example of their convergence of interests, based on shared concerns.
- **Multilateral Cooperation:**
 - Both are members of the **Quad, Commonwealth, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), ASEAN Regional Forum, Asia Pacific Partnership on Climate and Clean Development, and have participated in the East Asia Summits.**
 - Both countries have also been cooperating as members of the Five Interested Parties (FIP) in the **World Trade Organization** context.
 - Australia is an important player in **Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)** and supports India's membership of the organisation.
- **Economic Cooperation:**
 - **Economic Cooperation Trade Agreement (ECTA):**
 - It is the first free trade agreement signed by India with a developed country in a decade which entered into force in December 2022.
 - **Reduction in Duties:**
 - It has resulted in an **immediate reduction of duty to zero on 96% of Indian exports to Australia** in value (that is 98% of the tariff lines) and **zero duty on 85% of Australia's exports (in value) to India.**
 - **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI):**
 - India and Australia are partners in the trilateral arrangement along with Japan which seeks to enhance the resilience of supply chains in the **Indo-Pacific Region.**
 - **Bilateral trade:**
 - Australia is the **17th largest trading partner of India** and India is Australia's **9th largest trading partner.**
 - Bilateral trade between India and Australia was **US\$ 27.5 billion in 2021**, there is potential for it to reach around **US\$ 50 billion in five years.**
- **Cooperation in Education Sector:**
 - The Mechanism for **Mutual Recognition of Educational Qualifications (MREQ)** was signed in March 2023. This will facilitate mobility of students between India and Australia.

- Deakin University and University of Wollongong are planning to open campuses in India.
- **More than 1 lakh Indian students are pursuing higher education degrees in Australian universities**, making Indian students the second largest cohort of foreign students in Australia.
- **Cooperation on Clean Energy:**
 - In February 2022, countries signed a **Letter of Intent on New and Renewable Energy** for cooperation to reduce the cost of renewable energy technologies, including ultra low-cost solar and clean hydrogen.
 - India announced Australian Dollars(AUD) 10 million for Pacific Island Countries under the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)**.
 - Both the countries committed to USD 5.8 million to the **three-year India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership**.

What are the Challenges in India-Australia Relations?

- **Adani coal mine controversy:**
 - There was controversy over the Adani coal mine project in Australia, with some activists protesting against it, which created a strain in the relationship between the two countries.
- **Visa issues:**
 - There have been concerns over visa restrictions for Indian students and professionals seeking to work in Australia.
- **Violence with Indian Diaspora:**
 - Attacks on Indian Diaspora and temples in the recent past by Khalistan supporters have been a issue of strain.

Way Forward

- The India-Australia relations have strengthened in recent years due to **shared values, interests, geography, and objectives**.
- Both countries **envision a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific region**, unilateral or coercive actions are not preferred and are to be avoided in resolving any disagreements or conflicts.
- Renewed relationship between India- Australia through initiatives such as India Australia bilateral Summits give an **opportunity to further strengthen the ties between the two countries to play an active role in ensuring rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific**.

A 'ZEITENWENDE' IN THE INDIA-GERMANY RELATIONSHIP

Context: Chancellor Scholz of Germany made a two day visit to India, that began on February 25, 2023,

How is Germany undergoing major changes in its external approach?

- The **Russian invasion of Ukraine** has been a **watershed moment in Germany's security policy**. It has resulted in the abandonment of **post-war pacific policy towards strategic matters**. This is evident in **Germany's increased military spending**.
- **Russia's war and China's assertive posturing** have brought into question Germany's approach of change through trade. It has prompted a rethink of its **energy and trade dependencies**. The focus is now on **diversifying economic relations**.
- In a departure from **previous Asia policy** that centred around China, Mr. Scholz first visited Japan after assuming office in 2021. He later invited Mr. Modi for the **6th Intergovernmental Consultations** to Berlin.
- This enhanced **political outreach to Asia** is part of Germany's **overall strategy for the IndoPacific Region**. It mentions India as a **key partner**.
- For Germany, the **stability of supply chains and trade routes** linking Asia to Europe assumes critical importance. The reason is its status as Europe's **economic powerhouse and its reliance on exports**.

What are the points of convergence between India and Germany?

- As ties with Russia and China are uncertain, Europe is prioritising **values-based partnerships with likeminded countries**. It can advance India-German cooperation.
- The German government's **coalition agreement in 2021** refers to relations with India among its top foreign policy priorities.
- Mr. Scholz has expressed Germany's intent to enhance its **strategic involvement in the Indo-Pacific through greater military deployment**.
- Germany's symbolic gesture of **sending its frigate Bayern to the Indo Pacific in 2021**, with a stopover in Mumbai was a demonstration of this.
- A recent agreement on **India-Germany triangular cooperation** involving development projects in third countries is also an important step in this direction.

What is the status of the bilateral relationship between India and Germany?

- **Defence and security**– New Delhi attempts to **diversify from its military dependence** on Russia. Berlin is also **reassessing its arms exports policy**. Germany could become an **important defence partner** for India.
- The recent meetings between heads of the states included discussions around **codevelopment of military hardware and tech transfers**.
- A deal worth \$5.2 billion where Germany would jointly build **six conventional submarines in India** could be underway. Besides, the first ever **France-India-Germany military exercise drill** is slated to take place in 2024.
- Yet, it is important for the two countries to set **realistic expectations in the security realm**. Despite their common concerns regarding stability in the IndoPacific, Germany does not share a border with China.
- India has **territorial conflicts** with China. Despite the lack of German trust in China, there exists **economic interdependence**.
- It is encouraging that Germany is drafting a **new official China strategy** amidst a wider national security strategy.
- **On global issues**– India and Germany also cooperate in **multilateral forums, as part of the G4 grouping** pushing for United Nations Security Council reform.
- Discussions on the Russia Ukraine conflict and its **global repercussions** were the **centre stage of talks** between two Modi and Scholaz. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has reiterated India's commitment to contribute to any peace process.
- **Economy**– Germany is **India's largest economic partner** in the European Union (EU). The Chancellor had a high powered business delegation with him during visit to India.
- **Clean energy and green technologies**- It has emerged as the central pillar in the partnership. The **Green and Sustainable Development Partnership** was launched last year. There exists cooperation in the area of **green hydrogen**.
- **Mobility and migration**– It is also a focus area. Germany has shortages of **skilled manpower**; where technically skilled Indians could help plug this gap.

What is the future of bilateral partnership?

- The relationship is steadily evolving into a more **wholesome Partnership**.
- **Divergent positions on the war** have not undermined India's **regular political engagements** with Europe.
- An intensification of the **Russia-China axis** could further embolden this alignment. Against the backdrop of **volatile geopolitical shifts, emerging multipolarity**, India's ties with Germany could be vital in **shaping a new global order**.

INDIA – USA 5TH COMMERCIAL DIALOGUE 2023 HELD

Context: Recently, the **US Secretary of Commerce** visited India to participate in the India-US bilateral Commercial Dialogue 2023.

About:

- The **India-US Commercial Dialogue** aims to strengthen **US-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership** by enhancing commercial collaboration
- It is because of such collaborations that the **bilateral goods and services trade has almost doubled since 2014, surpassing \$191 billion.**

Outcomes

- India showed interest in partnering with the **United States in developing a secure pharmaceutical manufacturing base and diversifying supply chains** for critical and strategic minerals (including rare earth).
- **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** was signed on establishing a **semiconductor supply chain and innovation partnership** under the framework of India – US Commercial Dialogue.
- A new **Working Group on Talent, Innovation and Inclusive Growth** under the Commercial Dialogue was launched to further the cooperation on Start-ups, SMEs, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship including in digital and emergent technologies
- Re-launched the **Travel and Tourism Working Group** to address new challenges and opportunities to create a stronger travel and tourism sector.
- Launched **Standards and Conformance Cooperation Program** (Phase III) to be carried out in partnership between ANSI (American National Standard Institute) from the US side and BIS (Bureau of Indian Standards) from the Indian side in furtherance of standards cooperation.
- Announced **U.S.-India Energy Industry Network (EIN)** as a broad platform for facilitating U.S. industry involvement in the **Clean EDGE Asia initiative** to discuss opportunities in the Indian energy sector.

A MOMENT OF RECKONING FOR AUKUS AND AUSTRALIA

Context: An announcement about an “optimal pathway” for AUKUS is on the horizon. It has implications for Australia’s plans to operate a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines within the next decade.

Importance of AUKUS for Australia:

- **Focusing** on Indo-Pacific
- **Transferring** Nuclear Submarines to Australia
- **Australia is now set to join an elite group of only six countries** – India, the US, the UK, France, Russia and China (that operate nuclear-powered submarines).
- **Multi-Sectoral Cooperation-** Meetings and engagements between the three countries and cooperation across emerging technologies (**applied AI, quantum technologies and undersea capabilities**).

Concerns for Australia:

- **It requires a favorable path** to develop deterrence capabilities against potential adversaries
 - **even the most positive outcome** of the AUKUS consultations is not without drawbacks.
- **Many of its regional partners** oppose the Royal Australian Navy operating nuclear attack submarines.
 - **Such as Indonesia**, have been open about their reservations.
 - **India:** being politically supportive of **AUKUS**, conflicted about the prospect of these submarines operating in the regional littorals.

Australian stand:

- **AUKUS does not provide** Australia with nuclear weapons capability, but is rather a means of acquiring nuclear maritime propulsion.
- **Distinguished AUKUS from groups such as the Quad:** It describes the **Quad** as a **normative grouping** that lays out a vision for the region and **AUKUS** as a more **technical arrangement**.

Options and challenges for Australia:

- **The U.S. to build nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs)** for Australia.
 - **Challenges:**
 - **Many U.S. policymakers seem skeptical about this option.**

- Top U.S. Senators wrote to the President **urging him not to sell nuclear submarines to Australia.**
- K. to expand its Astute-class programme to Australia: **The U.K. is constructing its Dreadnought-class ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) programme while designing the Astute-class replacement in a sequential build process.**
 - **Challenge:**
 - Even if Australia acquired an Astute-class submarine, **integrating the onboard combat system would be difficult due to differences between the current Australian and American fleets.**
 - Trilateral effort to develop a new nuclear submarine design: **Australia could announce a modified version of the yet-to-be-launched**
 - S. Next-Generation Attack Submarine **or U.K. Submersible Ship Nuclear Replacement (SSNR) programmes**
 - Or a completely new **AUKUS-class design to be acquired by all three countries.**
 - Challenge:
 - Australia has to figure out **how to get around U.S. export controls.**
 - The U.S.'s stringent export control and **protocol regime could jeopardize the technology transfer agreement, particularly in areas related to undersea capabilities and electronic warfare.**

Implications for India:

- **The developments surrounding AUKUS** are instructive for Indian observers.
- **Acquiring nuclear propulsion technology** is likely to be also complicated for India, which is not a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.
- **The complexities involved in the transfer of technology** for HEU-fuelled reactors in nuclear attack submarines from the U.S. and U.K., leave India with only one practical option: **buying a high-power reactor from France.**
- **The miniaturized low-enriched uranium (LEU) reactor** core for SSNs, though a workable alternative for India, would impose its own limitations in terms of Indian dependence on France for reactor fuel and the need for periodic refueling.

Way Forward

- **AUKUS remains a military pact** with the potential to shape the strategic contours of maritime Asia
- **Reform the U.S. export control regime** by creating a “**carve-out**” of the **International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR).**
- **For India**, which has never been in the same league of U.S. partners as Australia, acquiring critical technology from the U.S. remains a more daunting prospect.
- **For Australia to operate nuclear-powered submarines with high-enriched uranium (HEU) fuelled reactors**, it will have to exploit a loophole that allows non-nuclear weapon countries to withdraw the fissile material required for submarine reactors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)-monitored stockpile.
- **The removal could set a dangerous precedent**, allowing potential proliferators to use naval reactors as a cover for future nuclear weapons development.

IN SAUDI-IRANIAN NORMALIZATION, NEW CHALLENGES EMERGE IN WEST ASIA

Context: Saudi Arabia and Iran, signed an agreement in Beijing, China, to re-establish **diplomatic ties**, **respect each other's sovereignty** and **maintain non-interference** in the other's domestic affairs.

What is the Conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia?

- **Religious Factor:**

- **Saudi Arabia broke off ties with Iran in 2016** after protesters invaded Saudi diplomatic posts after Saudi Arabia had executed a prominent Shiite cleric days earlier.
- **Saudi Arabia has long portrayed itself as the world's leading Sunni nation** while Iran views itself as the protector of the Islam's Shiite minority.
- **Attacks on Saudi Arabia:** Iran was blamed for a series of attacks including one targeting the heart of **Saudi Arabia's oil industry in 2019**.
- **Regional Cold War:** Saudi Arabia and Iran – two powerful neighbors – are locked in a fierce struggle for regional dominance.
- **Uprisings across the Arab world** (after the Arab Spring in 2011) caused political instability throughout the region.
 - **Iran and Saudi Arabia** expand their influence, notably in **Syria, Bahrain and Yemen**, further heightening mutual suspicions.
- **Proxy Wars:** Iran and Saudi Arabia are not directly fighting but they are engaged in a variety of proxy wars (conflicts where they support rival sides and militias) around the region.
 - **For Example, Houthi rebels in Yemen.** These groups can acquire greater capabilities which can cause further instability in the region.
 - **Saudi Arabia** accuses Iran of supporting them.

What is the agreement?

- Agreement to restore **diplomatic ties** which have been severed since **2016**.
- **The agreement reinstates two previous accords:**
 - **On security** cooperation signed in 2001
 - **Dealing with economic**, technical, scientific and cultural ties.
- **This agreement ends** seven years of diplomatic estrangement between the two Gulf neighbors.
- **China's Foreign Affairs Minister:** He described it as a "victory for dialogue, a victory for peace".
- **The Saudi Foreign Minister** said: Saudi "favored political solutions and dialogue
- **Iranian Foreign minister:** affirmed that his country was pursuing "the preparation of more regional steps".

The Saudi-Iran accord:

- **The agreement** addresses the most serious regional confrontation
- **It reduces regional tensions** and puts in place the bases for further dialogue on improving relations and engaging on contentious issues.
- **Meetings of Saudi and Iranian officials in Baghdad and Muscat in 2021 and 2022**
 - Addressing issues that divide the two countries
 - The wars in Syria and Yemen
 - Saudi concerns relating to Iran's mobilization of Shia communities in the region
 - **Arab states** were prepared to pursue their interests without United States involvement.
 - **S. not as a security-provider:** The U.S.'s military failures in Iraq and Afghanistan contributed to its loss of credibility among its regional allies.

Role of China:

- **China** is an attractive partner.
- **It has substantial energy**, trade, investment and technology-related ties with West Asia
- **It is the region's** largest buyer of crude oil
- It is a major trade and investment partner, and rapidly expanding its role as a technology-provider in most countries.

Importance of West Asia for China;

- West Asia is crucial for the realization of **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**
- **Regional states** being important for logistical connectivity, and investment, consultancy and contracting partnerships.
- **China's interests** require a stable regional environment.

China's new approach in West Asia:

- **Two years ago:** China was looking at greater political involvement with the region on the basis of “**quasi-mediation diplomacy**”.
 - **To promote its broad commercial,** diplomatic and political interests rather than its hard security concerns.
- **Chinese President to his Arab interlocutors during three summits (bilateral, Gulf and Arab League) in Riyadh:** The Chinese Foreign Office described the visit as “consolidating consensus on global governance, development, security and other crucial issues”.

Way Forward

- **Regional security needs the revival of the nuclear agreement,** the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and linked with it, the management of Israel's aggressiveness.
- **The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** announced it had seen traces of uranium enrichment by Iran to 84%
 - **The IAEA Director General visited Iran:** obtained an Iranian agreement to allow verification and monitoring activities by IAEA's inspectors.
 - **This has prepared the ground** for renewed talks on the JCPOA.
- **Saudi-Iran differences will be difficult to resolve:** Saudi Arabia's deep sense of strategic vulnerability vis-à-vis its northern neighbor and concerns that might destabilize regional states through the use of Shia proxies.
- **Iran will need to play a more proactive role** to assure its neighbor of its benign intentions.
- **Israel's domestic politics, deeply** polarized and dominated by the extreme right wing, is also expected to obstruct the renewal of the JCPOA and maintain a hostile posture towards Iran.
- **Though serious problems remain with this accord,** China has affirmed that its role in West Asian affairs is likely to get more active and substantial.
- **Challenges for Indian diplomacy:** India will need to engage with China in West Asia where they have a broad gamut of shared interests in energy security, free and open sea lanes, logistical connectivity, and, above all, regional stability.

DOHA POLITICAL DECLARATION ON LDCS

Context:

- The 5th **United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5)** concluded with adoption of the ‘**Doha Political Declaration**’ by the world leaders.
- The declaration is a key outcome of the **second part of LDC5 conference** held under the theme “**From Potential to Prosperity**” in Qatar.

What are the Key Highlights of the Declaration?

- **Doha Programme of Action:**
 - It focuses on implementing the **Doha Programme of Action (DPoA)**, the 10-year plan to put the **world's 46 most vulnerable countries back on track** to achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**.
 - DPoA for the Decade (2022-2031) was agreed upon during the first part of the LDC5 conference in March 2022 in New York, the US.
 - DPoA (2022-2031) consisted of **Six Key Focus Areas**,
 - Eradicating **Poverty**
 - Leveraging the potential of science and technology to fight against multidimensional vulnerabilities and to achieve the SDGs
 - Addressing **Climate Change**
 - Environmental Degradation
 - Recovering from **Covid-19** and building resilience against future shocks for risk-informed sustainable development.

- **Need for the Declaration:**

- The 46 LDCs are being hit the hardest by multiple crises including the **Covid-19 Pandemic, Climate Crisis**, growing Inequalities, rising Debt Burdens and economic shocks.
- They have contributed **minimally to Carbon Dioxide Emissions**, but disproportionately **bear the burden of climate change impacts**.
- These countries, which include 33 African nations, face the challenge of high **debt costs while having inadequate liquidity** to provide essential services.
- The LDCs are the **worst performers on the progress made towards achieving SDGs**, according to the **Sustainable Development Report 2022**.

What are LDCs?

- LDCs are a group of countries identified by the United Nations as having the **lowest indicators of socioeconomic development**. These countries are characterized by high levels of poverty, low levels of human capital, and limited access to basic services, such as healthcare and education.
- Currently, **there are 46 countries** on the United Nations' list of LDCs.
 - Africa (33);
 - Asia (9);
 - Caribbean (1): Haiti;
 - Pacific (3): Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu.
- The list of LDCs is reviewed **every three years by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP)**, a group of independent experts that report to the **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** of the United Nations.
- Following a triennial review of the list, the CDP may recommend, in its report to ECOSOC, countries for addition to the list or graduation from LDC status.

INDIA-US PACT ON SEMICONDUCTOR

Context: Recently, India and the US have signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on establishing the **Semiconductor Supply chain during India – USA 5th Commercial Dialogue 2023**, which can help **India** realize its long-nurtured dream of becoming a hub for electronic goods.

- The MoU seeks to establish a collaborative mechanism between the two governments **on semiconductor supply chain resiliency and diversification** in view of **US's CHIPS and Science Act and India's Semiconductor Mission**.

What is the Significance of the Deal?

- **Commercial Opportunities:**
 - The US and China are giants in chip manufacturing. So, this pact with the US to strengthen cooperation in the semiconductor sector to facilitate commercial opportunities and development of innovation ecosystems **is likely to help India immensely**.
- **Electronics Supply Chain:**
 - It can help India get aligned into **a more central role in the global electronics supply chain**.
- **Can Address Semiconductor Crunch:**
 - The crunch in semiconductors supply began during the **Covid-19** and went on to intensify in 2021. A Goldman Sachs report suggested that **at least 169 industries had been impacted by the global chip supply shortage** in 2021.
 - The crunch has eased now but some disruptions in the supply chain still exist.
- **Realignment towards Chip Manufacturing:**
 - From a domestic perspective, this could also prompt a **potential realignment of India's current policy approach on chip manufacturing**: which is currently focused, almost entirely, on the manufacture of **mature nodes – generally defined as chips that are 40 nanometres (nm) or above** and find application in sectors such as the automotive industry – before trying to attempt an entry into **the more advanced nodes (smaller than 40nm)**, which are far more strategic, but require exceptional manufacturing capabilities and project execution skills.

What are the Challenges for India?

- **High Investments Required:** Semiconductors and display manufacturing is a very **complex and technology-intensive sector** involving huge capital investments, high risk, long gestation and payback periods, and rapid changes in technology, which require significant and sustained investments.
- **Minimal Fiscal Support from Government:** The level of fiscal support currently envisioned is minuscule when one considers the scale of investments typically required to set up manufacturing capacities in the various sub-sectors of the semiconductor industry.
- **Lack of Fabrication Capacities:** India has a decent chip design talent but it never built-up chip fab capacity. The **ISRO and the DRDO** have their respective fab foundries but they are primarily for their own requirements and are also not as sophisticated as the latest in the world.
 - India has only government-owned semiconductor fabrication unit- can be added as there might be other private fabs old fab which is located in Mohali, Punjab.
- **Extremely Expensive Fab Setup:** A semiconductor fabrication facility (or fab) can cost multiples of a billion dollars to set up even on a relatively small scale and lagging by a generation or two behind the latest in technology.
- **Resource Inefficient Sector:** Chip fabs are also very thirsty units requiring millions of litres of clean water, an extremely stable power supply, a lot of land and a highly skilled workforce.

Where does India Stand in the Semiconductor Market?

- India currently imports all chips and the market is estimated to touch USD 100 billion by 2025 from USD 24 billion now. However, for the domestic manufacturing of semiconductor chips, India has recently launched several initiatives:
 - The Union Cabinet has allocated an amount of Rs 76,000 crore in 2021 for supporting the **development of a 'semiconductors and display manufacturing ecosystem'**.
 - Consequently, a significant number of incentives would be provided to design companies to design chips.
 - India has also launched the **Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS)** for manufacturing of electronics components and semiconductors.
 - In 2021, India announced its roughly USD 10 billion-dollar **Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme** to encourage semiconductor and display manufacturing in the country.
 - In 2021, the MeitY also launched the **Design Linked Incentive (DLI) Scheme** to nurture at least 20 domestic companies involved in semiconductor design and facilitate them to achieve a turnover of more than Rs.1500 Crore in the next 5 years.
- India's own consumption of semiconductors is expected to cross USD 80 billion by 2026 and to USD 110 billion by 2030.

Way Forward

- It is likely that India will achieve its long-nurtured dream of becoming an electronics hub and help ensure that there is no demand-supply gap in semiconductors.
- It is also likely that buyers won't ever have to wait for the second key to their vehicles.

INDIA AND THE AUKUS GROUPING

Context: Recently, the **US, UK and Australia** have unveiled details of their plan to create a new fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, aimed at countering China's influence in the **Indo-Pacific region**. Under the AUKUS pact Australia is to get at least three nuclear-powered submarines from the US.

- The **AUKUS agreement**, which involves Australia acquiring nuclear-powered submarines with the help of the US and the UK, is being praised and criticized simultaneously. It is viewed as a means of strengthening

deterrence and stability in the Indo-Pacific. However, **China sees it as a dangerous alliance that the US is building in the area**, along with the **Quadrilateral forum or the Quad**.

- This pact will **trigger multiple strategic consequences for Asia, including India**. However, it is also an opportunity for India to develop a unique set of arrangements with the US and its allies.

What is AUKUS Grouping?

- It is a trilateral security partnership for the Indo-Pacific, between Australia, the UK and the US (AUKUS) which was signed in 2021.
- The major highlight of this arrangement is the sharing of US nuclear submarine technology to Australia.
- Its Indo-pacific orientation makes it an alliance against China's assertive actions in the **South China Sea**.
- It involves a new architecture of meetings and engagements between the three countries, as well as cooperation across emerging technologies (**applied AI, quantum technologies and undersea capabilities**).

What are the Concerns related to AUKUS Grouping for Asia?

- **Regional Security:**
 - The AUKUS partnership has been **perceived as a challenge to the security and stability of the region**, particularly by China. The **agreement includes the sharing of sensitive defense technologies and intelligence**, which has raised concerns about its impact on the strategic balance in the region.
- **Diplomatic Implications:**
 - The AUKUS partnership has **also been viewed as a diplomatic setback for countries** such as India, Japan, and South Korea, which have traditionally been seen as key allies of the United States in the region.
 - These countries fear that the **new partnership will sideline them and reduce their influence in the region**.
- **Impact on Non-Proliferation:**
 - The AUKUS partnership **involves the transfer of nuclear-powered submarine technology to Australia, which has raised concerns about its impact on global non-proliferation efforts**. Some experts have expressed concern that this move could set a dangerous precedent and encourage other countries to pursue nuclear capabilities.
- **Economic Consequences:**
 - The AUKUS partnership has also **raised concerns about its economic implications, particularly for countries such as India that have significant defense industries**. The agreement is expected to lead to increased competition and could potentially impact the ability of these countries to sell defense equipment to Australia.

What will be the Strategic Consequences for India?

- **Strengthening ties with Australia:**
 - With Australia's upgraded scientific and technical capabilities, **there is an opportunity for India to deepen its S&T cooperation with Australia**, which could eventually expand to sensitive strategic areas.
 - This **would enhance India's own technological capabilities** and contribute to regional peace and security.
- **Recognizing the Continuing Global Strategic Salience of Britain:**
 - India tends to neglect the strategic importance of Britain, but the AUKUS deal may boost UK's profile in Asia.
 - **India could explore opportunities for closer cooperation with Britain** on Indo-Pacific security issues.
- **Embracing the idea of an "Anglosphere":**
 - Despite India's difficult past relations with the Anglosphere, the **AUKUS deal has brought enduring geopolitical bonds** between the US, UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand back to life.
 - An Anglosphere is also called the world of English-speaking people bound by common political beliefs, similar legal traditions, and shared geopolitical interests.
 - India could **explore opportunities to expand its ties with the English-speaking world**, particularly in the areas of technology and defense.

- **Developing a Unique Set of Arrangements:**
 - With the US seeking to boost the strategic capabilities of its allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, **India has a rare opportunity to develop its own set of arrangements with the US and its allies.**
 - This could involve **closer military cooperation, joint exercises, and intelligence sharing**, among other things.

How can India Safeguard its Strategic Interests?

- **Exploring Opportunities for Collaboration:**
 - India can explore opportunities for collaboration and technology transfer with the AUKUS countries, while also ensuring that its own national security interests are not compromised.
 - India can seek collaborations with AUKUS countries in areas such as maritime security, cybersecurity, and intelligence sharing.
- **Maintaining Balance:**
 - India should maintain a balance between its engagement with AUKUS and other key partners, such as Russia, France, and Japan.
 - India should avoid being drawn into a zero-sum game and strive to maintain strong ties with all relevant countries.
 - This is particularly important given the complex geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Strengthening Quad:**
 - India should work towards strengthening the Quad, which could provide a counterbalance to AUKUS and help promote a rules-based regional order.
 - India should leverage the Quad to promote regional stability and balance of power.
- **Ensuring the Interest of Smaller Countries:**
 - India needs to ensure that the interests of smaller countries in the region are not overlooked in any engagements with AUKUS. India should take a leadership role in promoting a cooperative and inclusive approach to regional security issues.
 - This could involve initiatives such as capacity building for smaller countries in the region and promoting greater regional integration and connectivity.

CHINA, INDIA AND THE PROMISE OF THE POWER

Context: With India's presidency of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** and the **G-20**, its focus is also on China.

What are the Focus Areas of China's Development?

- **Steady Growth:**
 - In 2022, China's **economy grew by 3%**.
 - China's **GDP (Gross Domestic Product)** increased to 121 trillion yuan (approximately USD 18 trillion), registering an **annual growth rate of 5.2% over the past five years.**
- **People's Well-Being:**
 - As a result of continued efforts of the past eight years, China has **historically resolved absolute Poverty**, with the alleviation of close to 100 million rural residents from poverty.
 - Over 70% of the government's expenditure went toward ensuring people's well-being.
- **Win-Win Cooperation:**
 - In the period 2013-2021, China's contribution to global economic growth averaged 38.6%, higher than that of **G7 countries combined (25.7%)**.
 - Ever since the Chinese President proposed the **Global Development Initiative (GDI)** in a speech at the **United Nations General Assembly** in 2021, more than 100 countries have **expressed their support and over 60 countries have joined the Group of Friends of the GDI.**

What is the Scenario of Trade between India and China?

- China is **India's second biggest trading partner** after the US.
- China and India are important trading partners, with bilateral trade volume reaching USD 135.984 billion in 2022.
- Though there is a trade deficit, **India's import of equipment and materials from China does reduce the overall cost of "Made-in-India" products**, benefits Indian downstream industries and consumers, enhances the competitiveness of Indian exports, and in turn facilitates India's integration into global industrial and supply chains.
- The Chinese market is open to India, and the **Chinese side is happy to see more high-quality Indian goods**, cultural and other products entering the Chinese market.
- Investments by Chinese enterprises have **created a large number of jobs for the Indian people and contributed to India's economic development**.

Way Forward

- The development and revitalisation of China and India embody a **boost to the force of developing countries**; it is one that will change the destiny of a third of the world's population and have bearing on the future of Asia and beyond.
- As two neighboring and ancient civilisations, with a combined population of 2.8 billion, China and India are **representatives of developing countries and emerging economies**.
- India and China are both in the process of national **rejuvenation and a crucial period of modernisation where challenges need to be overcome and problems need to be solved**.
- China and India **have far more common interests than differences**.

US SENATE RESOLUTION FOR UNDERLINING BACKING INDIA ON MCMAHON LINE: WHAT IS THE MCMAHON LINE?

Context: Two United States Senators, have introduced a **bipartisan resolution in the upper chamber of Congress** reiterating that the **US recognises the McMahon Line as the international boundary between China and India in Arunachal Pradesh**.

- The resolution reaffirms **India's well-known and established position that Arunachal Pradesh, which China calls 'South Tibet', is an integral part of India**.

What is the McMahon Line?

- The McMahon Line serves as the **de facto boundary between China and India in the Eastern Sector**.
- It specifically represents the **boundary between Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet, from Bhutan in the west to Myanmar in the east**.
- China has historically disputed the **boundary and claims the state of Arunachal Pradesh as part of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR)**.

When was it drawn:

- The McMahon Line was drawn during the **Shimla Convention of 1914, officially described as the Convention Between Great Britain, China, and Tibet**.
- China was represented at the convention by the **government of the Republic of China, which was in power in the mainland from 1912 to 1949**.
- The McMahon Line **delimited the respective spheres of influence of Tibet and British India in the eastern Himalayan region in what is today India's Northeast and northern Myanmar**. The border in this region was undefined prior to the signing of the convention.

What happened at the Shimla Convention of 1913-14?

- The convention attempted to **settle the question of Tibet's sovereignty and avoid further territorial disputes in the region.**
- The treaty divided the Buddhist region into **"Outer Tibet" and "Inner Tibet"** – the former would "remain in the hands of the Tibetan Government at Lhasa under Chinese suzerainty", though China was not allowed to interfere in its affairs.
- The latter would be **under the direct jurisdiction of the newly formed Republic of China.**
- The **latter of these newly decided boundaries would later be called the McMahon Line after McMahon, the chief British negotiator.**

Why China did not sign the convention:

- **Arguing that Tibet had no independent authority to enter into international agreements.**

How was the border between British India and China decided?

- Following the **"highest watershed principle"**. This principle, considered to be the **most logical way of drawing borders in mountainous regions by the British, basically drew the border along the highest ridge between two river plains.**

Status of the McMahon line since 1914:

- After the communists took power in 1949, **they pulled China out of all international agreements and the so-called "unequal treaties"**.



CHINA, INDIA AND THE PROMISE OF THE POWER OF TWO

Context: China and India have far more common interests than differences.

China and India coming together

- **Representatives of developing countries:**
 - As two neighbouring and ancient civilisations, with a combined population of 2.8 billion, China and India are representatives of developing countries and emerging economies.
- **Crucial period of modernisation for both:**
 - India and China are both in the process of **national rejuvenation** and a crucial period of **modernisation** where challenges need to be overcome and problems need to be solved.
- **China's path of modernization:**
 - China is advancing modernisation on all fronts. Here, the path to modernisation is based on China's practices with a focus on high-quality development.
 - It means the modernisation of a huge population, where there is
 - Common prosperity for all,
 - Material and cultural-ethical advancement,
 - Harmony between humanity and nature, and
 - Peaceful development.

- **Significance:**

- In his recent meeting with **India's External Affairs Minister & Chinese Foreign Minister** stated that the **development and revitalisation of China and India** embody a **boost to the force of developing countries**; it is one that will change the destiny of a **third of the world's population** and having bearing on the **future of Asia** and beyond.
 - This will spell new opportunities to all countries in the world, especially neighbouring countries.
- This echoes what India's External Affairs Minister had expressed in 2022, that **the Asian Century will happen when China and India come together**.

China's focus areas

- **Steady growth:**

- In 2022, China's economy grew by 3% with a total of 12.06 million urban jobs added. China's GDP registered an annual growth rate of 5.2% over the past five years and an annual growth of 6.2% over the past decade. China's economic strength is steadily reaching new heights.

- **People's well-being:**

- As a result of continued efforts of the past eight years, China has historically resolved absolute poverty, with the alleviation of close to 100 million rural residents from poverty.
- Over 70% of the government's expenditure went toward ensuring people's well-being. Basic old age insurance covers 1.05 billion people, an increase of 140 million.
- Living standards continue to witness new improvements.

- **Opening up:**

- In 2022, China's total volume of trade in goods exceeded 40 trillion yuan, registering an annual growth rate of 8.6%.
- China's actual use of foreign capital was up by 8% and the country remained one of the top destinations for foreign investors.
- The overall tariff level continues to fall, from 9.8% to 7.4%. China's doors to the outside world are opening even wider.

- **Win-win cooperation:**

- In the period 2013-2021, China's contribution to global economic growth averaged 38.6%, higher than that of G7 countries combined (25.7%).

- Ever since the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, proposed **the Global Development Initiative (GDI)** in a speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2021, more than 100 countries have expressed their support and over 60 countries have joined the Group of Friends of the GDI.

China-India trade

- **Significance:**

- China and India are **important trading partners**, with **bilateral trade volume** reaching \$135.984 billion in 2022.
- The Chinese market is open to India and the Investments by Chinese enterprises have created jobs for the Indian people and contributed to India's economic development.

- **Challenges:**

- **Tariffs and non-tariff steps:**

- India is considering a number of tariffs and non-tariff steps to cut imports of non-essential consumer and electronic goods, including from China, as trade imbalances concern policymakers.

- **Limited participation for industries:**

- A section of the industry has opined that some of the conditions like requirements of local experience, are limiting their participation in the Chinese procurement process.

- **China's dumping practices:**

- India's domestic industry has suffered material injury due to dumping. Against this, India has imposed antidumping duties on a few Chinese products.

- **Geopolitical constraints:**
 - India is also suspicious about the strong strategic bilateral relations between China and Pakistan. The border dispute between the two countries is also causing hindrances.

Indian Government's steps to reduce the trade deficit & way ahead

- **Buyers - Sellers meets:**
 - The Government of India has taken various measures to extend support to exporters by facilitating **Buyers - Sellers meets** between **potential Chinese importers and Indian exporters** to increase exports of **sugar, oil meals, Indian rice and grapes**.
- **Promoting domestic manufacturing:**
 - Government has been implementing various schemes and programmes to help the domestic industries compete effectively with imports.
 - To promote the domestic manufacturing, schemes like **'Make in India, 'Digital India', Software Technology Parks, Electronics Hardware Technology Park Scheme/ Export Oriented Unit Scheme and Special Economic Zone Scheme** provide support for promoting domestic manufacturing in the country.
- **The Foreign Trade Policy:**
 - **The Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20** has mechanisms such as Merchandise Exports from India Scheme, Advance Authorisation Scheme, Export Promotion Capital Goods Scheme, Interest Equalization Scheme to provide an enabling framework for businesses to make their exports competitive.
 - **Active interventions, in terms of policy and procedural changes**, are regularly undertaken by the Government so that businesses can cope with the dynamic international trade scenario.

ICC ISSUES ARREST WARRANT FOR VLADIMIR PUTIN

Context: The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for war crimes for **President Vladimir Putin** and a second Russian official.

- This is the first time that the ICC has issued an arrest warrant against one of the **five permanent members of the United Nation Security Council**.

Why did the ICC Issue an Arrest Warrant against Putin?

- ICC issued an arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin for the alleged **war crime of unlawfully deporting and transferring children** from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation.

What is ICC?

- On 17 July, **1998 Rome Statute was adopted by 120 States** in direction of creating a more just world.
- On 1 July, **2002 Rome Statute took effect upon ratification by 60 states, officially establishing the ICC**. Since it has no retroactive jurisdiction, the ICC deals with crimes committed on or after this date.
- The Rome Statute, grants the **ICC jurisdiction over four main crimes:**
 - **The crime of Genocide**
 - **Crimes against Humanity**
 - **War crimes**
 - **Crime of Aggression**
- The Court is participating in a **global fight to end lawlessness**, and through **international criminal justice**, the Court aims to hold those responsible accountable for their crimes and to help prevent these crimes from happening again.
- The ICC is the **world's first permanent international criminal court**.
- Currently, **123 countries** are party to the Rome Statute, **India is not a party to Rome Statute along with US and China**.

- The ICC was established to prosecute the most heinous offenses only when a country's own legal machinery fails to act. Unlike the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)**, which deals with **countries and inter-state disputes**, the ICC prosecutes individuals.

Does the ICC have the Power to Prosecute Russia?

- As of March 2023, **Russia is not a party to the Rome Statute**, and therefore, the **ICC has no jurisdiction over crimes committed on its territory**. However, the ICC can investigate and prosecute crimes committed by individuals from other countries who committed the alleged crimes on the territory of a **state party to the Rome Statute**.
- Ukraine is also not a State Party to the Rome Statute", but **it has twice exercised its options to accept ICC's jurisdiction** over alleged crimes under the Rome Statute, occurring on its territory, **under Article 12(3) of the Statute**.
 - **Article 12(3) states** that if the acceptance of a state that is not a party to the statute, the **state may accept the jurisdiction of the court** for a crime concerned, by **making a declaration to the Registrar and cooperating without any delay or exception**.

INDIA-BANGLADESH FRIENDSHIP PIPELINE (IBFPL)

Context: Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh recently inaugurated the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline (IBFPL). It is the first cross-border energy pipeline between the two countries.

More about the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline (IBFPL)

- **About:**
 - The entire pipeline is 131.5 km long.
 - The pipeline runs from the **Siliguri-based marketing terminal** of the **Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL)** to the **Parbatipur depot** of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC).
- **Cost:**
 - The pipeline has been built at an estimated cost of ₹377 crore. Bangladesh's section of the pipeline cost ₹285 crore.
 - The construction of the project started in 2018 with the help of India's grant funding.
- **Fuel transport:**
 - It will be used to supply diesel from India to Bangladesh.
 - The supply will start on an experimental basis in June this year.
 - The pipeline will transport 1 million metric ton of high-speed diesel every year to seven districts of North Bangladesh.
 - The fuel transport deal will be effective for 15 years with an option for further extension.
- **Significance:**
 - The operation of India- Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline will put in place a sustainable, reliable, cost-effective and environment friendly mode of transporting HSD (High-speed diesel) from India to Bangladesh and will further enhance cooperation in energy security between the two countries

India Bangladesh Relations

- India was one of the **first countries to recognize Bangladesh** and establish diplomatic relations immediately after **its independence in December 1971**.
- Internationally both the nations share the following platforms:
 - **SAARC, BIMSTEC, Indian Ocean Coastal Regional Cooperation Association, and Commonwealth**.
- **Trade and investment:**
 - Bangladesh is India's **biggest trade partner in South Asia** and **India is the largest market in Asia for Bangladesh's exports**.
 - India's **exports** to Bangladesh during 2021 was US\$14.09 Billion.

- Bangladesh may become India's fourth-largest export destination in FY22, jumping five places in two years.
- Bangladesh's growth stems largely from its success as an **exporter of garments**, which account for around **80 percent of its total exports**.
- **Power and energy cooperation:**
 - **Cooperation in the power sector** has become one of the hallmarks of India -Bangladesh relations.
 - Bangladesh is currently importing **1160 MW of power from India**.
 - Bangladesh is the biggest **development partner of India**.
 - **India has extended 3 Lines of Credits (LOC)** to Bangladesh in the last 8 years amounting to US\$ 8 billion for the development of infrastructure in various sectors including roads, railways, shipping and ports.
- **Capacity Building and Human Resource Development:**
 - Human resource development is a key component of India's development cooperation efforts in Bangladesh through its several **ongoing training programs and Scholarships**.
 - The Government of India has been **training 1800 Bangladesh Civil Service officials from 2019 at National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG), Mussoorie**
 - **The Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC) in Dhaka** plays an important role in the celebration of common cultural links between the two countries.
 - Its training programs including **Yoga, Kathak, Manipuri dance, Hindi language, Hindustani classical music and the cultural programs** of renowned artists of India and Bangladesh contribute to the promotion of people-to-people contacts.
- **Defense Cooperation:**
 - High level exchanges at the level of services chief of Indian Navy, Bangladesh Navy and Indian Air Force, the conduct of second annual defense dialogue and inaugural **tri-services staff talks**, service specific talks of Navy and Air Force.
 - **DG-level talks** between the **Coast Guards** have contributed to significant improvement in bilateral defense cooperation.
 - In the **training domain** both the countries have continued and enhanced mutual engagements.
 - **Various Joint exercises** take place between the two countries:
 - **Exercise Sampriti** (Army) and
 - **Exercise Milan** (Navy).
- **Multimodal Connectivity:**
 - **The passenger trains between India and Bangladesh:**
 - **Bandhan Express:** starting from Kolkata for Khulna - Since 2017
 - It covers the distance via **Petrapole and Benapole border route** to cater to the demands of the people from both countries.
 - **Maitree Express:** starting from Dhaka for Kolkata - since 2008
 - The tri-weekly service between Kolkata and Dhaka used to run with 90 percent occupancy.
 - The train has a capacity to carry 456 passengers, the same as Bandhan Express.
 - **Mitali Express:** starting from New Jalpaiguri in North Bengal for Dhaka.
 - **Bus Service:**
 - Both the governments decided to commence: **Dhaka-Siliguri-Gangtok-Dhaka and DhakaSiliguri-Darjeeling-Dhaka bus service** to enhance people to people contacts between both the countries and the trail run of Dhaka-Siliguri-Gangtok-Dhaka was also held in December 2019.
 - The Government of India has also been providing grant assistance to Bangladesh for **various infrastructure projects** including the construction of the **Akhaura-Agartala rail link, dredging of inland waterways in Bangladesh and construction of the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline**

Context: Iran and Saudi Arabia recently announced a Chinese-brokered deal to restore diplomatic relations.

Iran and Saudi Arabia issues

• Struggle for influence:

- Iran and Saudi Arabia are engaged in an ongoing struggle for influence in the Middle East and other Muslim regions.
- The two countries have provided varying degrees of support to opposing sides in nearby conflicts, including the civil wars in Syria and Yemen; and disputes in Bahrain, Lebanon, Qatar, and Iraq.
- **For example:**
 - **In Yemen**, Iran has armed and aided the Houthis, while the Saudi military launched an air war in 2015 to prevent a complete takeover by Houthi rebels.
 - The Houthis subsequently launched attacks on Saudi airports and oil facilities.

• 2016 incident:

- The two countries severed ties in 2016 after mobs stormed the Saudi embassy in Tehran, in revenge against the execution of a prominent Saudi Shia cleric and political dissident, Sheikh Nimr.
- The two countries since then have been engaged in a rivalry for regional geopolitical influence, prolonging conflicts in Yemen and Syria.

• Threats:

- Only a few months ago, Iran's top military officials threatened Saudi Arabia with consequences unless it controlled its Persian-language media outlets zealously covering anti-government protests in Iran.
- Riyadh had raised alert levels citing a "credible threat of attack" from Iran.

Significance of China's mediation

• Constructive role of China:

- China, by mediating the agreement, has demonstrated its vast political capital in the region and is contrasting its "constructive" role towards regional peace.

• Strategic and symbolic dimensions:

- For China, brokering rapprochement between these two long time Middle East rivals has key strategic and symbolic dimensions.
- **Strategic:**
 - On the strategic side, Beijing needs to maintain the free flow of oil from the region.
 - China needs stability in the Gulf, where it gets over 40 percent of its crude oil imports.
- **Symbolic:**
 - **Breaking hegemony of American mediation:**
 - The Iran-Saudi deal on restoring diplomatic relations, brokered by China, suggests American influence in West Asia is being challenged.
 - Since the end of World War II and especially since the fall of the Soviet Union, the US has been the principal external power in the region.
 - **Power shift:**
 - Many have thus already described the recent development as a power shift, with China emerging as a significant player in the Middle East.

World's response & potential of the deal

• USA:

- The US welcomed the agreement immediately despite its confrontational relations with China, saying if it brought lasting peace, it did not matter who brokered it.
- At the same time, it sought to play down the assessment of diminished US influence in the region.

• India:

- India has welcomed the pact, saying it has always advocated dialogue and diplomacy to resolve differences.

• For Pakistan:

- Increasing Chinese influence in the Middle East may indirectly help Pakistan, both economically and strategically.
- Given the close relationship between Islamabad and Beijing, China may advocate Pakistan's case and influence rich Gulf countries to help ease Pakistan's financial woes.
- **Hope for peace:**
 - Critics believe this deal will not end differences between the Sunni monarchy and Shia republic.
 - The modest hope is that the deal sealed in Beijing may lead to a lasting peace in Yemen, and also end proxy Saudi-Iran hostilities in Lebanon, Syria and elsewhere in the region.
 - The agreement also may yield some domestic reprieve.

Possibilities for India

- **Red flag:**
 - China has repeatedly declared that its interests in the Middle East are only economic. Some believe it is only a matter of time before Beijing establishes a military presence in the region.
 - This deal, therefore, comes with a huge red flag for India and raises important geopolitical and strategic questions for New Delhi.
- **Impact on I2U2:**
 - Critics believe that the deal is sure to impact the I2U2 (Israel-India-UAE-US) grouping.
 - It calls for India to work on its ties to the region independently of the US (for instance with Iran), and in ways that project its civilisational and cultural links and the positive contributions of the Indian diaspora.
- **In India's interest:**
 - On the whole, Indian interests in the Gulf would plausibly be more secure if the two bitter rivals were actively working to de-escalate mutual tensions.
 - India, among other countries, also gained from the 2001 security agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which prevented active conflict for 10 years despite deep mutual mistrust.
 - Iran was one of the primary oil suppliers to India, making up 11 percent of the total oil imports, up until 2019.
- **Indian Diaspora:**
 - Given India's long-standing relationships with most of the Gulf states, it has a clear edge over China to become a more reliable partner and mediator.
 - The large Indian diaspora in the Middle East is a formidable asset that provides India with a unique soft power advantage.
 - This diaspora can act as a steadfast anchor in relations, irrespective of policy shifts and external shocks.

Way ahead

- India needs to patiently assess if China's growing involvement in the Gulf is detrimental to its long-term security interests and the regional balance of power.
- At the same time, recent developments also provide a window of opportunity for India to embed itself as a significant player in the Middle East.
 - The I2U2 partnership between India, Israel, the UAE, and the U.S. has already put India on the region's alliance canvas. New Delhi has strong motivations to push I2U2 as it seeks to reframe its relationship with the Middle East and gain a bigger footprint in the region.
- This should serve as a reminder to India that it takes a great deal of work to convert historical ties and photo ops into actual influence

INDIA AS A UNSC MEMBER: CONCLUDING ON A HIGH NOTE, IN MANHATTAN

Context: India has concluded its eighth stint in the United Nations Security Council at the end of December 2022.

What were the priorities for India at UNSC?

- The focus was on **maritime security, terrorism, UN peacekeeping, reformed multilateralism and the Global South.**
- India was elected Chair of three important UNSC Committees: **the Taliban Sanctions Committee, Libyan Sanctions Committee and Counterterrorism Committee.**

What are the important contributions of India as a UNSC member?

- **Maritime issues:** The Prime Minister of India chaired for the first time a UNSC meeting on maritime security. India's statement for the first time is a direct reference to the **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea**. It called it international law setting out the **legal framework** in the context of maritime activities.
- It also called for **freedom of navigation, antipiracy and combating terror and transnational crime at sea.**
- **Major conflicts:** In case of major conflicts over the world, the Council stood polarised and unable to act decisively. India tried to bring them on the same page.
- There was a military takeover in Myanmar in 2021. India ensured **balanced and comprehensive Council pronouncements**. It finally culminated in a **resolution on Myanmar** in December 2022.
- In August 2021, the Taliban forcefully seized power in Afghanistan. India was able to **steer the Negotiations**. It resulted in **UNSC Resolution 2593**. The resolution lays down benchmarks for **stopping cross-border terrorism** from Afghan soil; protecting the **rights of women, minorities and children**; ensuring an **inclusive government**, and providing **humanitarian assistance**.
- During the Ukraine conflict, India took an **independent stand**. It called for **dialogue and peace**. India spoke out against such **sanctions on oil, food and fertilisers**.
- **Terrorism:** India has enhanced its focus on terrorism. As Chair of the **UNSC Counter terrorism Committee**, its meeting was organised in India in October 2022. India's proposal to list Abdul Rehman Makki, Deputy Chief of the Lashkar-e-Taiba under **UNSC Resolution 1267 sanctions** was approved by the UNSC.
- **Peacekeeping:** India has been the **largest contributor to UN peacekeepers**. Its launching of the **UNITE Aware technology platform** to strengthen the **realtime protection of peacekeepers** is to be noted. In 2021, India piloted the first UNSC resolution, calling for **accountability for crimes against peacekeepers**. India gifted **two lakh vaccines** to all UN peacekeepers.
- **Climate change:** In 2021, India thwarted a move by the West. It wanted to take out climate change from the **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change** process and brought it under the ambit of the UNSC. The draft resolution was defeated in the Council when India and Russia voted against.
- **A change in religious extremism:** India also raised the issue of a contemporary form of **religiophobia** in the Council. It condemned **phobia against Abrahamic religions** and called for the need to combat rising **hate crimes and phobias against non-Abrahamic religions**.

IMF BAILOUTS

Context: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently confirmed a **USD 3 billion bailout plan (under Extended Fund Facility (EFF))** for Sri Lanka's struggling economy.

- It is also **negotiating with Pakistan for a USD 1.1 billion bailout plan** on account of its severe economic crisis marked by falling currency and price rise.

What are IMF Bailouts?

- **Bailout:** Bailout is a general term for **extending financial support to a company/country facing a potential bankruptcy threat**.
 - It can take the form of **loans, cash, bonds, or stock purchases**.
 - A bailout **may (not) require reimbursement but is often accompanied by greater oversight and regulations**.
- **IMF Bailouts:** Countries seek help from the IMF usually when their economies face a **major macroeconomic risk, mostly currency crisis** (such as the ones Sri Lanka is facing).

- Countries seek such assistance from the IMF to **meet their external debt** and other obligations, to **purchase essential imports**, and to **prop up the exchange value** of their currencies.

How is an IMF Bailout Provided?

• Procedure:

- The IMF lends money to the troubled economies often in the form of **Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)**.
 - SDRs simply represent a basket of five currencies, namely the **U.S. dollar**, the **euro**, the **Chinese yuan**, the **Japanese yen**, and the **British pound**.
- This lending is carried out by a number of lending programs such as **extended credit facility, flexible credit line, stand-by agreements, etc.**
- Countries receiving the bailout can use the SDRs for various purposes depending on their individual circumstances.

• Conditions:

- A country may have to agree to implement certain structural reforms as a condition to receive IMF loans.

○ Criticism of Lending Conditions:

- Believed to be too tough on the public
- Often accused of being influenced by international politics
- Free-market supporters criticise the IMF for being too interventionist

○ Acclamation:

- Conditions are essential for successful lending; it may **not make sense for IMF to throw money at a country** if its **faulty policies that caused the crisis remain untouched**.
- Countries with poor institutional functioning and high corruption are **most likely to misspend the bailout money**.

What are the Impacts of Providing IMF Bailouts?

• Advantages:

- They ensure **continued survival of the country** under difficult economic circumstances and **help solve BoP problems** without resorting to measures that can be even more harmful to national/international prosperity.
- A **complete collapse of the financial system can be avoided** when industries too big to fail start to crumble.
- **Insolvency of institutions** that are needed for the smooth functioning of the overall markets **can be avoided**.
- In addition to financial support, the **IMF can provide technical assistance and expertise** to help a country implement economic reforms and strengthen its institutions.

• Disadvantages:

- IMF's strict conditions for economic policy reforms may result in **reduced govt spending, increased taxes** etc. which can be politically unpopular and **may lead to social unrest**.
- Seeking an IMF bailout may **harm a country's reputation in the eyes of investors and lenders**, making it more difficult for the country to access international capital markets.
- Repeated IMF bailouts can **create a sense of dependency on external funding** and **discourage countries from implementing necessary long-term reforms** to address their economic problems.
- IMF bailouts **may be viewed as an admission of economic failure by a govt**, which can **lead to political instability** and even the collapse of the govt.

TAIWAN AND ONE-CHINA POLICY

Context: An agreement was signed recently between **China and the Central American country** of Honduras to establish diplomatic ties, after **Honduras** ended its diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

About

- China has never recognized Taiwan as an independent political entity, arguing that it was always a Chinese province under its "One China" policy.
- Despite the policy being a contentious issue between China and Taiwan for decades, Taiwan has been engaging in separatist activities for independence.
- Currently, **only 13 countries recognize Taiwan**, including Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Tuvalu, Eswatini, Vatican City, Belize, Guatemala, Haiti, Paraguay, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

What is the One China Policy?

- The "One China" policy refers to the idea that **China is one country**, consisting of **mainland China and Taiwan**.
- It dates back to the **origins of the country in 1949** when the **Mao Zedong-led Communist Party won the Chinese civil war** and the **nationalist Kuomintang** fled to Taiwan and **set up the government of the Republic of China**.
- Both sides claimed to be the legitimate government of China, and for many years **Taiwan was recognized as such by much of the international community**.
- China asserts that Taiwan is a province of China and therefore part of "One China," **while Taiwan maintains its own government and claims to be an independent country**.

Major issues between China and Taiwan:

- **Sovereignty:** China considers Taiwan as a renegade province that must eventually be reunified with the mainland. However, Taiwan has its own government, military, and economy and considers itself a sovereign state.
- **Political Differences:** Taiwan is a democratic country, while China is a one-party communist state. The differences in political ideology have contributed to tensions between the two countries.
- **Military Threats:** China has not ruled out the use of force to reunify with Taiwan and has conducted military exercises near the Taiwan Strait in the past, which have increased tensions between the two sides.
- **Economic Competition:** Both China and Taiwan are economic powerhouses, and there is significant competition between the two in terms of trade and investment.
- **Diplomatic Recognition:** China has been using its diplomatic clout to isolate Taiwan by convincing other countries to cut ties with Taiwan and recognize China instead.
- **Taiwan's International Status:** Taiwan is not recognized as a sovereign state by the United Nations and is unable to join international organizations.
- **Cross-Strait Relations:** There are also a number of other issues that affect cross-strait relations, including Taiwan's relationship with the United States, Taiwan's national identity, and the possibility of a peaceful reunification.

Diplomatic Status of Taiwan

Stand of UN:

- The United Nations (UN) **officially recognizes the People's Republic of China as the only legitimate** representative of China, **including Taiwan**.
- This is **based on the "One China" policy**, which holds that there is only one China, of which Taiwan is an integral part.
- As a result, **Taiwan is not a member of the UN** and has **no representation in most UN specialized agencies**.

Stand of USA:

- The **United States**, for its part, has **maintained a "One China" policy since 1972**, recognizing the **PRC as the sole legitimate government of China** but **also maintaining unofficial ties with Taiwan**.
- This **delicate balancing act** has become increasingly difficult in recent years as **tensions between China and the US have risen**, with the US taking a more confrontational stance toward China on a range of issues.
- The **US One China Policy contains more elements** than the "One China" principle, including the **US interest in a peaceful process** of cross-Strait dispute resolution and differing interpretations of Taiwan's legal status.

Stand of India:

- It **officially recognizes the One China policy** and maintains diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.
- India has **not recognized Taiwan as a sovereign state** and instead **refers to it as a "part of China" which has remained consistent over the years.**
- However, **India maintains unofficial and non-governmental contacts with Taiwan** including **business, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges.**
- India **also recognizes the importance of Taiwan as a vibrant democracy** and an important economic partner.

Way ahead

- The issue of the "One China" policy is likely to remain a thorny one for the foreseeable future, with both sides firmly entrenched in their positions.
- There are signs however that the situation may be evolving, with China becoming more assertive in its claims on Taiwan and the US taking a more confrontational stance toward China.
- Ultimately, the future of Taiwan and its relationship with China is likely to be determined by a complex mix of economic, political, and strategic factors, and will continue to be a major flashpoint in the region for years to come.

A SHARED G20 VISION FOR THE OCEAN COMMONS

Context: India's G20 presidency would play an important role in promoting individual and collective actions to facilitate the transition towards a sustainable blue economy.

G20 countries & significance of oceans

- The G20 countries together account for **around 45% of the world's coastlines** and over **21% of the exclusive economic zones (EEZs).**
- **The oceans are the**
 - reservoirs of global biodiversity,
 - critical regulators of the global weather and climate, and
 - support the economic well-being of billions of people in coastal areas.
- **Blue economy:**
 - The term 'blue economy' includes not only **ocean-dependent economic development**, but also **inclusive social development** and **environmental and ecological security.**

G20 & initiatives for blue economy

- Over the last decade, the G20 forum has discussed some specific ocean-related issues. These include
 - The G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter,
 - The Osaka Blue Ocean Vision, and
 - The Coral Research and Development Accelerator Platform.
 - In 2022, holistic discussions on blue economy were initiated at the Ocean 20 launch in Bali.
- **Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group:**
 - **About:**
 - As part of India's G20 Presidency, the **blue economy is articulated as a key priority area** under the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group (ECSWG).
 - The first meeting of ECSWG marks the beginning of constructive discussions within G20 countries for a sustainable future, led by India's G20 presidency.
 - This approach is consistent with Prime Minister's call for the global adoption of 'Lifestyle for the Environment' that promotes mindful utilisation over mindless consumption patterns.
 - **Aim:**

- The aim is to promote adoption of high-level principles that guide sustainable and equitable economic development through the ocean and its resources, while simultaneously addressing climate change and other environmental challenges.
- **Significance:**
 - The G20 comprises a diverse group of countries with varying national circumstances.
 - Several G20 members have released their strategies for developing and/or expanding their blue economy.
 - This forum presents an excellent opportunity to build an effective communication with all stakeholders to share best practices, foster collaborations for advancements in science and technology, promote public-private partnerships, and create novel blue finance mechanisms.

Threats & responsibility

- The ambitious efforts by countries to expand their blue economies are being threatened by **intensifying extreme weather events, ocean acidification, and sea level rise**.
- Growing **marine pollution, over-extraction of resources, and unplanned urbanisation** also pose significant threats to the **ocean, coastal and marine ecosystems, and biodiversity**.
- The inherent **inter-connectedness of oceans** implies that activities occurring in one part of the world could have ripple effects across the globe.
 - Therefore, the responsibility of their **protection, conservation and sustainable utilisation** lies with all nations.
- Since the blue economy **involves a range of stakeholders and affects several other sectors of the national economy**, effective and efficient ocean and **blue economy governance** also presents a significant challenge.

India's initiatives the development of blue economy

- The Government of India has launched bold initiatives to **promote the development of a blue economy**.
 - The **Sagarmala initiative** promotes port-led development.
 - The **Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy** encourages domestic shipbuilding.
- The **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana** is actively engendering a 'blue revolution' through sustainable and responsible development of the fisheries sector.
 - The **Sagar Manthan dashboard** tracks vessels in real-time.
 - The **Deep Ocean Mission** explores deep-sea resources in the EEZ and continental shelf as well as development of technology for harnessing them.
 - India adopted the **Coastal Regulation Zone** notification to classify and better manage coastal regions and conserve ecologically sensitive coastal and marine areas including ecosystems.
- As the host of **World Environment Day** in 2018, India's PM gave a clarion call to eliminate single-use plastic.
 - In 2022, the global community rallied together for a **multilateral treaty on addressing plastic pollution**.
- The same year, India introduced an amendment to **the Plastic Waste Management Rules** banning select single-use plastic items and introduced policies for extended producer responsibility in waste management in order to combat plastic pollution, including in the marine environment

Way ahead

- India's commitment to prioritising oceans and the blue economy under its presidency would **ensure continued discussions on this crucial subject and pave the way for future G20 presidencies**.
- The **outcomes** of this forum **must further inform other international negotiations** under the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea**, etc., that are closely interlinked.
- The stewardship of oceans is an investment that will sustain future generations. The **spirit of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'** must unite the global community for the well-being of our ocean commons.

JAPAN'S OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Context: Recently, Japan has approved **Official Development Assistance (ODA)** to India, for a few Key projects.

- **India and Japan** have had a long and fruitful history of bilateral development cooperation since 1958. In the last few years, the economic cooperation between India and Japan has steadily progressed.

What are the Key Projects under ODA?

- **Patna Metro Rail Construction Project:**
 - Rs. 5,509 crores have been approved for Patna Metro Rail Construction Project (I).
 - It aims to cope with the increase of traffic demand in Patna by constructing the new metro corridor, thereby contributing to **improvement of the urban environment** and development of the economy as well as mitigation of **Climate Change**.
- **Forest and Biodiversity Conservation in West Bengal:**
 - Rs. 520 crores approx. have been approved for the Project for Forest and Biodiversity Conservation for Climate Change Response in West Bengal.
 - It aims to mitigate and adapt to climate change, conserve and restore ecosystems by **ecosystem-based climate change measures**, biodiversity conservation and restoration, thereby contributing to sustainable socio-economic development in the State.
- **Rajasthan Water Sector Livelihood Improvement Project:**
 - Rs. 1,055.53 crores have been approved for **Rajasthan Water Sector Livelihood Improvement Project (II)**.
 - It aims to improve **livelihoods of farmers as well as promote gender mainstreaming** in agriculture and irrigation sector in the State, by improving water use efficiency and agriculture productivity, through improvement of existing irrigation facilities and agriculture support services.

What are the Other ODAs to India from Japan?

- Delhi Metro is **one of the most successful examples of Japanese cooperation** through the utilization of ODA.
- India's **Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC)** project is funded by a soft loan provided by Japan International Cooperation Agency under Special terms for economic partnership (STEP).
- Besides, Japan and India had committed to build **High-Speed Railways in India by introducing Japan's Shinkansen System**.
- **India Japan Nuclear Deal 2016** will help India build the six nuclear reactors in southern India, increasing nuclear energy capacity ten-fold by 2032

EXPANSION OF SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION

Context: Recently, **Saudi Arabia** joined **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)** as a dialogue partner.

About

- Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have noticed the United States withdrawal from the region and have moved to diversify security partners. In this process the countries have grown closer to China.
- Recent **resumption of diplomatic relations between Saudi and Iran, brokered by China and Iran about to become the newest member of SCO** are to be seen in this regard.
- The Saudi's decision was also followed by announcement by Saudi Aramco which increased its investment in China by finalising a planned joint venture in northeast China and acquiring a stake in a privately controlled petrochemical group.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation:

- SCO is a **Eurasian political, economic and military organisation** aiming to maintain **peace, security, and stability in the region**.
- It covers **40% of the global population, nearly 20% of the global GDP, and 22% of the world's landmass**.

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was announced in **2001 by the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, The Russian Federation, and the Republic of Tajikistan.**
- The SCO currently comprises of eight Member States (China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), four Observer States interested in acceding to full membership (Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, and Mongolia) and six "Dialogue Partners" (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Turkey).
- **SCO Secretariat in Beijing and Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent** are its two permanent bodies
- **India and Pakistan became full members in 2017**
- The Chairmanship of SCO is held by rotation for a year among member states.
- **India and SCO:**
 - The SCO gives India the chance to start global and regional counterterrorism measures as well as regional efforts to combat the illicit drug trade
 - India can use SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) to boost cooperation for combating regional security challenges
 - India can utilise the SCO to promote the International North-South Transport Corridor and the Chabahar Port Project (INSTC). A trilateral working committee was also established in 2020 by India, Iran, and Uzbekistan to collaborate more closely on the Chabahar port and other connectivity initiatives.
 - SCO can be used to pressure Pakistan to change its position and strategy on tying together Central Asia and South Asia. Pakistan has previously obstructed India's interests by refusing to allow connectivity and energy projects such as The Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) Pipeline (TAPI) to pass through its borders.

Saudi -China Relations

- China is Saudi Arabia's largest trading partner, with **bilateral trade worth \$87.3 billion in 2021. Chinese exports to Saudi Arabia reached \$30.3 billion, while China's imports from the kingdom totalled \$57 billion.**
- **Saudi Arabia is China's top oil supplier. It makes up 18% of Beijing's total crude oil purchases.**
- China and Saudi Arabia have come together after the USA started ceding its influence in the middle east. The Russia-Ukraine war and Jamal Khashoggi incident have accelerated the process.
- Economically too both the countries have resolved to accelerate the synergy between the Belt and Road Initiative and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030

CivilsTap Hlmachal

SOCIAL ISSUES

ILO–UNICEF JOINT REPORT ON SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN

Context: Only **26.4 per cent (just 1 in 4 children)** of children aged 0-15 years are shielded by social protection, leaving the remaining **73.6 per cent** exposed to poverty, exclusion and multidimensional deprivations, noted a new United Nations (UN) report titled – **More than a billion reasons: The urgent need to build universal social protection for children.**

Need for Social Protection:

- **Social protection policies** are powerful tools for alleviating poverty for children and their families at risk of falling into poverty and **helping all children deprived of key services.**
- **Social protection can also shield children from** other major risks, such as **child labour** and forced labour.

Key findings of the report:

- 2.4 billion Children in this world need adequate **social protection.**
- **Nearly 1.77 billion children aged 0-18 years** lack access to a child or family cash benefit, **a fundamental pillar of a social protection system**
- Regional disparities
- One billion children live in **multidimensional poverty without access to education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation or water.**
- Gender disparity
- **Children** with disabilities or living in a household with a family member with a disability are **more vulnerable to poverty**

Stats on India in the report:

- **The report stated that 31 states in India had implemented the national 'PM CARES for Children' scheme. So far, only 4,302 children have received support from the scheme.**

Recommendations given to achieve universal social protection for children:

- **Provide a comprehensive range of benefits that supports children and families through a life-cycle approach.**
- **Authorities are advised to provide child benefits through national social protection systems that also connect families to crucial health and social services, such as free or affordable quality childcare.**
- **Increase budget allocation for children: Ensure sustainable and equitable financing of social protection systems**
- **Build social protection systems that are rights-based, inclusive, gender-responsive, informed by social dialogue and able to effectively respond to multiple shocks and crises, and that can therefore deliver for children and families.**
- **Guarantee access to decent work and adequate employee benefits.**
- **Ensure that social protection systems are adapted to developments in the world of work to enhance economic security for parents, caregivers and their families.**

Conclusion: Following the above recommendations will help us achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of achieving substantial social protection coverage by 2030.

CLEAN-TECH AS THE NEXT BIG THING IN RURAL INDIA

Context: Women from rural India are adopting clean energy-based livelihood technologies (from solar refrigerators to silk-reeling machines) to catalyse their businesses and transform women's livelihoods at the grassroots.

What is the potential of clean technologies for women's livelihoods?

- A recent **Council on Energy, Environment and Water study** has shown that out of the 13,000 early adopters of clean tech appliances, more than **80% are women.**
- **Renewable energy powered technologies provide an additional advantage to women farmers and microentrepreneurs by enhancing income opportunities through mechanisation.** They also free women from several gender assigned manual activities that are laborious.
- By 2030, India is expected to see **30 million women owned MSMEs**, employing around 150 million people. Renewable energy livelihood technologies have the potential to transform rural livelihoods, with women at the core of this transition.

Challenges in scaling up these accomplishments:

- Novelty and a high starting price of these technologies
- Perceived as high-risk purchases, especially by women users
- The relatively lower risk appetite of rural women due to socioeconomic reasons
- Limited avenues to avail financing
- Lack of established market linkages
- Limited mobility/networks of women outside their villages

Way ahead:

- Leverage the experience of early women adopters.
- Organise hyperlocal events and demos – create spaces for women to network, and become aware.
- Enable easy finance to purchase products. Financiers should consider the technologies themselves as collateral while easing the loan application process.
- Ensure adequate after-sales services and buy-backs.
- Support backwards and forward market linkage – finding and connecting producers to consumption hubs in urban areas.

- Collectivising women or establishing business models that enable them to sell to an intermediary can ensure a regular revenue stream.
- Enable policy convergence. Efforts towards promoting livelihoods for women from State rural livelihood missions, agriculture departments, etc., must be converged.
- Leveraging the reach of government institutions is imperative.

Conclusion: Similar to how it takes a village to raise a child, a village of politicians, investors, financiers, and technology promoters, is required to fully realise the potential of rural women and clean technologies.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN-LED DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

Context: The theme for International Women’s Day 2023 is ‘**DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality**.’

Data on Digital Disparity:

- **According to** a UNICEF report, as many as 90% of the jobs in the world today have a digital component. **These jobs, however, are available only to the** digitally able, and to more men than women.
- **According to the report**, in developing countries, only 41% of women have access to the internet compared with 53% of men.
 - Women are **20% less likely to own a smartphone and are more likely to borrow phones from a male family member.**
- **Another report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development revealed that the gender gap in internet use is widening. Software development remains a male-dominated field, with women comprising only 15% of software designers.**

Examples of how digital literacy helps in tackling issues:

- **The FoSafMDM application by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in partnership with the Governments of Odisha and Rajasthan has rolled out technology-based training modules**
- **This helps in strengthening the capacity of the community in ensuring that proper hygiene and safety measures** are followed so that children reap the full benefits of the nutrition that these school meals offer.
- **Young women known as ‘Digital Sakhis’ from Madhya Pradesh are upturning discriminatory social norms through the use of smartphones.**

Indian situation:

- **India accounts for half the world’s gendered digital divide given that only a third of all Internet users in the country are women.**
- **In Asia-Pacific, India has the widest gender gap of 40%. Less than 32% of women in India own a mobile phone compared to over 60% of men.**

Conclusion:

- **Women can harness digital tools for improving nutrition schemes and initiatives, while also using them to create economic opportunities that ensure long-term food and nutrition security.**
- Women20—the G20’s official engagement platform **to promote gender equity**—identifies “bridging the gender digital divide” **as one of its five priorities that need to be mainstreamed as part of the G20 agenda this year.**

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL GENDER GAP

Context: Despite progress in closing the global gender gap overall, women and girls continue to be left behind in the digital world.

More about the Digital gender gap

- **Meaning:**
 - It is the inequalities between men and women in terms of access to information and communications technologies.
 - The term “**digital gender gap**” was **coined by UN Women in 2010**.
 - **Digital Equity:**
 - Digital equity on the other hand is about providing everyone with equal opportunities to use technology to improve their lives.
 - It includes making sure that everyone has access to the internet and the skills they need to use it effectively.
- **Data on the digital divide:**
 - **UNICEF Report:**
 - According to a UNICEF report, as many as **90% of the jobs in the world** today have a digital component.
 - These jobs, however, are available only to the digitally able, and to **more men than women**.
 - According to the report, **in developing countries**, only **41% of women have access to the internet** compared with 53% of men.
 - **Women are 20% less likely to own a smartphone** and are more likely to **borrow phones from a male family member**.
 - **OECD data:**
 - Another report by **the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development** revealed that the **gender gap in internet use is widening**.
 - **Software development** remains a **male-dominated field**, with women comprising **only 15%** of software designers.
 - **ICUBE 2020:**
 - ICUBE is an annual syndicated study of Kantar to measure the reach and frequency of Internet users in India.
 - Data on the use of the internet in India indicates that in comparison with 58% of male internet users, female users are only 42%.

Significance of bridging the Gender Digital Divide

- **Benefits to women & Nation:**
 - India **aims to have a \$1 trillion digital economy** by 2025.
 - Already, **40% of global digital transactions** take place in India.
 - **In 2022**, a staggering **49 billion digital transactions** took place in India.
 - As economies digitize further, there is every reason to believe that most jobs will require **some knowledge of digital technology**.
 - There are **vast opportunities for girls and women to power India’s digital economy and benefit from it**.
- **Can act as a multiplier effect:**
 - We have the world’s largest young population, and women and girls constitute almost half of it.
 - Access to digital technology for a young woman **can be a game changer** with multiplier effects.
- **Acting as a solution:**
 - Giving women access to the internet and teaching them digital skills can help them **overcome many of the obstacles they face**.
 - With internet access, women can **gain new knowledge and skills, connect** with others, and find new **opportunities**. Digital knowledge can also play a **significant role in women’s safety**.
 - With digital equity, women can be empowered to reach their full potential.

Challenges leading to Gender Digital Divide

- **The post-pandemic world:**

- Children struggled to keep up with their studies using the limited smartphones and computers available to them.
- **UNESCO estimated** that around 168 million girls enrolled in pre-primary to tertiary levels of education were affected.
 - It is possible that within some families, boys had more access to scarce digital resources.
- **Always second to men:**
 - Girls and women are denied access to digital technologies because they almost always come second in a patriarchal social order.
 - Data on literacy, education, and access to resources confirm the reality of their being second to men.
- **Online abuse faced by women:**
 - The dangerous trend in online abuse was forcing women out of jobs, causing girls to skip school, damaging relationships and silencing female opinions, prompting him to conclude that “the web is not working for women and girls”.
- **Offline impacts:**
 - Online harassment often translates into offline impacts and consequences, with much-documented evidence in this regard.
- **Inadequate artificial intelligence:**
 - The third threat comes from badly designed artificial intelligence systems that repeat and exacerbate discrimination.

Suggestions

- **Addressing the divide:**
 - Addressing the digital divide requires special, urgent and focused efforts of the government.
 - A large investment needs to be made, year after year, in digital infrastructure.
- **Need of policy interventions:**
 - Bridging the gender gap will require smart interventions specially designed for girls and women in health, education, employment, banking, skilling and transportation.
 - A favourable policy environment to promote the digital empowerment of women is a step in the right direction.
- **Skills:**
 - Digital skills, required today both for life and for livelihoods, must be imparted on a war footing by transforming government digital literacy programmes into skilling missions, and expanding outreach, including through the private sector.
- **Online safety of women:**
 - Social media sites can use their “algorithm power” to proactively tackle the issue of safety.
 - Governments need to strengthen laws that hold online abusers to account, and the public to speak up whenever they witnessed abuse online.
- **Example of ‘Digital Sakhis’:**
 - Young women known as ‘Digital Sakhis’ from Madhya Pradesh are upturning discriminatory social norms through the use of smartphones.

Way ahead

- The digital gender gap is not only a modern social evil but also a huge economic constraint
- To leave women out of the digital world would amount to denying what today has become a basic skill for survival.
- **Making the right use of the G20 platform:**
 - Prime Minister has emphasized the need for ‘women-led development’ as India took over the G20 presidency.
 - Women20—the G20’s official engagement platform to promote gender equity—identifies “bridging the gender digital divide” as one of its five priorities that need to be mainstreamed as part of the G20 agenda this year.

Context:

- Consumer protection is a crucial aspect of modern economies, with the objective of safeguarding the rights of consumers against unfair trade practices and ensuring fair and efficient dispute resolution mechanisms.
- India, one of the world's fastest-growing economies, **has made significant strides in consumer protection, with the Consumer Protection Act 2019** strengthening the legal framework for consumer rights.
- However, **despite these policy efforts and grievance redressal mechanisms**, the overall time consumed in addressing consumer grievances in India remains a challenge, with a significant backlog of pending cases.
- The pendency in the dispute redressal system causes mental, financial, and emotional hardships for consumers and requires reimagining or redesigning the current dispute resolution framework. There is an **urgent need to lessen the mediation of the procedural, proper, and process brokers in the system.**

Why is Consumer Protection Necessary?

- **Empowering Consumers:**
 - Consumer protection measures **help to empower consumers by giving them the necessary information to make informed decisions** about their purchases. When consumers are protected, they can exercise their rights to demand quality products and services, and also demand compensation if they receive substandard products or services.
- **Preventing Fraudulent Activities:**
 - Consumer protection laws **help to prevent fraudulent activities**, such as false advertising, misleading labeling, and price manipulation. This not only protects consumers but also promotes fair competition in the market.
- **Reducing Health and Safety Risks:**
 - Consumer protection measures **help to reduce the health and safety risks associated with using products and services**. For example, regulations on food products, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices help to ensure that they meet minimum safety standards.
- **Promoting Economic Growth:**
 - Ensuring consumer protection can **promote economic growth by creating a level playing field for businesses to compete fairly**. This can increase consumer confidence in the market, leading to increased spending, investment, and job creation.
- **Upholding Consumer Rights:**
 - Consumer protection measures **help to uphold the basic rights of consumers, such as the right to be informed**, the right to choose, the right to safety, and the right to be heard. These rights are essential for building a fair and just society.

What are the Roadblocks in Consumer Protection in India?

- **Pendency of Cases:**
 - The **pendency of consumer cases in India is quite high**, with a backlog of cases at both state and national levels.
 - This results in long waiting periods and delays in dispute resolution, which frustrates consumers.
 - As of December 2022, the **state commissions had 1,12,000 pending cases, while district commissions had 4,29,000.**
 - The national commission had a pendency rate of 20.5% for the 1,06,088 cases filed with it, while the pendency rate for the 35 state and 637 district commissions stood at 22%.
- **Lack of Infrastructure:**
 - Many consumer forums and commissions **lack the necessary infrastructure and manpower** to handle a large number of cases effectively.
 - This results in delays in the resolution of cases, which could have been resolved quickly.
- **Inefficient Grievance Redressal Mechanisms:**
 - Although there are **several grievance redressal mechanisms in place**, they are often inefficient and do not address the consumer's grievances effectively.

- Consumers often do not know how to use these mechanisms or are not aware of them.
 - In a study conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research, it was found that only 18% of consumers who filed a complaint with a company received a satisfactory resolution, while the rest either did not receive any response or were not satisfied with the response.
- **Lack of Awareness among Consumers:**
 - Many consumers in India are **not aware of their rights and the legal procedures involved in seeking redressal**. This makes it difficult for them to approach the consumer forums and seek justice.
- **Limited Participation of Businesses:**
 - Businesses in India have been slow to adopt consumer-centric policies and participate in dispute resolution mechanisms.
 - This limits the effectiveness of consumer protection laws and slows down the resolution of consumer grievances.

Way Forward:

- **Consumer Awareness:**
 - Consumer awareness plays a crucial role in protecting consumer rights.
 - Consumers should be aware of their rights and responsibilities, and the government should conduct regular awareness campaigns to educate consumers about their rights.
- **Product Quality Standards:**
 - The government should establish and enforce strict quality standards for products and services to protect consumers from substandard and hazardous products.
- **Redressal Mechanisms:**
 - The government should establish effective redressal mechanisms to resolve consumer complaints quickly and efficiently.
 - The government can leverage the infrastructure and platforms already established by **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)** and **Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)** institutions through a **Public-Private Partnership (PPP)** model and treat them as digital public goods.
 - Establishing a tech-capabilities-led National Consumer Lok Adalat helpline can **help synchronise efforts between complainants, companies, commissions, legal services authorities, private ADR and ODR agencies, and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)** during the process of Lok Adalats.
- **E-commerce Regulations:**
 - With the rise of e-commerce, the **government has also introduced regulations to protect consumers who shop online**.
 - E-commerce platforms are required to provide accurate information about products, pricing, and delivery times, and they must have a robust system for handling consumer complaints.
- **Improving Data Governance:**
 - **By making it mandatory to collect all KYC details of the parties involved in disputes**, communication time can be saved.
 - Institutional parties like **banks, e-commerce entities, and large corporations can appoint nodal officers for speedier communication**, negotiations, and settlements, which will translate into faster complaint disposals.

WOMEN'S UNDERREPRESENTATION IN POLITICS

Context: India is expected to be the third-largest economy in the world by 2030, after the US and China. According to the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, India's economy will grow by 6.8% compared to the US's 1.6%. Despite its economic growth, **women's participation in the country's economy, polity and society has not kept pace**.

- **Elections in India have witnessed a striking contrast in recent times.** The female voter turnout has increased in the country as the seven out of eight states that went to the polls in 2022 saw a jump in female voter turnout.
- Though this sounds promising, **the increasing proportion of women voters seen in local, state and general elections** has not translated into more women contesting elections.
- So, the need of the hour is to **address the roadblocks in the representation of women** in politics. In order to achieve gender equality and ensure that women have equal opportunities to participate in politics, policymakers, civil society organizations, and the general public will have to work together.

What is the State of Women in Politics and Bureaucracy?

- **In Politics:**
 - As per data compiled by the **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)**, in India, women make up 14.44% of the **17th Lok Sabha**.
 - As per the latest available report of the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**, **women represent 10.5% of all Members of Parliament as of October 2021.**
 - For all the state assemblies, female MLAs' representation stands at an average of 9%.
 - India's ranking in this regard has fallen over the last few years. It is currently behind Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.
- **In Bureaucracy:**
 - Women's participation is **low enough for several public services jobs** at the Centre and states to facilitate free applications for women candidates.
 - Despite this, as per Indian Administrative Services (IAS) data and the central government's employment census of 2011, **less than 11% of its total employees were women**, which reached 13% in 2020.
 - Further, only 14% of Secretaries in the IAS were women in 2022.
 - There are only three women chief secretaries across Indian states and union territories.
 - India has never had a woman cabinet secretary. There have been no women Secretaries of Home, Finance, Defence and Personnel, either.
- **Other Sectors:**
 - **Only 20.37% of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) owners are women**, 10% of **start-ups** are founded by females, and 23.3% of women are in the labour force.

Why are Women Underrepresented in Politics and Bureaucracy?

- **Patriarchal Mindset:**
 - India is a **deeply patriarchal society**, and women are often considered inferior to men.
 - This **mindset is deeply ingrained in society and affects the way people perceive women's abilities** to lead and participate in politics.
- **Social Norms and Stereotypes:**
 - Women in India are **often expected to conform to traditional gender roles and are discouraged from pursuing careers in politics.** Social norms and stereotypes dictate that women should prioritize their roles as wives and mothers, and politics is often considered a man's domain.
- **Lack of Access to Education:**
 - Women in India have **historically had limited access to education**, which has hindered their ability to participate in politics. Even though there have been improvements in recent years, many women still lack the necessary education and skills to run for political office.
 - According to the **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2020**, 5.5% of children between the ages of 6-10 were not enrolled in school, and 15.9% of children between the ages of 11-14 were not enrolled in school.
- **Limited Representation in Political Parties:**
 - Women are **often underrepresented in political parties**, making it difficult for them to rise through the ranks and secure party nominations for elections.
 - This lack of representation can be attributed to gender bias within political parties and the perception that women are not as electable as men.

- **Violence and Harassment:**
 - Women in **politics are often subjected to violence and harassment, both physical and online**, which can deter them from entering politics or speaking out on issues. The lack of safe and inclusive spaces in politics is a significant barrier to women's participation.
- **Unequal Opportunities:**
 - Women in politics often **face unequal opportunities, such as lower salaries, less access to resources**, and limited networking opportunities. This inequality can make it challenging for women to compete with male candidates and succeed in politics.
- **Structural Impediments:**
 - **Structural impediments to women's empowerment, in general, are the primary issues** that make it difficult for them to be a part of the services.
 - Service conditions involving postings in distant cadres, patriarchal conditioning and balancing family commitments along with the requirements of this job are some of the social factors that lead women to opt out of the civil services.
 - Furthermore, there is a general perception that women should be preferred for “soft” ministries like Social Welfare, Culture, Women and Child Development.

How can Women be more Effectively Represented in Politics?

- **Reservation of Seats:**
 - One of the most effective ways to increase women's representation in politics is to reserve seats for women in legislative bodies.
 - This has been implemented in some states like Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal, where a certain percentage of seats are reserved for women in local bodies.
- **Political Parties should ensure Women Representation:**
 - Political parties **should ensure that women are given adequate representation in candidate selection for elections**.
 - They should make an effort to recruit women candidates and give them priority in winnable seats.
- **Education and Training:**
 - **Education and training programs can be conducted to empower women** to participate in politics.
 - This will help women to build their confidence and skill set, and understand the complexities of politics.
- **Encourage Participation from Local Women Leaders:**
 - Women's representation in politics **can be increased by encouraging and supporting local women leaders**. This can be achieved through **mentorship programs** and other support initiatives.
- **Address Violence against Women in Politics:**
 - Violence against women in politics is a **significant barrier to their effective representation**. Steps such as raising awareness, creating safe environment etc, should be taken to address this issue and ensure the safety and security of women in politics.
- **Address Social and Cultural Barriers:**
 - Women's effective representation in politics can be **hindered by social and cultural barriers such as patriarchy and gender norms**. These issues should be addressed through campaigns, education and awareness programs, and social reform initiatives like Beti Bachao **Beti Padhao Scheme**, **Sukanya Samridhi Yojana**.
- **Provide Support for Work-Life Balance:**
 - Many women face **challenges in balancing their political responsibilities with their family and personal lives**. Providing support for work-life balance, such as flexible schedules, childcare, and parental leave, can help to address this issue.
 - Recently, Kerala government announced to grant menstrual leave for female students in all state universities under the Department of Higher Education.
- **Increase Visibility and Recognition:**
 - Women in politics **should be given greater visibility and recognition for their accomplishments**.
 - This can help to inspire other women to get involved in politics and to create a culture of greater gender equality in politics.

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATION

CONTEXT:

The new reality of the twenty-first century has altered the objectives and standards of education everywhere. Inclusive development in education now include information technologies, especially digital skills and literacy, have become fundamental to daily life. The teacher of the twenty-first century must be adaptable and constructive, continually raising his or her bar, looking for answers, and resolving issues.

What is the Importance of Quality Education?

- Education is not just about gaining knowledge, but also about developing critical thinking, collaboration, and resource management skills.
- It is essential for improving employability, breaking the cycles of poverty and social exclusion, and promoting equality. The UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-4) aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for everyone by 2030.
- **The National Education Policy 2020** is a policy that aims to address the developmental needs of the country by promoting youth skill acquisition and all-around development in a welcoming, open, and multilingual environment.

About School Educational Scenario in India

- Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and prolonged school closures, there have been positive trends in the education sector. For example, access to education is now recognized as a non-negotiable part of a child's right to education, which is enshrined in law and widely accepted in practice in India.
- **Consequently, in 2021-**22 the Gross Access ratio (GAR) of schooling facilities at the primary level is 97.49% habitations, 97.01% at the upper primary level, and 95.48% at the secondary level.

What are the UDISE+ findings on Inclusive Development in Education?

- The Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+) and economic survey reported that **a)** 26.5 crore children were enrolled in schools, **b)** The enrolment of Children With Special Needs (CWSN) increased by 3.3% in the year 2021-22, **c)** The number of students dropping out of school has also decreased across all grade levels.
- This achievement is attributed to programmes like Samagra Shiksha, RTE Act, improvements to school infrastructure, residential hostel buildings, teacher availability, regular training, free textbooks, uniforms, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, and the PM POSHAN Scheme.
- Most government schools now have basic facilities, including toilets, drinking water, and hand-washing stations, thanks to the Swachh Bharat Mission and the Samagra Shiksha Scheme.
- The government also provides funding for the construction of smart classrooms and ICT labs, as well as support for hardware, instructional software, and e-content for classrooms. The GER (Gross enrolment ratio) of girls is higher or equal in all stages of school education, ensuring equitable access to education.

What are the various initiatives taken recently to ensure Inclusive Development in Education?

PM Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI)

- **The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for Foundational Stage:** The NCF aligns with the NEP 2020 and the 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, which includes early childhood care and education for children aged 3 to 8. It emphasises the importance of "play" in curriculum organization and the child's overall experience, with a focus on enhancing developmental outcomes through support from communities, parents, and teachers.

- **PRASHAST:** It is a mobile app for disability screening. It covers 21 impairments, including the benchmark impairments listed in the 2016 Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act.
- **The National Credit Framework (NCrF):** It incorporates the National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF), National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF), and National School Education Qualification Framework. It is an umbrella framework for skilling, re-skilling, up-skilling, accreditation, and evaluation.
- In addition to the above, other initiatives like toy-based pedagogy guidelines, starting Balvatikas in Kendriya Vidyalayas, Vidyanjali- an initiative for improving the quality of school education through community and various intervention under Samagra Shiksha were undertaken to improve the quality of school education sector.

How India's FY 2023-24 Budget made Inclusive Development in Education a Priority?

- The budget for FY 2023-24 aims to boost education, skill development, entrepreneurship, R&D, digital infrastructure, green growth and job creation. It is critical for transforming India into a technology-driven knowledge-based economy and achieving Sustainable Development Goals. The budget focuses on promoting an equitable and inclusive education system and implementing the National Education Policy 2020. It allocates 13% more funds for education than the previous year. With a young population of 52.3 crores, the budget aims to provide education to all sections of society and transform India into a technology-driven society. Overall, the budget focuses on inclusive growth and development to create a prosperous and inclusive India.
- **The major announcements of the budget 2023-24 for the education sector are as below:**
- **Inclusive Development in Education: School Education**
- Pandemic-related school closures have severely impacted India's school-going children, particularly in government schools and rural areas. The education sector is now focusing on learning recovery, with the budget providing priority areas to be emphasized, like:
- **Re-envisioning Teachers' Training:** The NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of training teachers to improve primary education and ensure high-quality teacher preparation. District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) will play a crucial role in this by providing pre-service and in-service teacher training and becoming centers of excellence for research and dissemination of best practices. The budget has allocated more funds for teacher training, including new pedagogy, ongoing professional development, and the use of ICT.
- **National Digital Library for children and Adolescents:** NEP emphasizes the importance of reading and the availability of diverse books for all students. To achieve this, a national digital library will be created with books by reputable Indian and international authors, including Braille and Braille translation tools. States will also be encouraged to establish physical libraries and provide access to the digital library's resources.
- The National Book Trust and Children's Book Trust will donate non-curricular books to these libraries to foster a reading culture and compensate for pandemic-related learning loss. NGOs and financial organizations will also be involved in promoting literacy and financial literacy.
- **Aspirational Blocks Programme:** The government has launched this Programme to provide public services, such as health, education, and infrastructure, in 500 blocks prioritizing tribal groups and disadvantaged pupils. This builds on the success of the Aspirational Districts Program.
- **Eklavya Model Residential Schools:** Over the next three years, the government will appoint 38,800 teachers and support personnel for the 740 Eklavya Model Residential Schools, which serve 3.5 lakh tribal students, to improve access to education for the last mile.
- **Inclusive Development in Education: Higher Education**
- This budget clearly reflects the Indian Prime Minister's vision of "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan, and Jai Anusandhan." The government has laid emphasis on new age technologies, like:
- **Centres of Excellence for Artificial Intelligence:** To achieve the goal of "Make AI in India" and "Make AI work for India," the government plans to establish three Artificial Intelligence Centres of Excellence in prestigious educational institutions. This will foster a robust AI ecosystem, promote multidisciplinary research, and address scalable issues in various sectors.

- **Lab Grown Diamonds (LGDs):** A research and development grant for indigenous production is given in recognition of the ITs' pioneering role in the nation's research excellence. One of the IITs will get equipment and seeds from Lab Grown Diamonds (LGD) for a period of five years.
- **5G Services:** The government plans to set up 100 labs in engineering schools across India to develop apps using 5G services in areas like healthcare, education, and transportation. This aims to revolutionize engineering education, boost employment, and encourage innovation and entrepreneurship among young engineers.
- **National Data Governance Policy:** To unleash innovation and research by start-ups and academia, a National Data Governance Policy will be brought out. This will enable access to anonymised data.
- In addition to the above announcements, Multidisciplinary courses in medical devices and programmes to promote research in pharmaceuticals, with both industry and government funding will further strengthen the 'Jai Anusandhan' motto.

Conclusion

- India has made notable progress in ensuring access to primary education and is striving to achieve equitable, inclusive, and quality secondary education for all by 2030. The Union Budget 2023-24 aims to support these efforts and advance the objectives of NEP 2020 and SDG 4 by promoting infrastructure improvements, educational technology developments, and raising the standards of instruction and learning. This will create new opportunities for teachers, students, and researchers, and revolutionize K-12 (K stands for Kindergarten and 12 stands for 12th grade) and higher education in a positive way.

ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE

Context: Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is widely discussed worldwide as an essential component of the development agenda. The **outbreak of Covid-19 has necessitated the need for universal health coverage** as the health systems failed miserably across the globe during those times. Considering the importance of UHC, the **United Nations declared 12th December as International Universal Health Coverage Day (UHC Day)** in 2017.

- The United Nations defines UHC as "everyone, everywhere should have access to the health services they need without risk of financial hardship." **Sustainable Development Goals target 3.8** ("Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential healthcare services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all") also focuses on achieving universal health coverage.
- **A big push in the health sector is the need of the hour**, in the absence of which the health and wellness centres will end up in deplorable conditions similar to the current primary health centres and sub-centres.

What are the Challenges in Implementing UHC in India?

- **Inequitable Access to Health Insurance:**
 - The lowest coverage of health insurance is among households with the lowest wealth quintile and underprivileged sections, indicating a lack of equitable access to health insurance.
 - The **NFHS-5 results paint a different picture for India, where insurance coverage is lowest (36.1%)** among households with the lowest wealth quintile.
- **Lack of Financial Protection:**
 - Despite the existence of schemes like **Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram**, the **average out-of-pocket expenditure per delivery in public health facilities is still high**, particularly in urban areas.
 - There are significant disparities in out-of-pocket expenditure and access to healthcare services among different states in India. Many north eastern states and larger states have seen a rise in out-of-pocket expenditure between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5.

- The latest report of NFHS revealed that the average out-of-pocket expenditure per delivery in a public health facility is Rs. 2,916, which in the case of urban and rural stands at Rs. 3,385 and Rs. 2,770. simultaneously.
- **Inclusion and Exclusion Errors in Health Insurance Policies:**
 - Recent studies have shown that like earlier health insurance policies, the **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)** is also not free from inclusion and exclusion errors, which could lead to the inclusion of ineligible households and exclusion of eligible households.
- **Availability of Services:**
 - **Although 56% of empanelled hospitals under the PMJAY are in the public sector**, 40% are in the private for-profit sector, indicating that the availability of services may be concentrated in areas with previous experience implementing publicly funded health insurance schemes.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure:**
 - In many low- and middle-income countries, the lack of proper infrastructure is a significant challenge to achieving UHC. This includes inadequate health facilities, inadequate equipment, and inadequate medical supplies.
 - There is a **shortfall of 79.5% of specialists at the Community Health Centers (CHCs)** as compared to the requirement.
- **Poor Health Education:**
 - Lack of education and awareness regarding healthy lifestyles and preventive health measures can lead to an increase in preventable illnesses and conditions.

What should be the Way Forward?

- **Enhancement of Health Expenditure:**
 - The need of the hour is to **enhance health expenditure as a percentage of GDP**, which currently stands lower than most of the developing nations.
 - India currently spends about **3.2% of its GDP on health**. This is **much lower than the average health spending share of the GDP (at around 5.2%)** of the Lower and Middle Income Countries (LMIC).
 - Strengthening the primary healthcare sector is another area of development that needs special attention.
 - In this direction, the establishment of the health and wellness centres under the **Ayushman Bharat scheme** was proposed in 2018, but the growth in this regard is questionable.
- **Increase Public Investment in Healthcare:**
 - The government should increase its spending on healthcare and allocate more resources to build a strong healthcare infrastructure. This includes building more healthcare facilities, increasing the number of healthcare professionals, and ensuring adequate supplies of medicines and medical equipment.
- **Expand Health Insurance Coverage:**
 - The government should work towards expanding health insurance coverage to all citizens. This would help reduce out-of-pocket expenses and make healthcare more affordable.
- **Prioritize Primary Healthcare:**
 - Strengthening primary healthcare is crucial for achieving UHC. This includes increasing access to primary healthcare facilities, improving the quality of care, and strengthening the primary healthcare workforce.
- **Improve Healthcare Quality:**
 - Quality of care is an important aspect of UHC. The government should invest in improving the quality of care by developing quality standards, ensuring adherence to these standards, and providing training to healthcare providers.
- **Invest in Health Information Systems:**
 - Health information systems play a crucial role in UHC by providing data for planning and monitoring healthcare services. The government should invest in developing robust health information systems that can provide timely and accurate data.
- **Promote Preventive Healthcare:**

- Investing in preventive healthcare can help reduce the burden of disease and the cost of healthcare. The government should promote preventive healthcare measures, such as vaccination programs, health education campaigns, and lifestyle interventions.
- **Foster Partnerships:**
 - Achieving UHC requires a collaborative effort between the government, healthcare providers, and civil society. The government should foster partnerships with healthcare providers and civil society organizations to achieve UHC.



GENERAL STUDIES 3.

ECONOMY

A NEW TRADE STRATEGY: INDIA'S PERFORMANCE ON EXPORTS IS A RESULT OF POLICY INTERVENTIONS

Context: India's robust export performance has made a **critical contribution to its economic growth** in recent times.

Despite global economic woes, India's overall exports grew at **17.33% to \$641 billion during April-January 2022-23 compared to \$547 billion** during the same period last year.

How has India improved its export performance in recent years?

- The country's exports performance was the result of well-crafted trade **policy interventions, their efficacious implementation and a host of other initiatives.**
- **Export facilitation**– It ensured the effective conceptualisation and implementation of export promotion schemes.
- These schemes are **Market Access Initiative (MAI), Remission of Duties and Tax on Exported Products (RoDTEP), Trade Infrastructure for Exports Scheme (TIES) and Interest Equalisation Schemes** on pre- and post-shipment rupee export credit.
- **Production-linked Incentive scheme**– It has been a game changer. It has not only transformed India into a **manufacturing hub**. It has also curtailed its **large trade deficit** in electronics and other manufactured goods.
- As a result of this scheme, **electronics manufacturing** attracted a massive investment and its exports have grown rapidly by over **55 % annually. Exports of mobile phones** alone may reach \$10 billion during the current financial year.
- **Logistics**– it has been a critical stumbling block in India's **exports competitiveness**. It has been proactively addressed in the Union budget 2023-24.
- **Capital expenditure allocation** has been sharply **increased by 33% to a record Rs 10 trillion** on the development of rail, road, air, and ocean infrastructure.
- It will make export **logistics efficient**. It will also integrate Indian production systems with **global value chains**.
- **Restructuring of process**– There has been **rationalisation of work allocation** within the Ministry of Commerce and restructuring of its divisions and subordinate offices. It is likely to transform **India's institutional mechanisms to promote exports**.
- Adopting the latest technology in the **collection, assimilation, processing of data and making available real-time information** across stakeholders has **bridged the information gap** between the exporters and the various government departments.
- **Work with state governments**– In recent years, the Ministry of Commerce has been actively engaging with state governments and at the district level for **speedy and effective implementation of policy measures** to promote exports.
- Each of the Indian states was asked to prepare an **export promotion strategy**. Proactive involvement of Indian missions abroad helped not only in **market identification** but also in **facilitating product entry**.
- **Free Trade Agreements**– Most Free Trade Agreements signed by India previously became **counterproductive**. The Ministry of Commerce has **re-examined all the FTAs**. It is in the process of engaging in newer ones to benefit India.
- Recently, India negotiated **new FTAs with UAE, Mauritius and Australia**. It is in the advanced stages of negotiations with the UK.
- It is also actively exploring **new trade agreements with the EU and US**.

OLD PENSION SYSTEM WILL TAKE FROM THE POOR AND GIVE TO THE RICH

Context: Recently, the return to the Old Pension System has been proposed by sections.

What are some facts about OPS and NPS?

- OPS is a “**pay-as-you-go**” scheme. The contributions of current government employees are used to fund the **pension liabilities** of past government employees. In OPS, the employees are guaranteed an amount equivalent to 50% of their last salary in perpetuity.
- NPS was established by the NDA government in 2003. It is a **defined contribution scheme**. The employees invest a certain fraction of their salary that is complemented by a contribution from the government.

What are the arguments against OPS?

- It will have **fiscal implications**. The only way the OPS can be made sustainable is by either having more government employees or by more borrowing. More employees will lead to **inefficiency in governance**.
- States’ finances will be crippled under the pension burden. A recently released report by the Reserve Bank of India on states’ finances provides a detailed breakdown of states’ expenditures on pensions.
- **In Rajasthan**, the state’s expenditure on pensions as a percentage of its own tax revenues is **28%**. In contrast, for example, **In Maharashtra**, the same percentage is **14%**.
- States will have to **cut down their expenses**. Expenses on health, education, and other long-term assets will naturally be the first ones to go.
- The losers will be the majority of poor people who will be denied **basic services and support from the state**. The winners will be the minority of wealthy government employees.
- This is a rare example of a policy that explicitly **takes away the wealth of the poor to distribute it to the rich**. The retiring government employees are amongst the **top 5% of income earners in India**.
- Finally, **the sixth and the seventh pay commissions** revised the salaries of government employees upwards assuming that they would be under NPS. Therefore, any switch to OPS now is a **breach of trust of all citizens**.

How can OPS make political sense?

- There can be two explanations. One benign, and one disturbing.
- **Benign explanation**– Freebies are not mutually exclusive. Parties desperate to win elections are **promising everything to everyone**. In the short run, they may even fulfil their promise. Finally, they will cut down on expenditures such as defence, healthcare.
- If the current dispensation at the Centre is re-elected, opposition parties will inherit an even **better fiscal situation** when they eventually come back to power.
- Parties may also have **miscalculated the political costs and benefits of OPS**.
- **Disturbing explanation**– The Opposition has realised that the main obstacle in its quest for power at the Centre is the **last-mile delivery of welfare schemes**.
- The success of these schemes eventually rests on the ability of the lowest layer of government employees to deliver these schemes. OPS may **incentivise government employees to sabotage** these welfare schemes.

BREAKING BARRIERS, BUILDING INCLUSION

Context: According to the latest **Findex Report – 2021 by the World Bank**, around **one-third of adults still lack access to formal financial services**.

About financial inclusion:

- **Financial inclusion means that** individuals and businesses have access to useful and affordable financial products and services that meet their needs – **transactions, payments, savings, credit, and insurance** – **delivered in a responsible and sustainable way**.

Importance of financial inclusion:

- **Financial inclusion has been** identified as an enabler for 7 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- **The G20 committed to advancing financial inclusion worldwide and reaffirmed its commitment** to implement the G20 High-Level Principles for Digital Financial Inclusion.
- **The World Bank Group considers** financial inclusion a key enabler to reduce extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity.
- **Financial inclusion has been linked to up to 14%** growth in the gross domestic product in developing economies.

Challenges in achieving financial inclusion:

- Lack of access to basic infrastructure
- Low financial literacy
- Limited trust in formal financial institutions
- Insufficient regulatory framework
- High transaction costs
- Lack of diversity in financial services

How India's G-20 presidency helps in improving financial inclusion:

- **The theme of India's G20 Presidency, "Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam," underlines the message of** equitable growth and a shared future for all.
- **The G20 Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion working group met under the grouping's** Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion (GPFI) initiative.
- **The G20 Financial Inclusion Action Plan (FIAP) aims to prevent future economic crises by encouraging conditions that promote its objectives of financial inclusion and stability.**
- Four major drivers have been highlighted in the new G20 FIAP to lay the groundwork for further progress toward financial inclusion.
 - **The acceptance of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development as a worldwide framework** for sustainable development
 - **Rapid development and penetration of digital breakthroughs,**
 - **Greater emphasis on underprivileged populations,**
 - Mainstreaming financial inclusion.

Financial Inclusion Schemes in India

- Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)
- Atal Pension Yojana (APY)
- Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY)
- Stand Up India Scheme
- Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY)
- Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY)
- Sukanya Samridhi Yojana
- Jeevan Suraksha Bandhan Yojana
- Credit Enhancement Guarantee Scheme (CEGS) for Scheduled Castes (SCs)
- Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Castes under the Social Sector Initiatives
- Varishtha Pension Bima Yojana (VPBY)

What should be done for improving financial inclusion?

- A **multifaceted strategy is needed** to create an inclusive and sustainable digital economy.
- **Focus on digital identification, banking, payments, and regulation:** This will provide opportunities to enhance global economic stability and streamline service delivery. Digital banking should focus on promoting stability, transparency, fairness, inclusivity, and interoperability.
- **Focus on Digital identity systems:** These include India's Aadhaar and national ID schemes in Morocco and the Philippines. These systems help to streamline the delivery of services and payments.

- **Create a digital stability board:** This will aid in advancing digital regulation by supporting better data-sharing legislation and data management for individuals and small- and medium-sized businesses.
- **Adaptation of laws and institutions to the digital revolution:** Adaptation is required especially in areas such as competition policy, regulatory regimes, innovation ecosystems, workforce development, social protection frameworks, and tax policies.
- **Promote sustainability and inclusivity in the digital economy:** These can be done by
 - a) establishing a supportive and enabling e-commerce environment,
 - b) developing inclusive digital infrastructure,
 - c) adapting policies and institutions to digital transformation,
 - d) harnessing digital transformation inclusively, and
 - e) using digital public goods.
- **Make financial inclusion a top priority for G20 countries:** The G20 working group should consider strategies to strengthen the financial system's foundation, facilitate remittance flows, and lower the price of remittance transfers.
- Along with the above measures, global nations should also focus on collaborating with international organisations to unlock the potential of millions of individuals and communities and foster sustainable, inclusive economic growth.

DOUBLING INDIA'S FARMERS INCOME

Context: In 2016, India's Prime Minister shared his dream of doubling farmers' incomes in the year when India completes 75 years of Independence and enters Amrit Kaal. Now that we have entered Amrit Kaal, it is a good time to revisit that dream and see if it has been fulfilled, and if not, how best it can be done.

- Unless the incomes of farmers go up, we cannot have sustained high growth of overall GDP. This is because the manufacturing sector starts facing a demand constraint soon after meeting the demand of well-off urban consumers.
- Agriculture engages the **largest share of the workforce (45.5% in 2021-22 as per Periodic Labour Force Survey)**. So, **focusing on agriculture, even if it was in a dream**, is the right way to ensure long-term high growth of the overall economy.
- Agriculture also has to **provide food and nutritional security to the largest population on this planet**. However, **if this objective has to be achieved in today's context**, it must encompass policies that also protect the basic resources of this planet, say soil, water, air, and biodiversity.

What are the Issues with Doubling Farmers Income?

- **Issues with Agricultural Policies:**
 - Trade and marketing policies adopted by the government are suppressing farmers' incomes.
 - **For Example:** The ban on exports, the suspension of several commodities from the futures markets, and the imposition of stocking limits on certain commodities.
 - These are **hidden policy instruments of "implicit taxation" of farmers' incomes**.
 - The **policy of heavy subsidisation along with assured and open-ended procurement of paddy and wheat** is creating challenges for the environment.
- **Fragmentation of Land:**
 - Land fragmentation is a **significant issue in India**. Small and marginal farmers who own less than two hectares of land constitute around 85% of the total number of farmers in India.
 - This fragmentation of land limits the scale of agricultural operations, making it difficult to achieve economies of scale.
- **Poor Infrastructure:**
 - India has a **weak agricultural infrastructure, including inadequate irrigation facilities, poor storage facilities**, and weak transportation networks. This results in poor-quality produce, wastage, and low returns to farmers.

- **Low Productivity:**
 - The **productivity of Indian agriculture is low compared to other countries**. The yield per hectare of major crops in India is lower than that of China, Brazil, and the United States.
- **Climate Change:**
 - **Climate change** has a significant impact on Indian agriculture. Erratic rainfall, rising temperatures, and extreme weather events such as **droughts** and **floods** affect crop production and reduce farmers' income.
- **Price Volatility:**
 - The agriculture sector in India is **characterized by price volatility due to the lack of a stable pricing policy**.
 - Fluctuations in prices of agricultural commodities, coupled with high input costs, make it difficult for farmers to plan their production and marketing strategies.
- **Inadequate Institutional Support:**
 - The **lack of institutional support in the form of credit, insurance, and marketing facilities for farmers** is a significant challenge.
 - Access to credit and insurance remains low for small and marginal farmers.
- **Dependence on Monsoon:**
 - A **large proportion of Indian agriculture is dependent on monsoon rains**.
 - Delayed or inadequate rainfall affects crop production and farmers' income.

What are the Steps taken by Government for Supporting Farmers?

- The government has implemented various schemes and policies to achieve this goal, including increasing the **Minimum Support Price** for crops, promoting **organic farming**, and creating a national agricultural market.
- Government **provides a fertiliser subsidy whose budget crosses Rs 2 lakh crore. It provides income support to farmers through PM-Kisan**.
- Many small and marginal farmers also get free ration of at least 5 kg/person/month through the **PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana**.
- There are also **subsidies for crop insurance, credit and irrigation**.
- **States also give out power subsidies in abundance, especially for irrigation**. Even farm machinery for custom hiring centres is being subsidised by many states.

What should be the Way Forward?

- **Realignment of Support Policies:**
 - The government **should incentivize the cultivation of crops that are environmentally friendly** and consume fewer resources such as water and fertilizers.
 - **Millets, pulses, oilseeds, and horticulture** crops could be given carbon credits to encourage their cultivation.
 - The subsidies/support should be crop-neutral or skewed in favor of the crops that are beneficial for the planet's resources.
- **Promotion of High-Value Crops:**
 - Farmers **should diversify their crops to include high-value crops** that have better market demand and can fetch higher prices.
 - This can be **done by introducing better seeds, irrigation techniques**, and training on sustainable farming practices.
- **Collaboration with Corporations:**
 - The government can **collaborate with corporations to provide farmers with better market access and an assured buyback arrangement** to reduce their market risk.
 - Corporations can **also offer farmers better prices for their produce by using them for making value-added products** such as tofu, soya milk powder, soya ice cream, and frozen soya yoghurt.
- **Technological Innovation:**

- The government **should invest in research and development to come up with new technologies** that can help farmers increase their productivity and profitability. This can include the use of solar panels on farmers' fields as a third crop.

SILICON VALLEY BANK CRISIS: REASONS AND IMPACTS - EXPLAINED, POINTWISE

Context: Recently, the California-based Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), a cornerstone of the US technology and startup industries, has failed. This marks the biggest bank failure since the 2008 financial crisis. The Silicon Valley Bank crisis has resulted in the subsequent seizure of SVB assets by regulators has generated a global wave of risk aversion, particularly among start-ups, including Indian startups.

About the Silicon Valley Bank Crisis

- After the pandemic in 2021, the US Federal bank adopted the easy money policy and pump huge money in to the market. During this period SVB deposits also increased.
- Subsequently, SVB decided to heavily invest in the bond market, where bonds had been issued at lower interest rates.
- **After a period of record low-** interest rates during the pandemic, central banks around the world, led by the US Federal Reserve, started raising key rates aggressively to tackle inflation. This has dampened investor sentiments and also hit the businesses of tech and start-up-focused lenders like SVB.
- This is because investors do not like to take risks when the money available to them becomes expensive due to higher interest rates. As a result of the higher interest rates, investors in technology start-ups became reluctant to take risks.
- **As higher interest rates led to a funding crunch for technology start-**ups, SVB's clients started pulling out their money to meet their liquidity needs.
- Under this pressure to meet customer withdrawals, SVB sold a \$21 billion portfolio consisting mostly of US Treasuries at a huge loss of \$1.8 billion.
- Moody's immediately downgraded the bank's credit rating to Baa1 negative outlook from A3.
- This was followed by further losses to SVB. To fill this loss, SVB announced it would sell \$2.25 billion in common equity and preferred convertible stock. This sudden announcement triggered concerns about its balance sheet and its shares plummeted 60%.
- SVB also failed to find alternative sources. Hence, it ended up being shut down by regulators, following which it was handed over to the FDIC.
- The FDIC has added that it would seek to sell SVB's assets, adding that future dividend payments may be made to uninsured depositors.

What is the reason behind Silicon Valley Bank Crisis?

Aggressive raising interest rates:

- Global borrowing costs have risen at the fastest pace in decades over the last year as the Federal Reserve lifted U.S. rates by 450 basis points from near zero, while the European Central Bank hiked the eurozone by 300 bps.
- Due to this, the value of existing bonds that were issued at lower interest rates has fallen. Banks, which bought these bonds are sitting on steep unrealised losses.
- Another facet of the rising interest rates was the decline in funding for startups as the venture capital ecosystem don't want to take risk.
- **Heavy investment in long-term government bonds:** SVB's invest heavily in US government bonds. A spike in interest rates has led to a sell-off in bonds, leaving banks exposed to potential losses on the securities they hold.

- **A downturn in technology stocks:** Silicon Valley Bank was hit hard by the downturn in technology stocks over the past year.
- **“Run on the bank”:** The bank failed after depositors — mostly technology workers and venture capital-backed companies — began withdrawing their money in panic, creating a “run on the bank”.
- **Soft Regulations:** In 2018, regulations were loosened for regional banks like SVB — among other things, it reduced the amount of potential loss reserves mandated for these banks.

What will be the potential impact of the Silicon Valley Bank Crisis on the World Economy?

- **Impacts on small businesses:** According to a petition to the US government, around 10,000 small businesses with accounts in Silicon Valley Bank may be unable to pay their employees in the next 30 days, and approximately 1 lakh jobs are anticipated to be affected as a result of the collapse.
- **Impact the technology industry:** It will immediately impact the US technology industry and US competitiveness worldwide and ultimately set back US competitiveness by a decade or more.
- **Can trigger a run on the bank:** Its collapse has already instilled fear among founders and management teams to look for safer havens for their remaining cash, which can trigger a bank run on every other smaller bank.
- **Vulnerability to the rising cost of money:** The SVB crisis spread concern about hidden risks in the banking sector and its vulnerability to the rising cost of money.

What will be the potential impact of the SVB Crisis on India?

According to some experts, India is **unlikely to be affected** by any contagion effects. This is because:

- Indian banks have minimal exposure to US lenders.
- In its 2022 Financial Stability Report (FSR), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said that macro-level stress tests for credit risk showed that domestic banks would be able to comply with minimum capital requirements even under severe-stress scenarios.
- Improved capital-to-risk-weighted-assets ratio (CRAR): The system-level CRAR in 2023, under baseline, medium and severe stress scenarios, is projected at 14.9%, 14% and 13.1%, respectively, the RBI said.

Note: The minimum regulatory requirement for CRAR for scheduled commercial banks is 9%. Adding on a counter-cyclical buffer, the requirement is 11.50%.

- Improvement in NPA: Banks have stepped up efforts to clean up asset quality and their profitability has also improved. Further, gross NPAs were at a seven-year low of 5% as of September 2022.
- The increase in the 10-year yield has been less than the policy rate hikes by the RBI.
- Banks have sharply reduced the modified duration of their bond portfolios over the last six years, according to the latest RBI data.

Note: Modified duration refers to the change in the value of a bond when interest rates change. The higher the modified duration of the bond portfolio, the more the risk of incurring losses when bond yields rise.

Benefits for the Indian economy from the SVB crisis:

- **Boom for emerging markets:** A fall in US bond yields typically improves the appeal of higher-yielding fixed-income assets in emerging markets.
- **Bring corporates back to India:** Falling US dollar rates coupled with SVB Crisis might bring back big corporates in India, who had shifted to overseas lending due to depreciation in Indian National Rupee (INR) against the US dollar.”

Impacts on Indian start-ups:

- Most of the named Indian startups got money from SVB, they are not depositors. SVB either lent them money (as venture debt) or invested in them in the form of equity. It realised its profits via a sale or got repaid by the companies, depending on the structure. Therefore, there is no impact on the start-ups themselves.

- However, some start-ups with deposits in SVB are impacted. For example, among its most notable funding was an investment of a total of \$1.7 million in One97 Communications, the parent company of Paytm. Other start-ups that had received funding from SVB include Bluestone and Carwale.

What should be done to prevent big bank failures?

- Maintain constant vigil: All the stakeholders, including bank boards, auditors and the regulator have to maintain constant vigil, given the high stakes for safety and stability.
- Indian banks should keep capital as measured under the current Basel regime (international standards set by bank regulators).
- Ensure Cooperation and coordination: Cooperation and coordination among all central banks will be helpful in bringing transparency and accountability and also help in minimising the spillover effect of bank failure.
- Ensure proper selection: The selection of the board of directors has to be prudent. The auditors' selection has to be done with care.
- Board members of banks usually spend most of their meeting time on governance issues, business updates, and "problem children." They should focus instead on the businesses that use the most capital.
- Strict actions from central banks: The central bank has to continuously monitor the lending institutions on various parameters including fit and proper. While supervising the banks, the Central bank should not avoid any loopholes in the management and should take strict action against them.

TRADE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR EXPORT SCHEME

Context: The **Department of Commerce, Government of India**, has implemented the **Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES)** to facilitate the growth of exports by creating appropriate infrastructure.

What are the Major Government Initiatives to Promote Export Growth?

- **TIES Scheme:**
 - The **TIES scheme** provides **grants-in-aid to central/state government-owned agencies** or their joint ventures for infrastructure projects with significant export linkages.
 - The infrastructure includes **Border Haats, Land customs stations, quality testing** and certification labs, cold chains, trade promotion centres, export warehousing and packaging, **Special Economic Zones**, and ports/airports cargo terminuses.
- **PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan (NMP):**
 - The **PM Gati Shakti NMP** is a digital platform that **integrates geospatial data** related to infrastructure in the country and planning portraits of various ministries/departments of the government.
 - This digital system helps in data-based decision-making for the **synchronised implementation of infrastructure projects**, aiming to reduce logistics costs and support economic activity in the country.
- **Duty Drawback Scheme:**
 - The **Duty Drawback Scheme** rebates the incidence of customs duties on **imported inputs and central excise duties on domestic inputs** used in the manufacture of export goods.
 - This scheme is operated in terms of provisions of the **Customs Act, 1962**, read with the **Customs and Central Excise Duties Drawback Rules, 2017**.

What are the Challenges Related to Indian Export Growth?

- **Rising Protectionism and Deglobalisation:** Countries around the globe are moving towards protectionist trade policies due to disrupted global political order (**Russia-Ukraine War**) and **weaponization of supply chain**, that is in way shrinking India's export capacities.

- **Lack of Basic Infrastructure:** India's manufacturing sector lacks sufficient **manufacturing hubs, internet facilities** and transportation are costly when compared to developed nations which is a huge deterrence to Industries.
 - India uses only **4.3% of its GDP for infrastructure construction** each year, as compared to China's 20% of its GDP. For infrastructure, **Rs 10 lakh crore (3.3% of GDP) was allocated in the budget 2023-24**, an increase of three times from 2019.
 - **Uninterrupted power supply** is another challenge.
- **Lack of Innovation Due to Low Spending On R&D:** Currently, India spends about **0.7% of GDP on research and development**. This prevents the manufacturing sector from evolving, innovating and growing.

Way Forward

- **Filling Up Infrastructural Gaps:** A robust infrastructure network - **warehouses, ports, testing labs, certification centres**, etc. will help Indian exporters compete in the global market.
 - It also needs to **adopt modern trade practices** that can be implemented through the digitisation of export processes. This will save both time and cost.
- **Exploring Joint Development Programmes:** Amidst a wave of deglobalisation and slowing growth, exports cannot be the sole engine of growth.
 - India can also **explore joint development programmes with other countries** in sectors like **space, semiconductor, solar energy** to improve India's medium-term growth prospects.
- **Frontlining MSME Sector:** Currently, **MSMEs** contribute to one-third of the country's GDP, account for **48% of exports** making them key players in achieving ambitious export targets.
 - It is important for India to **link Special Economic Zones with the MSME sector** and incentivize small businesses.

SVB, SIGNATURE BANK COLLAPSE: WHAT ARE 'TOO-BIG-TO-FAIL' BANKS, AND WHAT MAKES INDIAN BANKS SAFE

Context: The fall of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) has had its effects around the world.

Why are Indian banks less vulnerable to bank failures?

- This is because **a)** India's domestic banks have a different balance sheet structure, where deposits cannot be withdrawn in bulk quantities like SVB, **b)** Household savings constitute a major part of bank deposits in India. On the other hand, in the US a large portion of bank deposits are from corporates, **c)** A large part of Indian deposits is with public sector banks, and most of the rest is with very strong private sector lenders, **d)** The approach of the regulator has generally been that depositors' money should be protected at any cost, **e)** India have **domestic systemically important banks (D-SIBs)** and **f)** While the Basel-III Norms prescribe a capital adequacy ratio (CAR) of 8%, the RBI has mandated a CAR of 9% for scheduled commercial banks and 12% for public sector banks.

About Global-SIBs

- **Need:** 2008 financial crisis highlighted the issues with large and highly interconnected financial institutions in the real economy.
- **Recommendation:** In 2010, the **Financial Stability Board (FSB)** recommended that all member countries should put in place a framework to reduce risks attributable to Systemically Important Financial Institutions (SIFIs) in their jurisdictions.
- Further, the Basel, Switzerland-based **Financial Stability Board (FSB)** has identified a list of global systemically important banks (G-SIBs).
- **G-SIBs at present:** There are 30 G-SIBs currently, including JP Morgan, Citibank, HSBC, Bank of America, Bank of China, Barclays, BNP Paribas, Deutsche Bank, and Goldman Sachs. **No Indian bank is on the list.**
- **Advantages of being SIBs:** They are perceived as banks that are '**Too Big To Fail (TBTF)**', due to which these banks enjoy certain advantages in the funding markets.

How does the RBI Select D-SIBs in India?

- The RBI follows a two-step process to assess the systemic importance of banks.
- **First**, a sample of banks to be assessed for their systemic importance is decided. Banks having a size beyond 2% of GDP will be selected in the sample.
- **Second**, Once the sample of banks is selected, a detailed study to compute their systemic importance is initiated. Based on the study, a composite score of systemic importance is computed for each bank. Banks that have systemic importance above a certain threshold are designated as D-SIBs.
- Next, the D-SIBs are segregated into buckets based on their systemic importance scores.

What are the concerns associated with D-SIBs?

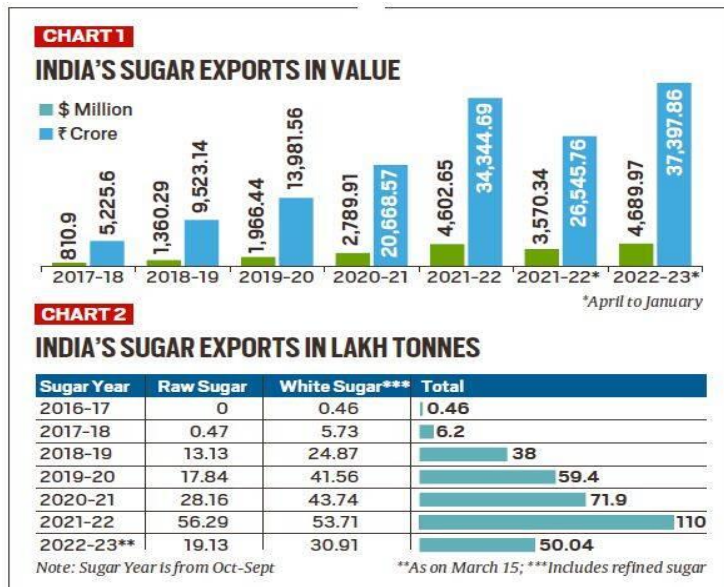
- D-SIB tag indicates that in case of distress, the government is expected to support these banks. This **a)** encourages risk-taking, **b)** reduces market discipline, **c)** creates competitive distortions, and **d)** increases the probability of distress in the future.
- So the RBI recommended that the SIBs should be subjected to additional policy measures to guard against systemic risks and moral hazard issues

INDIA SEES AN INCREASE IN SUGAR EXPORTS

Context: India has become the **world's largest producer and consumer** of sugar.

About

- Sugarcane is a **tall, perennial grass** used to make sugar, ethanol and paper.
- Sugar industry impacts the livelihood of about **50 million sugarcane farmers and around 5 lakh workers** directly employed in sugar mills.
- **Crop Conditions:**
 - Temperature: **Between 21-27°C** with hot and humid climate.
 - Rainfall: **Around 75-100 cm.**
 - Soil Type: Deep rich loamy soil. It can be grown on all varieties of soils ranging from sandy loam to clay loam given these soils should be well drained.
- **Top Sugarcane Producing States:** Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Bihar.
- **Distribution Of Industry :**
 - Sugar industry is concentrated around two major areas of production- **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana and Punjab** in the north and **Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh** in the south.
 - South India has a **tropical climate which is suitable for higher sucrose content** resulting in a higher yield per unit area as compared to north India.
- Sugar exports have shown an impressive trend. This can be seen from the fact that during the 2016-17 and 2017-18 sugar years (Oct-Sept), **India's shipments were a mere 0.46 lakh tonnes (lt) and 6.2 lt respectively. They had zoomed to 110 lt by 2021-22.**



- **Reasons for Increase in Exports:**

- **Impressive Sugar Season (Sep-Oct):** All records of sugarcane production, sugar production, sugar exports, cane procured, cane dues paid and ethanol production was made during the last years season.
- **Shift From Refined to Raw Sugar:** Exporters started focussing on raw sugar. Much of the world sugar trade is in 'raws' that are transported in bulk vessels of 40,000-70,000 tonnes capacity.
- **Indian Government Policy Initiatives:** Timely government initiatives in the last 5 years have taken the sugar industry out of financial distress in 2018-19 to the stage of self-sufficiency in 2021-22.

- **Government Initiatives:**

- **Encouraging Ethanol Production:** The Government has encouraged sugar mills to divert sugar to ethanol and also export surplus sugar so that mills may have better financial conditions to continue their operations.
- **Ethanol Blending with Petrol (EBP) Programme:** The National Policy on Biofuels 2018, provides an indicative target of 20% ethanol blending under the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme.
- **Fair and remunerative price (FRP):** The FRP is the minimum price that sugar mills have to pay to sugarcane farmers for procurement of sugarcane. Government has increased **FRP by more than 34% in the past 8 years.**

- **Challenges:**

- **Uncertain Production Output:** Sugarcane has to compete with several other food and cash crops like cotton, oil seeds, rice, etc. By nature being a water guzzling crop it's productivity depends on monsoon and varies from year to year causing fluctuations in prices leading to losses in times of excess production due to low prices.
- **Low Yield of Sugarcane:** India's yield per hectare is extremely low as compared to some of the major sugarcane producing countries of the world. For example, India's yield is only 64.5 tonnes/hectare as compared to 90 tonnes in Java and 121 tonnes in Hawaii.
- **Short Crushing Season:** Sugar production is a seasonal industry with a short crushing season varying normally from 4 to 7 months in a year.
 - It causes financial loss and seasonal employment for workers and lack of full utilisation of sugar mills.
- **Low Sugar Recovery Rate:** The average rate of recovery of sugar from sugarcane in India is less than 10% which is quite low as compared to other major sugar producing countries.
- **High Production Cost:** High cost of sugarcane, inefficient technology, the uneconomic process of production and heavy excise duty result in high cost of manufacturing.

- **Way Forward:**

- The sugarcane is a water guzzling crop. More Research and development in sugarcane can help address issues like sustainability, low yield and low sugar recovery rates.
- A fixed export policy will help in building supply chains which can result in higher price realisation for Farmers.
- The government should encourage value addition preferably with the help of co-operative enterprises for better price realisation.
- India should also look forward to producing sugar from beets in order to save scarce water resources.

BANKING: FOCUS ON NEW RESPONSIBILITIES AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Context: Banks have been traditionally known for accepting deposits and giving loans. However, the definition of a bank has expanded beyond just a physical building. Today, the banking system has evolved into a secure and robust medium that offers innovative deposit schemes, secure money storage, and quick loan transactions. Banks are no longer just a conglomerate of traditional banks but have also incorporated new forms of banks such as payment banks, small finance banks, and even the general banking system of post offices and non-banking financial companies.

Banking provisions in the budget

- Discussions about the banking provisions in budgets have broadened to include topics like tax concessions, capital provisions, and the role of these new forms of banks in the financial system. The General Budget 2023-24 for the banking sector can be analysed by dividing it into five parts:
- New savings schemes and changes in existing savings schemes
- Sources of Government Borrowing
- Campaign to promote digital transactions
- Loan for a specific sector
- Reforms in banking governance

Banking provisions in the budget: Deposit Schemes

- **The Budget 2023-24** includes measures to promote savings among women and secure the future of the elderly through savings.
- **Mahila Samman Savings Certificate:** It is a new small savings scheme, which will be available until March 2025. This scheme will offer a deposit facility of up to Rs 2 lakh for women or girls for two years at a fixed interest rate of 7.5 percent with a partial withdrawal option. This is aimed at encouraging economic empowerment of half the population and providing them with a secure medium to save their money.
- **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana:** It is a special scheme for girls launched in 2015, under the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' initiative. Its aim is to encourage families to invest in their education and save for marriage expenses. Parents of girls under 10 years can open up to two (three in case of first girl child twins) Sukanya Samriddhi accounts with a maximum deposit of Rs 1.5 lakh annually. The scheme is "EEE" (Exempt-Exempt-Exempt, i.e. tax exemption at the time of investment, tax exemption on the increase in investment, and tax exemption at the time of withdrawing the entire amount of investment including interest).
- **Senior Citizen Savings Scheme:** Under this, the maximum deposit limit for this scheme has been increased from Rs 15 lakh to Rs 30 lakh. The interest rates of the scheme are reviewed quarterly.
- **Monthly Income Account Scheme:** The maximum deposit limit for this scheme has been increased from Rs 4.5 lakh to Rs 9 lakh for a single account and from Rs 9 lakh to Rs 15 lakh for a joint account. The interest rates of the scheme are also reviewed quarterly.

Banking provisions in the budget: Sources of government borrowing

- **The Union Budget 2023-24** estimates net market borrowing from dated securities at Rs 11.8 lakh crore against a fiscal deficit of Rs 17.87 lakh crore.

- Banks play a crucial role in fulfilling this estimate as they invest a large amount of money in these bonds, aiming to meet statutory requirements and take advantage of market conditions. To actively participate in this system, banks must have sound financial conditions.
- Currently, all 12 public sector banks and major private banks are profitable, and their deposits are continuously increasing, making it easier for them to participate in the government's borrowing.
- **Banking provisions in the budget:** Promoting digital transactions
- Banks are competing to provide fast, secure, and accessible digital transaction services.
- **Incentive scheme:** After the success of last year's programme, which led to a 76% increase in digital transactions and a 91% increase in their value, the government has decided to keep offering incentives for the financial year 2023–2024.
- Under this scheme, approval has been granted for giving Rs 2600 crore to banks to promote Point-of-Sale (POS) and e-commerce transactions using RuPay Debit cards and low-value BHIM-UPI transactions.
- This provision will be beneficial for banks, which are striving to offer competitive digital payment solutions to their customers.

Banking provisions in the budget: Sector-specific loans

- The banking sector keeps an eye on credit targets for different sectors. In fact, banks get some facilities with these targets such as the provision of a part of the interest rate by the government or the credit guarantee fund. It helps the banks to give their loans to a specific sector.

Agricultural sector:

- The budget focuses on the agriculture sector and provides a provision of Rs 23,000 crores for small farmers to continue benefiting from the Kisan Credit Card.
- The agricultural loan target has been increased to Rs 20 lakh crore, with a focus on animal husbandry, dairy, and fisheries.
- The government offers short-term crop loans up to Rs 3 lakh at a 4% effective interest rate if repaid on time, and for allied activities such as fisheries, animal husbandry, and dairy, loans up to Rs 2 lakh are available at the same interest rate.
- In addition, if the bank gives agricultural loans through its resources, then they get 2 percent assistance.

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME):

- The Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs will be renewed with an additional Rs 9,000 crore, commencing from April 01, 2023. This will enable collateral-free loans of an additional Rs 2 lakh crore and bring down the cost of credit by about one percent.
- Due to the guarantee factor, banks will not have to worry much about the loss in case of loan default and it will be easier for small and medium businessmen to get loans.

Banking provisions in the budget: Reforms in Banking Governance

- The budget has proposed amendments to the Banking Regulation Act, Banking Companies Act, and Reserve Bank of India Act to reform the governance of banks and increase investor protection.
- Although the details are not disclosed, new guidelines are expected to be drawn for the bank's board of directors, including eligibility, tenure, and reappointment. The aim is to improve the banking system, which has expanded in recent years.

Conclusion

- Based on the changes in the banking system, the approach for analyzing the general budget for the banking sector has also evolved. The budgets for the financial years 2022-23 and 2023-24 do not include any provisions for the recapitalization of public sector banks. The main reason for this is that the financial health of public sector banks has improved a lot, bad loans have come down, and the situation is likely to remain the same in the future.

JAPAN'S PM FUMIO KISHIDA WRITES: JAPAN AND INDIA RENEWING A PLEDGE

Context – Japan PM is visiting India for the second time.

What is the importance of the bilateral relationship between India and Japan?

- Close coordination between India and Japan as **leading democracies of Asia** are the cornerstones of **peace and prosperity in the region**.
- The bilateral relationship between our two countries is **multi-layered**. It is based on **shared values and principles of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law**. Both have **shared vision of Free and Open Indo-pacific**.
- Today, the international community is at a **historic turning point**. Its impact, such as the food crisis and soaring fertiliser prices, are also being felt here in the Indo-Pacific region.
- As Japan and India assume the **Presidencies of the G7 and the G20** respectively this year, cooperation between them is important for the region.
- In the context of the Ukraine war, both have sought a **peaceful resolution based on international law**.

What are potential areas of cooperation between India and Japan?

- Japan-India relations have advanced in various fields. Japan is important partner in the **high-speed railway project** in India
- Japan has the target of **5 trillion Yen of public and private investment and financing** from Japan to India in the next five years. This was announced by our two governments last year.
- **Smart city projects by India**, share high compatibility with **Japan's Vision for a Digital Garden City Nation Realisation**.
- Japan is cooperating in the **development of the north-eastern region** of India by increasing connectivity with the surrounding regions.

What is the shared vision of Free and Open Indo-Pacific between India and Japan?

- FOIP is a **vision shared by Japan and India**. It has gained support and endorsement of the international community and led to the **mainstreaming of the "Indo-Pacific"**.
- FOIP is even more relevant at a time when Japan and India aim to pursue the **shared goal** of leading the international community towards **cooperation rather than division and confrontation**.

MEGA TEXTILE PARKS

Context: Recently the government announced seven mega textile parks under the scheme **PM Mega Integrated Textile Regions and Apparel (PM MITRA)**.

More about the PM MITRA Scheme

- **Key highlights:**
 - The seven Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel (**PM MITRA**) parks will be set up at **Greenfield or Brownfield sites** located in **different states**.
 - It will be **developed by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)**, which will be **owned by the State Government** and the **Government of India** in a **Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Mode**.
 - The scheme is inspired by the **5F vision of the Prime Minister of India**. The '5F' Formula encompasses
 - farm to fibre;
 - fibre to factory;
 - factory to fashion;
 - fashion to foreign.
- **Core infrastructure:**

- It will include an **incubation centre** and **plug and play facility**, developed **factory sites, roads, power, water and waste-water system, common processing house** and CETP and other related facilities like design centre, testing centres, among others.
- These parks will also have **support infrastructures** like **workers' hostels** and housing, logistics park, warehousing, medical, training and skill development facilities.
- The Scheme **shall be implemented on a pan-India basis** and is intended for the holistic development of the Textile sector.

The first phase

- Under the first phase of the PM MITRA scheme, **large textile parks, spread across at least 1,000 acres**, will come up in seven States —
 - Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh.
- It will house the **entire textile value chain, from fibre to fabric to garments**.
- The parks will have **plug-and-play manufacturing facilities** and all the common amenities required.
- **Role of Central government:**
 - The Central government will disburse Development Capital Fund of ₹500 crore in two tranches for each of the seven facilities. This is for the creation of core and support infrastructure.
- **Role of State governments:**
 - The State governments will provide the land, be part of the SPV, and give the required clearances.

Significance

- **Self-sufficiency:**
 - It is in line with the **vision of 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat'** and to position India strongly on the Global textiles map.
- **Streamlining value chain, investments & employment:**
 - The scheme seeks to streamline the textile value chain into one ecosystem, taking in spinning, weaving and dyeing to printing and garment manufacturing, is expected to generate investments worth ₹70,000 crore.
 - It would also lead to the creation of 20 lakh jobs.
- **Strengthening the sector:**
 - The parks, which will be open for foreign direct investments, will be located in States that have inherent strengths in the textile sector.
 - Each park will have effluent treatment plants, accommodation for workers, skill training centres and warehouses.
 - It is designed to attract investment from companies looking to scale up, requiring integrated manufacturing facilities in one location.
- **Global competitiveness:**
 - It will reduce logistics costs and strengthen the value chain of the textile sector to make it globally competitive.
 - Expanding the fibre and product line will give India a larger share in the global market, from the current 5%.

Impact of PM MITRA on MSMEs

- The industry has mixed views on the immediate impact of the huge investments that are expected to come into the parks in existing units.
- **MSME & textile sector:**
 - The micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector is said to control almost 80% of the textiles and apparels currently made in India.
 - Further, the Indian textile and clothing units are more cotton-based.
- **Issues with supply chains:**
 - With mounting challenges such as the global geopolitical situation, and overseas buyers exploring China as well as other sourcing options, the past two years have seen notable shifts in supply chains.
- **Significance of the scheme for the sector:**

- Orders are transitioning to suppliers who are highly price competitive and have sustainable production processes.
- The MSME exporters are also realising that there is a need for integrated, larger facilities and these factors are expected to drive the industry's investment plans.

Way ahead

- In order to make a giant leap in exports and domestic sales, the industry has to also be price competitive right from the raw material stage and gear up to meet the sustainability and traceability demands of international buyers.
- The State governments and developers should give thrust to the PM MITRA parks for sustainable and cost-effective solutions for pollution control and other issues that the value-adding segments of the textile chain face.
 - India can take a cue from countries such as Turkey where integrated textile parks are highly efficient.

INDIA'S DIGITAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE (DPI)

Context: India's digital public infrastructure (DPI), loosely the India Stack and more, is shaped in a unique partnership between governments (Union and States), regulators, the private sector, selfless volunteers, startups, and academia/think tanks.

- India, through India Stack, became the **first country to develop all three foundational DPIs:** digital identity (Aadhar), real-time fast payment (UPI) and a platform to safely share personal data without compromising privacy.

What is Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)?

- Digital public infrastructure (DPI) refers to blocks or platforms such as digital identification, payment infrastructure and data exchange solutions that help countries deliver essential services to their people, empowering citizens and improving lives by enabling digital inclusion.

What DPI Does?

- Put simply, foundational DPIs mediate the flow of people, money and information.
 - First, the flow of people through a digital ID System.
 - Second, the flow of money through a real-time fast payment system.
 - And third, the flow of personal information through a consent-based data-sharing system to actualise the benefits of DPIs and to empower the citizen with a real ability to control data.

Major Challenges with DPI

- There is a disturbing trend of the weaponization of data and technology or Digital Colonisation (Hicks, 2019) resulting in a **loss of agency, sovereignty and privacy.**
- Therefore, proactively deliberating on how to build good DPI is key to avoiding such challenges.

Need of DPI




- Public infrastructure has been a **cornerstone of human progress.** From the transcontinental railways of the nineteenth century to telecommunication in the twentieth century, infrastructure has been vital to facilitating the flow of people, money and information. Built on top of public infrastructure, democratic countries with largely free markets have fostered public and private innovation and, therefore, generated considerable value creation in societies.
- DPI has emerged as the most feasible model due to its low cost, interoperability and scalable design, and because of its safeguards against monopolies and digital colonisation.
- The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of these systems as enforced isolation left people with no choice but to rely on these digital alternatives

India's digital public infrastructure (DPI)

- In India, DPI has been a key focus area of the government in recent years, with several initiatives aimed at building a robust DPI ecosystem.

- As India aspires to become a \$5 trillion economy in the future, and the world's third-largest economy within a decade, its thriving DPI will be central to delivering on this economic promise and achieving these audacious goals.
- India today has 850 million internet users, compared to 5.5 million users in 2000. According to the central government, India is the world's largest "digitally connected democracy".

DIGITAL INDIA GOALS 2026

- 1  \$1 trillion digital economy by 2025-26
- 2  Global innovation and entrepreneurship system
- 3  Shape the future of technologies
- 4  Become a significant and trusted global player for digital products, devices, platforms, and solutions

Key Components of DPI in India

- **Digital Identity:** The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has developed Aadhaar, a unique identification system that provides every Indian citizen with a unique identification number based on their biometric data. Aadhaar is used for a variety of purposes, including as a digital identity proof for availing government services.
- **Unified Payment Interface:** UPI enables anyone with a bank account to make real-time digital payments using a mobile device. UPI is a payments system that runs on a central server operated by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), a non-profit organisation that is responsible for its management.
- **DigiYatra and DigiLocker:** DigiYatra is a Biometric Enabled Seamless Travel (BEST) experience based on a facial recognition system (FRS), again through a partnership between industry and government, which ensures seamless identification of passengers at key checkpoints such as airport entry, security check and boarding gate clearance.
- The United States CLEAR programme (an expedited airport security/airport identity verification process) is now active at 51 airports with about 15 million members at a cost of \$369 per annum for a family of four.
- **Cybersecurity:** The government has established the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), which is responsible for responding to cybersecurity incidents and ensuring the security of India's digital infrastructure.
- Overall, the growth and development of India's DPI ecosystem in the past decade have been impressive, and there are significant opportunities for further growth and development in the coming years. As India continues on its path towards digital transformation, the development of a robust DPI ecosystem will be crucial for enabling inclusive and sustainable growth.

Way Ahead

- For India's DPI success to become a worldwide revolution, three types of institutions must be built.
 - First, we need independent DPI steward institutions. It is important to have a governance structure that is agile and responsive. A multiparty governance process through independent DPI institutions will be accountable to a broad range of stakeholders rather than be controlled by a single entity or group. This can build trust and confidence in DPI.
 - Secondly, we need to develop global standards through a multilateral dialogue led by India. If standards originating from developed nations were transplanted to an emerging economies' context without deferring to their developmental concerns, smaller countries would simply be captive to dominant technology players.
 - Finally, we need to develop sustainable financing models for developing DPI for the world. Currently backed by philanthropic funding, such models are at risk of becoming a tool of philanthropic competition and positioning.

- India's DPI marks our second war for independence — economic freedom from the day-to-day drudgery of life and transactions, which has made it become our new business backbone that is powering India towards a \$25 trillion economy by the 100th year of our political independence. Imagine what new Cambrian explosion will happen when ChatGPT meets India Stack

Conclusion

- The world needs a new playbook for digital infrastructure that mediates the flow of people, money and information. This will facilitate countries looking to digitally empower their citizens. They can then rapidly build platforms that address the specific needs of people, while ensuring people are able to trust and use the platform – without fear of exclusion or exploitation.

TOURISM

TRAVEL AND TOURISM IS POISED FOR ITS OWN AMRIT KAAL

Context: India's travel and tourism sector will be the key axis of development in the coming years. Budget 2023 has outlined the path to developing tourism in **mission mode**. The tourism sector accounts for **10% of the total employment directly and provides 8% of the overall GDP**.

What are the efforts by the Indian government for the growth of tourism?

- The Budget Session addressed all the **"6Ps"** effectively by covering **destination planning and management, infrastructure development, sustainability and safety, development of human capital, policy, and process interventions** to align the Centre and states, and **promoting the narrative of Indian tourism**.
- The Union budget has listed **six themes** for the development of the sector — **convergence, public-private participation, creativity, innovation, digitisation and development of destinations**.
- Tourism remains a **state subject**. The central tourism department is making efforts to move it to the Concurrent List. The idea of a **National Tourism Board** is under consideration by the government.
- Prime Minister Modi has a vision to develop **50 destinations** across the country.

Way forward:

- There is a need for **collaboration between the government, private sector, and local communities** in developing and promoting tourism. It stimulates **creativity, enhances competitiveness**.
- **Technology adoption** will help in the growth of tourism. Travel experiences are becoming more **personalised, immersive, and interactive**.
- **AR/VR** can help travelers explore destinations before they even arrive. It can provide **virtual tours and simulations** of famous landmarks, historical sites, and cultural experiences. **AI-powered chatbots and digital assistants** can help travelers plan their trips, recommend personalized activities, and offer **real-time assistance while traveling**.
- A **coordinated approach** boosted by the adoption of technology resolves the issue of low spending by foreign tourists in India. On average, foreign tourists spend 33% less than they would in the US.
- The tourism sector requires a **comprehensive strategy** that addresses the **six key pillars of planning, place, people, policy, process, and promotion**.

Granting tourism **infrastructure status** will provide further impetus to the growth of the sector

DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND.

SOUTH ASIA'S HUMAN CAPITAL IS THE RESILIENCE IT NEEDS

Context: The pandemic has put at risk the decade's progress in building human capital, including the improvements in health, survival rates, school enrollment, and reduced stunting.

About Human Capital

- **Meaning:**
 - It consists of the **knowledge, skills, and health** that people accumulate over their lives, enabling them to realize their potential as productive members of society.
 - Research indicates that human capital investments **have high economic returns**.
- **Need of Human Capital:**
 - The last few years have ushered in a harsh new reality **where crises are the norm rather than the exception**, examples being pandemics, economic slumps, extreme weather events, etc.
 - The knowledge, skills, and health that people accumulate their human capital is a **critical source of the resilience** that countries rely on for recovery.
- **South Asia's human capital:**
 - With **nearly half its population under the age of 24** and **over one million young people** set to enter the labour force **every month until 2030**, the region could reap an enviably high demographic dividend.
 - **To strengthen resilience and protect the well-being of future generations**, governments across South Asia need to take urgent policy action and invest in human capital.

Issues & challenges

- **Shortcomings:**
 - South Asia is home to over one-third of the world's **stunted children**.
 - And a child born in the region today can, by the age of 18, expect to attain **only 48% of their full productive potential**.
 - If the quantity and quality of South Asia's human capital were to improve, regional GDP per worker could double.
- **Lack of resources & monetary support:**
 - These numbers are alarming but will be hard to shift without more resources.
 - South Asian governments on average **spend just 1% of GDP on health and 2.5% on education**.
 - In comparison, **the global average is 5.9% on health and 3.7% on education**.
- **Impacts of COVID 19:**
 - **Extreme poverty:**
 - The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed an additional 35 million people across South Asia into extreme poverty.
 - **Learning poverty**
 - **Learning poverty**, or the inability to read and understand a simple text by age 10.
 - While **around the world**, on average, **schools remained closed** for in-person learning between 2020 and 2022 for 141 days, in South Asia they were shut for 225 days.
 - Coupled with **ineffective remote instruction**, this increased South Asia's learning poverty from 60% to 78%.

- The poorest and most vulnerable people fell further behind. For example, in Bangladesh, the **poorest students lost 50% more in terms of learning** than the richest students.
- Several countries still show little to no signs of recovery, and **South Asia's students could lose up to 14.4% of their future earnings**.

Suggestions

- **Quality over quantity:**
 - Well-designed and implemented interventions can make a difference if governments act fast.
 - Recent evidence suggests that even simple and low-cost education programmes can lead to sizable gains in skills.
 - **Examples:**
 - In **Bangladesh**, for example, attending a year of additional pre-school through two-hour sessions significantly improved literacy, numeracy, and social-development scores.
 - In **Tamil Nadu**, six months of extra remedial classes after school helped students catch up on about two-thirds of lost learning linked to 18 months of school closures.
 - In **Nepal**, government teachers ran a phone tutoring programme that helped increase students' foundational numeracy by 30%.
 - Given the high returns to human capital, the huge losses inflicted by the pandemic, and the region's vulnerability to a variety of shocks, even with **constrained government budgets**, scaling up these interventions should be a no brainer.
- **Acting before crisis:**
 - Globally, countries that have systems in place to support individuals and families before a crisis strikes, can better protect their citizens during the crisis.
- **Interdependent focus:**
 - The health, education, and skills people acquire at various stages of their lives, build and depend on each other.
 - To be effective, human development systems must recognise and exploit these overlapping connections. In other words, they should be agile, resilient and adaptive.

Way ahead

- A robust human development system would not only mitigate the damage but also help ensure lives and livelihoods are protected.
- It could provide the resilience South Asia needs to prosper in an increasingly volatile world.

CivilsTap Hlmachal

CYBER SECURITY

CYBER WARRIOR

Context: 'Cyber Warrior' Teams and Help Desks to Combat Rising Cybercrime in Visakhapatnam.

About

- During the year 2022, visakhapatnam had **reported as many as 610 cybercrime cases**, as against 316 during the year 2021, **which is almost a 93% increase**.
- To combat the rise in cybercrime, **all police stations** in the city will soon have **exclusive 'cyber warriors' teams** to handle such cases.
- Additionally, **cybercrime help desks** will be set up in all police stations within the next two months.

What are Cyber Warriors?

- As part of the initiative, around **70 police personnel**, including around 20 sub-inspectors and several ASIs will be undergoing virtual and offline training on various aspects of cybercrime.
- The cyber warriors team will be headed by a Sub-Inspector and staff.
- The personnel will be trained on various aspects of cybercrime cases being reported, including the **modus operandi of cyber fraudsters**.
- The police are planning to introduce the **cyber sentinel concept** in which **at least one person in each colony** or area **will be trained with basic skills to handle cybercrime** and create awareness among people.
- Personnel will also be **trained in technical skills to launch immediate communication** with data operators and bank authorities after a cybercrime is committed.
- The aim is to **freeze accounts or stop money transfers** and **retrieve call data records** to prevent money from being transferred to fraudsters.

Cybercrime in India: (NCRB Report)

- India **reported nearly 52,974 cybercrime incidents** in 2021 which was **an increase of nearly 6%** from 2020.
- Telangana **was the state with the highest number** of cybercrime cases, accounting for more than **19% of the total**.
- Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka saw a decrease in the number of cybercrime **cases by 20% and 24%, respectively**.
- The main **challenges in prosecuting** cybercrime cases are jurisdictional issues and difficulty in obtaining electronic logs from foreign service providers.
- **Bengaluru** had the **highest number of cybercrime cases**, but there has been a decline in cases over the past three years.
- **Fraud** was the **most common motive** for committing cybercrime, **accounting for nearly 61% of cases**.
- Karnataka **recorded the highest number of cybercrimes** against women in 2021, with 2,243 cases.
- The **police pendency** percentage in cybercrime cases improved **from 71.3% in 2020 to 56.4% in 2021**.
- The **conviction ratio** for cybercrime cases **remains poor**, and the charge-sheeting rate declined from 47.5% in 2020 to 33.8% in 2021.
- The court pendency percentage remained high, with **81.4% of total cases in trial in 2021 remaining** pending at the end of the year.

Challenges of Cybercrime

- **Lack of Awareness:** Many people in India are still not aware of the risks associated with cybercrime, making them more vulnerable to attacks.

- **Low Cybersecurity Awareness:** A large number of individuals and organizations in India lack basic cybersecurity awareness, making them easy targets for cybercriminals.
- **Rapidly Evolving Cyber Threat Landscape:** Cybercrime is evolving at a rapid pace, with new threats emerging regularly. It is challenging for law enforcement agencies to keep up with these developments.
- **Limited Cybersecurity Infrastructure:** India's cybersecurity infrastructure is still developing, and many organizations do not have adequate security measures in place to protect their networks and data.
- **Increasing Use of Technology:** With the widespread adoption of technology in India, more people are becoming vulnerable to cybercrime, making it even more challenging to combat.
- **Lack of Cybercrime Laws:** India has outdated cybercrime laws that are not in line with current threats. There is a need for updated laws to be enacted to combat the ever-changing cybercrime landscape.

Need for controlling cyber-crimes in India

- **Increasing Digitalization:** With the growing digitalization of India, more people are using online services and technology, which has led to an increase in cybercrime incidents.
- **Economic Impact:** Cybercrime has a significant economic impact on India, with losses amounting to billions of dollars annually. The country is also losing out on potential investments due to concerns about cybersecurity.
- **National Security:** Cybercrime can have severe consequences for national security, as it can compromise sensitive information and infrastructure, leading to potential political instability.
- **Personal Privacy:** Cybercrime can violate personal privacy, leading to identity theft, financial fraud, and other forms of cyberstalking.
- **Cyber Security Jobs:** With the growing importance of cybersecurity, there is a need for skilled professionals in the field, creating job opportunities in India.
- **Digital India Initiative:** The Indian government's Digital India initiative aims to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. However, cybercrime can hinder the initiative's progress and undermine public trust in digital technologies.

Laws governing Cybercrime in India

- **Information Technology Act, 2000:** This is the primary law governing cybercrime in India. The act provides legal recognition for electronic transactions, penalties for cybercrime, and procedures for handling cybercrime investigations and prosecutions.
- **Indian Penal Code (IPC):** The IPC has provisions for dealing with cybercrime, including identity theft, online stalking, hacking, and dissemination of obscene materials.
- **Aadhaar Act, 2016:** This law regulates the use of Aadhaar, a biometric identification system, and provides penalties for unauthorized access or misuse of Aadhaar information.
- **Copyright Act, 1957:** This law protects intellectual property rights, including copyrights, patents, and trademarks, and provides penalties for cybercrime related to intellectual property theft.
- **Right to Information Act, 2005:** This law empowers citizens to access information from public authorities and provides penalties for cybercrime related to unauthorized access to public information.
- **Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002:** This law aims to prevent money laundering and provides penalties for cybercrime related to money laundering activities.

Way ahead

- Cybercrime is a crucial issue in India due to its economic, national security, and personal privacy implications.
- It is necessary to take proactive steps to combat cybercrime and create a safe and secure digital environment in the country.
- In this regard, Cyber warriors are significant especially when India ranks fifth globally in terms of the number of incidents reported.

DEVELOPMENT

INDIA'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS | SDGS – PERFORMANCE SO FAR

Context:

Recently, the Lancet journal published a report titled “Progress on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators in 707 districts of India: A quantitative mid-line assessment using the National Family Health Surveys, 2016 and 2021”. The report has highlighted India’s SDGs performance is not up to the mark and mentioned that India may not be able to achieve at least 19 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

About the Lancet survey

- The study was conducted by collecting data on children and adults from two rounds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted in 2016 and 2021. It identified 33 indicators that cover 9 of the 17 official SDGs.
- It used the goals and targets outlined by the Global Indicator Framework, Government of India and World Health Organisation (WHO) to determine SDG targets to be met by 2030.”

What is the status of India’s SDG performance according to the Lancet study?

- India is not on target for 19 of the 33 SDGs indicators (Sustainable Development Goals) of the United Nations, which is more than 50% of the indicators.
- **Among the 19 off-target indicators**, the situation has worsened for three of the off-target goals including those relating to anaemia among women, pregnant and non-pregnant women, between 2016 and 2021.
- **The critical off-target indicators** include access to basic services, wasting and overweight children, anaemia, child marriage, partner violence, tobacco use, and modern contraceptives.
- Off-target districts are concentrated in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Odisha,
- The performance of aspirational districts is also not satisfactory.
- Many districts will never meet the targets on the SDGs even after 2030 due to a worsening trend observed between 2016 and 2021.

Positive aspects of India’s SDG performance highlighted in the Lancet survey:

The study found some good things about India’s SDG performance. These include

- At the all-India level, the **one SDG indicator that has already been achieved** is related to **adolescent pregnancy** in the age group of 10–14 years.
- India is also **On-Target to meet 13 out of the 33 indicators**, including Internet use, women having a bank account, full vaccination (card), improved sanitation, multidimensional poverty, birth registration, skilled birth attendants, electricity access, tobacco use (women), child marriage of girls less than 15 years of age, under 5 mortality, teenage sexual violence, and neonatal mortality.
- If efforts continue, India may meet the target of improved water access by 2031, clean fuel for cooking by 2035, lowering teenage pregnancy age by 2039, and partner sexual violence by 2040.
- Another 11 off-target indicators, including access to basic services and partner violence (physical and sexual), may be met between 2041 and 2062.

Reason for India’s poor SDG performance:

General reasons responsible for India’s poor SDG performance

- **Slow world growth rate:** To reach the SDGs, the world needs to grow by 2.5 percentage points every year. But the wor

Id has only grown by 0.36 percentage points up to 2021. This is almost seven times slower than the United States.

The covid pandemic stopped all progress around the world from 2019 to 2021.

- **Linear**

extrapolation: To illustrate the gap between expectations and delivery, one can use linear extrapolation to project a future date when the world will achieve perfection. This is merely a generalisation since countries that are getting near completion will probably start focusing on and funding other goals.

- **Unrealistic promises:**

Some of the promises, such as ending the war, poverty, climate change, hunger, and disease, are unrealistic.

- **Impossible to**

focus: Having 169 aims is like having no priorities, so promising everything makes it impossible to focus. Most countries are either not able or not willing to set aside enough money to keep all their promises.

India-specific reasons:

- **Worsening period:** According to the

Lancet report many districts will never meet the targets on the SDGs even after 2030 due to a worsening trend observed between 2016 and 2021.

- **Financing SDGs:** SDG targets like zero hunger, poverty, etc requires significant investments to eliminate them. Being home to one-third of the world's 1.2 billion extremely poor, the Indian government alone cannot fund these SDG targets.

- **Monitoring & Ownership of Implementation Process:** Although NITI Aayog is expected to play an important role, the members of the Aayog have expressed their concerns time and again about the limited manpower they have to handle such a Herculean task.

Initiatives taken by India to achieve SDG Targets:

- **JAM**

trinity: Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and mobile proved to be helpful in forming the Digital Public Goods (DPGs) and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) which would be helpful in driving financial inclusion and helping improve benefits targeting which have been crucial to India's progress on SDG 1, namely No Poverty.

- The **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act**

(MNREGA) is being used to give unskilled workers jobs and raise their standard of living.

- The **National Food Security Act** is being used to make sure that food grains are subsidised.

- **Healthcare sector**

initiatives which are helpful in achieving sustainable development goals are – The Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram, Ayushman Bharat, National digital health mission (NDHM), etc.

- The government of India has taken several steps to mitigate the effects of climate change, like – National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project (NCRMP), The Net Zero Commitment.

- The government also supports the 10-

Year Framework Programme on Sustainable Consumption and Production. For that the Ministry has published a **draft notification of regulation on Extended Producer Responsibility**

(EPR) for Waste Tyre for receiving comments from the public and 'Guidelines on the EPR for Plastic Packaging' under Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 has been notified.

- Apart from the above-

mentioned initiative, other initiatives include the Swachh Bharat mission, Beti Bacho Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Awas

Yojana, Smart Cities, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, among others.

- **NITI Aayog “SDG India Index”:** It is the world’s first government-led sub-national measure of SDG development. It was launched in 2018 and has been developed to capture the progress of all states and union territories (UTs) in their journey towards achieving the SDGs. This index is based on the idea of cooperative and competitive federalism, which says that action needs to be taken at all levels. The index shows how the Global Goals of the 2030 Agenda cover a wide range of issues while also taking into account national priorities.

Way forward to improve India’s SDG performance:

- This Lancet report has suggested the following steps to improve India’s performance on the SDGs:
- **Appraisal of the policies and programs:** India needs to urgently conduct an appraisal of the policies and programs that relate to SDGs, especially those that relate to four SDG targets relating to no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being and gender equality.
- **Identifying and prioritizing districts:** On critical indicators of health and social determinants of health, there is a need for a greater degree of precision in identifying and prioritizing districts for intervention. Meeting these goals will require prioritising and targeting specific areas within India
- **Inter-ministerial initiatives:** Since the different SDGs fall under tightly organised ministries, there is a need to establish inter-ministerial initiatives, with clear governance structures under the Prime Minister’s Office. Similar structures could be developed at the state level under the respective chief minister’s office.
- **Conduct economic cost-benefit analysis:** This will aid in setting priorities and directing more resources to the policy that offers the greatest return for each additional rupee spent.
- Along with other initiatives, India should also **create a strategic road map** that will help make sure that the SDGs are met successfully.

WILL THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONS MODEL OF INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT WORK?

Context: Infrastructure in emerging economies like India has seemingly become both a **demonstration of good and a necessity.**

Importance of Infrastructure in emerging economies:

- Simultaneously works as a national aspiration good,
- A barometer of national progress,
- A mechanism for job creation,
- A vehicle for crowding in private investment, etc.

Constraints on infrastructure provision are:

- Expensive, **because it needs to be built to a minimum scale.**
- Often has a public good component, **which makes the social value of infrastructure higher than its private value to individual users** → making it relatively unprofitable for private investors.
- The traditional approach to financing infrastructure → **tax revenues or government borrowing.**
- Vicious trap → **poorer economies generate less tax revenue** → **increasing public borrowing domestically** → **crowd out private investment** → **limits infrastructure investment, growth of the economy** → **keep the country poor.**

Indian government’s efforts to come out of this vicious trap?

- Incentivise private sector participation **by providing targeted subsidies for infrastructure investments.**

- In the early 2000s, the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model was introduced.
- While the program did result in the construction of a lot of infrastructure, it ended in an avalanche of non-performing assets with public sector banks → widespread corruption → change in government in 2014.
- The “national champions” model: It modified the PPP approach by assigning the bulk of the infrastructure provisioning for roads, ports, airports, energy, and communications to a few chosen industrial houses.

How does this model overcome the difficulty of financing infrastructure?

- Incentivising national champions to build the projects identified by the government.
- New aspects of the national champions model:
 - Champions given control over existing projects with strong cash flows → helps them to achieve targeted returns and borrow from external credit markets → lowers the cost of finance, freeing up domestic savings for private investment
 - The public association of the champions with the government’s national development policy → generates a competitive advantage in getting domestic and foreign contracts.

Issues with the national champions model:

- The direct association of conglomerates with government policies → markets, regulators treat them as too big to fail → delayed discovery of problems, spillovers.
- The longer it takes for projects to generate large cash flows, the greater will be the need for the state to provide access to additional cash flows.
- This risks turning the country into an industrial oligarchy.
- An uneven playing field in terms of market access, regulatory relaxations → a significant deterrent for foreign investors → bad for efficiency and productivity at the economy-wide level

Dilemma India is facing:

- Can infrastructure provision be the solution to India’s growth aspirations?
- India is at an inflection point in its development path.

Way ahead: A development model based on a domestic demand-driven production structure, powered by soft and hard infrastructure.

THE WIDE DISPARITIES IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Context: India is now one of the fastest growing economies globally. However, this growth has not resulted in a corresponding increase in its Human Development Index.

What are some facts related to HDI?

- According to the Human Development Report of 2021-22, India ranks **132 out of 191 countries**. It is behind Bangladesh (129) and Sri Lanka (73).

What method is used in the current article to measure HDI?

- The HDI is calculated using four indicators: **life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling, expected years of schooling, and Gross National Income (GNI) per capita**.
- Life expectancy estimates are taken from the **Sample Registration System**. Mean and expected years of schooling are extracted from **NFHS-5**.
- For GNI per capita, **gross state domestic product (GSDP) per capita** is used as a proxy indicator to measure the standard of living.

- The methodology involves calculating the **geometric mean of the normalised indices** for the three dimensions of human development. HDI scores **range from 0 to 1**. Higher values indicate higher levels of human development.

What is the performance of various states on Human Development as per the methodology used in this article?

- While some States have made considerable progress, others continue to struggle. Delhi occupies the top spot and Bihar occupies the bottom spot. Bihar, unlike the previous HDI reports, is no longer considered a low human development State.
- The five States with the **highest HDI scores** are Delhi, Goa, Kerala, Sikkim, and Chandigarh. **Delhi and Goa** have HDI scores above 0.799, which makes them equivalent to countries in Eastern Europe with a very **high level of human development**.
- Nineteen States, including Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Punjab, Telangana, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh, have scores ranging between 0.7 and 0.799. These can be classified as **high human development States**.
- The bottom five States are Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Assam, with medium levels of human development. This category also includes States such as Odisha, Rajasthan, and West Bengal, which have **HDI scores below the national average**.
- The scores of these low performing States resemble those of African countries such as Congo, Kenya, Ghana, and Namibia.
- Despite having the **highest GSDP per capita** among larger States, **Gujarat and Haryana** have failed to translate this advantage into human development. They rank 21 and 10, respectively.
- **Kerala** stands out with consistently **high HDI values** over the years. It can be attributed to its **high literacy rates, robust healthcare infrastructure, and relatively high income levels**.
- The **impact of COVID-19** on subnational HDI is not captured here. It will be known when post-pandemic estimates are available.

What are the reasons for the poor performance of some states on HDI?

- One of the main reasons is that economic growth has been **unevenly distributed**. The **top 10%** of the Indian population holds over **77% of the wealth**. This has resulted in significant **disparities in access to basic amenities, like healthcare and education**.
- Another reason is the **quality of services** provided by the government such as health and education. For example, while the country has achieved near **universal enrolment** in primary education, the **quality of education** remains low.

What is the way forward to improve HDI?

- Governments must **prioritise human development alongside economic growth** to ensure that the benefits of growth are more evenly distributed.
- This requires a **multi-faceted approach**. It should **a)** address income inequality and gender inequality, **b)** Improves access to quality social services; and **c)** addresses environmental challenges.
- There is a need to provide for **greater investment in social infrastructure** such as healthcare, education, and **basic household amenities** including access to clean water, improved sanitation facility, clean fuel, electricity and Internet in underdeveloped States.
- India must prioritise **investments in human development and job creation**, particularly for its youth.

TRANSPORT

MARITIME INDIA VISION (MIV)-2030

Context: Government plans to increase Inland Water Transport share to **5% by 2030**.

About

- The **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways** has recently released the blueprint to increase share of Inland transport through “ **Maritime India Vision (MIV)-2030**”.
- The vision comprises **150 initiatives across 10 themes**, covering port infrastructure, logistics efficiency, technology, policy framework, shipbuilding, coastal shipping, **inland waterways, cruise tourism, marine ecosystem**, and maritime security.
- There is a need to push for IWT mode as these are **cheaper operating costs, relatively lesser fuel consumption, less polluting mode of transportation and more environmentally friendly mode of transportation**.

Maritime sector of India

- India has a significant maritime sector, with **12 major and 200+ non-major ports** situated along its **7500 km long coastline** and a vast network of navigable waterways.
- The country’s maritime sector plays a **crucial role in its overall trade and growth**, with **95% of the country’s trade volume and 65% of the trade value** being undertaken through maritime transport.
- India has two ports, **JNPT and Mundra, in the list of top 40 global container ports** and globally the country ranks **2nd in ship recycling and 21st in shipbuilding**.
- The country has **increased the modal share of cargo from 0.5% to 2%** and witnessed a **19% year-on-year growth** in cargo volumes **over the last 5 years**.
- Inland Water Transport is the **most economical mode** of transportation, especially for bulk cargo like coal, iron ore, cement, food grains and fertilizer.

Initiatives for growth of traffic on National Waterways

- **Fairway development works:**
 - Fairway development works to ensure Least Available Depth (LAD) of 3.0 meters in Haldia-Barh, 2.5 meters in Barh-Ghazipur, and 2.2 meters in **Ghazipur-Varanasi stretches on NW-1**.
 - **These** are progressing under the **Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP)** which has been undertaken by IWAI with technical and **financial assistance from the World Bank**.
- **Development of New National Waterways:**
 - IWAI has identified 25 new NWs through techno-economic feasibility studies for undertaking technical interventions to make the waterways navigable for transportation purposes.
 - Once ready, these new waterways will provide an alternate mode of transportation in respective geographies.
- **Ro-Ro/Ro-Pax Service Commenced in Various National Waterways:**
 - The Operation of Ro-Ro / Ro-Pax vessels in Neamati and Kamalabari (Majuli), Guwahati and North Guwahati besides along Wellington Island and Bolghaty.
- **Revision of Levy & Collection of Fees:**
 - The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways has considered the waiver of waterway user charges initially for a period of three years.
- **Digital Solutions for Ease-of-Doing Business:**

- The **CAR-D (Cargo Data) Portal** is a web-based portal for collection & compilation, analysis and dissemination of all cargo and cruise movement data of National Waterways to the stakeholders.

Key challenges of maritime sector in India:

- **Inadequate infrastructure:** Despite having a significant coastline and a vast network of waterways, India's maritime infrastructure, including ports and inland waterways, is inadequate and requires significant investment and development.
- **Poor connectivity:** The lack of connectivity between ports, as well as ports and hinterland, leads to inefficiencies and increased costs.
- **Regulatory hurdles:** The maritime sector in India is subject to complex and fragmented regulations, which can make it challenging for businesses to operate efficiently.
- **Skill gaps:** There is a shortage of skilled manpower in the maritime sector, including seafarers, engineers, and other professionals.
- **Environmental concerns:** The maritime sector can have a significant impact on the environment, and there are concerns around issues such as oil spills, pollution, and the impact of climate change.
- **Security challenges:** The maritime sector is also vulnerable to security threats such as piracy and terrorism.

Way ahead

- With the development work under **Jal Marg Vikas Project-II (Arth Ganga)** which is based on the principles of the sustainable development model to energize economic activities, maritime transportation will get a major push **National Waterways No. 1(River Ganga)**.
- Government should also work to define initiatives, driving innovation, creating a time-bound action plan, benchmarking, addressing capability building and human resources, and exploring ideas to achieve **“Waste to Wealth.”**
- The proposed vision will go a long way in brownfield capacity augmentation, developing world-class Mega Ports, the development of a trans-shipment hub in Southern India, and infrastructure modernization besides addressing the marine ecosystem and maritime security.

CivilsTap Hlmachal

SCIENCED AND TECHNOLOGY

A SUGAR RUSH FOR EMISSIONS – ON ETHANOL BLENDING

Context: All cars in showrooms have to be E20 compliant from April this year. This means that cars should be able to run with 20 percent ethanol blended petrol.

How much ethanol blending has been achieved by India?

- India had already crossed the 10 percent ethanol blended petrol and according to the National Policy on Biofuels, India could hit the 20 percent mark by 2025.
- **India is the world's fifth-largest producer of ethanol** after the US, Brazil, the European Union (EU) and China.

What is the major concern associated with ethanol production and how has the government tried to tackle it?

- Ethanol in India is mostly produced from sugarcane. Other crops from which ethanol can also be produced are maize, broken-rice, wheat, etc.
- Hence, one of the concerns with ethanol production **from sugarcane is its pricing.**
- The government has tried to solve the issue of price by adopting the system of **Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) for sugarcane farmers and that of minimum support price for sugar mills.**
- This has become the reason farmers in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra prefer sugarcane to other crops.
- This has ultimately led India to surpass Brazil in sugar production in the current sugar season (2022-23) and has become the world's second-largest exporter.
- This FRP and MSP model to control prices of ethanol and expect sugarcane farmers and millers to respond with production shifts has worked well.
- **For example,** the year 2021-22 (October-September) saw about 35 lakh tonnes of sugar diverted for ethanol production. This number is expected to reach 60 lakh tonnes by 2025-26.

What are other concerns with ethanol production in India?

- **Ethanol Production from other crops:** The government has plans to offer price support for maize or broken rice. But due to the higher prices in the market, there has been no attempt by the grain-based distilleries to produce ethanol from these two crops.
- **Stock reserves for Ethanol:** Stocking the ethanol crops is another concern because crops like sugarcane or maize production depends on the weather. However, this issue can be solved once the automobiles incorporate a flexi-fuel design that allows the car to run on any combination of ethanol and oil.
- **Increasing Demand:** As per Niti Aayog, the demand for ethanol is expected to increase 1,016 crore litres by 2025. The domestic production of 684 crore litres will have to jump by 48 per cent to achieve this target.
- **Fiscal Requirement:** The government will need more money for FRP and MSP in order to reduce dependence on oil imports.

Way forward:

- There is a need to come up with an option of storage of ethanol like that of petroleum reserves because a sudden drought could be dangerous to the production.

WHAT IS GPT-4 AND HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM CHATGPT?

Context: OpenAI has announced **GPT4, the latest version of its large language model** that powers key applications like ChatGPT and the new Bing.

What is ChatGPT?

- ChatGPT is an **artificial-intelligence chatbot** developed by San Francisco-based AI research company **OpenAI in 2022**.
- It is a **trained model** which interacts in a **conversational way**. The dialogue format makes it possible to answer followup questions, admit its mistakes, challenge incorrect premises, and reject inappropriate requests.
- It can have **conversations on topics** from history to philosophy, generate lyrics and suggest edits to computer programming code.

Technology Used

- The technology that underlies ChatGPT is referenced in the second half of its name, GPT, which stands for **Generative Pre-trained Transformer**.
- Transformers are **specialized algorithms** for finding **long-range patterns** in sequences of data.
- A transformer **learns to predict** not just the next word in a sentence but also the next sentence in a paragraph and the next paragraph in an essay. This is what allows it to **stay on topic for long stretches of text**.

Shortcomings of the Previous Models

- **The chatbot isn't always accurate:** Their sources aren't fact-checked, and they rely on human feedback to improve its accuracy. They can also get facts mixed up and produce misinformation.
- GPT-3 and ChatGPT's GPT-3.5 were limited to textual input and output, meaning they **could only read and write**.
- GPT-3 and GPT-3.5 only operated in one modality, text, meaning users **could only ask questions by typing them out**.

What is GPT-4?

- GPT-4 is a large **multimodal model** which means it can encompass more than just text and **accepts images as inputs**.
- GPT-4 also exhibits **human-level performance** on various professional and academic benchmarks.
- For example, it can answer tax-related questions, schedule a meeting among three busy people, or learn a user's creative writing style.
- GPT-4 is also capable of **handling over 25,000 words of text**, opening up a greater number of use cases that now also include **long-form content creation, document search and analysis, and extended conversations**.

How is GPT-4 different from GPT-3?

- **GPT-4 can see images now:** GPT-4 can be fed images and asked to output information accordingly whereas GPT-3 and ChatGPT's GPT-3.5 were limited to textual input and output.
- GPT-4 can process a lot more information at a time.
- **GPT-4 has an improved accuracy:** GPT-4 significantly reduces hallucinations relative to previous models and scores 40 per cent higher than GPT-3.5 on factuality evaluations.
- **Hard to trick:** It will be a lot harder to trick GPT-4 into producing undesirable outputs such as hate speech and misinformation.
- **Better at understanding languages other than English:** GPT-4 is more multilingual which means that users will be able to use chatbots based on GPT-4 to produce outputs with greater clarity and higher accuracy in their native languages.

NEXT-GENERATION TECH – ON 6 G TECHNOLOGY

Context: Few months after the formal launch of commercial 5G service, India is set to commit resources to the development of 6G technologies with the release of a vision document and the inauguration of a 6G testbed for research & development (R&D).

What are some facts about 6G technology?

- 6G will be 100 times faster than 5G.
- It will have **multiple applications**. The 6G network could enable a host of autonomous cars to talk to one another in real time as they navigate crowded urban landscapes.
- **Virtual reality without lags** could become a reality. **Edge computing, where AI is deployed extensively**, will be a possibility.
- 6G aims to be **more energy-efficient** and better at using whatever spectrum is available for the network. It would have huge **positive externalities**.

How can G be defined?

- Every “G” from 2G onwards can be described as a set of **globally agreed benchmarks** that allow for standardized networks to interact with one another and equipment that can be used everywhere.
- R&D at every stage has been focused on developing ways to **transfer data more efficiently, and to develop new use cases**.

What is the government plan to develop 6G?

- India will set up **six technology-innovation groups** to explore the possibilities and drive R&D into possible directions that 6G could go.
- The groups will **identify priority areas for research** involving industry, academia, and service providers in this process.
- The R&D would encompass all areas from **mmWave and Terahertz communications, to fibre-broadband, remote operations, multi-sensor man-machine interfaces and devices leveraging edge cloud computing**.

What are the aspects that should be considered while launching 6G?

- Earlier launching could give India the leverage to **mould 6G standards** in advantageous ways. It will generate **intellectual property (IP)** that could make it a world leader as 6G evolves.
- The initiative must be followed through with **robust policy implementation**. Policymakers must ensure that roll-outs of commercial networks are not delayed.
- In the case of 5G, India has been late in terms of network roll-outs due to **complex telecom policy and the resulting litigation**. Policymakers need to learn from those mistakes.

CivilsTap Hlmachal

ENVIRONMENT

MENACE OF PLASTIC CONSUMPTION

Context: A new Study Warns of doubling of Plastic Consumption in **G20 countries by 2050 without new policies.**

Plastic Consumption across Globe

- According to a report by the **Back to Blue initiative**, Plastic consumption in G20 countries **may nearly double by 2050 unless new global policies are put in place to reduce its use.**
- Countries with the **highest economic and population growth** are likely to see the **largest increase in plastic consumption** in the coming decades.
- Plastic consumption is expected to nearly double by 2050, **reaching 451 million tonnes from 261 million tonnes in 2019.**
- **Single-use plastic ban is the most effective policy**, but even with the ban, plastic consumption across **G20 countries will be 1.48 times higher in 2050 compared to 2019.**
- **Extended producer responsibility schemes** will have a minimal effect on the consumption of single-use plastic products, but still a vital part of the solution.
- Currently, the **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016**, prohibits manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of carry bags and plastic sheets less than 50 microns in thickness in the country.

What is the Significance of Plastic?

- **Resistant, inert, and lightweight**, plastic offers many benefits to companies, consumers, and other links in society. This is all because of its low-cost and versatile nature.
 - In the **medical industry**, plastics are used to **keep things sterile**. Syringes and surgical implements are all plastic and single use.
 - In the **automotive industry**, it has allowed a significant reduction in vehicle weight, **reducing fuel consumption** and, consequently, the environmental impact of automobiles.

Issues / Challenges with Plastic

- **Environmental:** It is harmful to the environment as it is non-biodegradable and takes years to disintegrate.
 - Marine wildlife such as seabirds, whales, fishes and turtles eat plastic waste and most die of starvation as their stomachs are filled with plastic debris.
- **Food and health:** Invisible plastic has been identified in tap water, beer, salt and are present in all samples collected in the world's oceans, including the Arctic.
 - The transfer of contaminants between marine species and humans through the consumption of seafood has been identified as a health hazard.
 - Fish consume thousands of tons of plastic in a year, ultimately transferring it up the food chain to marine mammals.
- **Climate change:** Plastic, which is a petroleum product, also contributes to global warming. If plastic waste is incinerated, it releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, thereby increasing carbon emissions.
- **Tourism:** Plastic waste damages the aesthetic value of tourist destinations, leading to decreased tourism-related incomes and major economic costs related to the cleaning and maintenance of the sites.
- **Financial costs of marine plastic pollution:** According to conservative forecasts made in March 2020, the direct harm to the blue economy of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations will be \$2.1 billion per year.

Challenges in controlling plastic pollution:

- **Weak enforcement of regulations:** While India has enacted laws to control plastic pollution, enforcement remains weak due to limited resources and inadequate monitoring and reporting mechanisms.
- **Lack of public awareness:** There is a need for more widespread public education campaigns to promote plastic alternatives and proper waste disposal practices.

- **Limited infrastructure:** There is a lack of proper waste collection and segregation systems, and many landfill sites are poorly managed and overflowing.
- **Recycling challenges:** While India has a vibrant informal recycling sector, there are challenges with the quality and safety of recycled plastics, as well as a lack of standardized recycling processes and technologies.
- **Single-use plastic production:** India still produces a significant amount of single-use plastic items, such as straws, cutlery, and bags, which are difficult to recycle and often end up in landfills or waterways.

Steps taken by India to control plastic pollution

- **Ban on single-use plastics:** India has banned the production, use, and sale of single-use plastics such as bags, cups, plates, cutlery, and straws in many states.
- **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR):** The Indian government has implemented EPR, making plastic manufacturers responsible for managing and disposing of the waste generated by their products.
- **Plastic Waste Management Rules:** India introduced the Plastic Waste Management Rules in 2016, which provide a framework for managing plastic waste through various measures, including recycling and waste-to-energy initiatives.
- **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan:** The Indian government launched the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, a national cleanliness campaign, which includes the collection and disposal of plastic waste.
- **Plastic Parks:** India has set up Plastic Parks, which are specialized industrial zones for recycling and processing plastic waste.
- **Beach clean-up drives:** The Indian government and various non-governmental organizations have organized beach clean-up drives to collect and dispose of plastic waste from beaches.
- **Awareness campaigns:** India has launched awareness campaigns to educate people about the harmful effects of plastic pollution and encourage them to use sustainable alternatives.

Way Forward

- **Identifying Hotspots:**
 - **Identifying key hotspots of Plastic leakage** associated with production, consumption, and disposal of Plastic can assist governments in developing effective policies that address the plastic problem directly.
- **Breaking Down Plastic Waste:**
 - Plastic has become so enmeshed in our ecosystem that bacteria have evolved to digest it. ‘
 - **Plastic-eating bacteria, discovered in Japan,** have been cultivated and modified to digest polyester plastics (food packaging and plastic bottles)
- **Circular Economy for Plastic Management:**
 - **Circular economy can reduce material use, redesigns materials to be less resource intensive, and recaptures “waste” as a resource** to manufacture new materials and products.
 - Circular economy is **not just applicable to the global currents of plastic and clothes,** but can also contribute significantly to the achievement of sustainable development goals.

FOREST CERTIFICATION IN INDIA

Context: Deforestation has become a **critically sensitive issue** globally in recent years, and there is a greater **need for the certification of forests.**

What is Forest Certification?

- Forest Certification offers a **multi-layer audit system** that seeks to authenticate the **origin, legality, and sustainability** of forest-based products such as timber, furniture, handicraft, paper and pulp, rubber, and many more.
- The certification is done to **avoid consumption** of any product that might be the result of **deforestation or illegal logging.**

Forest Certification Industry

- It is a **three-decade-old global certification industry** that began through **independent third-party audits** to review that **management in a sustainable manner**.
- There are **two major international standards**: one has been developed by **Forest Stewardship Council, or FSC**; the other by **Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certifications, or PEFC**. FSC certification is **more popular and in demand**, and also more expensive.
- They are not involved in the **evaluation and auditing of the processes** it is done by certification bodies authorised by FSC or PEFC.
- PEFC does not insist on the use of its own standards; instead, it endorses the **'national' standards of any country** if they are aligned with its own.
- **Two main types of certification are: forest management (FM) and Chain of Custody (CoC)**. CoC certification is meant to guarantee the traceability of a forest product like timber throughout the supply chain from origin to market.

Forest certification in India

- The forest certification industry has been operating in India for the **last 15 years**.
- Currently, forests in only one state — **Uttar Pradesh** — are certified.
- The standards have been developed by the New Delhi-based nonprofit **Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF)**.
- India allows the export of only **processed wood, not timber**. The demand for wood in India is **150-170 million cubic metres** annually, including 90-100 million cubic metres of raw wood. The rest goes mainly towards meeting the **demand for paper and pulp**.
- India's forests contribute just about **five million cubic metres** of wood every year. Almost **85 percent of the demand** for wood and wood products is met by **trees outside forests (ToF)**.
- Since ToF are so important, new certification standards are being developed for their sustainable management. **PEFC already has certification for TOF** and last year, FSC came up with India-specific standards that included certification for ToF.

Significance of the Certification

- **Forest-based industries** in India, particularly those for paper, boards, plywood, medium density fibreboard, furniture and handicrafts etc, have been pushing for forest certification to **enhance their market accessibility** to western markets including European Union and USA.
- Certification scheme is aimed to **improve India's forest management regime** that is often criticised for various issues ailing the sector such as forest rights, forest degradation, biodiversity losses, encroachments, lack of manpower, etc.

Conclusion: A simple, transparent, easy to adopt and internationally accepted **indigenous system of certifications** will take into account India's national circumstances and will make available sustainably grown and managed forest products in the domestic market.

UNUSED FUNDS, UNSUITABLE LAND: THE PROBLEMS WITH COMPENSATORY AFFORESTATION IN INDIA

Context: Compensatory afforestation forms a significant component of various reforestation programmes being implemented in India.

Background:

- **India has promised to increase its forest and tree cover to absorb an additional 2.5 – 3 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent by 2030.**
- **However, the forestry target is difficult to achieve due to the need for rapid industrial, infrastructure development, and urbanisation.**

- In the last 10 years, more than 1,611 square km of forest land (a third of this in the last three years) has been cleared.
- But government data shows that total forest cover had increased by 1,540 square km in the two years between 2019 and 2021.

Programmes with compensatory afforestation component:

- Green India Mission,
- National afforestation programme
- Tree plantation exercises along the highways and railways
- National rural employment guarantee scheme (MGNREGS)
- Namami Gange, etc

What is Compensatory Afforestation?

- The compensatory afforestation programme ensures that forest lands getting 'diverted' for non-forest purposes is mandatorily accompanied by afforestation on an equal area of land.
- It was made a legal requirement through the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) Act 2016.
- Though the law came in 2016, the concept has existed since the 1980s, as an offshoot of the Forest Conservation Act 1980.

Salient provisions of the CAF Act 2016:

- Newer parcels of land are earmarked for development as forests.
- Project developers (public/private) are required to fund the entire afforestation activity on these new lands.
- Project developers are also asked to pay for the Net Present Value (NPV) of the forests being cleared, as the new lands cannot be compared with the fully grown forests getting diverted.
- According to recent calculations, companies have to pay NPV between Rs 9.5 lakh and Rs 16 lakh per hectare, depending on the quality of forests getting diverted.
- All this money is meant for increasing/improving the quality of forest cover in the country.

How money is disbursed for compensatory afforestation?

- The money is parked in special funds created for this purpose at the Central and state levels.
- The money is first deposited in the Central fund, from where it gets disbursed to states where the projects are located.
- State governments prepare an annual plan of operations → approved by the Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) at the Central level → the state government transfers funds to the state forest departments → carry out the work.
- The Central fund can keep up to 10% of the total money for administrative expenses.

Issues faced by the compensatory afforestation:

- Legitimised clearing of forests and see it as an example of 'greenwashing'.
- Money collected before 2016 had remained largely unutilised. For example, much of the Rs 55,000 crore in the state funds remains locked.
- Allegations of misutilisation or diversion of these funds.
- Lack of availability of suitable land/unavailability of land in a contiguous stretch remains the biggest problem.
- Land made available for afforestation cannot be used for any other purpose and is unsuitable for growing plantations.
- Often the plantations are monocultures, which is against the core concept of biodiversity.
- Biotic pressures – plantations face nearby human habitations and cattle.

Conclusion: As the clearing of forests cannot be entirely eliminated, compensatory afforestation is a good mechanism to make up for these losses to some extent. However, the above issues need to be addressed.

TOURISM IN THE HIMALAYAS IS NOT UNIFORM; ITS IMPACTS THOUGH ARE DETRIMENTAL

Context: Over the last year, the Union government has laid emphasis on **promoting sustainable tourism in the Himalayan region.**

Background:

- The Indian Himalayan region, with its rich biodiversity, offers conditions suitable for several activities (recreation/adventure/religious pilgrimages) and attracts a large number of visitors from all over the world.
- As tourism is an important source of income and livelihood for people living in this region, it must be ensured that these activities take place in a sustainable manner.

Recent efforts:

- National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism and Responsible Traveller Campaign: Launched in 2022 by the Union Ministry of Tourism, it focuses on
 - Promotion of environmental, economic and socio-cultural sustainability;
 - Protection of biodiversity;
 - Capacity-building and governance;
 - Greater investment in green infrastructure with more efficient transport facilities reduced air pollution, and conservation of heritage sites and open spaces.
- Swadesh Darshan 2.0: It is a centrally sponsored scheme for the development of theme-based tourist circuits in the country, including a vision to set up sustainable and responsible tourism in the Himalayan region.

Some challenges need greater focus:

- **Mass tourism:** Seasons play a role as a major tourist activity is confined to just a few months in a year – during the peak summer season.
- Greater anthropogenic pressure on existing infrastructure and local resources during the summer months.
- More generation of solid waste, ambient air pollution, water pollution and deforestation.
- Shift is seen in snowfall and melting patterns due to climate change-related impacts.

Way ahead:

- Reduce mass tourism and inculcate a spirit of conservation among locals and tourists.
- Promoting ecotourism (which involves responsible travel and safeguarding of local environment and ecosystems), alternative or green tourism.
- Decentralisation of tourism activities based on the available resources in any place. Tourists would also be able to access the benefits of the largely untouched environment.
- Developing tourist systems in northeastern states that have great potential for ecotourism activities.
- Assessing the carrying capacity of municipal infrastructure prior to development works.

Combat pollution:

- By practising microbial bio composting: the best way of natural disintegration and decomposition of waste under aerobic process.
- To combat air pollution, planting locally available (like broad-leaved banj oak), introducing electric vehicles, using non-conventional energy sources like solar, etc.
- Pine forests, which often witness fires, can be used to make bio-briquettes (used as a substitute for biofuel) and purify water resources.

Involve all stakeholders:

- Any sustainable approach undertaken should involve the local communities, visitors, etc. Encourage skill and capacity-building programmes to spread awareness among different stakeholders.
- Visitors should learn the rules and good practices to be adopted while travelling through these areas.

Context: A parliamentary panel has attributed the low installation of solar roof-top and wind energy projects as key reasons for the shortfall in achieving India's renewable energy (RE) capacity target of 175 GW by 2022.

Background:

- India set an ambitious target (in 2014) of installing 175 GW of RE capacity by the year 2022, which included 100 GW (solar), 60 GW (wind), 10 GW (bio-power), and 5 GW (small hydropower).
- While India has enhanced its promises to RE in the “Long-Term Low-Carbon Development Plan” presented at the UNFCCC COP27, it appears that the nation will fall short of one of its initial pledges in the RE sector.

INDIA WILL MISS THE 175 GW RENEWABLE ENERGY TARGET BY 2022

Over the years, while the overall solar industry has seen strong growth, the rooftop solar segment is the main reason behind missed targets

RENEWABLE ENERGY INSTALLED CAPACITY TARGETS VS ACHIEVEMENT (IN GW)



Findings of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Energy:

- **A RE capacity of 90 GW (69% of the overall target) has been installed in the country as of December 31, 2022.**
- **This is a commendable achievement, as the RE installed capacity has increased by more than 236% since 2014.**
- **Whatever shortfall has occurred in achieving the target is because of the low installation of solar roof-tops and wind energy projects.**
 - Against 40 GW, **only 7.40 GW** of rooftop solar projects could be installed in the country.
 - Against 60 GW, the cumulative installed capacity of wind power is 41.93 GW.

Issues responsible for deficient performance under the solar rooftop programme:

- Non-availability of information at the grass root level,
- Lack of awareness about this scheme amongst the masses,
- The apathy of discoms, etc.

Recommendations:

- Keeping in view India's commitment to increase its non-fossil fuel-based energy capacity to 500 GW by 2030, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) must ramp up its pace for the timely achievement of targets.
- A strict timeline should be imposed for approvals/rejection of applications, installation of net-metre, an inspection of the system, etc., by the discoms.
 - As of Feb 2023, out of 43,171 applications received on the National Portal, 18,437 – were approved by DISCOMs, 3,031 – were rejected on technical grounds and the rest are pending.

- Discoms may be incentivised to allay their concerns about losing their high-paying customers as a result of the installation of solar rooftops.
- The MNRE should increase its fund absorption capacity and focus on exhaustive utilization of the budgetary allocation.
 - In the Union Budget 2023-24, Rs 10,222 crore has been allocated to MNRE with an increase of 45% against the Revised Estimates of 2022.

Government Initiatives

- **Deendayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana:**
 - Punjab has introduced a scheme by way of which farmers were refunded money if they consumed less electricity.
 - Under Deendayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana of Ministry of Power, separate components of agriculture and non-agriculture feeders have been created for facilitating judicious rostering of supply to agriculture & non-agriculture consumers in rural areas.
- **National Water Policy, 2012**
 - It has laid emphasis on the periodic assessment of groundwater resources on a scientific basis.
- **Atal Bhujal Yojana:**
 - The focus of the scheme is on community participation and demand side intervention for sustainable groundwater management in identified water stressed areas.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission:**
 - Provisions have been made for source recharging like dedicated bore well recharge structures, rain water recharge, rejuvenation of existing water bodies, etc.
- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana:**
 - It aims to enhance physical access of water on farm and for expanding the cultivable area under assured irrigation, improve on-farm water use efficiency, introducing sustainable water conservation practices, etc.
- **Per Drop More Crop:**
 - It mainly focuses on water use efficiency at farm level through micro irrigation (drip and sprinkler irrigation system).
- **Rejuvenation of Dry Ponds, puddles and wells:**
 - Water being a State subject, it is for the State Governments to take up rejuvenation of water bodies like formulation of action plan for rejuvenation of dry ponds, puddles and wells in their jurisdiction.
- **National Aquifer Mapping and Management program (NAQUIM):**
 - It is being implemented by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) as part of Ground Water Management and Regulation (GWM&R) Scheme, a central sector scheme.

Suggestions & way ahead

- **Monitoring:**
 - The exploitation and sale of groundwater by large corporations should be monitored on a continuous basis.
- **Rainwater harvesting:**
 - Both Central and State governments must take continuous steps to store rainwater in all possible ways to increase recharge.
 - Rainwater harvesting system must be made mandatory in every household, particularly in big cities where groundwater has been declining alarmingly.
- **MSP fixing considering groundwater resource:**
 - Considering the groundwater balance, MSPs for crops should be fixed according to the consumption of water; higher prices for crops that require less water and vice-versa.
- **Micro-irrigation:**
 - Micro-irrigation (drip and sprinkler), which can save about 50 percent of water in the cultivation of different crops, should be promoted in the over-exploited blocks to reduce the exploitation of groundwater.
- **Awareness:**

- People from all walks of life must continue to be made aware of water literacy and on the hazardous effects of rapidly declining groundwater.

IPCC REPORT ON INDIA'S AFFORESTATION POLICY

Context: Recently the Synthesis Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was released.

Report statement on India's afforestation policy

- The report states that not degrading existing ecosystems in the first place will do more to lower the impact of the climate crisis than restoring ecosystems that have been destroyed.
 - It is speaking about the increasingly contested policy in India that has allowed forests in one part of the country to be cut down and 'replaced' with those elsewhere.

More about Afforestation

- **Afforestation as part of India's climate pledges:**
 - The government has committed to adding **"an additional (cumulative) carbon sink of 2.5-3 GtCO₂e through additional forest and tree cover by 2030"**.
 - **'GtCO₂e'** stands for gigatonnes of carbon-dioxide-equivalent.
- **Afforestation & CAMPA:**
 - Afforestation is also codified in the **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA)**, a body created on the Supreme Court's orders in 2002, chaired by the environment minister.
 - According to the environment ministry, **"CAMPA is meant to promote afforestation and regeneration activities as a way of compensating for forest land diverted to non-forest uses."**
- **Forest (Conservation) Act 1980:**
 - When forest land is diverted to non-forest use, such as a **dam or a mine**, that land can no longer provide its historical ecosystem services nor host biodiversity.
 - According to the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980, the project proponent that wishes to divert the land must **identify land elsewhere to afforest**, and pay the land value and for the afforestation exercise.
 - That land will thereafter be stewarded by the forest department.

Issues

- **Unspent fund:**
 - The money paid sits in a fund overseen by Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA).
 - In 2006-2012, the fund grew from Rs 1,200 crore to Rs 23,600 crore. But the Comptroller and Auditor General found in 2013 that most of this money had been unspent. In 2019, the fund had Rs 47,000 crore.
- **Facilitating deforestation:**
 - CAMPA has also come under fire for **facilitating the destruction of natural ecosystems in exchange for forests to be set up in other places**.
 - For example, in October 2022, the Haryana government said it would develop the "world's largest curated safari" using CAMPA funds received from deforestation in Great Nicobar for development projects, 2,400 km away and of very different topography.
- **Issues with CAMPA-funded projects:**
 - A 2016 article in Current Science also said that CAMPA-funded projects endangered "landscape connectivity and biodiversity corridors" and exposed forest patches to "edge effects".
 - It added that planting non-native species or artificial plantations wouldn't compensate for the ecosystem loss as well as be "hazardous to the existing ecosystem".
- **No specific conditions for denying:**
 - There are no specific conditions laid by the environment ministry for outrightly denying permission for deforestation for development projects.

- For example, indiscriminately planting mangroves on mudflats which don't naturally have mangroves to act as a buffer from storms.
- Destroying grasslands and open natural ecosystems for solar parks.
- **Beyond compensation:**
 - What this means is that in addition to livelihood impacts, biodiversity impacts, and hydrological impacts, the climate impacts of such development projects also cannot adequately be 'compensated' by compensatory afforestation.

Significance of Natural Ecosystem & way ahead

- **Carbon sequestration:**
 - **Research has found that natural ecosystems sequester more carbon.**
- **No comparison with the Natural Ecosystem:**
 - We have known all along that creating single-species plantations in, say, Haryana does not really come close to a natural sal forest lost to a development project in, say, Central Indian forests in terms of biodiversity, local livelihoods, hydrological services, and sequestered carbon.
- **Time consuming:**
 - Of these, sequestered carbon recovers fastest under fast-growing plantations, but even then, it will take many decades before it approaches the level of carbon sequestered in a natural forest.

BIOTRANSFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Context: A UK-based startup has claimed to have developed a **Biotransformation Technology** that could alter the state of **plastics** and make them **biodegradable**.

What is Biotransformation Technology?

- **About:**
 - Biotransformation technology is a **novel approach to ensure plastics that escape refuse streams** are processed efficiently and broken down.
 - Plastics made using this technology are given a pre-programmed time during which the manufactured material looks and feels like conventional plastics without compromising on quality.
 - Once the product expires and is exposed to the external environment, **it self-destructs, and bio transforms into bioavailable wax.**
 - This wax is then consumed by **microorganisms, converting waste into water**, CO₂, and biomass.
 - This biotransformation technology is the **world's first that ensures polyolefins** fully biodegrade in an open environment causing no microplastics.
- **Need for such a Technology:**
 - India is generating 3.5 billion kgs of plastic waste annually and that the per capita plastic waste generation has **also doubled in the past five years**. Of this, a third comes from packaging waste.
 - In 2019, plastic packaging waste from **e-commerce firms was estimated at over a billion kilograms** worldwide, according to Statista.
 - Seeing such a burden of plastic waste, which could potentially harm biodiversity, it is needed to devise technology in order to tackle the Plastic Menace.
- **Utility:**
 - Food packaging and health care industries are the **two prime sectors that could use** this technology to reduce waste.
 - The increase in cost is relatively small **compared to conventional plastic** that does not contain.

What are the Alternatives to Reducing Plastic Waste?

- A switch to **jute or paper-based packaging could potentially cut down plastic waste**. This could also build **sustainability within the paper industry** and save on the import bill on ethylene solutions.
- The **Wooden Packaging** is yet another alternative, but that will make the packaging bulkier and increase cost.

- The Government of Tamil Nadu, in Chennai, organised **National Expo and Conference of Startups** to raise awareness on alternatives to single-use plastics.
- The alternatives showcased were made using **coir, bagasse, rice and wheat bran, plant and agricultural residue**, banana and areca leaves, jute and cloth.

Initiatives Related to Plastic Waste:

- The Indian government has launched multiple initiatives to move the country towards sustainability. They introduced a plastic waste management gazette to help tackle the ever-growing plastic pollution caused by single-use plastics.
- In 2022, the government imposed a ban on single-use plastics to bring a stop to its use in the country.
- The National Dashboard on **Elimination of Single Use Plastic and Plastic Waste Management** brings all stakeholders together to track the progress made in eliminating single-use plastic and effectively managing such waste.
- **An Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** portal helps in improving accountability, traceability, and facilitating ease of compliance reporting in relation to EPR obligations of the producers, importers and brand-owners.
- India has also developed a **mobile app to report single use plastics grievances** to check sale, usage or manufacturing of single use plastics in their area.

GREEN HYDROGEN - SUBSTITUTE TO FOSSIL FUEL

Context: Under the highly ambitious **National Green Hydrogen Mission**, India intends to be "**the Global Hub for the Production, Use, and Export of Green Hydrogen**" and "**to assume technology and market leadership.**" The mission's goal is to **generate 5 million tonnes of green hydrogen for domestic use.**

Green hydrogen is a **clean energy source produced through the electrolysis of water using renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and hydro power.** It has the potential to become a key player in the transition to a **carbon-free economy** and can help mitigate climate change. The hydrogen produced can be stored and used as a fuel for transportation, industry, and agriculture.

What are the Reasons to Develop Green Hydrogen?

- **Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions:**
 - The primary reason for developing green hydrogen is to **reduce greenhouse gas** emissions and mitigate climate change. The use of **fossil fuels for transportation and electricity generation is a major contributor to global emissions.**
 - Green hydrogen, produced from renewable sources, emits zero greenhouse gases, making it a sustainable and environmentally friendly energy source.
- **Energy Security and Independence:**
 - **Fossil fuels are a finite resource**, and their **prices can fluctuate** due to global supply and demand. By developing renewable energy sources like green hydrogen, **countries can become more energy-independent and less vulnerable to price shocks** and supply disruptions.
- **Creating New Industries and Jobs:**
 - The development of green hydrogen can create new industries and jobs, particularly in the renewable energy sector. The production, storage, and distribution of green hydrogen require specialized expertise and infrastructure, which can generate employment opportunities.
 - According to the **International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)**, the **renewable energy sector employed 11 million people worldwide in 2018** and is expected to create more than 42 million jobs by 2050.
- **Decarbonizing in Sectors which are Difficult-to-Decarbonize:**
 - The potential to substitute fossil fuels with green hydrogen is significant, especially in sectors that are difficult to decarbonize, such as heavy industry and aviation. These sectors contribute significantly to global emissions, and the use of green hydrogen can help reduce their **carbon footprint.**

- **Technological Advancements:**

- The development of green hydrogen can drive technological advancements and innovations in various sectors. The production, storage, and distribution of green hydrogen require new technologies and infrastructure, which can spur the development of new materials, processes, and systems.

What are the Applications of Green Hydrogen?

- **Agriculture Sector:**

- **Green Hydrogen as Replacement to Fossil Fuel in Agriculture:**
 - Green hydrogen has the potential to replace traditional fertilizers in agriculture through the **production of ammonia using renewable energy sources**.
 - **Ammonia is a key ingredient in the production of fertilizers**, and the current production process relies on natural gas, which is a fossil fuel and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions.
 - **Green ammonia** produced with help of green hydrogen is carbon-free, green ammonia has other benefits over traditional fertilizers, including improved efficiency and reduced soil acidity.
 - However, the production of green ammonia at scale will require significant investment in infrastructure and the development of new technologies. Currently, the production of green ammonia is more expensive than traditional ammonia production, which may limit its adoption in the short term.
- **Green Hydrogen-Powered Farm Machinery:**
 - Farm machinery like tractors, harvesters, and irrigation systems require a lot of energy to operate. **Green hydrogen-powered farm machinery can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions** while still delivering the power required to carry out essential farm tasks.
- **Green Hydrogen for Water Management:**
 - Water is a precious resource, and managing it efficiently is critical for sustainable agriculture. Green hydrogen can be used to power desalination plants that convert saltwater into freshwater, reducing our reliance on scarce freshwater resources.

- **Transport Sector:**

- **Hydrogen Fuel Cell:**
 - A hydrogen fuel cell is a device that converts the **chemical energy of hydrogen and oxygen into electricity, water and heat**.
 - **Hydrogen fuel cell vehicles produce zero emissions**, making them an attractive **alternative to gasoline and diesel-powered vehicles**. They have a longer range than battery electric vehicles and can be refuelled in minutes, making them more convenient for long-distance travel.

- **Industrial Sector:**

- **Cost Savings:**
 - The production of green hydrogen can be done using excess renewable energy that is produced during off-peak hours. This excess energy can be used to produce **green hydrogen, which can then be stored and used when the energy demand is high**. This can help to **reduce the cost of energy and promote sustainable development**.
- **Reliable:**
 - Green hydrogen can be **produced and stored on-site, making it a reliable and consistent source of energy for industrial processes**. This can help to reduce the dependence on the electricity grid and promote energy independence.
- **Reduction in Waste:**
 - Green hydrogen production can be done using waste materials like **municipal solid waste and agricultural waste**. This can help to **reduce waste and promote sustainable development**.
- **Increase in Energy Efficiency:**
 - Green hydrogen can be used to power fuel cells, which are more energy-efficient than traditional combustion engines. This can help to reduce energy consumption.

What are the Difficulties in Green Hydrogen Implementation?

- **Cost:**

- The cost of green hydrogen is **currently high compared to traditional fossil fuels**. The production, storage, and distribution of green hydrogen require specialized equipment and infrastructure, making it more expensive than conventional fuels.
- However, with **advancements in technology and scaling up of production, the cost of green hydrogen is expected to decrease over time**.
- **Infrastructure:**
 - The widespread adoption of green hydrogen requires the **development of a robust infrastructure for its production, storage, and distribution**.
 - The infrastructure must be developed in a way that is **compatible with existing energy infrastructure to facilitate the transition to green hydrogen**.
- **Energy Storage:**
 - Green hydrogen production is dependent on renewable energy sources like wind, solar, and hydro power. However, these sources are intermittent, **meaning that their output can fluctuate over time**. The **development of effective energy storage solutions** is critical to enable the widespread adoption of green hydrogen.
 - Energy storage solutions like **batteries and hydrogen storage can store excess energy produced by renewable sources and provide a constant supply of green hydrogen**.
- **Safety:**
 - Green hydrogen is a **highly flammable gas that requires special handling and storage**.
 - The development of proper safety protocols and regulations is crucial to ensure the safe handling and storage of green hydrogen.
- **Public Acceptance:**
 - The public acceptance of green hydrogen is crucial to its adoption. **The public must be educated about the benefits of green hydrogen and its role in mitigating climate change**.

What are India's Initiatives to Promote Green Hydrogen?

- India has recognized the potential of green hydrogen to decarbonize its economy and achieve its climate goals. The country has launched several initiatives and policies to promote the production, utilization and export of green hydrogen.
- **Some of the key initiatives are:**
 - **National Hydrogen Mission:**
 - The mission was announced in the Union Budget 2021-22 and aims to make India a global hub for green hydrogen and its derivatives.
 - The mission will also facilitate demand creation, pilot projects, R&D, skill development, standards and regulations, and policy framework for green hydrogen.
 - **Green Hydrogen Consumption Obligations:**
 - The **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)** has proposed to introduce **green hydrogen consumption obligations** for fertilizer and the petroleum refining industry, like the renewable purchase obligations for electricity distribution companies.
 - The obligations will require these industries to consume a certain percentage of green hydrogen in their total hydrogen consumption.
 - **Green Hydrogen Hubs:**
 - The **MNRE** has identified regions that can support large scale production and/or utilization of green hydrogen and develop them as green hydrogen hubs.

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **High Cost of Production and Utilization:**
 - Green hydrogen is currently more expensive than conventional hydrogen produced from fossil fuels or other low-carbon sources, **such as nuclear or blue hydrogen**. So, to address this issue, there is a need to develop efficient technologies that can reduce the production cost of green hydrogen.

- One promising approach is to use **more efficient electrolysis systems that require less energy to produce the same amount of hydrogen**. This can be achieved using advanced materials for the electrodes or the use of more efficient catalysts.
- Another approach is to **integrate green hydrogen production with other renewable energy technologies such as wind or solar farms**. This can **reduce the cost of electricity used in the electrolysis process**, making green hydrogen more competitive with conventional hydrogen.
- **Implement Regulatory Incentives:**
 - The government can play a key role in promoting the adoption of green hydrogen by implementing **regulatory incentives, such as tax credits and subsidies**, to encourage the production and use of this technology.
- **Lack of Adequate Infrastructure and Supply Chain:**
 - Green hydrogen requires dedicated infrastructure and supply chain for its production, storage, transport and distribution.
 - The existing infrastructure and supply chain for conventional hydrogen are not sufficient or compatible for green hydrogen, efficient and cost-effective supply chain must be developed.
- **Coordination Among Various Stakeholders and Sectors:**
 - Green hydrogen involves multiple stakeholders and sectors across the value chain, such as renewable energy producers, electrolyser manufacturers, hydrogen producers, transporters, distributors and end-users.
 - There is a need for coordination among these stakeholders and sectors to ensure alignment of policies, standards, regulations, incentives and markets for green hydrogen.
- **Awareness and Capacity Building among Potential Users and Producers:**
 - Green hydrogen is still a developing technology that requires awareness and capacity building among potential users and producers.
 - There is a need to demonstrate the benefits, safety and feasibility of green hydrogen in various applications and sectors.
 - There is also a need to develop skills and competencies for green hydrogen production and utilization.

INDIA'S SOLAR PV WASTE PROBLEM

Context: Recently, A report prepared by the **National Solar Energy Federation of India** predicted that India could generate **over 34,600 tonnes of cumulative solar waste in India by 2030**.

About:

- India has the **world's fourth highest solar PV deployment**. The installed solar capacity was **nearly 62GW in November 2022**. This contributes to a large amount of solar PV waste.
- India's solar PV installations are dominated by crystalline silicon (c-Si) technology. **A typical PV panel is made of c-Si modules (93%) and cadmium telluride thin-film modules (7%)** Both the technologies have a **recovery rate of 85-90 per cent**.
- The market value of raw materials recovered from solar panels could reach **\$450 million by 2030**, according to a projection by the **International Renewable Energy Agency**. **This amount of raw materials is approximately the same as that required to build 60 million new solar panels** or to generate 18 GW of electricity.

India's current PV recycling policy

- India had recently included PV waste under **E waste management rules**. This places PV modules under the **Extended Producer Responsibility framework**.
 - **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** is an environmental policy approach in which a producer's responsibility for a product is extended to the post-consumption stage in a product's life cycle.
- According to a 2021 report, **approximately 50% of the total materials in A PV module can be recovered but in India only about 20%** of the PV waste is recovered and the rest is treated informally. As a result, the waste often accumulates at landfills, which pollute the surroundings.

- Incinerating the waste also releases sulphur dioxide, hydrogen fluoride, and hydrogen cyanide into the atmosphere.

Issues with Policy

- Clubbing PV waste with other e-waste could lead to confusion as characteristics of solar panel materials are different from other E wastes.
 - PV cells have Monocrystalline or multi-crystalline silicon. Recovering this silicon needs different methods than those used for e waste ,where the main priority is recovery of metals.
- Recycling PV waste is not economical at this stage. According to the National Renewable Energy **Recycling a solar panel costs between \$20 and \$30, Laboratory, while sending it to a landfill costs \$1-2.**
- Lack of Incentives from the government for recycling is another challenge.

Remedial Measures

- India should **formulate and implement provisions specific to PV** waste treatment within the ambit of the e-waste guidelines.
- A **Central regulatory body** should be set up to protect against financial losses incurred in waste collection and treatment.
- An awareness campaign to drive home the hazardous qualities of PV materials.
- India needs to pay more attention to domestic R&D efforts since local solar PV-panel manufacturing capacity is limited.

CivilsTap Hlmachal

ENERGY

CLEAN ENERGY TRANSITION OF STATES AND THEIR CHALLENGES

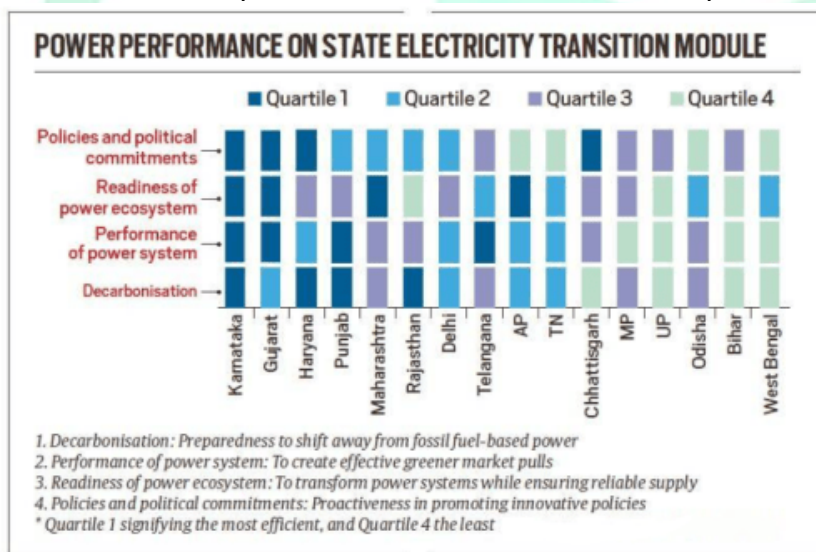
Context: The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) and Ember has recently released a report titled “**Indian States’ Energy Transition**“. The report highlighted the glaring inequality in the Clean Energy Transition of States. As per the report, Karnataka now has the best-equipped power systems to convert its electricity system from fossil-powered to renewable energy sources, followed by Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat. On the other hand, Bihar, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh did the worst.

What is a clean electricity transition?

- This refers to the shift from fossil-based power production and consumption to renewable energy sources by transforming the electricity sector through innovative policies, efficient technologies, and greener market pulls while ensuring reliable supply with effective closed-loop systems in place.
- An effective clean electricity transition requires a timely switch towards a clean power-fuelled, economically feasible, politically viable, and secure system that can create value for business and society.

What are the report’s key highlights on the Clean Energy Transition of States?

- The report analyses 16 states that account for 90 percent of India’s yearly power demand. Their scores were calculated based on states’ performance on four major dimensions. Such as Decarbonisation, Performance of the Power System, Readiness of the Power Ecosystem, and Policies and Political Commitments.



Karnataka:

- Karnataka ranks first in all four dimensions of the clean energy transition.
- The state fared the best in decarbonizing its power sector and has the highest share of renewables in its power supply mix (48%).
- Only Delhi’s power sector’s emission intensity of GSDP is lower than that of Karnataka (2.2 kgCO₂eq/Rs1,000).
- **Haryana** has the lowest installed capacity of older, more polluting coal power plants.

Maharashtra:

- It has the biggest power demand in India and was found to be in the mid-range. This is mostly because the state is slow to use renewable energy and can’t shut down older, more polluting coal power plants.
- Its renewable energy share (11%) is lower than most other states.
- **Chhattisgarh** has the highest emissions intensity of GSDP (43 kgCO₂eq/ Rs1,000). Its renewable energy share in the power supply mix (1%) is better than only Bihar.

Bihar, UP, and West Bengal:

- These states must work more to improve their clean energy transition performance.
- These states should maximize their renewable energy generation potential, and at the same time increase commitment to moving away from fossil fuels-based electricity.

What is the need for the Clean Energy Transition of states?

- India's clean electricity transition requires all states and Union Territories to transform their power sectors. More specifically, **progress in states with high power demand** is not only crucial but also **urgent for India's power sector** to achieve a clean electricity transition.
- The transition needs Indian states to work together and take the lead to fight the problems that make it hard to reach India's goals, such as fulfilling Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), India's net-zero commitments, and the implementation of the ambitious climate action at the national level.

What are the challenges faced by states in their clean energy transition?

- **Underutilisation:** Renewable energy-rich states are not utilizing their renewable energy generation potential. Potential hurdles, such as land conflict, technology upgrades, and lack of transmission infrastructure, could come in the way of the clean energy transition of states.
- **For instance,** even the top performer Karnataka has utilized only 11% of its total renewable energy potential.
- **Ignoring other possibilities:** While the states are focusing on large-scale renewable power projects, mainly utility-scale solar, they are ignoring other possibly viable options, such as rooftop solar, small hydel plants, etc.
- **Different priorities between the centre and states:** The national (central) government and sub-national (state) governments in India often have different priorities with respect to the energy sector. For example,
 - The Centre's perspective is informed by macroeconomic stability, economic growth and geostrategic issues. On the other hand, states are driven more by local and state-level concerns. Further, the State's political-economic realities are affected by factors such as energy access, affordability, local jobs and economies.
- **Energy Transition at the State Level and Fiscal Impact:** Many coal-producing states naturally rely heavily on fossil fuels for revenues as they benefit from both coal-related royalties from mining but also tax revenues from sales of oil and natural gas.
- **The transition and its impact on the state's employment:** As the country moves away from fossil fuels, there will be negative effects on jobs all along the value chain. This includes employment across mining, transport and storage, processing and manufacturing, and trade.
- What steps have been taken by the Indian states towards the clean energy transition?

Initiatives of the central government to facilitate clean energy transition of states

- **Intra-State Transmission System – Green Energy Corridor Phase-II** for laying the infrastructure for connecting electricity generated from renewables with the power grid in seven states. This scheme would receive 33% central financial assistance. This is crucial to create green market mechanisms for inter- and intra-state renewable energy trading.
- The scheme for **“Development of Solar Parks and Ultra Mega Solar Power Projects”** has a target of generating 40GW capacity by March 2024. So far, the central government has sanctioned 50 solar parks with a combined capacity of 33.82GW in 14 states.
- Progressive policies like net metering, banking of power and feeder segregation are implemented under the **‘Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan Yojana (KUSUM)’** scheme.
- **The green day ahead market (GDAM):** The Power Ministry has launched GDAM to enable India to achieve green targets and facilitate the integration and expansion of green energy in an efficient, competitive, sustainable, and transparent manner.
- The government has permitted foreign direct investment up to 100 per cent under the automatic route and has waived Inter-State Transmission System (ISTS) charges and losses for the inter-State sale of solar and wind power for projects.

- Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Ltd (IREDA), as of November 2020, has financed more than 2,700 renewable energy projects in India with cumulative loan disbursements to the tune of ₹ 57,000 crore

Initiatives of state governments to facilitate clean energy transition

- The Interstate Clean Energy Procurement Program (ICEPP) was launched in India by the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA). ICEPP will help eight Indian states build up their clean energy infrastructure by giving public procurement officials training on best value and life-cycle cost analysis. USTDA is funding ICEPP through its Global Procurement Initiative (GPI).
- Various states also have many initiatives. Such as,
- **Rajasthan:** Rajasthan Wind Solar Hybrid Policy 2019 and Rajasthan Electric Vehicle Policy 2022 helped accelerate the capacity addition.
- **Karnataka:**
It was the first southern state in India to notify a renewable energy policy, the Karnataka Renewable Energy Policy 2009-14 to harness green, clean, renewable energy sources for environmental benefits and energy security. Recently, the state released the Karnataka Renewable Energy Policy 2022-2027.
- **Tamil Nadu** has a dedicated solar energy policy 2019 and EV Policy 2019
- Several states have announced their EV Policy to complement the national scheme and to address state-specific needs.

What should be done to ensure the clean energy transition of states?

- In order to enhance the state's clean energy transition, the "Indian States' Energy Transition" report has recommended the following,
- **Focus on offshore wind energy:** India has the potential to generate 140GW of electricity from offshore wind along its 7,600km coastline. However, there is a need to develop local supply chain, logistics and port infrastructure to utilise offshore wind's full potential.
- **Pay attention to coal plants:** State energy departments need to closely monitor their coal plants and retire older plants, unless needed a peaker plant during high-demand months.
- **Increase green market participation of states:** States need to focus on increasing participation in green market mechanisms like GDAM, GTAM, open access, corporate PPAs etc. In addition, states also need to focus on innovative bilateral financial markets mechanisms like Virtual Power Purchase Agreements (VPPA) and Contracts for Difference (CfD).
- **Introduce private sector participation:** The introduction of private sector participation and competition shall bring more capital and management expertise into the electricity sector. This will help enhance operational efficiency, and increase accessibility and affordability.
- **Focus on feeder segregation:** Reliable state-level data on feeder segregation needs to be made available for more robust analysis. States with large agriculture loads need to focus more on feeder segregation.
- **Develop a circular approach:** States need to develop a holistic and circular approach towards handling solar panel, battery, and electric vehicle waste. This is even more crucial as India sets up new manufacturing units under the Atmanirbhar Bharat scheme.
- The **other recommendations** include, **a)** Data transparency and availability at the state level needs an enhancement for robust analysis, **b)** Robust transmission infrastructure is necessary to better evacuate renewables at the state level, **c)** Initiatives like 'Time of Day tariff' and 'Direct Benefit Transfer' need more focus for state-level implementation in addition to regular tariff revisions by the state regulators.

POWERING THE AMRIT KAAL THROUGH AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO ENSURE ENERGY SECURITY

Context: An integrated approach that focuses on renewable energy along with the exploration of traditional fuels is the key to **energy security** in the next 25 years in India.

Need for an integrated approach:

- **3As:** Ensuring energy **access, availability and affordability** for India's large population.
- As the world's fastest-growing major economy with rising energy needs, India will **account for approximately 25% of the global energy demand growth between 2020-2040.**

The success story of India:

- When petrol and diesel prices went up by 35-40% in the US, Canada, Spain and the UK, **prices of diesel in India have actually gone down** in the last 1 year.
 - This is despite the fact that **India imports over 85% of its crude oil** and 55% of its natural gas requirements.
- When several countries in India's neighbourhood have had dry outs and power cuts to manage demand, **there has been no shortage of fuel anywhere in India.**

How was this made possible?

- Through a pragmatic and balanced energy strategy → ensuring **energy justice.**

Focus on traditional fuels:

- The Centre and many states announced massive cuts in excise duty and VAT rates.
- Oil PSUs absorbed huge losses to ensure that the massive hikes in the prices of crude oil and natural gas were not passed on to Indian consumers.
- Subsidised APM gas for the city gas distribution sector was drastically increased.
- Imposing an export cess on petrol, diesel and ATF.
- A windfall tax on domestically produced petroleum products to prevent refiners and producers from profiteering at the cost of domestic consumers.
- Over the years, India has expanded –
 - **Its network of crude oil suppliers** from 27 nations to 39 nations. **For example,** in the US, the energy trade has gone up 13 times in the last four years.
 - **Its refining capacity** (450 MMT by 2040) – India is a global exporter of petroleum products [refining capacity is the 4th-largest after the US, China and Russia].
 - Traditional fuel exploration – reduced the prohibited/no-go areas in its EEZ by 99%, releasing nearly 1 million sq km for exploration.
 - **These strategic market cards** not only ensured **affordable** energy for Indian consumers but also had a calming effect on global petroleum markets.
- India is also pushing to move towards a **gas-based economy** by increasing the share of gas from the current **3 to 15% by 2030.**

Focus on alternative fuels/energy transition:

- India announced its net-zero emissions by 2070 and cutting down emissions by 1 billion tonnes by 2030 targets.
- At the India Energy Week 2023, India took a giant stride in its biofuel revolution by launching E20 – 20% ethanol-blended gasoline, which will be rolled out in 15 cities in the next 2 years.
 - India's ethanol-blending gasoline has grown from just **53% in 2013-14 to 10.17% in 2023.**
- India is also setting up five 2nd-generation ethanol plants that can convert agricultural waste into biofuel, further reducing pollution due to stubble burning, and generating income for farmers.
- The National Green Hydrogen Mission has been launched with an outlay of Rs 19,744 crore to accelerate India's efforts towards 4 MT of annual green hydrogen production.
- It will save Rs 1 lakh crore in cumulative fossil fuel import savings by 2030.
- India is also supporting electric vehicles through a production-linked incentive scheme to make advanced fuel cells of 50-gigawatt hours.
- India is also targeting the installation of alternative fuel stations (EV charging/ CNG/ LPG/ LNG/ CBG) at 22,000 retail outlets by May 2024.

Conclusion:

- **Energy security and independence** remain the main objectives as India implements its Amrit Kaal plan to grow to a **\$ 26 trillion economy by 2047.**



**Hp
Economic
Survey 2022-23**



**Basic Knowledge
about Himachal
Pradesh GK**



**Past Year
Question Papers
Discussion**



**Current Affairs
Magazine**



**Mains
Answer Writing
Practice**



**HPGK
MCQs Revision
Series**



**FREE NCERT
COURSE**



**Daily 15
MCQs Revision
Series**



**HP Sub-
Inspector Free
MCQ Crash Course**



**HPAS Offline/
Live Batch
20th March 2023**

**Fee
65000/-**

**HPAS
Online Course
29th March 2023**

**Fee
25000/-**

**NT/Allied Offline/
Live Batch
22nd March 2023**

**Fee
38000/-**

**NT/Allied
Online Course**

**Fee
12500/-**

**HP TGT Non-Medical
Online Course
20th March 2023**

**Fee
6000/-**

**HP TGT Medical
Online Course
20th March 2023**

**Fee
6000/-**

**HP TGT Arts &
Commerce
Online Course
20th March 2023**

**Fee
5000/-**

**HP Patwari
Online Course
18th March 2023**

**Fee
3000/-**

**HP Sub -
Inspector Online
Course**

**Fee
4000/-**

**HP High Court
Clerk/JOA(IT) Online
Course**

**Fee
5000/-**

**HP JBT
COMMISSION
Online Course**

**Fee
2499/-**

**HPAS
Prelims + Mains
Test Series**

**Fee
10000/-**