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GENERAL STUDIES 1.

GEOGRAPHY

UNION GOVERNMENT INKS MoU WITH MP AND RAJASTHAN FOR RIVER LINKING PROJECT

Context: Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** with the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti to implement the **Modified Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal-ERCP (Modified PKC-ERCP) Link Project**.

- ❖ The project envisages integration of the long-pending PKC river link project with the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project, under the **national perspective plan of interlinking of rivers (ILR) programme**.
- ❖ **PKC:** The **Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal (PKC)** link project is **one of the 30 links** included in the National Perspectives Plan.
- ❖ **ECRP:** The **Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP)** is aimed at **intra-basin transfer** of water within the **Chambal basin**, by utilising surplus monsoon water.
- ❖ **Linking of Both Project:** Rajasthan came up with the proposal of the ERCP in 2019, and to utilise water resources optimally, the Task Force for Interlinking of Rivers (TFILR) discussed its merger with the PKC link project.
 - ✓ This integration was approved by the Special Committee for Interlinking of Rivers in 2022.
- ❖ The Government of India formulated a **National Perspective Plan (NPP) for interlinking of rivers (ILR) in 1980**.
- ❖ **National Water Development Agency (NWDA)** has been entrusted with the work of **Interlinking of Rivers** under the National Perspective Plan (NPP).
- ❖ The NPP has two components, viz; **Himalayan Rivers Development Component and Peninsular Rivers Development Component**.
- ❖ **30 link projects** have been identified under the NPP.
- ❖ Under the **Himalayan Rivers Development Component of the NPP**, 3 link projects, viz; **Kosi-Mechi Link project, Kosi-Ghaghra link project and Chunar-Sone Barrage link project**
 - ✓ It envisages transfer of water from Kosi, Ghaghra and Gandak rivers flowing down from Nepal to the other rivers in the State of Bihar.
- ❖ **Peninsular Rivers Development Component** is divided into **four major parts**:
 - ✓ **Interlinking of Mahanadi-Godavari-Krishna-Cauvery Rivers:** This part involves interlinking of the major river systems where surpluses from the Mahanadi and the Godavari are intended to be transferred to the needy areas in the south, through Krishna and Cauvery rivers.
 - ✓ **Interlinking of west flowing rivers, north of Bombay and south of Tapi:** The scheme provides for taking water supply canal to the metropolitan areas of Mumbai; it also provides irrigation in the coastal areas in Maharashtra.
 - ✓ **Interlinking of Ken-Chambal:** The scheme provides for a water grid for Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and an interlinking canal backed by as much storage as possible.
 - ✓ **Diversion of other west flowing rivers:** The high rainfall on the western side of the Western Ghats runs down into numerous streams which discharge into the Arabian Sea.
 - The construction of an interlinking canal system backed up by adequate storage could be planned to meet all requirements of Kerala as also for transfer of some waters towards east to meet the needs of drought affected areas.

Significance of River Linking Projects

- ❖ **Reduction of Water Scarcity:** Interlinking rivers can help transfer surplus water from water-rich regions to water-deficient areas, addressing water scarcity issues.
- ❖ **Improved Water Availability for Agriculture:** Increased water availability in dry regions can enhance agricultural productivity, supporting the cultivation of crops and promoting food security.
- ❖ **Mitigation of Floods:** Interlinking rivers can help distribute excess water during periods of heavy rainfall, reducing the risk of floods in specific regions.

- ❖ **Increased Hydropower Potential:** The construction of reservoirs and canals for interlinking projects can create opportunities for hydropower generation, contributing to a cleaner and more sustainable energy mix.
- ❖ **Improved Navigation:** Connecting rivers can enhance the navigability of waterways, facilitating transportation of goods and reducing the dependence on road and rail networks.
- ❖ **Drought Mitigation:** By redistributing water resources, interlinking projects can help mitigate the impact of droughts by providing water to affected regions.
- ❖ **Job Creation:** The construction and maintenance of interlinking infrastructure can create job opportunities, contributing to economic development.
- ❖ **Conflict Resolution:** River interlinking projects can potentially reduce inter-state disputes over water resources by providing a more equitable distribution of water.

Concerns with the River Linking Projects

- ❖ **Ecosystem Disruption:** Altering natural river courses and diverting water can disrupt ecosystems, leading to habitat loss, changes in biodiversity, and potential extinction of species.
- ❖ **Displacement of Communities:** The construction of dams, reservoirs, and canals for river interlinking can result in the displacement of communities, leading to social and economic hardships for affected populations.
- ❖ **Inter-State Disputes:** River interlinking projects often involve multiple states, and disagreements can arise over water sharing, leading to inter-state disputes.
- ❖ **Financial Viability:** The construction of large-scale infrastructure for river interlinking projects can be economically challenging, with costs often exceeding initial estimates.
 - ✓ The return on investment for such projects may take a long time, raising questions about their financial viability.
- ❖ **Seismic Risks:** Areas prone to earthquakes may face increased risks due to the construction of large dams and other infrastructure associated with river interlinking.
- ❖ **Maintenance Issues:** The proper operation and maintenance of the interconnected water infrastructure are crucial for the success of these projects. Neglecting maintenance can lead to system failures and adverse consequences.
- ❖ **Community Resistance:** Local communities and environmental activists may oppose river interlinking projects due to concerns about their impact on the environment, livelihoods, and cultural heritage.

Conclusion

- ❖ Addressing the concerns requires comprehensive planning, environmental impact assessments, community engagement, and transparent decision-making processes.
- ❖ Sustainable water management practices, incorporating modern technologies and adaptive strategies, are essential to mitigate the potential negative consequences of river interlinking projects.

ODISHA GOVERNMENT'S TRIBAL OUTREACH

Context: Recently the Odisha government announced measures for the welfare of tribal Population.

- ❖ The Odisha government announced the launch of **LABHA (Laghu Bana Jatya Drabya Kraya) Yojana**, for minor forest produce (MFP).
- ❖ It has also approved the establishment of a **Commission for the Preservation and Promotion of the Tribal Languages** of the Scheduled Tribes of Odisha.

LABHA (Laghu Bana Jatya Drabya Kraya) Yojana

- ❖ It is a **100% State-funded minimum support price (MSP)** scheme for minor forest produce (MFP). The MSP will be determined every year by the State government.
- ❖ Under the scheme, a primary collector (a tribal person) will be able to sell the MFP.
- ❖ It will be collected at the procurement centers by the **Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation Limited** of Odisha (TDCCOL).

- ❖ These procurement centers will be managed by SHGs and any other notified agencies assisted by TDCCOL.
 - ✓ As 99% of primary collectors are tribals and the majority of them are women, the LABHA Yojana will integrate the efforts with **Mission Shakti's Women SHGs** (self help groups).
- ❖ **The procurement automation system** will be set up to capture the total collection of MFPs, the details of the primary collectors, and the procurement point.
- ❖ **Significance:** The LABHA Yojana will also eliminate the possibility of distress sale of produce to middlemen

Commission for the Preservation and Promotion of the Tribal Languages

- ❖ The Commission will encourage multilingual education, document and preserve tribal languages, promote the use and protect linguistic rights.
- ❖ The Commission will make efforts for inclusion of tribal languages like Ho, Mundari, Kui and Saora in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution

Tribal Population in Odisha

- ❖ Odisha is home to 62 distinct tribes, including 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG).
- ❖ The Scheduled Tribes in Scheduled Areas constitute approximately **68.09%** of the total tribal population in the State.
- ❖ It ranks as the third largest concentration of a tribal population, trailing behind Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.
- ❖ There are 21 tribal languages in Odisha.

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SOCIETY, CULTURE

RAISING THE AGE OF MARRIAGE OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Context: A parliamentary committee examining Bill seeking to **raise the age of marriage of women** from the **present 18 years to 21** has been given another extension to table its report.

- ❖ **The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021**, was introduced in the Lok Sabha in 2021 and was referred to the **Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports**.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021

- ❖ The Bill amends the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** to increase the minimum age of marriage of females to 21 years. Further, the Bill will override any other law, custom, or practice.
- ❖ Under the 2006 Act, a person married below the minimum age may apply for annulment within two years of attaining majority (i.e., before 20 years of age). The Bill increases this to five years (i.e., 23 years of age).

Legal Age of Marriage in India

- ❖ According to the **National Family Health Survey 2019-21 (NFHS-5)**, **23% of women** between the **age of 20 and 24** were married before 18 years of age.
- ❖ In India, the **practice of child marriage** was first legally prohibited through the **Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929**.
 - ✓ As per the 1929 Act, marriage of girls below the age of **14 years and boys below the age of 18 years was prohibited**.
 - ✓ This Act was amended in **1978** to increase the minimum age to **18 years for females, and 21 years for men**.
- ❖ **The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** replaced the 1929 Act, with the same minimum age limits.

Arguments in Favour of Increasing the Marriageable Age:

- ❖ **Educational Opportunities:** Increasing the marriageable age to 21 in India can contribute to higher educational attainment for women.
- ❖ **Career Development:** Raising the marriageable age provides Indian women with the chance to focus on building their careers before entering into marital commitments.
 - ✓ This can lead to increased workforce participation, financial independence, and professional development, contributing to the economic growth of the country.
- ❖ **Health and Maternal Well-being:** Women who marry later are generally more physically and emotionally prepared for pregnancy and childbirth, contributing to reduced maternal and infant mortality rates.
- ❖ **Gender Equality:** Raising the marriageable age aligns with the principles of gender equality by providing both men and women with similar opportunities for personal and professional growth.
- ❖ **Empowerment of Women:** Delaying marriage empowers women by allowing them more time to explore their own aspirations and make informed decisions about their lives.
- ❖ **Reducing Child Marriages:** Increasing the marriageable age serves as a legal deterrent to child marriages, protecting young girls from the physical, emotional, and social consequences associated with early unions.
- ❖ **Social and Emotional Maturity:** At the age of 21, individuals are likely to have a better understanding of themselves, their goals, and the responsibilities that come with marriage.
- ❖ **Population Control:** Delaying marriage can contribute to better family planning and population control.

Arguments Against Increasing the Marriageable Age:

- ❖ **Cultural and Traditional Variability:** Critics argue that different communities have their own norms and expectations regarding the appropriate age for marriage. Imposing a uniform age limit may not align with the cultural variability across the nation.
- ❖ **Individual Freedom and Autonomy:** Some individuals may be emotionally and mentally prepared for marriage at 18, and imposing a higher age limit may be seen as restricting their personal choices and decision-making abilities.
- ❖ **Legal Consistency:** Critics may point out that the legal age for voting and consenting to sexual activity in India is already 18.
 - ✓ Setting a different age for marriage introduces inconsistency in the legal framework, and opponents argue that individuals should be considered mature enough for all legal responsibilities at the same age.
- ❖ **Role of Parents and Family Decision-Making:** Increasing the marriageable age undermines the role of parents and families in decision-making.
- ❖ **Unintended Consequences on Relationships:** Delaying marriage could result in individuals entering into premarital relationships without the legal commitment of marriage.
 - ✓ This may lead to a shift in societal norms and values, which some may view as having negative consequences.
- ❖ **Social Stigma and Marital Status:** Imposing a higher marriageable age could result in social stigma for individuals who choose to marry earlier.
 - ✓ This may lead to societal judgments and challenges for those who do not conform to the new legal age limit.
- ❖ **Female Foeticide:** The pressure to educate young girls until 21 among poor families will increase the rate of sex-selective abortion in the country.
- ❖ **Safety Concerns:** The fear of rape or elopement will also loom large, especially in the rural areas due to the proposed law.

Way Ahead

- ❖ The result lies in **empowering youthful girls**, encouraging them to get educated and achieve fiscal autonomy education for girls, and conducting mindfulness programs on the ill goods of non-age marriages.
- ❖ Government should subsidize education and healthcare installations in order to insure that girl's right to live a life of her choice is admired and preserved.
- ❖ Government should also come with an on-ground medium to spread mindfulness and apply this policy change rigorously for the benefits to reflect in the society.

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HISTORY, PERSONALITIES

SWAMI DAYANAND SARASWATI

Context: The Prime Minister virtually addressed the **200th birth anniversary celebrations of Swami Dayanand Saraswati**.

Who was Swami Dayanand Saraswati?

- ❖ Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati, was born on **February 12, 1824 in Tankara, Gujarat**.
- ❖ He was a **social reformer** who founded **Arya Samaj in 1875** to counter then prevalent social inequities.

Religious and Social Reforms

- ❖ **Rejection of Idolatry and Ritualism:** He opposed idol worship and ritualistic practices that he believed deviated from the true teachings of the Vedas.
 - ✓ He promoted the worship of a formless, attributeless God.
- ❖ **Shuddhi Movement:** The Shuddhi Movement was introduced to bring back the individuals to Hinduism who were either voluntarily or involuntarily converted to other religions like Islam or Christianity.
- ❖ **Back to Vedas:** He highlighted the social reformer's role in awakening India from the shackles of ignorance and superstition, **leading a movement to rediscover the essence of Vedic knowledge**.
- ❖ **Women's Rights:** Dayanand Saraswati advocated for the rights and empowerment of women.
 - ✓ He encouraged women to receive education and participate in social and religious activities on an equal footing with men.
- ❖ **Opposition to Child Marriage and Sati:** He opposed practices such as child marriage and sati, considering them detrimental to society and contrary to Vedic principles.

Educational Reforms

- ❖ He set up a **number of Gurukuls** to teach his followers the knowledge of the Vedas and for them to spread the knowledge further.
- ❖ Inspired by his beliefs, teachings and ideas, his disciples established the **Dayanand Anglo Vedic College Trust and Management Society**, after his death in 1883.
- ❖ The first DAV High School was established at **Lahore** on June 1, 1886 with Mahatma Hans Raj as its headmaster.

Arya Samaj

- ❖ Dayanand Saraswati formed the **Arya Samaj at Bombay in 1875**.
- ❖ It was a Hindu reforms movement, meaning **"society of the nobles"**.
- ❖ The purpose of the Samaj was to **move the Hindu religion away from the fictitious beliefs**.
- ❖ **'Krinvento Vishwam Aryam'** was the motto of the Samaj, which means, **"Make this world noble"**.
- ❖ The Samaj directs its members to condemn ritualistic practices like idol worship, pilgrimage and bathing in holy rivers, animal sacrifice, offering in temples, sponsoring priesthood etc.
- ❖ The Samaj launched programs to support widow remarriage in the 1880s.

Literary Work

- ❖ The philosophy of Dayananda Saraswati can be known from his three famous contributions namely **"Satyarth Prakash", "Veda Bhashya Bhumika" and "Veda Bhashya Bhumika" and Veda Bhashya**.
- ❖ Further the journal **"Arya Patrika"** edited by him also reflects his thoughts.

Legacy

- ❖ The Arya Samaj is very active not only in India but also in other parts of the world.

- ❖ Maharishi Dayanand's life and teachings had considerable influence in **several important personalities** like Lala Lajpat Rai, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Madam Cama, Ram Prasad Bismil, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Madan Lal Dhingra and Subhash Chandra Bose.



GENERAL STUDIES 2.

POLITY, CONSTITUTION AND GOVERNANCE

UTTARAKHAND'S UNIFORM CIVIL CODE CURRENT STATUS

Context:

The article discusses the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India, focusing on Uttarakhand's plan to adopt it. It's debated for potentially impacting religious freedom and minorities.

What is The Uniform Civil Code (UCC)?

The UCC is a proposition to replace the personal laws, which are based on the scriptures and customs of different religious communities in India, with a common set of laws governing every citizen.

What is Happening in Uttarakhand Regarding the UCC?

- ❖ Uttarakhand's government is likely to pass the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill in its ongoing session.
- ❖ A state-appointed panel, led by Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, drafted the UCC, submitting the final report on February 2. The State Cabinet has approved this report.
- ❖ Specific changes include equal property share for Muslim women, revoking practices like polygamy and iddat, and maintaining current marriage age requirements.

What are The Issues of Adopting The UCC in Uttarakhand?

- ❖ **Concerns from Tribal Communities:** Tribal groups, making up 2.9% of Uttarakhand's population, have not agreed to the UCC. The Van Gujjar tribe, particularly, is worried about the impact on their customs.
- ❖ **Impact on Religious Freedom:** Critics fear the UCC could infringe upon religious freedoms and minority rights.
- ❖ **Threat to Cultural Diversity:** There are concerns that UCC might dilute India's rich religious and cultural diversity.
- ❖ **National Debate and Precedence:** The state's approach may set a precedent for other Indian states.

What are The Different Views on Implementing The UCC Nationwide?

Judicial View on UCC:

- ❖ The Supreme Court, in the **Shah Bano Begum case (1985)**, highlighted the unfulfilled mandate of Article 44 regarding UCC.
- ❖ In **Sarla Mudgal versus Union of India (1995)**, the Court again mentioned the UCC, stressing the complexity due to multiple personal laws.
- ❖ The **John Vallamattom case in 2003** saw the Court reiterating its stance on the need for a UCC.
- ❖ Despite these observations, **the Supreme Court has refrained from issuing directives to the government, noting law-making is Parliament's domain**, as seen in the 2021-2022 petition dismissals.
- ❖ **On Uttarakhand's UCC Committee:** The **Court referred to Article 162**, highlighting the state's executive power to deal with matters within its legislative competence. It stated that **forming a committee under Entry 5 of the Concurrent List**, which covers personal law matters like marriage, divorce, and adoption, is within the state's authority and not unconstitutional.

Law Commission's View:

- ❖ **21st Law Commission (2018):** Concluded that implementing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) across India was neither necessary nor desirable at that time. Emphasized the importance of respecting India's cultural diversity and suggested reforming discriminatory practices within existing personal laws instead of a uniform code.

- ❖ **22nd Law Commission (2021):** Showed a different approach by starting to gather public and stakeholder opinions on UCC. This shift indicates a renewed interest in exploring the feasibility and implications of implementing a UCC nationwide.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON HOUSING EMPHASIZES ON PHASE-2 OF SMART CITIES MISSION

Context: The Parliamentary Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs emphasizes the need to launch the second phase of Smart Cities Mission for tier-2 cities located between 50 and 100 kilometers.

- ❖ The Smart Cities Mission is an initiative of the **Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry**, launched in **2015**.
- ❖ **Objective:** To promote cities that provide core infrastructure, clean and sustainable environment and give a decent quality of life to their citizens through the application of 'smart solutions'.

Key Features

- ❖ **Four pillars:** Social Infrastructure, Physical Infrastructure, Institutional Infrastructure, Economic Infrastructure.
- ❖ **Integrated Command and Control Centre:** These ICCCs are designed to enable authorities to monitor the status of various amenities in real time.
 - ✓ The ICCC acts as a smart city and acts as a "nerve center" for operations management.
- ❖ **Other steps** taken under the SCM for digital infrastructure are;
 - ✓ Adaptive Traffic Control System (ATCS), Red Light Violation Detection (RLVD), and Automatic Number Plate Recognition System (ANPR),
 - ✓ Digital assets for solid waste and waste-water management and water distribution management,
 - ✓ CCTV surveillance systems, smart education and smart health systems.

Challenges

- ❖ **Financial Constraints:** Keeping the funds and finances flowing in for the smart cities mission is a challenge. Most Urban Local Bodies are not even financially self-sustainable.
- ❖ **Infrastructure Development:** Many Indian cities lack basic infrastructure, such as efficient public transportation, waste management systems, and reliable water and electricity supply. Implementing smart solutions requires significant upgrades to existing infrastructure.
- ❖ **Data Security and Privacy:** Smart cities rely heavily on data collection and analysis to optimize services and resources. However, ensuring the security and privacy of this data is a major concern.
- ❖ **Technological Integration:** Integrating various technologies and systems to create smart solutions poses a challenge, especially in cities with outdated or disparate infrastructure.

Way Ahead

- ❖ **Data protection:** A robust system is required to protect digital platforms from cyber attack and safeguarding sensitive public and private data adequately.
- ❖ **Integrated Command and Control Centres (ICCCs):** The role of ICCCs in cities should be expanded by enabling them to provide a variety of services in the fields of health, internal security, waste management, traffic management, disaster management, e-governance etc.
- ❖ **Leveraging the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV):** The experience and expertise gained by SPVs must be leveraged in other projects, such as AMRUT, Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) etc.

WOMEN IN POLITICS

Context: Recently, the **Women's Reservation Bill** was passed in the Parliament of India.

Status of Women in Indian Politics

- ❖ **Representation:** Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, women remain underrepresented in Indian politics. **As of 2023, they hold only 14.3% of Lok Sabha (lower house) and 11.8% of Rajya Sabha (upper house) seats.**
- ❖ **State level:** Representation is even lower in state assemblies, averaging around 8%.
- ❖ **Local governance:** Although 33% of seats in Panchayats (rural local bodies) are reserved for women, their effective participation and leadership remain concerns.

Challenges

- ❖ **Socio-cultural barriers:** Patriarchal societal norms and discriminatory attitudes restrict women's entry and advancement in politics.
- ❖ **Economic constraints:** Financial limitations hinder women's ability to contest elections and participate effectively.
- ❖ **Lack of access to resources:** Political networks, funding, and campaign support are often skewed towards men.
- ❖ **Violence and harassment:** Women face physical and verbal abuse, online trolling, and intimidation, creating a hostile environment.
- ❖ **Political party structures:** Lack of internal party support and gender-sensitive policies within parties hinder women's rise.

Measures

- ❖ **Reservations:** Increased reservation of seats in legislatures and local bodies can provide a crucial initial boost to women's representation.
- ❖ **Financial support:** Government funding schemes and subsidies can address economic barriers faced by women candidates.
- ❖ **Capacity building:** Training programs and leadership development initiatives can equip women with necessary skills and confidence.
- ❖ **Awareness campaigns:** Public awareness campaigns can challenge societal biases and promote gender equality in political participation.
- ❖ **Stricter laws:** Effective enforcement of laws against electoral violence and harassment can create a safer environment for women in politics.
- ❖ **Internal party reforms:** Political parties need to adopt gender-sensitive policies, quotas, and mentorship programs to support women candidates and leaders.
- ❖ **Empowering women voters:** Educating and mobilizing women voters can enhance their political participation and hold parties accountable for fielding women candidates.

Way Ahead

- ❖ Increased representation of women in politics is **crucial for a truly democratic and just society.**
- ❖ **Addressing the existing challenges and implementing effective measures,** including the prompt implementation of the Women Reservation Bill, will require sustained efforts from individuals, political parties, civil society organizations, and the government.

SC DECLARED ELECTORAL BONDS SCHEME AS UNCONSTITUTIONAL

Context: The Supreme Court has **struck down** the Electoral Bonds Scheme.

About the Judgement

- ❖ The apex court said that the Scheme is violative of the **Right to Information under Article 19(1)(a).** They also **infringe on the principle of free and fair elections** as stipulated in the constitution.
- ❖ SC also quashed the **amendments** made to the **Income Tax Act and the Representation of People Act** which made the donations anonymous.
- ❖ The SC also criticised the legal provision that allowed **unlimited political contribution**, saying it allowed companies with deep pockets to influence policy.

- ❖ The SBI shall submit details of electoral bonds purchased **since April 12, 2019, to date** to the Election Commission.

What is an Electoral Bond?

- ❖ Government of India notified the **Electoral Bond scheme in 2018**.
- ❖ An electoral bond is like a **promissory note** that can be bought by any Indian citizen or company incorporated in India from select branches of State Bank of India.
- ❖ The citizen or corporate can then **donate the same to any eligible political party of his/her choice**.

Why was it Introduced?

- ❖ The government contended that it would make **political donations transparent** while also protecting the identity of the donor.
- ❖ The electoral bonds would keep a **tab on the use of black money** for funding elections.

How does it Work?

- ❖ The bonds are issued in **multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 100,000 and Rs 1 crore**.
- ❖ The receiver can encash the bonds through the party's verified account. The electoral bond will be valid **only for fifteen days**.
- ❖ The electoral bonds are available for purchase for **10 days at the beginning of every quarter**.
- ❖ **Eligibility:** Any party that is **registered under section 29A of the Representation of the Peoples Act, 1951** and has secured **at least one percent of the votes** polled in the **most recent** General elections or Assembly elections is eligible to receive electoral bonds.
- ❖ **Anonymous Donation:** The electoral bonds **will not bear the name of the donor**. Thus, the political party might not be aware of the donor's identity.
- ❖ **Tax exemption:** A donor will get a **deduction** and the recipient, or the political party, will get **tax exemption**, provided returns are filed by the political party.

Concerns with Electoral Bonds

- ❖ **Anonymity of Donor:** Concerns arose due to donor anonymity and lack of disclosure.
 - ✓ The cash donation limit was reduced from ₹20,000 to ₹2,000, while mandatory disclosure remained at ₹20,000.
- ❖ **Further Amendments:** Amendments removed the cap on corporate donations and disclosure obligations.
 - ✓ The petitioners argue that these changes allow unlimited, unchecked funding for political parties, with a bias toward the ruling government.
- ❖ **Corporate Dominance:** Electoral bonds, mainly issued in high denominations, raise concerns of corporate dominance over individual donors, and the anonymity for donors further fuels suspicion.
- ❖ **Lack of Transparency:** Transparency issues exist, as funds transferred to political parties make it challenging to track corporate contributions, infringing upon citizens' right to information and creating corruption risks.

Conclusion

- ❖ All election funding should be made **completely transparent** so that voters know who is funding whom.
- ❖ A set of rules on limiting funding shall be brought **to prevent private interests** from unduly influencing elections or Governments.
- ❖ Elections should be a **more level playing field** so that good politicians, candidates and parties with less funds also stand a chance of competing in elections.

PANCHAYATS AS SELF-GOVERNING INSTITUTIONS

Context: There is a growing recognition of the crucial link between local governance, development, and gender equality.

About local self-governance

- ❖ In December 1992, Parliament passed the **73rd and 74th constitutional amendments**, which instituted **panchayats and municipalities**, respectively.
- ❖ These amendments mandated that State governments constitute panchayats (at the village, block and district levels) and municipalities (in the form of municipal corporations, municipal councils and nagar panchayats) in every region.
- ❖ They sought to institute a **third-tier of governance** in the federal framework through the **devolution of functions, funds, and functionaries to local governments**.
- ❖ The amendments to the Constitution ensured the **reservation of one third of the total seats for women** in all elected offices of local bodies in both the rural and urban areas.
- ❖ Emanating from the Central Act, various States Panchayati Raj Acts have made provisions for **taxation and collection**.

Sources of Revenue

- ❖ Property tax, cess on land revenue, surcharge on additional stamp duty, tolls, tax on profession, advertisement, user charges for water and sanitation and lighting are the major own source of revenues(OSRs)where panchayats can earn maximum income.
- ❖ The huge potential for non-tax revenue includes fees, rent, and income from investment sales and hires charges and receipts.
- ❖ There are also innovative projects that can generate OSR.
 - ✓ This covers income from rural business hubs, innovative commercial ventures, renewable energy projects, carbon credits. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds and donations.

Importance

- ❖ It provides for **efficient provision of public goods** since governments with smaller jurisdictions can provide services as per the preferences of their residents.
- ❖ It promotes **deeper democracy** since governments that are closer to the people allow citizens to engage with public affairs more easily.
- ❖ Gram sabhas have a significant role in fostering **self-sufficiency and sustainable** development at the grass-roots level by leveraging local resources for revenue generation.
- ❖ They can be engaged in **planning, decision-making**, and implementation of revenue-generating initiatives that range from agriculture and tourism to small-scale industries.
- ❖ They have the **authority to impose taxes**, fees, and levies, directing the funds towards local development projects, public services, and social welfare programmes.
- ❖ Through transparent financial management and inclusive participation, **gram sabhas ensure accountability** and foster community trust, ultimately empowering villages to become economically independent and resilient.

Concerns and Challenges

- ❖ Despite the constitutional promise of local self-governance, local governments operate with limited autonomy and authority.
- ❖ **Revenue raised by panchayats is meagre** : “**Panchayats earn only 1% of the revenue** through taxes”, with the rest being raised as grants from the **State and Centre**
 - ✓ It specifically points out that **80% of the revenue** is from the **Centre** and **15 % from the States**.
- ❖ **Several impediments:** Despite every enabling factor to raise revenue, panchayats confront several impediments in resource mobilisation:
 - ✓ The **‘freebie culture’** rampant in society is the cause for the antipathy in paying taxes.
 - ✓ Elected representatives feel that imposing taxes would alter their popularity adversely.

- ✓ In several States, **gram panchayats lack the authority** to collect taxes, while in numerous others, intermediate and district panchayats are not delegated the responsibility of tax collection.

Suggestions and Way Ahead

- ❖ There is a need to educate elected representatives and the public on the significance of raising revenue to develop panchayats as self-governing institutions.
- ❖ Ultimately, the dependency syndrome for grants has to be minimised and in due course, panchayats will be able to survive on their own resources.
- ❖ Panchayats can only achieve such a state of affairs when there are dedicated efforts in all tiers of governance, which includes even the State and central level.
- ❖ Thus, gram sabhas need to promote entrepreneurship, and foster partnerships with external stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of revenue generation efforts.

LADAKH'S DEMAND OF SIXTH SCHEDULE

Context: Recently, the Union Government has agreed to examine whether the provisions of the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution** can be implemented in Ladakh's context

Background

- ✓ The demand for inclusion in the Sixth Schedule came into prominence after **Ladakh was carved out as a separate Union Territory** from the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019. The move led to concerns among locals about potential loss of identity, resources, and bureaucratic overreach.



Key Demands

- ✓ These include **statehood for Ladakh**, safeguards under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, job reservation for the youth of Ladakh, and the creation of separate Parliamentary constituencies for the two parts of the region — Leh and Kargil.

Issues faced by Ladakh

- ✓ **No decentralization of power:** There had been four MLAs from the region in the erstwhile J&K Assembly; the administration of the region is now completely in the hands of bureaucrats. A. To many in Ladakh, the government now looks even more distant than Srinagar.
- ✓ **Changed domicile policy in Jammu and Kashmir:** It raised fears in the region about its own land, employment, demography, and cultural identity.
- ✓ **Limited Finances:** The UT has two Hill councils in Leh and Kargil, but neither is under the Sixth Schedule. Their powers are limited to collection of some local taxes such as parking fees and allotment and use of land vested by the Centre.

The Sixth Schedule

- ❖ It comes under **Article 244** that provides for the formation of **Autonomous Administrative Divisions — Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)** — that have some legislative, judicial, and administrative autonomy within a state.

- ❖ It applies to the Northeastern states of **Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram (three Councils each), and Tripura (one Council)**.

About ADCs:

- ADCs have up to 30 members with a **term of five years**.
- They can make laws, rules and regulations with regard to land, forest, water, agriculture, village councils, health, sanitation, village and town level policing, inheritance, marriage and divorce, social customs and mining, etc.
- **Exception: The Bodoland Territorial Council in Assam** is an exception with more than 40 members and the right to make laws on 39 issues.

Significances of the Sixth Schedule in Indian Constitution

- ❖ **Autonomy to Tribal Populations:** It protects the autonomy of tribal populations through the creation of autonomous development councils.
 - ✓ These councils can frame laws on land, public health, and agriculture.
- ❖ **Administration of Tribal Areas:** It provides for the administration of tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.
 - ✓ As of now, ten autonomous councils exist in these states.
- ❖ **Protection of Tribal Rights:** It is intended to protect tribal populations from exploitation and preserve their unique cultural and social practices.
 - ✓ It ensures that tribal communities have a say in their governance and development.
- ❖ **Safeguarding Resources:** The autonomous councils under the Sixth Schedule have the power to regulate the issuance of licences for mining, control money lending to tribes, and regulate business and commerce in the areas.

Other Recommendations

- ❖ **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST):** In September 2019, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes recommended the inclusion of Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule.
 - ✓ The Commission took note of the fact that the newly created Union Territory of Ladakh is predominantly a tribal region in the country.
- ❖ **Report highlights of the Parliamentary Standing Committee:** The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs recently tabled a report in the Rajya Sabha.
 - ✓ The report stated that, according to the 2011 Census, the tribal population in the Union Territory of Ladakh is 2,18,355, that is 79.61% of the total population of 2,74,289.
 - ✓ **Special Status:** The committee recommended that special status may be granted to the Union Territory of Ladakh considering the developmental requirements of the tribal population.

Conclusion

- ❖ The Sixth Schedule is a crucial constitutional provision that recognizes the unique cultural, social, and economic needs of tribal populations and provides a framework for self-governance.
 - ✓ It holds significant importance as it provides for the administration of tribal areas, thereby protecting the autonomy of tribal populations.
 - ✓ It protects tribal populations, allowing for the creation of autonomous development councils which can frame laws on land, public health, agriculture.

- ❖ The demand for inclusion in the Sixth Schedule reflects the aspirations of the people of Ladakh for greater autonomy and preservation of their unique cultural identity.
- ❖ The government's response to these demands will have significant implications for the future of Ladakh and its people.

CRIMINALISATION OF POLITICS IN INDIA

Context: As per the latest data available with the **Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)**, about **one-third members** of Rajya Sabha declared criminal cases against themselves.

Criminalisation of Politics in India

- ❖ It refers to the involvement of individuals with criminal charges or backgrounds in Indian politics. It means that persons with criminal backgrounds contest in the election and get selected as a member of parliament or state legislature.

Key Findings of ADR

- ❖ **Rajya Sabha Candidates:** About 36% of Rajya Sabha candidates have declared criminal cases against themselves while the average assets of candidates analysed stood at ₹127.81 crore.
- ❖ **Electoral Bonds:** The Supreme Court held that the **Electoral Bonds Scheme** was unconstitutional for violating the right to information of voters
- ❖ **Registered Unrecognised Political Parties:** According to a report by ADR, the number of registered unrecognised political parties has increased two-fold from 2010 to 2019.
- ❖ **Election Commissioners Appointment:** ADR argues that the present practice of appointment of Election Commissioners by the Centre is **violative of Articles 14 and Article 324 (2)** and the **basic features of the Constitution**.

Major Reasons

- ❖ Criminalization of political parties is a result of the connection between criminals and politicians and vote-bank politics.
- ❖ Lack of enforcement of laws and judgments.
- ❖ lack of ethics, and values, and loopholes in the function of the election commission.
- ❖ It is also linked to political control of state machinery and corruption.
- ❖ The political system is unwilling to change the law or the system.

Issues of Criminalization of Politics

- ❖ **Question of safety & security:** The main purpose of governance is to provide safety and security to citizens who elect their representatives for this role.
 - ✓ But if the elected members themselves have criminal records, would they be interested in a criminal justice system that is prompt and efficient?
- ❖ **Low conviction rate:** As per the **National Crime Records Bureau's 2021 report**, only 10,416 cases of murder were disposed of during the year with just a 42.4% conviction rate.
 - ✓ The Law minister has admitted to more than 4.7 crore cases pending in various courts.
- ❖ **Situation in police stations:** Politicians play a very powerful role at police stations, compromising both integrity and impartiality of field staff.
 - ✓ In due course, ordinary criminals graduate to be dreaded ones and form gangs extorting money, grabbing land, threatening witnesses in criminal cases, etc.

Measures to Curb Criminalisation

- ❖ The **Vohra Committee** set up by the Centre in 1993 sounded a note of warning saying that "some political leaders become the leaders of these groups and, over the years, get themselves elected to local bodies, state assemblies, and the national Parliament.
- ❖ **Law Commission's 179th report:** It recommended an amendment to the Representation of People Act 1951, and suggested the people with criminal backgrounds should be disqualified for five years or until acquittal.

- ✓ It also recommended that the person who wants to contest the election must furnish details regarding any pending case, with the copy of the FIR/complaint, and also furnish details of all assets.

Related Supreme Court Judgement

- ❖ **In 2002:** Every candidate contesting election **had to declare his criminal and financial records** along with educational qualifications.
- ❖ **In 2005:** A sitting MP or MLA will be **disqualified** from contesting the election **if convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for two years or more** by a court of law.
- ❖ **In 2014:** The Supreme Court **accepted the Law Commission recommendations** and passed an order directing that trials against sitting MPs and MLAs should be concluded within a year of charges being framed and conducted on a day-to-day basis.
 - ✓ As a follow-up to these directives, in 2017, the government started a **scheme to establish 12 special courts** for a year to **fast-track** the trial of criminal cases against MPs and MLAs.
- ❖ **In 2021:** The **political parties** need to upload on their websites and social media platforms the **details of pending criminal cases** against their candidates and the reasons for selecting them as also for not giving tickets to those without criminal antecedents.
- ❖ **Recently,** the Supreme Court published **some necessary mandates** to avert the criminalisation of politics as many lawsuits have been withdrawn against MPs and MLAs in the past.

Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)

- ❖ It is an **apolitical and non-partisan non-profit organisation** in India that was **established in 1999** by a group of professors from the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad.
- ❖ It focuses on **corruption and criminalization** in the political process, empowerment of the electorate through greater dissemination of information relating to the candidates and the parties etc.
- ❖ It has published numerous reports on the criminal backgrounds, financial details, and other relevant information of candidates contesting in various elections.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- ❖ The criminalisation of politics in India is a grave issue that needs immediate attention. The involvement of criminals in politics not only undermines the democratic process but also hampers the development of the nation.
- ❖ There is a **need to fix the role of Political Parties** that should be more transparent and accountable in their candidate selection process.
- ❖ The **Election Commission of India and other respective authorities** need to take transparency measures about the Political Parties and their funding to the People of India so that they can **make informed decisions** while exercising their vote.
 - It is high time that stringent measures are taken to curb this menace and restore faith in the democratic system.

INDIA – PRESIDENT GIVES NOD TO KERALA’S LOKAYUKTA BILL

Context: President Droupadi Murmu has approved the **Kerala Government’s Lok Ayukta Amendment Bill 2022**.

Highlights of the Bill

- ❖ The amendment sought to **take away the Lok Ayukta’s powers** to declare public servants **ineligible to hold their positions** if complaints of corruption and nepotism against them were proven.
- ❖ In the case of any unfavourable decision from the Lok Ayukta against the Chief Minister, the competent authority in the existing Act will now be the Assembly instead of the Governor.
- ❖ In the case of an MLA, the Speaker will be the competent authority.

- ❖ The competent authorities will also now have the option to **accept or reject the LokAyukta recommendations**.

What are Lokayukta?

- ❖ The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 came into effect in 2014.
- ❖ Lokayukta are anti-corruption ombudsman institutions in India, established in states.
- ❖ **Concept:** The concept of Lokayukta was inspired by the Scandinavian Countries Ombudsman system.
- ❖ **Function:** The Lokayukta are responsible for investigating allegations of corruption and maladministration against public servants and elected representatives.
- ❖ **First Lokayukta:** The establishment of Lokayukta institutions in India began with the first Lokayukta being constituted in **Maharashtra in 1971**.
- ❖ **Members:** The Lokayukta is to be headed by a chairperson, who is or has been a Chief Justice or Judge of the High Court, and can have up to eight members, including judicial and non-judicial members.
 - ✓ The Governor of the State appoints the members.
- ❖ **Powers:** Lokayukts have the authority to summon witnesses, examine evidence, and recommend punitive measures such as dismissal, suspension, or prosecution of guilty officials.
 - ✓ However, their recommendations are usually not binding, and the final decision lies with the respective government authorities or judiciary.
- ❖ **Jurisdictions:** The Lokayukts typically have jurisdiction over public officials and employees within the state government and its agencies, including ministers, legislators, bureaucrats, and other elected representatives.
- ❖ **Independence:** To ensure impartiality and independence, Lokayukts are typically headed by retired judges or eminent persons with experience in public administration.

Challenges

- ❖ **Limited Jurisdiction:** The jurisdiction of Lokayuktas is often limited to certain categories of public servants or specific areas of governance, which may restrict their ability to address all forms of corruption comprehensively.
- ❖ **Lack of Independence:** Despite being intended as independent bodies, Lokayuktas often face political interference or pressure from the government, which can hinder their autonomy.
- ❖ **Inadequate Resources:** Lokayuktas often suffer from insufficient financial and human resources.
- ❖ **Whistleblower Protection:** Whistleblowers and complainants who report corruption may face threats, harassment, or retaliation, which discourages them from coming forward with information.
- ❖ **Political Will:** Ultimately, the effectiveness of Lokayuktas depends on the political will of the government to combat corruption and strengthen accountability mechanisms.

Measures Needed to Strengthen Lokayukta:

- ❖ **Legislative Reforms:** Enact comprehensive legislation granting Lokayuktas broader jurisdiction, including coverage of all public servants and entities receiving public funds.
- ❖ **Appointment:** Expedite the process of appointing Lokayuktas and ensure the selection process is transparent, merit-based, and free from political influence.
- ❖ **Independence:** Safeguard the independence of Lokayuktas by providing them with fixed tenures, adequate resources, and immunity from arbitrary removal or interference.
- ❖ **Public Awareness:** Launch awareness campaigns to educate the public about the role and functions of Lokayuktas, how to file complaints, and the importance of reporting corruption.
- ❖ **Whistleblower Protection:** Strengthen legal provisions for protecting whistleblowers who report corruption, including measures to ensure their confidentiality, safety, and immunity from retaliation.
- ❖ **Accountability:** Hold governments and public officials accountable for implementing Lokayukta recommendations and take disciplinary action against those found guilty of obstructing or undermining anti-corruption efforts.

Conclusion

- ❖ Over the years, there have been calls for strengthening Lokayukts and expanding their jurisdiction to cover more public officials and institutions.
- ❖ Some states have also introduced amendments to their Lokayukts Acts to address deficiencies and enhance accountability.
- ❖ By implementing the required measures, India can significantly enhance the effectiveness and credibility of Lokayuktas in combating corruption and promoting good governance at the state level.

LAW PANEL READIES REPORT ON SIMULTANEOUS POLLS

Context: The Law Commission of India has worked out three major Constitutional amendments to set the ground for the 'One Nation, One Election' project in 2029.

- ❖ The 22nd Law Commission, headed by former Karnataka High Court Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi, is set to recommend the addition of a new chapter on simultaneous polls in the Constitution.
- ❖ Currently, **Part XV of the Constitution deals with elections.** It prescribes the role of the Election Commission and for elections to be based on adult suffrage among other aspects.
 - ✓ The Commission is likely to recommend **insertion of a new chapter, Part XVA**, that would make provisions for simultaneous polls.

Recommendations: Three major Constitutional Amendments

- ❖ While the law panel has not submitted its report to the government, it has made detailed presentations of its **likely recommendations before the high-level committee, headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind.**
 1. **Synchronization of Assembly elections:** The Commission's report is likely to suggest **synchronising assembly elections in two stages in the next five years before all states can go to polls simultaneously** with the next Lok Sabha elections in 2029.
- ❖ Then **2029 can be the third election cycle** where the Centre, all states, municipal and panchayat elections can be held together.”
 2. **Sustainability of simultaneous polls:** One of the key concerns on simultaneous polls was **tackling situations where the mandate results in a hung assembly** or when a government falls midway when a no-confidence vote is instituted.
- ❖ Sources said that a **second Constitutional amendment would deal with “sustainability of simultaneous polls”** which would address these concerns.
- ❖ It is learnt that the Law Commission's prescription is to first attempt setting up an **all-party “unity” government if a government falls during its five-year tenure.**
 - ✓ **“If that is not possible, then the alternative would be holding elections only for the term remaining before another cycle of simultaneous polls can be held”.**
 - **Contesting elections only to form a government for a short term could be a disincentive for political parties to bring down a government.**
- 3. **Common voter list:** The third Constitutional amendment to be recommended by the law panel would specifically deal with a **common voter list.**
- ❖ Currently in many states, **the voter list for the panchayat and municipal elections is different from the one used for Parliament and assembly elections.**
- ❖ It said a common voter list will ensure **every citizen gets the right to exercise his/her franchise for all public bodies.**

Idea of Simultaneous Elections in India (One Nation One Election)

- ❖ Simultaneous Elections refer to the **idea of holding Lok Sabha and State legislative assembly elections together**, with the aim of reducing the frequency of elections and their associated costs.
- ❖ Simultaneous elections in India to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies were held in the **years 1951-52, 1957, 1962 and 1967.**

- ✓ Thereafter, the schedule could not be maintained and the elections to the Lok Sabha and the State legislative assembly have still not been realigned.

- ❖ **The Election Commission in its annual report (1983)** had recommended that a system should be evolved so that elections could be held simultaneously.
- ❖ **The Law Commission (170th Report- 1999)** stated that we must go back to the past where the elections to Lok Sabha and all the Vidhan Sabha were held simultaneously.
- ❖ **The 79th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee (2015)** also favored the idea of the simultaneous elections which was reiterated by a NITI Aayog paper in 2017.

Arguments In Favour of One Nation One Election

- ❖ It will **reduce the huge expenditure** incurred for conducting separate elections every year.
- ❖ The problem of frequent elections leads to **imposition of MCC over prolonged periods of time which affects the normal governance**. Simultaneous elections can overcome such issues.
- ❖ Simultaneous elections **will free the crucial manpower** which is often deployed for prolonged periods on election duties
- ❖ The **focus on governance will increase**, instead of being constantly in election mode.

Arguments Against One Nation One Election:

- ❖ **Logistical Challenges:** All states and the central government face massive logistical challenges including coordinating the schedules, resources etc.
- ❖ **Disadvantage for regional parties:** It may help the dominant national party or the incumbent at the Centre at the cost of regional parties and regions issues can be overshadowed by the national issues.
- ❖ **Financial Implications:** Conducting elections is expensive and requires significant resources like manpower.
- ❖ **Issue of dissolution:** Prematurely dissolution on account of a **vote of no-confidence** becomes difficult to deal with in case simultaneous elections are there.

Way Ahead

- ❖ Considering the fact that **frequent elections led to a huge burden on human resources and affected the development process**, a **sustained debate is required** on the subject.
- ❖ All political parties need to arrive at a consensus on the issue of simultaneous elections before taking any step towards it.

CivilsTap Hlmachal

INTERNATIONAL

INDIA-UAE: BILATERAL INVESTMENT TREATY

Context: Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the signing and ratification of a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to significantly boost bilateral economic engagement, including Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

About the Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT):

- ❖ It is an **agreement between two countries** that sets the terms and conditions for private investment by nationals and companies of one state in another.
- ❖ It is a part of the **International Investment Agreements (IIAs)** under the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (**UNCTAD**).
- ❖ It is expected to improve investor confidence, increase foreign investments and overseas direct investment opportunities, and have a positive impact on employment generation.

India and BIT

- ❖ India has been actively negotiating Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) with various countries to boost foreign direct investment (FDI).
- ❖ **India's Position on BITs:** Recent Interim Budget highlighted that India is negotiating BITs with trade partners to boost FDI inflow.
 - ✓ It emphasised that these negotiations are being conducted from a position of strength.
- ❖ **India's Model BIT:** India adopted the model BIT in 2016.
 - ✓ The **objective** is to provide appropriate protection to foreign investors in India and Indian investors in the foreign country, while maintaining a balance between the investor's rights and the Government obligations.
- ❖ **India's Economic Integration with Western Nations:** India is pursuing economic integration with western nations such as the **United Kingdom (UK)** and the **European Union** through **Free Trade Agreements and investment treaties**.

Significances of BITs

- ❖ **Investor Confidence:** BITs can boost the confidence of investors by providing a level playing field and non-discrimination in all matters.
 - ✓ They provide an independent forum for dispute settlement by arbitration.
- ❖ **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):** BITs can help increase the inflow of FDI.
 - ✓ For example, India is negotiating BITs with trade partners to improve its ease of enforcing contracts, which is currently a hurdle for FDI inflows.
 - The FDI inflow during 2014-23 was \$596 billion.
- ❖ **Economic Growth:** By attracting foreign investment, BITs can contribute to economic growth and **employment generation** in the host country.
- ❖ **Legal Protection:** BITs offer legal protection to investors, which can be particularly important for investments in countries where the domestic legal framework is unpredictable or unstable.
 - ✓ BITs impose obligations under international law on host states to protect foreign investment from the other state.

Challenges associated with the BITs

- ❖ **Unequal Distribution of Rights and Obligations:** BITs often create an unequal distribution of rights and obligations between developed countries, which are the source of most foreign direct investment, and developing countries, which are mainly recipients.
- ❖ **Risk of Litigation:** BITs lead to an increased risk of litigation. Some developing countries have been sentenced by international arbitral tribunals to pay millions of dollars as a result of alleged violations to these treaties.

- ❖ **Ambiguous Legal Standards:** Most of these awards are based on expansive interpretations of ambiguous legal standards and concepts such as **‘fair and equitable treatment’** and **‘indirect expropriation’**.
- ❖ **Limitations in Addressing Issues:** BITs can’t address every problem that companies face abroad.
 - ✓ For example, American companies in China face challenges in protecting and enforcing their intellectual property rights (IPR).
- ❖ **Loss of Policy Space:** BITs can lead to a loss of policy space for the host country, limiting its ability to regulate in the public interest.
- ❖ **Treaty Shopping:** Investors might take advantage of the most favourable nation clause in BITs to sue a host country under a treaty to which it is not a party.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- ❖ Current trends in the world economy and global politics provide evidence that the global south is at ‘normal capitalism’, bringing with it new patterns of uneven development, inequality, and injustice.
- ❖ They are seen as a tool to boost the confidence of investors by assuring a level playing field and non-discrimination in all matters while providing for an independent forum for dispute settlement by arbitration.
- ❖ However, the negotiation and implementation of BITs can be complex and require careful balancing of interests.
- ❖ The challenges need for careful negotiation and implementation of BITs, balancing the interests of both the investing and host countries.

INDIA- U.S. NUCLEAR COOPERATION

Context: The U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources recently said, **India-U.S. nuclear cooperation** envisaged under the **nuclear deal** two decades ago is **“an important piece of unfinished business”**.

- ❖ Speaking on clean energy and climate change, he stressed on **getting away from Chinese domination of clean technology supply chains**.
- ❖ He also emphasises using **India’s capacities in manufacturing and labour costs to build up a real alternative supply chain**.

India-U.S. Nuclear Cooperation

History and Milestones:

- ❖ **1974:** India conducts its first nuclear test, leading to U.S. sanctions and limited cooperation.
- ❖ **2005:** The landmark **U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement** is signed, paving the way for civil nuclear trade and cooperation.
- ❖ **2008:** The U.S. Congress approves the agreement, allowing nuclear fuel and technology transfers to India.
- ❖ **2010:** The first U.S.-built nuclear power plant in India begins construction in **Kudankulam**.
- ❖ **2015:** The Westinghouse Electric Company signs an agreement to **build six nuclear reactors in India** in **Kovvada, Andhra Pradesh**.

The U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement

- ❖ The U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, also known as the **123 Agreement**, is a landmark agreement signed in 2005 that marked a significant shift in the **nuclear relationship between the two countries**.

Key Provisions:

- ❖ **Separation of Programs:** India agreed to separate its civilian and military nuclear facilities, placing civilian facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards.

- ❖ **Nuclear Trade:** The agreement allowed the U.S. to supply nuclear fuel and technology to India for its civilian nuclear program.
- ❖ **Non-proliferation Commitments:** India reaffirmed its commitment to non-proliferation and agreed to additional safeguards against transferring sensitive nuclear technology or materials.

Expected benefits for India:

- ❖ **Energy Security:** Reduced dependence on fossil fuels for electricity generation, which is crucial for a growing economy. Cleaner energy source with lower greenhouse gas emissions.
- ❖ **Economic Growth:** Creation of jobs in the nuclear power sector, potential for attracting investments and technology transfers.
- ❖ **Strategic Partnership:** Stronger relationship with the U.S., with implications for regional security and global non-proliferation efforts.
- ❖ **Access to Advanced Technology:** Acquisition of modern nuclear reactors and fuel, promoting technological advancements and improved safety standards.
- ❖ **Environmental protection:** Reduced reliance on coal-fired power plants, contributing to lower air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.
- ❖ **Regional stability:** Cooperation on nuclear energy could foster trust and collaboration between India and neighboring countries.
- ❖ **Global leadership:** Demonstrating responsible nuclear cooperation could set a positive example for other countries.

Current Status:

- ❖ Even after eight years of announcing that the nuclear deal was done in 2015, **there is still no techno-commercial offer.**
- ❖ **The progress has been slower than initially expected** due to various **Challenges.**
 - ✓ **Domestic challenges in India:** Complex regulatory procedures, limited infrastructure, and liability concerns.
 - ✓ **Geopolitical considerations:** Evolving global nuclear landscape and concerns about technology transfer.
 - ✓ **U.S. domestic politics:** Concerns about non-proliferation and Congressional approval processes.

Measures/Suggestions:

- ❖ India and the U.S. needs to make **fresh efforts for practical cooperation in the civil nuclear energy sector.**
- ❖ Also, India needs to **revise laws to enable private companies to participate in the civil nuclear sector.**
- ❖ Further, there is a “shared interest” to move forward, both on the **large traditional reactors** which were foreseen as part of the nuclear deal and also on **Small and Modular Reactor (SMR) technology.**

Way Ahead:

- ❖ Despite the challenges, **both countries remain committed to the agreement** and continue to work towards expanding cooperation.
- ❖ The success of the agreement will depend on **addressing outstanding challenges and building mutual trust** to unlock its full potential.

RAPID POPULATION GROWTH OF INDIA

Context: The article talks about a new committee being formed to address issues caused by India’s rapid population growth and demographic changes. It also highlights the need for this committee to focus on related challenges, such as job creation and social security.

What is the Current Situation of India’s Population?

- ❖ The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in India has decreased to 2.

- ❖ Some states like Bihar (2.98), Meghalaya (2.91), Uttar Pradesh (2.35), Jharkhand (2.26), and Manipur (2.17) have TFRs above 2.1.
- ❖ The TFR has fallen from 5.7 in 1950 to 2 in 2020, showing significant reduction.
- ❖ Southern States' population share decreased from 26% in 1951 to 21% in 2011, due to rapid TFR reduction.
- ❖ This decrease in TFR is linked to better socio-economic outcomes and education in these regions.

What are The Challenges of Population Changes?

- ❖ **Aging and Urbanization:** The demographic shift and rising life expectancy in India are leading to new challenges in managing an aging population and rapid urbanization.
- ❖ **Employment and Productivity:** With high unemployment and slow creation of non-farm jobs, there's a risk of not fully capitalizing on the demographic dividend.
- ❖ **Social Security:** Adequate social security is crucial for the aging workforce, ensuring support in later years.
- ❖ **Avoiding Distractions:** The committee should focus on these demographic challenges rather than getting sidetracked by issues of religion and immigration, as suggested by the ruling party.

What Should be Done?

- ❖ **Form a Focused Committee:** Establish a high-powered committee to address issues arising from population growth and demographic changes.
- ❖ **Job Creation and Social Security:** The committee should focus on creating jobs and improving social security, crucial for the working-age population.
- ❖ **Avoid Distracting Issues:** The committee must avoid getting sidetracked by the ruling party's focus on religion and immigration, and instead concentrate on the actual demographic challenges.
- ❖ **Utilize the Demographic Dividend:** Address the challenges to effectively harness the demographic dividend, such as high unemployment and the need for skilled job opportunities.

INDIA AND CHINA BILATERAL TRADE

Context: India and China trade reached **record levels in 2023**, indicating that bilateral trade had surpassed 2022 figures despite a slowdown.

India and China Trade Relations

- ❖ In 2022, the overall trade with China increased by **8.47%** year on year to reach **USD 136.26 billion**, crossing the USD 100 billion mark for a second time in a row.
- ❖ The **trade deficit** came at USD 101.28 billion as India's **imports from China witnessed an increase by 118.77%**.
- ❖ As of 2022-23, **China was India's third-largest trading partner**.
- ❖ **Trade Agreements and Negotiations:** India and China have engaged in negotiations to address trade issues and enhance economic ties.
 - ✓ Both countries have participated in regional trade agreements such as the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**, although India withdrew from the agreement citing concerns about its domestic industry and trade imbalances with China.

Concerns of India- China Trade Relations

- ❖ **Trade Imbalance:** One of the primary concerns for India is the significant trade imbalance with China.
 - ✓ India imports far more goods from China than it exports, leading to a large trade deficit.
 - ✓ This trade imbalance has been a persistent issue and has raised concerns about the impact on India's domestic industries and employment.
- ❖ **Quality and Safety of Chinese Goods:** There have been concerns in India about the quality and safety of some Chinese goods, particularly in sectors such as electronics and consumer products.

- ✓ Incidents of substandard or counterfeit products entering the Indian market have raised regulatory and consumer protection concerns.
- ❖ **Dumping Practices:** India has accused China of engaging in dumping practices, whereby Chinese companies allegedly flood the Indian market with cheap goods at prices below production costs.
 - ✓ This can harm domestic industries in India by undercutting their competitiveness and market share.
- ❖ **Market Access and Non-Tariff Barriers:** Indian companies have faced challenges in accessing the Chinese market due to non-tariff barriers, regulatory hurdles, and lack of transparency.
 - ✓ Issues such as restrictions on foreign investment, complex approval processes, and intellectual property rights protection have hindered Indian businesses' efforts to expand into China.
- ❖ **Geopolitical Tensions and Border Disputes:** The longstanding border disputes between India and China, particularly along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), have periodically escalated into military standoffs and political tensions.
 - ✓ These tensions have spilled over into economic relations and have led to calls for boycotts of Chinese goods in India, impacting bilateral trade.
- ❖ **Strategic Competition:** India and China are also engaged in strategic competition, both regionally and globally.
 - ✓ Their growing influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region has led to geopolitical rivalries, which can affect trade relations.
- ❖ **Security Concerns:** Security concerns related to Chinese investments in critical infrastructure projects in India have also raised alarms.
 - ✓ India has been cautious about allowing Chinese companies to participate in sensitive sectors such as telecommunications and infrastructure, citing national security concerns.

Way Ahead

- ❖ Overall, India and China have a complex trade relationship influenced by geopolitical tensions, border disputes, trade imbalances, and efforts to enhance economic cooperation.
- ❖ The future trajectory of their trade relations will depend on various factors, including efforts to address underlying issues and build trust between the two countries.

ENHANCED SURVEILLANCE OF THE INDO-MYANMAR BORDER (BORDER MANAGEMENT)

Context: The government has decided to construct a fence along the entire **1643-kilometer-long Indo-Myanmar border** to **facilitate better surveillance**.

About

- ❖ Two pilot projects of fencing through a Hybrid Surveillance System (HSS) are under execution.
- ❖ The fencing will be completed in the **next four-and-half years**. Anyone coming through will have to get a visa.

Free Movement Regime

- ❖ The FMR is a mutually agreed arrangement between the two countries that allows tribes living along the border to **travel up to 16 km** inside the other country **without a visa**.
- ❖ Under the FMR, every member of the hill tribes, who is either a citizen of India or a citizen of Myanmar and who is resident of any area within 16 km on either side of the border can cross over on production of a border pass with one-year validity and can stay up to two weeks.

Borders in India

- ❖ India currently has **more than 15000 km of land borders** and **more than 7500 km of maritime borders**.
- ❖ It shares borders with **seven countries** including Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar.



Border Management in India

- ❖ Border guarding responsibility initially was with the state forces post-independence, however, the same was found inadequate to handle the challenges and threats.
- ❖ **Central armed police forces (CAPFs)** were raised under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and were tasked to guard the borders under the control of the ministry.
- ❖ In case of active hostilities, the Army is given the responsibility to man the borders.

Need for Border Management

- ❖ **India- Pakistan Border:** The border with Pakistan has been a problematic one since India's independence.
 - ✓ Despite the accession of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) to India as per the Indian Independence Act of 1947, Pakistan fought four conventional wars with India namely in 1947-48, 1965, 1971 and 1999.
 - ✓ It has also been engaged in a proxy war as well both in the state of J&K and Punjab.
 - ✓ The border is active in the form of LC where the Army has been deployed in addition to the BSF.
- ❖ **India- China Border:** India has disputed borders with China in Ladakh, Middle Sector, and in Arunachal Pradesh. Despite many levels of talks, very little progress has been made to resolve the dispute.
- ❖ **India-Bangladesh Border:** The relations between India and Bangladesh have been moving up and down based on the government in power.
 - ✓ The current relations with Bangladesh are good but Pakistani efforts to create a religious divide, Chinese inroads and presence of inimical elements have made the peace process prone to disruption.
- ❖ **India-Bhutan Border:** India is responsible for the defence of Bhutan and therefore responds to Chinese aggression even in Bhutan which happened in Doklam in 2017.
 - ✓ The Chinese threat manifesting through Bhutan always remains which rises the need to secure this border.
- ❖ **India-Nepal Border:** Due to close relations between India and Nepal, Nepalese working in the Indian Army as soldiers and porous border management remains a challenge.
 - ✓ Several Chinese activities in terms of infrastructure development and language centers have come up in Southern Nepal close to Indian borders.
 - ✓ Pakistan's ISI is also using the porous nature of this border to infiltrate militants for anti-national activities in India.
- ❖ **India-Myanmar Border:** India and Myanmar share a large land boundary with the northern end bordering China and the southern end bordering Bangladesh.
 - ✓ The border remains porous as local communities are divided into both sides of the border.
 - ✓ The current arrangement also allows insurgents to have camps in the dense jungles of Myanmar across the border.
 - ✓ There are a large number of refugees moving into the northeastern (NE) states, primarily in Manipur.

Challenges in Managing the Borders

- ❖ **Length and Diversity:** India shares borders with multiple countries totaling thousands of kilometers.
 - ✓ Each of these borders has unique geographical features, ranging from mountains to rivers and plains, making effective monitoring and control challenging.
- ❖ **Porosity of Borders:** Many parts of India's borders are porous, allowing illegal crossings of people, goods, and contraband such as drugs and weapons.
 - ✓ The difficult terrain, along with dense forests and riverine areas, facilitate such activities, posing a significant challenge to border security forces.
- ❖ **Cross-Border Terrorism:** India faces threats of cross-border terrorism, particularly from Pakistan-based militant groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir.
 - ✓ These groups exploit the porous borders to infiltrate into Indian Territory and carry out attacks, leading to security concerns and tensions between the two countries.
- ❖ **Transnational Crime:** Transnational criminal activities, including smuggling of narcotics, arms, and counterfeit currency, thrive along India's borders.
- ❖ **Ethnic and Tribal Dynamics:** India's border regions are often inhabited by diverse ethnic and tribal communities with historical, cultural, and social ties across borders.
 - ✓ Managing these communities' aspirations, addressing their grievances, and preventing their exploitation by external forces require nuanced approaches to border management.
- ❖ **Dispute over Borders:** India has unresolved border disputes with neighboring countries, most notably with China and Pakistan.
 - ✓ These disputes lead to occasional tensions and confrontations, necessitating constant vigilance and diplomatic efforts to maintain peace and stability along the borders.
- ❖ **Infrastructure Development:** Many border areas in India lack basic infrastructure such as roads, communication networks, and border outposts, hampering the effectiveness of border management efforts.
 - ✓ Developing infrastructure in these remote and often inhospitable regions is crucial for enhancing surveillance capabilities and response mechanisms.
- ❖ **Humanitarian Concerns:** India shares borders with countries experiencing political instability, humanitarian crises, and refugee influxes.
 - ✓ Managing such situations while upholding humanitarian principles and international obligations poses additional challenges for border management authorities.

Conclusion

- ❖ Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach involving robust border surveillance and security measures, enhanced cooperation with neighboring countries, diplomatic initiatives to resolve disputes, development of border infrastructure, and engagement with local communities to address their concerns and aspirations.

SOUTH ASIA SUBREGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION (SASEC) CORRIDOR CONNECTIVITY

Context: The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone for **multiple road upgrade projects** as part of the **South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Corridor Connectivity**.

- ❖ **SASEC** was established in **2001**, it brings together Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka in a project-based partnership.
- ❖ SASEC seeks to strengthen multimodal cross-border transport networks that boost **intraregional trade** and open up trade opportunities with East and Southeast Asia.
- ❖ The key projects underway in the region include:
 - ✓ formulation and implementation of new Customs laws and regulations;
 - ✓ strengthening of automated Customs systems;
 - ✓ implementing provisions of the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC) such as on pre-arrival processing, risk management and post-clearance audit; and
 - ✓ developing trade portals for better transparency.

A PRIVILEGED STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP-INDIA AND U.A.E.

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will pay visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from February 13-14, 2024, to inaugurate a temple in Abu Dhabi.

What is the status of India-U.A.E relations?

- ❖ The upcoming visit will be the Prime minister's seventh visit to the UAE since 2015 and the third in the last eight months. Further, UAE President was felicitated in a road show when he was in Gandhinagar in January this year as the chief guest of the 10th Vibrant Gujarat Summit.
- ❖ In this short duration, India's relationship with UAE has evolved into becoming one of the most prominent bilateral relationships for New Delhi.

What are the Areas of cooperation between India-U.A.E. relationship?

1) Strategic cooperation-

- a) India is a part of a number of important groupings such as the I2U2 or the West Asian Quad comprising India, Israel, the United States and the UAE.
- b) The UAE is also part of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) infrastructure project that was signed during the G-20 summit in Delhi. This is aimed to counter China's Belt and road initiative in the region.

2) Energy cooperation- The UAE is only nation from the gulf region which has strategic oil reserves stored in India. An agreement was signed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd (ISPRL) and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company to invest in the strategic crude oil storage facility in Mangaluru.

3) Economic cooperation

- a) The UAE is India's third-largest trading partner and India's second-largest export destination. The bilateral trade between the two countries grew to \$85 billion in 2022-23.
- b) The UAE is also the fourth-largest overall investor in India.
- c) The India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement aims to increase trade in services to \$115 billion in five years.
- d) The Indian government has also approved the signing and ratification of a bilateral investment treaty with the UAE.

4) Technical cooperation- India and U.A.E. have a robust financial technology cooperation. For example-

- a) The RuPay card, a key component of India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), is accepted in the UAE.
- b) From July 2023, the rupee was accepted for transactions at Dubai's airports.
- c) India and the UAE have operationalized a rupee-dirham settlement system where the Indian Oil Corporation made a rupee payment to the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company for crude oil imports.

5) Climate change cooperation- PM Modi attended the COP 28 climate summit held in Dubai. To address the issue of finance, India and the UAE co-launched the Global Green Credit Initiative.

What are the areas of divergence between India and U.A.E.?

1. There are challenges like unclear regulations, labour laws and transparency faced by Indian businesses' in U.A.E.
2. The UAE and Iran have territorial disputes between them. Any escalation in this will affect India's trade and energy security.
3. The UAE is home to a large number of Indians. There are so many blue-collar workers and manual laborers as well. They face many issues such as terrible working and living conditions, and discrimination in treatment vis-a-vis other workers.

Conclusion- India and UAE display great convergence and mutual respect at all levels. There are certain divergences, but those exist even among the best of friendly nations.

INDIA “NON-WEST” BUT NOT “ANTI-WEST” ALIGNMENT -EXPRESS VIEW ON INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY

Context: The article discusses how India is redefining its relationship with Western countries. India is not against the West, but has a distinct, non-Western identity. The US supports this approach, indicating strong India-US relations. India’s domestic politics are shifting away from anti-Western sentiments.

What is India’s new approach to international relations?

- ❖ **Non-Western Identity:** India, led by External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, is positioning itself as non-Western, not anti-Western. This contrasts with other BRICS nations like Russia and China, which often appear more opposed to Western perspectives.
- ❖ **Flexible Alliances:** India advocates for flexible international relationships, avoiding alignment against the West despite being a part of BRICS.
- ❖ **Stronger Ties with the West:** India is strengthening its relationships with Western nations, particularly the US. Secretary of State Antony Blinken recognizes and supports this growing bond.

What is the US’s perspective on India’s position?

- ❖ **Support for Flexibility:** The US, through Secretary of State Antony Blinken, endorses India’s flexible approach to international relations, valuing diverse collaborations over rigid blocs.
- ❖ **Recognition of Strong Bilateral Ties:** US acknowledges the strength of the US-India relationship, stating it is the strongest it has ever been, despite India’s leading role in BRICS.
- ❖ **No Conflict with BRICS Membership:** The US does not see India’s membership in BRICS as a hindrance to their bilateral relationship.
- ❖ **Encouragement for Variable Geometry:** US emphasizes the importance of “variable geometry” in current global contexts, supporting India’s stance of maintaining multiple partnerships.

How is India’s domestic politics influencing its foreign policy?

- ❖ **Shift in Political Perspective:** The present government in India has transcended the traditional anti-Western paradigm. This marks a significant shift from previous governments’ approach.
- ❖ **Strategic Engagement with the US:** The present government’s administration is actively engaging with the United States, building a strategic partnership that is described as deeper and broader than ever before.
- ❖ **Decline of Traditional Resistance:** With the weakening of the Congress party and the decline of the left in India, resistance to engaging with Western countries, particularly the US and Europe, has diminished.
- ❖ **Balancing Domestic Sentiments:** The government’s characterization of India as “non-West” but not “anti-West” aligns with the rising conservative nationalist sentiments. This stance facilitates India’s foreign policy in balancing domestic and international interests.
- ❖ **Expanding Foreign Policy Horizons:** This approach allows the government to maintain support from various domestic political factions while expanding India’s foreign policy horizons, especially in its relations with Western nations.

SOCIAL ISSUES

MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY IN INDIA

Context: Recently, the Union Finance Minister informed that nearly 25 crore people have been raised from multi-dimensional poverty in the last 10 years.

About the Poverty

- ❖ It is a **state or condition** in which a person or community lacks the financial resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living, such as housing, clean water, healthy food, and medical attention.
- ❖ Traditionally, poverty is calculated based either on **income levels** or, if income data are not available, on **expenditure levels**.
 - ✓ The **‘poverty lines’** are actually expenditure levels that are considered minimum enough for someone to be called poor.
- ❖ A person who is poor can **suffer multiple disadvantages** like poor health or malnutrition, a lack of clean water or electricity, poor quality of work or little schooling.
 - ✓ Focusing on one factor alone, such as income, is not enough to capture the true reality of poverty.

What is the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)?

- ❖ Globally, the MPI uses 10 indicators covering three main areas:
 - ✓ **Health** includes nutrition and child & adolescent mortality indicators.
 - ✓ **Education** includes years of schooling and school attendance indicators.
 - ✓ **Standard of living** includes six household-specific indicators: housing, household assets, type of cooking fuel, access to sanitation, drinking water, and electricity.
- ❖ The **Indian MPI has two additional indicators**:
 - ✓ **Maternal Health** (under the health dimension) and;
 - ✓ **Bank Accounts** (under the standard of living dimension).

Multidimensional Poverty in India Since 2005-06:

- ❖ It is published by **NITI Aayog** with technical inputs from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Policy and Human Development Initiative (OPHI).
- ❖ It uses indicators covering three main areas: **health, education, and standard of living**.
- ❖ It was found to **decline from 29.17% in 2013-14 to 11.28% in 2022-23** with about 24.82 crore people escaping poverty during this period.
 - ✓ At the States’ level, **Uttar Pradesh topped the list** with 5.94 crore people escaping poverty **followed by Bihar at 3.77 crore and Madhya Pradesh** at 2.30 crore.
 - ✓ However, the largest number of poor people in the world — 228.9 million — lived in India in 2020.

Related Data

- ❖ **The NFHS-5 (2019-21):** About **14.96% of India’s population** are multidimensionally poor compared to 24.85% of the population that was multidimensionally poor based on the 2015-16 (NFHS-4).
 - ✓ It shows that nearly 135 million individuals escaped poverty during the 5-year period.
- ❖ **A UNDP study highlighted that 415 million Indians** came out of multidimensional poverty in the **last 15 years**.
- ❖ According to the **IMF**, the **‘extreme poverty’** was as below **1% in 2020** due to the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKY)**.

Reason for Poverty in India

- ❖ **Economic Slowdown and Policy Decisions:** The economy has been slowing for nine quarters prior to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic.
 - ✓ Unemployment had reached a 45-year high in 2017-18.

- ❖ **Child Malnutrition:** India's poor score comes almost entirely from the **child stunting and wasting** parameters.
 - ✓ Almost 35% of Indian children are stunted, and although this is much better than the 54.2% rate of 2000, it is still among the world's worst.
 - ✓ Almost 17.3% of Indian children under five are wasted, which is the highest prevalence of child wasting in the world.
- ❖ **Pandemic Impact:** The pandemic led to a 'sudden increase in poverty'.
 - ✓ Over an eight month period (March to October 2020), average incomes of the bottom 10% of households were lower by Rs 15,700.
- ❖ **Homelessness:** Increasingly, a large number of persons are being rendered homeless across the world.
 - ✓ There are both natural as well as man-made reasons that are contributing to this crisis

Government Efforts

- ❖ **Interventions through Policies/Schemes:** The government has expanded the social security net through schemes like *Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (Accident Insurance)*, *Atal Pension Yojana (Unorganized Sector)*, and *Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Yojana (Life Insurance)*.
 - ✓ The MUDRA Yojana has enabled about eight crore people to start new businesses.
- ❖ **Rural Development:** The **Ministry of Rural Development** has implemented various programs to increase livelihood opportunities, empower rural women, provide a social safety net, and improve infrastructure in rural areas.
 - ✓ The main focus is on increasing livelihood opportunities, empowering rural women, providing a social safety net, skilling rural youth, infrastructure development, increasing land productivity, etc.
- ❖ **Nutrition and Health:** Despite the progress in economic development, a significant portion of the Indian population cannot afford healthy food.
 - ✓ Initiatives like **Poshan Abhiyan and Anaemia Mukh Bharat** have been launched to address this issue.
- ❖ **State-Level Efforts:** States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh have recorded the largest decline in the number of multidimensionally poor people.

Various Committees

- ❖ There are various committees formed with the objective to estimate the number of people living in poverty in India. These are:
 - ✓ The Working Group of 1962;
 - ✓ V N Dandekar and N Rath in 1971;
 - ✓ Y K Alagh in 1979;
 - ✓ D T Lakdawala in 1993;
 - ✓ Suresh Tendulkar in 2009;
 - ✓ C Rangarajan in 2014.
- ❖ The **Lakdawala Committee** assumed that health and education is provided by the state.
 - ✓ Therefore, expenditure on these items was excluded from the consumption basket it proposed. Since **expenditure on health and education** rose significantly in the 1990s, the **Tendulkar Committee included them** in the basket.

A Way Forward

- ❖ Poverty eradication remains India's top priority, but there is still work to be done. Strategies such as increasing livelihood opportunities, empowering rural women, providing a social safety net, and skilling rural youth, infrastructure development, increasing land productivity, etc seem to be effective in reducing poverty.
- ❖ There is a need to address the inequalities of income, education, and opportunity that are all interconnected that can foster social cohesion and boost general well-being.
- ❖ It is essential that the government should provide education and health services free of cost for the deserving citizens and those from the socially oppressed classes.

A GLOBAL ALLIANCE TO BRIDGE THE GENDER EQUITY GAP

Context: India has successfully established the “Global Alliance for Global Good- Gender Equity and Equality” during 54th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum.

About the Alliance

- ❖ It was anchored by the CII Centre for Women Leadership, guided by the Minister of Women and Child Development, Government of India and supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- ❖ It will have a global network of experts, think-tanks, industry and country leadership that will drive collective actions to augment women empowerment.
- ❖ The initiative builds on the commitments of the G20 Leaders’ Declaration and India’s dedication to women-led development.

Importance of Alliance

- ❖ Women play an integral part in society; without their progress, the overall progress of society comes to a halt.
- ❖ Societies in which women see consistent growth have been known to prosper themselves.
- ❖ It is through the empowerment of women that societies can ensure their growth as well.
- ❖ Their economic empowerment drives development, and their access to education drives global progress. Their leadership promotes inclusivity, and their voices inspire positive change.
- ❖ Therefore, Global Alliance for Global Good- Gender Equity and Equality aims to bring together global best practices, foster knowledge sharing, and attract investments in key areas such as women’s health, education, and enterprise.

Achieving Gender Parity is Considered Important for Several Reasons

- ❖ **Human Rights and Equality:** Gender parity is rooted in the principles of human rights and equality. It emphasizes that all individuals, regardless of their gender, should have equal opportunities, rights, and responsibilities.
- ❖ **Social Justice:** Gender inequality has been a long-standing issue, and addressing it is essential for promoting social justice. It aims to eliminate discrimination and bias based on gender, allowing individuals to be treated fairly and with dignity.
- ❖ **Economic Growth:** Research suggests that gender diversity in the workforce contributes to economic growth. Companies with diverse leadership and workforce tend to be more innovative, make better decisions, and outperform their less diverse counterparts.
- ❖ **Improved Governance:** Gender-balanced representation in political and decision-making processes leads to more inclusive governance. Policies and decisions are likely to reflect a broader range of perspectives, contributing to more comprehensive and effective solutions.
- ❖ **Health and Education:** Gender parity is closely linked to improvements in health and education outcomes. Ensuring equal access to education and healthcare for both genders can lead to healthier and more educated populations.
- ❖ **Social Stability:** Societies with greater gender equality tend to be more stable. Reducing gender-based discrimination and violence contributes to social harmony and cohesion.
- ❖ **Role Modelling:** Achieving gender parity provides positive role models for future generations, challenging stereotypes and encouraging young individuals to pursue their aspirations without limitations based on gender norms.
- ❖ **Global Development Goals:** Gender equality is a key component of several international development goals, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Working towards gender parity contributes to the achievement of broader development objectives.

Present Scenario in India

- ❖ There has been an increase in India’s female labour force participation rate, from 23.3% in 2017-18 to 37% in 2022-23 (data from the annual Periodic Labour Force Surveys).
- ❖ Female enrolment in higher education has gone up by 28% in the last 10 years.
- ❖ In terms of enrolment in science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) courses, the share of women is a significant 43%, which is one of the highest enrolment rates in the world.

- ❖ Even within rural India, there is a participation of over nine crore women in 83 lakh self-help groups, improving the socio-economic conditions in rural areas.
- ❖ All these provide a glimpse of women-led development that India is witnessing.
- ❖ About one-fourth of the space scientists in India are women. The talent and hard work of women scientists are behind the success of our flagship programmes like Chandrayaan, Gaganyaan, and Mission Mangal.

Issues and Challenges

- ❖ The development models adopted by countries describing themselves as democracies (mainly developed countries in the West) have led to obscene inequalities between countries, between the rich and the poor within countries, and between men and women.
- ❖ A crucial obstacle to the progress and advancement of women and girls across geographies is the pronounced gender-based digital divide
- ❖ There is a decreasing government investment in projects and schemes meant for women's development.
- ❖ Another wicked challenge disproportionately impacting women across the globe is the climate crisis.
- ❖ Women entrepreneurs hurdle more barriers compared to their male counterparts in starting, operating, and growing enterprises
- ❖ These obstacles include poor access to capital, markets, and skills, as well as technological, social, cultural, and psychological constraints.

Related Steps of India

- ❖ Mainstreaming gender equality and equity has been a key development area for the Government of India for over a decade now.
- ❖ The passage of the Women's Reservation Bill, ensuring reservation of a third of seats for women in Parliament and the State Assemblies, is a revolutionary tool for women's empowerment and is expected to contribute extensively to improving the processes of India's governance.
- ❖ Allocations of nearly \$27 billion under the gender budget in 2023-24 are a manifestation of the commitment of the government to advancing women-led development.
- ❖ Stand-Up India aims to promote entrepreneurship amongst Women, Scheduled Castes (SC) & Scheduled Tribes (ST) categories and help them in starting a greenfield enterprise
- ❖ 80% of the beneficiaries under Stand-Up India are women
- ❖ **Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY):** PMMY was launched for providing loans up to Rs. 10 Lakhs to non-corporate, non-farm small/micro enterprises
- ❖ Around 70% of the loans have been sanctioned to women entrepreneurs under PMMY
- ❖ It has been decided to set up a new working group on the empowerment of women under the chairmanship of India in the G20 summit.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- ❖ The most effective way to empower women is through a women-led development approach. India is taking steps in this direction.
- ❖ India took the mission for gender equity several steps ahead with the launch of the 'Alliance for Global Good – Gender Equity and Equality'.
- ❖ It is an opportunity to learn and develop solutions with the global community to advance our commitment to increased engagement and leadership of women within the economy, through increased access to health care, education opportunities and economic opportunities
- ❖ We must work to remove barriers that restrict women's access to markets and global value chains.
- ❖ At the same time, we need to ensure that the burden of caregiving and domestic work is addressed appropriately.
- ❖ There is also a need to reduce the burden of unpaid care work, boosting demand for women's employment, promoting digital skills, and enhancing urban infrastructure to facilitate women's mobility and economic engagement.

EMPLOYABILITY OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Context: Recently, the Supreme Court of India said that termination of a woman's employment due to marriage is gender discrimination, and unconstitutional.

Status of Working Women in India:

- ❖ As per the **Union Budget 2022**, the overall workforce participation rate in India is 20.3%, of which 18.2% is in Urban India.
 - ✓ Women's employability stands at 51.44% for 2022, compared to 41.25% in 2021.
- ❖ **Periodic Labour Force Survey Report 2022-23:** It shows that the Female Labour Force Participation Rate in the country has improved significantly by 4.2% points to 37.0% in 2023, as per the '**usual status**' concept of measuring labour force participation.
- ❖ The presence of girls/women in **Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)** is **43%**, which is one of highest in the world.
 - ✓ India is presently one of the only 15 countries in the world with a woman Head of State.
- ❖ **National Family Health Survey 5 (NFHS 5):** It says 88.7% women participate in major household decisions today as against 84% five years ago.
- ❖ **Public Sphere:** In the 2019 Lok Sabha election for the first time in the country since independence, 81 women were elected as Members of Lok Sabha.
 - ✓ There are over 1.45 million or 46% women elected representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions (against mandatory representation of 33%).

Challenges faced by the working women:

- ❖ **Work-Life Balance:** Indian working women often struggle to balance their professional responsibilities with their roles at home.
- ❖ **Workplace Complications:** Women face complications in the workplace, including discrimination, bias, and sometimes even harassment.
- ❖ **Gender Bias:** There is a prevalent assumption that women are only suitable for specific tasks, leading to discrimination among those who work with them.
- ❖ **Pay Disparity:** Despite laws declaring equality in remuneration, it is not always followed.
 - ✓ The ingrained belief that women are incapable of doing difficult work and are less effective than men impacts the payment of differential salaries and compensation for the same job.
- ❖ **Security Issues:** Safety and security are major concerns for working women, especially those who work at night or in remote locations.

Initiatives to tackle the issue:

- ❖ **Flexible Working Hours:** Organisations are increasingly offering flexible working hours to accommodate the needs of their female employees.
- ❖ **Equal Women Representation:** There is a growing emphasis on ensuring equal representation of women in planning and decision-making roles within organisations.
- ❖ **Gender Equality Initiatives:** Organisations are driving transformative change for gender equality, which includes initiatives like leadership development programs, increased female recruitments, and transparent communication.
- ❖ **Support Services:** Support services such as counselling sessions are being provided to help women cope with workplace challenges.
- ❖ **Safety and Security Measures:** Organisations are implementing proper safety and security measures to ensure a safe working environment for women.
- ❖ **Effective Child Care Policies:** Organisations are introducing effective child care policies to support working mothers.

- ❖ **Appropriate Grievance Redressal Mechanisms:** Appropriate grievance redressal mechanisms are being put in place at workplaces to address issues faced by women.

Related Supreme Court's Observations:

- ❖ **Marriage, Employment, and Gender Discrimination:** The Supreme Court has stated that rules that edge out women from employment for getting married are 'coarse', unconstitutional.
 - ✓ It observed that terminating employment because a woman has got married is a coarse case of gender discrimination and inequality.
 - ✓ Acceptance of such patriarchal rule **undermines human dignity, right to non-discrimination and fair treatment.**
- ❖ **Safe Working Environment:** The Supreme Court recognized that under **Article 14 (2), 19 (1) (g), and 21** of the Constitution, the fundamental rights also include the **right to a safe working environment.**
- ❖ **Sexual Harassment:** The Apex court commissioned the **Vishaka Guidelines (1997)** that defined **sexual harassment** and put the onus on the employers to provide a safe working environment for women.

Statutory and Legal Provisions

- ❖ **The Prohibition of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013:** It provides a definition of sexual harassment and mandates employers to develop a complaint mechanism.
 - ✓ It also outlines procedural requirements for employers, including the establishment of an **Internal Complaints Committee (ICC)**, conducting orientation and awareness programs, and displaying details of the penal consequences of indulging in acts of sexual harassment.
- ❖ **The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961:** It regulates the employment of women in certain establishments for a certain period before and after childbirth and provides for maternity and other benefits.
- ❖ **The Factories Act, 1948:** It mandates that any factory employing 30 or more women workers must provide creche facilities for the use of children under the age of 6 years.
 - ✓ It also stipulates that women cannot be made to lift more than the prescribed weight and cannot be made to clean or oil any moving machine.
- ❖ **The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976:** It provides for the payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers for the same work or work of a similar nature.
- ❖ **Minimum Wages Act, 1948:** It sets the minimum wages that must be paid to skilled and unskilled labourers.

Way Forward: What more to be done?

- ❖ **Work from Home:** A survey conducted by **UNICEF's public-private youth platform YuWaah and U-Report** revealed that 55% of women prefer to work from home so they can manage household chores.
 - ✓ It suggests that flexible work arrangements could be beneficial.
- ❖ **Access to Information and Opportunities:** The same survey found that 52% of respondents believe that access to information and opportunities or support from families are key factors that influence young women's decision to develop job-ready skills and join the workforce.
- ❖ **Family Influence:** The survey also found that 56% of respondents believed that parents/family or partners are important actors in choosing aspirations and career options.
- ❖ **Education and Unemployment:** A study by the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Lucknow, found a rise in the unemployment rate with education levels.
 - ✓ It suggests that more job opportunities need to be created for educated women.

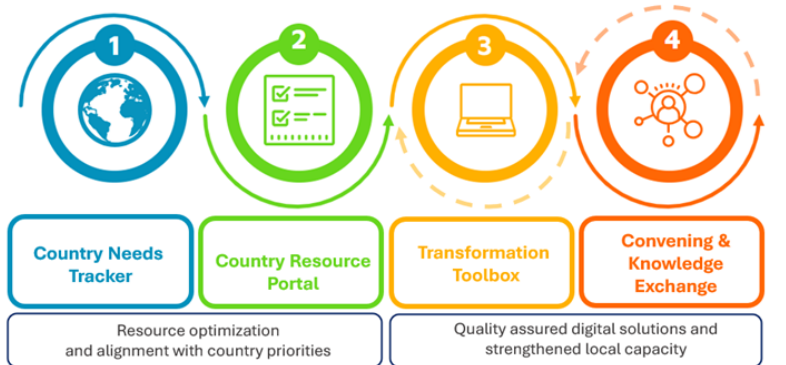
- ❖ **Labour-Intensive Manufacturing Sector:** The researchers suggested that a conscious effort to identify and promote the labour-intensive manufacturing sector will help in accomplishing inclusive growth.

WHO'S GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON DIGITAL HEALTH (GIDH)

Context: The World Health Organization (WHO) recently launched the **Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH)**, a platform for **sharing knowledge and digital products among countries**.

Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH)

- ❖ The GIDH will be a **WHO Managed Network** ("Network of Networks") that will promote **equitable access to digital health** by addressing challenges such as duplication of efforts and "products-focused" **digital health transformation**.
- ❖ **Aim:**
 - ✓ **ALIGN** efforts to support the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025;
 - ✓ **SUPPORT** quality assured technical assistance to develop and strengthen standards-based and interoperable systems aligned to global best practices, norms and standards;
 - ✓ **FACILITATE** the deliberate use of quality assured digital transformation tools that enable governments to manage their digital health transformation journey.
- ❖ The GIDH will focus on following **four foundational pillars**:



Digital health in India

- ❖ Digital health refers to the **utilization of digital technologies** across the healthcare ecosystem, aiming to **improve accessibility, affordability, and efficiency** of healthcare services for individuals and healthcare providers.



Significance

- ❖ **Improved Access:** Digital tools can reach remote areas, connect patients to specialists, and enable virtual consultations, expanding healthcare access.
- ❖ **Enhanced Affordability:** Telemedicine, electronic prescribing, and data-driven resource allocation can potentially reduce healthcare costs.

- ❖ **Personalized Care:** Electronic health records (EHRs) and wearable devices facilitate personalized treatment plans and preventive care.
- ❖ **Empowered Patients:** Digital platforms can educate patients, enhance medication adherence, and promote self-management of chronic conditions.
- ❖ **Streamlined Healthcare Delivery:** Digitization empowers efficient data management, administrative processes, and resource optimization within healthcare systems.

Challenges

- ❖ **Infrastructure Gaps:** Unequal access to internet connectivity, electricity, and digital devices hinders widespread adoption.
- ❖ **Data Privacy and Security:** Concerns and regulations regarding patient data privacy and security require robust solutions.
- ❖ **Digital Literacy:** Bridging the digital divide through training and awareness programs is crucial for patient and provider involvement.
- ❖ **Interoperability and Standards:** Seamless integration and exchange of data across different healthcare IT systems is needed.
- ❖ **Skilled Workforce:** Building a workforce equipped to handle digital health technologies and data analysis is vital.

Government initiatives

- ❖ **National Digital Health Mission (NDHM):** Aims to create a national digital health ecosystem with unique health IDs, EHRs, and a health data exchange platform.



- ❖ **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM):** Focuses on creating a digital infrastructure for ABHIM, with health registries, e-claim processing, and telemedicine.
- ❖ **E Sanjeevani Telemedicine Platform:** Facilitates virtual consultations between doctors and patients across the country.
- ❖ **Jan Arogya Setu App and COWIN Platform:** Provides access to health services, appointment booking, and COVID-19 information.
- ❖ **Digital Aarogya Mitra (DAM):** A community health worker program leveraging technology for data collection and community health interventions.

Way Ahead

- ❖ Digital health is a **proven accelerator to advance health outcomes and achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC)** and health-related Sustainable Development Goals. Hence, it needs to be made **integral to every health policy**.
- ❖ As Deputy Secretary-General of ITU said recently that nearly **half the world's population might not have access to health services** they need, but **90% have access to a 3G connection, showing the potential for digital health**.

- ❖ By **scaling up existing initiatives, collaborating across stakeholders, and fostering innovation**, India can leverage digital health to achieve its goal of universal healthcare and ensure better health outcomes for all.

OPERATION AMRITH (ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE INTERVENTION FOR TOTAL HEALTH)

Context: The Kerala Drug Control Department launched Operation AMRITH to prevent the overuse of antibiotics in the state.

Background

- ❖ In 2011, the Indian government introduced the **H1 rule** to prohibit the **over-the-counter (OTC) sales** of antibiotics without a prescription, responding to the growing concern over antimicrobial resistance (AMR).
- ❖ In 2013, the rule to limit the OTC restriction was limited to second- and third-line antibiotics, allowing the sale of first-line antibiotics without a prescription.
 - ✓ Step was taken to ensure that life-saving antibiotics remained accessible to the public, especially in remote areas
- ❖ Operation AMRITH enforces the original H1 rule, mandating a doctor's prescription for acquiring any class of antibiotics.

What is Antimicrobial Resistance?

- ❖ Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites change over time and no longer respond to medicines making infections harder to treat and increasing the risk of disease spread, severe illness and death.
- ❖ Nearly **700,000 people** die of AMR every year. The toll can rise to as many as 10 million by 2050 and eat up **3.8 per cent** of annual global gross domestic product (GDP).

Causes for Antimicrobial Resistance

- ❖ **Overuse and Misuse of Antibiotics:** The excessive and inappropriate use of antibiotics in humans and animals is a major driver of antimicrobial resistance. This includes using antibiotics without a prescription, not completing the full course of prescribed antibiotics, and using antibiotics for non-bacterial infections.
- ❖ **Inadequate Dosage and Duration:** When antibiotics are not taken in the correct dosage and for the recommended duration, it can lead to incomplete eradication of the targeted microorganisms, allowing the surviving bacteria to develop resistance.
- ❖ **Self-Medication:** Self-prescription without proper medical guidance contributes to the misuse of antibiotics.
- ❖ **Antibiotics Consumption in Food-Animals:** Use of antibiotics as growth promoters in food animals and poultry is a common practice and later it evolves in the food chain.
- ❖ **Unavailability of laboratory facilities:** Over 50-70% of doctor-prescribed antibiotics are unnecessary due to lack of accurate infection diagnosis. Limited access to affordable rapid diagnostic tests contributes to this issue.

Challenges Posed by AMR

- ❖ Antibiotic resistance is emerging as the threat to successful treatment of infectious diseases, organ transplantation, cancer chemotherapy and major surgeries.
- ❖ The issue of AMR causes out of pocket expenditure on health care, especially on medicines. The use of high order drugs or second-line expensive antibiotics pushing treatment costs high.
- ❖ **Poor Sanitation:** The large proportion of sewage is disposed of untreated into receiving water bodies, leading to gross contamination of rivers with antibiotic residues, antibiotic-resistant organisms.

Global Efforts against Antimicrobial Resistance

- ❖ **Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (GAP):** Globally, countries committed to the framework set out in the Global Action Plan (GAP) 2015 on AMR during the 2015 World Health

Assembly and committed to the development and implementation of multisectoral national action plans.

- ❖ **World Antimicrobial Awareness Week (WAAW):** It is a global campaign that aims to raise awareness of antimicrobial resistance worldwide.
- ❖ **Global Antimicrobial Resistance and Use Surveillance System (GLASS):** WHO launched it in **2015** to continue filling knowledge gaps and to inform strategies at all levels.
 - ✓ GLASS has been conceived to progressively incorporate data from surveillance of AMR in humans, surveillance of the use of antimicrobial medicines, AMR in the food chain and the environment.
- ❖ **Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership (GARDP):** A joint initiative of WHO and the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative (DNDi), GARDP encourages research and development through public-private partnerships.
- ❖ By 2025, the partnership aims to develop and deliver five new treatments that target drug-resistant bacteria identified by WHO as posing the greatest threat.
- ❖ **Country wise initiatives:** A multi-sectoral \$1 billion **AMR Action Fund** was launched in **2020** to support the development of **new antibiotics**, and the U.K. is trialing a subscription-based model for paying for **new antimicrobials** towards ensuring their commercial viability.
 - ✓ **Peru's efforts** on patient education to reduce unnecessary antibiotic prescriptions.
 - ✓ **Australian regulatory** reforms to influence prescriber behaviour, and initiatives to increase the use of point-of-care diagnostics, such as the **EU-supported VALUE-Dx programme**.
 - ✓ **Denmark's reforms** to prevent the use of antibiotics in livestock have not only led to a significant reduction in the prevalence of resistant microbes in animals, but also improved the efficiency of farming.

Measures Taken against Antimicrobial Resistance in India

- ❖ **National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (NAP-AMR):** It has a focus on the One Health approach & was launched with the aim of involving various stakeholders ministries/departments.
- ❖ **AMR Surveillance Network:** Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) established the AMR surveillance and research network (AMRSN) to generate evidence and capture trends and patterns of drug resistant infections in the country.
- ❖ **India's Red Line campaign:** Which demands that prescription-only antibiotics be marked with a red line, to discourage the over-the-counter sale of antibiotics– is a step forward.
- ❖ **FSSAI has set certain guidelines** limiting the antibiotics in food products such as fish and honey.
- ❖ **National Health Policy, 2017:** It terms antimicrobial resistance as one of the key healthcare issues and prioritizes the development of guidelines regarding antibiotic use and checks on restricting the growth of antibiotics.
- ❖ **National Antibiotic Consumption Network (NAC-NET):** The network sites compile data on antibiotic consumption in their respective health facilities and send it to National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).

Way Ahead

- ❖ Antimicrobial resistance is a socioeconomic problem, and combating it requires measures to improve public health infrastructure, sanitation facilities, and governance.
- ❖ While enforcing the OTC regulation is a welcome step, curbing antimicrobial resistance requires a multipronged approach, including reformations to physicians' prescribing practices and mandating that hospitals report healthcare-associated infection rates.

GENERAL STUDIES 3.

ECONOMY

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM INTERIM BUDGET (2024-25)

Context: Recently, the Union Finance Minister presented the Union Budget for the next financial year (2024-25) in the Parliament.

Budget at a Glance

- ❖ The **Revised Estimate (RE)** of the total receipts other than borrowings is Rs 27.56 lakh crore.
 - a. The **RE of the total expenditure** is Rs 44.90 lakh crore.
- ❖ **The revenue receipts** at Rs 30.03 lakh crore are expected to be higher than the **Budget Estimate (BE)**.
 - a. It reflects strong growth momentum and formalisation in the economy.
- ❖ It suggests that **income tax revenues** will account for **19%**, **Corporate tax** will account for **17%**, **GST for 18%** and **borrowings for 28%** of all government resources in FY25.

Rupee come from:

- ❖ Borrowings and other liabilities account for the largest avenue from where the Budget money comes, followed by income tax and GST and other taxes.

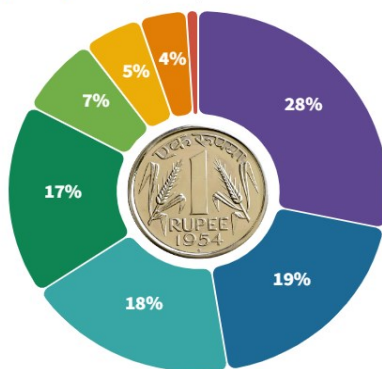
Rupee goes to:

- ❖ When it comes to expenditure, the highest amount goes towards paying interest and the money given to the states in the form of taxes and duties, accounting for 20% each of the total expenditure.

Where does the money come from?

Take a look at the avenues from where the money comes

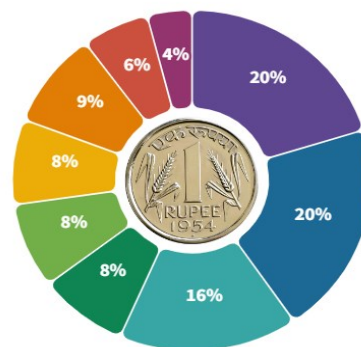
■ Borrowings & other liabilities ■ Income Tax ■ GST & other taxes ■ Corporation Tax ■ Non-tax revenue
 ■ Union Excise Duties ■ Customs ■ Non-debt capital receipts



Where does the money go?

Here's how government spends its money

■ Interest payments ■ States' share of taxes & duties ■ Central sector scheme
 ■ Finance Commission & other transfers ■ Defence ■ Centrally sponsored schemes ■ Others ■ Subsidies
 ■ Pensions



Gross and Net Borrowings for 2024-25:

- ❖ These are estimated to be **lower than the current financial year 2023-24**.
- ❖ These aim to make available **larger credit for the private sector**, which is seen to making investments at scale now.

Key Takeaways in the Budget

Capital Expenditure (2024-25):

- ❖ It was raised to ₹11.1 lakh crore for FY25 from the ₹9.5 lakh crore in the previous fiscal.
 - ✓ This would be **3.4% of the GDP**.
- ❖ The proportion of capital expenditure (excluding grant in aid) to **total expenditure stands at 23.31%**.
- ❖ In 2024-25, the total expenditure is estimated at ₹47.66 lakh crore, a 6.1% increase over the revised estimates of 2023-24.

Fiscal Prudence:

- ❖ The budget estimates for the fiscal deficit for FY 25 was **pegged at 5.1%**, down from the revised estimates of 5.8% last fiscal year.

Achievement of Taxation Reform:

❖ Direct Taxes:

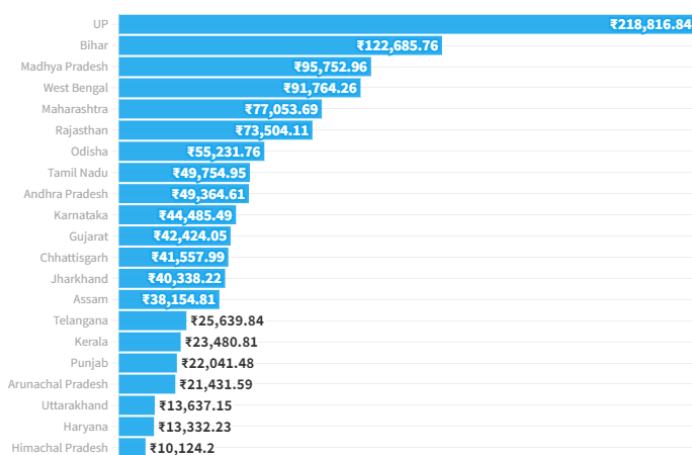
- ✓ Direct tax collections have more than tripled in the last ten years, with return filers increasing by 2.4 times.
- ✓ Reduction and rationalisation of tax rates implemented:
 - No tax liability for income up to Rs 7 lakh under the new tax scheme, increased from Rs 2.2 lakh in FY 2013-14.
 - Introduction of Faceless Assessment and Appeal for greater efficiency and transparency.

❖ Indirect Taxes:

- ✓ **GST** unified the indirect tax regime, reducing compliance burdens.
 - GST transition viewed positively by 94% of industry leaders; 80% reported supply chain optimization.
 - GST tax base more than doubled; average monthly gross GST collection nearly doubled to Rs 1.66 lakh crore.
 - States benefited from SGST revenue, showing a higher tax buoyancy post-GST.
- ✓ **Customs:** Import release time significantly reduced at Inland Container Depots, air cargo complexes, and sea ports.

State-wise Allocation of Central Taxes and Duties:

State-wise distribution of net proceeds of Union taxes and duties
BE 2024-25



Allocation to Ministries:

- ❖ The Union Budget allocated a massive ₹6.21 lakh crore for the Defence Ministry, followed by Road Transport & Highways with ₹2.78 lakh crore and Railways with ₹2.55 lakh crore.

For Example:

- ❖ **Education budget** for 2024-25 seen at Rs 1.25 lakh crore, 14.5% higher than revised estimate of Rs 1.1 lakh crore for 2023-24.
- ❖ **Housing:** New **housing plan for the middle class**; 2 crore houses to be built under **PM Aavas Yojana**; **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Grameen)** close to achieving target of 3 crore houses, additional 2 crore targeted for next 5 years.
- ❖ **Agriculture:** Investment in **post-harvest activity** by both private and public sector support; Empowering dairy farmers; More efforts to control **Foot and mouth disease**; Application of **Nano-DAP** to be expanded in all agro-climatic zones; **Crop insurance** has been given to 4 crore farmers under **PM Fasal Bima Yojana**; **Five integrated Aqua Park** to be set up; **Blue Economy 2.0** to

promote aquaculture; Implementation of **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana**; and Direct financial assistance to 11.8 crore farmers under **PM-KISAN**.

- ❖ **Renewable energy: Viability gap funding** for wind energy; Setting up of coal gasification and liquefaction capacity; Phased mandatory blending of CNG, PNG and compressed biogas; Financial assistance for procurement of biomass aggregation machinery; 1 crore households will be enabled to obtain up to 300 units of free electricity per month.

Health Expenditure:

- ❖ The expenditure for the **Department of Health & Family Welfare** for FY25 is Rs. 10,000 crores more than the revised estimates of the current FY.
- ❖ But the allocation to the Union Ministry of Health is **estimated to be 1.9% of the total expenditure**, continuing the trend of **staying below the 2% mark from 2022-23**.
- ❖ **Healthcare facilities** under **Ayushman Bharat** will be extended to all **Asha workers, Aanganwadi workers**.
- ❖ Vaccination of 9-14 year **old girls for cervical cancer**
- ❖ **Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0** to be expedited for improved nutrition delivery, early childhood care and development

Railway Budget in a Glance:

- ❖ Railway projects have been **identified under the PM Gati Shakti Yojana** for enabling multi-modal connectivity.
- ❖ It aims to **'improve logistics efficiency and reduce costs'**.
- ❖ **Railway Infrastructure:** To expand India's railway infrastructure, **three major railway economic corridors** were announced.
 - ✓ These include an **energy, mineral and cement corridor, a port connectivity corridor and a high traffic density corridor**.
 - ✓ It emphasised that these corridors, along with **dedicated freight corridors, aim to accelerate the country's GDP and reduce logistic costs**.
 - ✓ Additionally, there will be 40,000 normal train bogies to be converted into high-speed Vande Bharat ones.

Conclusion:

- ❖ The Interim Budget is a **temporary budget** that is presented by the government **in an election year**. It ranged from railways, tourism, healthcare, technology, aviation, green energy, aquaculture, housing, etc.
- ❖ However, the new government will present its full budget after the newly elected Lok Sabha, outlining the government's financial roadmap **for the entire fiscal year**.

CONCERNS IN THE INTERIM BUDGET (2024-25)

Context: There are **concerns over GDP, expenditure cuts, and Fiscal deficit** etc. in the recently presented Interim Union Budget for the 2024-25.

On GDP Growth:

- ❖ The **nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** is the size of the Indian economy in terms of current prices.
 - ✓ It is the **actual observed value**.
- ❖ The **real GDP growth and its rate** are derived from the nominal GDP data by **removing the effect of inflation**.
 - ✓ **For instance**, if nominal GDP growth in a particular year is 12% and inflation is 4%, then the real GDP growth will be 8%.
- ❖ However, **for all budget-related work**, it is the **nominal GDP that is used**.

- ✓ It means a **decent growth** rate in nominal GDP is **not good** for India's real growth rate.
- ❖ For the coming year, the **nominal GDP is likely to grow by just 10.5%**.
 - ✓ If an **inflation rate of 4-4.5%** it would suggest a **GDP growth rate of 6% to 6.5%** in 2024-25.

On the reduction in Fiscal Deficit:

- ❖ **Fiscal deficit** essentially shows the amount of money that the government borrows from the market. It does so **to bridge the gap between its expenses and income**.
 - ✓ If a government borrows more, it leaves a smaller pool of money for the private sector to borrow from.
 - ✓ It, in turn, **leads to higher interest rates**, thus disincentivizing borrowings by the private sector and further dragging down economic activity in the form of lower consumption and production.
 - ✓ If the government tries to print more money instead of borrowing from the market, that too **leads to negative effects such as inflation**.
- ❖ **If fiscal deficits continue to grow** unrestrained—repaying the debt and associated annual interest payments tends to become a **critical concern**.
- ❖ It eventually requires **governments to tax its citizens**, which, again, **slows down economic activity**.

The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (2003):

- ❖ It requires the Union government to contain **its fiscal deficit to just 3% of the nominal GDP**.
 - a. However, barring 2007-08, India has never met this target.
- ❖ In the current year, the government has **set a target of 5.9%** and revised estimates show it is likely to be even lower at 5.8%, which is further aim to reduce at **5.1% of GDP for FY25, and at 4.5% of GDP for FY26**.

Capital Expenditure (Capex) Target:

- ❖ All government expenditure can be divided into two broad categories:
 - ✓ **Revenue expenditure** to meet daily needs such as fuel bills, salaries, etc. and;
 - ✓ **Capital expenditure** to make productive assets such as roads, schools, bridges, ports, etc.
- ❖ There is a clear advantage for the broader economy when the government ramps up **Capital expenditure**.
 - ✓ Every **Rs 100 spent on capex leads to a Rs 250 increase in GDP**. On the other hand, the revenue expenditure returns **less than Rs 100**.
- ❖ The Capex was Rs 10 lakh crore in **the Budget 2023-24** — more than double the Rs 4.39 lakh crore of 2020-21.
 - ✓ However, **Revised Estimates (RE)** show that this **Capex target was not met in the current year** — it stands at Rs 9.5 lakh crore.

Expenditure on Health and Education:

- ❖ Historically, in India, budget allocations towards health and education have been **lower than required**.
- ❖ These allocations were in the **range between 2.5% to 1.5%** of the total government expenditure.
 - ✓ However, the Revised Estimates show that even those targets **have not been met in the current financial year**.
- ❖ The Budget 2024-25 **estimated to be 1.9% of the total expenditure for the** Union Ministry of Health, continuing the trend of **staying below the 2% mark from 2022-23**.

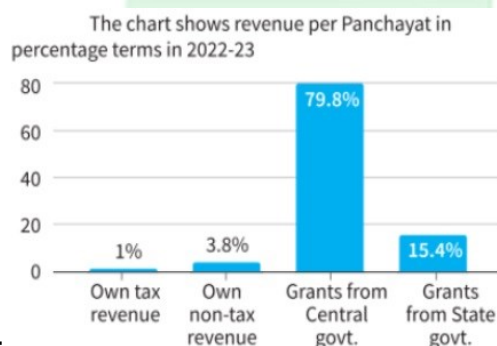
Reduction in Core Schemes:

- ❖ The Revised Estimates for the **outlays on 'core of core schemes'** show the **reduction in funds** that was meant for the **most disadvantaged sections** of society, such as SCs, STs and minorities.
 - ✓ For example, the **Umbrella Scheme for Development of Scheduled Castes** is Rs 6,780 (Revised Estimates) crore against the Budget Estimates of Rs 9,409 crore.
 - ✓ For **Scheduled Tribes**, the Revised Estimates is Rs 3,286 crore against a Budget Estimates of Rs 4,295 crore.
 - ✓ For minorities, the fall has been the sharpest.

Recently, the Union Finance Minister informed that nearly 25 crore people have been raised from multi-dimensional poverty in the last 10 years.

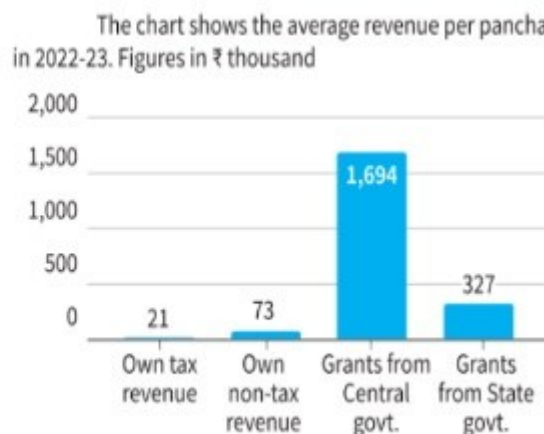
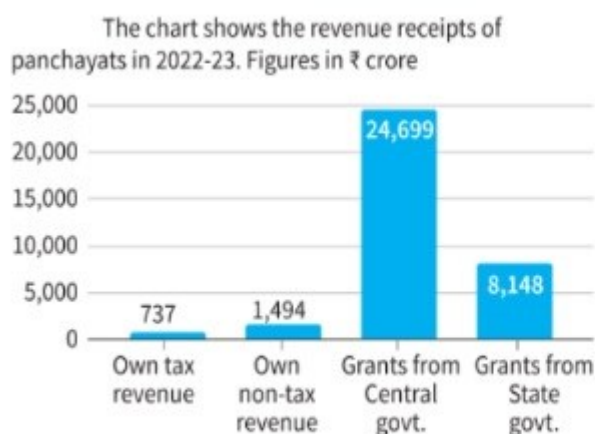
FINANCES OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS

Context: Recently, the **Reserve Bank of India** released a report on Finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for 2022-23 which presents an assessment of their finances and their role in India's socio-economic development.



Key Findings of the Report

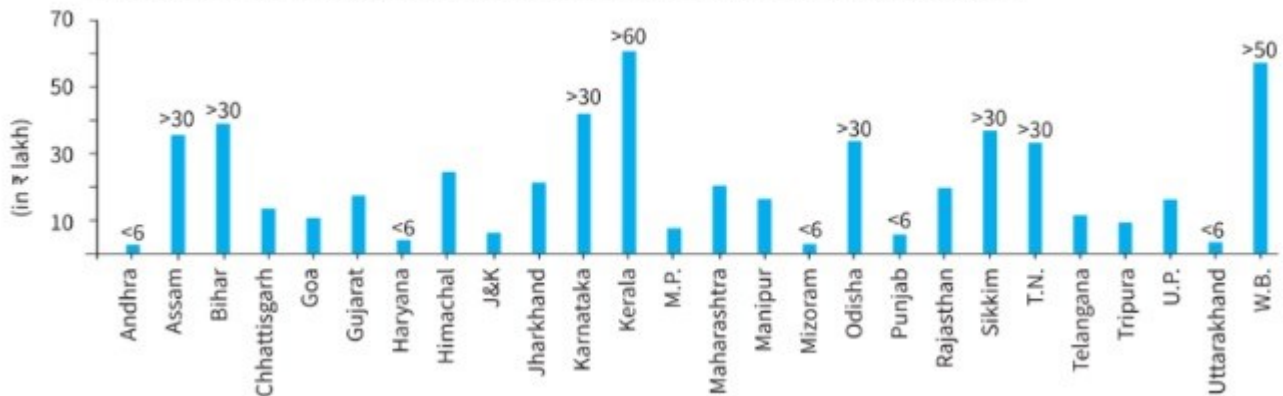
- ❖ About **1% of the revenue** of Panchayats was earned by them, with the rest being raised as **grants from the State (about 15%)** and the **Union Government (about 80%)**.
 - ✓ Panchayats had recorded a total revenue of ₹35,354 crore in 2022-23.
- ❖ **In 2022-23:** Each panchayat earned just ₹21,000 as its own tax revenue and ₹73,000 as non-tax revenue.
 - ✓ Each panchayat earned about ₹17 lakh as grants from the Central government and more than ₹3.25 lakh as grants from the State governments.
- ❖ Panchayats earned ₹1,494 crore through non-tax revenue, which is mostly earnings from interest payments and Panchayati Raj programmes.
 - ✓ They earned ₹24,699 crore as grants from the **Union Government** and ₹8,148 crore as grants from the **State governments**.



- ❖ **State Wise Performances: In Kerala**, the average revenue raised by each panchayat was over ₹60 lakh in 2022-23.

- ✓ **West Bengal** came a close second with an average revenue of ₹57 lakh per panchayat.
- ✓ The revenue was **over ₹30 lakh per panchayat** in *Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Odisha, Sikkim, and Tamil Nadu*; and **less than ₹6 lakh** in *Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Mizoram, Punjab, and Uttarakhand*.

The chart shows the average revenue per panchayat across States in 2022-23. Figures in ₹ lakh



- ❖ The revenue receipts of panchayats formed **just 0.1%** of the State's own revenue in **Andhra Pradesh**.
- ❖ The revenue of panchayats in **Uttar Pradesh formed 2.5%** of the State's own revenue, the **highest among States**.

Functions and Finances of the PRIs in India

- ❖ Until 1992, the responsibilities of the PRIs were primarily focused on sanitation efforts, conservancy services, building and maintaining fair-weather roads, access to domestic water supply, and street lighting.
- ❖ In 1992, the 73rd Amendment introduced a significant change, specifying 29 subjects (outlined in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution) for which Panchayats were entrusted with the responsibility of devising and executing plans aimed at fostering local economic development and social justice. It empowers the local self-governing institutions viz. PRIs.

Fundings of PRIs

- ❖ PRIs have their own resources of tax and non-tax revenue (e.g., fair tax, building tax, fees, rent on land and buildings, water reservoirs, etc.) and capital receipts from the sale of land.
- ❖ They receive funds from the Union and State Government in the form of grants-in-aid/loans for general administration, implementation of developmental schemes/works, and creation of infrastructure in rural areas, etc.
- ❖ Funds are also provided under the recommendations of the State Finance Commission.

Challenges and Constraints highlighted in the report

- ❖ **Limited Own Revenues:** Panchayats rely on limited sources like property taxes, fees, and fines, which constitute a minor share of their revenue.
 - ✓ Own revenues, generated through local taxes, contribute only about 1.1% to their total revenue in 2022-23.
- ❖ **Low Expenditure:** The revenue expenditure of panchayats is less than 0.6% of the gross state domestic product for all states.
- ❖ **Grant Dependency:** Approximately 95% of Panchayats' revenues come in the form of grants from higher government levels, limiting their financial autonomy.
- ❖ **Inter-State Variations in Devolution:** There are significant variations in the devolution of powers and functions to Panchayats across states.
 - ✓ States with higher devolution levels show improved socio-economic outcomes.
- ❖ **Inconsistency in Data:** The assessment of the fiscal health of Panchayati Raj Institutions is hindered by inconsistent data on their finances.
- ❖ **Challenges in Local Tax Revenue Generation:** Panchayats face challenges in generating local tax revenue due to a limited tax base, administrative infrastructure shortages, lack of trained staff, and unclear guidelines.

Way Forward and Conclusion

- ❖ The RBI report suggests several measures to improve the fiscal position of PRIs, such as boosting revenue-generating capabilities, effectively implementing **Article 243 (I)** for fair revenue sharing through established Finance Commissions, strengthening local administrative skills for better financial management, and promoting decentralisation.
- ❖ PRIs bridge the gap between the rural population and the higher levels of government. They are the **most appropriate institutions for grassroots development**.
 - ✓ These need to devise innovative approaches for generating adequate revenue.
- ❖ The recommendations of the **Finance Commissions** and the recent digital initiatives have **collectively enhanced transparency and accountability at the Panchayat level**, thereby contributing significantly to the empowerment of Panchayats.
- ❖ According to **Mahatma Gandhi**, 'Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a Republic or Panchayat having full powers'.

INCREASE IN GENDER BUDGETING

Context: The Interim Budget 2024-25 has increased the Gender Budget.

- ❖ The quantum of Gender Budget reported in **2024-25 is 38.6%** more than budget estimates of 2023-24.
- ❖ The share of Gender Budget in the total Union Budget increased to **6.5% in 2024-25** from 5% in 2023-24.

What is Gender Budgeting?

- ❖ **Gender Budgeting** is a strategy with gender responsive formulation of legislation, policies, plans, programmes, and schemes; resource allocation; implementation; tracking of expenditure, audit, and impact assessment.
- ❖ **It aims** to ensure that public resources are collected and spent efficiently based on differing gender needs and priorities.
- ❖ **Gender Budgets are not separate budgets** for women; neither do they imply that funds be divided into half for men and women or that budgets should be divided into half.
 - ✓ They are attempts to disaggregate the government's budget according to its differential impact on different Genders, and reprioritize allocations to bridge gender gaps.
- ❖ Gender-responsive budgeting in India was adopted in **2005**. It comprises **two parts**:
 - ✓ **Part A:** It encompasses schemes that allot **100 percent** of the funds for women (such as maternity benefits).
 - ✓ **Part B:** It consists of schemes that allocate **at least 30 percent** of funds for women (such as the Mid-Day Meal scheme).

Need for Gender budgeting

- ❖ **Addressing Gender Inequality:** The Gender Gap Report 2023 ranked India at **127 out of 146** countries.
 - ✓ Gender budgeting provides a systematic framework for addressing these inequalities by allocating resources towards programs and initiatives that promote gender equality.
- ❖ **Enhancing Development Outcomes:** Gender equality yields significant development benefits, including poverty reduction, improved health outcomes, and enhanced economic growth.
 - ✓ Gender budgeting helps in mainstreaming gender considerations across all sectors of the economy, thereby contributing to more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.
- ❖ **International Commitments:** India is a signatory to various international agreements and conventions that mandate the promotion of gender equality and women's rights, including the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**. Gender budgeting is necessary to fulfill these commitments.
- ❖ **Ensuring Targeted Interventions:** Gender budgeting helps in identifying and prioritizing the specific needs and priorities of women and girls.

Challenges

- ❖ **Data Availability and Quality:** Gender budgeting relies on accurate gender-disaggregated data to identify specific needs and assess the effectiveness of interventions.
 - ✓ However, data collection mechanisms lack gender disaggregation, making it challenging to formulate evidence-based policies and allocate resources efficiently.
- ❖ **Fragmentation of Initiatives:** Gender-related initiatives in India are fragmented across different ministries and departments, leading to duplication of efforts, inefficiencies, and gaps in service delivery.
- ❖ **Regular monitoring:** Absence of robust monitoring mechanisms to evaluate the accountability and progress of gender budgeting initiatives reduces its effectiveness.

Way Forward

- ❖ Gender budgeting is a critical tool for advancing gender equality, promoting women's empowerment, and achieving inclusive and sustainable development in India.
- ❖ By addressing the challenges in implementation of gender budgeting India can address the root causes of gender disparities and work towards creating a more equitable and just society.

AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN INDIA

Context: This article discusses how the government's financial plans and budget for 2024-25 seem more focused on showing the government in a positive light, rather than addressing the ongoing problems in agriculture.

What are the special provisions for the agricultural sector in the Budget for 2025?

Growth in Agriculture GDP: Agriculture GDP in 2023-24 showed a modest growth of 1.8%, a decrease from 4% in the previous year.

Budget Allocations for Agriculture Departments:

- ❖ The Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare saw a slight increase of 0.6%.
- ❖ The Department of Agricultural Research and Education received Rs 99.4 billion, a marginal increase of 0.7% over the previous year.
- ❖ Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry, and Dairying: Experienced a significant budget increase of 27%.

Overall Budget Support for Agri-food Sector:

Includes PM-KISAN, credit subsidy, and PM-Fasal Bhima Yojana, totaling Rs 5.52 trillion for FY25, slightly less than Rs 5.8 trillion in FY24.

Food and Fertilizer Subsidies:

- ❖ Food subsidy reduced to Rs 2.05 trillion in FY25, a drop of 3.3% from FY24.
- ❖ Fertilizer subsidies decreased from Rs 1.89 trillion in FY24 to Rs 1.64 trillion in FY25.

What does the official data show about the agricultural sector in India?

- ❖ **Decline in Agricultural Prices:** Official data indicates a significant decline in agricultural prices, causing a reduction in farmers' incomes. The sectoral deflator in agriculture decreased from 9.4 in 2013-14 to 3.7 in 2023-24.
- ❖ **Slowed Growth of MSP:** The growth of Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for major crops slowed down considerably, from an 8-9% annual increase between 2003-04 and 2012-13 to about 5% between 2013-14 and 2023-24.
- ❖ **Drop in Farmers' Incomes:** Despite a promise to double farmers' real incomes from 2015 to 2022, incomes from cultivation actually fell by about 1.4% between 2012-13 and 2018-19.
- ❖ **Rising Rural Unemployment:** Rural unemployment rates increased, with a notable rise from 2011-12 to 2018-19, and remained higher in 2022-23 compared to 2011-12.
- ❖ **Stagnation of Rural Wages:** Real wages in rural India have not increased since 2016-17 and even decreased after 2020-21.

- ❖ **Lack of Capital Investment:** Capital investment in agriculture and allied sectors didn't increase. Much of the long-term bank credit meant for agriculture was diverted to corporates and agri-business firms as short-term loans.

What are the issues with the government's report on the agricultural sector in India?

- ❖ **Selective Data Presentation:** The government's report emphasizes the increase in agricultural production but neglects the overall decline in growth rates. For example, growth rates dropped from 3.1% annually (2003-04 to 2010-11) to 2.7% (2011-12 to 2022-23).
- ❖ **Ignoring Yield Decline:** The report omits the significant fall in yield growth rates, from 3.3% per year to 1.6% per year in the same periods.
- ❖ **Budget Cuts in Agriculture:** The 2024-25 budget plans to reduce spending in crucial agricultural areas, such as fertilizer subsidies (from ₹1.9 lakh crore to ₹1.6 lakh crore) and rural infrastructure projects.
- ❖ **No Clear Strategy for Growth:** The report and the budget lack a comprehensive plan to revive agricultural growth, with no significant measures to address the ongoing decline.
- ❖ **Unchanged Support Despite Inflation:** The PM-Kisan scheme's allocations remain the same as in 2019, not accounting for inflation, which reduces the real value of cash transfers to farmers.

What should be done?

- ❖ **Rationalize Food Subsidy:** Implement rationalization of the food subsidy system, similar to the strategy used by former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS). This could save around Rs 50,000 crore.
- ❖ **Redirect Subsidy Savings:** Use the funds saved from food subsidy rationalization for enhancing agricultural research and development, particularly in areas like micro-irrigation.
- ❖ **Reform Fertilizer Subsidies:** Shift from subsidizing the price of urea to direct cash transfers to farmers. This approach is expected to save Rs 30,000-40,000 crore, which can be reinvested in agricultural development programs like PM-KISAN.
- ❖ **Focus on Sustainable Agriculture:** Allocate the saved funds towards sustainable agriculture practices, which is crucial for ensuring food security under the challenges of climate change.

PRADHAN MANTRI MATSYA KISAN SAMRIDHI SAH-YOJANA

Context: The Union Cabinet approved the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)**.

- ❖ It is a **sub scheme** under the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana**, for the **micro and small enterprises** operating in the fisheries sector with an expected investment of ₹6,000 crore in the next four years.
- ❖ The sub-scheme PM-MKSSY is with **50% public finance**, including the World Bank and the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) external financing, and the rest 50% investment from the **private sector leverage**.
- ❖ It will be implemented **for four years from 2023-24 to 2026-27** across all the States and union territories.
- ❖ **Significance:** Fishers, aquaculture farmers, fish workers and fish vendors are expected to benefit from the scheme.
 - ✓ It is aimed at **gradual formalisation** of the fisheries sector and enhanced access to institutional credit.

Fisheries Sector of India

- ❖ India is the **3rd largest fish producing and 2nd largest aquaculture** producing nation in the world.
- ❖ India is the **4th largest exporter** of fish and fisheries products with a growth in exports of **26.73%** in terms of quantity between FY 2021-22 and FY 2022-23.
- ❖ In terms of employment, the sunrise sector supports the livelihood of over 30 Mn people in India.

- ❖ The Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying has implemented a flagship scheme “**Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)**”- to bring about Blue Revolution through sustainable and responsible development of the fisheries sector in India.

Challenges of the Fisheries Sector in India

- ❖ **Overfishing:** Overexploitation of fish stocks due to excessive fishing pressure is a significant challenge.
- ❖ **Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing:** IUU fishing undermines efforts to manage and conserve fish stocks.
 - ✓ It includes activities such as fishing without proper authorization, disregarding catch limits, and using banned fishing gear.
- ❖ **Lack of Infrastructure and Technology:** Inadequate infrastructure and outdated fishing technology hinder the efficiency and productivity of the fisheries sector.
 - ✓ Poor storage and transportation facilities lead to post-harvest losses, while outdated fishing vessels and gear limit the ability of fishers to catch fish sustainably.
- ❖ **Poor Fisheries Management:** Limited enforcement of regulations, lack of comprehensive data on fish stocks, and inadequate monitoring and control measures exacerbate the problem of overfishing and IUU fishing.
- ❖ **Pollution and Habitat Destruction:** Pollution from industrial activities, coastal development, and agricultural runoff poses a threat to marine and freshwater habitats.
 - ✓ Similarly, habitat destruction through activities such as coastal reclamation, mangrove deforestation, and dredging further exacerbates the loss of valuable fish habitats.
- ❖ **Climate Change:** Climate change is altering oceanic and freshwater environments, affecting fish distribution, migration patterns, and reproductive cycles.
 - ✓ Rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, and extreme weather events can disrupt fish populations and destabilize fisheries ecosystems.
- ❖ **Socio-economic Issues:** Poverty, lack of alternative livelihood options, and unequal distribution of resources contribute to the vulnerability of fishing communities.
 - ✓ Many small-scale fishers face challenges accessing credit, markets, and social services, exacerbating their socio-economic marginalization.

Government Initiatives for the Growth of the Sector

- ❖ **National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB):** Established in 2006, NFDB serves as the apex body for the planning and promotion of fisheries development in India.
 - ✓ It implements various schemes and programs aimed at enhancing fish production, improving infrastructure, and providing support to fishers and fish farmers.
- ❖ **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY):** Launched in 2020, PMMSY is a flagship scheme aimed at boosting fish production and doubling farmers' income.
 - ✓ It focuses on modernizing fisheries infrastructure, promoting sustainable aquaculture practices, improving post-harvest management, and enhancing the livelihoods of fishers and fish farmers.
- ❖ **Blue Revolution:** Launched in 2015, the Blue Revolution aims to promote sustainable development and management of the fisheries sector.
 - ✓ It focuses on increasing fish production and productivity through the adoption of modern technologies, enhancing infrastructure facilities, promoting entrepreneurship, and strengthening fisheries governance.
- ❖ **Sagarmala Programme:** The Sagarmala Programme, launched in 2015, aims to promote port-led development and unlock the potential of India's maritime sector.
 - ✓ It includes initiatives to develop fishing harbors, cold chain infrastructure, and fish processing facilities to support the growth of the fisheries sector.
- ❖ **National Fisheries Policy:** The Government of India formulated the National Fisheries Policy in 2020 to provide a comprehensive framework for the sustainable development of the fisheries sector.

- ✓ The policy focuses on promoting responsible fisheries management, conserving aquatic biodiversity, enhancing fish production, and improving the socio-economic status of fishers and fish farmers.
- ❖ **Fish Farmers Development Agencies (FFDAs):** The Government has established FFDAs at the district level to provide technical guidance, training, and extension services to fish farmers.
 - ✓ These agencies play a crucial role in disseminating knowledge about modern aquaculture practices, facilitating access to credit and inputs, and promoting entrepreneurship in the fisheries sector.
- ❖ **Coastal Aquaculture Authority (CAA):** The CAA regulates and promotes coastal aquaculture activities to ensure sustainable development and environmental conservation.
 - ✓ It formulates guidelines for shrimp farming, regulates the use of coastal land for aquaculture purposes, and monitors compliance with environmental norms to prevent adverse impacts on coastal ecosystems.

Way Ahead

- ❖ Addressing the challenges requires coordinated efforts from government agencies, fishery stakeholders, civil society organizations, and the private sector.
- ❖ Implementing sustainable fisheries management practices, investing in infrastructure and technology, strengthening governance frameworks, promoting community-based approaches, and mitigating the impacts of climate change are essential steps towards ensuring the long-term viability and resilience of India's fisheries sector.

MGNREGA SCHEME

Context: Recently, the Union Budget allocated ₹60,000 crore for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) Scheme for 2023-24.

- ❖ It is 18% lower than the budget estimates for the current year (₹73,000 crore), and 33% lower than the revised estimates (₹89,000 crore) for the scheme.

MGNREGA Scheme

- ❖ It is an employment scheme by the **Ministry of Rural Development**.
- ❖ It provides at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled work.

Eligibility:

- ❖ Any Indian citizen above the age of 18 years and residing in a rural area can apply to this scheme.
- ❖ The applicant receives guaranteed employment within 15 days from the date of application.

Mode of Payment:

- ❖ The wage is deposited directly in the Bank Account/Post Office Account of the applicant.
 - ✓ Wages are paid within a week, or fifteen days at most.
- ❖ Men and Women are paid equally.
- ❖ It has been credited with having a positive impact on income per household, agricultural productivity, and production-related expenditure.
- ❖ MGNREGA **covers the entire country** with the **exception of districts that have a hundred percent urban population**.

Associated Issues:

- ❖ **Not fulfilling the core demand:** The Economic Survey 2022-23 highlighted that 6.49 crore households demanded work under it.
 - ✓ Of these, 6.48 crore households were offered employment by the government and 5.7 crore actually availed it.

- ❖ **Wage Payment Delays:** There have been instances of delayed wage payments. As of November 26, 2021, State governments were facing a shortage of ₹9,682 crore and 100% of the allocated funds for the year had been exhausted before the conclusion of the year.
- ❖ **Corruption and Audit:** The scheme's inbuilt mechanism to combat corruption — the social audit units meant to detect any cases of malpractice — has not been backed by the effective recovery of embezzled funds.

INDIA FACES WTO PRESSURE ON FARM SUBSIDIES

Context: The government acceding to the protesting farmers demand for a legal guarantee of MSP) is somewhat limited given India is under pressure on its farm subsidies at the WTO.

About:

The Cairns Group – comprising Australia, Brazil and Canada among others members — have claimed that India's public stockholding (PSH) programme is highly subsidised and the farm support that India gives is "distorting" global food prices and "hurting" food security of other countries.

WTOs Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)

It was designed to remove trade barriers and to encourage transparent market access and integration of global markets.

AoA stands on 3 pillars:

(1) Domestic Support: Subsidies such as guaranteed minimum price or input subsidies which are direct and specific to a product.

This can be divided into:

- ❖ **Green Box:** Subsidies which are not or least market distorting. It includes measures such as income-support payments, safety-net programs, payments under environmental programs and agricultural research and development subsidies.
- ❖ **Blue Box:** These production-limiting subsidies cover payments based on acreage, yield or number of livestock in a base year. The government is given the room to fix 'targets price' if the 'market prices' are lower than the farm prices.
- ❖ **Amber Box:** Those are trade distorting subsidies which need to be curbed. These reduction commitments are expressed in terms of a "Total Aggregate Measurement of Support" (Total AMS) which includes all supports.
- ❖ These supports are subject to limits- "De minimis". This threshold is generally 5% of the value of agricultural production for developed countries, 10% for most developing countries.
- ❖ Peace Clause is a product of the Bali Summit, 2013. Article 13 of AoA contains a "due restraint" or "peace clause" which controls the application of other WTO agreements to subsidies.

(2) Market Access requires that tariffs, which have been fixed (like custom duties) by individual countries, should be cut progressively to facilitate free trade.

It also encompasses removal of non-tariff barriers (e.g. quotas on import).

(3) Export subsidies are limited to four situations:

- a) product-specific reduction commitments within the limits;
- b) any excess of budgetary outlays for export subsidies;
- c) export subsidies consistent with the special and differential treatment provision; and
- d) export subsidies other than those subject to reduction commitments provided that they are in conformity with the anti-circumvention disciplines of Article 10 of the Agreement on Agriculture.

A Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM) was designed as a safety valve, allowing developing countries to impose additional (temporary) safeguard duties in the event of an abnormal surge in imports or the entry of unusually cheap imports.

Challenges for India at WTO regarding subsidies

Agriculture: India's extensive agricultural subsidies are often deemed WTO-noncompliant, exceeding allowed limits and distorting global markets.

- ❖ Examples include minimum support prices, input subsidies, and export subsidies. Developed countries like the US and EU challenge these at the WTO, arguing they harm global farmers.

Industrial subsidies: Some Indian industrial subsidies may also be challenged, particularly those deemed to have specific export promotion or trade-distorting effects.

- ❖ Examples include the Production Linked Incentive(PLI) scheme for electronic goods.
- ❖ **Developed vs. developing country distinctions:** India advocates for fairer treatment based on development levels, arguing that the subsidy rules need to consider the needs of developing countries like India to promote economic growth and support vulnerable sectors.
- ❖ **Complexities of subsidy rules:** WTO rules around subsidies are complex and open to interpretation, leading to disputes and protracted litigation.
- ❖ **Negotiation difficulties:** Achieving consensus-based solutions at the WTO is often challenging, with developed and developing countries having differing priorities and interests.
- ❖ **Geopolitical dynamics:** The broader geopolitical context can influence the willingness of countries to engage constructively in subsidy negotiations.

Ongoing efforts by India:

- ❖ To attain greater flexibility to offer farm support, India is in the process of pushing for a permanent solution at the upcoming inter-ministerial summit at Abu Dhabi from February 26 to 29.
- ❖ India is not only pushing for measures to amend the formula to calculate the food subsidy cap but also to include programmes implemented after 2013 under the ambit of 'Peace Clause'.

Way Ahead:

- ❖ Addressing subsidy concerns will be crucial for India to participate effectively in the global trading system and ensure a level playing field for its exports.
- ❖ India needs to actively engage in WTO negotiations, seeking reforms that address its concerns about developed country subsidies while also working towards greater transparency and compliance with its own subsidy obligations.
- ❖ Exploring alternative frameworks like plurilateral agreements or sectoral negotiations might be needed to find workable solutions.

POTENTIAL OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN INDIA

Context: Union Minister Smriti Irani said that spiritual tourism has a high potential for tourist footfall and future investment in India.

About

- ❖ Religious/Spiritual tourism, a subset of cultural tourism, holds vast unrealized potential for destinations worldwide.
- ❖ As an intricate interplay between spirituality, history, and culture, it offers a unique opportunity to attract a diverse range of travelers seeking meaningful experiences.

Prospects of Spiritual Tourism in India

- ❖ **Diverse Religious Heritage:** India is home to a multitude of religions, each with its own sacred sites, rituals, and traditions. This diversity attracts tourists from around the world.
- ❖ **Wellness Tourism Integration:** India's spiritual traditions are closely linked with practices promoting health and wellness, such as yoga, Ayurveda, and meditation.
- ❖ **Historical Significance:** Many of India's religious sites have deep historical significance, dating back centuries. These sites offer visitors a glimpse into the country's rich past.
- ❖ **Pilgrimage Circuits:** India is home to numerous pilgrimage circuits that connect multiple religious sites within a region. Examples include the Char Dham Yatra in the Himalayas, the Golden Temple circuit in Punjab, and the Buddhist circuit in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Benefits of Promoting religious tourism

- ❖ **Economic Growth:** The popular religious centers in India attract annual tourist traffic of 10-30 million.
- ❖ Creation of a new religious tourist center with improved infrastructure can create a large economic impact.
- ❖ **Job Creation:** Growth in religious tourism leads to the creation of employment opportunities in various sectors, including hospitality, transportation, tour guiding, and handicrafts.
- ❖ **Cultural Exchange:** Religious tourism promotes cultural exchange and understanding between visitors and local communities.
- ❖ **Enhanced Connectivity:** Development of new religious tourist centers with improved connectivity and infrastructure, like Ayodhya, can have a significant economic impact.
- ❖ **Preservation of Heritage:** Promoting religious tourism contributes to the preservation of cultural and historical heritage at religious sites.

Challenges in Spiritual Tourism

- ❖ **Infrastructure Deficits:** Many religious sites lack adequate infrastructure such as transportation, accommodation, and sanitation facilities, hindering the tourist experience.
- ❖ **Maintenance and Conservation:** Historical religious sites require extensive maintenance and conservation efforts due to their significance, putting a strain on local resources and posing challenges for their preservation.
- ❖ **Misconceptions about Religious Tourism:** Many people perceive religious tourism as solely for believers, overlooking its appeal to those interested in cultural and historical exploration.
- ❖ **Waste Management:** Increased tourist activity at religious sites can lead to environmental degradation and waste management challenges. Proper waste management systems need to be implemented to preserve the sanctity of these sites and protect the surrounding environment.
- ❖ **Problem of Carrying Capacity:** Certain religious centers experience short but intense tourist seasons, leading to overcrowding and straining local infrastructure.
- ❖ The Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand causes pressure on transport infrastructure and leads to safety hazards like landslides during the monsoon season.
- ❖ **Commercialization Concerns:** There is a risk of over-commercialization of religious sites, which can detract from their spiritual essence and alienate both local religious communities and tourists seeking authentic experiences.

Government Steps

- ❖ Spiritual projects across India such as the Kashi Corridor, the Mahakal Corridor and the Ram Temple in Ayodhya are attracting a high volume of tourists and have been helping boost the local economy.
- ❖ **Swadesh Darshan scheme:** The objective of the scheme is to develop sustainable and responsible destinations following a tourist & destination-centric approach.
- ❖ Under the scheme thematic circuits are identified including Buddhist Circuit, Krishna Circuit, Ramayana Circuit, Spiritual Circuit, Sufi Circuit, Tirthankar Circuit.
- ❖ National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD): It was launched in 2015 to identify and develop pilgrim sites across the country to promote religious tourism.
- ❖ Under the scheme religious cities/sites in different States are identified like Kedarnath (Uttarakhand), Dwaraka (Gujarat), Amritsar (Punjab), Kamakhya (Assam), Varanasi and Mathura (Uttar Pradesh) etc.

Way ahead

- ❖ The unrealized potential of religious tourism is a compelling prospect for destinations seeking to diversify their offerings and boost local economies.
- ❖ By addressing infrastructure, preservation, marketing, and education, governments and local communities can transform religious sites into thriving hubs of cultural and spiritual exploration.
- ❖ Collaborative efforts between travel agencies, religious organizations, and cultural bodies can create comprehensive packages that cater to different interests, including heritage tours, art exhibitions, and culinary experiences.

INDIA'S ECONOMIC POLICY AGENDA

Context: The Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission recently stressed on the reform agenda to 10% growth for the Indian Economy.

Status of India's Economy at Present

- ❖ **GDP Growth:** India's GDP growth rate declined annually from 2016-17, and fell below 3.5% in the fourth quarter of 2019-20.
 - ✓ The GDP growth rate has been declining since 2016.
 - ✓ However, the Indian economy is expected to recover with a GDP growth forecast for FY24 to be in the range of 6-6.8%.
 - ✓ The IMF has projected India's real GDP growth as 6.7% for 2023-24 and 6.5% for 2024-25.
- ❖ **Fiscal Deficit:** The interim Budget signals significant cutbacks in public expenditures, slashing effective capital expenditure by ₹1 lakh crore and reducing welfare and subsidy allocations.
 - ✓ The fiscal deficit, which was expanded to 9.2% of GDP in 2020-21 to deal with the pandemic-induced recession, would be brought down to 5.8% by the end of the current financial year and 5.1% by next year to reach the targeted 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26.
- ❖ **Economic Ranking:** Recent **IMF** data show that India is **ranked 4th** in world's GDP rankings in 2024, just **after the USA, China and Germany**.
 - ✓ India's economy boasts diversity and swift growth, fuelled by key sectors such as **information technology, services, agriculture, and manufacturing**.
- ❖ **Economic Performance:** India aims to become a **\$5 trillion economy by 2024** has been questioned due to the lack of a coherent policy structure.

Current Policies to Boost India's Economy

- ❖ **India's Evolving and Dynamic Policy Framework:** It is designed to ease the entry of foreign direct investment, streamline the financial system, dismantle redundant procedures and add transparency to the process of **doing business**.
 - ✓ As per the **World Bank's Ease of Doing Business**, India is ranked **63 among 190 economies**.
- ❖ **Diversification:** India has implemented a range of policy initiatives in the areas of sustainable development, infrastructural improvements, banking and financial services, job creation, digital transformation, manufacturing and services industries in an effort **to build a strong base for the Indian economy**.
- ❖ **Priority:** It is keeping India on track as **one of the world's fastest growing economies** so it can become the **second largest economy in the world by 2050**.
- ❖ **Formalisation:** India aims to expand the reach of the formal economy, thereby **improving the informal sector's efficiencies** and **increasing the country's tax base**.
 - ✓ It has taken measures to **improve capacity to spend in the rural sector**, infrastructure creation, and inviting foreign investments.
- ❖ **Inclusive Growth:** India has the **twin objectives** of inclusive growth and financial empowerment as the centrepiece of its policy agenda for the country's growth.
- ❖ **Climate related Policy:** Achieving **net-zero emissions by 2070** could boost India's economy by as much as **4.7%** above the projected baseline growth in GDP terms by **2036**.

Emerging Challenges

- ❖ **Disruption caused by the pandemic:** India's potential growth may have slowed to **6% (from 7.1% YoY estimated in 2017)** due to longer-than-expected disruption caused by the pandemic, balance-sheet concerns and a modest policy response by the government.

- ❖ **Regulatory Issues:** These are related to trade policy, labour law implementation, and the long standing, very long-term issue of the land markets.
 - ✓ India's economic growth is facing potential risks **due to reform and policy barriers**, according to research by **Moody's Investors Service**.
- ❖ **Geopolitical conflicts:** There are **many ongoing crises** in the world that are impacting the global supply chain that affects the emerging economy and market like India.
 - ✓ End of **hyper globalisation** in global manufacturing, **energy transition** challenge, and advent of **Artificial Intelligence**.

Future Outlook:

- ❖ Challenges before the economy are complex and multifaceted, and it requires a **combination of policy interventions, institutional reforms, and private sector initiatives**.
- ❖ Political stability and policy consistency can pave the way for India's ascent to becoming the third-largest economy at a time of geopolitical uncertainties and risks to economic growth.

RISE OF 'INTELLIGENCE DIPLOMACY' IN A TIME OF SECURITY CHALLENGES

Context: Three major events drew attention to the expanding **Indian diplomatic footprint**.

Major Events: Indian Diplomatic Footprint

The annual Raisina Dialogue: It was hosted by the Observer Research Foundation and the Ministry of External Affairs

- ❖ It brings together ministers, officials, scholars, and policy researchers from across the world to promote an India-centred global agenda.
- ❖ It has become a "must-go" event for the global strategic community interested in India.

Milan Exercise: The biennial Multilateral Naval Exercise (Milan) in the Bay of Bengal attracts naval leaders from far and wide for professional exchanges on maritime issues.

- ❖ The Milan exercise is part of a much older naval diplomacy.
- ❖ Navies have always been flexible instruments for sovereigns in power projection and diplomacy.
- ❖ The annual Malabar exercises with the US and the multilateral Milan exercises were among the first initiatives of the Indian Navy in the early 1990s.
- ❖ Today, they together showcase India's new strategic salience in the Indo-Pacific.

Gathering of top intelligence officials: "Intelligence diplomacy" is about sharing information with allied governments and their security agencies.

- ❖ The US, for example, has a tight circle of intelligence gathering and sharing with its Anglo-Saxon allies — Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.
- ❖ Similar to the "Five Eyes" arrangement are intelligence-sharing networks among the NATO allies and the EU partners.
- ❖ For India, the emerging "intelligence diplomacy" could be as consequential as the "discourse diplomacy" of the Raisina Dialogue and the "naval diplomacy" of the Milan exercises.

Importance and Need

- ❖ As the volume of international engagements dramatically expanded in the 21st century, there has been a rapid growth in the size of the global communities interested in international commercial, political, technological and military affairs.
- ❖ This has translated into a proliferation of think tanks and media outlets discussing foreign and security outlets.
- ❖ The deepening military crises worldwide, the new stresses on the global economic order and the return of great power rivalry have created new risks to global peace and prosperity.
- ❖ They have raised the value of the forums that facilitate valuable exchange of notes among national security professionals.

- ❖ The intelligence agencies are an essential part of the national security establishment along with the diplomatic community and the armed forces.
 - ✓ As the first line of defence against internal and external threats, intelligence has been a critical part of statecraft since ancient times.
 - ✓ The role of intelligence in national security has grown significantly in recent years thanks to the rise of international terrorism, the growth of cross-border criminal networks, renewed economic competition, the increasing need to protect intellectual property, the return of great power rivalry, and the impact of new technologies that are reshaping the domestic and global dynamics of an interconnected international society.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- ❖ The regular exchanges between the Indian agencies and their counterparts from like-minded countries on the margins of the Raisina Dialogue underline Delhi's shift from the isolationism of the later Cold War decades to building productive intelligence partnerships today.
- ❖ India's intelligence diplomacy aligns with India's current strategy of building regional and global coalitions.
- ❖ It is also an important part of modernising India's spying agencies — the Intelligence Bureau and its many offspring — which date back to the late 19th century.

CHALLENGES WITH INDIA'S SERVICE-DRIVEN GROWTH – WHY INDIA NEEDS DEEP INDUSTRIALIZATION

Context: The article discusses India's struggle with industrial growth and high unemployment. It critiques the focus on high-skill, service-based growth, arguing it increases inequality and neglects mass education, which is essential for successful industrialization and overall economic development. Why India needs deep industrialization

What are The Factors Affecting India's Industrial Growth?

- ❖ **Stagnant Manufacturing Sector:** Manufacturing has consistently been below 20% in output and employment for 75 years.
- ❖ **Ineffective 1991 Reforms:** These reforms, aimed at labor-intensive industrialization, failed to significantly boost the manufacturing sector.
- ❖ **High Unemployment:** Persistent unemployment issues, including chronic disguised unemployment, reflect industrial challenges.
- ❖ **Widening Trade Deficit:** Driven by an increase in imported goods, indicating a lack of domestic manufacturing capacity.
- ❖ **Shift to Service-Based Growth:** Since the late 1980s, the focus has been on high-skill, service-driven growth, which hasn't absorbed labor from agriculture effectively.
- ❖ **Neglect of Mass Education:** Emphasis on higher education at the expense of mass schooling has led to a workforce not adequately equipped for industrial jobs.
- ❖ **Cultural Impact on Industrial Growth:** Cultural factors, such as the undervaluing of certain vocational skills (like electrical and welding work), have hindered the development of the manufacturing sector.

Why is Deep Industrialisation Important for India?

- ❖ **Broad-based Employment:** Deep industrialization offers more employment opportunities, absorbing labor from sectors like agriculture, unlike the limited absorption capacity of service-driven growth.
- ❖ **Economic Stability:** A strong industrial base can lead to more stable economic growth and reduce dependence on imports, addressing India's widening trade deficit.
- ❖ **Skill Development:** Industrial growth encourages the development of a wide range of skills, benefiting from a focus on both vocational and higher education.
- ❖ **Innovation and Efficiency:** Deep industrialization fosters innovation, leading to increased efficiency and competitiveness in the global market.

What are The Challenges with India's Service-Driven Growth?

- ❖ **Limited Employment Absorption:** Service-driven growth since the late 1980s couldn't adequately absorb labor exiting agriculture, unlike manufacturing.
- ❖ **Requirement for High Skills:** The service sector demands a highly skilled workforce, which India struggles to supply due to educational inequalities.
- ❖ **Increased Inequality:** Service sector growth leads to higher inequality. The Gini index for regular wages in services is 44, compared to 35 in manufacturing.
- ❖ **Neglect of Mass Education:** A focus on higher education over mass schooling contributed to a workforce ill-equipped for service sector jobs.
- ❖ **Elite Dominance:** Higher education institutions fostered elites who advanced in the IT sector but contributed to stagnation in broader industrial areas.
- ❖ **Limited Rural Entrepreneurship:** Compared to countries like China, India's poor human capital endowment in rural areas hampers entrepreneurship, crucial for service sector growth.

What Should be Done?

- ❖ **Diversify Industrial Strategy:** Instead of solely focusing on high-skill, service-driven growth, India should diversify its industrial strategy to include and boost manufacturing.
- ❖ **Address Educational Inequality:** Tackling the disparity in education quality between rural and urban areas, and among different social classes, is vital to creating a more equitable and capable workforce.
- ❖ **Support Rural Entrepreneurship:** Encouraging entrepreneurship in rural areas can help absorb labor from agriculture and contribute to more balanced economic growth.
- ❖ **Cultural Shift in Work Value:** Cultivating a culture that respects and values all forms of work, including manual and vocational labor, is essential for comprehensive industrial development.

FINANCIAL DEVOLUTION AMONG STATES

Context: Recently various South Indian States raised issues about their less than proportionate share of receipt in tax revenue when compared to their contribution towards tax collection.

About the Financial Devolution Among States

- ❖ It is a critical aspect of **federalism in India** involving the **distribution of financial resources** from the **Union government to the states**, enabling them to meet their expenditure requirements and provide public services.
 - ✓ The process of financial devolution is **guided by the Finance Commission (FC)**.

The Divisible Pool of Taxes:

- ❖ **Article 270** of the Constitution provides for the scheme of distribution of **net tax proceeds collected by the Union Government** between the Centre and the States.
- ❖ These include **corporation tax, personal income tax, Central GST**, and the **Centre's IGST** etc.
 - ✓ It **does not include cess and surcharge** that are levied by the Union Government.
- ❖ States are provided **grants-in-aid** as per the recommendation of the FC, apart from the share of taxes.

Role of 15th Finance Commission

- ❖ **Vertical Devolution:** The FC is responsible for recommending the **distribution of the net proceeds of taxes of the Union between the Union and the States**, commonly referred to as vertical devolution.
- ❖ **Horizontal Devolution:** The FC determines the **allocation between the States of the respective shares of such proceeds**, known as horizontal devolution.
- ❖ **Criteria For Horizontal Devolution:**
- ❖ **Income distance:** It is the distance of a State's income from the State with the highest per capita income.
 - States with lower per capita income are given a higher share to maintain equity among States.

- ✓ **Forest and Ecology:** The share of dense forest of each State in the aggregate dense forest of all the States.
- ❖ Currently, **41% of taxes** collected by the Union Government (as per the **recommendation** of 15th Finance Commission) is devolved in 14 installments among States during a fiscal year.

Challenges and Concerns

- ❖ **Disproportionate Share of Receipt in Tax Revenue:** Various Opposition-ruled States, especially from south India, have claimed that they have not been receiving their fair share as per the present scheme of financial devolution.
 - ✓ **Cess and surcharge** collected by the Union government is estimated at around 23% of its gross tax receipts for 2024-25, which does **not form part of the divisible pool** and hence not shared with the States.
- ❖ **Reduction in Financial Transfers to States:** Since the start of the Fourteenth Finance Commission award period (2015-16), the Union government has been reducing **financial** transfers to States.
 - ✓ This is particularly strange given that the **Fourteenth Finance Commission** recommended devolving **42% of Union tax revenues** to States, which is a **10 percentage points increase over the 13th Finance Commission's** recommendation.
- ❖ **State Wise Variations:** The **amount** each State gets back for every rupee they contribute to Central taxes shows steep variation.
 - ✓ It can be seen that industrially developed States received much less than a rupee for every rupee they contributed as against States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.
- ❖ The percentage share in the divisible pool of taxes has been reducing for southern States over the last six FCs.
- ❖ It is **attributable** to the higher weightage being given for equity (income gap) and needs (population, area and forest) than efficiency (demographic performance and tax effort).
- ❖ **Increase in Union Government's Discretionary Expenditure:** The Union government not only reduced **the** financial transfers to States but also increased its own total revenue to increase its discretionary expenditure.
 - ✓ The discretionary expenditures of the Union government are not being routed through the **States' Budgets**, and, therefore, can impact different States in different ways.
- ❖ **Decline in States' Share in Gross Revenue:** One of the reasons for the States' share in gross revenue declining during this period is that the net tax revenue is arrived at after deducting the revenue collections under cess and surcharge.
- ❖ **Against the Federal Spirit:** The Constitutional scheme has always favoured a strong centre in **legislative**, administrative and financial relations.
 - ✓ However, federalism is a basic feature and it is important that States don't feel short-changed when it comes to distribution of resources.

Way Forward

- ❖ The **States** generate around 40% of the revenue and bear around 60% of the expenditure. It is the responsibility of all States to contribute towards the more equitable development of our country.
- ❖ **However**, there are **three important reforms** that may be considered for **maintaining the balance between equity and federalism** while sharing revenue:
 - ✓ The **divisible pool can be enlarged** by including some portion of cess and surcharge in it.
 - ✓ The **weightage for efficiency criteria in horizontal devolution** should be increased.
 - ✓ Similar to the GST Council, **a more formal arrangement for the participation of States** in the constitution and the working of the FC should be considered.

CHANGING THE GROWTH PARADIGM

Context: Recently, it is proposed to change the pattern of economic growth in India .

About Economic Growth

- ❖ Economic growth refers to an increase in the size of a country's economy over a period of time. The size of an economy is typically measured by the total production of goods and services in the economy, which is called **gross domestic product (GDP)**
 - ✓ GDP is the total monetary or market value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific time period.
- ❖ The term economic growth is defined as the process whereby the country's real national and per capita income increases over a long period of time.

Current Scenario

- ❖ GDP growth has become the dominant measure of the health of all economies.
- ❖ The dominant paradigm is, first, increase the size of the pie before its redistribution.
- ❖ It has **replaced "socialist" models** which were concerned with conditions at the bottom.
- ❖ All Indian governments, since the liberalisation of the economy in 1991, **have focused on GDP**.
- ❖ As per the First Advance Estimates of National Income of FY 2023-24, India's Real GDP is projected to grow at 7.3 per cent.
 - ✓ This was stated in the Macro-Economic Framework Statement 2024-25.
- ❖ As per the IMF, India is likely to become the **third-largest economy in 2027** in USD at market exchange rate.
 - ✓ It also estimates that India's contribution to global growth **will rise by 200 basis points in 5 years**.

Challenges and Concerns

- ❖ GDP is not a measure of the overall standard of living or well-being of a country.
- ❖ It does not capture things that may be deemed important to general well-being.
 - ✓ For example, increased output may come at the **cost of environmental damage or other external costs** such as noise.
 - ✓ Or it might involve the **reduction of leisure time** or the depletion of nonrenewable natural resources.
 - ✓ The **quality of life** may also depend on the **distribution of GDP** among the residents of a country, not just the overall level.
- ❖ India is becoming one of the most unequal countries in the world with this flawed model of economic progress.
- ❖ They need decent jobs, which the Indian economy has not provided despite impressive growth of GDP.

Fossil Fuels and the Modern Economy

- ❖ Fossil fuels are an integral part of the global economy, with significant economic importance.
- ❖ **Fossil fuels(including coal, oil, and natural gas)** in the **modern economy** are used in the production and the distribution of four foundational materials for modern civilization: steel, concrete, plastics, and food.
- ❖ Fossil fuels are key to industrialization and rising prosperity, but their impact on health and the climate are concerning .

Suggestions and Way Forward

- ❖ India must address the global climate crisis while growing its own economy to catch-up with developed countries.
- ❖ India must find a new paradigm of progress, for itself and for the world, for more **inclusive and environmentally sustainable growth**.
- ❖ India's policymakers must free themselves from western-dominated theories of economics.
- ❖ Rural Bharat can be a university for the world, producing innovations in institutions and policies for inclusive and sustainable growth.

- ✓ Systems science reveals that local systems solutions, cooperatively developed by communities in their own villages and towns, are the way to solve global systemic problems of climate change and inequitable economic growth.
- ❖ There is a need to focus more on **Economic development** which generally refers to the sustained, concerted endeavor of policymakers and community to promote the standard of living and economic condition in a country.
 - ✓ Economic development refers to the total quality of life of the population.
 - It includes the standard of its education, medical care, the diet, etc.
 - The greater a country's economic development, the better the living standard of people is.

APEDA FORMS DEDICATED ORGANIC PROMOTION DIVISION

Context: Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) has created a dedicated organic promotion division for the promotion of organic exports.

Organic Farming in India

- ❖ India occupies fifth place globally with a total area of 2.66 million hectares in organic farming.
- ❖ Madhya Pradesh has the largest area under organic certification followed by Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Karnataka.
- ❖ Sikkim is India's first fully organic state, with implementing organic practices on around 75,000 hectares of agricultural land.
- ❖ In 2022-23, India produced around 2.9 million metric tonnes of certified organic products like oil seeds, cereals and millets, cotton, pulses among others.
- ❖ The exports of India's organic products stood at \$708 million in 2022-23 and considering the global market size of around \$138 billion, there is a tremendous scope to increase the organic exports in the near future.

Advantages of Organic Farming

- ❖ **Healthier Food Products:** Organic farming avoids the use of synthetic fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides etc. This results in food products that are free from harmful chemical residues with higher levels of essential nutrients.
- ❖ **Enhanced Soil Health:** Organic farming methods focus on building and maintaining soil health by increasing organic matter content, microbial activity, and nutrient cycling.
- ❖ **Economic Opportunities:** Organic farming provides economic benefits to farmers through premium prices for organic products, access to niche markets, and reduced input costs over the long term.
- ❖ **Climate Change Mitigation:** Organic farming practices such as composting and organic soil management contribute to carbon sequestration in the soil, helping to mitigate climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- ❖ **Biodiversity Conservation:** Organic farming practices support biodiversity by creating habitats for beneficial insects, birds, and other wildlife.

Challenges in Organic Farming

- ❖ **Yield Limitations:** Organic farming typically yields lower outputs compared to conventional farming methods, at least in the short term.
- ❖ **Weed Control:** Weed management is a significant challenge in organic farming, as synthetic herbicides cannot be used. Organic farmers rely on methods such as manual weeding, mulching, and cover cropping, which is labor-intensive and time-consuming.
- ❖ **Access to Organic Inputs:** Organic farmers face difficulties in accessing certified organic seeds, fertilizers, and other inputs, especially in remote or underdeveloped regions.
- ❖ **Certification and Compliance:** Obtaining organic certification requires adherence to strict standards and regulations, which is complex and costly for farmers, especially smallholders.

Organic Certifications Systems in India

- ❖ **National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP):** It is under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry for development of the export market.
- ❖ It is a third party certification programme where the production and handling of activities at all stages such as production, processing, trading and export requirements for organic products is covered.
- ❖ **Participatory Guarantee System (PGS-India):** In the operation stakeholders (including farmers/producers) are involved in decision making and essential decisions about the operation of the PGS-India certification itself by assessing, inspecting and verifying the production practices of each other and collectively declaring produce as organic.
- ❖ It is under the Ministry of Agriculture and farmers Welfare for meeting the demand of the domestic market.
- ❖ Food Safety Regulation has made it mandatory for organic products to be certified under NPOP or PGS for being sold in the domestic market under the Jaivik Bharat logo.

Government Schemes for Organic Farming

- ❖ **Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY):** The schemes stress on end-to-end support to farmers engaged in organic farming i.e. from production to processing, certification and marketing and post-harvest management.
Training and Capacity Building are integral parts of the scheme.
- ❖ **Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER):** The scheme is being implemented exclusively in the NE States to support farmers engaged in organic farming.

Way Ahead

- ❖ The shift in global consumption patterns towards healthier, safer, sustainable and nutritious food has propelled organic products into the limelight.
- ❖ The surge in demand presents a golden opportunity for India, to meet the growing global demand for organic products and to tap into the global organic food market.

INDIA'S POVERTY LEVELS DECLINED TO BELOW 5%

Context: NITI Aayog has claimed that India's poverty level has fallen to just **five percent**, citing the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2022-23.

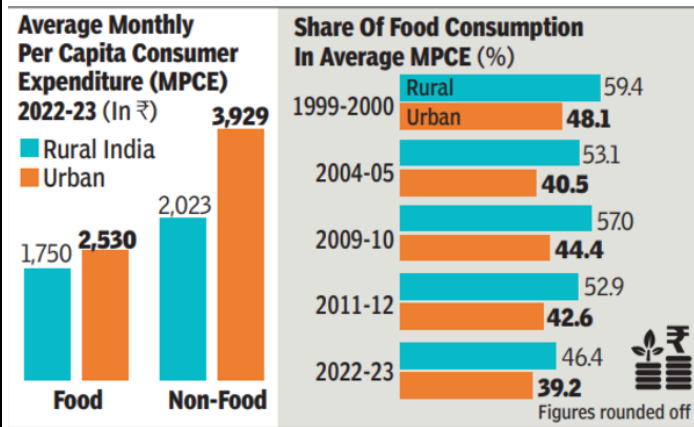
Findings of HCES 2022-23

- ❖ The urban-rural consumption divide has narrowed to **71%** in **2022-23** from a peak of **91%** in 2004-05, so inequality is declining.
- ❖ Rural households spending on food has dropped below **50%** of their total expenditure for the first time ever.
- ❖ There is a sharp rise in urban and rural consumption by over **2.5 times** from **2011-12** levels in current prices, hence India's growth is not restricted to a few, but is very broad-based.
- ❖ As per the **Niti Aayog's multi-dimensional poverty index 2023**, **11%** of the population was below the poverty line, based on which it has argued that 25 crore people have escaped poverty.

Changes in Spending Pattern

- ❖ There is lower spending on pulses and cereals — dropped **below 5%** of per capita consumer expenditure — and higher expenditures on conveyances, consumer durables, and consumer services.
 - ✓ It indicates that people are earning more and need to spend a lesser share of their income on food.
- ❖ Within food, the consumption of beverages, processed food, milk, and fruits is going up, an indication of more diverse and balanced food consumption.

SPENDING ON FOOD DECLINING



Government Steps for Poverty Elevation

- ❖ **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS):** It provides at least one hundred days of unskilled manual work in a financial year to every household in rural areas as per demand resulting in creation of productive assets of prescribed quality and durability.
- ❖ **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013:** It gives legal entitlement to 67% of the population (75% in rural areas and 50% in urban areas) to receive highly subsidized foodgrains.
- ❖ **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) (2016):** This initiative was introduced to provide LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to women belonging to Below Poverty Line (BPL) families.
- ❖ **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM):** It aims to reduce poverty by enabling the poor household to access gainful self-employment and skilled wage employment opportunities resulting in sustainable and diversified livelihood options for the poor.
- ❖ **Ayushman Bharat scheme:** It offers health insurance coverage of up to ₹5 lakh per family per year to shield beneficiaries from the financial burden of expensive medical treatments, thereby preventing them from falling deeper into poverty due to healthcare costs.

Way Ahead

- ❖ **Employment Generation:** Creating more employment opportunities, especially in sectors that absorb large numbers of low-skilled and semi-skilled workers, can significantly reduce poverty.
- ❖ **Skill Development:** Investing in education and skill development programs like vocational training, apprenticeship programs etc. to enhance the employability of the workforce is necessary.
- ❖ **Women's Empowerment:** Providing women with access to education, healthcare, financial services, and opportunities for employment can improve household income, enhance family well-being, and contribute to overall economic growth.

Committees for Poverty Estimation

Lakdawala Committee (1993)

- ❖ It was constituted in 1993, made the following suggestions:
 - consumption expenditure should be calculated based on calorie consumption as earlier;
 - state specific poverty lines should be constructed and these should be updated using the **Consumer Price Index of Industrial Workers (CPI-IW)** in urban areas and **Consumer Price Index of Agricultural Labour (CPI-AL)** in rural areas; and
 - discontinuation of 'scaling' of poverty estimates based on National Accounts Statistics.
- ❖ This assumes that the basket of goods and services used to calculate CPI-IW and CPI-AL reflect the consumption patterns of the poor.

Tendulkar Committee (2009)

- ❖ It was constituted in **2005** and submitted its report in **2009**.
- ❖ The Committee recommended a shift away from calorie consumption based poverty estimation and incorporation of private expenditure on health and education while estimating poverty.

- ❖ Instead of monthly household consumption, consumption expenditure was broken up into per person per day consumption, resulting in the figure of **Rs 32** and **Rs 26** a day for urban and rural areas.
- ❖ **The national poverty line for 2011-12** was estimated at **Rs. 816** per capita per month for rural areas and **Rs. 1,000** per capita per month for urban areas.

Rangarajan Committee (2014)

- ❖ It was constituted in 2012 and submitted its report in 2014.
- ❖ The Committee recommended separate consumption baskets for rural and urban areas.
- ❖ This committee raised the daily per capita expenditure to **Rs 47** for urban and **Rs 32** for rural.
- ❖ The government did not take a call on the report of the Rangarajan Committee, therefore, poverty is measured using the Tendulkar poverty line.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES IN INDIA

Context: There is a media highlight that the unsold electric two/three-wheeler vehicles will not be able to claim subsidy after expiry of Faster Adoption & Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME) II.

Market Growth and Potential of Electric Vehicles in India

- ❖ India is witnessing a significant shift towards electric vehicles (EVs), driven by the government's ambitious targets and increasing consumer awareness about the environmental benefits of EVs.
- ❖ India has set a target that **by 2030**, 80% of two and three-wheelers, 40% of buses, and 30 to 70% of cars in India will be electric vehicles.
- ❖ India offers the world's largest untapped EV market, especially in the two-wheeler segment.
- ❖ It is expected to be worth around at least ₹475 billion by 2025.
- ❖ **The Economic Survey of 2023** predicted that India's domestic electric vehicle market will see a **49% Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)** between 2022 and 2030, with 10 million annual sales by 2030.

Challenges associated with the EVs in India

- ❖ **High Initial Cost:** The upfront cost of EVs is a significant barrier to their adoption. Over 60% of consumers believe that an EV is beyond their budget.
- ❖ **Lack of Charging Infrastructure:** The lack of adequate charging infrastructure is a major hindrance to the mass adoption of EVs.
 - ✓ Compared to traditional petrol stations, charging stations are harder to find, normally limited by investment costs and difficult infrastructure development.
- ❖ **Reduced Allocation:** The government has ₹1,500 crore right now for disbursement from the revised estimate of nearly ₹4,807 crore allocated in FY24 for FAME schemes.
 - ✓ It has reduced the allocation by around 44% to ₹2,671 crore for FY25. Because of this cut, a slowdown is expected in the adoption of EVs in India in FY25. Last year too, the government slashed the incentive from ₹15,000 per kWh of battery to ₹10,000 per kWh from June 1, 2023.
- ❖ **Battery Technology and Raw Material Availability:** It is anticipated that there will be a shortage of nickel, and scaling up lithium production would be a challenge, leading to supply shortage that may cause manufacturers to use lower-quality mineral inputs, adversely affecting battery performance.
- ❖ **Uneven Electricity Distribution:** The issue of power shortage in India, especially in villages and smaller towns, can affect the EV switch on a large scale.
- ❖ **Limited Choice and Performance of EVs:** There is a lack of high performing EVs in the market, and the choices available to consumers are limited.
- ❖ **Service and Repair Options:** Consumers have concerns about the availability of service centres and repair options for EVs.

Government Initiatives

- ❖ **FAME India Scheme:** It was launched with a budgetary outlay of Rs. 10,000 crore for a period of five years starting from April 1, 2019.
 - ✓ It aims to promote hybrid/electric technology in transportation to reduce dependency on fossil fuels and address issues of vehicular emissions.
- ❖ **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes:** The government has launched PLI schemes for Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) and Auto and Automotive Components to boost the manufacturing of EVs and their components.
 - ✓ The budgetary outlay for the ACC PLI scheme is Rs. 18,100 crores, and for the Auto and Automotive Components PLI scheme, it is Rs. 25,938 crores.
- ❖ **Tax Exemptions and Subsidies:** The government is offering subsidies for purchasing electric vehicles.
 - ✓ A tax exemption of Rs 1.5 lakh is also given for people buying electric cars on loan.
 - ✓ The GST for the purchase of EVs is set at just 5% with zero cess.
- ❖ **Infrastructure Development:** Under the FAME scheme, the government has been trying to improve the infrastructure for electric vehicle manufacturing in the country.
 - ✓ There is also a plan for 22,000 EV charging stations to be set up by Oil Marketing Companies across the country.
- ❖ **Battery Swapping Policy:** In the Union Budget (2022), a battery swapping policy was announced as an easier way to charge EVs.

Conclusion

- ❖ The transition to electric vehicles is a key component of India's strategy to reduce its carbon emissions and achieve its climate goals.
- ❖ While there are challenges to overcome, the potential benefits of this transition – in terms of improved air quality, reduced dependence on fossil fuels, and opportunities for economic growth – make it a journey worth pursuing.

CivilsTap Hlmachal

AGRICULTURE

ON THE SCOPE OF THE HORTICULTURE SECTOR IN INDIA – NEXT STEP FOR FARMERS

Context: The article discusses the growing opportunities in the horticultural sector, especially F&V sector in India. It also highlights the steps that should be taken to improve it.

What are the growing opportunities in the horticultural sector, especially F&V?

1. **Scope of Agri Exports:** There is a huge opportunity in horticultural exports.
2. **Changes in Dietary Habits:** The focus of the Indian diet is shifting from mere calorie security to a nutrition-secure mindset, leading to an increase in per capita consumption of F&V.
3. **Technological Advancements:** Digital and technology advancements and increased focus on bio-based and sustainable solutions can solve the challenges of horticulture value chains.
4. **Higher Incomes:** Horticulture farming promises higher incomes and offers a steady income stream throughout the year, unlike traditional subsistence farming.
5. **Agri-Inputs Sector:** Increase in horticulture production will also unlock immense potential for the agri-inputs sector that comprises seeds, agrochemicals, and fertilisers.

What steps should be taken to improve horticultural production in India?

The issues of higher productivity, better price realization, and the affordability and accessibility of agri-inputs are crucial. This can be achieved by:

1. Focusing on value-added, export-led businesses.
2. Integrated value-chain approach from sourcing to processing.
3. Supply of key agri-inputs to the farmer can help improve yield.
4. **Innovation in Seeds:** Agronomic and genetic seed innovations, including high-quality hybrids, can enhance shelf life and improve access to quality F&V produce. High quality seeds can help extend the geographical footprint for cultivation.
5. **1.0 Hectare Model of Integrated Farming:** This cluster-based, whole-farm approach includes multiple interventions such as solar-powered farming equipment, water conservation practices, diversified cropping integrated with livestock, vermicompost, etc., soil health replenishment with natural bio-based agri-inputs, village cluster creation for produce aggregation and exports.

It holds the potential to address the challenges of droughts and erratic weather patterns.

6. **Specific Approaches for Diverse Agro-Climatic Zones:** A tailored approach to F&V agri-inputs is needed for India's diverse agro-climatic zones.
7. **Multi-stakeholder Partnerships:** Partnerships among farmers, government, customers, industry, and academia/research need to be strengthened to achieve demand-backed production, high productivity, robust credit and risk management, and market linkages.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

RUSSIA TESTS ANTI-SATELLITE WEAPON

Context: The US has confirmed that Russia is developing a space-based weapon that is a 'serious threat to national security'.

What are anti-satellite weapons?

- ❖ Anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons are designed to debilitate and/or destroy satellites that are already in orbit and operational.
- ❖ Most of these **weapons are kinetic**, i.e. they destroy satellites in orbit by rocketing into them or detonating an explosive near them, and blowing them to pieces.
- ❖ Because of the low gravity and lack of an atmosphere, the resulting debris can stay in orbit for a long time depending on their size.
- ❖ ASAT weapons violate the **Outer Space Treaty (OST)** through
 - ✓ **Article VII**, which holds parties to the treaty liable for damaging satellites belonging to other parties
 - ✓ **Article IX**, which asks parties to refrain from the "harmful contamination" of space.

Space weapons in the past

- ❖ **The U.S.** in 1962 in a high-altitude test called Starfish Prime detonated a thermonuclear bomb 400 km above ground. It remains the largest nuclear test conducted in space.
 - ✓ It set off an **electromagnetic pulse (EMP)** and the charged particles and radiation emitted was accelerated by the earth's magnetic field, distorting the ionosphere and resulting in bright aurorae.
- ❖ **The Soviet Union** also conducted high-altitude nuclear tests during the same period, which is **Test 184**.
 - ✓ The resulting EMP induced a very high current in 500 km of electric cables and eventually triggered a fire that burned down a power plant.

Why has space emerged as the new battlefield?

- ❖ **Military Significance of Space:** Space has immense strategic importance due to its role in enabling communication, navigation, reconnaissance, and surveillance capabilities for military operations.
- ❖ **Competing Interests:** As space becomes more accessible and economically valuable, there is a growing competition among countries for space resources, such as valuable minerals and water on celestial bodies.
- ❖ **National Security Concerns:** Countries perceive safeguarding their space assets as critical to their national security interests. As a result, they invest in deploying capabilities to protect their assets and degrade those of potential adversaries, leading to militarization of the space.
- ❖ **Technological Advances:** Advances in technology have led to the proliferation of capabilities that could be used for offensive purposes in space, such as anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons, cyber warfare tools targeting space systems, and directed energy weapons.

Outer Space Treaty (OST)

- ❖ The Treaty was opened for signature by the three depository Governments (the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America) in January 1967, and it **entered into force in October 1967**.
- ❖ It provides the basic framework on international space law, including the following principles:

Mission Shakti

- ❖ Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in **2019** successfully neutralized a satellite in space with its anti-satellite (ASAT) missile in Mission Shakti.
- ❖ The satellite downed by the ASAT missile was **Microsat-R**, an imaging satellite in the **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** at 300 km in space.
- ❖ **Significance:** Anti-satellite weapons provide the capability to shoot down enemy satellites in orbit thereby disrupting critical communications and surveillance capabilities.
A. ASAT missiles also act as a space deterrent in dissuading adversaries from targeting the country's satellite network.

- ✓ The exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries and shall be the province of all mankind;
- ✓ Outer space shall be free for exploration and use by all States;
- ✓ Outer space is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means;
- ✓ States shall not place nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in orbit or on celestial bodies or station them in outer space in any other manner;
- ✓ The Moon and other celestial bodies shall be used exclusively for peaceful purposes;
- ✓ Astronauts shall be regarded as the envoys of mankind;
- ✓ States shall be responsible for national space activities whether carried out by governmental or non-governmental entities;
- ✓ States shall be liable for damage caused by their space objects; and
- ✓ States shall avoid harmful contamination of space and celestial bodies.

PRIVATE INVESTMENTS IN INDIA'S NUCLEAR ENERGY SECTOR

Context: India is planning to invite private companies to invest approximately **\$26 billion in its nuclear energy sector**.

About

- ❖ The government plans to build **11,000 megawatts (MW)** of new nuclear power generation capacity by **2040**.
- ❖ Under the funding plan, the private companies will make the investments in the nuclear plants, acquire land, water and undertake construction in areas outside the reactor complex of the plants.
- ❖ However, the rights to build and run the stations and their fuel management will rest with the Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL).
- ❖ The plan will not require any amendment to **India's Atomic Energy Act of 1962** but will need a final go-ahead from the Department of Atomic Energy.
- ❖ **Though, Indian law bars private companies** from setting up nuclear power plants but allows them to supply components, equipment and sign construction contracts for work outside of the reactors.

Benefits of Private Investment

- ❖ **Achieve the energy target:** The proposed funding is crucial for India to achieve its target of having **50%** of its installed electric generation capacity sourced from non-fossil fuels by **2030**, compared to the current 42%.
- ❖ **Increased Efficiency:** Private companies bring in more efficient management practices, technological advancements, and innovation to the sector.

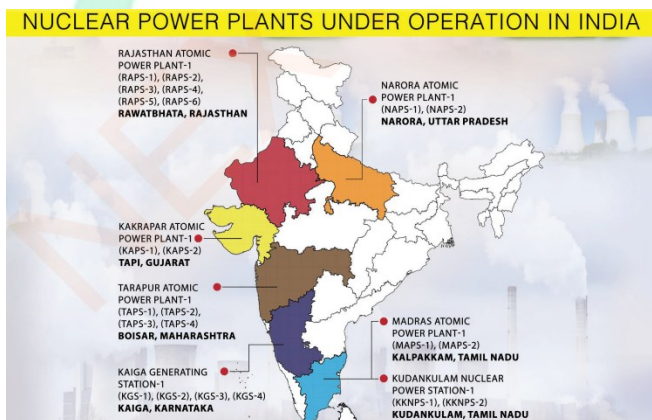
- ❖ **Innovation and Research:** Private investment incentivizes the development of advanced reactor designs, fuel cycles, safety systems, and waste management solutions, leading to long-term sustainability and competitiveness in the sector.
- ❖ **Financial Resources:** Private investment provides additional financial resources for the development and expansion of nuclear infrastructure.

What is Nuclear Energy?

- ❖ **Nuclear energy** is the energy released during nuclear reactions, either through fission (splitting of atomic nuclei) or fusion (merging of atomic nuclei).
- ❖ **In nuclear fission**, heavy atomic nuclei, such as those of uranium or plutonium, are split into lighter nuclei, releasing a large amount of energy.
- ❖ This process is utilized in nuclear power plants to generate electricity.

India's Nuclear Programme

- ❖ Nuclear Energy is a non-carbon-emitting energy source that contributes less than **2%** of India's total electricity generation.
- ❖ NPCIL owns and operates India's current fleet of nuclear power plants, with a **capacity of 7,500 MW**, and has committed investments for another 1,300 MW.
- ❖ India imports uranium fuel for nuclear plants from Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, France and Canada under bilateral agreements.



Advantages of Nuclear Energy

- ❖ **Energy Security:** Nuclear energy with its high power output can solve the energy crisis that the world is facing today. The fuel to power output ratio for nuclear energy is incredibly high. A relatively small amount of uranium can be used to fuel a 1000 Megawatts electric plant, thus providing enough electricity to power a city of about half a million people.
- ❖ **Clean energy:** Nuclear power plants have a low greenhouse gas footprint. The World Nuclear Association found that the average emissions for nuclear power are 29 tonnes of CO₂ per gigawatt-hour (GWh) of energy produced.
 - ✓ This compares favorably with solar (85 tonnes per GWh), wind (26 tonnes per GWh) and fossil fuels like lignite (1,054 tonnes per GWh).
- ❖ **Low Operating Costs:** Nuclear power produces very inexpensive electricity and is cheaper than gas, coal, or any other fossil fuel plants.

Disadvantages of Nuclear Energy

- ❖ **Risky source of energy:** The risks of nuclear power are ultimately uncontrollable. The Chernobyl disaster of 1986 and Fukushima disaster in Japan in 2011 have already shown the dangers of nuclear power.
- ❖ **Not really renewable:** Uranium, the nuclear fuel that is used to produce nuclear energy, is limited and cannot be produced again and again on demand.

- ❖ **Radioactive Waste Disposal:** A nuclear power plant creates 20 metric tons of nuclear fuel per year, and with that comes a lot of nuclear waste. The greater part of this waste transmits radiation and high temperature, causing damage to living things in and around the plants.

PLASMA ANALYSER PACKAGE FOR ADITYA-L1 (PAPA)

Context: Recently, ISRO informed that the **Plasma Analyser Package for Aditya (PAPA)** payload onboard the **Aditya-L1** has been operational and performing nominally.

About the Plasma Analyser Package for Aditya-L1 (PAPA)

- ❖ It is **one of seven scientific payloads** aboard the 1,480-kg **Aditya-L1 (India's first mission to study the Sun)**, the solar probe of the ISRO which was inserted into a halo orbit at L1 in early January 2024.
- ❖ It is developed by the **Space Physics Laboratory (SPL)** at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC).
- ❖ It is designed **to understand and gain deeper insights into** the phenomenon of the '**solar winds**' (outward expansion of plasma or a collection of charged particles) from the sun's corona and their composition.
 - ✓ Solar winds pose a threat to communications networks.
- ❖ It is **an energy and mass analyzer** designed for **in-situ measurements of solar wind electrons and ions** in the low energy range.
- ❖ The **preliminary analysis** shows that PAPA science data are of very good quality and the results **match similar observations** made by other instruments which are being operated at or around Lagrangian point L-1 by other space agencies.

Other Payloads in Aditya-L1

- ❖ **Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC):** It allows viewing of the corona (the outermost part of the sun's atmosphere) by masking the glare of the photosphere (sun's surface). It could help explain why the **corona is 200 to 500 times hotter than the photosphere**.
- ❖ **Solar Low Energy X-ray Spectrometer (SoLEXS):** It studies solar flares. The sun's interiors contort the magnetic field, throwing out high-energy particles that reach Earth in the form of solar flares, disrupting radio communication and damaging satellites.
- ❖ **High Energy L1 Orbiting X-ray Spectrometer (HEL1OS):** It is designed to study solar flares in high-energy X-rays, with the acceleration and propagation of energetic electrons in the flare.
- ❖ **Solar Ultraviolet Imaging Telescope (SUIT):** It is a UV telescope to image the solar disk in the near ultraviolet wavelength range to study complex active regions of the sun (where the magnetic field is more concentrated) and **Coronal Mass Ejections**.
- ❖ **Aditya Solar wind Particle EXperiment (ASPEX):** It comprises two subsystems:
 - a. Solar Wind Ion Spectrometer (SWIS):** is a low energy spectrometer designed to measure the proton and alpha particles, the two primary ion components of solar winds.
 - b. Suprathermal and Energetic Particle Spectrometer (STEPS):** is designed to measure high-energy ions of the solar wind. They allow scientists to study the properties of plasmas and their role in the transfer of mass, momentum, and energy from the sun to Earth.
- ❖ **MAGNETOMETER:** It will study the sun's low intensity interplanetary magnetic field, which is carried by solar winds.

Key Features of PAPA

- ❖ PAPA contains **two sensors** that are equipped to measure the direction of arrival of solar wind particles:
 - ✓ **The Solar Wind Electron Energy Probe (SWEPP):** It measures the solar wind electron flux.

- ✓ **The Solar Wind Ion Composition Analyser (SWICAR):** It measures ion flux and composition as a function of direction and energy.

Role in the Aditya-L1 Mission

- ❖ The Aditya-L1 mission was launched aboard the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle-C57 mission on September 2, 2023.
- ❖ As Aditya traversed the 1.5 million km distance to L1, the PAPA payload was switched on for the first time on November 8.
- ❖ The high voltage (HV) commissioning of the payload and science data observations were started on December 11.

Conclusion

- ❖ PAPA payload onboard the Aditya-L1 Mission remains healthy and the scientific data sent by it are of very good quality.
- ❖ The successful operation of PAPA is a testament to the capabilities of ISRO and its contribution to our understanding of the solar wind.

COMPLETION OF '10,000 GENOME' PROJECT

Context: The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) announced the completion of the '10,000 genome' project.

About

- ❖ The project was an attempt to **create a reference database of whole-genome sequences** out of India.
- ❖ The United Kingdom, China, and the United States are among the countries that have programmes to sequence at least 1,00,000 of their genomes.

What is Genome Sequencing?

- ❖ The human genome is the entire set of **deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA)** residing in the nucleus of every cell of each human body.
- ❖ It carries the complete genetic information responsible for the development and functioning of the organism.
- ❖ The DNA consists of a double-stranded molecule built up by four bases – **adenine (A), cytosine (C), guanine (G) and thymine (T)**.
 - ✓ Every base on one strand pairs with a complementary base on the other strand (A with T and C with G).
- ❖ In all, the genome is made up of approximately 3.05 billion such base pairs.
- ❖ The process of deciphering the order of base pairs, to decode the genetic fingerprint of a human is called genome sequencing.

Significance of Genome Sequencing

- ❖ **Disease-based human genetics:** The Indian population of 1.3 billion consists of over 4,600 population groups, and many of them are endogamous.
 - ✓ These factors have contributed to the genetic diversity of the current population. Thus, the Indian population harbors distinct variations and often many disease-causing mutations are amplified within some of these groups.
 - ✓ Therefore, findings from population-based or disease-based human genetics research from other populations of the world cannot be extrapolated to Indians.
- ❖ **Evaluation of disease:** Genome sequencing has been used to evaluate rare disorders, preconditions for disorders, even cancer from the viewpoint of genetics, rather than as diseases of certain organs. Nearly 10,000 diseases, including **cystic fibrosis** and **thalassemia** are known to be the result of a single gene malfunctioning.

- ❖ **Treatments of diseases:** Advanced analytics and AI could be applied to essential datasets created by collecting genomic profiles across the population, allowing to develop greater understanding of causative factors and potential treatments of diseases.
- ❖ **Help in customizing drugs and therapies:** Creating a database of Indian genomes means that researchers anywhere can learn about genetic variants that are unique to India's population groups and use that to customize drugs and therapies.

Way Ahead

- ❖ This project allows India to draw upon its tremendous genetic diversity, given the series of large migrations historically, and thus, add greatly to the current information about the human species.
- ❖ This initiative reflects India's progress in gene therapies and precision medicine, and its movement towards emerging next-generation medicine which yields the possibilities for greater customization, safety, and earlier detection.

The Human Genome Project (HGP)

- ✓ The project was a voyage of biological discovery led by an international group of researchers looking to comprehensively study all of the DNA (known as a genome) of a select set of organisms.
- ✓ It was launched in **1990** and completed in **2003**.
- ✓ The Project's signature accomplishment provided fundamental information about the human blueprint, which has since accelerated the study of human biology and improved the practice of medicine.

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ENVIRONMENT

STATUS REPORT OF SNOW LEOPARDS IN INDIA

Context: India's first nationwide report, '**Status Report of Snow Leopards in India**', was released by the Government of India recently.

- ❖ The assessment estimates **718 snow leopards in India** based on systematic surveys covering over 70% of their potential habitat from 2019-2023.
- ❖ For this, the Wildlife Institute of India coordinated **the Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI) program** across snow leopard range states.
- ❖ The SPAI used a two-step approach aligned with Ministry guidelines. The first **step mapped snow leopard spatial distribution** and habitat analysis. The second step estimated abundance through camera traps in identified areas.
- ❖ Until recently, snow leopard ranges in India were **poorly defined and studied only across 5% of their habitat**. The SPAI has significantly expanded habitat surveys to 80% versus just 56% in 2016.

Key Findings of the Report

- ❖ **Only 34 percent** of the 120,000 square kilometre (sq km) snow leopard habitat in India is **legally protected**. **Almost 70 percent** of it, crucial for the predator, **remains unprotected**.
- ❖ According to the report, **the highest number of snow leopards are in Ladakh (477)**.
 - ✓ It is followed by **Uttarakhand (124 animals)** and **Himachal Pradesh (51)**. Sikkim and Jammu and Kashmir recorded 21 and 9 individuals respectively.

Suggestions of the report

- ❖ The report emphasised the need for a **dedicated Snow Leopard Cell** at the **Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).
 - ✓ Its objective should be **long-term population monitoring, organised studies and consistent field surveys**.
- ❖ For the same, states and Union territories (UT) can consider **adopting a periodic population estimation approach** (every fourth year) in the snow leopard range.
 - ✓ These **regular assessments will offer valuable insights** for identifying challenges, addressing threats, and formulating effective conservation strategies.
- ❖ It also underscored the **need to make a revised assessment from the earlier estimate of 400-700 snow leopards** in India, among the 4,000-7,500 estimated to be present across the globe.

GLOBAL WARMING

Context: A new study based on estimates of warming from **palaeo-thermometry**, have said that **the earth's surface has already warmed by more than 1.5 degrees C on average over pre-industrial levels**.

Background of 1.5 degrees C threshold

- ❖ The **1.5 degrees C is not a scientific threshold**. It became enshrined in the **Paris Agreement** after negotiations by member-countries of the UNFCCC.

Global warming

- ❖ It refers to the **long-term heating of Earth's climate system** observed since the **pre-industrial period (between 1850 and 1900)**, primarily due to human activities.
- ❖ This process **releases greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, trapping heat in the atmosphere** and causing the planet to warm.

Causes

- ❖ **Greenhouse gases:** These gases absorb and re-emit infrared radiation from the sun, trapping heat in the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is the main culprit, followed by methane, nitrous oxide, and others.
- ❖ **Fossil fuel burning:** Burning coal, oil, and natural gas releases large amounts of CO₂, the primary driver of global warming.
- ❖ **Deforestation:** Trees absorb CO₂, so their removal contributes to higher atmospheric levels.
- ❖ **Other human activities:** Industrial processes, agriculture, and land-use changes also contribute to greenhouse gas emissions.

Effects

- ❖ **Rising global temperatures:** The average global temperature has already risen by about 1 degree Celsius since the pre-industrial era, with further warming expected in the future.
- ❖ **Climate change:** More extreme weather events like heat waves, droughts, floods, wildfires, and intense storms are becoming more frequent and severe.
- ❖ **Sea level rise:** Melting glaciers and thermal expansion of oceans are causing sea levels to rise, threatening coastal communities and ecosystems.
- ❖ **Ocean acidification:** Increased CO₂ absorption by oceans makes them more acidic, harming marine life.
- ❖ **Changes in plant and animal life:** Species are being forced to adapt or migrate due to changing temperatures and ecosystems.

Measures to address global warming

Mitigation:

- ❖ **Energy transition:** Rapidly shift to renewable energy sources like solar, wind, geothermal, and hydro power.
- ❖ **Sustainable land management:** Protect forests, restore degraded land, and adopt sustainable agricultural practices that reduce emissions and store carbon.
- ❖ **Circular economy:** Transition to a circular economy where resources are reused and recycled, minimizing waste and associated emissions.
- ❖ **Technological innovation:** Invest in research and development of clean technologies for various sectors, like carbon capture and storage, advanced biofuels, and green hydrogen.

Adaptation:

- ❖ **Early warning systems:** Develop and implement effective early warning systems for extreme weather events to enable timely preparedness and response.
- ❖ **Climate-resilient infrastructure:** Build and manage infrastructure like dams, water management systems, and coastal defenses to withstand the impacts of rising sea levels, floods, and storms.
- ❖ **Climate-smart agriculture:** Develop and adopt agricultural practices that are resilient to climate change and drought, ensuring food security.
- ❖ **Disaster risk reduction:** Invest in programs that reduce vulnerability to disasters and enable communities to recover quickly and effectively.
- ❖ **Social safety nets:** Implement social protection programs to support vulnerable populations disproportionately affected by climate change impacts.

International cooperation:

- ❖ **Global agreements:** Strengthen international agreements like the Paris Agreement, ensuring ambitious emissions reduction targets and effective implementation mechanisms.
- ❖ **Technology transfer and financial support:** Developed countries should support developing countries in their mitigation and adaptation efforts through technology transfer, financial assistance, and capacity building.

Individual action:

- ❖ **Reduce carbon footprint:** Make conscious choices to reduce energy consumption in your daily life, opt for sustainable transportation, and consume less.

- ❖ **Support climate-friendly businesses:** Choose products and services from companies committed to sustainability and reducing their environmental impact.
- ❖ **Advocate for action:** Raise awareness about climate change and advocate for policies that support mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Way Ahead:

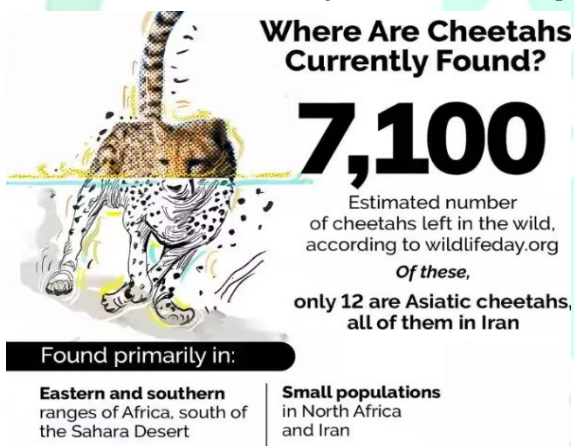
- ❖ The **urgency of addressing climate change is widely recognized**, but the pace of action remains insufficient to meet international targets for emissions reductions.
- ❖ **The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** has warned of **severe consequences** if we fail to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

SURVIVAL CHANCES OF CHEETAH IN INDIA

Context: Recently, the Wildlife officials of Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh informed about the birth of seven cheetah cubs.

About Cheetah (*Acinonyx Jubatus*):

- ❖ It is the fastest terrestrial animal on earth, and **native to Africa and central Iran**.
- ❖ **The Gestation Period:** 93 days;
- ❖ **Cub Mortality:** Higher in Protected Areas (like National Parks and Wildlife Reserves); It can be as high as 90%;
- ❖ **Average Life Span (in the wild):** 10 – 12 years.
 - ✓ Adult male about 8 years (*Adult mortality is one of the most significant limiting factors for the growth and survival of the wild cheetah population*).



Cheetah in India (Asiatic):

- ❖ **1st plan to reintroduce the cheetah:** First solid steps were taken in the **1970s**, during negotiations with Iran.
 - ✓ **Iran's cheetahs were Asiatic**, like India's extinct animals.

- **African Cheetah:**
 - **IUCN Status:** Vulnerable
 - **Characteristics:** They are bigger in size as compared to Asiatic Cheetah.
- **Asiatic Cheetah:**
 - **IUCN Status:** Critically Endangered
 - **Status in India:** Declared extinct in India in 1952.
 - **Distribution:** They are only 40-50 and found **only in Iran**.
 - **Characteristics:** Smaller and paler than the African cheetah.

- ❖ The plan was **to exchange Asiatic lions for Asiatic cheetahs**.
- ❖ **In 2009:** Another attempt to source Iranian Cheetahs in India was made without success.
 - ✓ Iran did not permit cloning of its Cheetahs.
- ❖ **In 2020:** **South African** experts visited four potential sites: **Kuno-Palpur, Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary, Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary and Madhav National Park**.
- ❖ **In 2022:** The Government of India has decided to reintroduce cheetahs, under the **‘Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India’**.
 - ✓ It aims to bring back the cheetah.
 - ✓ As part of the project, **50 cheetahs** will be introduced in **various National Parks over five years**, and it is being done under **Project Cheetah**, the **world’s first inter-continental** large wild carnivore translocation project.
 - ✓ It aims to re-establish the functional role of the cheetah in representative ecosystems **within its historical range**.

Kuno Palpur National Park

- ❖ It was established in 1981 as a Wildlife Sanctuary.
 - A. In 2018, it was given the **status of a National Park**.
- ❖ Kuno Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary is underway to become India’s second home for the Asiatic lion.
Why was it selected for Cheetah?
- ❖ Amongst the 10 surveyed sites of the central Indian states, Kuno Palpur National Park has been rated the highest.
 - A. It is because of its suitable habitat and adequate prey base.
- ❖ Kuno is probably the **only wildlife site** in the country where there has been a complete relocation of villages from inside the park.
- ❖ It offers the prospect of **housing four big cats of India** – tiger, lion, leopard and cheetah – and allowing them to coexist as in the past.

Role Played by Cheetah

- ❖ **Ecological:** Cheetahs fulfil a unique ecological role within the **carnivore hierarchy** and their restoration is expected **to enhance ecosystem health** in India.
 - ✓ It helps restore India’s open forests and grassland ecosystems, which have been suffering.
- ❖ **Conservation:** The Cheetah can benefit **India’s broader conservation goals** by improving general protection and ecotourism in areas that have been previously neglected.
 - ✓ Resources invested in these highly exploited and neglected systems ensure better management and restore their ecosystem services for the country.
- ❖ **A Flagship Species:** The cheetah serves as a flagship to save its prey-base and other endangered species of the grassland and semi-arid ecosystems.
 - ✓ **India** is home to the **world’s largest free-roaming populations** of livestock.

Threats to Cheetah:

- ❖ **Coexistence with Tigers and Leopards:** Threats like conflict with leopards, poaching and deaths caused while capturing cheetahs to retrieve them from outside park boundaries loom over the reintroduced species in the new habitat.
 - ✓ More aggressive predators such as tigers and leopards will compete with the cheetahs.
 - ✓ They may be driven to the outskirts of the park, where they could come into conflict with humans.

- ❖ **Anthropogenic Threats:** These include snaring for bush meat and retaliatory killings due to livestock depredation.

Impacts of Close Enclosure on Cheetah:

- According to Kuno officials, the cubs are **safe in enclosures, away from predators**.
 - But they are going to be artificially protected from **danger without protecting the genetics**.
- Housing cheetahs in small enclosures has been linked to *'stress related behaviours, medical conditions and reduced reproductive performance'*.

- ❖ **Captive Breeding:** There is a concern among experts that weak genetics accumulated may persist among the captive cheetahs and **eventually weaken the gene pool**, resulting in animals that need constant human intervention for survival.
 - ✓ Cheetahs are known for **open forests and grassland ecosystems**.
- ❖ **Locational Challenges of Kuno-Palpur National Park:**
 - ✓ The protected area of Kuno-Palpur National Park is largely **dry, deciduous forest**.
 - ✓ The **African cheetahs** who are more **used to the savannahs** of that continent adapt well to Kuno.
 - ✓ There is a hypothesis that via the wound the African cheetah may have been **exposed to parasites** that Indian big-cats are usually resistant too.
- ❖ **Specific Prey Base:**
 - ✓ Indian cheetahs were largely dependent on blackbucks and chinkaras, sometimes on chital and rarely on nilgai.
 - ✓ Few of these species are believed to have disappeared from Kuno.

Government's Efforts:

- ❖ **Increasing Prey Base:** To increase prey base inside the 500-hectare enclosure, the Kuno National Park has brought in 238 chitals or spotted deer (*Axis axis*) from Pench and Narsingharh Wildlife Sanctuaries of the state and are planning to bring in around 300 more deer.
- ❖ **Gradual Co-existence:** Over time, says the action plan by the Centre, cheetah and leopard populations will be able to coexist.
- ❖ **Tracking:** The initial batch of cheetahs and their potential offspring will be radio-collared and tracked for at least 10 years.

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