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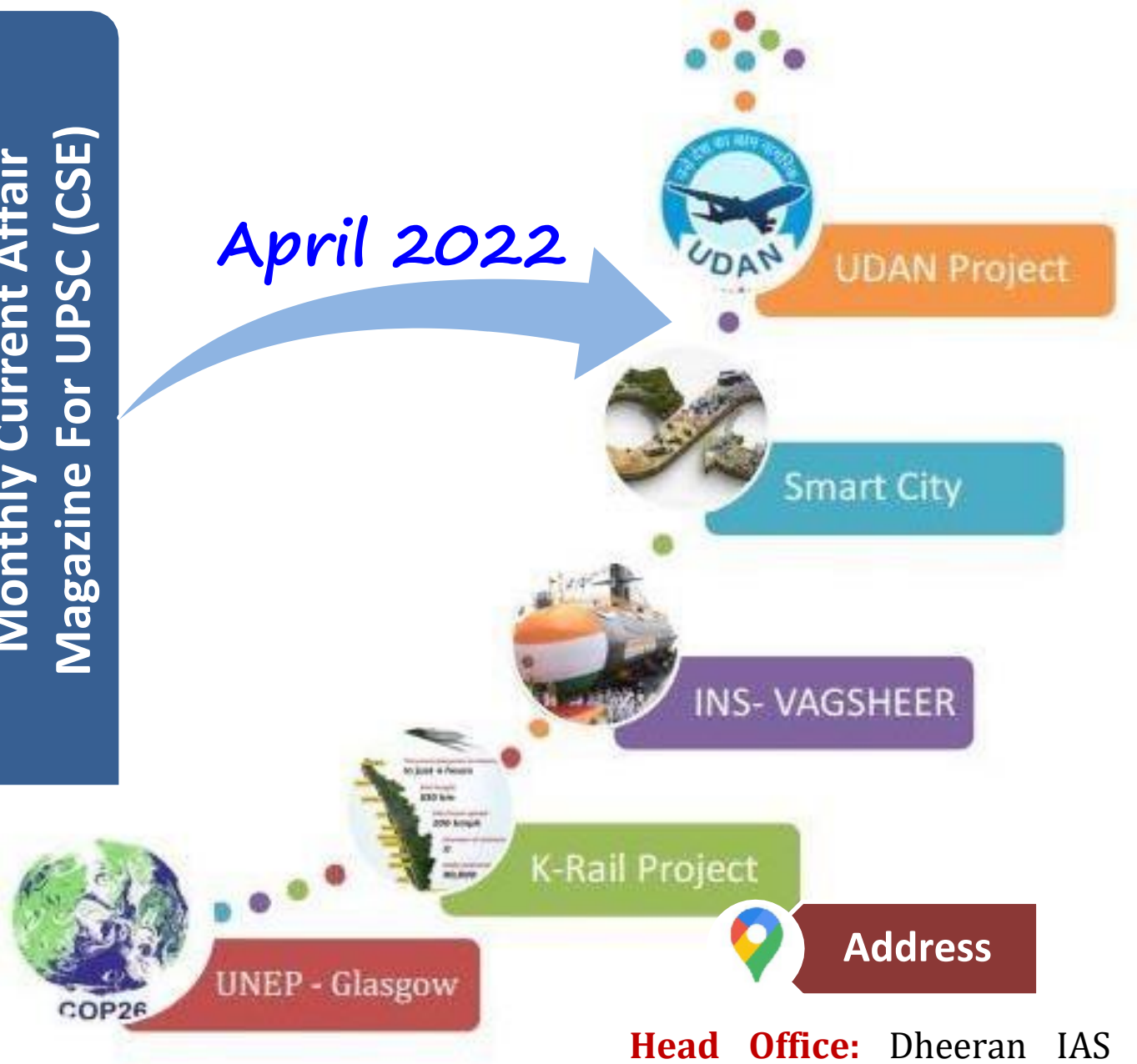

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SYLLABUS –UPSC EXAMINATION

GENERAL STUDIES - 1

Art and Culture

Syllabus:

- Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

History

Syllabus:

- Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present significant events, personalities, issues.
- The Freedom Struggle — its various stages and important contributors/contributions from different parts of the country.
- Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country.
- History of the world will include events from 18th century such as industrial revolution, world wars, redrawal of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization, political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc.— their forms and effect on the society.

Geography

Syllabus:

- Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian sub-continent); factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India).
- Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone,. Geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

GENERAL STUDIES - 2

Polity

Syllabus:

- Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.
- Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein. Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.
- Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries. Parliament and State legislatures—structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.
- Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary—Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.
- Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.
- Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.
- Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.
- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
- Development processes and the development industry —the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

Governance

Syllabus:

- Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.
- Role of civil services in a democracy.

Schemes

Syllabus:

- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Society and Social Issues.

Syllabus:

- Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.
- Effects of globalization on Indian society.
- Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.
- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.
- Issues relating to poverty and hunger.

International Relation and organization

Syllabus:

- India and its neighborhood- relations.
- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.
- Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

GENERAL STUDIES – 3

Economy

Syllabus:

- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.
- Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.
- Government Budgeting.

Agriculture

Syllabus:

- Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country, - different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.
- Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.
- Food processing and related industries in India- scope' and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management.
- Land reforms in India.

Infrastructure

Syllabus:

- Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.
- Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.
- Investment models.

Science and technology

Syllabus:

- Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.
- Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

- Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

Environment

Syllabus:

- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.
- Disaster and disaster management.

Defense and security

Syllabus:

- Linkages between development and spread of extremism.
- Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.
- Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention.
- Security challenges and their management in border areas - linkages of organized crime with terrorism.
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GENERAL STUDIES – 1

TOPIC: ART AND CULTURE

JAGANNATH TEMPLE

In News:

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has asked the Odisha government to tweak its much-vaunted Shree Mandira Parikrama Project (SMPP) — a massive beautification project around the 12th-century Jagannath temple in Puri — which has already run into a controversy.

Analysis of Background:

- It is being alleged that neither does the State government have permission of the National Monuments Authority (NMA) nor does it have approval from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to plan.
- Execution of the project could potentially pose a threat to the centuries-old temple.

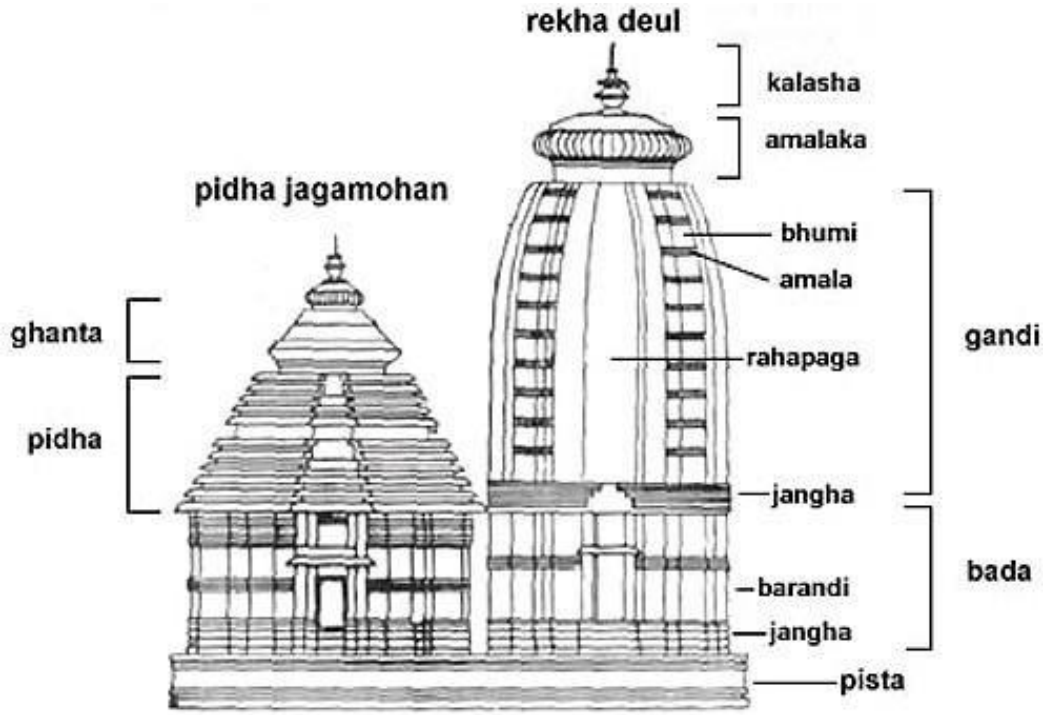
AMASR Act:

- The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (or AMASR Act) was passed in 1958.
- It is an act of the Parliament that provides for the preservation of ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance.
- It provides for the regulation of archaeological excavations and for the protection of sculptures, carvings and other like objects.
- The Archaeological Survey of India functions under the provisions of this act.
- The rules stipulate that area in the vicinity of the monument, within 100 metres is prohibited area.
- The area within 200 meters of the monument is regulated category.
- Any repair or modifications of buildings in this area requires prior permission

About Jagannath Temple:

- The Jagannath Temple is an important Vaishnavite temple dedicated to Jagannath, a form of Sri Krishna in Puri in Odisha.

- The present temple was rebuilt from the 10th century onwards, on the site of an earlier temple, and begun by Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva, the first king of the Eastern Ganga dynasty.
- The Puri temple is famous for its annual Ratha Yatra, or chariot festival, in which the three principal deities are pulled on huge and elaborately decorated temple cars.
- With its sculptural richness and fluidity of the Oriya style of temple architecture, it is one of the most magnificent monuments of India.
- This 20 feet high wall is known as Meghanada Pacheri.
- Another wall known as kurma bedha surrounds the main temple.



SANGEET NATAK AND LALIT KALA AKADEMI AWARDS

In News:

Recently, the Vice-President of India presented the Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards for the year 2018 and National Awards of Lalit Kala Akademi for the year 2021 .

Analysis of Background:

Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards (Akademi Puraskar):

- They are national honours bestowed by the government on performing artists and teachers and scholars in the field of performing arts.
- The awards were given in the categories of music, dance, and theatre.
- The recipients are selected by the Academy's General Council, consisting of distinguished musicians, dancers, theatre artists and scholars in these disciplines and nominees of the Government of India, State Governments and Union Territories of the Indian Union.
- The Akademi also confers Fellowships on eminent artists and scholars of music, dance and drama; and has in 2006 instituted annual awards to young artists – the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar.
- The Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship is the highest honour conferred by Sangeet Natak Akademi without distinction of nationality, race, caste, religion, creed, or sex.
- The criteria restricts any person below the age of 50 to ordinarily be considered for the honour. The recommendations are received from the current fellows along with the members of the General Council of the Akademi.

Lalit Kala Akademi Awards:

- The Lalit Kala Akademi has instituted several awards and honours to be conferred on artists in recognition for their outstanding work in the field of art.
- Of all these awards and recognitions, the honour of Fellow of the Lalit Kala Akademi is regarded as the highest honour conferred on an artist by the Lalit Kala Akademi.
- The National Exhibition of Art is organised annually by the Lalit Kala Akademi as it’s the most prestigious event, showcasing the brilliance and capacious oeuvre of the awarded artists.
- The 62nd National Exhibition organised this year is a platform to showcase the outstanding artists on a nationwide scale.

TOPIC: HISTORY

GURU NABHA DASS

In News:

Punjab government has announced gazetted holiday on the birth anniversary of Guru Nabha Dass, a 16th century saint, taking it out from list of restricted holidays.

Analysis of Background:

Guru Nabha Dass:

- Guru Nabha Dass was born on April 8, 1537 at village Bhadrachalam on the bank of Godavari river in Khammam district, which falls in the present day Telangana.
- He belonged to Mahasha also known as doom or dumna community, which is one of the Schedule Caste communities.
- Since childhood, orphaned Guru Nabha Dass, whose original name was Narayan Dass, had an inclination towards spirituality.
- Two religious gurus — Agar Dass and Keel Dass — who were passing through his village took the orphan child to a temple at Ghalta Dham, which is now main pilgrimage of Nabhadassias, at Jaipur.
- People from this community are also known as Nabhadassias. They are known for making baskets and grain storage containers with bamboo.
- Guru Nabha Dass wrote 'Bhagatmal' in 1585.
- It has the life history of around 200 saints. He died in 1643.

VEER KUNWAR SINGH

In News:

Political factions in Bihar has planned to organise the birth anniversary of the 1857 uprising hero Veer Kunwar Singh on April 23 at Jagdishpur in Bhojpur.

Analysis of Background:

Veer Kunwar Singh:

- Kunwar Singh also known as Babu Kunwar Singh was a leader during the uprising of 1857.

- He belonged to a family of the Ujjainiya clan of the Parmar Rajputs of Jagdispur, currently a part of Bhojpur district, Bihar.
- At the age of 80, he led a selected band of armed soldiers against the troops under the command of the British East India Company.
- He was the chief organiser of the fight against the British in Bihar.
- He is popularly known as Veer Kunwar Singh or Veer Babu Kunwar Singh.

Role in 1857 Uprising:

- Singh led the Indian Rebellion of 1857 in Bihar. He was nearly eighty and in failing health when he was called upon to take up arms.
- He was assisted by both his brother, Babu Amar Singh and his commander-in-chief, Hare Krishna Singh.
- He gave a good fight and harried British forces for nearly a year and remained invincible until the end.
- He was an expert in the art of guerrilla warfare.

In popular culture

- To honour his contribution to India's freedom movement, the Centre issued a commemorative stamp on 23 April 1966.
- The Government of Bihar established the Veer Kunwar Singh University, Arrah, in 1992.

SABARMATI ASHRAM

In News:

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson arrived in Ahmedabad as part of his two-day India trip and visited the famous Sabarmati Ashram.

Analysis of Background:

- On his return from South Africa, Gandhiji established the first ashram at Kochrab in 1915. It was at the Kocharab Bungalow of Jivanlal Desai, a barrister and friend of Gandhi. At that time the ashram was called the Satyagraha Ashram.
- He shifted this Ashram after the plague to a piece of open land on the banks of the river Sabarmati in 1917 for experiments in farming, animal husbandry, cow

breeding, Khadi and related activities.

- Sabarmati Ashram (also known as Gandhi Ashram) is thus located in the Sabarmati suburb of Ahmedabad, Gujarat, on the banks of the River Sabarmati.
- This was one of the many residences of Mahatma Gandhi who lived at Sabarmati (Gujarat) and Sevagram (Wardha, Maharashtra) when he was not travelling across India or in prison.
- He lived in Sabarmati or Wardha for a total of twelve years with his wife Kasturba Gandhi and followers, including Vinoba Bhave.
- The Bhagavad Gita was recited here daily as part of the Ashram schedule.
- It was from Sabarmati Ashram that Gandhiji led the Dandi march also known as the Salt Satyagraha on 12 March 1930.
- Over the years, the Ashram became home to the ideology that set India free. It aided countless other nations and people in their own battles against oppressive forces.
- Today, the Ashram serves as a source of inspiration and guidance, and stands as a monument to Gandhi's life mission and a testimony to others who have fought a similar struggle.
- In recognition of the significant influence that this march had on the Indian independence movement, the Indian government has established the ashram as a national monument.

GURU TEGH BAHADUR

In News:

The government will celebrate the 400th birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur with a two-day event at the Red Fort.

Analysis of Background:

Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–1675)

- Guru Tegh Bahadur was the ninth of ten Gurus of the Sikh religion. He was born at Amritsar in 1621 and was the youngest son of Guru Hargobind.

- His term as Guru ran from 1665 to 1675. One hundred and fifteen of his hymns are in Guru Granth Sahib.
- There are several accounts explaining the motive behind the assassination of Guru Tegh Bahadur on Aurangzeb's orders.
- He stood up for the rights of Kashmiri Pandits who approached him against religious persecution by Aurangzeb.
- He was publicly executed in 1675 on the orders of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in Delhi for himself refusing Mughal rulers and defying them.
- Gurudwara Sis Ganj Sahib and Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib in Delhi mark the places of execution and cremation of his body.

Impact of his martyrdom:

- The execution hardened the resolve of Sikhs against religious oppression and persecution.
- His martyrdom helped all Sikh Panths consolidate to make the protection of human rights central to its Sikh identity.
- Inspired by him, his nine-year-old son, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, eventually organized the Sikh group into a distinct, formal, symbol-patterned community that came to be known as Khalsa (Martial) identity.
- In the words of Noel King of the University of California, "Guru Teg Bahadur's martyrdom was the first-ever martyrdom for human rights in the world.
- He is fondly remembered as 'Hind di Chaadar'.

JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE

In News:

PM paid tribute to the brave Indians who died in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre on April 13, 1919.

Analysis of Background:

Rowlatt Act:

- The British had imposed a draconian Martial Law, banning public gatherings.

- On March 10, 1919, Rowlatt Act (Black Act) was passed, authorising the government to imprison or confine, without a trial, any person found involved in seditious activities.
- The British introduced the 'Rowlatt Act', on the recommendations of the Sedition Committee chaired by Sir Sidney Rowlatt & and Act modelled on the Defence of India Act of 1915.
- The rule led to discontent among Indians.
- Mahatma Gandhi launched the Satyagraha movement to protest against the Rowlatt Act.
- On April 7, 1919, Gandhi published an article called Satyagrahi, describing ways to oppose the oppressive rule.

Arrest of activists:

- Two popular Indian independence activists**,** Saifuddin Kitchlew and Satyapal, also organised a peaceful protest against the Rowlatt Act in Amritsar.
- On the occasion of Ram Navami on April 9, 1919, an order was issued to arrest the duo.
- In view of the protests, Britishers banned the public gatherings.
- The crowd assembled at Jallian Wala Bagh to peacefully protest at the venue condemning the arrest of these freedom fighters.

Ordered open firing:

- When Colonel Dyer got to know about the gathering, he reached the venue with around 50 soldiers.
- With a motive to punish civilians for showing "disobedience", Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer arrived at the Jallianwala Bagh and sealed off the exit to ensure nobody could flee the spot.
- He then ordered the troops to fire into a crowd of thousands of unarmed civilians.
- The firing went on for about 10 minutes and around 1,650 rounds of bullets were fired.
- According to the British government, 379 people died and 1,200 were wounded in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Some records say nearly a thousand were killed.

- As Britishers resorted to indiscriminate firing, many raised "inquilab zindabad" slogans and jumped into a well. More than 200 bodies were recovered from the well after the firing.
- The massacre angered Indians and Mahatma Gandhi gave a call for non-cooperation movement.

Post Jallianwala Bagh Massacre:

- **Martial Law:** The shooting was followed by the proclamation of martial law in Punjab.
- **Non-cooperation Movement:** The Jallianwalah Bagh massacre angered the Indian people and Mahatma Gandhi called the Non-cooperation Movement (1920-22).
- **Renouncement of Knighthood:** The Bengali poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore renounced the knighthood that he received in 1915.
- **Mahatma Gandhi** gave up the title of Kaiser-i-Hind, bestowed by the British for his work during the **Boer War**.
- **Formation of Hunter Commission:** On 14 October 1919, after orders issued by the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, the Government of India announced the formation of a committee of inquiry into the events in Punjab.
- Referred to as the Disorders Inquiry Committee, it was later more widely known as the Hunter Commission.
- In 1920 Commission censured **Dyer** for his actions and ordered him to resign from the military.

MAHAVIR JAYANTI

In News:

Recently ,The Prime Minister of India extended his greetings to all on Mahavir Jayanti.

Analysis of Background:

About Mahavira Jayanti:

- Mahavir Jayanti falls on the 13th day of the Chaitra month. On this auspicious day, the rath yatra is carried out with the idol of Lord Mahavira and the devotees

visit temples, worship the idol, seek god's blessings and prepare delicious traditional delicacies.

About Mahavira Swami:

- Birth: He was born to King Siddhartha and Queen Trishala of the Ikshvaku dynasty, in 599 BC at Kshatriyakund (part of the well known Vaishali republic) in Bihar.
- Early Life
    - He was named Vardhaman, which means continuously increasing.
    - He was a kshatriya prince of the Lichchhavis, a group that was part of the Vajji Sangha.
    - Though he was born with worldly comforts and luxuries, they never attracted him and at the age of thirty, he left home and went to live in a forest. For twelve years he led a hard and lonely life.
- **Kevaljnan**
    - At the age of forty-two he attained Kevaljnan (omniscience) through right knowledge, right faith and right conduct (Three Jewels of Jainism).
    - He became a Jina (conqueror) and the twenty-fourth tirthankara.
    - Rishabh Deva was the first tirthankara.
- **Teachings and Contributions**
    - All living beings have a soul and all souls are equal.
    - He questioned the authority of the Vedas and also emphasised individual agency and suggested the masses to attain liberation from the trials and tribulations of worldly existence.
        - This was in marked contrast to the Brahmanical position, wherein, an individual's existence was thought to be determined by his or her birth in a specific caste or gender.
    - He added one more vow to the four great vows from the time of Lord Parshvanath. The five great vows are

1. **Ahimsa** (non-violence)
2. **Satya** (truth)
3. **Asteya** (non-stealing)
4. **Aparigraha** (non-possession)
5. **Brahmacharya** (chastity, added by Mahavira).

- There are **two forms of these five vows**
    - **Mahavrata:** The 5 great vows followed **by Jain monks and nuns**.
    - **Anuvrata:** The less strict version of great vows followed **by Jain lay people**.
- As the last Tirthankar, he revived the Tirth (religious order) and this order is known as the Jain Sangh (order).
- He taught renunciation and restraint, love and compassion and modesty and righteousness as the basis to lead a balanced human life.

- **Language**

    - He used Prakrit language so that ordinary people could understand the teachings as Sanskrit was not understood by many.
    - There were several forms of Prakrit, used in different parts of the country and named after the regions in which they were used.

        - For example, the Prakrit spoken in Magadha was known as Magadhi Prakrit.
- Death: He attained mahaparinirvana at the age of seventy-two at Pavapuri near Patna in 527 BC and became a Siddha (free from the cycle of birth and death).

About Jainism:

- The word Jain comes from the term Jina, meaning conqueror.
- The basic philosophy was already in existence in North India before the birth of Lord Mahavira.
    - According to Jain tradition, Mahavira was preceded by 23 tirthankaras (teachers), literally, those who guide men and women across the river of existence.

- Jainism was supported mainly by Vaishyas (traders) in opposition to Brahmin-Kshatriya power dynamics.
- The most important idea in Jainism is that the entire world is animated and even stones, rocks and water have life.
- Non-injury to living beings, especially to humans, animals, plants and insects, is central to Jain philosophy.
- According to Jain teachings, the cycle of birth and rebirth is shaped through karma and asceticism and penance are required to free oneself from the cycle of karma. This can be achieved only by renouncing the world, therefore, monastic existence is a necessary condition of salvation. In order to do so, Jain monks and nuns had to take the five vows.
- Seven Tattvas (elements) of Jain Philosophy

1. **Jiva** (living substance)
2. **Ajiva** (matter or non-living substance)
3. **Asrava** (influx of Karmic matter in the soul)
4. **Bandha** (bondage of soul by Karmic matter)
5. **Samvara** (stopping of Asrava)
6. **Nirjara** (gradual removal of Karmic matter)
7. **Moksha** (attainment of perfect freedom or salvation).

- **Karmas** are responsible for distortions of the soul and fall into two groups, namely
    - Ghati (Destructive) Karma: These obstruct the true nature of the soul.

1. Jnanavarniya (Knowledge obscuring) Karma
2. Darshanavarniya (Perception obscuring) Karma
3. Antaräy (Obstructing) Karma
4. Mohniya (Deluding) Karma

- Aghati (Non-destructive) Karma: These affect only the body in which the soul resides. As long as Aghati karmas will be present, human souls will stay caged in some kind of a body and will have to experience pain and sufferings in many different forms.

1. Vedniya (Feeling producing) Karma

2. Nam (Body determining) Karma
3. Gotra (Status determining) Karma
4. Ayushya (Age determining) Karma
5. Vedniya (Feeling producing) Karma

- **Spread of Jainism**
    - Over hundreds of years, it spread to different parts of north India and to Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- **Literature**
    - Jain scholars produced a wealth of literature in a variety of languages namely Prakrit, Sanskrit and Tamil.
    - Jain literature is classified into two major categories
        - Agam Literature: This consists of original scriptures compiled by Ganadhars and Srut-kevalis. They are written in the Prakrit language.
        - Non-Agam Literature: This consists of commentary and explanation of Agam literature and independent works, compiled by elder monks, nuns, scholars, etc. and are written in many languages such as Prakrit, Sanskrit, Old Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannad, Tamil, German and English.

Sects of Jainism:

- Famine in Magadha led to the division of Jaisim into two sects namely Digambar (meaning sky clad) and Shwetamber (meaning white clad).
- Digambar Sect: It was led by Bhadrabahu, leader of monks who moved to the south.

    - This sect is **more austere** and is **closer in its ways to the Jains at the time of Mahavira**.
    - In recent centuries, it has been further divided into various sub-sects.

        - **Major sub-sects**

        1. Bisapantha
        2. Terapantha
        3. Taranapantha or Samaiyapantha

- **Minor sub-sects**

1. Gumanapantha
2. Totapantha

- **Shwetambar Sect:** It was led by **Sthulabhadra**, the leader of Monks who stayed in the **North**.

- Like the Digambar Sect, it has also been divided into three main sub-sects.

1. Murtipujaka
2. Sthanakvasi (avoided Idol Worship/Murtipujak)
3. Terapanthi (simpler worship pattern than Digambar TeraPanthi)

Difference Between Jainism and Buddhism:

Dimension	**Buddhism**	**Jainism**
Soul	Does not believe in the soul. No soul theory is propounded (**Nairatmyavada**).	Believe in the soul, which is present in everything.
God	Generally silent on questions related to the existence of God.	Does believe in God, not as a creator, but as a perfect being.
Varna System	Condemn it.	Do not condemn it.
Incarnation	Do not believe in incarnations.	Believe in incarnations.
Both Jainism and Buddhism **condemn the authority of Vedas** and **support** the **Karma Theory and rebirth doctrine**.		

RONGALI BIHU

In News:

Rongali Bihu, also known as Bohag is observed in mid-April (14-15th April) and marks the start of the Hindu calendar's Assamese New Year.

Analysis of Background:

About Rongali Bihu:

- The word Bihu is taken from the Sanskrit word Bishu meaning to ask blessings and prosperity from the Gods" during harvesting season.
- Bohag or Rongali Bihu is one of Assam's three Bihus, and it is one of the most significant festivals for the Assamese community.
    - Bihu, in Assam, is of three types: Rangoli Bihu, Magh Bihu and Maghar Domahi.
- It falls in the second week of April every year, marking the beginning of the harvest period.
- It celebrates the commencement of harvesting season and is also regarded as the first day of the Assamese New Year.
    - The significance of this festival is purely agricultural in nature. It is celebrated with great enthusiasm and joy throughout the state.
- It is Assam's harvest festival which marks the beginning of the Assamese New Year.
- This Bihu is all about partying, donning new outfits, and ringing in the New Year with song, dancing, and cultural performances. Hundreds of people turn up to enjoy cultural events.

AMBEDKAR JAYANTI

In News:

The Prime Minister of India has paid tributes to **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on his Jayanti.**

Analysis of Backgorund:

About Dr BR Ambedkar:

- Birth: In a Dalit (Hindu Mahar) family on 14th April 1891 in a small town at Mhow Cantt in erstwhile Central Provinces (now Madhya Pradesh).
- Often termed as the 'Father of the Indian Constitution', he always worked for the welfare of the poor, Dalits and deprived sections.
- He was a social reformer, jurist, economist, author, scholar and thinker.
- He envisioned a better and just society and fought for it throughout his life and wanted to create a modern India where there would be no prejudice based on caste or any other reason, where women and communities subjected to backwardness for centuries would enjoy equity of economic and social rights.
- He considered the Right to Constitutional Remedy (Article 32) as the soul of the constitution.

- **Major Contributions**

    - 1920: Started a fortnightly newspaper, the 'Mooknayak' (Dumb Hero), with the support of Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur.
    - 1924: Founded the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha also known as Outcastes Welfare Association, with an aim to spread education and awareness among the dalits.
    - 1930: Started Kalaram Satyagraha in Nashik, which was a temple entry movement for the untouchables.
    - 1932: He, on behalf of untouchables, signed the Poona Pact with Mahatma Gandhi, who was representing Congress.

        - The pact provided the provisions for reserved seats for the depressed class instead of a separate electorate in the regional legislative assemblies and Central Council of States.
        - He participated in all the three Round Table Conferences in 1930, 1931 and 1932, voicing for untouchables and the depressed class.

    - 1936: Formed the Independent Labour Party, which was later transformed into the Scheduled Castes Federation.
    - 1937: Contested for the Central Legislative Assembly from Bombay.
    - 1939: During the Second World War, he called upon Indians to join the Army in large numbers to defeat Nazism, which in his opinion, was another form of Fascism.
    - 1942-46: Worked as Minister of Labour in the Viceroy's Executive Council.
    - 1947: Worked as the first Law Minister of India in Jawahar Lal Nehru's cabinet and was also made the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of Constitution.
    - 1955: Founded the Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha.
    - 1956: Embraced Buddhism along with many of his followers in a public ceremony in Nagpur.

- **Major Literary Works**

    - The Untouchables: Who Were they and why they Became Untouchables?
    - Who were the Shudra?
    - Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables
    - Annihilation of Caste
    - Pakistan or the Partition of India
    - The Buddha and His Dhamma

- **Death:** In **New Delhi** on **6th December 1956**.
    - In 1990, he was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna (highest civilian honour of India).

MIRAT-UL-AKHBAR

In News:

- India's first Persian newspaper Mirat-ul-Akhbar was seen in the news

Analysis of Background:
About Mirat-ul-Akhbar:

- Raja Rammohun Roy started India's first Persian newspaper the Mirat-ul-Akhbar.
    - An erudite Persian scholar and a tenacious social reformer, he believed in 'searching for the truth through the light of discussion.'
- The newspaper was first published on 12 April 1822.
    - It was published on a weekly basis on Fridays.
- Persian was chosen because it was still recognised in courts, and was seen as a means to reach the intelligentsia, the top policymakers of the country.

Rammohan also realised that he could express himself best in a language he was most comfortable with.

MAHATMA JYOTIBA PHULE

In News: The Prime Minister has paid tribute to the great social reformer, philosopher and writer Mahatma Jyotiba Phule on his birth anniversary.

Analysis of Background:
About Mahatma Jyotiba Phule:

Jyotirao Govindrao Phule was an Indian writer, social activist, thinker and anti-caste social reformer from Maharashtra.

Personal Life:

- He was born in the Satara district of Maharashtra in 1827.
- His father, Govindrao was a vegetable vendor at Poona. Jyotirao's family belonged to the 'mali' caste and their original title was 'Gorhay'.

    - Malis were considered as an inferior caste by the Brahmins and were shunned socially.
- He was influenced by Thomas Paine's book titled The Rights of Man and believed that the only solution to combat the social evils was the enlightenment of women and members of the lower castes.
- Phule was also a merchant, author as well as a municipal council member.
    - In 1863, one of his businesses was to supply metal-casting equipment to construction sites. He was appointed commissioner to the Poona municipality and served in the position until 1883.

Social reforms and key contributions:

- He led the movement against the prevailing caste restrictions in India.
- He revolted against the domination of the Brahmins and struggled for the rights of peasants and other low-caste people.
- He is believed to be the first Hindu to start an orphanage for unfortunate children.
- He and his wife, Savitribai Phule, were pioneers of women's education in India.
    - He started his first school for girls in 1848 in Pune at Tatyasaheb Bhide's residence (Bhidewada).
- He, along with his followers, formed the Satyashodhak Samaj (Society of Truth Seekers) to attain equal rights for people from exploited castes.
    - People from all religions and castes could become a part of this association which worked for the upliftment of the oppressed classes
- He is regarded as an important figure in the social reform movement in Maharashtra. He was bestowed with the honorific Mahatma title by Maharashtrian social activist Vithalrao Krishnaji Vandekar in 1888.

Famous Works:

- He was also a reputed author. His well-known books include Gulamgiri (Slavery) and Shetkarayacha Aasud (Cultivator's Whipcord).

TOPIC: GEOGRAPHY

BANARASI PASHMINA

In News:

Recently, Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) launched "Banarasi Pashmina" to boost self-sustainability & Artisanal Creativity.

Analysis of Background:

- This is for the first time that Pashmina products are being produced outside the region of Leh-Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir.
- KVIC will be selling the "Made-in-Varanasi" Pashmina products through its showrooms, outlets and through its online portal.
- **Significance:**
    - It creates a fusion of diverse artistry from Leh-Ladakh, Delhi and Varanasi.
    - It aims to generate sustainable employment opportunities for women in Ladakh and diversify the skills of traditional weavers in Varanasi.
    - It would ensure round-the-year livelihood to women artisans in Leh-Ladakh where spinning activities are suspended for nearly half the year due to the extreme cold.

Pashmina:

- The word Pashmina comes from the Persian word 'Pashm' which means 'soft gold.
- Pashmina comes from an animal fibre Cashmere, derived from the Changthangi goat of Ladakh.
- It is indigenous to the high altitude regions of Leh-Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir.

- **Features:**
    - It is well known for its warmth, lightweight, and softness in addition to its characteristic dye absorbing property.
    - Pashmina has been accredited by the Guinness Book of World Records for being the costliest cloth in the world.
    - Pashmina wool is the finest version of cashmere and it is thinner than human hair and highly prized in the international market.

- **Usage:**
    - It is known for its use in beautiful shawls and other handmade items.

WESTERN DISTURBANCES

In News:

Over the past six months, variations in the intensity and locations of western disturbances have brought heavy rainfall to Delhi during some months, and kept the city dry and in the grip of a heat wave at other times.

Analysis of Background:

Western disturbances explained

- A western disturbance is an extratropical storm originating in the Mediterranean regionthat brings sudden winter rain to the northern parts of the Indian subcontinent.
- It is a non-monsoonal precipitationpattern driven by the westerlies.
- The moisture in these storms usually originates over the Mediterranean Sea, the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea.
- Extratropical storms are a global phenomena with moisture usually carried in the upper atmosphere, unlike their tropical counterparts where the moisture is carried in the lower atmosphere.
- Western disturbances are more frequent and stronger in the winter season.
- Western disturbances are important for the development of the Rabi crop ,which includes the locally important staple wheat.
- Western disturbances are usually associated with cloudy sky, higher night temperatures and unusual rain.
- Excessive precipitation due to western disturbances can cause crop damage, landslides, floods and avalanches.
- Over the Indo-Gangetic plains, they occasionally bring cold wave conditions and dense fog.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

In News:

Recently leaked document has revealed that the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific has reached a deal with China which outlines an unprecedented level of security cooperation.

Analysis of Background:

About Solomon Islands:

- It is a country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. It consists of a double chain of volcanic islands and coral atolls in Melanesia.
- The Solomon Islands is part of the ethnically Melanesian group of islands in the Pacific and lies between Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.
- The islands, which were initially controlled by the British Empire during the colonial era, went through the hands of Germany and Japan and then back to the U.K., after the Americans took over the islands from the Japanese during World War II.
- The islands became independent in 1978 to become a constitutional monarchy under the British Crown, with a parliamentary system of government.
- English is the official language, but Solomon Islands pijin is the lingua franca. There are over 80 different local languages plus dialects.
    - About 95% of the population is Christian.

6TH MASS EXTINCTION UNDERWAY

In News:

The Earth is losing species at unprecedented rates, with thousands likely to go extinct within decades. This marks the beginning of the Anthropocene Epoch, a self-aggrandising nomenclature that highlights our disproportionate and irreversible impacts on the surroundings.

Analysis of Background:

Mass Extinction:

- A mass extinction is a short period of geological time in which a high percentage of biodiversity, or distinct species—bacteria, fungi, plants, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, invertebrates—dies out.
- In this definition, it's important to note that, in geological time, a 'short' period can span thousands or even millions of years.
- The planet has experienced five previous mass extinction events, the last one occurring 65.5 million years ago which wiped out the dinosaurs from existence.
- Experts now believe we're in the midst of a sixth mass extinction.

Major Studies in this context:

IUCN study:

- In December 2021, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) on dragonflies and damselflies revealed that "16% out of 6,016 species are at risk of extinction"
- In South and Southeast Asia, which includes India, the situation is even worse because a quarter of all species are under threat of extinction.
- IUCN attributes this extinction of small creatures to the fast-declining freshwater breeding grounds.
- It means, the decline is due to rapid urbanisation and clearing of wetlands and rainforests to make way for cash crops.
- Marshes and other wetlands may seem unproductive and inhospitable to humans, but in fact they provide us with essential services.
- They store carbon, give us clean water and food, protect us from floods, as well as offer habitats for one in ten of the world's known species.

Threat faced by dragonflies:

- The existential threat faced by dragonflies is a cause of concern for all of the planet's 8.1 million species.
- the number of species at risk of extinction on the Red List has exceeded 40,000 for the first time.

The **World Wildlife Fund's (WWF's)** "Living Planet Report 2020"

- It says the Asia Pacific region lost 45 percent of its vertebrate population in four-and-half decades, while the average global loss is 68 per cent.
- The biennial report, prepared jointly by WWF and Zoological Society of London, is based on the global dataset analysed between 1970 and 2016.
- The report has tracked almost 21,000 populations of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles globally to reach its conclusions.

The "Living Planet Report 2020":

- It points out five major reasons behind the biodiversity loss across the planet: changes in land and sea use (habitat loss and degradation), overexploitation of species, invasive species and disease, pollution and climate change.
- In the Asia Pacific region, including India that is experiencing loss of species higher than the global average, habitat degradation is the biggest trigger, followed by species overexploitation and invasive species and disease. The role of pollution and climate change was proportionately higher at 16 per cent.

Factors affecting the extinction:

- **Human activity:**
  - Unlike previous extinction events caused by natural phenomena, the sixth mass extinction is driven by human activity, primarily (though not limited to) the unsustainable use of land, water and energy use, and climate change.
  - According to the Living Planet Report, 30% of all land that sustains biodiversity has been converted for food production.
  - Agriculture is also responsible for 80% of global deforestation and accounts for 70% of the planet's freshwater use, devastating the species that inhabit those places by significantly altering their habitats.

- It's evident that where and how food is produced is one of the biggest human-caused threats to species extinction and our ecosystems.

- **Greenhouse gas emissions:**
  - Unsustainable food production and consumption are significant contributors to greenhouse gas emissions that are causing atmospheric temperatures to rise, wreaking havoc across the globe.
  - The climate crisis is causing everything from severe droughts to more frequent and intense storms.

- **Major changes in Earth's carbon cycle**:
  - Such as large igneous province eruptions, huge volcanoes that flooded hundreds of thousands of square miles with lava. These eruptions ejected massive amounts of heat-trapping gases such as carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, enabling runaway global warming and related effects such as ocean acidification and anoxia, a loss of dissolved oxygen in the water.

Impact of mass extinction:

- Species do not exist in isolation; they are interconnected.
  - A single species interacts with many other species in specific ways that produce benefits to people, like clean air, clean water, and healthy soils for efficient food production.
  - When one species goes extinct in an ecosystem or its population numbers decline so significantly that it cannot sustain its important function, other species are affected, impacting the way the ecosystem functions and the benefits it provides.
  - Serious declines in populations of species are an indicator that the ecosystem is breaking down, warning of a larger systems failure.

- Currently, the species extinction rate is estimated between 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than natural extinction rates—the rate of species extinctions that would occur if we humans were not around.

  - While extinctions are a normal and expected part of the evolutionary process, the current rates of species population decline and

species extinction are high enough to threaten important ecological functions that support human life on Earth, such as a stable climate, predictable regional precipitation patterns, and productive farmland and fisheries.

- It also exacerbates the challenges associated with food production that stress species, while creating conditions that make their habitats inhospitable.
- Increased droughts and floods have made it more difficult to maintain crops and produce sufficient food in some regions.
- The intertwined relationships among the food system, climate change, and biodiversity loss are placing immense pressure on our planet.

Various steps to be taken to prevent the mass extinctions:

- **Humans can be the driving force**: The world is awash with scientists, conservationists and environmentalists working in the laboratory, in conservation areas and in political battlegrounds to protect endangered species.
- **Legislation**: From tackling global pollution emissions in the 2016 Paris Agreement to the U.K.'s Global Resource Initiative that combats deforestation, legislation will always be at the forefront of the fight against mass extinction.
    - We can ramp up our commitments to cutting carbon emissions under the Paris Agreement and limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- **Regulating wildlife markets**: In the wake of the current pandemic, wildlife markets have been thrust into the spotlight as not only being environmentally irresponsible, but potentially dangerous to human health through zoonotic diseases that jump from animals to humans such as COVID-19. These markets, trading live exotic animals or products derived from them, are found throughout the world.
- **Monitoring species population**: One of the best ways to help prevent species from becoming extinct is to monitor their populations and identify any problems before it's too late to help. Currently camera traps and surveys conducted on foot or from aircraft are the main method of data collection.
- **Saved by cloning**: Another potential solution to combat extinction could be to clone species. In 2021, scientists revealed they had successfully cloned a black-footed ferret from an animal that had died more than 30 years ago.

- Native to North America, these small mammals were thought to be extinct until a small colony was found in the early 1980s, which were entered into a breeding program and reintroduced around the United States.

- **30X30.** Our leaders can support the America the Beautiful initiative to conserve 30% of US lands and waters by 2030.
- **UN Biodiversity Summit**. US leadership can play a critical role beside 195 other countries and agree to new ambitious global goals on biodiversity and how they can be financed and implemented.
- **Grassroots action**. While the federal government can set high-level policies to conserve nature, businesses, communities, and individuals have a powerful role to play in shifting corporate behaviour with their consumer choices and demanding accountability from political leaders.

SOLAR FLARES

In News:

The sun emitted a strong X2.2 class solar flare that can impact satellite communication and global positioning systems.

Analysis of Background:

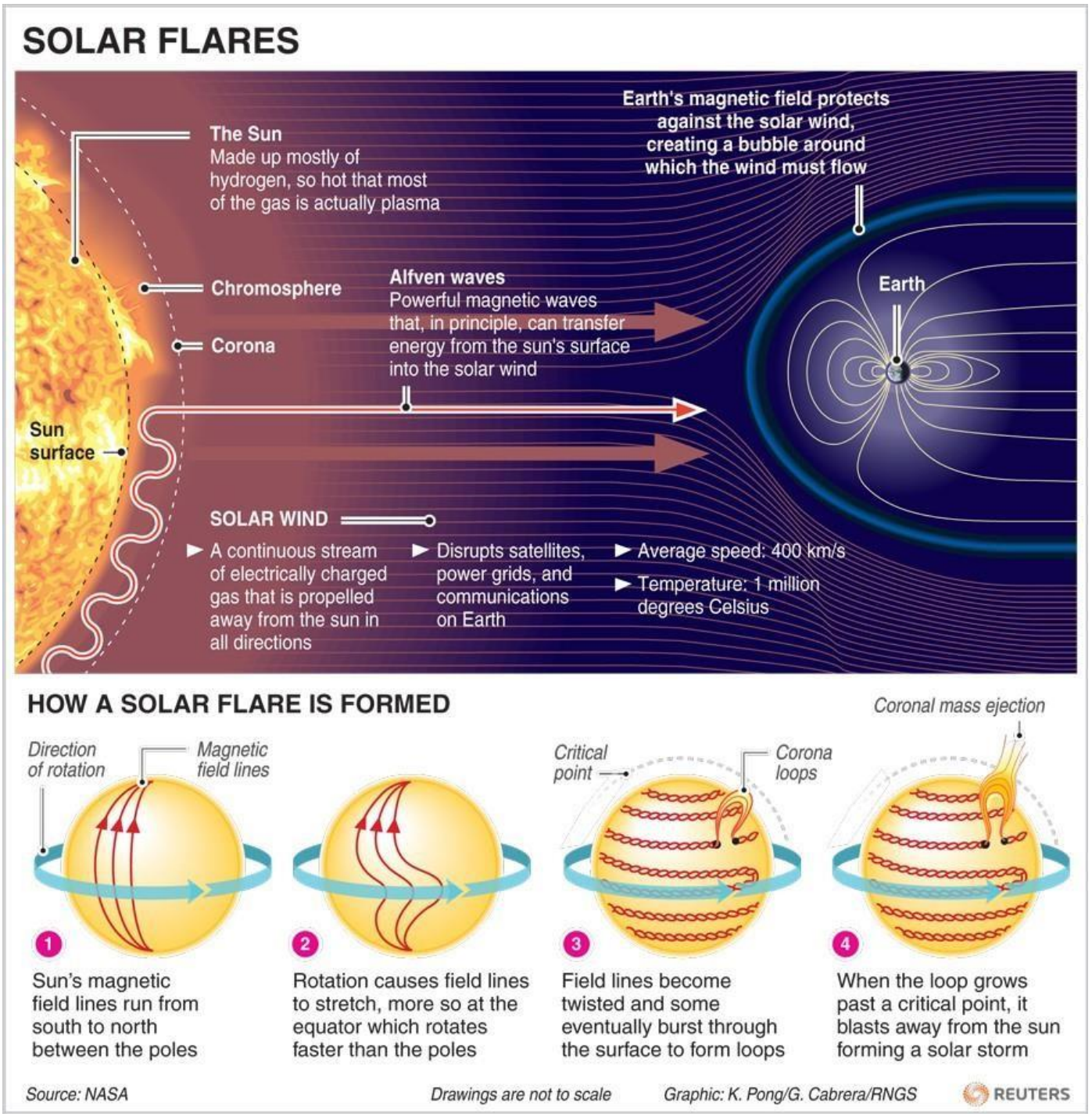
Solar flare:

- A solar flare is an intense localized eruption of electromagnetic radiation in the Sun's atmosphere.
- Flares occur in active regions and are often, but not always, accompanied by coronal mass ejections, solar particle events, and other solar phenomena.
- Solar flares occur in a power-law spectrum of magnitudes; an energy release of typically 1020 joules of energy suffices to produce a clearly observable event, while a major event can emit up to 1025 joules.
- Solar flares affect all layers of the solar atmosphere (photosphere, chromosphere, and corona).
- The plasma medium is heated to tens of millions of kelvins, while electrons, protons, and heavier ions are accelerated to near the speed of light.
- Flares produce electromagnetic radiation across the electromagnetic spectrum at all wavelengths, from radio waves to gamma rays.

- Most of the energy is spread over frequencies outside the visual range; the majority of the flares is not visible to the naked eye and must be observed with special instruments.
- Flares occur in active regions often around sunspots, where intense magnetic fields penetrate the photosphere to link the corona to the solar interior.
- Flares are powered by the sudden release of magnetic energy stored in the corona. The same energy releases may produce coronal mass ejections (CMEs), although the relationship between CMEs and flares is still not well understood.
- The frequency of occurrence of solar flares varies with the 11-year solar cycle. It can range from several per day during solar maximum to less than one every week during solar minimum. Additionally, more powerful flares are less frequent than weaker ones.

Impact of Solar Flares and CMEs on Earth

- Not all solar flares reach Earth, but solar flares/storms, solar energetic particles (SEPs), high-speed solar winds, and coronal mass ejections (CMEs) that come close can impact space weather in near-Earth space and the upper atmosphere.
- **Space-dependent services:** Solar storms can hit operations of space-dependent services like global positioning systems (GPS), radio, and satellite communications.
- **Radio communication:** Geomagnetic storms interfere with high-frequency radio communications and GPS navigation systems.
- **Magnetosphere:** CMEs, with ejectiles loaded with matter travelling at millions of miles an hour, can potentially create disturbances in the magnetosphere, the protective shield surrounding the Earth.
- **Astronauts:** Astronauts on spacewalks face health risks from possible exposure to solar radiation outside the Earth's protective atmosphere.
- **Other:** Aircraft flights, power grids, and space exploration programmes are vulnerable.


SOLAR FLARES
The Sun
Made up mostly of hydrogen, so hot that most of the gas is actually plasma
Earth's magnetic field protects against the solar wind, creating a bubble around which the wind must flow
Chromosphere
Corona
Alfven waves
Powerful magnetic waves that, in principle, can transfer energy from the sun's surface into the solar wind
Earth
Sun surface
SOLAR WIND
A continuous stream of electrically charged gas that is propelled away from the sun in all directions
Disrupts satellites, power grids, and communications on Earth
Average speed: 400 km/s
Temperature: 1 million degrees Celsius
HOW A SOLAR FLARE IS FORMED
Direction of rotation
Magnetic field lines
Critical point
Corona loops
Coronal mass ejection
1
Sun's magnetic field lines run from south to north between the poles
2
Rotation causes field lines to stretch, more so at the equator which rotates faster than the poles
3
Field lines become twisted and some eventually burst through the surface to form loops
4
When the loop grows past a critical point, it blasts away from the sun forming a solar storm
Source: NASA
Drawings are not to scale
Graphic: K. Pong/G. Cabrera/RNGS
REUTERS

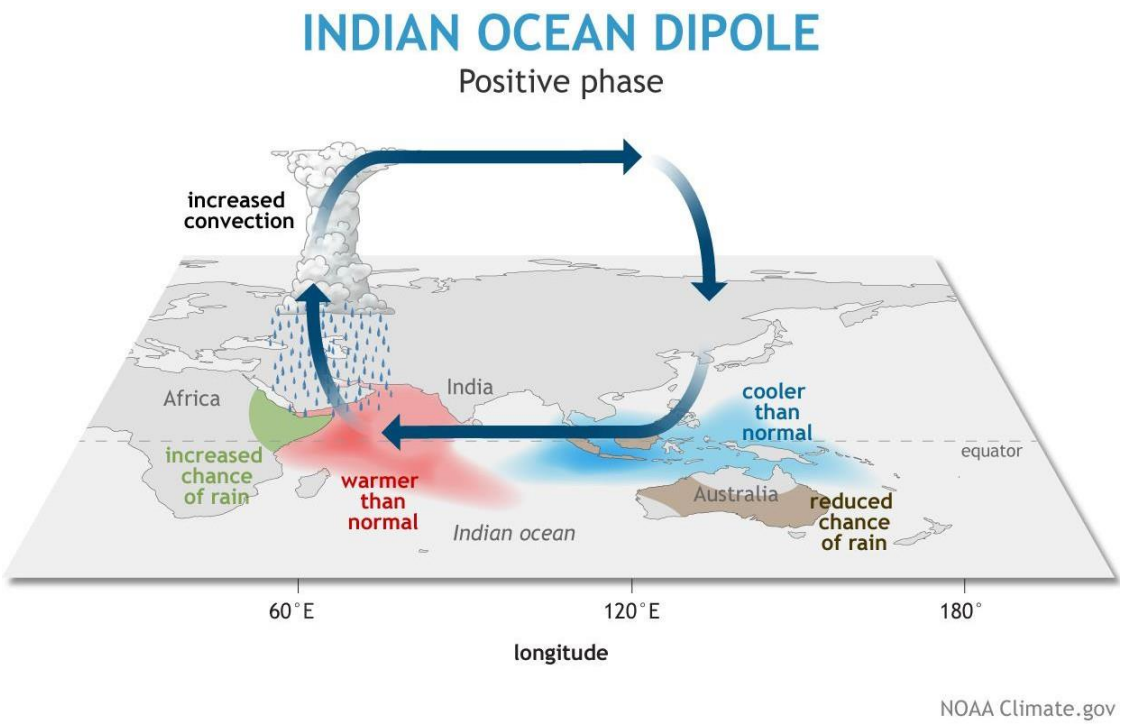
EL NINO AND INDIAN OCEAN DIPOLE

In News:

Southwest monsoon 2022 will be “normal” predicted by private weather forecaster Skymet. El Nino and Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) are not going to affect it .

Analysis of Background:

- **El Nino:**
  - This is a name given to the periodic development of a warm ocean current along the coast of Peru as a temporary replacement of the cold Peruvian current.
  - ‘El Nino’ is a Spanish word meaning ‘the child’, and refers to the baby Christ, as this current starts flowing during Christmas.
  - The presence of the El Nino leads to an increase in sea-surface temperatures and a weakening of the trade winds in the region.
  - In a normal monsoon year (without El Nino), the pressure distribution along the coast of Peru in South America has a higher pressure than the region near northern Australia and South East Asia.
- **Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD):**
  - It is defined by the difference in sea surface temperature between two areas (or poles, hence a dipole) – a western pole in the Arabian Sea (western Indian Ocean) and an eastern pole in the eastern Indian Ocean south of Indonesia.
  - In scientific terms, the IOD is a coupled ocean and atmosphere phenomenon, similar to ENSO but in the equatorial Indian Ocean.
  - It is thought that the IOD has a link with ENSO events through an extension of the Walker Circulation to the west and associated Indonesian throughflow (the flow of warm tropical ocean water from the Pacific into the Indian Ocean).
  - The IOD affects the climate of Australia and other countries that surround the Indian Ocean Basin, and is a significant contributor to rainfall variability in this region.



GENREAL STUDIES - 2

TOPIC: POLITY

DELIMITATION OF CONSTITUENCIES IN J&K

In News:

Members of the Jammu & Kashmir Delimitation Commission faced protests in Jammu as they embarked on a two-day visit to hold consultations with citizens, civil society groups and political parties.

Analysis of Background:

Delimitation:

- Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of an Assembly or Lok Sabha seat to represent changes in population over time.
- This exercise is carried out by a Delimitation Commission, whose orders have the force of law and cannot be questioned before any court.

Delimitation in J&K:

- Assembly seats in J&K were delimited in 1963, 1973 and 1995.

- Prior to August 5, 2019, carving out of J&K's Assembly seats was carried out under the J&K Constitution and Jammu and Kashmir Representation of the People Act, 1957.
- Until then, the delimitation of Lok Sabha seats in J&K was governed by the Constitution of India.
- However, the delimitation of the state's Assembly was governed by the J&K Constitution and J&K Representation of the People Act, 1957.
- There was no census in the state in 1991 and hence no Delimitation Commission was set up by the state until 2001 census.

Recent News:

- After the abrogation of J&K's special status in 2019, the delimitation of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats in the newly-created UT would be as per the provisions of the Indian Constitution.
- On March 6, 2020, the government set up the Delimitation Commission, headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, which was tasked with winding up delimitation in J&K in a year.
- As per the J&K Reorganization Bill, the number of Assembly seats in J&K would increase from 107 to 114, which is expected to benefit the Jammu region.

Concerns:

- **Jammu vs. Kashmir:** Concerns had been expressed over how the delimitation process may end up favoring the Jammu region over Kashmir in terms of the seats.
- **Under-representation of Ladakh:** Arguments have been made on how Ladakh has been underrepresented, with demands for statehood/sixth schedule.
- **Non-proportionate reservations:** It is argued that seats for STs should have been divided in both Jammu province & Kashmir province, as the ST population is almost equal.

THE 'CHANDIGARH QUESTION'

In News:

The newly elected Punjab Legislative Assembly passed a resolution, moved by the Chief Minister himself, on April 1 in a special session seeking the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab.

Analysis of Background:

Bifurcation of Punjab and Common Capital:

- Under the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966 following the Punjabi Suba movement, Haryana was carved out of the Hindi-speaking regions as a separate State.
- The hill regions of Punjab were merged with what was then the Union Territory (UT) of Himachal Pradesh.
- Chandigarh was made a UT and has remained the joint capital of Haryana and Punjab with State assets divided between Punjab and Haryana in a ratio of 60:40.

Chandigarh issue:

- Since 1966, the lack of full rights to its capital has remained a vexed issue in Punjab politics.
- All the governments and most political parties of Punjab have regularly raised the demand for Chandigarh.
- It has featured in all major developments, whether it is the 1973 Anandpur Sahib resolution, Dharam Yudh Morcha (then separatist movement) and the 1985 Rajiv-Longowal Accord.
- Since 1966, the Punjab Assembly has passed at least six such resolutions with the last being in 2014 under the Shiromani Akali Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party (SAD-BJP) government.
- The Centres' opposition to the latest Assembly resolution is the first time a political party has taken a contrarian stand.

The position of the union government on the city:

- At the time of the 1966 Act, the Union government with Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister indicated that the UT status to Chandigarh was temporary and that it would be transferred to Punjab.

- This decision was formalised in 1970 with Mrs Gandhi promising Haryana funds for building its own capital.
- According to the 1985 Rajiv-Longowal Accord, Chandigarh was to be handed over to Punjab on January 26, 1986 but this never fructified after the assassination of Longowal and the long period of militancy.
- The recent developments could thus indicate a shift in the Central government's position.

TRIPURA'S DARLONG COMMUNITY IN INCLUDED IN ST LIST

In News:

The Lok Sabha recently passed a bill to amend a constitutional order to include Darlong, a tribal clan in Tripura which was among the generic Halam community till now, in the list of Scheduled Tribes (ST).

Analysis of Background:

Tribes of tripura:

- Tripura has 19 tribal communities.
- These include Tripuri or Debbarma, Reangs or Brus, Jamatia, Noatia, Uchoi, Chakma, Mog, Lushai, Kuki, Munda, Kour, Oram, Santhal, Bhil, Bhutia, Chaimar or Sermai, Garo, Khasi, Lepcha and Halam.
- Many of these communities are further divided into sub-tribes. For example, Kukis have nearly 17-18 sub-tribes within the community.
- It is an umbrella tribal community including many smaller clans like Khasi, Lushai, Hmars and other generic clans. In course of time, Lushai, Hmar, Garo etc. came out of Kuki as separate communities

Darlongs:

- Darlong is a tribal community of 11,000 people.
- Despite its small population, the community has a high prevalence of education, cultural activities and members of the community are serving in different high positions in the local administration.

- Darlongs, despite being Scheduled Tribes, were never given ST certificates. Since they were considered a generic tribe under the Kuki community, they were handed their tribal certificates as members of 'Kuki' community.
- People from the Darlong community, like many other tribal communities, are now serving in high positions in the state administration, academia, and public services.
- Tribal musicologist Rosem (tribal instrument) maestro Thanga Darlong was conferred the prestigious Padma Shri award a few years back for his contribution to culture.

STRENGTHEN SECULARISM

In News:

The High Court of Karnataka has not been able to settle the hijab issue. The petition has been filed in the apex court by a Muslim student against the high court judgement.

Analysis of Background:

Freedom of religion under Indian Constitution:

- Under the Indian Constitution, there is a separation of religion from the state as in Europe.
- The essence of India's secularism is that the state has no religion.
- This is clear from Articles 27 and 28 of the Constitution.
- **Article 27** says that no tax can be levied for promoting any particular religion.
- In other words, no public revenue is permitted to be spent in favour of any particular religion.
- **Article 28** says that no religious instruction shall be given in any educational institutions wholly maintained out of state funds.
- The same Article says that no educational institution recognised or aided by the state shall compel any person to attend religious classes or worship therein.
- Article 25(2)(a) empowers the state to regulate secular activities associated with religious practice.
- **Article 15** prohibits any kind of discrimination on the ground of religion.

- **Freedom of religion is subject to other fundamental rights:** Above all, freedom of religion is made subject to other fundamental rights, apart from the reasonable restrictions on the grounds of public order, morality and health.
- Thus, the freedom of religion under the Constitution does not enjoy the same status as other secular rights such as equality before law, non-discrimination, right to life and liberty, etc.

Why India needs to be secular?

- Theocracy will ensure the disintegration of the country.
- India is a multi-religious country where the largest minority is around 200 million.
- The Government of India had notified as many **as** six minority religions in the country.
- So, a theocratic state with the majority religion as the state religion is an unworkable proposition.
- **Complex structure:** Another crucial factor which makes a theocratic state impossible in India is the complex, inegalitarian, hierarchical and oppressive social structure of the majority religion.
- **There would be no equality:** Since a theocratic state based on the religious texts, in the Indian context, would mean a state which would deny equality before law and equal protection of law to the subaltern class and discriminate against them on the basis of caste, it will be inherently unstable.
- This may lead to perennial conflicts and the eventual disintegration of society.
- Therefore, we reach the inevitable conclusion that India, as a nation, can survive only as a secular state where the state has no religion and does not promote any religion.

DENOTIFIED TRIBES

In News:

A standing committee of Parliament, tabled last week, has criticised the functioning of the development programme for de-notified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes.

Analysis of Background:

De-notified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes:

- These are communities who are the most vulnerable and deprived.
- Denotified tribes (DNTs) are communities that were 'notified' as being 'born criminal' during the British regime under a series of laws starting with the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871.
- Nomadic and Semi-nomadic communities are defined as those who move from one place to another rather than living at one place all the time.
- Historically, Nomadic Tribes and De-notified Tribes never had access to private land or home ownership.
- While most DNTs are spread across the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) categories, some DNTs are not covered in any of the SC, ST or OBC categories.
- **Many commissions and committees constituted** since Independence have referred to the problems of these communities.
    - These include the Criminal Tribes Inquiry Committee, 1947 constituted in the United Provinces.
    - Ananthasayanam Ayyangar Committee in 1949 (based on the report of this committee the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed).
    - Kaka Kalelkar Commission (also called first OBC Commission) constituted in 1953.
    - In 1965, an Advisory Committee constituted for revision of the SC and ST list under the chairmanship of B N Lokur referred to denotified tribes.
    - The B P Mandal Commission constituted in 1980 also made some recommendations on the issue.

PROCESS OF ELECTING PRESIDENT OF INDIA

In News:

The tenure of the current President of India is set to end in July 2022.

Analysis of Background:

About President of India:

- Under the Constitution of India, there shall always be a President of India (Article 52 of the Constitution).
- He holds the highest elective office in the country and is elected in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the Presidential and vice-Presidential Elections Act, 1952.
- The said Act is supplemented by the provisions of the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Rules, 1974, and the said Act under Rules form a complete Code regulating all aspects of conduct of elections to the Office of the President.
- Under Article 324 of the Constitution of India, the authority to conduct elections to the Office of President is vested in the Election Commission of India.
- The President shall hold office for a term of 5 years from the date on which he enters upon his office.
- He shall, however, continue to hold office notwithstanding the expiry of his term, until his successor enters upon his office. [Article 56 of the Constitution of India]

How is the President elected?

- The President is elected by an Electoral College, which consists of the elected members of both Houses of Parliament and the elected members of the Legislative Assemblies of all the States and also of NCT of Delhi and the Union Territory of Puducherry. [Article 54 of the Constitution of India]
- As per Article 55(3) of the Constitution of India, the election of the President shall be held in accordance with the system of proportional representation by means of single transferable vote and the voting at such election shall be by secret ballot.

ZONAL COUNCIL

In News:

Several inter-state issues will be discussed in the meeting of the Eastern Zonal Council, comprising the states of Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal and Jharkhand.

Analysis of Background:

About Zonal Council:

- **History:**
  - The idea of creation of Zonal Councils was mooted by the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru in 1956 when during the course of debate on the report of the States Reorganisation Commission.
- **Objectives of setting up of Zonal Councils:**
  - Bringing out national integration;
  - Arresting the growth of acute State consciousness, regionalism, linguism and particularistic tendencies;
  - Enabling the Centre and the States to co-operate and exchange ideas and experiences;
  - Establishing a climate of co-operation amongst the States for successful and speedy execution of development projects.
- **Composition Of Zonal Councils:**
  - **The Northern Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Union Territory of Chandigarh;
  - **The Central Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh;
  - **The Eastern Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Sikkim and West Bengal;
  - **The Western Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra and the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli;
  - **The Southern Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

- **North Eastern Council:**
  - The North Eastern States Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland are not included in the Zonal Councils and their special problems are looked after by the North Eastern Council, set up under the North Eastern Council Act, 1972.
  - The State of Sikkim has also been included in the North Eastern Council vide North Eastern Council (Amendment) Act, 2002 notified in 2002.
  -
- **Organizational Structure Of Zonal Councils:**
  - **Chairman** - The Union Home Minister is the Chairman of each of these Councils.
  - **Vice Chairman** - The Chief Ministers of the States included in each zone act as Vice-Chairman of the Zonal Council for that zone by rotation, each holding office for a period of one year at a time.
  - **Members**- Chief Minister and two other Ministers as nominated by the Governor from each of the States and two members from Union Territories included in the zone.
  - **Advisers**- One person nominated by the Planning Commission for each of the Zonal Councils, Chief Secretaries and another officer/Development Commissioner nominated by each of the States included in the Zone.
- **Functions Of The Councils:**
  - Any matter of common interest in the field of economic and social planning;
  - Any matter concerning border disputes, linguistic minorities or inter-State transport;
  - Any matter connected with or arising out of, the reorganization of the States under the States Reorganisation Act.

PROMOTE ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR) MECHANISMS: CJI

In News :

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana stressed the need for increasing the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms like mediation that can change the judicial landscape, bringing justice to millions and settling grievances without protracted legal proceedings.

Analysis of Background:

Need for Alternative Dispute Resolution(ADR)

- It is a well known fact that the present Judicial System is extremely expensive and delaying.
    - The parties to a dispute have to wait for Justice for years.
- This lengthy and expensive process of litigation has reduced the faith of common people in the Judicial System being followed by the Courts.
- These weaknesses of the Judicial System have given birth to alternative remedies for the disposition of disputes.
- Alternative remedies provide cheap and speedy Justice and that is the reason that ADR mechanism is being preferred by the disputing parties for the resolution of their disputes.
- The Malimath Committee Report (1989-90) underlined the need for ADR mechanisms as a viable alternative to conventional court litigation.

Alternative Dispute Resolution:

- ADR refers to the methods of resolving a dispute, which are alternatives for litigation in Courts.
- Generally, it uses a neutral third party who helps the parties to communicate, discuss the differences and resolve the dispute.
- It offers to resolve all types of matters related to civil disputes, as explicitly provided by the law.
- It is capable of providing a substitute for the conventional methods of resolving disputes.
- **Important Provisions Related To ADR**
    - Section 89 of the Civil Procedure Code, 1908: Provides that opportunity to the people, if it appears to court there exist elements of settlement

outside the court then the court formulate the terms of the possible settlement and refer the same for ADRs.

- Acts dealing with ADR
    - Legal Services Authority Act, 1987 (established Lok Adalat System)
    - Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996

Various Modes of ADR:

- **Arbitration:**
    - The dispute is submitted to an arbitral tribunal which makes a decision on the dispute that is mostly binding on the parties.
    - It is less formal than a trial and rules of evidence are often relaxed.
    - Generally, there is no right to appeal an arbitrator's decision.
    - Except for some interim measures, there is very little scope for judicial intervention in the arbitration process.

- **Mediation:**
    - An impartial person called a "Mediator" helps the parties try to reach a mutually acceptable resolution of the dispute.
    - He/she does not decide the dispute but helps the parties communicate so they can try to settle the dispute themselves.
    - It leaves control of the outcome with the parties.

- **Conciliation:**
    - It is a non-binding procedure in which an impartial third party, the conciliator, assists the parties in a dispute in reaching a mutually satisfactory agreed settlement of the dispute.
    - It is a less formal form of arbitration.
    - The parties are free to accept or reject the recommendations but if both parties accept the settlement document drawn by the conciliator, it shall be final and binding on both.

- **Negotiation:**
    - It is another form of ADR for resolving disputes.
    - The parties agree upon a course of action and bargain for advantage.

- Sometimes they try to adopt a creative option that serves their mutual interests.
- It is the most common form of resolving a dispute and this process solves most disputes.

- **'Lok Adalat':**
  - It is yet another form of ADR created as per the requirements of people in particular areas.
  - Camps of Lok Adalat were initially started in Gujarat in 1982 and now they have been extended to all over India.
  - The main purpose of establishment of Lok Adalats is to diminish the heavy burden of pendency of cases in the Courts which were of petty nature. The seekers of justice are in millions and it is becoming rather a heavy burden on the courts to dispose of such matters keeping in view the ever increasing litigation.

Advantages of ADR:

- **Less Time Consuming:** People can resolve their dispute in a short period as compared to courts.
- **Cost-effective: ADR** saves all that money, which one spends if undergoing the litigation process.
- **Less-Technical:** It is free from technicalities of courts and informal ways are applied in resolving the dispute.
- **No Fear of Court:** People are free to express themselves without any fear of court of law. They can reveal the true facts without disclosing them to any court.
- **Efficient Restoration:** There are always chances of restoring the relationship back as parties discuss their issues together on the same platform.
- **Prevent More Conflict:** ADR prevents further conflict and maintains a good relationship between the parties and also preserves the best interest of the parties.

Limitations:

- **No Appeals:** There is less or no scope of appeal in awards. Whenever there is a problem with the award, there would be no scope of appeal or correction.
- **Varied Guidelines:** It is difficult to choose among various guidelines and multiple institutions providing the facility of arbitration.
- **Different Statutes:** Due to different statutes for domestic and international arbitration, it is difficult to ascertain the applicability of the laws relating to international arbitration.
- **Cross-cultural Language Barrier:** Due to discrepancy in the language and culture of the two regions, it becomes difficult to bridge the gap and come to a unified solution.
- **Unfamiliarity** & **lack of awareness:** Most people still prefer the conventional method of going to courts and are also not informed about these options and the methodology.

e-BCAS PROJECT

In News:

In order to facilitate e-governance and automation of internal processes, the Ministry of Civil Aviation is mulling over the implementation of the **'e-BCAS Project'.**

Analysis of Background:

- Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, BCAS has undertaken e-BCAS, an initiative under e-Governance for automation of internal processes. This will be an online platform for the facilitation of stakeholders.
- It will leverage the strength of existing processes and organizational structure, with the objective to make entire activities transparent, user-friendly, and efficient.
- It will digitize the office processes, facilitate fast approvals, and ensure ease of doing business, by technological integration across various divisions and processes.

‘E-DAR’ (E-DETAILED ACCIDENT REPORT)

In News:

The Ministry of Roads, Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has developed the portal named ‘e-DAR’ (e-Detailed Accident Report).

Analysis of Background:

About ‘e-DAR’ (e-Detailed Accident Report)

- A web portal designed by the government in consultation with insurance companies to provide instant information on road accidents with a few clicks and help accelerate accident compensation claims, bringing relief to victims’ families.
- Digitalised Detailed Accident Reports (DAR) will be uploaded on the portal for easy access.
- The web portal will be linked to the Integrated Road Accident Database (iRAD).
    - From iRAD, applications to more than 90% of the datasets would be pushed directly to the e-DAR.
- e-DAR portal would conduct multiple checks against fake claims by conducting a sweeping search of vehicles involved in the accident, the date of accident, and the First Information Report number
- The portal would be linked to other government portals like Vaahan and would get access to information on driving licence details and registration of vehicles.
- **Benefits**
    - For the benefit of investigating officers, the portal would provide geo tagging of the exact accident spot along with the site map.
    - This would notify the investigating officer on his distance from the spot of the incident in the event the portal is accessed from any other location.
    - Integrated data and instant information on road accidents will bring relief to victims’ families, check fake claims.

E-SHRAM PORTAL

In News:

Unorganized sector workers registered on the E-Shram portal are getting Decent Jobs through National Career Service (NCS).

Analysis of Background:

E-Shram Portal:

- The Ministry of Labour and Employment has developed the e-SHRAM portal for building a National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW).
- The Portal was developed with the aim of extending the benefits of the social security schemes to unorganized sector workers.
- It is the first-ever national database of unorganized workers including migrant workers, construction workers, gig and platform workers, etc.
- The following is required to register on the portal:
    a. Aadhar Number
    b. The mobile number is linked with Aadhaar
    c. Savings Bank Account Number

Significance of e-Shram portal:

- It created a centralized database of all unorganized workers (UWs) including Construction Workers, Migrant Workers, Gig and Platform workers, Street Vendors, Domestic Workers, Agriculture Workers, etc.
- Improve the implementation efficiency of the social security services for the unorganized workers.
- Smooth Sharing of information in respect of registered unorganized workers with various stakeholders such as Ministries/ Departments/ Boards/ Agencies/ Organizations' of the Central & State Governments.
- Portability of the social security and welfare benefits to the migrant and construction workers.
- It provides a comprehensive database to Central and State Governments for tackling any National Crises like COVID-19 in future.

THE DELHI MCA ACT AND THE SPIRIT OF FEDERALISM

In News:

Recently, both Houses of Parliament passed the Delhi Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Act, 2022, to unify the trifurcated Delhi Municipal Corporations.

Analysis of Background:

- The split-up was first proposed in the 1987 Balakrishnan Committee Report which was bolstered in the 2001 Virendra Prakash Committee Report.
- The proposal finally took shape in 2011 and the law to trifurcate was enacted.
- A seven-member Delhi Legislative Assembly Panel was set up in 2001 to study the recommendations and suggest modalities.
- Trifurcation in 2011: The proposal finally took shape in 2011 and the law to trifurcate was enacted.

Changes introduced by the amendment

- The law provides that the power to determine the number of wards, extent of each ward, reservation of seats, number of seats of the Corporation, etc. **will now be vested in the Central government.**
- The number of seats of councillors in the Municipal Corporations of Delhi is also to be decided now by the Central government.
- By exercising that very power, the number of councillors to the Municipal Corporations of Delhi has been reduced from 272 to 250.
- The Central government has also **taken over powers from the State to** decide on matters such as 'salary and allowances, leave of absence of the Commissioner, the sanctioning of consolidation of loans by a corporation, and sanctioning suits for compensation against the Commissioner for the loss or waste or misapplication of municipal fund or property

Issues with the changes made:

- The Central government's line is that the amendment has been passed as in Article 239AA of the Constitution, which is a provision that provides for special status to Delhi.

- No consultation with Delhi govt.-The large-scale changes by the Central government has been done without any consultation with the Delhi government.
- Not in line with Part IXA of the Constitution: Part IXA specifically states that it will be the Legislature of the State that will be empowered to make laws concerning representation to the municipalities.
- Part IXA is a specific law while Article 239AA is general law: The argument of the Centre that Article 239AA can be applied over and above Part IXA of the Constitution does not hold good as the latter is a specific law that will override the general law relatable to Article 239AA.
- Against the federalism: In State of NCT of Delhi vs Union of India judgment the Supreme Court held, "The Constitution has mandated a federal balance wherein independence of a certain required degree is assured to the State Governments."
- It was made clear that the aid and the advice of the State government of Delhi would bind the decision of the Lieutenant General in matters where the State government has the power to legislate.
- No doubt, the amendment to the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957 will lead to further litigation on the aspect of a sharing of powers between the State of NCT of Delhi and the Central government.

ELECTION FREEBIES AND RELATED ISSUES

In News:

India could end up facing a Sri Lanka-type economic crisis if it doesn't stop the "culture of freebies" and subsidies in sectors like agriculture, NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand has warned.

Analysis of Background:

Freebie:

- The term Freebies is not new; rather it is a prevalent culture in Indian politics (in the name of socialism).
- The political parties are always trying to outdo each other in luring the Indian voters with assorted freebies.

- From free water to free smartphones the Indian politicians promise everything to attract prospective voters in favour.
- This trend has gained more momentum in the recent times with the political parties being innovative in their offerings as the 'traditional free water and electricity' is no longer sufficient as election goodies.

Examples of freebies:

1. Promise of Rs 15 lakh in our bank accounts
2. Free TV, Laptops
3. Free electricity
4. Loan waivers
5. Offering free public transport ride to all women in Delhi

Why are such policies popular among the public?

- **Failure of economic policies:** The answer lies in the utter failure of our economic policies to create decent livelihood for a vast majority of Indians.
- **Quest for decent livelihood:** The already low income had to be reoriented towards spending a disproportionately higher amount on education and health, from which, the state increasingly withdrew.
- **Prevailing unemployment:** Employment surveys have shown that employment growth initially slowed down from the 1990s, and then has turned negative over the past few years.
- **Increased cost of living:** Real income growth of the marginal sections has actually slowed down since 1991 reforms.
- **Increased consumerism:** The poor today also spend on things which appear to be luxuries; cellphones and data-packs are two such examples which are shown as signs of India's increased affluence.
- **Necessity:** For migrant workers, the mobile phone helps them keep in touch with their families back home, or do a quick video-call to see how their infant is learning to sit up or crawl.

Can Freebies be compared with Welfare Politics?

- These freebies are not bad. It is a part of social welfare.
- Using freebies to lure voters is not good.
- Voter's greediness may lead to a problem in choosing a good leader.

- When we don't have a good leader then democracy will be a mockery.

Impact of such policies

- **Never ending trail:** The continuity of freebies is another major disadvantage as parties keep on coming up with lucrative offers to lure more number of votes to minimize the risk of losing in the elections.
- **Burden on exchequer:** People forget that such benefits are been given at the cost of exchequer and from the tax paid.
- **Ultimate loss of poors:** The politicians and middlemen wipe away the benefits and the poor have to suffer as they are deprived from their share of benefits which was to be achieved out of the money.
- **Inflationary practice:** Such distribution freebie commodity largely disrupts demand-supply dynamics.
- **Lethargy in population:** Freebies actually have the tendency to turn the nation's population into: Lethargy and devoid of entrepreneurship.
- **Money becomes only remedy:** Everyone at the slightest sign of distress starts demanding some kind of freebies from the Govt.
- **Popular politics:** This is psychology driving sections of the population expecting and the government promptly responds with immediate monetary relief or compensation.

Arguments in favour

- **Social investment:** Aid to the poor is seen as a wasteful expenditure. But low interest rates for corporates to get cheap loans or the 'sop' of cutting corporate taxes are never criticized.
- **Socialistic policy:** This attitude comes from decades of operating within the dominant discourse of market capitalism.
- **Election manifesto:** Proponents of such policies would argue that poll promises are essential for voters to know what the party would do if it comes to power and have the chance to weigh options.
- **Welfare:** Economists opine that as long as any State has the capacity and ability to finance freebies then its fine; if not then freebies are the burden on economy.

- **Other wasteful expenditure:** When the Centre gives incentives like free land to big companies and announce multi-year tax holidays, questions are not asked as to where the money will come from.

A rational analysis of freebies:

- Winning election and good governance are two different things. The role of freebies to avail good governance is definitely questionable.
- The social, political and economic consequences of freebies are very short-lived in nature.
- There are many freebies and subsidies schemes available in many States but we still find starvation deaths, lack of electricity, poor education and health service.
- Hence the sorrow of the masses of India cannot be solved by freebies or by incentives.

POSTAL BALLOT FOR NRIS

In News:

Chief Election Commissioner, during a recent visit to South Africa and Mauritius, urged Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) to register as overseas electors and told them that a proposal on postal ballots for NRIs was being contemplated by the Election Commission of India.

Analysis of Background:

- CECs interactions with NRIs came after Union Law Minister informed the Lok Sabha in March that the government was exploring the possibility of allowing online voting for NRIs.
- The ECI had written to the Law Ministry in 2020 proposing that NRIs be allowed to vote through postal ballots, following which the matter has been under consideration by the government.
- The ECI at present allows NRIs to register as overseas electors as long as they have not acquired the citizenship of another country.
- They have to reach their respective polling booths to cast their votes in person on voting day.

Classification of Overseas Indians

Overseas Indians, officially known as Non-resident Indians (NRIs) or Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), are people of Indian birth, descent or origin who live outside the Republic of India:

Non-Resident Indian (NRI)

- Strictly asserting non-resident refers only to the tax status of a person who, as per section 6 of the Income-tax Act of 1961, has not resided in India for a specified period for the purposes of the Act.
- The rates of income tax are different for persons who are "resident in India" and for NRIs.

Person of Indian Origin (PIO)

- Person of Indian Origin (PIO) means a foreign citizen (except a national of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Iran, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and/or Nepal), who:
    - at any time held an Indian passport OR
    - either of their parents/grandparents/great-grandparents were born and permanently resident in India as defined in GoI Act, 1935 and other territories that became part of India thereafter provided neither was at any time a citizen of any of the aforesaid countries OR
    - is a spouse of a citizen of India or a PIO.

Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI)

- After multiple efforts by leaders across the Indian political spectrum, a pseudo-citizenship scheme was established, the "Overseas Citizenship of India", commonly referred to as the OCI card.
- The Constitution of India does not permit full dual citizenship.
- The OCI card is effectively a long-term visa, with restrictions on voting rights and government jobs.

NATIONAL PANCHAYATI RAJ DAY

In News:

India commemorates the 12th National Panchayati Raj day on 24th April 2022. The Prime Minister has launched the distribution of e-property cards under the SWAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas) scheme on the Day.

Analysis of Background:

National Panchayati Raj Day:

- The first National Panchayati Raj Day was celebrated in 2010. Since then, the National Panchayati Raj Day is celebrated on 24th April every year in India.
- The day marks the enactment of the 73rd amendment of the constitution in 1992.

Panchayati Raj:

- After the Constitution came into force, Article 40 made a mention of panchayats and Article 246 empowered the state legislature to legislate with respect to any subject relating to local self-government.
- Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) was constitutionalized through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 to build democracy at the grass roots level and was entrusted with the task of rural development in the country.
- PRI is a system of rural local self-government in India.
- Local Self Government is the management of local affairs by such local bodies who have been elected by the local people.
- To strengthen e-Governance in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) across the country, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) has launched eGramSwaraj, a user-friendly web-based portal.
- It unifies the planning, accounting and monitoring functions of Gram Panchayats. Its combination with the Area Profiler application, Local Government Directory (LGD) and the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) renders easier reporting and tracking of Gram Panchayat's activities.

Salient Features of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment:

- The 73rd Constitutional Amendment added Part IX titled "The Panchayats" to the Constitution.
- Basic unit of democratic system-Gram Sabhas (villages) comprising all the adult members registered as voters.
- Three-tier system of panchayats at village, intermediate block/taluk/mandal and district levels except in States with population is below 20 lakhs (Article 243B).
- Seats at all levels to be filled by direct elections (Article 243C (2)).
- **Reservation of Seats:**
  - Seats reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and the chairpersons of the Panchayats at all levels also shall be reserved for SCs and STs in proportion to their population.
  - One-third of the total number of seats to be reserved for women.
  - One-third offices of chairpersons at all levels reserved for women (Article 243D).
- **Duration:**
  - Uniform five year term and elections to constitute new bodies to be completed before the expiry of the term.
  - In the event of dissolution, elections compulsorily within six months (Article 243E).
- Independent Election Commission in each State for superintendence, direction and control of the electoral rolls (Article 243K).
- Power of Panchayats: Panchayats have been authorised to prepare plans for economic development and social justice in respect of subjects illustrated in Eleventh Schedule (Article 243G).
- Source of Revenue (Article 243H): State legislature may authorise the Panchayats with
  - Budgetary allocation from State Revenue.

- Share of revenue of certain taxes.
- Collection and retention of the revenue it raises.

- Establish a Finance Commission in each State to determine the principles on the basis of which adequate financial resources would be ensured for panchayats and municipalities (Article 243I).
- Exemptions:
    - The Act does not apply to the states of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram and certain other areas because of socio-cultural and administrative considerations. These areas include:
    - the Scheduled areas and the tribal areas (under Schedule VI of the Constitution) in the states.
    - the hill areas of Manipur for which district councils exist,
    - Darjeeling district of West Bengal for which Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council exists.
        - However, the Parliament has extended the provisions of Part IX to Vth schedule areas through an Act called the Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996.
- At present, 10 States namely Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and Telangana have Fifth Schedule Area.

ANTI-DEFECTION LAW NEEDS TO BE REFORMED: VICE-PRESIDENT

In News:

Recently, the Vice-President has said that the time has come to amend the anti-defection legislation in the country to plug existing loopholes.

Analysis of Background:

Anti Defection Law:

- The anti-defection law punishes individual Members of Parliament (MPs)/MLAs for leaving one party for another.
- Parliament added it to the Constitution as the Tenth Schedule in 1985. Its purpose was to bring stability to governments by discouraging legislators from changing parties.
    - The Tenth Schedule - popularly known as the Anti-Defection Act - was included in the Constitution via the 52nd Amendment Act, 1985.
    - It sets the provisions for disqualification of elected members on the grounds of defection to another political party.
    - It was a response to the toppling of multiple state governments by party-hopping MLAs after the general elections of 1967.
- However, it allows a group of MP/MLAs to join (i.e., merge with) another political party without inviting the penalty for defection. And it does not penalize political parties for encouraging or accepting defecting legislators.
    - As per the 1985 Act, a 'defection' by one-third of the elected members of a political party was considered a 'merger'.
    - But the 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003, changed this and now at least two-thirds of the members of a party must be in Favour of a "merger" for it to have validity in the eyes of the law.
- The members disqualified under the law can stand for elections from any political party for a seat in the same House.
- The decision on questions as to disqualification on ground of defection are referred to the Chairman or the Speaker of such House, which is subject to ‘Judicial review’.

- However, the law does not provide a timeframe within which the presiding officer has to decide a defection case.

The Grounds of Disqualification:

- If an elected member voluntarily gives up his membership of a political party.
- If he votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party or anyone authorized to do so, without obtaining prior permission.
  - As a pre-condition for his disqualification, his abstention from voting should not be condoned by his party or the authorized person within 15 days of such incident.
- If any independently elected member joins any political party.
- If any nominated member joins any political party after the expiry of six months.

The issues with Anti Defection Law:

- Undermining Representative & Parliamentary Democracy:
  - After enactment of the Anti-defection law, the MP or MLA has to follow the party's direction blindly and has no freedom to vote in their judgment.
  - Due to Anti-Defection law, the chain of accountability has been broken by making legislators accountable primarily to the political party.
- Controversial Role of Speaker:
  - There is no clarity in the law about the timeframe for the action of the House Chairperson or Speaker in the anti-defection cases.
    - Some cases take six months and some even three years. There are cases that are disposed off after the term is over.
- No Recognition of Split:
  - Due to the 91st amendment, the anti-defection law created an exception for anti-defection rulings.
  - However, the amendment does not recognize a 'split' in a legislature party and instead recognizes a 'merger'.
- Subversion of Electoral Mandates:

- Defection is the subversion of electoral mandates by legislators who get elected on the ticket of one party but then find it convenient to shift to another, due to the lure of ministerial berths or financial gains.

- Affects the Normal Functioning of Government:
  - The infamous "Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram" slogan was coined against the background of continuous defections by the legislators in the 1960s.
  - The defection leads to instability in the government and affects the administration.

- Promote Horse Trading:
  - Defection also promotes horse-trading of legislators which clearly go against the mandate of a democratic setup.

- Allows only Wholesale Defection:
  - It allows wholesale defection, but retail defection is not allowed. Amendments are required to plug the loopholes.
  - He raised concern that if a politician is leaving a party, s/he may do so, but they should not be given a post in the new party.

PARDONING POWERS OF GOVERNOR

In News:

The Supreme Court advised the Union government to release the convict in the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's assassination case, as he already served a sentence of more than three decades.

Analysis of Background:

- The Supreme Court has advised the Union government to act against the Tamil Nadu Governor who chose to "ignore" the State Cabinet's binding advice to release a convict.
- The Governor ignored the state cabinet's advice by highlighting that the President had the authority to decide on the mercy plea.

Governor:

- Part VI of the Indian Constitution deals with the State government.

- Articles 153 to 167 in Part VI of the Constitution deal with the state executive. The state executive consists of;
    - The Governor
    - The Chief Minister
    - The Council of Ministers
    - The Advocate General of State.
- The office of the governor has a dual role;
    - The Governor is the chief executive head of the State.
    - The Governor also acts as an agent of the central government.
- Normally, there is a governor for each state, but the 7th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1956 enabled the appointment of the same person as a Governor for 2 or more states.
- Governor is appointed by the president by warrant under his hand and seal.
    - It is an independent constitutional office and is not under the control of or subordinate to the Central government.

Pardoning Power of the Governor:

- Under Article 161 of the Indian Constitution, the Governor of a state can grant; Pardons, Reprives, Respites and Remissions of punishment or Suspend, Remit and Commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence against any State law.
- Earlier, the Governor cannot pardon the death sentence that was the exclusive power of the Indian President. But in August 2021, the Supreme Court held that the Governor of a State can pardon prisoners; including death row ones, even before they have served a minimum of 14 years of a prison sentence.

Pardon:

- It removes both the sentence and the conviction and completely forgives the convict from all sentences, punishments and disqualifications.

Commutation:

- It denotes the substitution of one form of punishment for a lighter form.
- For example, a death sentence may be commuted to life imprisonment.

Remission:

- It indicates reducing the period of a sentence without changing its character.
- For example, a sentence of imprisonment for two years may be remitted to imprisonment for one year.

Respite:

- It suggests awarding a lesser sentence in place of originally awarded due to some special fact, such as the physical disability of a convict or the pregnancy of a woman offender.

Reprieve:

- It means a stay of the execution of a sentence (especially that of death) for a temporary period.
- Its purpose is to enable the convict to have time to seek pardon or commutation from the Governor/President.

Comparison between Pardoning Powers of President and Governor

President	Governor
● Authority to pardon, reprieve, respite, remit, suspend, or commute the punishment or sentence of any person convicted of a violation of a Central law.	● Authority to pardon, reprieve, respite, remit, suspend, or commute the punishment or sentence of anyone who has been convicted of an offence against state law.
● Authority to pardon, reprieve, respite, remit, suspend, or commute a death sentence. ● The sole authority to pardon a death sentence.	● He is unable to pardon the death sentence. Even if a state law calls for the death penalty, the President, not the governor, has the authority to grant a pardon. ● However, the governor has the authority to suspend, remit, or commute a death sentence.
● Authority to grant pardon, reprieve, respite, suspension, remission, or commutation of	● He doesn't have this kind of power.

punishment or sentence imposed by a court-martial (military court).	

TOPIC: IR/IO

INDIA CONDEMNS ATROCITIES IN BUCHA, UKRAINE

In News:

More than 300 bodies have been found in a **Kyiv suburb called Bucha**. The discoveries have drawn comparisons with the killings of civilians in this area during World War II.

Analysis of Background:

About Bucha:

The discoveries have been made in a Kyiv suburb called Bucha, a town located about 25 km to the northwest of the capital, which had an estimated population of around 36,000 before the invasion began.

- The discoveries have drawn comparisons with the killings of civilians in this area during World War II.
  - The First Battle of Kyiv in which part of Hitler's Operation Barbarossa against the Soviet Union that began in June 1941 and
  - The Second Battle of Kyiv when the Red Army started to push back the Germans from Ukraine, the area around the Ukrainian capital, including Bucha, saw the Holocaust by bullets during which an estimated 1.5 million people, mostly Jews, were shot dead at close range.

- **Genocide or war crimes?**
    - Ukraine and the West have accused Russia of war crimes even earlier, alleging that it targeted civilians in the bombing.
    - War crimes are defined as “grave breaches” of the Geneva Conventions, agreements signed after World War II that laid down international humanitarian laws during war time.
    - Deliberately targeting civilians amounts to a war crime.
    - The International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague has already opened an investigation into possible war crimes by Russia.
    - The crime of genocide, as defined by the United Nations Genocide Convention of December 1948, includes acts “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”.
    - Genocide is seen as the gravest and most serious of all crimes against humanity.

- **Issues associated**
    - Russia does not recognise the ICC and will likely not cooperate with the investigation.
    - Differences of opinion on what constitutes genocide explain in part the reluctance of the international community to use the term frequently.

- **History of genocides**
    - Holocaust in which more than 6 million Jews were exterminated
    - The 1915-20 mass killings of Armenians by the Ottoman Turks
    - The killings of 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda in 1994
    - The Srebrenica massacre of 1995.

- **Global reaction**
    - Amid calls for more, stronger sanctions against Russia, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Denmark, and Sweden have expelled dozens of Russian diplomats**, and** Swedish prosecutors have opened **a** preliminary investigation into possible war crimes in Ukraine.

INDIA-NEPAL RELATIONSHIP

In News:

The Nepal Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, paid a long-awaited visit to India last week Sworn in in July 2021, this was his first bilateral visit abroad, in keeping with tradition.

Analysis of Background:

Outcomes of the visit:

- Among the highlights was the operationalisation of the 35 kilometre cross-border rail link from Jayanagar (Bihar) to Kurtha (Nepal).
- The second project that was inaugurated was the 90 km long 132 kV double circuit transmission line connecting Tila (Solukhumbu) to Mirchaiya (Siraha) close to the Indian border.
- In addition, agreements providing technical cooperation in the railway sector, Nepal's induction into the International Solar Alliance, and between Indian Oil Corporation and Nepal Oil Corporation on ensuring regular supplies of petroleum products were also signed.
- The Mahakali Treaty covers the Sarada and Tanakpur barrages as well as the 6,700 MW (approximately) Pancheshwar Multipurpose project.
- Both sides have agreed to push for an early finalisation of the detailed project report.
- The joint vision statement on power sector cooperation recognises the opportunities for joint development power generation projects together with cross border transmission linkages and coordination between the national grids; it can provide the momentum.

Issues in India-Nepal relations:

- Over the years, a number of differences have emerged between India and Nepal that need attention.
- The relationship took a nosedive in 2015, with India first getting blamed for interfering in the Constitution drafting process and then for an "unofficial blockade" that generated widespread resentment against India.

- Revision of Treaty of Peace and Friendship: As one of the oldest bonds, the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship was originally sought by the Nepali authorities in 1949 to continue the special links they had with British India.
- It provides for an open border and for Nepali nationals to have the right to work in India.
- But today, it is viewed as a sign of an unequal relationship, and an Indian imposition.
- The idea of revising and updating it has found mention in Joint Statements since the mid-1990s.
- Demonetisation is another irritant. In November 2016, India withdrew ₹15.44 trillion of high value (₹1,000 and ₹500) currency notes. Many Nepali nationals who were legally entitled to hold ₹25,000 of
- Indian currency (given that the Nepali rupee is pegged to the Indian rupee) were left high and dry.
- The Nepal Rashtra Bank, which is the central bank, holds ₹7 crore and estimates of public holdings are ₹500 crore.
- After more than five years, it should certainly be possible to resolve this to mutual satisfaction.
- Kalapani boundary issue: These boundaries had been fixed in 1816 by the British, and India inherited the areas over which the British had exercised territorial control in 1947.
- While 98% of the India-Nepal boundary was demarcated, two areas, Susta and Kalapani remained in limbo.
- In November 2019, India issued new maps following the division of the State of Jammu and Kashmir as Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.
- Though the new Indian map did not affect the India-Nepal boundary in any material way, a new map of Nepal was endorsed by the legislature through a constitutional amendment.
- While it did not alter the situation on the ground, it soured relations with India and added a new and emotive irritant.

FOURTH ANNUAL U.S.-INDIA 2+2 MINISTERIAL DIALOGUE

In News:

Recently, the Fourth Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial **Dialogue** was held in Washington DC.

Analysis of Background:

About 2+2 Dialogue:

- The 2+2 Dialogue is a format of meeting of the foreign and defence ministers of India and its allies on strategic and security issues.
- A 2+2 ministerial dialogue enables the partners to better understand and appreciate each other's strategic concerns and sensitivities taking into account political factors on both sides, in order to build a stronger, more integrated strategic relationship in a rapidly changing global environment.
- India has 2+2 dialogues with four key strategic partners: the US, Australia, Japan, and Russia.

India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue:

- The US is India's oldest and most important 2+2 dialogue partner.
- The first 2+2 dialogue between the two countries was held during the Trump Administration in September 2018.
    - The launch of the dialogue was seen as a "reflection of the shared commitment" by India and the US to promote synergy in their diplomatic and security efforts.
- The second and third editions of the 2+2 dialogues were held in Washington DC and New Delhi in 2019 and 2020 respectively.

Major Highlights of recent Dialogue:

- **Discussion on range of issues:**
    - India and the U.S. discussed a broad range of issues — from the COVID-19 response, supply chains, climate action to global and regional issues.
    - Both the countries discussed ways of mitigating the negative impact of the Ukraine situation on food and energy supplies.
    - U.S. has not made a decision on CAATSA sanctions

- **Global Partnership and Indo-Pacific Cooperation:**
    - Both reviewed mutual efforts to respond to the worsening humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and assessed its broader implications.
    - The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific in which the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states are respected.
    - They affirmed their interest in expanding efforts to promote sustainable and durable infrastructure across the Indo-Pacific and affirmed they would remain engaged through the Blue Dot Network and Build Back Better World (B3W) Initiative.

- **Logistics cooperation:**
    - They have agreed to explore further cooperation in the fields of Defence Cyber, Special Forces and expanding the scope of logistics cooperation under LEMOA and during joint exercises.
    - Both sides have agreed on the need to revitalise the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) with joint projects on advanced and emerging and critical military technologies, to be executed quickly.

- **Space:**
    - They also signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Space Situational Awareness — to further cooperation in outer-space.
- **Cyber-space:**
    - The two sides had discussed deepening cooperation also in cyber-space, in order to develop capabilities in both “war-fighting domains.”
- **Situation in Afghanistan:**
    - The two sides discussed the ramifications of the situation in Afghanistan (where the Taliban has taken over after a chaotic U.S. departure in August last year) for the neighbourhood..
- **Other countries in India’s neighbourhood:**
    - The two sides discussed other countries in India’s neighbourhood — presumably, Sri Lanka, which is in the midst of the worst economic crisis in decades, and Pakistan, which, after intense political drama, has a new Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, who replaced former Prime Minister Imran Khan ,following a no-confidence vote in parliament.

Significance of Meeting:

- The Dialogue would enable both sides to undertake a comprehensive review of cross-cutting issues in the India-US bilateral agenda related to foreign policy, defence and security with the objective of providing strategic guidance and a vision for further consolidating the relationship.
- The 2+2 Dialogue will also provide an opportunity to exchange views about important regional and global developments and how we can work together to address issues of common interest and concern.

RUSSIA SUSPENDED FROM UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

In News:

Russia's membership to the Human Rights Council (UNHRC), to which it was elected in 2020, was suspended after the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) vote.

Analysis of Background:

Why was Russia suspended from UNHRC?

- Russia's three-year term as member of the Council began on January 1, 2021.
- With membership on the Council comes a responsibility to uphold high human rights standards.
- It is this responsibility that Russia is alleged to have wilfully violated in Ukraine.

India stayed absent,

- India questioned the process by which the move to suspend Russia took place given that it happened before the international probe into the massacre.
- New Delhi's point is that it should have been brought before the Human Rights Council first, and not the UNGA, sources said.
- This is a signal to the West that due process has not been followed, something that Indian interlocutors can draw Moscow's attention to.

About UN Human Rights Council:

- The UNHRC is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system, which is responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the world.
- It addresses and makes recommendations on situations of human rights violations, and can discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations.
- The UNHRC **replaced the former UN Commission on Human Rights.**
- It was created by the UNGA on March 15, 2006, and the body met in its first session from June 19-30, 2006.

Membership of the Council

- The Council, which meets at the UN Office in Geneva, Switzerland, is made up of 47 UN Member States who are elected by majority vote through a direct and secret ballot at the UNGA.
- The membership of the Council is based on **equitable geographical distribution.**
- African and Asia-Pacific states have 13 seats each, Latin American and Caribbean states have 8 seats, Western European and other states 7 seats, and Eastern European states 6 seats.
- The members serve for three years and are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.

Leadership of the Council

- The Council has a five-person Bureau, consisting of a president and four vice-presidents, each representing one of the five regional groups.
- They serve for a year each, in accordance with the Council's annual cycle.
- The Human Rights Council President of the 16th Cycle (2022) is Federico Villegas, who is the Permanent Representative of Argentina to the UN and other international organizations in Geneva.
- He was elected president of the Human Rights Council for 2022 in December 2021.

Meetings of the Council

- The Human Rights Council holds no fewer than three regular sessions a year, for a total of at least 10 weeks.

- These sessions take place in March (4 weeks), June (3 weeks) and September (3 weeks).
- The Council met in its latest (49th) regular session from February 28 to April 1, 2022
- If a third of the Member states requests, the Council can decide at any time to hold a special session to address human rights violations and emergencies.
- Under the presidency of Nazhat S Khan of Fiji, the Council held a record five special sessions in 2021 — on Myanmar, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Ethiopia.

EAST ASIA SUMMIT

In News:

Recently, India and Singapore organised an East Asia Summit workshop on Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing.

Analysis of Background:

- The Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Government of India and the Government of Singapore organised a virtual East Asia Summit (EAS) Workshop on Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing.
- It was co-chaired by India and Singapore Food Agency (SFA).

Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing:

- **About:**
  - IUU fishing activities violate both national and international fishing regulations.
  - Illegal fishing refers to fishing activities conducted in contravention of applicable laws and regulations, including those laws and rules adopted at the regional and international level.
  - Unreported fishing refers to fishing activities that are not reported or are misreported to relevant authorities in contravention of national laws and

regulations or reporting procedures of a relevant regional fisheries management organisation.
    - Unregulated fishing occurs in areas or for fish stocks for which there are no applicable conservation or management measures and where such fishing activities are conducted in a manner inconsistent with State responsibilities for the conservation of living marine resources under international law.

- **Threats:**
    - It is a global problem that threatens ocean ecosystems and sustainable fisheries.
    - It also threatens **economic security and the natural resources** that are critical to global food security, and
    - It puts law-abiding fishermen and seafood producers at a disadvantage.

- **Economic losses due to IUU:**

    - **Difficult to Quantify:**

        - The inherent nature of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing makes it difficult to accurately quantify the full global economic impacts resulting from these activities.
        - Various studies over the years have assessed regional levels of IUU fishing and estimated global losses, but such estimates are based on data that are now many years old.

    - **NewMethodologies:**

        - The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) is currently developing regional IUU estimate methodologies that can be regularly updated.
        - Implementing the UN's action plan recommendations will help gauge the actual level of activity and impacts so that they may be appropriately addressed.

About East Asia Summit(EAS):

- **Origin:**

    - The concept of East Asia Grouping was first promoted in 1991 by the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir bin Mohamad.
- **Formed:**
    - Established in 2005, it is the Indo-Pacific's premier forum for strategic dialogue.
- **Aim:**
    - Promoting peace, stability and economic prosperity in East Asia.
- **Different from rest:**
    - It is the only leader-led forum at which all key partners meet to discuss political, security and economic challenges facing the Indo-Pacific.
- **Membership:**
    - Apart from the 10 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) member states, the East Asia Summit includes India, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Russia.
- **Leader:**
    - ASEAN leads the forum, and the chair position rotates between the ASEAN Member States annually.
- **India:**
    - India is one of the founding members of the East Asia Summit.
- **Priority areas:**
    - There are six priority areas of regional cooperation within the framework of the EAS. These are:
        - Environment and Energy,
        - Education,
        - Finance,
        - Global Health Issues and Pandemic Diseases,
        - Natural Disaster Management, and
        - ASEAN Connectivity.

Significance of East Asia:

- **Important Nations:** The eastern region of Asia consists of the Asian nations, Greater China (Greater China consists of the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan), Japan, Mongolia, North Korea and South Korea.

- **Economic benefit:** It represents nearly 50 per cent of the world's population with 20 percent of global trade, and comprising 16 nations that are on a dynamic path of economic development.
- **Regional Security:** Considering tension on the Korean Peninsula, South China and in the Taiwan Strait, among others, it is vital for Japan, China and South Korea to maintain a common stance and to share a common concern for security in the East Asian region.
- **Global Implications:** An East Asia community would play a big role in instilling a sense of responsibility in Asian countries and in leading them jointly in contributing to the resolution of global issues.
- **Importance for India**

- India has been a part of EAS since its inception in 2005 in Kuala Lumpur and the fact that Indian Prime Ministers have participated in all the Summits, stands testimony to the importance India attaches to this process.

RUSSIA WARNS AGAINST NATO ENLARGEMENT

In News:

One of Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest allies warned NATO that if Sweden and Finland joined the US-led military alliance then Russia would have to bolster its defences in the region, including by deploying nuclear weapons.

Finland, which shares a 1,300-km border with Russia, and Sweden are considering joining the NATO alliance.

Analysis of Background:

Why do they want to join NATO?

- The possible accession of Finland and Sweden into NATO to get collective Western security against Russia — would be one of the biggest strategic consequences of the Ukraine war.
- Finland gained independence from Russia in 1917 and fought two wars against it during Second World War during which it lost some territory to Moscow.

- Sweden has not fought a war for 200 years and post-war foreign policy has focused on supporting democracy internationally, multilateral dialogue and nuclear disarmament.

NATO:

- NATO is a military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty (also called the Washington Treaty) of April 4, 1949.
- It sought to create a counterweight to Soviet armies stationed in Central and Eastern Europe after World War II.
- Its original members were Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- NATO has spread a web of partners, namely Egypt, Israel, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland and Finland.

Why was it founded?

- After World War II in 1945, Western Europe was economically exhausted and militarily weak, and newly powerful communist parties had arisen in France and Italy.
- By contrast, the Soviet Union had emerged from the war with its armies dominating all the states of central and Eastern Europe.
- By 1948 communists under Moscow's sponsorship had consolidated their control of the governments of those countries and suppressed all non-communist political activity.
- What became known as the Iron Curtain, a term popularized by Winston Churchill, had descended over central and Eastern Europe.

Ideology of NATO:

- NATO ensures that the security of its European member countries is inseparably linked to that of its North American member countries.
- It commits the Allies to democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, as well as to the peaceful resolution of disputes.
- It also provides a unique forum for dialogue and cooperation across the Atlantic.

What is Article 5 and why is it needed?

- Article 5 was a key part of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, or Washington Treaty, and was meant to offer a collective defence against a potential invasion of Western Europe.
- It states: (NATO members) will assist the party or parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.
- However, since then, it has only been invoked once, soon after the 9/11 attack in the United States.

Why has Article 5 not been invoked this time?

- The reason is simple: Ukraine is a partner of the Western defence alliance but not a NATO member.
- As a result, Article 5, or the Collective Defence Pledge, does not apply.
- While NATO has said it will not be sending troops to Ukraine, it did invoke Article 4, which calls for a consultation of the alliance's principal decision-making body, the North Atlantic Council.
- In its history, it has only been activated half a dozen times.
- But the fact that this time around eight-member nations chose to invoke it was enough to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation at a global level.

But what is NATO's problem with Russia?

- Russia has long been opposed to Ukraine's growing closeness with European institutions, particularly NATO.
- The former Soviet republic shares borders with Russia on one side, and the European Union on the other.
- After Moscow launched its attack, the US and its allies were quick to respond, imposing sanctions on Russia's central bank and sovereign wealth funds.

NEPAL'S DWINDLING FOREX RESERVES

In News:

In an unusual development, the Nepali PM sacked the head of its central bank accusing him of leaking sensitive information and for failing to perform his duties.

Analysis of Background:

- Nepal's forex reserves have plummeted by 18.5% to $9.58 billion in March from $11.75 billion in July 2021.
- The current forex reserves are not enough to pay the government's import bills beyond the next seven months or so.
- Nepal's central bank recently announced a ban on the import of vehicles and other luxury items, citing liquidity crunch and declining foreign exchange reserves.
- It is rumoured that the Nepali economy will go into a crisis like Sri Lanka.

Why have Nepal's forex reserves fallen?

- Nepal's forex reserves situation appears healthy as of now as the country, unlike Sri Lanka, is not burdened by external debt.
- There are, however, concerns that the lower middle-income economy is being battered repeatedly by external factors and that may precipitate a crisis sometime soon.
- Nepal which is blessed with one of the finest tourism sectors in South Asia, because of the Himalayan mountain range, suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic as global tourist flow fell.
- This is followed by the global energy crisis caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- This has put extraordinary inflationary pressure on the economy.

How bad is the situation?

- Nepal's economy is highly dependent on imports as the country buys a range of merchandise goods apart from fuel.
- The prevailing weak economic indicators mean that Nepal is spending from its forex reserves faster than it can save.

- Economists contend that Nepal will soon have double-digit inflation. All economic indicators are declining.
- The real shortfall in forex reserves is because of the decline in foreign remittances which suffered during the pandemic when the Nepalese workforce abroad suffered job losses.

Can the energy scene in Nepal escalate economic woes?

- Nepal's history shows that any uncertainty regarding fuel can trigger serious internal problems as was visible during the 2015-16 blockade when disruption of fuel supply from India.
- Nepal's primary supplier of energy is Indian Oil Corporation (IOC).
- Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) pays IOC in two installments every month, on the 8th and the 23rd.
- The NOC has been in crisis for months as high global prices depleted the company's savings, prompting it to approach the government for a lifeline.
- The Government of Nepal has agreed to provide NOC the necessary amount to continue supplies from IOC.
- NOC's financial status makes it unattractive for banks and as a result the public sector company does not enjoy confidence in the market.

Impact on elections:

- Nepal will hold local level polls next month which will be followed by general elections towards the end of the year.
- The election process requires considerable financial allocation and Nepal has received support in the past for elections from international donors like the USAID.
- These donors help in carrying out pre-election staff training and logistics that are part of any democratic process.
- But there are uncertainties considering the bleak financial situation.
- It will require at least 10 billion Nepali rupees for the election process and that will mean diversion of a large amount of resources for the democratic process.

Link to sri Lankan crisis:

Sri Lankan Crisis:

- Like Nepal, Sri Lanka is a country with a small economy. The Sri Lankan economy is around 1.5 times bigger than Nepal's.
- Sri Lanka's economic crisis was in the making since it suffered a terrorist attack in 2019 which hit its tourism industry, a major contributor to the GDP.
- Then came the pandemic, which further wiped out tourism incomes. Then there were debt burdens in dollars.
- The political leadership failed to act to address the looming crisis.
- The Rajapaksha dynasty made some wrong moves—it cut taxes and started printing money, hugely devaluing the currency.
- In what looked like a well-intentioned move towards organic farming, the county banned imports of chemical fertilisers. Paddy production failed. The country ran out of money to pay its bills.

Is Nepal really going the way of Sri Lanka?

- In Nepal, the situation is not as bleak.
- Nepal's current forex reserves are enough to pay for imports of goods and services for about seven and a half months.
- Tourism, one of the major foreign currency earners, was hit hard by the pandemic, but its gradual revival has given a glimmer of hope.
- Since Nepal's currency is pegged to the Indian rupee, a massive devaluation shock is unlikely. Tourism is also rebounding, giving a fillip to foreign currency reserves.

INTER-MINISTERIAL COORDINATION GROUP

In News:

The first meeting of Inter-Ministerial Coordination Group (IMCG) on India's neighbourhood outreach was convened.

Analysis of Background:

Inter-Ministerial Coordination Group (IMCG):

- The IMCG has been set up as a high-level mechanism (secretary-level) towards mainstreaming of India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy.
- The IMCG is supported by Inter-Ministerial Joint Task Forces (JTF) convened by the concerned joint secretaries in the Ministry of External Affairs.
- The IMCG will further improve institutional coordination across government and provide comprehensive direction to this whole-of-government approach on India's relations with its neighbouring countries.

Key Highlights of the meet:

- The IMCG provided a comprehensive direction with a whole-of-government approach to promote better connectivity, stronger interlinkages and greater people-to-people connect with our neighbours,
- It deliberated upon and took important decisions on various aspects of India's bilateral relationship with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in the areas of trade and investment, connectivity, border infrastructure, immigration, development cooperation, border security.
- It focussed on construction of cross-border infrastructure for enhancing trade with Nepal.
- It will look after addressing special needs of Bhutan and Maldives besides humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and Myanmar.
- In addition to the IMCG mechanism, Ministries and Departments have been requested to accord priority to India’s neighbours in their international activities, programmes and projects
- the MEA had also organised a “training module” on India’s neighbourhood for civil service trainees this year.

Relevance:

- The timing of the initiative is significant as it comes within days of the massive protests over the economic situation in Sri Lanka
- The IMCG could also be convened to help avoid tensions at the land borders with Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh.

India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy:

- It is a core component of India's foreign policy that focuses on peaceful relations and collaborative synergetic co-development with its South Asian neighbours of the Indian subcontinent.
- It encompasses a diverse range of topics, such as economic, technology, research and education, connectivity, space program, defence security, environment and climate challenge.
- This policy creates new avenues as well as leverages existing regional cooperation initiatives, such as SAARC, SASEC, BBIN, and BIMSTEC.
- It compliments India's Look East policy focused on Southeast Asia and Look West Policy focused on the Middle East.

Major roadblocks in India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy:

- **Trust deficit**: Since India's independence, there has been a huge trust deficit between India and its neighbours who consider that India flaunts a "Big Brother" attitude towards its smaller neighbours.
- **Not focussing on other countries**: There is also a pervasive impression that barring Pakistan, India does not devote enough time and attention to solving problems or strengthening relations with other neighbours.
- **Relations with Nepal hit a roadblock in 2015**: when months-long demonstrations and protests were launched by the Madhesi community of Nepal against the newly adopted Constitution as their demands for greater representation were ignored.
    - This forced a blockade of vehicular movement from India into Nepal delivering a shock to the Nepalese economy.
    - New maps drawn up in 2020 and the Nepalese Constitution amended to show the Indian territories of Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura and Kalapani as belonging to Nepal are some of the other zones of conflict.

- **India's initiatives to improve relations with Pakistan did not meet with a positive response:** Pakistan resorted to increased firing and shelling from across India's borders and continued to mastermind and support terrorist attacks on Indian Territory.
- The recent takeover by the Taliban in Afghanistan has introduced great uncertainty and anxiety in India and several other countries in the region and beyond.
- China doubled down on territorial claims and its transgressions along its borders with South Asia from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh.
    - Other issues include the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers at the Galwan valley.
    - China also laid claim to Bhutan's Sakteng natural reserves and pushed along the boundary lines with Nepal.

BRICS MEET

In News:

India has agreed to attend a virtual summit of leaders of the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa grouping, likely to be held at the end of June.

Analysis of Background:

- India hosted last year's BRICS summit, which was also held virtually, and attended by the five leaders.
- This is the first summit hosted by China since the tensions broke out at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) due to the PLA's transgressions in April 2020.
- Recently, BRICS health ministers held a virtual launch of the "BRICS Vaccine R&D Centre" to conduct "vaccine joint research, plant co-construction, authorised local production, and mutual recognition of standards"
- Trade options: Ahead of the summit, Sherpas of the five countries will meet virtually to discuss Ukraine conflict, financial mechanisms to deal with sanctions against Russia, and cooperation against the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Sanctions against Russia: BRICS Finance Ministers called for the use of national currencies for BRICS countries, integration of payment systems and cards, their own financial messaging system and the creation of an independent BRICS rating

agency to effectively circumvent some of the sanctions imposed by the U.S. and European Union, which none of the BRICS countries have joined.

- Business with Beijing: India-China trade in 2021 reached $125 billion, crossing the $100 billion mark for the first time, driven by India's imports of Chinese goods, most notably electronic products and chemicals, including Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs).
- India had received 347 FDI proposals from neighbouring countries since April 2020, most are thought to be from China or China-linked firms.

What is BRICS? How did these countries come together?

- It is an informal group of statescomprising the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Russian Federation, the Republic of India, the People's Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa.
- It is actually a forum than a traditional-type organization with rigid membership and regulations.
- Originally the first four were grouped as "BRIC" (or "the BRICs"), before the induction of South Africa in 2010.
- At the Fortaleza Summit (2014), in Brazil, the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) were created
- Among other areas of collaboration, matters pertaining to drug trafficking are an important area of cooperation among the BRICS member states.

What challenges BRICS is facing?

- Disagreements between its members.
- Slow progress shown on the ground when it comes to the implementation of initiatives makes it quite vulnerable to criticism.
- The development trends of the BRICS nations are not very similar, as there is a huge difference in the economic structure of the member countries.
- The members also have differences over the UN Security Council (UNSC) reforms. It will be tough for the member countries to make a consensus on contemporary global issues.
- The burden of the NDB cannot be shared equally, as the size of the economy of each member varies with great magnitude. So, it is inevitable that disputes will arise in sharing the burden of NDB.

New Development Bank:

- It aims to mobilize resources for development projects in BRICS, emerging economies, and developing countries.
- It formerly referred to as the BRICS Development Bank.
- It is a multilateral development bankestablished by the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).
- It supports public or private projectsthrough loans, guarantees, equity participation and other financial instruments.
- The bank is headquartered in Shanghai, China.
- In September 2021, Bangladesh, the United Arab Emirates and Uruguayjoined the NDB.
- In December 2021, the NDB admitted Egypt as new member.

BRICS- Agricultural Research Platform:

- It is a global platform for science-led agriculture.
- It will help in addressing the issues of world hunger, under nutrition, poverty and inequality by promoting sustainable agricultural development through strategic cooperation in agriculture and allied sector.
- It has been operationized to intensify cooperation in the areas of agricultural research technology, policy, innovations and capacity buildingincluding technologies for smallholder farming and to sustainably increase yields and farmers income in the BRICS member countries.
- The platform shall escalate the exchange of research findings and innovation and best practices for upscaling in the respective BRICS Nations.
- The BRICS Nations have also appointed their focal points for BRICS-ARP to interact virtually through the platform and identify the common problems and develop joint projects for finding the solutions.
- Indian Council of Agricultural Researchis the focal organization from India.

BRICS and COVID-19:

- Most of its programs and mechanisms proved to be effective during the pandemic.

- The BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Framework Programme, helped scientists and researchers to effectively exchange their findings to better facilitate a common response.
- It worked better than other global governance institutions amidst the ongoing COVID crises.
- There was no blame game or pointing fingers within BRICS, rather there is only a common vision for intensifying cooperation, including in sectors like healthcare, and social welfare.
- BRICS has progressed in developing a common position on the most important matters of the global economy and security.

INDIA'S CRUDE OIL IMPORTS FROM OPEC

In News:

OPEC's share of India's oil imports for the FY22 financial year remained almost steady year-on-year, arresting sharp declines over the past six years, as refiners prefer crude from West Asia to counter rising global prices.

Analysis of Background:

India's crude oil imports from OPEC

- OPEC oil accounted for about 88% of India's crude imports in FY08.
- Its share of India's overall imports could decline because refiners in Asia's third-largest economy are buying cheaper Russian oil.
- However, Russian oil continued to account for less than 1% of India's crude imports in FY22.

OPEC:

- OPEC stands for Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.
- It is a permanent, intergovernmental organization, created at the Baghdad Conference in 1960, by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela.
- It aims to manage the supply of oil in an effort to set the price of oil in the world market, in order to avoid fluctuations that might affect the economies of both producing and purchasing countries.
- It is headquartered in Vienna, Austria.

- OPEC membership is open to any country that is a substantial exporter of oil and which shares the ideals of the organization.
- Today OPEC is a cartel that includes 14 nations, predominantly from the middle east whose sole responsibility is to control prices and moderate supply.

OPEC+:

- The non-OPEC countries which export crude oil along with the 14 OPECs are termed as OPEC plus countries.
- OPEC plus countries include Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, South Sudan and Sudan.
- Saudi and Russia, both have been at the heart of a three-year alliance of oil producers known as OPEC Plus — which now includes 11 OPEC members and 10 non-OPEC nations — that aims to shore up oil prices with production cuts.

Why OPEC plus came ?

- When Russia concluded the Vienna Agreement in 2016, the Russian leadership believed that it would help prepare the country for the Russian presidential elections in March 2018.
- Higher oil prices ensured the Kremlin's financial capacity to lead a successful electoral campaign.
- This changed the regime's priorities – from satisfying the needs of the general population to ensuring the sustainability of the Kremlin's alliance with powerful tycoons, including that controlling oil production.
- For Saudi Arabia, turning what had been an ad hoc coalition into a formal group provides a hedge (protection) against future oil-market turbulence.
- For Russia, the formalization of the group helps expand Putin's influence in the Middle East
- However, both reportedly aimed at causing a drop in oil prices in order to hit US shale producers, who have continued to benefit from OPEC production cuts by expanding their market share.

INDIA-SRI LANKA FISHERIES ISSUE

In News:

After a gap of 15 months, the India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group (JWG) on fisheries held its much-awaited deliberations (in virtual format) on March 25.

Analysis of Background:

- As sections of fishermen from the Palk Bay bordering districts of Tamil Nadu continue to transgress the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL), cases of many of them getting arrested and their boats being impounded by the Sri Lankan authorities continue.
- Apart from poaching in the territorial waters of Sri Lanka, the use of mechanised bottom trawlers is another issue that has become a bone of contention between the fishermen of the two countries; the dispute is not just between the two states.
- Use of mechanised bottom trawlers: This method of fishing, which was once promoted by the authorities in India, is now seen as being extremely adverse to the marine ecology, and has been acknowledged so by India.
- The actions of the Tamil Nadu fishermen adversely affect their counterparts in the Northern Province.
- Reason for transgression**:** The fishermen of Tamil Nadu experience a genuine problem — the lack of fishing areas consequent to the demarcation of the IMBL in June 1974.
- If they confine themselves to Indian waters, they find the area available for fishing full of rocks and coral reefs besides being shallow.
- Under the Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation Act 1983, mechanised fishing boats can fish only beyond 3 NM from the coast.
- This explains the trend of the fishermen having to cross the IMBL frequently.

Way forward:

- Transition to deep-sea fishing: While Indian fishermen can present a road map for their transition to deep sea fishing or alternative methods of fishing, the Sri Lankan side has to take a pragmatic view that the transition cannot happen abruptly.
- In the meantime, India will have to modify its scheme on deep-sea fishing to accommodate the concerns of its fishermen, especially those from

Ramanathapuram district, so that they take to deep-sea fishing without any reservation.

- Alternative livelihood measures: There is a compelling need for the Central and State governments to implement in Tamil Nadu the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana **in** a proactive manner.
- The scheme, which was flagged off two years ago, covers alternative livelihood measures too including seaweed cultivation, open sea cage cultivation, and sea/ocean ranching.
- During Mr. Jaishankar's visit, India had signed a memorandum of understanding with Sri Lanka for the development of fisheries harbours.
- This can be modified to include a scheme for deep-sea fishing to the fishermen of the North.
- Joint research on fisheries: . It is a welcome development that the JWG has agreed to have joint research on fisheries, which should be commissioned at the earliest.
- Institutional mechanism: Simultaneously, the two countries should explore the possibility of establishing a permanent multi-stakeholder institutional mechanism to regulate fishing activity in the region.
- Using common thread of culture, language and religion**:** The people of the two countries in general and fisherfolk in particular have common threads of language, culture and religion, all of which can be used purposefully to resolve any dispute.

INDIANS CAN NOW MAKE PAYMENTS USING UPI IN UAE

In News:

Tourists or migrants to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with Indian bank accounts will be able to make UPI payments at shops, retail establishments and other merchants in the gulf nation.

Analysis of Background:

UPI:

- Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is an instant real-time payment system developed by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) facilitating inter-bank transactions.
- The interface is regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and works by instantly transferring funds between two bank accounts on a mobile platform.

Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM)

- BHIM is an Indian mobile payment App developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), based on the Unified Payments Interface (UPI).
- Named after B. R. Ambedkar and launched on 30 December 2016 it is intended to facilitate e-payments directly through banks and encourage cashless transactions.
- The application supports all Indian banks which use UPI, which is built over the Immediate Payment Service (IMPS) infrastructure and allows the user to instantly transfer money between bank accounts of any two parties.
- It can be used on all mobile devices.

How does the service work?

- The NPCI and UAE's Mashreq Bank's NEOPAY have partnered for this service
- It will be mandatory for users to have a bank account in India with UPI enabled on it.
- The users will also need an application, like BHIM, to make UPI payments.

Will UPI be accepted everywhere in the UAE?

- Payments using UPI will only be accepted at those merchants and shops which have NEOPAY terminals.

Does NPCI have other such international arrangements?

- NPCI's international arm NIPL have several such arrangements with international financial services providers for its products, including UPI and RuPay cards.
- Globally, UPI is accepted in Bhutan and Nepal, and is likely to go live in Singapore later this year.
- In Singapore, a project to link UPI with the city-state's instant payment system PayNow is being undertaken by the RBI and the Monetary Authority of Singapore.
- The linkage is targeted for operationalization by July this year.

MALDIVES BANS 'INDIA OUT' CAMPAIGN

In News:

Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih issued a decree banning the 'India Out' campaign, now led by former President Abdulla Yameen, terming it a "threat to national security".

Analysis of Background:

The India-Out Campaign

- Maldivian protesters recently demanded the Solih administration to 'stop selling national assets to foreigners', implying India.
- 'India Out' campaign in Maldives had started sometime last year as on-ground protests in the Maldives and later widely spread across social media platforms under the same hashtag.
- It is not related to people-to-people conflict (Indian diaspora) but is discontent on close relationship between Maldivian government & India.

Causes for the anti-India sentiments

- Political instability: The anti-India sentiment is nearly a decade old and can be traced back to when Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom became president in 2013. He used anti-India sentiments for his political mobilization and started tilting China.

- Controversy over helicopter gift: Two Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopters (ALF) that were given by India to the Maldives for ocean search-and-rescue operations. Opposition tried to portray this as military presence in the country.
- Confidential agreements: Most agreements being signed between the Ibrahim Solih government and India are backdoor and has not been publicly discussed in the Maldives Parliament.
- Alleged interference in domestic politics: India being a big neighbour, there are unsubstantiated perceptions & allegations on Indian Diplomats stationed in Maldives interfering in Domestic affairs.

Restoration of ties

- Ibrahim Mohamed Solih who became President in 2018 has restored Maldives close ties with India.

India-Maldives Relations:

- India and Maldives are neighbors sharing a maritime border.
- Both nations established diplomatic relations after the independence of Maldives from British rule in 1966.
- India was one of the first nations to recognize Maldives' independence.
- Since then, India and Maldives have developed close strategic, military, economic and cultural relations.
- Maldivians generally regard Indians and India as a friend and trusted neighbor in the field economic, social and political.

Major irritants in ties

- Political Instability: India's major concern has been the impact of political instability in the neighborhood on its security and development.
- Increasing radicalization: In the past decade or so, the number of Maldivians drawn towards terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS) and Pakistan-based jihadist groups has been increasing.
- Inclination towards terror**:** Radicalism in the island nation has increased the possibility of Pakistan-based terror groups using remote Maldivian islands as a launch pad for terror attacks against India and Indian interests.

- Chinese affinity: China's strategic footprint in India's neighborhood has increased. The Maldives has emerged as an important 'pearl' in China's "String of Pearls" construct in South Asia.

Why is Maldives significant for India?

- Increasing maritime cooperation: As maritime economic activity in the Indian Ocean has risen dramatically in recent decades, the geopolitical competition too in the Indian Ocean has intensified.
- Toll Gate in Indian Ocean: It is situated at the hub of commercial sea-lanes running through the Indian Ocean. More than 97% of India's international trade by volume and 75% by value passes through the region.
- Naval cooperation**:** Maldives is an important partner in India's role as the net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Important SAARC member: Besides, Maldives is a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC).
- People To People Contact: There is a significant population of Maldivian students in India. They are aided by a liberal visa-free regime extended by India. There is also medical tourism.
- Major destination for Tourists: Tourism is the mainstay of the Maldivian economy. The country is now a major tourist destination for some Indians and a job destination for others.

MISSION SAGAR IX

In News:

With the overarching aim of providing critical medical aid to Sri Lanka during the ongoing crisis, INS Gharial as part of Mission SAGAR IX arrived at Colombo and delivered over 760 kgs of 107 types of critical lifesaving medicines. In line with GoI's vision of SAGAR – Security And Growth for All in the Region – the Indian Navy undertakes several deployments titled 'Mission SAGAR' to assist friendly IOR littorals.

Analysis of Background:

Mission SAGAR:

- Mission SAGAR is a major milestone in India's engagement with the countries in the Indian Ocean Region, in line with 'SAGAR — Security and Growth for All in the Region'.
- Launched on May 10, 2020, Mission SAGAR is India's initiative to deliver COVID-19 related assistance to the countries in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Mission SAGAR is in line with India's role as the first responder in the region and builds on the excellent relations existing between these countries to battle the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As part of this Mission, INS Kesari successively visited Maldives, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros and Seychelles during May-June 2020 to deliver assistance to our maritime neighbors in dealing with the COVID crisis.
- India's humanitarian assistance included supplies of essential food items, medicines, Ayurvedic medicines and deployment of medical assistance teams to Mauritius and Comoros.
- As part of Mission SAGAR-II, Indian Naval Ship Airavat delivered food aid to Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti and Eritrea.

What is SAGAR policy?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced the concept of SAGAR — 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' during his visit to Mauritius in March 2015.
- It is a high-level articulation of India's vision for the Indian Ocean. SAGAR has distinct but inter-related elements and underscores India's engagement in the Indian Ocean.
- The principles enshrined in SAGAR provide a coherent framework to address some of the challenges related to economic revival, connectivity, security, culture and identity.
- During his address in Maldives Parliament in June 2019, Modi said SAGAR is also a blueprint for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Under the broad vision of SAGAR, relations have been augmented with partners in the region in defence and security, development partnership, training and capacity building. The Indian Ocean Region received priority in COVID assistance.

Key features of SAGAR:

- Enhancing capacities to safeguard land and maritime territories and interests.
- Deepening economic and security cooperation in the littoral.
- Promoting collective action to deal with natural disasters and maritime threats like piracy, terrorism and emergent non-state actors.
- Working towards sustainable regional development through enhanced collaboration.
- Engaging with countries beyond shores with the aim of building greater trust and promoting respect for maritime rules, norms and peaceful resolution of disputes.
- The 'Blue Economy' has emerged as a promising new pillar of prosperity in the region, with immense economic and employment potential. India is engaging with its neighbours in Blue Economy initiatives, particularly in the areas of marine bio-technology, exploration and sustainable exploitation of ocean mineral resources, sustainable fishing practices, and harnessing of ocean energy.

Challenges for SAGAR:

- The main challenge is to ensure intra-ocean trade and investment, and the sustainable harnessing of the wealth of the seas, including food, medicines and clean energy.
- Security is fundamental to the SAGAR vision. If the revitalised maritime economy of the Indian Ocean region is to be a force for global economic growth, it is essential that the waters remain peaceful, stable and secure.
- The waters must not only be better connected but they should remain free from non-traditional and traditional threats that could impede the seamless movement of goods, people and ideas.
- The Indian Ocean is prone to non-traditional security threats like piracy, smuggling, maritime terrorism, illegal fishing, and trafficking of humans and narcotics.

TOPIC: SOCIAL ISSUE

PINK TOILETS: SWACHH BHARAT MISSION

In News:

In Karnataka, many Gram Panchayats have started the construction of "Pink Toilets" to promote the safety and security of women.

Analysis of Background:

- Many Gram Panchayats in Karnataka have taken the initiative to construct "Pink Toilets" to make sanitation accessible and safe, and to remove shame during menstrual days among adolescent girls.
- Pink Toilets are an innovation under the Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen (SBM-G).
- These toilets are provided with adequate water supply, lighting, a changing room and other amenities, including the washroom for adolescent girls and women.
- Each toilet has an incinerator which is used for the safe disposal of sanitary pads and menstrual waste.
- Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is an integral part of waste management under the Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen (SBM-G) campaign.
- The initiative has been admired by girls and women, supporting them to remove embarrassment during their menstrual days.
- The toilets have been constructed with the cooperation and coordination between Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, 15th FC and the Gram Panchayat funds.

Swachh Bharat Mission:

- Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) is a country-wide campaign initiated by the Government of India in 2014 to eliminate open defecation and improve solid waste management.
- It is a restructured version of the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan launched in 2009.
- Phase 1 of the Swachh Bharat Mission lasted till October 2019.
- Phase 2 is being implemented between 2020–21 and 2024–25.

- The mission aimed to achieve an "open-defecation free" (ODF) India by 2 October 2019, the 150th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi through the construction of toilets.
- The objectives of the first phase of the mission:
- Eradication of manual scavenging.
- Generating awareness and bringing about behaviour change regarding sanitation practices.
- Building capacity at the local level.
- The second phase of the mission aims to sustain the open defecation free status and improve the management of solid and liquid waste, while also working to improve the lives of sanitation workers.
- Under the scheme, the Government provides subsidies for constructing toilets, waste management structures, and awareness campaigns to bring behaviour change.
- The campaign is financed by the Government of India and state governments.
- The mission is split into two: Rural and Urban.
- In rural areas "SBM - Gramin" is financed and monitored through the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- In Urban areas "SBM - urban" is overseen by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Present Status;

- According to the dashboards maintained by ministries, more than 100 million individual household level toilets have been constructed in rural areas and 6 million household toilets in urban areas.
- Nearly 6 million community and public toilets have also been constructed in the urban areas.
- Nearly 11 crores of online Integrated Management Information systems (IMIS) have been constructed in the country.
- Nearly 2 lakh Community Sanitary Complexes (CSCs) have been constructed under the programme.
- More than 4,200 cities and more than 600,000 villages across the country have declared themselves open defecation free (ODF).

- More than 87 thousand wards in urban areas now have 100% door to door collection of solid waste and nearly 65 thousand words practice 100% segregation of waste at source.
- According to UNICEF, the number of people without a toilet has been reduced from 550 million to 50 million.
- The World Bank reports that 96% of Indians who have a toilet use it.

MISSION ANTYODAYA

In News:

This article argues that given the right momentum, the 'Mission Antyodaya' project bears great promise to eradicate poverty in its multiple dimensions among rural households.

Analysis of Background:

Mission Antyodaya:

- The 'Mission Antyodaya' project was launched by the Government of India in 2017-18.
- The Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Ministry of Rural Development act as the nodal agents to take the mission forward.
- Key goals: The main objective of 'Mission Antyodaya' is to ensure optimum use of resources through the convergence of various schemes that address multiple deprivations of poverty, making gram panchayat the hub of a development plan.
- Annual survey: This planning process is supported by an annual survey that helps to assess the various development gaps at the gram panchayat level, by collecting data regarding the 29 subjects assigned to panchayats by the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.
- Also, data regarding health and nutrition, social security, good governance, water management and so on are also collected.
- The idea of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to identify the gaps in basic needs at the local level, and integrating resources of various schemes, self-help groups, voluntary organisations and so on to finance them needs coordination and capacity-building of a high order.

- If pursued in a genuine manner, this can foster economic development and inter-jurisdictional equity.

Infrastructural gaps as pointed out by the Mission Antyodaya Survey:

- The 'Mission Antyodaya' survey in 2019-20 for the first time collected data that shed light on the infrastructural gaps from 2.67 lakh gram panchayats, comprising 6.48 lakh villages with 1.03 billion population.
- The maximum score values assigned will add up to 100 and are presented in class intervals of 10.
- While no State in India falls in the top score bracket of 90 to 100, 1,484 gram panchayats fall in the bottom bracket.
- Even in the score range of 80 to 90, 10 States and all Union Territories do not appear.
- The total number of gram panchayats for all the 18 States that have reported adds up only to 260, constituting only 0.10% of the total 2,67,466 gram panchayats in the country.
- If we consider a score range of 70-80 as a respectable attainment level, Kerala tops but accounts for only 34.69% of gram panchayats of the State, the corresponding all-India average is as low as 1.09%.
- The composite index data, a sort of surrogate for human development, are also not encouraging.
- Although only 15 gram panchayats in the country fall in the bottom range below 10 scores, more than a fifth of gram panchayats in India are below the 40 range.
- The gap report and the composite index show in unmistakable terms that building 'economic development and social justice' remains a distant goal even after 30 years of the decentralisation reforms and nearly 75 years into Independence.

GENERAL STUDIES - 3

TOPIC: ECONOMY

HDFC LTD.-HDFC BANK MERGER

In News:

Mortgage lender HDFC Ltd. and India's largest private sector bank HDFC Bank on Monday announced a mega-merger.

Analysis of Background:

- Under the terms of the deal, which is one of the biggest in the Indian financial sector, HDFC Bank will be 100% owned by public shareholders.
- Existing shareholders of HDFC Ltd. will own 41% stake in HDFC Bank.
- Post-merger HDFC Ltd. will no longer be a separate mortgage lender, it will get folded into the bank.

The terms of the merger Means,

- The merger has to go through a series of regulatory approvals.
- It has to get approval from the shareholders of both companies.
- At this moment what has been announced by the two entities is that its an all-share deal, so there's no cash transaction involved.
- The terms of the share swap are such that shareholders of HDFC Ltd. will receive 42 shares of HDFC Bank for every 25 shares they hold in HDFC Ltd.

Existing customers & employees:

- As far as customers are concerned, HDFC Ltd.'s customers will become the bank's customers as well.
- As for employees, HDFC Bank is planning to absorb and retain all the employees.
- Neither of the entities are very heavy on employee numbers and have been fairly conservative in their employee sizes.

Rationale behind this merger:

- HDFC have largely had a fairly conservative lending culture, both reasonably customer-friendly, customer-centric, culturally, there wouldn't be a big challenge.

- The evolution of the regulatory framework for the NBFC (non-banking financial company) industry has been gradually moving closer, to harmonise with the banking sector's regulatory framework.
- Earlier, NBFCs had a fairly different and a far more loose sort of framework for lending and deposits.
- This led to issues in the industry with some NBFCs struggling and going under or being taken over by others.
- As Basel III norms for capital adequacy are in place, the NPA (non-performing asset) book is very closely monitored.

Impacts :

- It's possible that we might see more NBFCs seeking to merge with banks.
- There is already talk of the number of banks coming down.
- So in some ways, this merger may be a precursor to what is going to happen in the state-run banking space, where the government has said it is going to reduce the number of public sector banks.

NITI AAYOG GETS A NEW VICE-CHAIRMAN

In News:

The government has appointed Suman K. Bery as the vice-chairman of the NITI Aayog following the resignation of Rajiv Kumar.

Analysis of Background:

NITI Aayog:

- The NITI Aayog serves as the apex public policy think tank of the GoI.
- It was established in 2015, by the NDA government, to replace the Planning Commission which followed a top-down model.
- It advises both the centre and states on social and economic issues.
- It is neither a constitutional body nor a statutory body but the outcome of an executive resolution. It was not created by the act of parliament.

Composition of NITI Aayog

- The Prime Minister of India is the chairperson/chairman of the NITI Aayog.

- The PM appoints one Vice-Chairperson**,** who holds the rank of a cabinet minister.
- It includes the Chief Ministers of all the states and Union territories.
- It has Regional Councils for looking after contingencies in regional areas. It is convened and chaired by the Prime Minister of India and includes concerned chief ministers and Lt. Governors.
- The Prime Minister nominates Personalities with skilled knowledge, who are experts in particular domains as special invitees.
- There are full-time members who hold the rank of ministers.
- There is a maximum of two Part-time members who are invited from leading organisations, universities, and research centres.
- The Prime Minister also appoints one Chief Executive Officer (CEO**)** who holds the rank of a Secretary.

Aims, Agenda, and Objectives of NITI Aayog

The purpose with which NITI Aayog was formed in place of the Planning Commission was a far-sighted vision. It was important to boost the development of India in the emerging global scenario. The objectives are:

- To generate a platform for national development, sectors and strategies with the collaboration of states and centre.
- To boost the factor of cooperative federalism between the centre and the states. For national development, it is necessary for both wings to work in synergy.
- To develop such mechanisms which work at the ground root level for progressive growth. A nation develops when its regions and states develop.
- To work on long term policies and strategies for long-term development. To set up a system for monitoring progress so that it can be used for analysing and improving methods.
- To provide a platform for resolving inter-departmental issues amicably.
- To make it a platform where the programmes, strategies, and schemes can be monitored on a day to day basis, and it could be understood which sector needs more resources to develop.
- To upgrade technological advancements in such a manner that focus can be made on iNITIatives and programmes.
- To ensure India’s level and ranking at the worldwide level and to make India an actively participating nation.

- To progress from food security towards nutrition and standardised meals and focus on agricultural production.
- To make use of more technology to avoid misadventures and corruption in governance.
- To make the working system more transparent and accountable.

NITI Aayog – Seven Pillars of Effective Governance

- NITI Aayog works on principles like Antyodaya (upliftment of poor), inclusion **(**to include all sections under one head), people participation, and so on.
- NITI Aayog is a body that follows seven pillars of governance. They are:

1. To look after pro-people agenda so that the aspirations and desires of no one are compromised.
2. To respond and work on the needs of citizens.
3. Make citizens of the nation involve and participate in various streams.
4. To empower women in all fields, be it social, technical, economic, or other.
5. To include all sects and classes under one head. To give special attention to marginalised and minority groups.
6. To provide equal opportunity for the young generation.
7. To make the working of government more accountable and transparent. It will ensure less chance of corruption and malpractices.

INDIA EXTENDS DURATION OF $400 MN CURRENCY SWAP TO SL

In News:

India has extended the duration of a $400 million currency swap facility with Sri Lanka which it had concluded with the island nation in January this year.

Analysis of Background:

Currency Swaps:

- A currency swap, also known as a cross-currency swap, is an off-balance sheet transaction in which two parties exchange principal and interest in different currencies.
- Currency swaps are used to obtain foreign currency loans at a better interest rate than could be got by borrowing directly in a foreign market.

How does it work?

- In a swap arrangement, RBI would provide dollars to a Lankan central bank, which, at the same time, provides the equivalent funds in its currency to the RBI, based on the market exchange rate at the time of the transaction.
- The parties agree to swap back these quantities of their two currencies at a specified date in the future, which could be the next day or even three months later, using the same exchange rate as in the first transaction.
- These swap operations carry no exchange rate or other market risks, as transaction terms are set in advance.

Benefits of currency swap

- The absence of an exchange rate risk is the major benefit of such a facility.
- This facility provides the flexibility to use these reserves at any time in order to maintain an appropriate level of balance of payments or short-term liquidity.
- Swaps agreements between governments also have supplementary objectives like the promotion of bilateral trade, maintaining the value of foreign exchange reserves with the central bank and ensuring financial stability.

A MERGER TO BETTER MANAGE THE INDIAN RAILWAYS

In News:

A recent Gazette notification regarding the creation of the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS) marks a paradigm shift in the management of one of the world's largest rail networks.

Analysis of Background:

About the merger and IRMS

- A nearly 8,000 strong cadre of the erstwhile eight services is now merged into one.
- Eight out of 10 Group-A Indian Railway services have been merged to create the IRMS.
- The merged services are: Indian Railway Traffic Service (IRTS), Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS), Indian Railway Accounts Service (IRAS), Indian Railway Service of Electrical Engineers (IRSEE), Indian Railway Service of Signal Engineers (IRSS), Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers (IRSME), Indian Railway Service of Civil Engineers (IRSE) and Indian Railway Stores Service (IRSS).
- Aims of the restructuring: Besides removing silos, this restructuring also aims at rationalising the top-heavy bureaucracy of the Indian Railways.

Way forward:

- Training the future leaders of India's public transporter in the rapidly evolving logistics sector of the country is the most important task ahead.
- The UPSC will recruit a few hundred IRMS officers each year from now, they will remain much less in number when compared to already serving officers for a long time to come.
- Training of the existing cadre of officers: The fact remains that even after the creation of the IRMS, the 8,000 strong (already serving) officers of the Indian Railways will need to work in coordination and not in silos, as they will be serving in the organisation for decades to come.
- This highlights the importance of training of the existing cadre of officers as they will have to deliver on the ambitious Gati-Shakti projects.
- The task of training such a dynamic talent pool assumes importance in view of India's aspirations of becoming a $5 trillion economy.

- All this will require a massive revamp of the capacity building ecosystem of the Indian Railways.
- Redesign the training: The merger of services provides an opportunity to redesign the training for newly recruited IRMS officers to make them future-ready. Initial training along with mid-career training programmes may be reoriented.
- The IRMS training needs to be designed based on the competencies required for different leadership roles.
- Mission Karmayogi of the Government of India provides for competencies based postings of officers**.**
- The Integrated Government Online Training (iGOT) programme of the Government of India will be instrumental in shaping the career progression of IRMS officers.

SC UPHELDS FCRA AMENDMENTS

In News:

The Supreme Court upheld amendments introducing restrictions in the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) while holding that no one has a fundamental or absolute right to receive foreign contributions.

Analysis of Background:

FCRA:

- **Regulate foreign donations**: It is a slew of new measures to regulate foreign donations.
- The Act, first enacted in 1976 was amended in the year 2010 and then 2020.
- **Application:** The FCRA is applicable to all associations, groups and NGOs which intend to receive foreign donations.
- It is mandatory for all such NGOs to register themselves under the FCRA.
- **Validity:** The registration is initially valid for five years and it can be renewed subsequently if they comply with all norms.
- **Purpose**: Registered associations can receive foreign contribution for social, educational, religious, economic and cultural purposes.
- Mandatory IT filing: Filing of annual returns, on the lines of Income Tax, is compulsory.

- **Internal security**: The FCRA regulates foreign donations and ensures that such contributions do not adversely affect internal security.

New guidelines to banks on Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act rules:

- **State Bank of India's New Delhi branch**: A new provision that makes it mandatory for all NGOs to receive foreign funds in a designated bank account at the State Bank of India's New Delhi branch was inserted.
- **Designated FCRA account**: All NGOs seeking foreign donations have to open a designated FCRA account at the SBI branch.
    - The NGOs can retain their existing FCRA account in any other bank but it will have to be mandatorily linked to the SBI branch in New Delhi.
- **Only banking channels allowed**: Foreign contribution has to be received only through banking channels and it has to be accounted for in the manner prescribed.
- **OCI or PIO**: Donations given in Indian rupees by any foreign source including foreigners of Indian origin like OCI or PIO cardholders" should also be treated as foreign contribution**.**
- **Sovereignty and integrity**: It requires NGOs to give an undertaking that the acceptance of foreign funds is not likely to prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of India or impact friendly relations with any foreign state and does not disrupt communal harmony.

Governments Stand:

- The Government has contended that the amendments were necessary to prevent foreign state and non-state actors from interfering with the country's polity and internal matters.
- The changes are also needed to prevent malpractices by NGOs and the diversion of foreign funds. Preventing the possible diversion of funds is also the reason cited for reducing the administrative expense component, as some organizations tended to inflate the actual expenditure incurred.
- The provision of having one designated bank for receiving foreign funds is aimed at making it easier to monitor the flow of funds.

- The Government clarified that there was no need for anyone to come to Delhi to open the account as it can be done remotely.

Who cannot receive foreign donations?

- **Prohibition**: Members of the legislature and political parties, government officials, judges and media persons are prohibited from receiving any foreign contribution.
- **Political parties**: However, in 2017 the MHA, through the Finance Bill route, amended the 1976-repealed FCRA law paving the way for political parties to receive funds from the Indian subsidiary of a foreign company or a foreign company in which an Indian holds 50% or more shares.

How else can one receive foreign funding?

- **Prior permission**: The other way to receive foreign contributions is by applying for prior permission.
    - A letter of commitment from the foreign donor specifying the amount and purpose is also required.
- **Specific activities or projects**: It is granted for receipt of a specific amount from a specific donor for carrying out specific activities or projects.
- **Registration**: But the association should be registered under statutes such as the Societies Registration Act, 1860, the Indian Trusts Act, 1882, or Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956.

When is a registration suspended or canceled?

- **The MHA**: on inspection of accounts and on receiving any adverse input against the functioning of an association can suspend the FCRA registration initially for 180 days.
    - The MHA can cancel the registration of an organization which will not be eligible for registration or grant of 'prior permission' for three years from the date of cancellation.
- **25% of the amount available**: Until a decision is taken, the association cannot receive any fresh donation and cannot utilize more than 25% of the amount available in the designated bank account without permission of the MHA.

NATIONAL MONETISATION PIPELINE (NMP)

In News:

Recently, the Centre has completed transactions worth Rs 96,000 crore under the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) in 2021-22, surpassing the ambitious programme's first-year target of Rs 88,000 crore.

Analysis of Background:

- **Ministry of Coal:**
  - In Financial year 2022, the Ministry of Coal was the biggest contributor to the asset monetisation pipeline, generating a monetisation value of about Rs 40,000 crore through the auctioning of 22 coal blocks and awarding MDO contracts, the official said.
- **Mineral mining assets:**
  - It achieved an estimated monetisation value of Rs 18,700 crore in FY22 after the completion of 31 mineral blocks auctions.

- **The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways:**
  - It achieved an overall monetisation value of about Rs 23,000 crore.
  - In FY22, close to 390 kilometres of roads were monetised under the Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT) mode and three Toll Operate

- **The Ministry of Power** :
  - It reported a monetisation achievement of Rs 9,500 crore after state-owned transmission major Power Grid Corporation undertook the monetisation of its first batch of transmission assets using the InvIT model.
  - Apart from that, the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) also completed securitisation of one of its operational hydel assets raising about Rs 1,000 crore.

- **New models** such as InViTs (Infrastructure Investment Trusts), REITS (Real Estate Investment Trusts) and public-private partnership models such as the toll-operate-transfer (TOT) in the roads sector and Mine Developer and Operator (MDO) contracts in the coal sector proved instrumental in the targets being met.
  - The target for 2022-23 fiscal was fixed at Rs 1.67 lakh crore at the meeting.

Unachieved Targets:

- Some ministries lack the technical expertise to put their monetisation plans in action .
- The underperformance of railways assets was also discussed at the review meeting as it could achieve a monetisation value of only Rs 800-900 crore against a target of Rs 17,810 crore.

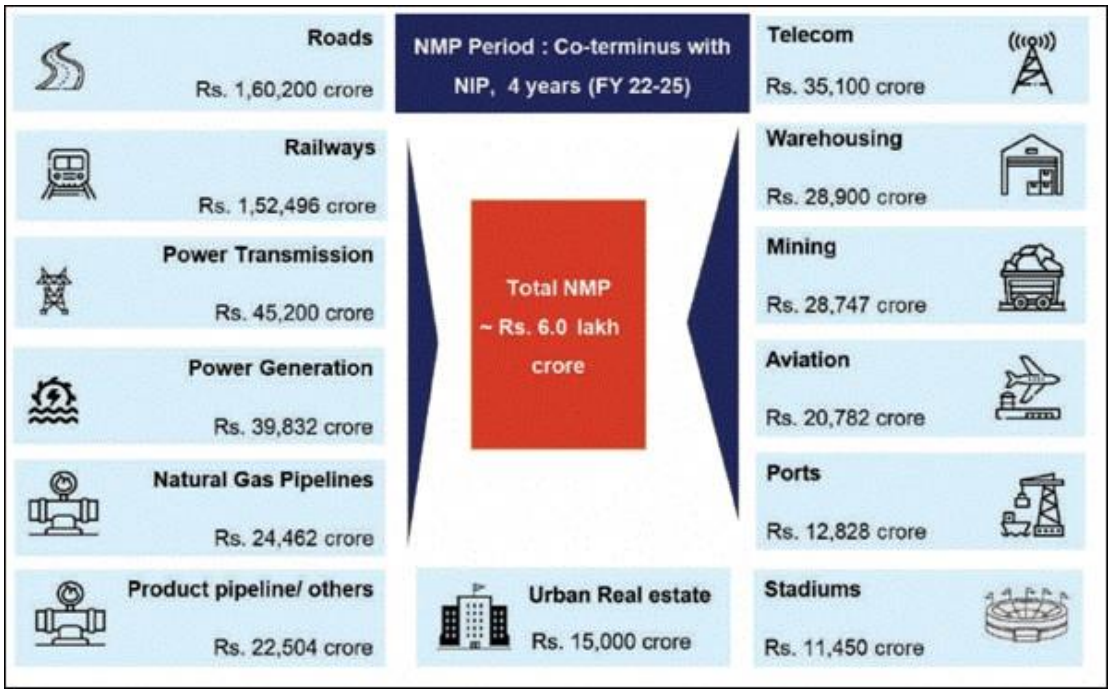
About National Monetisation Pipeline:

- The pipeline has been developed by NITI Aayog, in consultation with infrastructure line ministries, based on the mandate for 'Asset Monetisation' under Union Budget 2021-22.
- NMP estimates aggregate monetisation potential of Rs 6.0 lakh crores through core assets of the Central Government, over a four-year period, from FY 2022 to FY 2025.
- It aims to unlock value in brownfield projects by engaging the private sector, transferring to them revenue rights and not ownership in the projects, and using the funds generated for infrastructure creation across the country.
- Framework
    - The pipeline has been prepared based on inputs and consultations from respective line ministries and departments, along with the assessment of total asset base available therein.
        - Monetization through disinvestment and monetization of non-core assets have not been included in the NMP.

- The framework for monetisation of core asset monetisation has three key imperatives.

Estimated Potential:

- Sector wise Monetisation Pipeline over FY 2022-25 (Rs crore)



- The top 5 sectors (by estimated value) capture ~83% of the aggregate pipeline value.
    - These top 5 sectors include: Roads (27%) followed by Railways (25%), Power (15%), oil & gas pipelines (8%) and Telecom (6%).
- In terms of annual phasing by value, 15% of assets with an indicative value of Rs 0.88 lakh crore are envisaged to be rolled out in the current financial year (FY 2021-22).

Expected Benefits of the Scheme

- **Innovative way of Private Participation:**
    - Private sector is well known for its efficiency and technology.
    - NMP will provide a way to exploit the strength of the Private sector for infrastructure creation without transfer of ownership.
- **Ensure Further investment in Infrastructure Building:**
    - It will help to properly monetise under utilised brownfield projects
- **Revival of the economy and create sustainable demand.**
    - Spillover effect of infrastructure is high on cycle of demand
    - It will create further value for infrastructure creation in the country
    - It will enable high economic growth and seamlessly integrating the rural and semi-urban areas for overall public welfare

Key Challenges:

- Lack of identifiable revenue streams in various assets,
- Level of capacity utilisation in gas and petroleum pipeline networks,
- Dispute resolution mechanism,
- Regulated tariffs in power sector assets, and
- Low interest among investors in national highways below four lanes, according to the NMP framework.
- Analysts also point to issues such as the lack of independent sectoral regulators as potential impediments.

INDONESIA'S PALM OIL CRISIS

In News:

Indonesia, the largest producer and exporter of Palm Oil is experiencing domestic shortages of it — so much so as to force its government to introduce price controls and curbs on shipments.

Analysis of Background:

- The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has estimated the archipelago's palm oil production for 2021-22 (October-September) at 45.5 million tonnes (mt). That's almost 60% of the total global output and way ahead of the next bigger producer: Malaysia (18.7 mt).
- It is also the world's No. 1 exporter of the commodity, at 29 mt, followed by Malaysia (16.22 mt).
- Yet, the country has seen domestic prices of branded cooking oil spiral, from around 14,000 Indonesian rupiah (IDR) to 22,000 IDR per litre between March 2021 and March 2022.

There are two possible reasons.

- The first has to do supply disruptions — manmade and natural — in other cooking oils, especially sunflower and soyabean.
- The second factor is linked to petroleum, more specifically the use of palm oil as a bio-fuel. The Indonesian government has, since 2020, made 30% blending of diesel

with palm oil mandatory as part of a plan to slash fossil fuel imports.

Impact on India

- India is the world's biggest vegetable oils importer. Out of its annual imports of 14-15 mt, the lion's share is of palm oil (8-9 mt), followed by soyabean (3-3.5 mt) and sunflower (2.5).
- Indonesia has been India's top supplier of palm oil, though it was overtaken by Malaysia in 2021-22.

PRODUCTION-LINKED INCENTIVE SCHEME FOR TEXTILE SECTOR

In News:

Recently,The government approved 61 applications of companies with an investment potential of over Rs 19,000 crore under the production linked incentive (PLI) scheme for textiles.

Analysis of Background:

About PLI Scheme in Textile Sector:

- Government approved PLI Scheme for Textiles products, namely MMF Apparel, MMF Fabrics and Products of Technical Textiles, for enhancing India's manufacturing capabilities and enhancing exports with an approved financial outlay of Rs 10,683 crore over a five-year period.
- Types of Investment : The scheme has two parts
    - Part 1 where minimum investment is Rs. 300 crore and minimum turnover required to be achieved for incentive is Rs.600 crore
    - Part-2, where minimum investment is of Rs. 100 crore and minimum turnover required to be achieved for incentive is Rs. 200 crore.
- The investment period is 2 years, and the incentive will be paid for 5 years after the first year of post-investment operation.
- Segments
    - The PLI scheme for textiles aims to promote the production of high value Man-Made Fibre (MMF) fabrics, garments and technical textiles

Significance:

- The PLI scheme will provide an immense boost to domestic manufacturing, and prepare the industry for making a big impact in global markets in sync with the spirit of Atma Nirbhar Bharat.
- It will also help attract more investment into this sector.
    - The PLI Scheme for Textiles will lead to fresh investment of more than Rs.19,000 crore, cumulative turnover of over Rs.3 lakh crore will be achieved under this scheme and will create additional employment opportunities of more than 7.5 lakh jobs in this sector.
- The scheme would directly benefit the states of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Odisha, as these were states where the textile sector is already growing.

- Leveraging Economies of Scale, the scheme will help Indian companies to emerge as Global Champions in the Textile Sector.
    - It will incentivise the companies to grow more as higher the turnover, more is the incentive.
- The scheme will also pave the way for the participation of women in large numbers.

Criticism of the Scheme:

- The scheme will not impact traditional textile segments such as jute or cotton.
- Separate schemes will be required for them.
- It has minimum investment thresholds and select product lines and hence targets a limited number of players.

About Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme:

- The Finance Minister announced the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes across 13 key sectors.
    - It will create national manufacturing champions and generate employment opportunities for the country's youth.

- The aim is to give companies incentives on incremental sales from products manufactured in domestic units.
- It also invites foreign companies to set units in India along with encouraging local companies to set up or expand existing manufacturing units.

FIVE EYES (FYEY) ALLIANCE

In News:

The annual Raisina Dialogue in Delhi held this year by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval will host intelligence agency chiefs of several countries.

Analysis of Background:

- The conference is modelled on the lines of the annual Munich Security Conference and Singapore's Shangri-La dialogue.
- It is expected to bring together heads and deputy heads of the top intelligence and security organisations from more than 20 — mostly Western countries and their allies.
- Intelligence chiefs and deputies from Australia, Germany, Israel, Singapore, Japan and New Zealand are among those expected to attend the conference.
- The meet is held on the sidelines of the "Five eyes alliance" of the U.S., U.K., Canada, New Zealand and Australia, who coordinate on terrorism and security issues.

The Five Eyes Alliance:

- The Five Eyes (FVEY) is an intelligence alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- These countries are parties to the multilateral UKUSA Agreement, a treaty for joint cooperation in signals intelligence.
- The origins of the FVEY can be traced to informal secret meetings during World War II between British and American code-breakers.
- It was started before the US formally entered the war, followed by the Allies' 1941 Atlantic Charter that established their vision of the post-war world.

SOVEREIGN DEBT

In News:

The Sri Lankan government decided to default on all its sovereign debt worth $51 billion as it awaits financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Analysis of Background:

Sovereign Debt:

- Sovereign debt refers to the debt issued or accumulated by any government.
- Governments borrow money to finance the various expenses that they cannot meet through their regular tax revenues.
    - They usually need to pay interest on such debt along with the principal amount over time although many governments simply choose to borrow fresh debt to **repay existing debt.**

- Historically, governments have tended to borrow more money than they could actually repay in order to fund populist spending.
- **Features**
    - Governments can borrow either in their local currency or in foreign currency like the U.S. dollar.
        - Governments usually find it easier to borrow and repay in their local currency.
        - This is because governments with the help of their central banks can easily create fresh local currency to repay debt denominated in the local currency.
            - This is known as debt monetisation and it can lead to increased money supply which in turn causes prices to rise.
    - Debt denominated in foreign currency, say the U.S dollar, is difficult to repay as one depends on consistent flow of U.S. dollars into the economy.

IIP AND IT'S CORE SECTOR

In News:

India's core sector growth slowed to 4.3% in March after it grew 6.0% in February 2022- Ministry of Commerce and Industry data.

Analysis of Background:

Index of Industrial Production

- The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is an index which shows the growth rates in different industry groups of the economy in a stipulated period of time.
- More formally, it chooses a basket of industrial products — ranging from the manufacturing sector to mining to energy, creates an index by giving different weight to each sector and then tracks the production every month.
- Finally, the index value is compared to the value it had in the same month last year to figure out the economy's industrial health.
- The IIP number measures the industrial production for the period under review, usually a month, as against the reference period.

Who releases Index of Industrial Production or IIP data?

- The IIP is estimated and published on a monthly basis by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) .
- As an all India index, it gives general level of industrial activity in the economy.

IIP base year/ Reference Period

- The IIP base year was changed to 2011-12 from 2004-05 in the year 2017.
- The earlier base years were 1937, 1946, 1951, 1956, 1960, 1970, 1980-81, 1993-94 and 2004-05.

Where is IIP data sourced from?

- The CSO uses secondary data to reach the monthly IIP number.
- The data is sourced from various agencies in different ministries or departments of the government.
- The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP)is the source for the major chunk of data for the calculation.

Who uses IIP data?

- The factory production data (IIP) is used by various government agencies such as the Ministry of Finance, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), private firms and analysts, among others for analytical purposes.
- The data is also used to compile the Gross Value Added (GVA) of the manufacturing sector in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on a quarterly basis.

Calculation of IIP:

IIP is a composite indicator that measures the growth rate of industry groups classified under,

1. Broad sectors, namely, Mining, Manufacturing and Electricity
2. Use-based sectors, namely Primary/Basic Goods, Capital Goods, Intermediate Goods, Consumer durables etc.

Core Industries in IIP

- The main or the key industries constitute the core sectors of an economy.
- In India, there are eight sectors that are considered the core sectors.
- The eight industries have a combined share of 40.27 per cent in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), which gives the growth rates of different industry groups in a specified period.
- The eight-core sectors of the Indian economy are electricity, steel, refinery products, crude oil, coal, cement, natural gas and fertilizers.
- These sectors have a major impact on the Indian economy and significantly affect most other industries as well.
- The Office of Economic Adviser, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade releases Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI).

Core Industries in IIP	
New Series (Base year 2011-12)	Weight %
Coal	10.33
Crude Oil	8.98
Natural Gas	6.88
Refinery Products	28.04
Fertilizers	2.63
Steel	17.92
Cement	5.37
Electricity	19.85
Total	100

The Eight Core Industries in decreasing order of their Weightage:

Refinery Products> Electricity> Steel> Coal> Crude Oil> Natural Gas> Cement> Fertilizers

Recent findings

- India's core sector growth slowed to 4.3% in March after it grew 6.0% in February 2022.
- The cumulative growth rate of Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) stood at 10.4% during April-March 2021-22 compared to the same year in the previous fiscal.
- The production of natural gas, refinery products, fertilizers, and steel, cement and electricity industries increased in March 2022 over the corresponding period of last year.
- Six sectors including natural gas (7.6%), refinery products (6.2%), steel (3.7%), cement (8.8%), Fertilizers (15.3%) and electricity (4.9%) reported a growth in the month of March.
- Coal and Crude oil sectors witnessed a contraction of 0.1% and 3.4% respectively this month on a year-on-year basis.
- The fertiliser sector saw a growth of3% in March 2022 against a contraction of 5% seen in March 2021 and a contraction of 1.4% in February 2022.

TOPIC: ENVIRONMENT

CONSERVATION OF SACRED GROOVES

In News:

India's sacred groves are being gradually altered due to ever-expanding human populations, pollution; effective conservation is the need of the hour to maintain their functional values.

Analysis of Background:

Sacred Grooves:

- Sacred groves of India are forest fragments of varying sizes, which are communally protected, and which usually have a significant religious connotation for the protecting community.
- It usually consists of a dense cover of vegetation including climbers, herbs, shrubs and trees, with the presence of a village deity and is mostly situated near a perennial water source.
- Sacred groves are considered to be symbols of the primitive practice of nature worship and support nature conservation to a great extent.
- The introduction of the protected area category community reserves under the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002**.**

Regulation of activities in Sacred Grooves:

- Hunting and logging are usually strictly prohibited within these patches.
- Other forms of forest usage like honey collection and deadwood collection are sometimes allowed on a sustainable basis.
- NGOs work with local villagers to protect such groves.
- Traditionally, and in some cases even today, members of the community take turns to protect the grove.

Threats:

- Urbanization,
- Over-exploitation of resources.

- Many of the groves are looked upon as abode of Hindu deities, in the recent past a number of them have been partially cleared for construction of shrines and temples.

Different names in different states:

- *Sarna* in Bihar
- *Dev Van* in Himachal Pradesh
- *Devarakadu* in Karnataka
- *Kavu* in Kerala
- *Dev* in Madhya Pradesh
- *Devarahati* or *Devarai* in Maharashtra
- *Lai Umang* in Maharashtra
- *Law Kyntang* or *Asong Khosi* in Meghalaya
- *Oran* in Rajasthan
- *Kovil Kadu* or *Sarpa Kavu* in Tamil Nadu

VERTICAL FARMING

In News:

India is evolving every day with something new. Also, industrialization is increasing dramatically due to which many arable lands are at greater risk. Vertical farming in India is the answer to all these problems.

Analysis of Background:

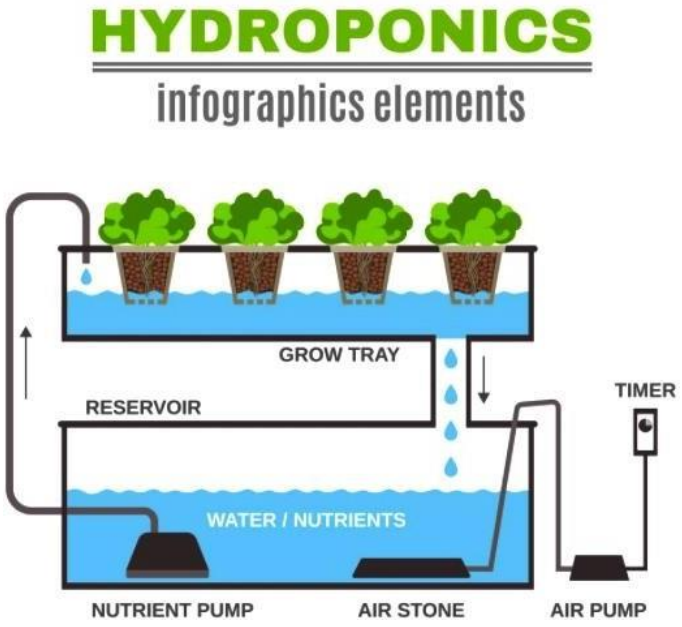
Vertical Farming:

- In 1915, Gilbert Ellis Bailey coined the term vertical farming and he went on to write a namesake book.
- The modern concept was first proposed in 1999 by professor Dickson Despommier. His concept centered on the idea that urban areas should grow their own food which can save time and resources required for transportation.

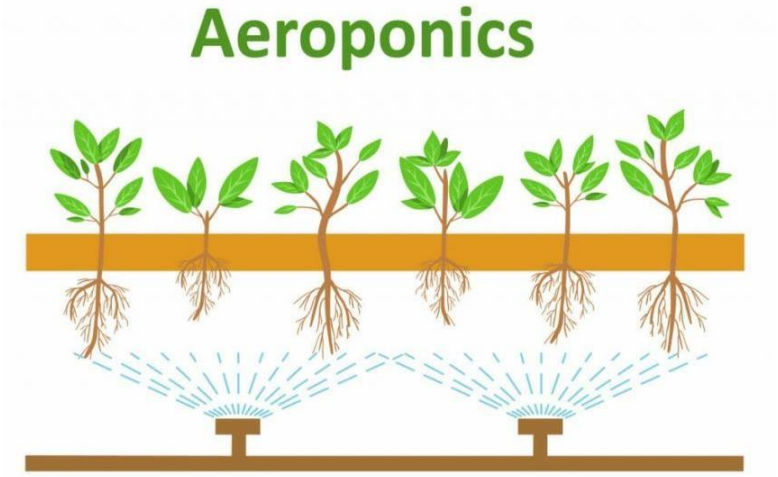
- Instead of horizontally on the ground like traditional farming, vertical farming grows crops in vertical, stacked layers without putting too much impact on land and water resources which are scarce.
- It includes soilless farming techniques, among others.
- Vertical farming systems like aeroponics and hydroponics come under the broad umbrella ambit of 'protected cultivation', where one can control and regulate multiple variables like water, soil, temperature, humidity, and so on.
- Protected cultivation, when practised at scale, offers a massive potential to shorten and optimise our farm-to-plate supply chains by making food available closer to the consumer and thereby can go a long way to improve our nation's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and reduce imports dependency.

Types:

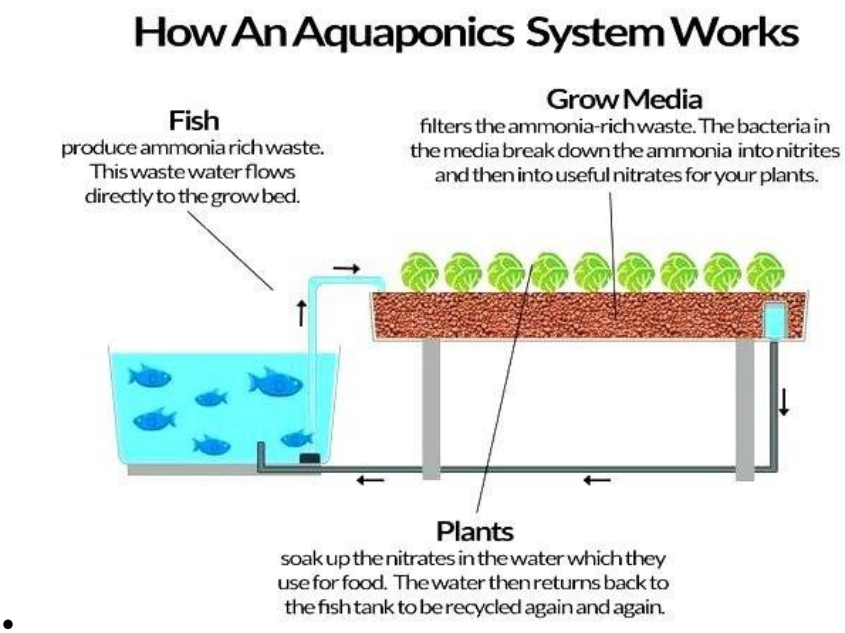
- **Hydroponics:**
  - Hydroponics is a method of growing plants in a water-based, nutrient-rich solution.
  - In this method, the root system is supported using an inert medium such as perlite, clay pellets, peat moss or vermiculite.
    - The main purpose is to provide access to oxygen which is essential for proper growth.



- **Aeroponics:**
  - Aeroponics is an environment-friendly way of farming in which the roots are suspended in the air and plants grow in a humid environment without soil.
  - It is a variation of hydroponics where both growing medium and flowing water are absent.
    - The roots of the plants, in this method, are sprayed with water and nutrient solution.
    - This technique enables farmers to control humidity, temperature, pH levels and water conductivity inside a greenhouse.



- **Aquaponics:**
  - Aquaponics is a system that combines hydroponics and **a**quaculture within a closed system.
  - There are three biological components in the aquaponics process: fishes, plants, and bacteria.
    - The system represents a symbiotic relationship between the plants and the fishes; the fish feces is used as fertilizer for the plants, and the plants clean the water for the fish.



Significance of Vertical Farming:

- **Financial Viability:**
  - While the upfront initial capital cost involved in vertical farming is usually higher, if and when the entire crop production design is done properly, it makes absolute sense and financial viability to grow, harvest, and produce a particular crop throughout the year or in a specific season applying vertical farming methods.
- **More Water Efficient:**
  - All crops grown via vertical farming methods are usually over 95% water efficient, as compared to crops grown through traditional agricultural practices.
- **Water Saving:**
  - For a country like India, which consists of only around 4% of the world's water resources, vertical farming-based technologies can not only increase the efficiency and productivity of our food production but can also lead to quantum leap in water savings, which in turn shall support and give impetus to India's ambitious goals of achieving carbon-neutrality within its food production ecosystem.

- **Better Public Health:**
    - Additionally, as most of the crops are grown “without the use of pesticides”, it leads to “a positive contribution towards better public health as well over time”; hence the consumers can expect zero-pesticide produce**,** which is also healthy, fresh, and sustainable for the planet.
- **Employment:**
    - Lastly, it is important to emphasise that protected cultivation has the potential to create new jobs, skill sets, and economic opportunities for the agriculture students of our country, who are seen to be able to adapt and move forward with the learning curve quickly.

BARBARA FOREST

In News:

The Barbara Forest will be thrown open to the public from the next tourist season for promoting ecotourism.

Analysis of Background:

About Barbara forest:

- It is named after a British forest officer's wife, who was killed in a tiger attack in the area, 100-odd years ago.
- It is situated in Odisha and is dubbed as Asia’s largest teak and sal forest.
    - Its teak plants are about 80-ft tall with a girth of 10-feet each, rarely found anywhere else in the country. Teak species from 10 different States are also preserved here.
- Spread over 870-sq km, the forest touches three districts Khordha, Nayagarh and Ganjam of Odisha.
- It is an enriched area that boasts several century-old plants sown by the British back in 1910.
- It was perhaps the only forest in India guarded by the jawans of the Central Reserve Police Force (for protecting forest resources).

COASTAL EROSION

In News:

Recently, the Ministry of Earth Sciences informed the Lok Sabha that of the 6,907.18 km long Indian coastline of the mainland, a significant area is under varying degrees of Coastal erosion.

Analysis of Background:

Coastal erosion: Coastal erosion is the loss or displacement of land, or the long-term removal of sediment and rocks along the coastline due to the action of waves, currents, tides, wind-driven water, waterborne ice, or other impacts of storms.

- The National Centre for Coastal Research, Chennai, an attached office of the Ministry of Earth Sciences has been monitoring shoreline erosion since 1990 using remote sensing data and GIS mapping techniques.
- About 6,907.18 km long Indian coastline of the mainland has been analyzed from 1990 to 2018.
- Another organization under the MoES, the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), has prepared and published an atlas of Coastal Vulnerability Index (CVI) maps for the entire coastline of India at a 1:100000 scale.
- It uses data on sea level rise, coastal slope, shoreline change rate, coastal elevation, coastal geomorphology, tidal range and significant wave height.

Key Findings:

- **Percentage wise assessment**
    - About 34% is under varying degrees of erosion, while 26% of the coastline are of an accreting nature, and the remaining 40% is in a stable state.
- **State wise assessment**:
    - In terms of percentage, West Bengal, located on the eastern coast of the country, with a 534.35 km-long coastline, suffered erosion along about 60.5% of the coast (323.07 km) over the period from 1990 to 2018.
    - This is followed by Kerala on the west coast, which has 592.96 km of coastline and 46.4% of it (275.33 km) faces erosion.
    - Tamil Nadu, with a long coastline of 991.47 km, recorded erosion along 42.7% of it (422.94 km).

- Gujarat, with the longest coastline of 1,945.60 km, recorded erosion along 27.06% (537.5 km) of it.
- In the Union Territory of Puducherry, with a 41.66 km-long coastline, about 56.2% of its coast (23.42 km) recorded erosion.

Factors causing Coastal erosion:

Coastal erosion may be caused by **hydraulic action, abrasion, impact and corrosion by wind and water, and other forces, natural or unnatural.**

- **Hydraulic action**: Hydraulic action occurs when waves striking a cliff face compress air in cracks on the cliff face.
    - This exerts pressure on the surrounding rock, and can progressively splinter and remove pieces.
    - Over time, the cracks can grow, sometimes forming a cave.
    - The splinters fall to the sea bed where they are subjected to further wave action.

- **Attrition**: Attrition occurs when waves cause loose pieces of rock debris to collide with each other, grinding and chipping each other, progressively becoming smaller, smoother and rounder.
    - Scree also collides with the base of the cliff face, chipping small pieces of rock from the cliff or has a corrasion (abrasion) effect, similar to sandpapering.
- **Solution**: Solution is the process in which acids contained in sea water will dissolve some types of rock such as chalk or limestone.
- **Abrasion:** Abrasion, also known as corrasion, occurs when waves break on cliff faces and slowly erode it.
    - As the sea pounds cliff faces it also uses the scree from other wave actions to batter and break off pieces of rock from higher up the cliff face which can be used for this same wave action and attrition.
- **Corrosion**: Corrosion or solution/chemical weathering occurs when the sea's pH (anything below pH 7.0) corrodes rocks on a cliff face.
    - Limestone cliff faces, which have a moderately high pH, are particularly affected in this way.

    - Wave action also increases the rate of reaction by removing the reacted material.
- **Secondary factors**
    - Weathering and transport slope processes
    - Slope hydrology
    - Vegetation
    - Cliff foot erosion
    - Cliff foot sediment accumulation
    - Resistance of cliff foot sediment to attrition and transport
    - Human Activities
- **Tertiary factors**
    - Resource extraction
    - Coastal management

Control methods:

- **Hard-erosion control methods:**
    - It provides a more permanent solution than soft-erosion control methods.
    - Seawalls and groynes serve as semi-permanent infrastructure.
    - These structures are not immune from normal wear-and-tear and will have to be refurbished or rebuilt.
    - It is estimated the average lifespan of a seawall is 50–100 years and the average for a groyne is 30–40 years.

- **Soft erosion strategies:**
    - It refers to temporary options of slowing the effects of erosion.
    - These options, including Sandbag and beach nourishment, are not intended to be long-term solutions or permanent solutions.
    - Another method, beach scraping or beach bulldozing allows for the creation of an artificial dune in front of a building or as means of preserving a building foundation.

- **Living Shorelines**
    - The solutions to coastal erosion that include vegetation are called “living shorelines.”
    - Living shorelines use plants and other natural elements.

- Living shorelines are found to be more resilient against storms, improve water quality, increase biodiversity, and provide fishery habitats.
- Marshes and oyster reefs are examples of vegetation that can be used for living shorelines; they act as natural barriers to waves.

- **Relocation**
  - Relocation of infrastructure any housing farther away from the coast is also an option.
  - The natural processes of both absolute and relative sea level rise and erosion are considered in rebuilding.
  - Depending on factors such as the severity of the erosion, as well as the natural landscape of the property, relocation could simply mean moving inland by a short distance or relocation can be to completely remove improvements from an area.

WATER TRAINS AND CROCODILES

In News:

The Indian Railways has been delivering water to Pali district in western Rajasthan as the region's water bodies have dried up due to a hot March.

Analysis of Background:

- Extreme and early heat in March forced authorities in Pali to release water from the Jawai dam built on the Jawai river, a tributary of the Luni which flows through Pali.
- The district had not received good rains last year. High demand led to water from the reservoir's dead zone being supplied to Pali and now, the dam is empty much before it should have been.
- Now, over 350 mugger crocodiles for whom the Jawai dam is home are struggling to survive.
- The water in the reservoir is down to three feet. Crocodiles need at least 10 feet of water to survive.
- In lean times, crocodiles seek shelter in dens dug on land near the water body they reside in. They stop all activity in the cool of these dens to conserve their energy and wait for the rains. They can survive for four-six months in this manner.

- The crocodiles found in Jawai are muggers or marsh crocodiles.

About muggers or marsh crocodiles:

- These are freshwater specialists.
- They found all over south Asia — India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh — as well as south-eastern Iran.
- Muggers measure six to 13 feet on average and live for 70-80 years.
- The species has been extirpated in many areas of its former range and now survives largely in protected areas, mainly in India and Sri Lanka.
- The mugger is found in 15 Indian states, with the largest populations in the middle Ganges (Bihar-Jharkhand) and Chambal (Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan) basins.
- The main threats to mugger crocodiles are habitat loss due to expansion of agriculture and industry, getting trapped in fishing nets, poaching of their eggs and illegal trade in their skin and meat.
- Since 1982, it has been listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List. It is listed in CITES Appendix I, hence international commercial trade is prohibited.
- In India, it has been protected since 1972 under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, which prohibits catching, killing and transporting a crocodile without a permit; offenders face imprisonment and a fine.

SIX ASSESSMENT REPORT: IPCC

In News:

The 56th session of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) approved the Summary for PolicyMakers (SPM) of the Working Group III contribution to the Sixth Assessment Cycle (AR6 WGIII) titled 'Mitigation of Climate Change'.

Analysis of Background:

Major Highlights of the report

- **Updated global assessment:**

    - It provides an updated global assessment of climate change mitigation progress and pledges, and examines the sources of global emissions.
    - It explains developments in emission reduction and mitigation efforts, assessing the impact of national climate pledges in relation to long-term emissions goals.
- **Greenhouse gas emissions:**
    - In 2010-2019 average annual global greenhouse gas emissions were at their highest levels in human history, but the rate of growth has slowed.
    - Without immediate and deep emissions reductions across all sectors, limiting global warming to 1.5°C is beyond reach.
    - However, there is increasing evidence of climate action.
- **Costs of solar and wind energy, and batteries:**
    - Since 2010, there have been sustained decreases of up to 85% in the costs of solar and wind energy, and batteries.
    - An increasing range of policies and laws have enhanced energy efficiency, reduced rates of deforestation and accelerated the deployment of renewable energy.
- **Countries were falling behind:**
    - It found that countries were falling behind on the policies and actions needed to reach net zero emissions, and in current form could see temperatures rise by as much as 3C, a catastrophic level.

Suggestions:

- Drastic changes will be needed to all aspects of the global economy and society, to phase out dependence on fossil fuels.
- To achieve 1.5 degrees Celsius, the world must reduce annual CO2 emissions by 48 per cent by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050 (India has opted for a net zero target of 2070) while reducing methane emissions a third by 2030 and almost halving them by 2050.
- Retrofitting existing fossil fuel assets with carbon capture and storage (CCS) is being proposed as one option to reduce the amount of emissions already locked in by existing infrastructure.
- Limiting global warming will require major transitions in the energy sector.

- This will involve a substantial reduction in fossil fuel use, widespread electrification, improved energy efficiency, and use of alternative fuels (such as hydrogen).
- Cities and other urban areas also offer significant opportunities for emissions reductions.
- These can be achieved through lower energy consumption (such as by creating compact, walkable cities), electrification of transport in combination with low-emission energy sources, and enhanced carbon uptake and storage using nature.
- There are options for established, rapidly growing and new cities.
- Reducing emissions in industry will involve using materials more efficiently, reusing and recycling products and minimising waste.
- Agriculture, forestry, and other land use can provide large-scale emissions reductions and also remove and store carbon dioxide at scale.
- Mitigation in industry can reduce environmental impacts and increase employment and business opportunities.
- Electrification with renewables and shifts in public transport can enhance health, employment, and equity.
- The developed countries - especially China, the United States, and the European Union - must significantly ramp up their climate mitigation efforts as these three big emitters alone would consume 45 per cent of the available carbon space by 2030 under a business-as-usual scenario.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE (IPCC)

- An intergovernmental body of the United Nations (UN).
- Established by World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 1988
- Membership: Open for all the members of the WMO and UN.
- Function of IPCC:
    - It provides objective scientific information in order to understand human-induced climate change.
        - It also covers natural, political & economic impacts of these anthropogenic climate changes and possible response options.
    - Its main activity is to prepare Assessment Reports, special reports, and methodology reports assessing the state of knowledge of climate change.

- However, the IPCC does not itself engage in scientific research. Instead, it asks scientists from around the world to go through all the relevant scientific literature related to climate change and draw up the logical conclusions.
- It does not monitor climate or related phenomena itself.

Assessment Reports:

- The IPCC's Assessment Reports (ARs), which are produced every few years, are the most comprehensive and widely accepted scientific evaluations of the state of the Earth's climate.
- They form the basis for government policies to tackle climate change, and provide the scientific foundation for the international climate change negotiations.
    - **Six Assessment Reports** have been published so far
        - The sixth report (AR6) is coming in three parts — the first in August 2021, the second in February 2022, and the third recently .
            - The first part of AR6 flagged more intense and frequent heat-waves, increased incidents of extreme rainfall, a dangerous rise in sea-levels, prolonged droughts, and melting glaciers — and said that 1.5 degrees Celsius warming was much closer than was thought earlier, and also inevitable.
            - The second part warned that multiple climate change-induced disasters were likely in the next two decades even if strong action was taken to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases.

What previous reports said,

- **First Assessment Report**
    - The first Assessment Report (1990) noted that emissions resulting from human activities are substantially increasing the atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases.
    - **Global temperatures have risen by 0.3 to 0.6** degree Celsius in the last 100 years.
    - In the business-as-usual scenario, temperatures were likely to increase by 2 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels by

2025, and 4 degrees Celsius by 2100. Sea levels were likely to rise by 65 cm by 2100.

- This report formed the basis for the negotiation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, known as the Rio Summit.

- **The second Assessment Report (1995):**

  - It revised the projected rise in global temperatures to 3 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2100, and sea-level rise to 50 cm, in light of more evidence. Global rise in temperature by 0.3 to 0.6 degree Celsius since the late 19th century was "unlikely to be entirely natural in origin", it said.
  - AR2 was the scientific underpinning for the Kyoto Protocol of 1997.

- **The third Assessment Report (2001)**
  - It revised the projected rise in global temperatures to 1.4 to 5.8 degrees Celsius by 2100 compared to 1990.
  - The projected rate of warming was unprecedented in the last 10,000 years, it said.
  - The report predicted increased rainfall on average, and that by 2100, sea levels were likely to rise by as much as 80 cm from 1990 levels.
  - Glaciers would retreat during the 21st century, and the frequency, intensity, and duration of extreme weather events would increase, it said. The report presented new and stronger evidence to show global warming was mostly attributable to human activities.

- **The fourth Assessment Report (2007) :**
  - It said greenhouse gas emissions increased by 70 per cent between 1970 and 2004, and atmospheric concentrations of CO2 in 2005 (379 ppm) were the most in 650,000 years.
  - In the worst-case scenario, global temperatures could rise 4.5 degrees Celsius by 2100 from pre-industrial levels, and sea levels could be 60 cm higher than 1990 levels.
  - The report won the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for IPCC. It was the scientific input for the 2009 Copenhagen climate meeting.

- **The fifth Assessment Report (2014)**
    - It said more than half the temperature rise since 1950 was attributable to human activities, and that the atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide were “unprecedented” in the last 800,000 years.
    - The rise in global temperatures by 2100 could be as high as 4.8 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial times, and more frequent and longer heat waves were “virtually certain”. A “large fraction of species” faced extinction, and food security would be undermined.
    - AR5 formed the scientific basis for negotiations of the Paris Agreement in 2015.

PARBOILED RICE

In News:

The Centre has said it will stop the purchase of excess parboiled rice, of which Telangana is a major producer.

Analysis of Background:

Parboiled rice:

- The dictionary meaning of ‘parboil’ is ‘partly cooked by boiling’. Thus, the expression parboiled rice refers to rice that has been partially boiled at the paddy stage, before milling.

History:

- Parboiling of rice is not a new practice, and has been followed in India since ancient times. However, there is no specific definition of parboiled rice of the Food Corporation of India or the Food Ministry.

Processes:

- There are several processes for parboiling rice. For example, the Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI), Mysuru, uses a method in which the paddy is soaked in hot water for three hours.

- There is another common method in which paddy is soaked for 8 hours. The water is then drained and the paddy steamed for 20 minutes. Also, the paddy is dried in the shade in the method used by the CFTRI, but it is sun-dried in the common method.
- The Paddy Processing Research Centre (PPRC), Thanjavur follows a method known as the chromate soaking process. It uses chromate, a family of salt in which the anion contains both chromium and oxygen, which removes the odour from the wet rice.
- All processes generally involve three stages—soaking, steaming and drying. After passing through these stages, the paddy goes for milling.

Are all rice varieties suitable for parboiling?

- Generally, all varieties can be processed into parboiled rice, but it is ideal to use long slender varieties to prevent breakage during milling. However, aromatic varieties should not be parboiled because the process can make it can lose its aroma.

What are the benefits of Parboiled Rice?

- There are several benefits. For example, parboiling makes rice tougher.
- This reduces the chances of the rice kernel breaking during milling.
- Parboiling also increases the nutrient value of the rice.
- Parboiled rice has a higher resistance to insects and fungi.
- Loss of nutrients due to the removal of husk and bran in milling are decreased.
- During harvesting the vitamin and mineral present in hull (outer covering of the paddy) and bran coat are dissolved and seeped into the endosperm. Part of the scutellum and germ which are rich in B vitamins get fixed to the grain and hence losses of B vitamins are less.
- Losses of water soluble nutrients due to washing of rice are less in parboiled rice compared to raw rice.
- Parboiled rice is a source of iron and calcium. Compared to white rice, parboiled rice has fewer calories, fewer carbohydrates, more fiber, and more protein. This makes it a healthier alternative to traditional white rice.
- Parboiling improves digestibility and protein efficiency ratio is higher compaired to raw rice.

- Parboiled rice will not turn into glutinous mass when cooked.
- Parboiled rice swells more when cooked to the desired softness.
- Parboiling stabilizes the oil content of the bran. The discrete oil globules in the aleuronic layer of the native rice grain are ruptured into a band by parboiling.

Disadvantages of parboiling

- The rice becomes darker and may smell unpleasant due to prolonged soaking.
- Besides, setting up a parboiling rice milling unit requires a higher investment than a raw rice milling unit.

Stock of parboiled rice in the country

- According to the Food Ministry, the total stock of parboiled rice is 40.58 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) as on April 1, 2022.
- Out of this, the highest stock is in Telangana at 16.52 LMT, followed by Tamil Nadu (12.09 LMT) and Kerala (3 LMT).
- The stock was in the range 0.04–2.92 LMT in 10 other states —Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Karnataka, Bihar, Punjab and Haryana.

Demand of Parboiled Rice in India

- The Food Ministry pegs the parboiled rice demand at 20 LMT per annum for distribution under the National Food Security Act, 2013. According to the Ministry, the demand for parboiled rice has come down in recent years.
- In the last few years, production in parboiled rice-consuming states such as Jharkhand, Kerala and Tamil Nadu has increased, resulting in less movement to the deficit states.
- Earlier, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) used to procure parboiled rice from states such as Telangana to supply to these states. But in recent years, parboiled rice production has increased in these states. So, the Ministry says, the current stock of parboiled rice is sufficient to meet the demand for the next two years.

PALM OIL

In News:

Recently, Indonesia announced its plans to ban palm oil exports.

Analysis of Background:

Palm Oil:

- Palm oil is an edible vegetable oil derived from the mesocarp (reddish pulp) of the fruit of the oil palms.
- Along with coconut oil, palm oil is one of the few highly saturated vegetable fatsand is semisolid at room temperature.
- It is resistant to oxidation and so can give products a longer shelf-life; it's stable at high temperatures
- Hence, the oil is used in food manufacturing, in beauty products, and as biofuel.
- Its use in the commercial food industry in other parts of the world is widespread because of its lower cost.

Production:

- Indonesia is the largest producer of palm oil, followed by Malaysia - both countries account for 84% of the worlds palm production. The largest producers of palm oil are Thailand, Colombia and Nigeria.
- Globally, palm oil supplies 35% of the world's vegetable oil demand on just 10% of the land.

Consumption:

- The largest consumer of palm oil are India (9.4 million tonnes) and Indonesia (6 million tonnes)– countries in which palm oil is traditionally used for cooking.
- The largest importer of palm oil is India(19 per cent), followed by the European Union (15 per cent, 7.3 million tonnes) and China (14 per cent) (Index Muni, 2020).

The recent ban by Indonesia:

- Indonesia has confirmed that the ban will only apply to exports of refined, bleached and deodorized (RBD) palm oil, and would not affect flows of crude palm oil or other forms of derivative products.
- However, it will widen the ban if there is a shortage of refined palm oil.

- RBD palm olein accounts for around 40% of Indonesia's total exports of palm oil products.

Why has Indonesia banned the export of palm oil?

- Indonesia, much like most of the world, is grappling with inflation and a shortage of palm oil, as high exports of the commodity, has further fuelled inflation in that country.
- Of late, there have been multiple protests in the country on rising food prices.
- The country is also facing an acute shortage of edible oil including palm oil.
- Rise in palm oil prices has been a cause of worry for the Indonesian government.
- To stem the rising prices of palm oil, the government banned its exports and removed retail price caps on the commodity, which had led to the shortage of the commodity.
- So, it has made a series of interventions over the past few months, including capping local prices, providing higher subsidies, hiking export duty, and controlling exports through surveillance and documentation, etc.

Why are palm oil prices rising?

- Palm oil prices, have jumped 50 percent in the last 12 months and nearly tripled over two years. The rise in prices is the result of multiple factors.
- The key price drivers, are :
    1. Weather conditions in top oil-producing nations,
    2. Demand-supply balance of competing oils like soya bean, rapeseed, sunflower, etc.,
    3. Demand environment and mix of edible oils in consuming countries, and
    4. Demand for palm-based bio-diesel, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia.
    5. A labour unrest in Malaysia also led to a shortage of the product last year.
    6. With the Russia-Ukraine war, prices of the commodity climbed again.

India’s Palm Oil requirements:

- As per ICRA, palm oil accounts for about 40 percent of total edible oil consumption in India and 60 percent of imports.
- Almost India’s entire palm oil requirement is met by Indonesia and Malaysia.

- Indonesia though, was the largest exporter of palm oil to India historically, imports of the commodity from Malaysia increased in recent years.
- Currently, India imports less than 50 percent of its palm oil needs from Indonesia, which though lesser than Malaysia, is still substantial.
- India imported about 500,000 tons of crude palm oil from Indonesia in the five months ended March 2022.
- RBD palm olein purchases totaled 475,000 tons, according to data compiled by the Solvent Extractors' Association of India.

Note: India is the second-largest consumer of vegetable oils globally**,** accounting for more than 10 percent of global demand. Palm oil is of importance, given it accounts for about 40 percent (normalized) share in India's overall edible oil consumption basket. Nearly two-thirds of India's edible oil demand is met by imports.

Implications of export bans on India:

- Indonesia's palm oil export ban has huge implications for the Indian consumers, as it would lead to a further jump in prices of several daily-use items.
- Palm oil is a key commodity for several products, such as soaps, shower gels, hand washes, shampoos, oral care products, and processed food products, such as noodles, biscuits, and frozen desserts.
- The commodity is cheaper compared to other edible oils, and hence, is used by the hotels, restaurants and caterers (HoReCa) industry
- Palm oil is a key ingredient in the food processing industry. Rising prices of palm oil will impact costs and margins of several consumer companies.
- The impact would be seen most in categories, such as biscuits, noodles, cakes, potato chips, frozen desserts.
- The restaurant industry is already grappling with a 10-12 percent increase in operational costs due to inflation. And now with prices of palm oil set to surge again, the industry might pass on the costs to the consumers.

Palm Oil: India specific

- In India, oil palm is being cultivated in 13 states. Potential states are Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Bihar.

- Andhra Pradesh (83.5 percent) along with Telangana accounts for about 97 percent of India's 278,000 tonnes of crude palm oil production.

National Mission on Edible Oils-Oil Palm (NMEO-OP):

- Under this mission the government will focus on increasing the oil palm cultivation to 10 lakh hectares by 2025-26 and 16.7 lakh hectares by 2029-30.
- The Centre will provide some financial assistance to farmers to ensure that they get a good price for their produce. It will work out the formula price and the viability price of the produce.
- The weather condition in North East and Andaman and Nicobar Islands is conducive for oil palm cultivation and this is the reason why the special focus of the mission will be on these two areas.

Other Concerns associated with Palm Oil Production

- **Deforestation:**Palm oil has been and continues to be a major driver of deforestation of some of the world's most biodiverse forests, destroying the habitat ofalready endangered species like the Orangutan, pygmy elephant and Sumatran rhino.
- **GHGs:**This forest loss coupled with conversion of carbon rich peat soils are throwing out millions of tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and contributing to climate change.
- **Labour exploitation:**There remains some exploitation of workers and child labour.

GREEN HYDROGEN POLICY

In News:

India's Green Hydrogen Policy released in Feb 2022 has addressed several critical challenges such as open access, waiver of inter-state transmission charges, banking, time-bound clearances, etc., It is expected to further boost India's energy transition.

Analysis of Background:

Hydrogen:

- Hydrogen is the lightest and first element on the periodic table. Since the weight of hydrogen is less than air, it rises in the atmosphere and is therefore rarely found in its pure form, H2.
- At standard temperature and pressure, hydrogen is a nontoxic, nonmetallic, odorless, tasteless, colorless, and highly combustible diatomic gas.
- Hydrogen fuel is a zero-emission fuel burned with oxygen. It can be used in fuel cells or internal combustion engines. It is also used as a fuel for spacecraft propulsion.

Types of Hydrogen:

Grey Hydrogen:

- Constitutes India's bulk Production.
- Extracted from hydrocarbons (fossil fuels, natural gas).
- By product: CO2

Blue Hydrogen:

- Sourced from fossil fuels.
- By product: CO, CO2
- By products are Captured and Stored, so better than gey hydrogen.

Green Hydrogen:

- Generated from renewable energy (like Solar, Wind).
- Electricity splits water into hydrogen and oxygen.
- By Products : Water, Water Vapor

National Hydrogen Energy Mission:

- This mission will emphasise hydrogen from clean sources.
- It also envisages linking the country's growing renewable energy capacity with the hydrogen economy.
- India's target for 2022 for renewable energy generation is 175 GW and this mission is expected to bolster the process.
- The renewable energy target for 2030 is 450 GW.
- The country has set to decarbonise by 2050.
- Using hydrogen will serve the twin purposes of achieving India's emission commitments under the Paris Agreement and reducing the import dependence on fossil fuels.
- The end-users of hydrogen energy are the transportation sector, chemical industry and steel sector.
- These sectors contribute to 1/3rd of all greenhouse gas emissions because of their using fossil fuels.
- Replacing fossil fuels with hydrogen in these sectors will help reduce GHGs in a big way.

UNFCCC COP-26:

At the 26th Session of the Conference of Parties (COP-26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Glasgow, in November 2021, India has made the following announcements:

- India's non-fossil energy capacity to reach 500 GW by 2030.
- India will meet 50 per cent of its energy requirements with renewable energy by 2030.
- India will reduce its total projected carbon emissions by one billion tonnes from now to2030.
- India will reduce the carbon intensity of its economy by 45 per cent by 2030, over 2005levels.
- By 2070, India will achieve the target of net-zero emissions.

CENTRE ENHANCES SUBSIDY FOR NON-UREA FERTILIZERS

In News:

With urea and fertilizer prices shooting up in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Union Cabinet approved an enhancement in subsidies on non-urea fertilisers for the upcoming Kharif crop, to ₹60,939 crore.

Analysis of Background:

- The government fixes the retail price of urea and subsidises producers based on the difference between costs and the fixed selling price.
- It pays a subsidy to non-urea fertiliser makers on the basis of nutrient-based rates.
- The increase in the prices of Di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) and its raw material is in the range of about 80%.

Fertilizer Subsidy in India

- Subsidy as a concept originated during the Green Revolution of the 1970s-80s.
- Fertiliser subsidy is purchasing by the farmer at a price below MRP (Maximum Retail Price), that is, below the usual demand-and-supply-rate, or regular production and import cost.
- The subsidy goes to fertiliser companies, although its ultimate beneficiary is the farmer who pays MRPs less than the market-determined rates.
- From March 2018, a new so-called direct benefit transfer (DBT) system was introduced, wherein subsidy payment to the companies would happen only after actual sales to farmers by retailers.
- With the DBT system, each retailer — there is over 2.3 lakh of them across India — now has a point-of-sale (PoS) machine linked to the Department of Fertilizers' e-Urvarak DBT portal.

Non-urea fertilizers:

- The non-urea fertiliser is decontrolled or fixed by the companies.
- The non- urea fertilizers are further divided into two parts, DAP (Diammonium Phosphate) and MOP (Muriate of Phosphate).
- The government pays a flat per tonne subsidy to maintain the nutrition content of the soil, and ensure other fertilizers are economical to use.

Issues with such subsidies:

- A flawed subsidy policy is harmful not just for the farmer, but to the environment as well.
- Indian soil has low Nitrogen use efficiency, which is the main constituent of Urea.
- Consequently, excess usage contaminates groundwater.
- The bulk of urea applied to the soil is lost as NH3 (Ammonia) and Nitrogen Oxides. The WHO has prescribed limits been breached by Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan.
- For human beings, "blue baby syndrome" is a common side ailment caused by Nitrate contaminated water.

FORTIFICATION OF RICE

In News:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved supply of fortified rice in all States and Union Territories (UTs) by 2024 in a phased manner.

Analysis of Background:

- Fortified Rice will be supplied throughout the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) under the:

1. National Food Security Act (NFSA)
2. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)
3. Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman-PM POSHAN [erstwhile Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDM)] and
4. Other Welfare Schemes (OWS)

Phases of implementation:

The following three phases are envisaged for full implementation of the initiative:

1. **Phase-I:** Covering ICDS and PM POSHAN in India all over by March, 2022 which is under implementation.
2. **Phase-II:** Phase I above plus TPDS and OWS in all Aspirational and High Burden Districts on stunting (total 291 districts) by March 2023.

3. **Phase-III:** Phase II above plus covering the remaining districts of the country by March 2024.

Fortification:

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has explicitly defined fortification.
- It involves deliberate increasing of the content of essential micronutrients in a food so as to improve the nutritional quality of food and to provide public health benefit with minimal risk to health.

Types of food fortification:

1. **Commercial and industrial fortification** (wheat flour, cornmeal, cooking oils)
2. **Biofortification** (breeding crops to increase their nutritional value, which can include both conventional selective breeding, and genetic engineering)
3. **Home fortification** (example: vitamin D drops)

Fortification Process:

- Various technologies are available to add micronutrients to regular rice, such as coating, dusting, and 'extrusion'.
- The last mentioned involves the production of fortified rice kernels (FRKs) from a mixture using an 'extruder' machine.
- It is considered to be the best technology for India.
- The fortified rice kernels are blended with regular rice to produce fortified rice.

Standards for fortification:

- Under the Ministry's guidelines, 10 g of FRK must be blended with 1 kg of regular rice.
- According to FSSAI norms, 1 kg of fortified rice will contain the following: iron (28 mg-42.5 mg), folic acid (75-125 microgram), and vitamin B-12 (0.75-1.25 microgram).
- Rice may also be fortified with zinc (10 mg-15 mg), vitamin A (500-750 microgram RE), vitamin B-1 (1 mg-1.5 mg), vitamin B-2 (1.25 mg-1.75 mg), vitamin B-3 (12.5 mg-20 mg) and vitamin B-6 (1.5 mg-2.5 mg) per kg.

Advantages :

- **Health:** Fortified staple foods will contain natural or near-natural levels of micro-nutrients, which may not necessarily be the case with supplements.
- **Taste:** It provides nutrition without any change in the characteristics of food or the course of our meals.
- **Nutrition:** If consumed on a regular and frequent basis, fortified foods will maintain body stores of nutrients more efficiently and more effectively than will intermittently supplement.
- **Economy:** The overall costs of fortification are extremely low; the price increase is approximately 1 to 2 percent of the total food value.
- **Society:** It upholds everyone's right to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger.

INDIAN TENT TURTLES

In News:

Indian tent turtle is now listed in Schedule –I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and is thereby provided the highest degree of protection.

Analysis of Background:

- The Indian tent turtle is threatened due to illegal mining in Narmada River.
- This turtle has also been widely traded as a pet at aquariums.

Indian Tent Turtles:

- **IUCN status:** Least Concerned

- The Indian tent turtle (Pangshura tentoria) is a species of turtle in the family Geoemydidae. The species is endemic to India and Bangladesh.
- Its preferred habitats are freshwater rivers and swamps.
- The species is native to India, Nepal and Bangladesh, with three subspecies recorded from the region viz., P. t. tentoria, P. t. circumdata and P. t. flaviventer.
- t. tentoria occurs in peninsular India and is recorded from Orissa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Assam and Madhya Pradesh.

- t. circumdata occurs in the western tributaries of Ganga and the rivers of Gujarat. It is found in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat.
- t. flaviventer occurs in the northern tributaries of Ganga and is recorded from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Assam.

TOPIC: SCIENCE AND TECH

NEAR FIELD COMMUNICATION (NFC) TECHNOLOGY FOR INSTANT PAYMENTS

In News:

Google Pay has recently launched a new feature in India, 'Tap to pay for UPI', in collaboration with Pine Labs. The feature makes use of Near Field Communication (NFC) technology.

Analysis of Background:

Near Field Communication (NFC):

- NFC is a short-range wireless connectivity technology that allows NFC-enabled devices to communicate with each other and transfer information quickly and easily with a single touch.
- It makes possible to pay bills, exchange business cards, download coupons, or share a document.
- NFC transmits data through electromagnetic radio fields, to enable communication between two devices. Both devices must contain NFC chips, as transactions take place within a very short distance.
- NFC-enabled devices must be either physically touching or within a few centimetres from each other for data transfer to occur.

How the NFC technology work with 'Tap to pay for UPI':

- Google Pay has been the first among UPI apps to bring the Tap to Pay feature working on POS terminals.
- It will allow users with UPI accounts configured on Google Pay to make payments just by tapping their NFC-enabled Android smartphones on any Pine Labs Android POS terminal.

- Once users tap their phones on the POS terminal, it will automatically open the Google pay app with the payment amount pre-filled.
- Users can then verify the amount and merchant name and authenticate the payment, using their UPI PIN.
- The process is much faster compared to scanning a QR code or entering the UPI-linked mobile number which has been the conventional way till now.

Other applications of NFC technology:

- NFC tech has a wide range of applications besides driving payment services.
- It is used in contactless banking cards to perform money transactions or to generate contact-less tickets for public transport.
- Contactless cards and readers use NFC in several applications from securing networks and buildings to monitoring inventory and sales, preventing auto theft, keeping tabs on library books,
- NFC is behind the cards that we wave over card readers in subway turnstiles and on buses to check tickets.
- It is present in speakers, household appliances, and other electronic devices that we monitor and control through our smartphones.
- With just a touch, NFC can also set up WiFi and Bluetooth devices in our homes, investopedia noted.
- NFC is used in wireless charging too.

JUPITER'S MOON EUROPA

In News:

Team of researchers from Stanford University have said that on one of Jupiter's moons Europa, a prime candidate for life in the solar system might have abundance of water pockets beneath formations called double ridges.

Analysis of Background:

About Europa

- Europa is slightly smaller than Earth's moon and its diameter is about one-quarter that of the Earth.

- Even though Europa has a very thin oxygen atmosphere, it is considered one of the most promising places in the solar system to find present-day environments that are suitable for life beyond the Earth.
- It is also believed that underneath Europa's icy surface the amount of water is twice that on Earth.
- NASA notes that scientists believe Europa's ice shell is 15-25 km thick and is floating on an ocean, which is estimated to be 60-150 km deep.
- Interestingly, while its diameter is less than the Earth's, Europa probably contains twice the amount of the water in all of the Earth's oceans.
- NASA is expected to launch its Europa Clipper in 2024.
- The module will orbit Jupiter and conduct multiple close flybys to Europa to gather data on the moon's atmosphere, surface and its interior.

What is the new finding?

- It is already known that Europa, whose surface is mostly solid water ice, contains water beneath it.
- The researchers are now saying that the double ridges – the formations which are most common on Europa's surface and are similar to those seen on Earth's Greenland ice sheet .
- They are formed over shallow pockets of water.

Significance of the recent findings

- The central implication is that the shallow water pockets beneath the double ridge increase the potential habitability of the moon.
- The ice shell, which is potentially miles thick, has been a difficult prospect for scientists to sample.
- But according to the new evidence, the ice shell is believed to be less of a barrier and more of a dynamic system.
- This means that the ice shell does not behave like an inert block of ice, but rather undergoes a variety of geological and hydrological processes.
- This suggests active volcanism and thus a possibility for life.

RECOMBINANT VARIANTS OF SARS-COV-2

In News:

The World Health Organization (WHO) has flagged the emergence of a new variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus — the XE recombinant.

Analysis of Background:

How are variants created?

- SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is an RNA virus which evolves by accumulating genetic errors in its genome.
- These errors are produced when the virus infects a person and makes copies of itself inside the host's cells.
- These errors (otherwise called mutations) are therefore a by-product of replication of SARS-CoV-2 inside the cell and may be carried forward as the virus continues to infect people.
- When viruses having a specific set of errors or mutations infect a number of people, this forms a cluster of infections descending from a common parental virus genome and is known as a lineage or a variant of the virus.

What is a recombinant variant?

- Apart from the errors in the virus genome, another process through which a virus increases its genetic diversity is recombination.
- Recombination occurs when, in extremely rare situations, two different lineages of the virus co-infect the same cell in the host and exchange fragments of their individual genomes.
- This generates a descendent variant having mutations that occurred in both the original lineages of the virus.
- Recombination of lineages happens in a variety of other viruses, including those that cause influenza, as well as other coronaviruses.
- Such recombination events occur typically in situations where two or more lineages of SARS-CoV-2 may be co-circulating in a certain region during the same time period.
- This co-circulation of lineages provides an opportunity for recombination to occur between these two lineages of SARS-CoV-2.

Are recombinant variants more deadly?

- Although recombination has been detected in SARS-CoV-2, it has not yet impacted public health in a unique way.
- There is little evidence to suggest that recombinant lineages have a varied clinical outcome compared to the currently dominant Omicron variant.
- It is certain at this point in time that more data will be needed to ascertain the impact of these lineages on the epidemiology of COVID-19.

What are the methods through which recombinants are identified?

- Identifying and tracking recombinant lineages for SARS-CoV-2 is a challenging task.
- This would require specialised tools and the availability of primary (or raw) data for genome sequences as similar variant combinations could also arise from inadvertent errors in sequencing or analysis as well as contamination of sequencing experiments.
- A cluster of recombinant genomes can be designated a lineage name by the PANGO network if it can be confirmed that samples in the cluster have a common origin and descend from two individual lineages of SARS-CoV-2.
- Additionally, there should be at least 5 genomes in the public domain belonging to the cluster, indicating an ongoing transmission of the lineage.
- Furthermore, screening the sequencing data of these samples should show no signs of contamination and meet the definition of a recombinant.

JAMES WEBB TELESCOPE

In News:

The James Webb telescope is an exemplar of collaborative science and human ingenuity- The Hindu.

Analysis of Background:

- The James Webb Space Telescope (JWST or "Webb") is a joint NASA–ESA–CSA space telescope that is planned to succeed the Hubble Space Telescope as NASA's flagship astrophysics mission.
- JWST will study various phases in the history of the universe, from the formation of solar systems to the evolution of our own Solar System.

- The telescope must be kept very coldin order to observe in the infrared without interference, so it will be deployed in space near the Sun–Earth L2 Lagrange point.
- Also a large sunshield made of silicon-coated and aluminium-coated Kapton will keep its mirror and instruments below 50 K (−223.2 °C).
- A Lagrange point is a location in space where the combined gravitational forces of two large bodies, such as Earth and the sun or Earth and the moon, equal the centrifugal force felt by a much smaller third body.
- The interaction of the forces creates a point of equilibrium where a spacecraft may be "parked" without coming in the influence of gravitational field of any other body (example Earth or Sun).

ISRO DEVELOPS SPACE BRICKS FROM MARTIAN SOIL

In News:

Researchers from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) have developed a way to make bricks from Martian soil with the help of bacteria and urea.

Analysis of Background:

Space Bricks:

- ISRO and IISc have collaborated to develop a novel scalable technique of manufacturing space bricks using Martian Simulant Soil (MSS).
- The team first made the slurry by mixing Martian soil with guar gum, a bacterium called Sporosarcina pasteurii**,** urea **and** nickel chloride (NiCl2).
- This slurry can be poured into moulds of any desired shape, and over a few days the bacteria convert the urea into crystals of calcium carbonate.
- These crystals, along with biopolymers secreted by the microbes act as cement holding the soil particles together.
- This method ensures that the bricks are less porous, which was a problem with other methods used to make Martian bricks.
- The bacteria seep deep into the pore spaces, using their own proteins to bind the particles together, decreasing porosity and leading to stronger bricks.

Significance:

- In the past, the team had made bricks out of lunar soil using a similar method.
- These ‘space bricks’ can be used to construct building-like structures on Mars that could facilitate human settlement on the red planet.

PROJECT-75

In News:

Recently, the sixth Scorpene Submarine of Project-75 "Vagsheer" was launched at the Mazagon Docks, Mumbai as part of ‘Make in India’ initiative.

Analysis of Background:

- P 75 is one of two lines of submarines, the other being P75I, as part of a plan approved in 1999 for indigenous submarine construction with technology taken from overseas firms.
- The contract for six submarines under P75 was given to Mazgaon dock in 2005 and delivery was to start from 2012, but the project has faced delays.
- Under P75, INS Kalvari, INS Khanderi, INS Karanj and INS Vela have been commissioned. Sea trials are on for Vagir. Vagsheer is the sixth; its production was delayed due to the pandemic.

Vagsheer:

- Vagsheer is named after the sand fish, a deep sea predator of the Indian Ocean. The first submarine Vagsheer, from Russia, was commissioned into the Indian Navy on December 26, 1974, and was decommissioned on April 30, 1997.
- The new Vagsheer will be officially named at the time of its commissioning.

Specifications:

- Vagsheer can take up to eight officers and 35 men.
- It is 67.5 metres long and 12.3 metres high, with a beam measuring 6.2 metres Vagsheer can reach top speed of 20 knots when submerged and a top speed of 11 knots when it surfaces
- It has four MTU 12V 396 SE84 diesel engines, 360 battery cells for power, and a silent Permanently Magnetised Propulsion Motor.

- The hull, fin and hydroplanes are designed for minimum underwater resistance and all equipment inside the pressure hull is mounted on shock-absorbing cradles for enhanced stealth.

Features:

- Vagsheer is a diesel attack submarine, designed to perform sea denial as well as access denial warfare against the adversary.
- It can do offensive operations across the spectrum of naval warfare including anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, mine laying and area surveillance.
- It is enabled with anti-torpedo counter measure system. It can carry up to 18 torpedoes or Exocet anti-ship missiles, or 30 mines in place of torpedoes.
- Its superior stealth features include advanced acoustic absorption techniques, low radiated noise levels, hydro-dynamically optimised shape, and it has the ability to launch a crippling attack using precision guided weapons, underwater or on surface.
- Scorpene submarines can undertake various types of missions such as anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, mine laying, area surveillance etc.

Road ahead:

- Vagsheer will be commissioned into the Indian Navy's Western Command after 12 to 18 months when sea trials end. It will be based with Western Naval Command, mostly in Mumbai.
- The submarine will undergo a very comprehensive and rigorous set of tests and trials, for more than a year, to ensure delivery of a fully combat worthy submarine, capable of operation in all modes and regimes of deployment.

NIPAH VIRUS INFECTION (NIV)

In News:

Scientists at Pune's Indian Council of Medical Research – National Institute of Virology were able to detect the presence of IgG antibodies against Nipah virus infection (NiV) in 51 bats that were captured from Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

Analysis of Background:

Nipah Virus (NIV):

- It is a zoonotic virus (it is transmitted from animals to humans) .
- The organism which causes Nipah Virus encephalitis is an RNA or Ribonucleic acid virus of the family Paramyxoviridae, genus Henipavirus, and is closely related to Hendra virus.
- The case fatality rate is estimated at 40% to 75%. This rate can vary by outbreak depending on local capabilities for epidemiological surveillance and clinical management.
- The virus can also cause severe disease in animals such as pigs, resulting in significant economic losses for farmers.
- Past Outbreaks
    - Nipah virus was first recognized in 1999 during an outbreak among pig farmers in Malaysia when pigs in Malaysian farms came in contact with the bats who had lost their habitats due to deforestation.
    - The disease has also been identified periodically in eastern India.

- In subsequent outbreaks in Bangladesh and India, consumption of fruits or fruit products (such as raw date palm juice) contaminated with urine or saliva from infected fruit bats was the most likely source of infection.

- It has caused annual outbreaks in Malaysia, Bangladesh and other countries in South-East Asia including India.

- **Transmission:**
    - The disease spreads through fruit bats or 'flying foxes,' of the genus Pteropus, who are natural reservoir hosts of the Nipah and Hendra viruses.

- The virus is present in bat urine and potentially, bat faeces, saliva, and birthing fluids.
- The virus is transmitted to people from animals and can also be passed on through contaminated food or directly from person to person.
- Human-to-human transmission of the Nipah virus has also been reported among family and caregivers of infected patients.

- **Symptoms:**
  - In infected people, it causes a range of illnesses from asymptomatic infection to acute respiratory illness and fatal encephalitis.
- **Treatment:**
  - There are currently no drugs or vaccines specific for Nipah virus infection although WHO has identified Nipah as a priority disease for the WHO Research and Development Blueprint.
  - Intensive supportive care is recommended to treat severe respiratory and neurologic complications.
- **Preventive Measures:**
  - Raising awareness about its spread & transmission.
  - Reducing the risk of bat-to-human transmission
  - Reducing the risk of animal-to-human transmission by using Gloves and other protective clothing.

ATAL INNOVATION MISSION

In News:

Recently, the Union Cabinet approved continuation of Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), till March 2023.

Analysis of Background:

- The AIM shall work on its intended target of creating an innovation culture and entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country.
- This will be done by AIM via its various programs.
- The intended targets that will be achieved by AIM are:
- Establishing 10000 Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs),
- Establishing 101 Atal Incubation Centres (AICs),

- Establishing 50 Atal Community Innovation Centres (ACICs) and
- Supporting 200 startups via the Atal New India Challenges.
- The total budgeted expenditure of Rs.2000+ crore shall be incurred in the process of the establishment and supporting the beneficiaries.

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):

- Launched by NITI aayog, AIM is the Government of India's flagship initiative to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.
- **Objectives:**
    - To create and promote an ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship across the country via interventions at school, university, research institutions, MSME and industry levels.
    - To provide platform and collaboration opportunities for different stakeholders.
- **Few Major Initiatives:**
    - Atal Tinkering Labs: Creating a problem-solving mindset across schools in India.
    - Atal Incubation Centres: Fostering world-class startups and adding a new dimension to the incubator model.
    - Atal New India Challenges: Fostering product innovations and aligning them to the needs of various sectors/ministries.
    - Mentor India Campaign: A national mentor network in collaboration with the public sector, corporates and institutions.
    - Atal Community Innovation Centre: To stimulate community-centric innovation and ideas in the unserved /underserved regions including Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities.
    - Atal Research and Innovation for Small Enterprises (ARISE): To stimulate innovation and research in the MSME industry.
    - Apart from the above initiatives, it has also launched AIM Prime, AIM iCREST, etc to boost industrial exposure of students and innovators.
- **Achievements**
    - AIM has worked on **integrating innovation ecosystem** both nationally and globally:

- **Bilateral relations**

- The AIM has created bilateral relations with various international agencies for building synergistic collaboration on innovation and entrepreneurship such as the AIM – SIRIUS Student Innovation exchange program with Russia, AIM – ICDK (Innovation Centre Denmark) Water Challenge with Denmark, and IACE (India Australian Circular Economy Hackathon) with Australia.
- The AIMs played a pivotal role in the success of InSpreneur, an Innovation Startup Summit hosted between India and Singapore.

- **Defence sector**
  - The AIM partnered with the Ministry of Defence to set up the Defence Innovation Organisation which is fostering innovation as well as procurement in the defence sector.

- **Startups :**
  - The AIM supported startups have raised 2000+ Crores from the government and private equity investors and have created several thousand jobs.

TOPIC: SECURITY

AFSPA

In News:

The Centre on Thursday significantly reduced the footprint of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), 1958 in the Northeast, withdrawing it entirely from 23 districts in Assam; and partially from seven districts in Nagaland, six districts in Manipur, and one district in Assam.

Analysis of Background:

AFSPA:

- AFSPA was adopted in 1958 during the early days of the Naga uprising to apply to what was then the state of Assam and the union territory of Manipur.
- The counterinsurgency campaigns against the Nagas were counterproductive.

- In the following decades, as new states were formed in Northeast India, AFSPA was amended to accommodate the names of those states.

Provision under AFSPA, 1958:

- AFSPA allows civilian authorities to call on the armed forces to come to the assistance of civil powers.
- **Sweeping powers to armed forces:** Once a state — or a part of a state — is declared "disturbed" under this law, the armed forces can make preventive arrests, search premises without warrants, and even shoot and kill civilians.
- **Approval of central government for legal action:** Legal action against those abusing these powers requires the prior approval of the central government — a feature that functions as de facto immunity from prosecution.

Issues:

- Critics charge that it effectively suspends fundamental freedoms and creates a de facto emergency regime.
- In 2012, a petition was filed in the Supreme Court to investigate as many as 1,528 cases of fake encounters that allegedly occurred in the state between 1979 and 2012.
- Supreme Court appointed a three-member commission **t**o inquire into the first six of the 1,528 cases in the petition.
- Its interim judgment of July 2016 said that "there is some truth in the allegations, calling for a deeper probe".
- In the court's view, AFSPA clearly provided the context for these killings.

Demand for repeal/Change:

- When the Supreme Court pronounced AFSPA constitutional in 1997, it also recommended some changes.
- Among them was the stipulation that a "disturbed area" designation be subjected to review every six months.
- In some parts of Northeast India, AFSPA is now routinely extended every six months. But there is little evidence that any meaningful review occurs at those times.
- In 2004, the then central government set up a five-member committee under former Supreme Court Justice Jeevan Reddy**,** which submitted its report in 2005

recommending the repeal of AFSPA, calling it “highly undesirable”, and saying it had become a symbol of oppression.

- Subsequently, the Second Administrative Reforms Commission, headed by Veeerapa Moily, endorsed these recommendations.

VAGSHEER

In News:

Vagsheer, the last of the six submarines of **Project 75**, is ready for launch on 20th of April.

Analysis of Background:

- The Scorpene class submarine is a diesel-electric attack submarine built by Mumbai’s Mazgaon Dock ship builders with French collaboration.
- The state-of-the-art technology used in Scorpene-class has superior stealth features such as advanced acoustic silencing techniques, low radiated noise levels and ability to launch crippling attacks with precision-guided weapons on board.
- This submarine can attack through launching the torpedoes and anti-ship missiles while underwater or on the surface.
- It will enhance Indian Navy’s capacity to address the threats both above and under water.

Four submarines of scorpene class- INS Kalvari, INS Khanderi, INS Karanj and INS Vela have already been commissioned while the fifth submarine Vagir is still undergoing sea trials.

MISCELLANEOUS

TOPIC: INDEX

STATE ENERGY AND CLIMATE INDEX LIST

In News: NITI Aayog has launched the State Energy & Climate Index-Round I.

Anaysis of Background:

- The State Energy & Climate Index (SECI) Round I ranks the states' performance on 6 parameters, namely

    1. DISCOM's Performance
    2. Access, Affordability and Reliability of Energy
    3. Clean Energy Initiatives
    4. Energy Efficiency
    5. Environmental Sustainability
    6. New Initiatives.
    7. The parameters are further divided into 27 indicators.

- Based on the composite SECI Round I score, the states and UTs are categorised into three groups**: Front Runners, Achievers, and Aspirants**.
- The States have been categorised based on size and geographical differences as larger and smaller States and UTs. The index is based on 2019–20 data
- **Top Performers**
    - Gujarat, Kerala, and Punjab have been ranked as the top three performers in the category of larger states.
    - Goa, emerged as the top-performing state in the smaller states category, followed by Tripura, and Manipur.
    - Among UTs, Chandigarh, Delhi, and Daman & Diu/Dadra & Nagar Haveli are the top performers.

- It is the first index that aims to track the efforts made by States and UTs in the climate and energy sector.

- **Suggestions:**

- This edition of the report reveals that some of the important data is not available at the state level.
- There is a need to develop a robust mechanism for capturing such data so that it can be incorporated in future editions of the report.
- Synergy and partnership among the Centre and the States will be critical for achieving energy and climate-related goals and making the country self-reliant in the energy sector.
- Achieving the ambitious climate targets would require a conducive policy environment to encourage investment.
- The best practices of the States should be regularly documented and disseminated through mediums such as SECI to promote peer–to–peer learning.
- For instance, each State can learn from the best performing States/UTs.

WORLD ECONOMIC OUTLOOK: IMF

In News:

The latest edition of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) World Economic Outlook cut its forecast for India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in FY 2022-23 to 8.2%, making it the fastest-growing major economy in the world, almost twice faster than China's 4.4 %.

Analysis of Background:

International Monetary Fund:

- The IMF was set up along with the World Bank after the Second World War to assist in the reconstruction of war-ravaged countries.
- The two organizations agreed to be set up at a conference in Bretton Woods in the US. Hence, they are known as the Bretton Woods twins.
- Created in 1945, the IMF is governed by and accountable to the 189 countries that make up its near-global membership. India joined on 27th December 1945.
- The IMF's primary purpose is to ensure the stability of the international monetary system — the system of exchange rates and international payments that enables countries (and their citizens) to transact with each other.

- The Fund's mandate was updated in 2012 to include all macroeconomic and financial sector issues that bear on global stability.

Reports by IMF:

- Global Financial Stability Report.
- World Economic Outlook.

World Economic Outlook:

- It is a survey by the IMF that is usually published twice a year in the months of April and October.
- It analyzes and predicts global economic developments during the near and medium term.
- In response to the growing demand for more frequent forecast updates, the WEO Update is published in January and July, between the two main WEO publications released usually in April and October.

IMF's Growth Forecast -Indian Scenario:

- It has also lowered India's growth projection by 0.8 % points for 2022-23 from its previous forecast (9%) for the same period in 2021.
    - In 2021, India registered a growth rate of 8.9 %.
    - In 2023-24, India is estimated to grow at 6.9 %.
- With import bills rising due to high commodity and fuel prices, the IMF estimates India's current account deficit to widen to 3.1% in FY 2022-23 from 1.6% in FY 2021-22.
- India was "suffering like many other countries because of the Russia –Ukraine war and negative terms of trade shock "due to higher food and energy prices weighing down trade balances.
- Additionally, external demand was also softening as the rest of the world's growth was impacted.

Global Scenario:

- The IMF has projected global growth at 3.6 % in 2022 and 2023, 0.8 and 0.2 % lower than in the January 2022 forecast, respectively.
- A deceleration in global growth dampens India's growth prospects especially because it would lead to lower demand for Indian exports.

- The downgrade largely reflects the war's direct impacts on Russia and Ukraine and global spillovers.
- The recent lockdowns in key manufacturing and trading hubs such as Shenzhen and Shanghai (China) due to the resurgence of covid cases would likely compound supply disruptions elsewhere in the region and beyond.

IMF's Recommendations:

- **Monetary Tightening:**
  - It recommended monetary tightening by central banks to keep inflationary expectations in check amid global supply disruptions caused by the war in Ukraine.
  - The IMF warned that the war would "severely set back the global recovery," slow growth and stoke inflation.

- **Monitoring of Rising Prices:**
  - Monetary authorities should carefully monitor the pass-through of rising global prices to domestic inflation expectations to calibrate their responses.

TOPIC: SCHEMES

RASHTRIYA GRAM SWARAJ ABHIYAN

In News:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved the continuation of the revamped RGSA from April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2026 to develop governance capabilities of panchayati raj institutions (PRIs).

Analysis of Background:

- Under the revamped RGSA, the focus will shift towards "capacitating" the elected representatives of PRIs for leadership roles to develop an effective third tier of government.
- The total financial outlay of the scheme is Rs 5,911 crore with the central share of Rs 3,700 crore and that of the states Rs 2,211 crore

- The approved scheme of RGSA will help more than 2.78 lakh rural local bodies including traditional bodies across the country to develop governance capabilities to deliver on SDGs through inclusive local governance with focus on optimum utilisation of available resources.
- The initiative is expected to enable them to deliver on localization of SDGs (sustainable development goals) for nine themes, – poverty free and enhanced livelihood in villages; healthy village, child-friendly village, water sufficient village; clean and green village; self-sufficient infrastructure in village, socially secured village; village with good governance; and engendered development in village.
- The revamped RGSA will help improve Panchayati Raj Institutions and ensure development in villages.
- It will help bridge the gap between the rural and urban areas and strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions across the country

About Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA):

- RGSA is proposed to be implemented as a core Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) for four years viz., from 2018-19 to 2021-22 with State and Central shares.
- The sharing ratio for the State components will be in the ratio of 60:40 except NE and Hilly States, where the Central and State Ratio will be 90:10.
    - For all UTs, the Central share will be 100%.
- The main central components of the scheme included incentivisation of panchayats and mission mode projects on e-Panchayat including other activities at central level.
- RGSA enables Panchayats to function effectively to achieve SDGs and other development objectives that require significant Capacity building efforts.

UDAN SCHEME

In News:

UDAN Scheme has been selected for the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration.

Analysis of Background:

- The UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) scheme has been selected for the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration 2020 under the category "Innovation (General) – Central".
- The Government of India has initiated this award to acknowledge, recognize and reward extraordinary and innovative work done by Districts and Organizations of State/Government.
- The award consists of a trophy, scroll and an incentive of Rs 10 lakhs.

About UDAN Scheme

- Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik or UDAN is a regional airport development programme of the Union Government and also a part of the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS).
- The main objective is to upgrade under-serviced air routes and to promote air transport infrastructure development in all regions and states of India.
- Its goal is to make air travel affordable, boost economic development, and promote job growth.

Key features of the UDAN Scheme

- The UDAN Scheme is a key element of the National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP) which was released by the Ministry of Civil Aviation (India) in 2016**.**
- It is jointly funded by the Union government and state governments.
- Develop new airports and enhance the existing regional airports to increase the number of operational airports with regularly scheduled flights.
- The UDAN scheme will run for 10 years and can be extended thereafter.
- **Concessions from the Union Government;**
    1. Created a Viability Gap Funding (VGF) to subsidise the airfare.
    2. Concession on service tax on tickets.
- **Concessions from State Governments;**

1. Reduction of GST for 10 years.
2. Coordinate with oil companies to create fuelling infrastructure on airports.
3. Provide free land for the development of the airport, with multimodal (rail, road, metro, waterways, etc.) hinterland connectivity.
4. Provide free security Systems and manpower.
5. Provision of water, electricity and other utilities at a reduced rate.
6. 20% share of Viability Gap Funding; North-Eastern states, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Union territories to provide 10% share only.

- **Concessions from airport operators;**
  1. No landing, parking or other charges.
  2. No Terminal Navigation Landing Charges.
- There is a cap of maximum fare of Rs 2,500 per hour of flight for 50% of the seats, connecting un-served and underserved regional airports, the remaining 50% of seats will be priced at market rate.
- For helicopter services, the maximum fare is also capped at Rs 2,500 for every 30-minute leg of the flight.

About International Air Connectivity Scheme (IACS)

- The Ministry of Civil Aviation has launched the International Air Connectivity Scheme (IACS) under the "International Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN)" initiative.
- The main objective of the scheme is to improve air connectivity between the certain Indian States with designated international destinations to promote the socio-economic growth of the Indian state.
- The scheme is also supported by the State Governments.
- The State Government of Assam, Manipur and Tripura have specified routes connecting Guwahati, Imphal and Agartala with selected international destinations viz. Bangkok, Dhaka, Kathmandu, Yangon, Hanoi, Mandalay, Kunming and Chittagong.
- Development and up-gradation of airports to international standards are undertaken by concerned airport operators.

JAL JEEVAN MISSION

In News:

The Union Jal Shakti Minister has chaired a review meeting on Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).

Analysis of Background:

- The Union Jal Shakti Minister, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat chaired a review meeting on Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).
- He highlighted the importance of community participation and empowerment of people to achieve success.
- He stated that States must involve the local village community in preparation of the Village Action Plan (VAP).
- He suggested ensuring the participation of the Members of Parliament to make the Jal Jeevan Mission a 'Jan Andolan', a people's movement.

Jal Jeevan Mission:

- The Mission was launched on August 15, 2019.
- Implemented by the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- To provide safe and adequate drinking water through household tap connections by 2024 to all rural households and public institutions; Gram Panchayat building, Primary School, Anganwadi centre, Health and wellness centres, etc.

Features:

- The Mission ensures community participation and also includes an Awareness, Education and Communication Campaign.
- Development of water supply infrastructure to provide tap water connection to every rural household.
- Development of drinking water sources to ensure the long-term sustainability of the water supply system.
- Other features; Providing training, establishing water quality laboratories, Strict water quality testing and surveillance, Promoting Research work, starting a knowledge centre, programmes for capacity building of communities, etc.

Steps by the Government for water management:

- The government of India launched Jal Shakti Abhiyan with a mission mode approach intended to improve water availability including groundwater conditions in the water-stressed blocks in India.
- National Water Policy (2012) has been formulated by the Department of Water Resources for the conservation of rivers, river bodies and infrastructure in a scientifically planned manner through community participation.
- Central Ground Water Authority has been constituted under the "Environment (Protection) Act, 1986" for regulation and control of groundwater development and management in the Country.
- Master Plan for Artificial Recharge to Groundwater 2020 has been prepared in consultation with States/UTs.
- Construction of watershed management structure under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.
- Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana promotes water conservation and management, water harvesting, soil and moisture conservation, groundwater recharge, flood protection, and land development.
- Atal Bhujal Yojana for sustainable management of groundwater with community participation is being taken up in the identified over-exploited and water-stressed areas in the States of Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Steps need to be taken:

- The Water Management program focuses on recharging underground aquifers and promoting rainwater harvesting. This improves the availability and quality of groundwater in the long run and provides water security to all.
- Adopt Innovative Approaches to Sustainable Operation and Maintenance.
- Making Village Water and Sanitation Committee under Gram Panchayat, Involve Community members at all Stages.
- Effective Communication among all stakeholders.
- Ensure Transparency and Accountability in Governance.
- Promote and ensure maintenance services.
- Investments in creating the necessary infrastructure, and developing skills.

TOPIC: HEALTH

AYUSHMAN BHARAT DIGITAL MISSION

In News:

The National Health Authority (NHA), the implementing agency for the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM), has extended an open invitation to all interested parties for sharing their Expression of Interest (EoI) in developing innovative solutions aimed at building a national digital health ecosystem for India.

Analysis of Background:

- This collaborative approach will not just help speed up the development but also will help in making digital public goods available to public and/or private entities. Interested parties shall provide these solutions as a service at no cost to public and/or private entities.

About Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission:

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare formulated the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission with the aim to provide the necessary support for the integration of digital health infrastructure in the country.
- This visionary initiative, stemming from the National Health Policy, 2017 intends to digitise healthcare in India.

ABDM Components:

- **Health ID:**
    - It is important to standardise the process of identification of an individual across healthcare providers.
    - It will be used to uniquely identify persons, authenticate them, and threading their health records (only with the informed consent of the patient) across multiple systems and stakeholders.
- **Healthcare Professionals Registry (HPR)**
    - It is a comprehensive repository of all healthcare professionals involved in delivery of healthcare services across both modern and traditional systems

of medicine. Enrolling in the Healthcare Professionals Registry will enable them to get connected to India's digital health ecosystem.

- **Health Facility Registry (HFR):**
    - It is a comprehensive repository of health facilities of the country across different systems of medicine. It includes both public and private health facilities including hospitals, clinics, diagnostic laboratories and imaging centres, pharmacies, etc.
- **Personal Health Records (PHR):**
    - It is an electronic application through which patients can maintain and manage their health information (and that of others for whom they are authorised) in a private, secure, and confidential environment.
    - The citizens can get a longitudinal view of the personal health record by creating and linking the health ID with the visited health care facilities.

Aims and Objectives :

- It aims to develop the backbone necessary to support the integrated digital health infrastructure of the country.
    - It will bridge the existing gap amongst different stakeholders of the Healthcare ecosystem through digital highways.
- It aims to create a seamless online platform that will enable interoperability within the digital healthcare ecosystem.
- It aims to give impetus to open and interoperable standards in the digital health ecosystem.
- It aims to significantly improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency of health service delivery overall.
    - Patients will be able to securely store and access their medical records (such as prescriptions, diagnostic reports and discharge summaries), and share them with health care providers to ensure appropriate treatment and follow-up.

- It aims to provide choice to individuals to access both public and private health services, facilitate compliance with laid down guidelines and protocols, and ensure transparency in pricing of services and accountability for the health services being rendered.

Limitations/Concerns:

- **Digital Divide:** This could lead to exclusion of digitally illiterate and unconnected remote, hilly and tribal areas.
- **Data Breach/Privacy issues:** The lack of a data protection bill could lead to the misuse of data by private firms.
- **Huge requirement of skilled labours:** Need for skilled manpower in the digital domain versus the latest computer skills.
- **Inadequate Primary Health Care data**: Lack of infrastructure and staff at primary level.

TOPIC: INFRASTRUCTURE

SMART CITIES

In News:

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has organized the "Smart Cities, Smart Urbanization" conference in Surat.

Analysis of Background:

- 3-day "Smart Cities, Smart Urbanization" conference in Surat, organized by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, under the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM) to mark the 75th anniversary of Independence.
- Events were organised based on 5 themes;
    - Reimagining Public Spaces
    - Digital Governance
    - Climate-Smart Cities
    - Innovation
    - Smart Finance

Initiatives announced during the conference

- The conference highlighted some of the important initiatives being implemented in 100 Smart Cities.
- An awards distribution ceremony was organised;
    - Surat and Indore were given the Best city award.
    - Uttar Pradesh was awarded the Best State.
- The event also featured the release of*;*
        - Urban Outcomes Framework 2022
        - Ease of Living
        - Municipal Performance Index
        - Data Maturity and Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework.
- The Ministry has launched an integrated data portal AMPLIFI, which will provide valuable data about Indian cities.
    - AMPLIFI - Assessment and Monitoring Platform for Liveable, Inclusive and Future-ready urban India.
- The Ministry has launched a comprehensive dashboard with Outcome Output Management Framework (OOMF) dashboard during the event.
- Inauguration of 'Amaro Padosh':
    - The Smart Cities Mission and Surat Municipal Corporation created a temporary, life-size neighbourhood with public amenities like a park, Anganwadi, public health centre, municipal school, bus stop with cycle stand, food plaza, EV charging station, and handloom shop.
    - The objective is to provide a 'learning by experiencing' opportunity to attendees participating in the event.
- The Ministry has launched a 'virtual hub for collaborations on urban transformation' in collaboration between the Smart Cities Mission and the World Economic Forum (WEF).
    - To solve complex urban challenges, cities require collaborative action across governments, industry, academia and civil society – both national and international.
    - The hub will leverage technologies and innovations to transform Indian cities into centres of sustainable, inclusive and resilient growth.
- 'Digital Duniya' pavilion was inaugurated at the Conference to highlight initiatives that empower communities through data and digital technology.

- Innovation Bazaar pavilion was organised to show cutting-edge solutions for urban challenges, and through diverse activities, expert dialogues.
- The Smart Finance pavilion named 'finance ka adda' focuses on innovation in urban finance helping cities identify untapped sources of revenue.

About Smart Cities Mission:

- The Government of India launched Smart Cities Mission (SCM) on 25 June 2015.
- 100 Smart Cities have been selected through 4 rounds of competition from January 2016 to June 2018.
- The purpose of the Smart Cities Mission is to drive economic growth and improve the quality of life of people by enabling local area development and harnessing technology, especially technology that leads to Smart outcomes.
- As per SCM Guidelines, the Government of India provided financial support to the extent of ₹ 48,000 crores over five years i.e., on an average of Rs 100 crore per city per year.
- An equal amount on a matching basis will be contributed by the State Government/Urban Local Body (ULB).
- The implementation of SCM at the city level is done by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) created for the purpose.
- At the State level, Mission implementation is coordinated by the State level High Powered Steering Committee (HPSC) chaired by the Chief Secretary of the State.
- At the National level, the implementation of SCM is monitored by an Apex Committee headed by the Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).
- **The core elements of the Mission;**
    1. Adequate water supply
    2. Assured electricity supply
    3. Sanitation, including solid waste management
    4. Efficient urban mobility and public transport
    5. Affordable housing, especially for the poor
    6. Robust IT connectivity and digitalization
    7. Good governance, especially e-Governance and citizen participation
    8. Sustainable environment
    9. Safety and security of citizens, particularly women, children and the elderly

10. Health and education

Objectives of the Smart Cities Mission:

- Smart Cities focus on their most pressing needs and on the greatest opportunities to improve lives.
- They tap a range of approaches; digital and information technologies, urban planning best practices, public-private partnerships, and policy change to make a difference. They always put people first.
- The objective is to promote cities that provide core infrastructure and give a decent quality of life to its citizens, a clean and sustainable environment and the application of 'Smart' Solutions.
- The focus is on sustainable and inclusive development and the idea is to look at compact areas and create a replicable model which will act as a lighthouse to other aspiring cities.
- The Smart Cities Mission is meant to set examples that can be replicated both within and outside the Smart City, catalysing the creation of similar Smart Cities in various regions and parts of the country.

Significance of Smart Cities Mission:

- Cities accommodate nearly 31% of India's current population and contribute 63% of GDP (Census 2011).
    - Urban areas are expected to house 40% of India's population and contribute 75% of India's GDP by 2030.
- This requires comprehensive development of physical, institutional, social and economic infrastructure.
    - All are important in improving the quality of life and attracting people and investment, setting in motion a virtuous cycle of growth and development. The development of Smart Cities is a step in that direction.
- The Smart Cities Mission is an innovative and new initiative by the Government of India to drive economic growth and improve the quality of life of people by enabling local development and harnessing technology as a means to create smart outcomes for citizens.

Present Status:

- As of March 2022, 100 Smart Cities have tendered out 6,928 projects worth ₹ 1,91,238 crore; work orders have been issued in 6,282 projects worth ₹ 1,65,503 crore; 3,576 projects worth ₹ 59,958 crores have been completed.
- So far, the Government of India has released ₹ 29,213.60 crores for 100 Smart Cities, out of which Rs 25,177.65 crores (86%) has been utilised.

Our Initiative For Current Affair Coverage:

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