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Dear Forumites,

The eleventh edition of EPIC! Magazine, comes when the Civil Services Preliminary Examination of 2021 is nearing. For those aspirants, who have cleared the CSE Mains 2020 should now focus on interview, and here EPIC! Magazine provides issue-based analysis for both mains and interview related topics.

The showcase article provides comprehensive coverage of "Reservation Policy and associated issues". Aggregating the various view points from our 9PM and 7PM initiatives, this edition includes detailed analysis of important topics such as GNCT bill, women in politics, the recent issues with Afghan peace process, India's Space sector and Operations Green etc

EPIC! series of current affairs magazine with FACTLY provides a segregated yet complete monthly coverage of current affairs for civil services preparations.

You can contribute to the topics you would like us to cover or provide your feedback by writing to us at feedback@forumias.academy.

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RESERVATION POLICY AND ASSOCIATED ISSUES

IN NEWS - SC while examining the constitutional validity of a 2018 Maharashtra law **has** asked states whether they are in favour of extending caste-based reservation beyond the 50 per cent ceiling set by it in a nine-judge bench ruling in 1992, famously known as the Indra Sawhney case. The law provides for **16% reservation of Maratha community.**

Rationale behind the Supreme Court revisiting the Indra Sawhney case

- In 2018, the Maharashtra government enacted a law to provide 16 percent reservation to the Maratha community in jobs and admissions. This **violated the 50 percent ceiling** mentioned by the Mandal case.
- The **Bombay High Court upheld** the validity of the quota. But the Court **reduced the Maratha reservation to 12-13%** (Instead of 16%). This percent is also recommended by the State Backward Classes Commission. (Both are above 50 per cent)
- An **appeal was filed in the Supreme Court**. The Supreme Court during the case said that it will look into the capping of 50 per cent reservation in the Mandal case.

Relation of Maratha reservation Case to the Indra Sawhney case

- **The President's power to notify backward classes**–This power is provided by the **102nd Constitutional Amendment** which provided powers to the President to notify the backward classes. The Court has to find out whether States have powers to notify the backward classes or not.
- **Validity of 103rd Amendment, 2019-** This amendment provides for 10% reservation for the EWS in government jobs and educational institutions from the unreserved category.
  - Thus, the Marathas belong to EWS can attain benefits under the 103rd CAA. But the specific quotas to Marathas will turn into a bad example for communities asking for such reservations. For example, Patels in Gujarat, Jats in Haryana and Kapus in Andhra Pradesh.
- **The breach of 50% ceiling set by Indra Sawhney Verdict -**The Maharashtra law if enacted could make a reservation of up to 68%. Further, it can join states like Tamil Nadu, Haryana which already exceed the 50 per cent ceiling.
  - **For Example:** the Tamil Nadu government reserves **69% of the seats in colleges and jobs** in the State government. Further, Tamil Nadu also placed its reservation law in Ninth Schedule.

Background

- **Mandal Commission:** In 1979, the Second Backward Classes Commission was set up by the President.
    - Recommendation of Commission - The commission report concluded 52% of the population in India are "Socially and Economically Backward Classes (SEBCs)". Further, the commission recommended a 27% reservation for SEBCs. This reservation is provided in addition to the previously existing 22.5% reservation for SC/STs.
    - The government accepted the recommendation and provided the 27% reservation.
    - In 1991, the government enacted provisions for the reservation of 10% of jobs for economically weaker sections (EWS) among higher caste people.
- **Indra Sawhney vs UOI case or The Mandal case:** The Mandal Commission report and the government's decision to reserve 10 percent for the EWS was challenged in the Supreme Court. A 9-judge bench gave the following verdict:
    - First, the criterion for a group to qualify for reservation is **social and educational backwardness only**. So, the 10 percent reservation to the EWS becomes unconstitutional.
    - Second, **a 50% limit to vertical quotas** will apply to ensure efficiency in administration unless in exceptional circumstances. The court in its earlier judgments like **M R Balaji v/s State of Mysore (1963) and Devadasan v/s UOI (1964)** also mentioned the 50 percent reservation limit.

Historical evolution of reservation

Pre-independence India

- 1932 British Prime-Minister Ramsay Macdonald presented the **'Communal Award'.** The award made provision for separate electorates for Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans and Dalits.
- Gandhi and Ambedkar signed the '**Poona Pact'**, where it was decided that there would be a single Hindu electorate with certain reservations in it.

Post-Independence India

- After independence, initially reservations were provided only for SCs and STs.
- **1991:** OBCs were included in the ambit of reservation in 1991 on the recommendations of the **Mandal Commission**
- **1992: Indra Sawhney Case,** the Supreme Court upheld the 27 percent quota for backward classes and the principle that the combined reservation beneficiaries should not exceed 50 percent of India's population**.**
- **The concept of 'creamy layer' also gained currency through this judgment and provision that reservation for backward classes should be confined to initial appointments only**

and not extend to promotions. unreserved category. This is over and above the 50% reservation cap.

- **Constitutional and Legal provisions 2019:** Constitution (103rd amendment act) provided for 10% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions for the "economically backward" in the

The constitution provides for **three types of reservations for the SCs and STs.** These are reservations **of jobs in government services and in public sector, educational institutions, and reservations in legislative representations.**

- **Reservation in public services – Article 15(4) and 16(4)** of the Constitution enabled both the State and Central Governments to **reserve seats in public services** for the members of the SC and ST. This was to ensure equality of opportunity in matters of civic service.
- **Reservation in promotion – Article 16(4 A)** makes provisions for reservation **in the matter of promotion** to any class or classes of posts in the services under the State in favour of SCs and STs (Constitutional 77th Amendment Act, 1995).
- **Exemption in 50% ceiling – Article 16 (4 B)**: It enables the State to fill the unfilled vacancies of a year which are reserved for SCs/STs in the succeeding year, thereby nullifying the ceiling of fifty percent reservation on total number of vacancies of that year (Constitutional 81st Amendment Act, 2000).
- **Ensuring efficiency – Article 335** of the constitution says that the claims of SCs and STs shall be taken into consideration constituently with the maintenance of efficacy of the administration.

- **Benefits cornered by Dominant sections** - The benefits of reservation policy have largely been cornered by the **dominant class within the backward castes**, thereby the most marginalised within the backward castes have remained marginalised.
  For example, Rohini committee on sub categorisation of OBC'S in its report has stated that

Arguments for reservation policy
- **Addresses historical discrimination** - Caste system has dominated both the **rural and urban ecosystem** of the country for centuries. The prevailing biases has resulted in tons of unfulfilled potential and aspirations.
- **Ensures equality** - By satisfying the basic idea that all people must be brought to the same level before judging them on the **basis of merit**.
- **Ensures social justice** - Reservation schemes are needed to provide social justice to the **most marginalized and underprivileged** by providing them adequate representation in the services under the state.
- **Provides a level playing field –** The backward sections cannot compete with those who have had the **access of resources and means** for centuries.

Arguments against reservation policy
- **Reservation as tool for populism** - Caste has become a **major vote bank for political parties** which has led to perpetuation of notion of caste in society.

- **Representation in Constitutional Institutions - Article 330 and 332** provide for specific representation through reservation of seats for the SCs and the STs **in the Parliament** (Article 330) and in the State Legislative Assemblies (Article 332), as well as, in Government and public sector jobs, in both the federal and state Governments (Articles 16(4), 330(4) and 335).
  - **Article 243D** provides reservation of seats for SCs and STs in every Panchayat.
  - **Article 233T** provides reservation of seats for SCs and STs in every Municipality.

THEME 1: CREAMY LAYER CRITERIA FOR SC/ST
In Jarnail Singh vs Lachhmi Gupta Case (2018), the Supreme Court asked the government to examine the **possibility of introducing creamy layer for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)** by stating that if some sections bag all the coveted jobs, it will leave the rest of the class backward as they always were.
The union government has urged the court to reconsider the ruling and refer the issue to a seven-judge Bench.

Arguments promoting creamy layer criteria in SC/STs
- **Prioritizing most marginalized** - Supreme Court in Jarnail Singh Case Judgement noted that the benefits, by and large are appropriated by the creamy layer of the backward caste or class, keeping the **weakest among the weak always weak.**

- **Improved income and status**- The creamy layer within the SCs and STs has improved socio-economic indicators and have achieved **social mobility**. This implies that they do not face discrimination of similar intensity.

Arguments against the Creamy Layer concept in SCs/STs

- **Not Anti-poverty programme**- Reservation for Dalits is not only to undo economic backwardness but is also a solution for societal and historical **discrimination based on untouchability**. Thus, it may not possess a direct correlation with economic status.
- **Discrimination within service**- It is argued that there is widespread discrimination within services.
  - o For example, there are about **12,000 cases lying with the SC/ST Commission**, complaining about discrimination in service.
- **Difference between OBCs and ST/SCs** - OBCs don't face the **kind and extent of social discrimination** as faced by SCs/STs. Thus, OBC has the concept of creamy layer.

Way Forward

- **Consultative Approach**- Reservation is a very sensitive topic of **social justice**, thus any decision on it should be in consultation with all the stakeholders affected by it.
- **Empowering via social welfare schemes**-It involves effective implementation of schemes like Stand**-up India Scheme, Van-Dhan Yojana** etc. which enables the socio-economic mobility of SCs/STs.

THEME 2: SUB-CATEGORIZATION OF OBC's

- The **article 340** of the Indian Constitution lays down conditions for the appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes.
- The Union Government constituted a four-member commission headed by **Justice G. Rohini** in 2017 under Article 340 with an aim to improve the equitability of sharing of benefits among OBCs.
- **Mandate of the Commission**
  - o Examining the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation (27 percent reservation in jobs and education) among the castes or communities with reference to the central OBC list.
  - o Work out the mechanism, criteria, norms and parameters in a scientific approach for sub-categorization of OBCs.

Rationale for Sub-categorization of OBC's

- **Benefits are cornered by a few**- The Rohini commission highlighted that
  - o From about 2,633 central list OBCs, about **1900 castes have not proportionately benefitted**.
  - o Half of these 1900 castes have **not availed the benefits of reservation at all**, and the other half include those that have availed the benefits and have less than 3 per cent share in the OBC quota.

- o The commission has also highlighted that 25% of benefits from OBC reservations have been availed by only 10 sub-castes.
  - o The communities that have got almost no benefits of reservations include profession-based castes such as Sikligars, Saranias (traditionally sharpen knives), Kalaigars(a community that traditionally polishes tins) and many others of such kind.
- **Economically stronger sub-sections dominate the others-** Several researches have come to an understanding which suggests that the Mandal Commission recommendations have helped the economically better positioned OBCs more than the **most backward classes.**

Challenges in its implementation

- **Use of unreliable data** - Instead of using data from recent **Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) 2011**, the commission has based its recommendations on quota within quota on the population figures from the 1931 Census.
  - o For example, since the implementation of the Mandal Commission report, over 500 new castes have been added to the Central list of OBCs. The 1931, Census does not have the population for these new additions.
- **Lack of data on social backwardness-** There is lack of availability of information regarding the social and educational backwardness of various castes which is needed for the sub-categorisation within one group.
- **Creates social disturbances-** The move to sub-categorise OBCs may **create agitation and protest** in some sections of OBCs as the benefits get redistributed among new sections.
- **Humungous task** It could be a very difficult exercise due to following reasons:
  - o **Large number of castes**- According to **National Commission on Backward Classes**, there are 2514 OBC castes in the country and scientific sub-categorisation by analysing each caste could be challenging.
  - o **Regional variation**- There are **significant variations within castes from state to state** which implies data collection needs to be larger and more robust.

Way forward for sub-categorisation

- **Revision of the creamy layer ceiling**- National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) has proposed that the **income ceiling be further revised as the current limit of 8lakhsper annum is** not in sync with the associated purchasing power in the present economic conditions.
- **Strengthening NCBC**- Expanding the **powers, capacity and domain of NCBC so** that it can better perform its duties.

THEME 3: RESERVATION FOR ECONOMICALLY WEAKER SECTIONS

- The **Constitution (103rd Amendment) Act**, 2019 (124th Constitution Amendment Bill) was enacted to provide for **10% reservation in government jobs and educational**

institutions to the economically weaker sections (EWS). All those already availing reservation benefits are exempted.

- o It amended **Article 15** to enable the government to take special measures (not limited to reservations) for the advancement of "economically weaker sections" (EWS).
- o It also added **Article 16(6)** which allowed the government to reserve up to 10% of all posts for the "economically weaker sections" of citizens.

- The reservation of up to 10% for the EWS will be in addition to the existing **cap of 50% reservation** for SC, ST and OBCs as declared by SC under the Indra Sawhney case of 1991.

- The central government will notify the "economically weaker sections" of citizens on the basis of family income and other indicators of economic disadvantage.
  - o For example, **annual household income below 8lakhs, agricultural land holdings below 5 acres, house below 1000 sq. feet.**

- **Constitutional recognition to Economically Weaker Section (EWS)** - For the very first time a departure from traditional centrality of caste in deciding affirmative action is done.

Arguments in favour of reservation based on economic status

- **In Ram Singh v. Union of India (2015)**- SC recognised that social backwardness may exist **beyond the concept of caste** (e.g., economic status / gender identity as in transgenders). Hence, with evolving times and the nature of Indian society; the caste centric definition of backwardness needs a relook. This would result **in attaining the fruits of the reservation policy** to the **most backward of all groups**.

- **A new deprivation assessment criterion is needed**- Due to the **weakening links between the caste and class** in recent times, a discussion on whether caste should be the only determinant of backwardness of a class is beginning to emerge. Caste nevertheless still remains a major determinant of backwardness.

- **Increasing relativedeprivation and Vote bank politics**- Communities having similar or **poorer economic status** but excluded from **caste-based reservation** are increasingly getting dissatisfied with their standard of living and representation. Add to it, the phenomenon of exploitation of such needs to meet the **narrow political ends** by political parties which makes the situation even more complex.

Arguments against extending reservation based on economic status

- **Opens up 'Pandora's box' of demands-** There may be demand from sections of the **SCs/STs and OBCs to introduce similar sub-categorisation, based on economic criteria, within their respective quotas**.

- **Adequate representation of upper caste**- The upper caste is adequately represented in public employment. Further, the government didn't prove that it has **quantifiable data** to

show that people from lower income groups from upper castes are **under-represented in its service**.

- **Violates right to equality**- A cap of 50% was put on the reserved seats so as to balance the **equality of opportunity** of backward classes 'against' the **right to equality of others**. When the quota exceeds 50% limit, it violates right to equality.

- **Income ceiling issue** - The income ceiling for EWS is fixed at ₹8 lakhs a year which is the same as the **'creamy layer' limit of OBC's,** above which OBC candidates become ineligible for reservations. Thus, a parity has been created between **socially backward classes (OBC) & economically backward classes (EWS).**

- **Ambiguous definition of EWS-** The issue with current definition of EWS is that it is **too broad** and it includes a large section of population.

- **Issue with quota**- Further, reservation for SCs/STs and non-creamy layer amongst OBCs has direct relation with their **respective populations**. While there is no such **clarity on methodology** used for arriving at the 10% EWS quota.

- **Issue in the identifying beneficiaries**- In a country where taxable population is still low due to **misrepresentation of income**, implementing **economic eligibility criteria** would be a huge challenge for the bureaucracy.

- **Less employment opportunities in public sector-** With steadily shrinking jobs pool in the Central Government, Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) and even the drive of bank privatisation, 10% reservation will not meet expectations of the targeted group.

- **Vote bank tool**- Offering reservations to different sections has now become tool for **vote gains in politics**. This affects **credibility of affirmative action** as a tool for social justice to marginalised sections.

Steps that need to be taken

- **Improving job creation in private sector**- This is in terms of both **quantitative and qualitative improvements.** Both the number of jobs and the **remunerations need to be in sync** with the needs of the changing times. This in turn can be done by creating an ecosystem which supports and enables the **improvement in investment in labour intensive** and hitherto underutilized sectors.

- **Expansion of creamy layer**- The further extension of **creamy layers among the SC/STs can be explored.** The sensitivities of concerned groups however need to be taken in account while arriving at a final decision.

- **Robust institutional measures**- In order to **avoid populist measures a ceiling** of 50%was introduced in Indra Sawhney Case. As a result, the recommendations of classes for reservation need to come up via proper institutional mechanisms.

- **Prevent exclusion and inclusion errors**- Independent and transparent **verification method**s must be adopted in order to prevent the misuse of reservation provisions.

THEME 4: RESERVATION IN PROMOTIONS

- **Article 15(4)**- It allows State to make **special provision for the advancement** of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for SCs and STs.
- **Article 16(4B)-** It provides that **reserved promotion posts for SCs and STs** that remain unfilled can be carried forward to the subsequent year.
- **Article 335**- It mandates that reservations have to be balanced with the 'maintenance of efficiency'.
- **Indira Sawhney case (1992)**- The Supreme Court held that the **reservation policy cannot be extended to promotions**.
- **77th Constitutional Amendment (CA)**- It inserted Clause 4A in Article 16, which enables the state to make any law regarding reservation in promotion for SCs and STs.
- **M. Nagaraj vs. Union of India Case 2006**- The Supreme Court agreed with the stance of state to extend reservation in promotion for SCs and STs. In addition to it, SC gave three parameters upon which state have to provide proof to it.
- **Empirical Data on Backwardness** of the class benefitting from the reservation.
- **Empirical Data on Inadequate Representation** in the position/service for which reservation in promotion is to be granted.
- **Impact on efficiency**- How reservations in promotions would improve administrative efficiency.
- **Jarnail Singh vs Lachhmi Narain Gupta case,2018- In this case,** the Supreme Court held that reservation **in promotions does not require the state to collect quantifiable data on the backwardness of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes**.

Arguments in favour of reservation in promotion

- **Incomplete understanding of the term "efficiency"**- It is very difficult to empirically establish the **cause-and-effect relationship between reservation and efficiency**. It also stems from a narrow understanding of the idea of '**merit**'. Currently, the measure of efficiency is the rating attained in the respective annual confidential reports of the employees.
- **Idea of equality**- Denying application of reservation in promotions has kept **SCs and STs largely confined to lower cadre jobs**. Hence, providing reservation for promotions is even more justified and appropriate to attain equality.
- **Skewed representation at senior level**s- Only **one of the 89 secretaries** posted at the Centre belongs to the Scheduled Castes (SC), while three belong to the Scheduled Tribes. The representation of SCs/STs is skewed even in additional secretary, joint secretary and director levels.
- **Huge number of backlogs of vacancies**- Due to the lingering question mark over the appropriate definition of the term **no "quantifiable data" could be collected. This** resulted in cancellation of all the promotions made post **Nagraj judgement of SC** in 2006.

Arguments against reservation in promotion

- **Reservation is not a fundamental right**- Provisions under articles **16(4), 16 (4A) and 16 (4B)** of the Constitution are **only enabling provisions**, and not a fundamental right. SC recently ruled that **"there is no fundamental right which inheres in an individual to claim reservation in promotion",** and that 'no mandamus can be issued by court directing state government to provide reservations.
- **Skewed distribution of Benefits within the communities-** Several Critics fear that like the other aspects of reservations, in promotion too, i**t might be cornered by the already uplifted castes and tribes.**
- **Hurts efficiency of administration**-As per **Article 335, affirmative action** should be subject to the **overall efficiency** of Public Administration. Reservation in promotions may affect the overall **merit-based culture** withinan organisation. This holds true especially for technical domains such as space, nuclear research, etc.
- **Persisting social discrimination**- To this day an **improvement in employment and status** within an organisation has not resulted in an end to all forms of **social discrimination.** As a result, it can't be used as a sole criterion to calculate whether one is backward or not.

Way forward

- **Consensus based solution**- SC has recently started a debate about the **introduction of creamy layer** in SC/ST reservations too. Any legislative and administrative changes, however, should only be introduced by taking along suggestions from all the **stakeholders involved.**
- **Redesigning of policies**-There is a need to make a critical **assessment of our reservation policy** in general. Simplification of laws, legislative sunsets, and periodic reviews should be important principles in the redesign of policy.

THEME 5: ISSUE OF RESERVATION IN PRIVATE SECTOR JOBS
Introduction

- Recently, Haryana government notified its **Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Bill, 2020**. This bill provides job reservation in the private sector for locals.
- **Andhra Pradesh** also passed a law to provide job reservation for locals. It **reserved 75% private jobs** across all categories in industrial units, factories, joint ventures as well as **Public-Private Projects**. The law passed by the Andhra Pradesh assembly is currently challenged in the court and the court is yet to decide on it.
- The **Karnataka government** also approved a new industrial policy (2020-2025) in 2020. The policy aims to give **minimum employment of 70 per cent employment to Kannada people** on an overall basis. Further, the reservation went up to 100 per cent in the case of Group C and Group D employees.

Supreme Court Judgements regarding reservation in private jobs

- **Dr. Pradeep Jain v Union of India (1984) case**- The Supreme Court discussed the issue of legislation for **"sons of the soil".** Further, the court held an opinion that such policies would be **unconstitutional but did not expressly ruled on it**.
- **Sunanda Reddy v State of Andhra Pradesh (1995) case-** The Supreme Court repeated its earlier interpretation in Dr. Pradeep Jain case. Further, the court strikes down the state government policy that gave **5% extra weightage to candidates who had studied with Telugu as the medium of instruction**.
- The Rajasthan government gave preference to **"people belonging to the concerned district or the rural areas of that district"** in appointments. But, in 2002, **the Supreme Court** invalidated the appointment of government teachers in Rajasthan.
- **In 2019, the Allahabad High Court struck down** a recruitment notification issued by the Uttar Pradesh Subordinate Service Selection Commission. The commission prescribed preference for women who were original residents of the state in job appointments.

Arguments for reservation in local jobs
- **Issue of migration** According to some estimates drawn from 2011 Census, NSSO surveys and Economic Survey suggests that there are a total of about **65 million inter-state migrants, and 33 per cent of these migrants are workers**. These migrants increase the labour market competition which fuels the demand for reservation of natives in local jobs.
- **Rising unemployment**- According to **Periodic Labour Force Survey**, the unemployment in 2017-2018 was at **6.1%, highest of last 45 years**. These unemployment figures are likely to rise drastically in the backdrop of pandemic which has halted global economy. Thus, demand for reservation in local jobs.
- **Agrarian Distress**-The agrarian sector is under tremendous stress across the country with **45% population employed in it**. The young people are desperate to move out of the sector, hence seeking opportunities in local jobs.
- Since the **private sector uses public infrastructure** in many ways like subsidized allotment of land, tax exemptions, etc. The **state has a legitimate right** to require them to comply with the reservation policy.
- **Followed globally**-Globally also, many countries allow such reservation in private jobs. For example,
    o The **US Civil Rights Act of 1964** allows the courts to order monetary damages and relieffor victims of discrimination (i.e.local people).
    o The **Employment Equity Act in Canada** also protects minority groups from job deprivation. The Act protects the native people from discrimination in all the federally regulated industries, even in the private sector.

Arguments against reservation in local jobs
- **Discourages brotherhood and fraternity-** This step would create tensions among locals and non-locals in the implementing states which may lead to ethnic clashes. This goes against the fundamental of Indian democracy **which includes spirit of fraternity and Unity in Diversity in long run.**

- **Against constitutional provisions**- These laws are against the following constitutional provisions:
    o **Article 14** provides for **right to equality** before the law.
    o **Article 19(1)(g)** provides for **right to business, trade and profession** in any part of the country.
    o **Article 16(3)** allows reservation based on the residence by a parliamentary law (not state legislative assembly) in matters of **public employment and not in private employment**.
- **Effect on current state of economy-** The pandemic scenario has made it imperative for all market players to focus on fast and effective economic recovery. However, compulsion on companies to employ locals might **compromise quality and delay the economic recovery phase**.
- **Hinders Competitiveness and Investment**-Compulsions to employ on basis of reservation **decrease the competitiveness of companies**. Apart from that, such measures directly discourage investment potential in a state.
- **Against the reservation ceiling-** Providing more than **50% reservation is against the ceiling given** in Indra Sawhney case by the apex court.
- **Challenges industry will face** -
    o **Prevents ease of doing busines**s- There are certain sectors like chemical technology, textile and biotechnology, where it may be **difficult to find talented locals for the jobs** and the units are forced to search outside. It will likely facilitate corruption and create another barrier in ease of doing business.
    o **Hinders investments**- Such a decision may lead to **relocation of industries elsewhere and also alienate the potential investors**. Lack of investments could further drop the job creation and employment rate.
    o **Promotes Red Tapism**-The private sector cannot employ outsiders without the permission of concerned authorities. It might lead to the **inspector raj prior to 1991 economic reforms**.

Way Forward

- **Incentive based cooperation**- The government needs to incentivise the companies which are investing money in providing skills to the local youths. Such i**ncentives** could be in the form of **tax rebates, capital for better skill development, lower electricity charges, better infrastructure facilities,** etc.
- **Focus on holistic improvement of skill ecosystem**- The State government should **focus on better education delivery, greater job creation and skill enhancement.** It will make companies to employ more local youth automatically.

JOB RESERVATIONS, PROMOTION QUOTAS NOT A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT
Introduction

The Supreme Court has ruled that there is **no fundamental right to reservations in appointments and promotions** under articles 16(4) and 16(4A) of the Constitution.

The case pertains to a decision by the Uttarakhand government in 2012. Back then, the government had decided to fill up posts in public services without providing reservation to members of the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities.

About the Judgement

- **Enabling provision**- **Article 16 (4) and 16 (4-A)** are in the nature of enabling provisions, **vesting a discretion** on the State Government to consider providing reservations, if the circumstances areso warrant. It isa settled law that the state cannot be directed to give reservations for appointment in public posts.
- **Condition for reservation in promotion**- The order adds that the state is not bound to make a **reservation for SCs and STs** in matters of promotions. However, if the state wishes to exercise its discretion and make such provision, it has to collect quantifiable data showing **inadequacy of representation** of that class in public services.

Associated cases

C.A. Rajendran v. Union of India- In 1967, a five-judge bench in C.A. Rajendran v. Union of India held that the government is under **no constitutional duty to provide reservations for SCs and STs**, either at the initial stage of recruitment or at the stage of promotion.

Other cases- The judgement went on to be reiterated in several other decisions, including the nine-judge bench ruling in Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992) and the five-judge bench decision in M Nagaraj v. Union of India (2006).

Cases challenging this judgement

Although this position of law is a settled one, it is nonetheless against some other principles of the constitution which provides for right to equality.

NM Thomas Case 1976- In this case, SC asserted that the idea of **Substantive** equality is integral to our constitution. Substantive equality implies that while **determining what equal treatment is, court had to take into account the actual circumstances of people.**

This was done so as to account for the **historical injustices** which resulted in barriers both structural and institutional for the oppressed. As a result of which they can't really be expected to compete with those that are relatively well off on equal footing.

- As there are **less avenues** for the direct appointment in higher posts, reservations play a major role for the representation of backward classes in higher posts.
- According to a Parliament reply oflast year, only one of the 89 secretaries posted at the Centre belonged to the SC, while three belong to the ST. The court order may go against the substantive equality in higher posts.

CONCLUSION

The issue of reservation remains to this day a contentious one, between those who are reserved and those who are not. Although it has constantly faced **opposition from the unreserved sections,** those who need it the most among the reserved ones are hardly aware and capable enough to have the knowhow of the benefits. On the other hand, only, a certain section

has been enjoying the fruits of the reservation policy. Due to **vote bank politics**, the political executive has been reluctant to bring about a holistic change in the current reservation policy. Reservation has no doubt its positives and probably, it was a good solution way back when it was introduced. But its implementation has raised questions, f**rom exclusion and inclusion errors to increasing perception of relative deprivation** among those who are unreserved. The policy is creating newer set of issues which have the potential to even harm the unity and integrity of the nation. The time has come when we need to address the challenge of reservations **honestly, openly, fairly and innovatively**.

GENERAL STUDIES-1

Empowering women in politics

Syllabus: GS I- Role of women and women's organization, Social empowerment

In news : The women MPs of Rajya Sabha urged government to ensure passage of women's quota bill in Lok Sabha. The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, commonly known as the Women's Reservation Bill was passed by Rajya Sabha in 2010, but is awaiting nod of Lok Sabha.

Positive Impacts of reservation in politics on economic empowerment:

- **Economic performance:** According to a study by United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, women legislators improve the economic performance of their constituencies 1.8 per cent more than male legislatures (UN University).
  - o Research suggests that women favour redistributive politics and thus, have a tolerance of higher taxes.
- **Female inheritance:** Reservation increased frequency and magnitude of female inheritance. For instance, Frequency of female inheritance increased from 10.3 per cent to 16.3 per cent.
- **Bargaining power:** Higher the political representation more the bargaining power in public and private domain, better the response from official stakeholders.
- **Enhances women's ability:** Female elected leaders increase women's ability to demand effective enforcement of economic rights through mobilizing political participation and women's social solidarity.
- **Negotiating rights:** Marriage negotiations are sphere when women have shown maximal voice over the natal family's distribution of resources mainly by young women capable of negotiating their rights.
- **Economic infrastructure:** Evaluation of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana shows the share of incomplete road projects is 22 percentage points lower in female-led constituencies.

Constraints:

- **Political voice:** Only a subset of women can translate greater public, political voice into bargaining power for private, ancestral property.
- **Enhanced backlash among men**: For Example, increased willingness to sanction violent punishment to daughters and her marital family for marriage against father approval.
- **Not beneficial to married women:** Not beneficial to women who were already married at time of reform introduction as natal family consider implementation of such right as double burden.
- **Rural women will not benefit**: The Women's Reservation Bill in its present form will only benefit the rich and urban women and not the poor and rural women. A provision of sub-reservation for OBC women and Dalit women should be added to the Bill; has been demanded.

Status of women political participation across globe:
- **Women in parliament:** Only 24 percent of all national parliamentarians are women
- **Country with highest participation:** Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide (61.3%). Wide variations in the average percentages of women parliamentarians in each region.
- **Nordic countries: 42.33% Americas:** 30%; Europe including Nordic countries: 27.7%; Europe excluding Nordic countries: 26.6%.
- **Sub-Saharan Africa:** 23.6%; Asia:19.4%; Arab States:17.8%; and the Pacific:17%
- **Ministers:** Only 18.3 percent of government ministers are women.
- **Ministries handled:** Most commonly held portfolio by women ministers is environment, natural resources, and energy, followed by social sectors, such as social affairs, education and the family

Status of women political participation in India:
- **Women in Lok and Rajya Sabha:** Lok Sabha have 64 (8percent) and Rajya Sabha 27 (11) women MPs (IPU and UN women report)
- **Women MLA:** Out of the total 4,118 **MLA,** only **9 percent** are women.
- **Rise in women's share:** From 2010-17, women's share rose 1 percentage point in its Lower House (Lok Sabha)
- **Elected representatives:** There are 72 lakh elected women representatives (EWRs) in PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions) which constitute 44.2 percent of total elected representatives (ERs)
- **Women Sarpanch:** Women Sarpanches accounted for 43 per cent of total gram panchayats (GPs) across the country
- **Gender Gap Index:** India's rank on **World Economic Forum's** Gender Gap Index was 108/149 and political empowerment ranking in 2017 was 15.
- **Gender Inequality Index:** India's rank on **United Nation Development Program's** Gender Inequality Index was 127/189 and share of seats in parliament was 11.6%.
- **Projects under women**: Research on panchayats in India discovered that the number of drinking water projects in areas with women-led councils was 62 per cent higher than in those with men-led councils.

- **According to Economic Survey 2017-18:** Domestic responsibilities, prevailing cultural attitudes regarding roles of women in society, lack of support from family, lack of confidence and lack of finance are some of the main reasons for low participation of women.
- **Other Reasons are:**
  o Lack of will of Political Parties to provide adequate number of party tickets to women candidates for their better representation.
  o Delay in passing of Women Reservation Bill providing 33% reservation in Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies.
  o Lack of leadership training and limited involvement in decision making process.

Some issues related women representation in PRIs

- **Illiteracy in women:** Illiteracy and low education levels of the majority of the women elected to the PRIs.
- **Family responsibilities:** Women are overburdened with family responsibilities.
- **Lack of communication skills:** Introversion due to the lack of communication skills.
- **Socio-economic background:** Poor socio-economic background with which the women have come into the system and poor capacity building.
- **Interference by other family members:** Male family members and also leaders from the caste group/community come in the way of the affairs of the Panchayats. Undue interference by the husband (post sarpanch) of women representatives, treating them as mere dummies.
- **Behavioural problems:** Indifferent attitude and behaviour of officials working in the system.
- **Pressure of political party:** Mounting pressure from the political party which has vested interests in the gender reservation for positions in the PRI system.
- **Corrupt practices:** Widespread use of corrupt practices among the male members and local bureaucrats.

Women: Performance in PRIs

Provisions for women in the 73rdamendment act:

- **Reserved seats:** The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008 seeks to reserve one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies. The allocation of reserved seats shall be determined by such authority as prescribed by Parliament.
- **SC and ST women:** One third of the total number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be reserved for women of those groups in the Lok Sabha and the legislative assemblies.
- **Rotation method:** Reserved seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the state or union territory.
- **Duration of reservation:** Reservation of seats for women shall cease to exist 15 years after the commencement of this Amendment Act.
- **Women empowerment through 73rdAmendment Act:** Women's experience of being involved with the PRls has transformed many of them.
- They have gained a sense of empowerment by asserting control over resources, officials & most of all, by challenging men. They have become articulate & conscious of their power.
- **Political empowerment:** The Act provides for the reservation of not less than one-third of the total number of seats for women. It is an attempt to ensure greater participation of women in election process directly and indirectly.
  - Even the participation of common women citizens in various activities such as attending Gram Sabha meeting, etc. has reportedly increased (68-78 percent).

Successes of women reservation in PRI:

- **Economic empowerment:** Women are actively participating in rural development as per their capacity, right from labourers to policy-makers. This empowers them economically and help them in being independent.
- **Decision-making:** The participation of women as elected as well as non-elected members are rising due to reservation for women. It acts as pull factor for women to participate in meeting. They give their suggestions for various works and problems faced by them. This empowers them and enable them to take decisions in different spheres of life.
- **Raise in voice:** Despite their low- literacy level, they have been able to tackle the political & bureaucratic system successfully. They have used their elected authority to address critical issues such as education, drinking water facilities, family planning facilities, hygiene & health, quality of healthcare & village development.
- **Empowerment of other women:** Women are acting as an agent of change in the society and raising voice against injustice and atrocities. The active participation of women created awareness among women about their rights and power.
- **Reduction in violence against women:** Domestic violence has substantially declined due to women Pradhan or sarpanch. These women representatives pro-actively take up such violence. The victims also feel free to share their grievances to women representatives.

Way forward

- **Women's Reservation Bill:** Passing of Women's Reservation Bill 2008 which seeks to reserve one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies.
  - o There is quota-within-quota for SCs, STs and Anglo-Indians.
  - o The reserved seats will be rotated after each general election.
- **Institutionalization of Intra-party democracy:** Institutionalization ofIntra-party democracy for wider pool of candidates including women.
- **Women participation at panchayat:** Further promotion of women participation at panchayat level through strengthening of women self-help groups.
- **Women participation in student political parties:** Promoting girl's participation in College/Universities student political parties and political debate.
- **Strengthening women's agencies:** Strengthening women's agencies and organizations for building a progressive society with equality of opportunities among citizens.
- **Fixed quota system:** Rwanda introduced fixed quota system for women instead of voluntary quota system, nearly 50% women won, which subsequently rose to 64%, even when the stipulated quota was only 30%. On the contrary many developed countries of Europe are struggling with around 20% representation of women with the voluntary allocation system.

India's migrant workers

Syllabus: GS I- Developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.
In news
NITI Aayog has released a draft report on migrant workers. Though it is well-intentioned, it hasn't addressed the policy misrepresentations which are at the root of migrant workers' issues.

Background

- **Awareness about migrant workers:** The suffering of millions of migrant workers during the pandemic, raised awareness about their scale, vulnerability, and role in the economy. It also led to several measures taken by the central and state governments.
- **Drafting of policy:** Niti Aayog handling the drafting of this policy is a good decision as it required inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial coordination.
- **Scale and role of migrant workers:** The draft policy makes important steps in providing a perspective on recognizing the scale and role of migrant workers. It states that a complete policy must be viewed from a "human rights, property rights, economic, social development, and foreign policy lens".
- **Internal Migrants**: Migrants who move within the boundaries of their own country are known as internal migrants.

State of India's migrants

- **Migrant workers in India:** According to a tentative estimate of the government, there are 10 crores of migrant workers in India and many among them are not even documented and registered as workers.
- **The law which governs migrant workers:** Inter-State migrant workmen Act, 1979 is the only act that regulates them.
  - In 2011, 99% of total migration was internal and immigrants (international migrants) comprised 1%.
  - As per the 2011 census, there were 21 crore rural-rural migrants which formed 54% of classifiable internal migration.
- The extent of Internal Migration in India:
  - According to the Census 2011 migration data, over 45.58 crore Indians were found to be migrants as against 31.45 crores during the 2001 Census.
  - UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, and MP had the highest 'outmigration'.
  - Maharashtra, Delhi, and Gujarat had the largest 'in-migration'.

Issues faced by Indian migrants

- **Independent workers: Inter-State Migrant Workers Act, 1979** was designed to protect laborers from exploitation by contractors. It safeguards their right to non-discriminatory wages, travel and displacement allowances, and suitable working conditions.
  - However, this law covers only laborers migrating through a contractor. It does not cover independent migrants.
- **Lack of basic social safety net**: Many factors like lack of awareness, employer's apathy, poor governance by the State has made tribal workmen live in hand-to-mouth circumstances.
  They lack proper housing and services like water, schools, ration which makes them more vulnerable and susceptible to exploitation by employers.
- **Xenophobia:** According to the Status of Policing in India Report, in 2019, on average 60% of Police personnel held the opinion that migrants are naturally prone to committing a crime or are borne criminals.
- **Little bargaining power of labour:** due to **lack of options,** labourhas no option but to work on any terms.
- **The problem of demand and supply:** Wages are low and workers are treated poorly because there are too many unskilled workers trying to get into few jobs.
  - Laws against market forces misalign incentives and create corrupt inspectors and middlemen.
- **Sharing of Surplus:** Demand for labour services in India is highly responsive to wages.
  - **For Small firms:** The cost of labour (wages+cost of compliance) is a large proportion of total costs, so the demand for labour is highly flexible.

- o **For larger firms:** The demand is elastic because capital can be more easily substituted for labour. This coupled with a very large supply of poor and unskilled workers is the reason for workers' low bargaining power.

Factors responsible for migration

- **Economic factors:** These relate to the labour market of a place, the employment situation, and the overall state of the economy.

Push factors	Pull factors
- Unemployment or lack of employment opportunities. - Rural poverty. - Unsustainable livelihood.	- Job opportunities. - Better income and prospects for wealth creation. - Industrial innovation and technical know-how for a new industry. - Pursuit of specialized education.

- **Socio-political factors:** These include family conflicts and unification, the quest for independence, ethnic, religious, racial, and cultural parameters; warfare, or the threat of conflict, among other factors that contribute to migration.

Push factors	Pull factors
- Political instability. - Safety and security concerns (ethnic, religious, racial, or cultural persecution). - Conflicts or threats of a conflict. - Slavery or bonded labour. - Inadequate or limited urban services and infrastructure (including healthcare, education, utilities, transport, and water)	- Family reunification. - Independence and freedom. - Integration and social cohesion. - Food security. - Affordable and accessible urban services (including healthcare, education, utilities, and transport).

- **Ecological factors:** These include environmental factors, such as climate change and the availability of natural resources, that cause individuals to migrate in search of more favourable ecological conditions.

Push factors	Pull factors
- Climate change (including extreme weather events). - Crop failure and scarcity of food.	- The abundance of natural resources and minerals (e.g., water, oil, uranium). - Favourable climate.

About the Draft Policy on Migrant Workers:

- **Approach:** The draft policy describes two approaches to policy design:

- - **Handout Approach:** It focuses on cash transfers, special quotas, and reservations. It also means providing aids instead of skills.
  - **Rights-Based Approach:** It enhances the agency and capability of the community. Thereby, it promotes an individual's own natural ability to thrive.
- **Salient features of the Draft Policy:**
  - **Implementation by:** Ministry of Labour and Employment should be the nodal Ministry for implementation.
  - **Special Unit:** Ministry should create a special unit to help converge the activities of other Ministries. This unit would manage migration resource centres in high migration zones.
  - **Central Database:** The policy calls for the creation of a central database of migrant laborers.
- **ILO commitments and SDG goals:** It states that a rights-based and labour rights perspective built around the core issue of the dignity of labour must be the principle of policy. It should meet ILO commitments and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Role in the economy: T**he document appreciates the magnitude of the migrants and their role in the economy but finds that the data has failed to capture the growth in their numbers.
- **Vulnerabilities of migrant labourers:** Many sources of vulnerabilities of migrant labourers have been described in the document. It includes:
  - Their invisibility and political and social exclusion to informal work arrangements.
  - Exploitation and denial of labour rights.
  - Lack of collective voice, exclusion from social protection arrangements.
  - Formal skills, health, education, and housing.
- **Transferability of social protection:** It identifies the transferability of social protection, voting rights, the right to the city, health, education, and housing facilities as key issues to be dealt with.
- **Governance structure:** It proposes a governance structure with the Ministry of Labour which will act as a focal point for inter-ministerial and Centre-state coordination. It also proposes mechanisms for coordinating the effort on inter-state migration.
- **Role of Panchayats:** Panchayats should maintain a database of migrant workers. It would issue identity cards and passbooks to workers. Moreover, it would also provide migration management and governance through training, placement, and social-security benefit assurance.
- **Inter-state migration management bodies** should be set up to cover the nation's key migration corridors: Uttar Pradesh and Mumbai, Bihar and Delhi, Western Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat, and Odisha and Gujarat.
- **Migrants Workers Section: Labour Departments in** each state should establish a migrant workers section. Labour officers of source states and destination states should work collectively.

- **Migrants Children Education:** The Ministry of Education should take measures for migrant children's education. It should map migrant children and provide local-language teachers in migrant destinations.
- **Housing for Migrants:** The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs should address issues of night shelters, short-stay homes, and seasonal accommodation for migrants in cities.
- **Grievance Cells**: The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and the Ministry of Labour should set up grievance handling cells and fast-track legal responses. It should work on issues like trafficking, minimum wage violations, and workplace abuses and accidents for migrant workers.
- **Migrants should be the target of Disaster Risk Reduction (DDR)** programmers in urban centers.

What are the issues missed by the draft policy?

The draft misses recognizing and addressing many critical issues.

- **Inequalities:** Gaps in development and inequalities have grown constantly in the last 3 decades. It requires corrections in the development strategy without which migration is bound to grow unchecked. The report did not acknowledge this.
- **Uneven urban strategy:** The report fails to recognize the root cause of the uneven urban development strategy. The urban strategy has marginalized the poor and the migrants.
- **Disapproval of approaches:** The report has denied approaches which rely on cash transfers and special allowance. The denial of the first approach has resulted in ignoring the migratns' and informal workers' right to social security.
- **Labour rights:** the biggest weakness for the report is its approach towards labour rights and labour policy. It puts grievance and legal redressal above regulation and enforcement.
- **Labour codes:** the labour codes which are promoting ease of business, have shifted the balance firmly in favour of capital. This weakens the bargaining power of labour and further weakens an already drained enforcement system.

The way forward

- **Increasing state Capacity: Necessities** like environmental protection, worker safety, basic rights require regulation. The government has to invest in the state capacity to do them right.
- **Empower migrants:** "Reform" should be used only when a particular action achieves the desired objective. Designing protection that can protect the core interests of workers, respect their bargaining power, and at the same time rescue distortions in capital allocation, is reform.
- **People-centric governance:** People-centric and people-led governance in 5th and 6th schedule areas by empowered local bodies and compassionate public servants is the panacea for tribal welfare.

Forests in the era of climate change

Syllabus – GS I- Geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water bodies and ice-caps) and flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

In News

The Simlipal forest reserve area frequently witnesses forest fires during dry weather conditions.

Role of Forests in Climate Systems

- **Carbon Sinks**- Forests play a role in mitigating climate change by **absorbing the carbon dioxide** emitted into the atmosphere from human activities, chiefly the burning of fossil fuels for energy and other purposes, into the terrestrial carbon sink.

- **Releasing Carbon in the atmosphere-** When forests are burned or cleared for uses such as **cropland, pasture, infrastructure or urbanization, it** causes the release of carbon stock that has accumulated, both in the trees themselves and in the forest soil.

- **Forests regulating temperature and water flows**- Forests contribute to atmospheric moisture and rainfall patterns over land through **evapotranspiration**. The resulting atmospheric moisture is circulated by winds across the Earth's continents and oceans. **Forest loss and degradation** reduce evapotranspiration, impacting the precipitation.

- **Forest helps in condensation**- Trees and forests also lead to more intense rainfall through the release biological particles (fungal spores, pollen, bacterial cells, and biological debris) into the atmosphere, which **accelerates the condensation of atmospheric moisture**.

- **An antidote to Urban Heat Island Effect**- Forests also influence local temperatures, providing a **cooling effect through transpiration and shade**. This can be particularly important in cities, where trees can help to counteract the urban heat island effect.

- **Promoting and preventing floods**- Because of their **capacity to store and recycle water**, forests help to moderate flooding. Conversely, removing trees leads to **soil compaction and hardening, soil erosion (especially in mountainous areas), transpiration loss, reduced infiltration, and increased run-off**, thereby promoting floods.

Benefits of Forests to Development and Human Well-Being

Source: Seymour and Busch 2016.

Impact of Climate Change on forests

- **Forest Composition-** Warming temperatures generally **shift the geographic ranges of some tree species**. Habitats of some types of trees are likely to move north or to higher altitudes. Other species will be at risk locally or regionally if conditions in their current geographic ranges are no longer suitable.
    - For example, species that currently exist only on mountaintops in some regions may die out as the climate warms since they cannot shift to a higher altitude.
- **Forest Productivity-** Carbon dioxide is required for photosynthesis, the process by which green plants use sunlight to grow. Given sufficient water and nutrients, increase in atmospheric CO_2 **may enable trees to be more productive**, which may change the distribution of tree species. Growth will be highest in nutrient-rich soils with no water limitation and will decrease with decreasing fertility and water supply.
- **Forest Nutrient cycling- T**he productivity and integrity of forest ecosystems are linked to the supply of nutrients. Climate change can influence nutrient dynamics by **altering the rate of litter decomposition, the leaching of key nutrients from the soil and the uptake of nutrients and water by fine roots and symbiotic fungi.**
- **Forest becoming susceptible to disturbance-** Climate change could alter the **frequency and intensity of forest disturbances** such as insect outbreaks, invasive species, wildfires, human-induced forest fires such as in amazon forests and Australia, and storms. These disturbances can reduce forest productivity and change the distribution of tree species.

Challenges in protecting forests

- **Patronage and Power**- Forests are often treated as a source of political patronage to be used to get and keep political power and support.
- **Worth more dead than alive**- Forests are often seen as obstacles to economic growth, while so-called development is seen as **first extracting value from standing forests in the form of timber or biomass energy and then offering supposedly longer-term value of the land under the trees**, either for grazing cattle, raising crops, extracting minerals or speculating on the value of a future sale.
- **Lack of resources-** Financing forest conservation and restoration has proved difficult because many **forest benefits are not monetized**. And financial incentives supporting activities that drive deforestation or keep trees from coming back often outweigh the incentives for conservation and restoration.
- **Absence of ownership- Communities** living in and around forest areas can play a vital role in successful conservation and restoration but are too often excluded from decision-making about forest policy in part because of **unclear and contested land tenure.** Indigenous peoples and local communities collectively occupy at least half the world's forests but have **legal rights to only about 10% of these lands**. The absence of secure legal rights leaves communities and their forests vulnerable.

- **Working at cross purposes-** In some cases, governance over land that affects forests is not aligned, leading to **policy paralysis, the incoherence, or even conflict**. The governance of forests is often influenced by multiple agencies, operating at different levels, leading to fragmentation of interests, priorities, and actions along horizontal (e.g.,

Steps taken by the government
- **National Afforestation Programme (NAP)scheme**-NAP is being implemented for afforestation of degraded forest lands with a participatory approach.
- **National Mission for a Green India (GIM)-** GIM aims at improving the quality of the forest and increase in forest cover besides cross-sectoral activities on a landscape basis.
- **Forest Fire Prevention & Management Scheme (FFPM)-** The FFPM takes care of forest fire prevention and management measures.
- **Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitat (IDWH)- Components of the scheme**
  - Support to Protected Areas (National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves, and Community Reserves)
  - Protection of Wildlife Outside Protected Areas
  - Recovery programs for saving critically endangered species and habitats
- **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA)**-CAMPA Act has been passed to compensate for the loss of forest area and to maintain sustainability.
  - The law establishes the **National Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of India** and **a State Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of each state.**
  - **These Funds will receive payments for** (i) compensatory afforestation, (ii) net present value of forest (NPV), and (iii) other project-specific payments.
- Nagar Vana Udyan Yojana- Aimed to create/ develop at least one CITY FOREST in each City having Municipal Corporation/ Class I Cities for providing a wholesome healthy living environment, and contributing to the growth of Smart, Clean, Green, Sustainable and Healthy Cities.
- **National REDD+ Strategy-** Complying with the **UNFCCC** decisions on REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), India has prepared its National REDD+ Strategy. The strategy seeks to **address drivers of deforestation and forest degradation** and also developing a roadmap for the enhancement of **forest carbon stocks** and achieving sustainable management of forests through REDD+ actions.
- **Paris deal-** COP21 marked a defining moment for the global community to come together and collectively show their resolve towards **"changing climate change"**. The deal includes the e**xplicit mention of forests in the agreemen**t,sends an indisputable signal that actions to halt deforestation and forest degradation will have to be a part of a high-level domestic political agenda. India has ratified the Paris deal and has adopted the INDC to produce an additional **25-30 million hectares of forest cover by 2030**.

agriculture vs. environment ministries) and vertical (e.g., national vs. local government) lines.

- **Poor implementation of laws- Systemic corruption and low levels of law enforcement** often exacerbate these barriers. Although progressive laws may be on the books to support forest conservation and restoration, there is little follow-through and illegalities continue to occur. For example, Forest's rights Act and Environment Impact Assessment are mired with poor implementation in India.

Way Forward

- **Combatting deforestation and forest degradation:** This helps conserve the benefits that people and societies get from forests, including forest carbon stocks and livelihoods.
- **Restoring forest landscapes** helps enhance climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- **Bonn Challenge**- It aims to restore 150 million hectares of degraded land by 2020.
- **Enabling rights-based land use-** This helps in strengthening community control over forests, alleviate poverty, empower women and men, enhance biodiversity, and sustainably manage forests.

Forests cover 30 percent of the Earth's surface, provide vital habitats for millions of species, and important sources for clean air and water, as well as being crucial for combating climate change. **Urgent action** must be taken to reduce the loss of natural habitats and biodiversity which are part of our **common heritage** and support global food and water security, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and peace and security.

GENERAL STUDIES-2

Governing the national capital
Syllabus: GS II-Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure
In news
The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 or the NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill 2021 got passed in Lok Sabha.

About the Bill
- The bill amends certain provisions related to the distribution of powers and responsibilities among the LG (Lieutenant Governor) and the Delhi legislative assembly.
- The issue of power tussle between the LG and the elected government of Delhi has come into the limelight again.

Centre vs Delhi govt again

WHAT THE BILL PROPOSES
- The term "Government" in any law by the legislative assembly will mean "Lieutenant Governor"
- The assembly shall not make rules or committees to consider day-to-day administration or conduct inquiries
- Rule or committee made before the new amendment comes into force "shall be void"
- Before taking any executive action, opinion of the L-G shall be obtained by a general or special order
- L-G shall have power to reserve for consideration any bill, and any of the matters outside the purview of the powers conferred on the legislative assembly

Bill will define responsibilities in line with the constitutional scheme of governance of national Capital, as interpreted by SC
— AMIT SHAH, UNION HOME MINISTER

DELHI GOVT'S RESERVATIONS
- Article 239AA says legislature can make laws on any matters on state and concurrent list except for issues relating to public order, police and land.
- SC's Constitution bench in 2018 recognised assembly's right, and said Union has exclusive powers only in the above 3 issues.
- SC said L-G should work with aid and advice of council of ministers
- SC order clarified that L-G has not been entrusted with any independent decision-making power
- While any matter of dispute can be sent to President, the SC said it does not mean every matter should be

After being rejected by people of Delhi, BJP seeks to drastically curtail powers of elected govt. Bill is dilution of SC judgment.
— ARVIND KEJRIWAL, CM

Key Provisions related to administration of Delhi

- **69th Amendment Act**: Delhi's current status as a Union Territory with a Legislative Assembly is an outcome of the 69th Amendment Act. The act introduced **Articles 239AA and 239BB** in the Constitution.
  - They have created the Union Territory of Delhi with a legislative assembly.
  - Further, the administrator appointed under article 239 gets designated as the Lieutenant Governor (LG). There shall be a council of ministers to aid and advise LG.
  - Lastly, provisions of public order, police and land are not under the jurisdiction of the Delhi government. The Centre will maintain these provisions.
- **Article 239AA (4)**: Article 239AA (4) mandates that in case of a d**ifference of opinion between the LG and the Council of Ministers**, the LG has to refer the issue to the President.
  - Until the decision is pending before the President, the LG can use his discretion to take immediate action if urgency requires him/her to take an action.
- **The GNCTD Act 1991:** The GNCTD Act 1991 was passed to supplement the constitutional provisions relating to the **Assembly and the Council of Ministers** in the national capital. The act outlines few important provisions such as:
  - The powers of the Assembly.
  - The discretionary powers enjoyed by the LG.
  - Duties of the Chief Minister with respect to the need to furnish information to the LG.

Salient features of the NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021:

- **Amendment of four clauses:** The NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill mainly aims to amend four clauses of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 (GNCTD Act 1991). They are,
  - **Section 21:** This section deals with the restrictions on laws passed by the Legislative Assembly concerning certain matters.
    - The Bill provides that the term "government" referred to in any law made by the Legislative Assembly will imply Lieutenant Governor (LG).
  - **Section 24 –** This section deals with assent to Bills passed by the Legislative Assembly. The LG will reserve the bills for the consideration of the President in a few matters. It includes bills that diminish the powers of the High Court of Delhi, the President directed the LG to reserve a bill, etc.
    - The NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill requires the LG **to reserve bills** for the President that **incidentally cover any of the matters outside the purview** of the powers of the Legislative Assembly.
  - **Section 33-** It mentions that the Legislative Assembly will make rules to regulate the procedure and conduct of business in the Assembly.
    - The 2021 NCT bill states that such rules must be consistent with the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Lok Sabha.
  - **Section 44 – It deals with the conduct of business.** Accordingly, all executive decisions taken by the elected government should be under the LG's name.
    - The 2021 bill empowers the LG to specify his suggestions on certain matters. His opinions have to be taken before making any executive action on decisions of the Minister/ Council of Ministers.

Need for amendments:

- **Structural issues between LG and government:** Frequent tussles have been witnessed between the Delhi government and the LG of Delhi since 2015.
- **Lack of clarity:** The primary reason behind it was the lack of clarity over Article 239AA. The proviso of Article 239AA (4) seems to give primacy to LG. Using this, allegedly the LG was able to undermine the will of the elected government.
- **Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India case 2018:** The Bill seeks to give effect to the 2018 judgement and implement the verdict. In the Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India case 2018, the Supreme Court defined the limits of LG's discretionary powers. The important points of that judgement were,
  - LG is **bound by the aid and advice of the council of ministers** except in subjects of land, public order and police.
  - **Executive decisions do not need the concurrence of the Lieutenant General.** Further, the court also held that the LG has no powers to overrule the decisions of the elected government.
  - The difference of opinion has to be referred to the president under Article 239AA (4) provision.

- ▪ The Lieutenant Governor cannot act mechanically and refer every decision to the president.
        - ▪ Only genuine cases of public interest can be referred to the President.
        - ▪ Before referring a bill to the President, the LGhas to consider the principles of collaborative federalism, the concept of constitutional governance, objectivity, etc.
    - o Executive power rests with the council of ministers of NCT, Delhi. The union government has no overruling powers with respect to the executive powers.
- **Cooperative federalism**: The new Bill is also intended to promote cooperative federalism between the centre and the state.
- **Addressing the ambiguities:** The Bill would address the ambiguities in the interpretation of legislative provisions.

Implications of NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021

- **Reducing the legitimacy of the elected government:** Equating the LG with the government simply undermines the legitimacy of the elected government thereby, disrespecting representative democracy.
    - o **Curtail the autonomy:** The bill empowers LG to specify certain matters on which his opinion must be taken. This can curtail the autonomy that any elected government legitimately requires for governance.
- **Against the supreme court interpretation in the Delhi v. LG case:** The bill **goes** against the spirit of the 2018 verdict. The provisions such as getting the compulsory opinion from the LG are against the verdict.
- **Against the representative form of government:** The NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill restricts the Delhi government from inquiring into executive matters. The Delhi assembly at present is examining multiple issues ranging from riots to the environment.
- **Setback for full statehood:** The NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill if passed would be a huge setback for Delhi's quest for full statehood as the LG gets precedence to the Delhi government.
- **Distort the federal equilibrium**: Providing excess powers to LG can also distort the federal equilibrium. The centre can use this bill as a precedent to curtail the powers of other states in the future.

Way Forward

- **Justice D Y Chandrachud's note**: The new bill should be reconsidered in the light of Justice D Y Chandrachud's note in the 2018 verdict: "In a democratic form of government, the real power must subsist in the elected arms of the state".
- **Discussion between the centre and government:** This will help in the eradication of unconstitutional and undemocratic provisions.
- **Cooperation between state and centre government**: Apart from that, the government at the centre and state must cooperate to make sure that LG can discharge its

constitutional function. At the same time, they need to avoid LG; so hedoesn't become a hindrance to development.

Criminal conspiracy laws

Syllabus: GS II- Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions

In news: Recently, the Delhi High Court granted bail to a climate activist in the Greta Thunberg toolkit case. The court dismissed the criminal conspiracy charges filed by Delhi police due to a lack of evidence.

The recent case on the law of criminal conspiracy

- **Greta Thunberg toolkit Case:** It was related to the violence committed during the farmer's protest on January 26. The Delhi Police arrested a Climate Activist in India related to the tool kit case.
  - The police claimed that the climate activist was the editor of "toolkit Google doc" and a "key conspirator" in the toolkit formulation and distribution.
- **Charges of police:** Delhi Police accused the activist under section 120B (Criminal Conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Section 124A of IPC (sedition).
  - The police claimed the Activist and others were the local collaborators in the conspiracy for inciting disaffection and accelerating the violence.
- **High court's response:** But the Delhi high court rejected the Delhi Police accusations and granted her bail. The court mentioned that the police lacked evidence to prove her conspiracy charges.
- The Court further held that interaction with people of **doubtful credentials is not an offense.** Apart from that the court also held that the authorities can not consider inferences (prior assumptions) as evidence.

- The Police also claimed the Poetic Justice Foundation (PJF) as a key conspirator. (Poetic Justice Foundation is responsible for pro-Khalistani activities). The police also accused the PJF of waging a "social, economical and cultural war against India".
- The Delhi Police claimed a Climate Activist in India as the editor of "toolkit Google doc" and a "key conspirator" in the toolkit formulation and distribution. The Delhi Police arrested the activist and issued a non-bailable warrant against two other persons.

The criminal conspiracy law in India:

- **IPC:** In India, criminal conspiracy falls under Section 120 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
  - Section 120A of IPC defines criminal conspiracy.
  - Section 120B of IPC prescribes punishments for criminal conspiracy.
- **Definition:** It is defined as an "agreement" between two or more persons to commit a criminal offense. For an offense to be classified as a criminal offense, certain conditions have to be satisfied. They are,
  - There must be two or more persons indulged in a criminal offense.

- o Even if the actual offense has not been committed, an **agreement alone is necessary and sufficient to punish the person.**
- o The agreement has to be either related to committing an illegal act or a legal act committed through illegal means.

The Toolkit Case
What is a toolkit?

- A toolkit is a set of essential guidelines or suggestions to get something done. The contents of the toolkit differ depending upon the activity. For example, the recent self-regulation toolkit by OTT platforms for self-regulation.
- A toolkit is also used during protests. It contains pieces of information to help the protesters to promote their campaign and to become popular as much as possible.
- During the anti-CAA protests, a toolkit suggested places to hold protests, Twitter hashtags to use, and other similar guides were shared on social media.

What is the Greta Thunberg toolkit case?

- Greta Thunberg is an 18-year-old Swedish environmental activist. She s**hared a toolkit on Twitter during the anti-farm law protests.** The toolkit suggested few activities like creating a Twitter storm and protesting outside Indian embassies, etc. Due to severe criticism, the activist deleted the tweet within a few minutes. However, it had already got circulated on social media.
- The Cyber Cell of Delhi Police filed an FIR against unknown people for creating and spreading the toolkit.

- **Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act**: Initially, during Colonial rule, a conspiracy was considered a civil offense. But the **Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1913 changed** the conspiracy as a criminal offense. This was used by the British to handle the Revolutionary leaders of India. The famous few cases were,
    - o **Kakori Conspiracy Case (1925):** The case was framed against Hindustan Republican Association for train robbery. The revolutionaries were arrested and tried in court.
    - o **Lahore Conspiracy Case (1931):** This case was framed for the murder of JP Saunders, a British police officer. The case was filed against Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Rajguru, and Chandrashekhar Azad. Except Azad, all were caught and punished with the death sentence. Azad got killed in an encounter later on.

The observations made by various courts on the criminal conspiracy law

- **Bimbadhar Pradhan vs. state of Orissa case 1956:** The court held that based on sufficient evidence the court can even convict one person alone for criminal conspiracy.
- **Brij Bhushan vs the state of Delhi and Romesh Thapar vs the State of Madras:** In these cases, the court held that "public order" was not an enumerated exception to the right to

free speech, and that a law that restricted speech on the ground that it would disturb the public order was unconstitutional.

- **Kedar Nath Singh vs the state of Bihar:** The Supreme Court has taken decision on the constitutionality of Section 124A. It upheld the constitutionality of sedition, but limited its application to "acts involving intention or tendency to create disorder, or disturbance of law and order, or incitement to violence".

- **Balwant Singh vs the State of Punjab:** The Supreme Court acquitted persons from charges of sedition for shouting slogans such as "Khalistan Zindabaad" and "Raj Karega Khalsa" after Indira Gandhi's assassination.

- **State of H.P vs Krishan lal case:** The Court held that the criminal conspiracy consists of a **meeting of minds** for agreeing to do an offence. The court defined **Meeting of Minds** as the persons involved in the conspiracy were well aware of the objective and intention behind the conspiracy.

- **Param Hans Yadav Vs State of Bihar case 1987:** The court observed the difficulties in producing evidence for the charges of conspiracy. Establishing the link between the different chain of events was the only way to prove the conspiracy.

- **State of Tamil Nadu vs Nalini case:** If a person has knowledge about the conspiracy, then it would not make him a conspirator. The court also held that providing shelter to the main accused is not considered as evidence of the conspiracy. A meeting of minds will be required to prove the conspiracy.

The need to reform the Criminal Conspiracy law

- **Law commission report:** The law commission in one of its reports mentions the need to reform the criminal conspiracy laws. They are,
  - Section 120A of IPC provides wide-sweeping powers to the government.
  - There is no need for criminal conspiracy legislation especially to punish for conspiracies related to petty offences.

- **General rule of crime:** The general rule of crime is not fulfilled by criminal conspiracy law. As a general rule, to constitute a crime, both **mens rea (guilty mind or intention)** and **actus rea (the guilty act)** must be involved. But Section 120 A of IPC punishes merely the guilty mind as a criminal offence.

- **Illegal ways to achieve lawful actions:** Section 120-A does not define what are illegal ways to achieve lawful actions. So, this provision is getting misused by the government to silence the critics.

- **Misuse of the law:** The recent case of climate activist is one of the many instances where the law on criminal conspiracy is getting misused.

- **Vague definition:** A constitutional rule that requires criminal laws to state explicitly and definitely which conduct is punishable. Criminal laws that violate this requirement are said to be void.

- **Relic of colonial legacy:** Section 124A is a relic of colonial legacy and unsuited in a democracy. It is a constraint on the legitimate exercise of constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech and expression.
- **UAPA is sufficient:** It aims at effective prevention of unlawful activities associations in India. Unlawful activity refers to any action taken by an individual or association intended to disrupt the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India.

Way forward:
- **Training of law enforcement authorities:** Law enforcement authorities need education on these laws to prevent the problem of misuse. The enforcement authorities might be trained regarding the application and non-application cases of criminal conspiracy cases.
- **Define illegal ways to do legal actions**: The government needs to define illegal ways to do legal actions. This will ensure clarity in the definition and check the misuse to a great extent.
- **Removing petty crimes from Section 120A:** Further, the government should implement the suggestion of the Law Commission by removing petty crimes from Section 120A of IPC.
  - **Criminal Law Amendment Act:** The government can consider rolling back the conspiracy to a civil offence. As it was the practice prior to the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1913.
  - **Encourage constructive criticisms:** It is high time for the government to encourage constructive criticisms and amend Section 120A. This will ensure the midline of encouraging healthy debates and punishing the wrong ones in one go.

Measuring Ease of Living

Syllabus – GS II- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

In News

Recently, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs released the final rankings of the Ease of Living Index (EoLI) 2020.

About Ease of Living Index
- It is an assessment tool that evaluates the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development. It was first launched in 2019.
- The Indian EOL Index is similar to the **Global Liveability Ranking** published annually by the Economist Intelligent Unit that assesses which locations around the world provide the best or worst living conditions.

Features of the Ease of Living Index:
- **Aim**- It provides a comprehensive understanding of participating cities across India,based on the **quality of life, economic-ability of a city, and its sustainability and resilience.**

- **Criteria for indices**- It examines the outcomes that lead to existing living conditions through pillars of Quality of Life, Economic Ability, Sustainability, spanning across 13 categories of -**Education, Health, Housing and Shelter, WASH and SWM, Mobility, Safety and Security, Recreation, Level of Economic Development, Economic Opportunities, Environment, Green Spaces, and Buildings, Energy Consumption, and City Resilience**, that account for 70% of the overall outcome.
- **Citizen's participation**- The assessment also incorporates the residents' view on the services provided by city administration through a **Citizen Perception Survey** which holds a weightage of 30%.
- **Good governance**- Learnings gathered from these indices can help the **government identify gaps, tap into potential opportunities, and increase efficiency in local governance** to improve the lives of citizens and fulfill broader development outcomes.
- **Knowledge partner**- The framework for these assessments was prepared by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation **with the Institute for Competitiveness** as the knowledge partner.

Highlights of Report
- The rankings under **Ease of Living Index 2020** were announced for 111 cities that participated in the assessment exercise that was conducted in 2020. The analysis categorizes them into:
  - **Million+ populated cities** (those with a population of more than a million) - Bengaluru emerged as the top performer in the **Million+ category**, followed by Pune, Ahmedabad,   Chennai, Surat, Navi Mumbai,   Coimbatore, Vadodara, Indore, and Greater Mumbai.
  - **Less than Million populated cities** (those with a population of less than a million) along with all the cities under the Smart Cities Program. In the **Less than Million category**, Shimla was ranked the highest in ease of living, followed by Bhubaneshwar, Silvassa,   Kakinada,   Salem, Vellore, Gandhinagar, Gurugram, Davangere, and Tiruchirappalli.

Significance of the Ease of Living Index
- **Better monitoring of developmental programs**- Monitoring progress in achieving SDGs is very important. The Index provides an annual database for achieving the three urban-oriented SDGs. The urban missions like the Smart City mission which are helping to achieve three urban-oriented Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely — **SDG 1, 6, and 11** can be monitored with the index.
- **Active citizen participation**- Citizens require access to authentic information based on which they can hold the governments accountable and actively participate in day-to-day governance. This calls for an **authentic, reliable and robust database** and urban information system with its granularity and spatiality at the city level.

- **Competitive Federalism**- EOL Index provides a **good comparative** benchmark to promote healthy competition among cities.
- **Promoting planned urbanization**- Urban Missions like Smart Cities Mission, Digital India and Housing for all get better feedback with such indicators. Ease of Living Index helps in **data-driven urban policy** development.

Issues associated with the Index

- **Incomplete information**- Urban India is very large and diversified in terms of size, number, culture and administration. **"One size fits all"** does not work for our cities. In this context, EOL Index despite providing a comparative picture doesn't indicate the ground realities of Indian cities.
  - **For example**- It does not take into account the level of **urban decentralization** in terms of finances, functions and capacities.
- **Poor performance of top cities** - It is also very important to note that Bengaluru, which is on top of most million-plus population cities for EOI, has obtained only a score of 67 out of 100. The corresponding score is as low as 61 in the case of Shimla, that ranks highest among cities with a population less than one million. Both cities need to improve their performance in terms of **delivery of services and governance**.
- **Exclusive Growth**- EOL Index provides information at the overall city level. The proportion of **slums and low-income** households average about **25 percent of the total population.** These city-level indices do not reflect the level of services and governance in low-income areas.

Steps taken by the government

- **AMRUT**- Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) is aimed at providing basic civic amenities like **water supply, sewerage, urban transport, parks as to improve the quality of life** for all, especially, the poor and the disadvantaged.
- **HRIDAY**- The National Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY), a central sector scheme of the Government of India, was launched on 21st January 2015 with the aim of bringing together **urban planning, economic growth and heritage conservation** in an inclusive manner & with the objective of preserving the heritage character of the City.
- **Swachh Bharat Mission**- To accelerate the efforts to **achieve universal sanitation coverage** and to put the focus on sanitation, the Prime Minister of India had launched the Swachh Bharat Mission.
- **National Health Mission**- The NHM envisages the achievement of u**niversal access to equitable, affordable & quality health care services** that are accountable and responsive to people's needs. The main programmatic components include Health System Strengthening, Reproductive-Maternal- Neonatal-Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A), and Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases.

- **Smart Cities mission**- 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 l**ocal development and harnessing technology** as a means to create smart outcomes for cities.

- **Power for all**- Power for All (24x7 PFA) is a Joint Initiative of the Government of India (GoI) and State Governments with the objective to provide 24x7 **power available to all households, industry, commercial businesses, public needs**, any other electricity consuming entity and adequate power to agriculture farm holdings.

- **Housing for all**- The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) Programme launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MoHUPA), in Mission mode envisions provision of Housing for All by 2022. The Mission seeks to address the housing requirement of **urban poor including slum dwellers through the following program verticals**:
    o Slum rehabilitation of Slum Dwellers with participation of private developers using land as a resource
    o Promotion of Affordable Housing for weaker section through credit linked subsidy
    o Affordable Housing in Partnership with Public & Private sectors
    o Subsidy for beneficiary-led individual house construction /enhancement.

- **PM Jan Dhan Yojana** - Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) is National Mission for Financial Inclusion to ensure **access to financial services**, namely, basic savings & deposit accounts, remittance, credit, insurance, pension in an affordable manner. Under the scheme, a basic savings bank deposit (BSBD) account can be opened in any bank branch or Business Correspondent (Bank Mitra) outlet, by persons not having any other account.

- **Digital India** - Digital India is a program to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The focus is on being transformative to realize **IT (Indian Talent) + IT (Information Technology) = IT (India Tomorrow).**

- **PM Kaushal Vikas yojana** - The objective of this Skill Certification Scheme is to enable a large number of Indian youths to take up **industry-relevant skill training** that will help them in securing a better livelihood. Individuals with prior learning experience or skills will also be assessed and certified under the **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).**

Conclusion

Urban India needs a much more disaggregated index at the ward or zonal level to prepare local area action plans and to promote citizens' participation in the urban development process. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has announced a **National Urban Digital Mission** that will streamline and coordinate various efforts of the Ministry to support and enable urban local bodies in India. This mission may help in further improving the data collection and analysis for the EOI Index in near future.

Institutionalizing Lateral Entry

Syllabus- **GS II- Role of civil services in a democracy.**

In News: Recently, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has issued an advertisement. It is seeking applications for lateral entry in 30 government posts including joint-secretary level, director level postings. The recent advertisement from the UPSC has stirred the debate about lateral entry into civil services.

Background

- The word lateral means **'from the side or sideways'**. Hence, lateral entry involves the appointment of specialists from the private sector at middle and senior-level positions in the Central government.
- The lateral entry appointments are done on a **contractual basis.** Since, it is not a permanent post like regular government jobs, it will **dilute the monopoly of bureaucrats in the government departments.**
- The process was adopted as **numerous agencies and groups had recommended** it in the past.
- Earlier in India, experts have been brought by the Government of India, at specific posts such as the **Reserve Bank of India, Chief Economic Advisor, NITI Aayog** among others.
    - o But till now it has not become an **institutionalized mechanism of recruitment**. E.g. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Raghuram Rajan, E. Sreedharan.
    - o The Government of India **recruited nine joint secretaries from the private sector i**n 2019.

Agencies that have supported the idea of lateral entry

- **The Constitution Review Commission recommendation of 2002:** The Commission supported the lateral entry. It recommended that there is a "Need to specialise some of the generalists" by infusing new talents from the private sector.
- **The 2nd Administrative Reform Commission recommendation of 2005:** The 2nd ARC recommended an institutionalized, transparent process for lateral entry at both the Central and State levels.
- **Other such recommendations:** Eminent institutions and groups have also supported the idea of lateral entry into civil services.
    - o The NITI Aayog in its three-year Action Agenda supported this idea.
    - o Similarly, the **Sectoral Group of Secretaries (SGoS) on Governance** in their 2017 report also supported the idea of lateral entry into public services.

Need of Lateral Entry

- **Changing role of the state:** The civil services were designed for a time when the state was all powerful. However, after the market-led reforms of 1991, the role of the state has undergone changes.
    - o The state has been compelled to cede more space to markets. Therefore, it becomes more critical for the government to ascertain the impact its policy

decisions have on various stakeholders such as the private sector, non-profits, and general public, i.e., those who have experienced government from the outside.

- **Shortage of Officers:** There is a shortage of officers across states. For instance, The Baswan Committee has shown that Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have a deficit of 75-100 officers. This shortage has a direct bearing on the implementation of socio-economic policies and programmes.

- **Promote Specialization:** Career bureaucrats, due to their frequent transfers and postings remain generalists in nature. Along with it, lack of commensurate incentives prevents them from gaining specialization in their respective domains. In the wake of changing political and economic scenarios domain-experts are required.

- **Burden to Exchequer:** Increasing recruitment through the formal process acts as a burden on the exchequer through salaries, allowances and pension.

- **Competitive Bureaucracy:** It will push the career bureaucrats to improve their efficiency at work. Thus, it will ensure meritocracy in the bureaucracy.

- **Incentivize Ideas:** Bringing in professionals from the private sector would bring in fresh ideas and promote innovative solutions to the pressing problems.

- **Increasing complexity in governance:** Emergence of new issues like globalization, digitalization of governance, financial frauds, cybercrime, organized crime, terrorism, climate-change among others requires specialists and domain expertise.

- **Recommendations:** In 2005, the 2nd Administrative Commission Report had recommended lateral entry at both central and state levels. The same was also previously advocated by Surinder Nath Committee (2003) and Hota Committee (2004).

Challenges associated with lateral entry

- **Adverse Working Environment:** Performance of the lateral entrants will depend on the enabling environment to a large extent. Lateral entrants from the private sector and academia may not work well with the bureaucracy. Differences in work culture, turf wars and systemic inertia may reduce the efficiencies at work and defeat the purpose.

- **Lack Field Experience:** The width and depth of field experience of a career civil servant may not be available to a new lateral entrant. Bridging the gap between policy-making and ground-level implementation will be a challenging task for the lateral entrants.

- **Scope of Nepotism and Corruption:** Interests and motivation vary from person to person. Therefore, short-term entry of officers through lateral entry may lead to corrupt practices. Secondly, a lack of properly defined procedures may give way to nepotism.

- **Piecemeal Measure:** It is considered to be a piecemeal effort to deal with a systemic problem. Bureaucracy needs major overhauling with systemic reforms, such as steps to reduce politicization of bureaucracy, revamping civil services training etc.

- **Quality of Lateral Entrants:** The recent lateral entry initiative would recruit professionals for only 3 years with remuneration not competitive with the private sector. Thus, the terms of recruitment may not be rewarding enough to attract the best of talents.

- **Transparency in Recruitment:** Political interference in the Selection process may occur and it may promote Nepotism and Spoils System (an arrangement that employed and promoted civil servants who were friends and supporters of the political group in power).

CIVIL SERVICES: THE WAY FORWARD.
- **Maintaining a balance:** Too much induction from lateral entry should be avoided so that a fine balance between government officials and lateral entrants can be maintained.
- **"13-point roster" system:** The "13-point roster" system should be implemented in the reservation. This will ensure collective vacancies are not portrayed as numerous single post advertisements.
- **Prior consultation work:** A greater weightage can be given for 'prior consultation work' with the government. As these people will face less difficulty in assimilation with the bureaucratic structure.

Lateral entry will bring in much-needed outside experience. However, institutionalized lateral entry should be complemented with allowing regular IAS officers to specialize in sectors overtime. This will enable them to compete on an equal footing with lateral entrants. It will also help the government to have the best of both youth and experience and take the system closer to the goal of "minimum government, maximum governance".

Navigating the complexities: QUAD
Syllabus – GS II-Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests
In News: Prime Minister addressed the first summit of the leaders of the **QUAD (Quadrilateral Framework). The meeting was hosted by the USA on a virtual platform.**

Background
- **About** - The **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue** (**QSD**, also known as the **Quad**) is an informal strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan, Australia and India.
- The dialogue began informally as a response to the **2004 Boxing Day tsunami**, with the US, India, Japan and Australia coordinating their relief efforts in devastated region. However, it failed to take off initially due to hesitation among the four nations and objections by China.
- **Revival of Quad** - In **2017**, India, USA, Australia and **Japan focused on revival of "QUAD"** Coalition to develop a new strategic alliance to keep Indo-Pacific region free of any assertion, especially by China. Since then, QUAD has **taken several steps to promote economic and strategic** ties.
    o For example, the **2+2 framework** is particularly important feature to strengthen ties as all of the Quad nations maintain 2+2-level meetings with one another.

Significance of Quad for India

- **Defense-related spending:** China's spending on defense ($261 b) is more than the collective spending of India ($71.1 b), Japan ($ 47.6 b), Australia ($25.9 b). In the times of **COVID pandemic and lack of resources** associated with lockdowns, partnership with each other will provide heavyweight to the alliance.

- **Sustainable Development in the Indian Ocean Region:** India holds the responsibility to act as the **net security provider** in the Indian Ocean region. India along with likeminded countries needs to counter **China's String of Pearls strategy and 'debt-trap'** diplomacy in the region and promote sustainable development in the region.

- **Strengthen Act East policy:** Joining Quad group will strengthen and supplement India's Act East policy which in turn will boost **development of north-east region** of India.

- **Issue-based alliance-** India has moved beyond non-alignment towards an issue-based alliance with no formal agreements in recent times. Therefore, joining Quad will be in line with the **present foreign policies** of the government.

- **Countering China**- The Quad is one of the platforms for India to seek cooperation from member nations on issues such as ensuring **its territorial integrity and sovereignty** and peaceful resolution of border disputes.

- **Post-COVID-19 global order**- The pandemic has brought about a radical transformation internationally which involves effect on **global supply chains, social infrastructure like health and education systems and overall economies of countries**. QUAD can help member nations to successfully recover from the pandemic through coordinated responses and India can secure its place in the new world order.

- **Convergence and cooperation -** India has converging interests with other Quad members on a variety of important issues such as **connectivity and infrastructure development, climate change, counter-terrorism; cyber and maritime security; reform of multilateral institutions** etc. Support from Quad members on these issues can go a long way for India in realizing its multi-dimensional goals.

Challenges for India

- **The vulnerability of India to China-** India is the only Quad member that is not in the west Pacific. Further, it is also the only country that shares a **non-demarcated land border** with China. So, any developments will have more impact on India-China relation. For example, the recent **Ladakh stand-off.**

- **De-stabilizing the Peace in South-Asia**- India is facing a 2-front challenge between China and Pakistan. The recent acceptance of the **Ceasefire Agreement with Pakistan** and the **Disengagement Agreement with China** over border stand-off brought some stability to the relationship. But joining Quad now might act as an incentive for China to violate the agreement and Pakistan, which is already having a nexus with China might also turn hostile.

- **Against Non-alignment Principle:** India is abandoning its old age tradition of non-alignment in favor of an **alliance with the US, Japan and Australia** in order to counter the China threat.
- **Ambiguity in objectives:** The Quad lacks a **coherent purpose, strategic objective and an institutional framework** which clearly states its long-term goals. A relatively new forum, the Quad still lacks the track record and **credibility of a formal alliance**.
- **Individual visions of the Indo-Pacific:** Within the Indo-Pacific, Australia's and Japan's priorities lie in the Pacific region, while India is primarily focused in the Indian Ocean region.
- **Unequal partners**: The four members of the Quad do not have the **same levels of financial resources, global status, strategic awareness and military capabilities**. This creates an imbalanced partnership where burden falls unequally on partners.
- **Antagonizing China**: Internationally Quad isperceived as an **Anti-China coalition**. Thus, member nation's relations with China may deteriorate as they proceed to increase their engagement with the Quad related initiatives targeted against China.
- **Inclusion of other regional players** - There has been consensus regarding support for **ASEAN's centrality** as well as the outlook on the Indo-Pacific, but their inclusion into it will be a debatable issue, due to Chinese influence over them.

First Virtual Summit of National Leaders

Priorities of Quad as discussed in the Virtual Summit

- **The Quad Vaccine Partnership**- "Quad" partners decided to launch a landmark partnership to further accelerate the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, Quad leaders are taking shared action necessary to **expand safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing in 2021**, and will work together to strengthen and assist countries in the Indo-Pacific with vaccination, in close coordination with the existing relevant **multilateral mechanisms including WHO and COVAX**.
- **The Quad Climate Working Group**- A new Quad Climate Working Group focused on cooperation on **climate mitigation, adaptation, resilience, technology, capacity-building, and climate finance** will be established.
- **The Quad Critical and Emerging Technology Working Group**- Quad leaders recognize that a **free, open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific** requires that critical and emerging technology is governed and operates according to shared interests and values.
  - o In that spirit, a Critical and Emerging Technology Working Group will be convened. This will **facilitate coordination on technology standards development**, including between our national technology standard bodies and working with a broad range of partners.

Conclusion

From its ad-hoc beginnings as the **Tsunami Core Group** to the present day, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has found tentative footing among its members and identified a workable agenda for the years ahead.

Learning from the recent developments in the Pacific, refocusing the **diplomatic efforts** of the Quad towards other smaller partners across the region, including the **island nations of the South Pacific**, is critical.

Not only does it reinforce a **sense of strategic clarity** for members of the Quad outlook, it also offers an important opportunity to bring the concerns of small and micro maritime states to the fore of the Indo-Pacific diplomatic agenda.

Afghan Peace Process and India

Syllabus: **GS II- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests**

In News: The Joe Biden administration has proposed a new peace initiative (plan) to the Afghan government and the Taliban, seeking to bring violence to a halt and form an interim government.

Background:

- **New peace initiative:** The Joe Biden administration has proposed a **new peace initiative that has kept open the possibility of delay in withdrawal of troops, a more inclusive and unified approach, and immediate action.**

USA's *new peace initiative*:

- **Delay in withdrawal of troops: The plan has kept open the possibility that the 2500 odd US troops deployed in Afghanistan might stay on for a while. Earlier US had promised to withdraw all troops by May 2021.**
- **Immediate action: Washington will be pressing the Taliban to accept an immediate agreement to reduce violence for 90 days that will provide space for the peace initiative.**
- **Afghan peace process:** The Afghan peace process comprises the proposals and negotiations that were aimed at ending the ongoing civil war between the Taliban and Afghanistan government.
- **Afghanistan Reconciliation:** Moreover, the continuation of Zalmay Khalilzad as the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation indicated that the US wants to proceed to a final settlement based on the Doha agreement.
- **Security situation: T**he withdrawal of the US from the state will worsen the security situation, and it would help the Taliban to make rapid gains.

The dilemma faced by the US

- **US's objective:** The U.S. maintains that its objective is to bring about a just and durable peace through political negotiations. It wants Afghanistan to remain united, sovereign, and democratic.
- **A contradiction of statements**: But withdrawing troops from Afghanistan to cut its expenses is a contradiction to its above-stated objectives.
- **Pakistan's terms:** Also, the major problem for the US is that it cannot withdraw from Afghan without accepting Pakistan's terms.
- **Acceptance by afghan patriots:** But acceding to Pakistan's terms will not be accepted by Afghan patriots who want freedom for Afghanistan to choose its political direction.
- **Biden's view:** Mr. Biden is of the view that Pakistan is strategically more important to the U.S. than Afghanistan.
- **Power-sharing arrangement:** Thus, instead of pressuring Pakistan, the USA is seeking Afghan support for a power-sharing arrangement with the Taliban. It would help to enable the exit of U.S. soldiers.
- **Inclusive Government:** The U.S. Government is advocating a **new, 'inclusive government'** in Afghanistan. It supports an immediate 50% share for the Taliban in an interim government, as a quid pro quo for a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.
- **Consultative group:** Ghani is now asked to work closely with a broad consultative group to build consensus for negotiations with the Taliban on power-sharing, governance, and essential supporting principles.

The implications for India

- **Reconnecting to Afghanistan:** Invites to prominent elders and senior Afghan leaders by India helped it to reconnect with the political forces in Afghanistan.
- **Support of afghan:** India's efforts in Afghanistan have attracted support from the Afghan people and government.
- **Expectation of solidarity:** The patriotic Afghan people have always supported their erstwhile leaders such as Ex-President Najibullah, who are committed to building the nation. And these leaders in turn look to India as a friend and expect solidarity.
- **Indo- Afghan relations:** In the late 1990s, when no country was willing to help the democratic forces in Afghanistan. India and Iran voiced their support. A similar situation is arising.
- **Settling disputes:** India must step up to assist materially those who want to defend the Afghan republic. This will also mark the arrival of India as the superpower and as an arbiter in settling international disputes.
- **Regional connectivity and related economic concerns:** India's investments of billions in Afghanistan and plans to connect with Central Asia would be jeopardized if Taliban, being supported by Pakistan, gains ground.
- **Regional instability:** Sudden American withdrawal might create a civil war-like situation as various regional stakeholders (China, Russia, and Pakistan) will try to reshape the

battlefield in accordance with their own strategic priorities, which will hamper India's long gestated efforts at building Afghanistan.

- **Isolation of India:** India's displeasure with the Taliban is explicit and India was supported by the US on this, but post US announcement of withdrawal most of the other stakeholders, like Russia and the US, have simply ignored and isolated India and have engaged with Taliban and its sponsors in Pakistan in finding a solution.

India's policy towards Afghanistan:

- **Re-building indigenous Afghan capacity:** India's policy towards Afghanistan is to help rebuild Afghanistan's infrastructure and institutions, education, and technical assistance in order to rebuild indigenous Afghan capacity in different areas.
- **Peace and reconciliation:** India is encouraging an **Afghan-led, Afghan-owned** broad-based and inclusive process of peace and reconciliation and advocating the need for a sustained and long-term commitment to Afghanistan by the international community.
- **Reconstruction and development:** India has inaugurated the **Afghan-India friendship dam,** earlier known as Salma Dam. India agreed to implement some important new projects such as the **Shahtoot Dam** and the drinking water project for Kabul.
- **Strengthening democratic institutions in Afghanistan:** India has focused on strengthening democratic institutions in Afghanistan through various efforts like inaugurating the newly built Afghan Parliament.
- **Soft power:** India is focusing on soft power methods that involve winning hearts and minds. India's contribution to the development of cricket in Afghanistan is such an example.
- **No military intervention:** India is not in favour of using the military in Afghanistan. It was reflected in the recent rejection of the USA proposal to India to intervene militarily. India is in favour of no boots in Afghanistan.
- **Mutual sharing and solidarity:** The development partnership of India-Afghanistan is based on the principles of mutual sharing and solidarity which is branched into five founding **modalities of development cooperation** that includes capacity building, trade and investment, technology cooperation, and others.
- **India's position on Taliban**
  - India refused to recognize the Taliban regime of 1996-2001 and rather supported the '**Norther Alliance'** in fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan.
  - India has long held the position of **dealing only with the elected government** in Kabul and has always considered the Taliban a terrorist organisation backed by Pakistan.
  - Recently, India participated in the inaugural session in intra-Afghan peace talks after being invited by the Qatari government on the recommendation of the Afghan government.

Significance of peace in Afghanistan:

- **Natural resources:** Afghanistan is known for its geo-strategic importance and abundance of natural resources. Afghanistan has an estimated 1 trillion USD of untapped resources according to a joint report of The Pentagon and US Geological Survey.
- **Security:** Afghanistan, becoming a Center of radical ideology and violence again would affect Pakistan and inevitably reach India.
- **Connectivity**: The most important role of Afghanistan is always considered as India's gateway to Central Asia. For instance, connectivity with Afghanistan and further with **Central Asia** have been primarily the reasons for India's engagement with Iran to develop Chabahar port.
- **Energy ambitions: T**o address its energy needs andto sustain its economic growth, pipelines from Iran and Central Asia would be extremely important. India sees Afghanistan as an essential component of the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline.
- **Strengthening regional foothold and trade**: In the case of trade, Afghanistan can help India export its products to Europe, gaining foreign exchange. The railway line from **Chabahar to Zahedan** in Afghanistan envisages connecting New Delhi with Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Europe.

The way forward

- **Establish political and commercial relations:** The relationship between India and Afghanistan is not limited to the governments, but has its foundations in the historical contacts and exchanges between the people.
- **Enhancing connectivity:** The strategic location of Afghanistan as a connection to Central Asia and West Asia is important for Indian efforts to establish stronger and more direct commercial and political relations with Central Asia.
- **Multi-dimensional importance:** The importance of Afghanistan is multi-dimensional. Also, India understands that a peaceful Afghanistan will help in a peaceful India and South Asia in a world that is threatening to break into a war anytime.

Murky waters of Brahmaputra

Syllabus: GS II- India and its neighbourhood relations.

In News: The Chinese government's new five-year plan (2021-2025) has approved the construction of dams in the lower stretch of the Brahmaputra River (Yarlung Zangbo in China).

More on news:

- It is a matter of serious concern for the lower riparian states namely, India and Bangladesh. The move is expected to give China an edge in International diplomacy as it would gain substantial bargaining power post dam construction.

About the China's five-year plan for dams

- **Five-year plan:** The New Five-year plan approves the dams to be built on the lower reaches of the Brahmaputra river. The river is also known as Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet.
  - The lower reaches refer to the sections of the Brahmaputra river in Tibet before it flows into India.
- **Hydropower base:** The plan also calls for building a hydropower base on the lower reaches of the Brahmaputra river. Clean energy bases in the upper and lower reaches of the Jinsha River are also under the proposal (the upper course of the Yangtze River in western China).
- **Priority project**: The dam proposal is among the priority energy projects undertaken by the Chinese government in the next five years. Other projects under the draft five-year plan include "clean energy bases" in the upper and lower reaches of the Jinsha River. (the upper course of the Yangtze River in western China).
- **Change in river water exploitation:** It would be the first time that the lower stretch will witness such development of dams, marking a radical change in river water exploitation.
- **Construction of dams earlier:** China had earlier built dams on upper stretches of the river including Zangmu Dam in 2015. Three more dams at Dagu, Jiacha and Jeixu are currently under construction.

About Brahmaputra River and its Importance to India:
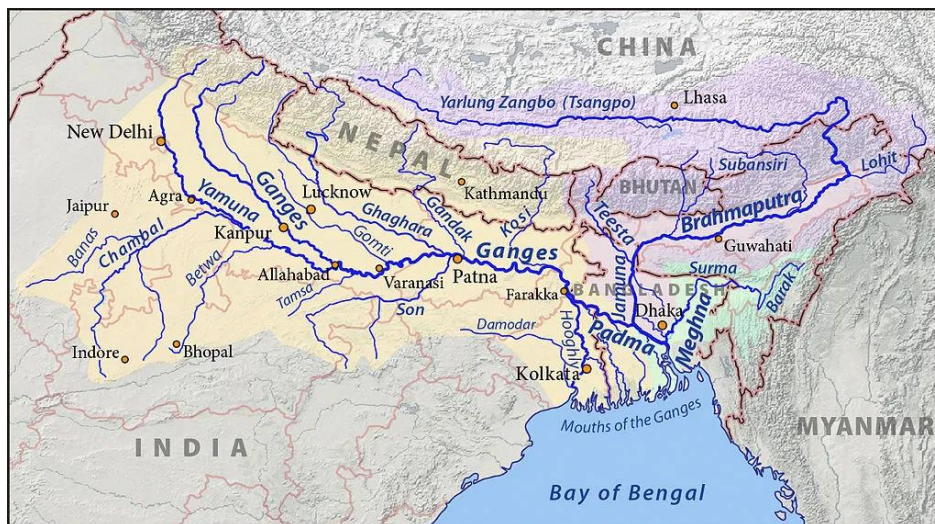
- **Brahmaputra River** also called Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet, Siang/ Dihang River in Arunachal Pradesh. It is a trans-boundary river that flows through Tibet, India, and Bangladesh.
- **Origin**: The river rises in the Chemayungdung Glacier in the Kailash Range in Tibet. It descends rapidly from Tibet forming a Grand Canyon and then flows eastward and reaches Namche Barwa. It then takes a U-turn and enters India in Arunachal Pradesh and known as Dihang.

- **Important Tributaries of River Brahmaputra:** The Siang flows down the Himalayas, enters the Assam valley. Here two other major tributaries, Dibang and Lohit join the Siang river. The culmination of all finally becomes the Brahmaputra.
  - o **Major left bank tributaries:** Burhi Dihing, Dhansari (South), Kailang, Lohit, Dibang
  - o **Major right bank tributaries:** Subansiri, Kameng, Manas, Sankosh, Teesta.
- **Significance of the river:**
  - o **Cultural significance:** Most rivers on the Indian subcontinent has female names. But this river has a rare male name that literally translates as 'Son of Brahma'. The river is also revered by Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists.
  - o **Residence of several species:** This region is home to several species of flora and fauna that are unique to this part of the world. For example, The Kaziranga National Park houses 15 mammalian species that are listed as threatened in the IUCN conservation list. Further, it hosts national Parks like the Kaziranga, Manas, and Kanchenjunga.
  - o **Water resource potential:** The Brahmaputra River and its tributaries carry more than 30% of the total water resource potential of India.
  - o **Economic significance:** The Brahmaputra River is also extremely important for livelihood and for transportation of people and materials in North East India. For instance, the residents of 22 districts in the Indian state of Assam rely on the Brahmaputra and its tributaries for their **livelihood**. The river system supports the subsistence agriculture of 66 million people.

Reasons behind China developing dams on the Brahmaputra

- **Developing clean energy:** The construction would help the country develop clean energy and curb the rising pollution levels. This would improve citizens' health and augment water security.
- **Fulfilling Paris agreement commitments:** The dam would also allow it to fulfil its international climate commitments under multilateral agreements like the Paris Agreement.
- **Water grabbing:** China's location of the upper riparian state would allow it to control water flow towards the lower riparian states (India and Brahmaputra). This will give greater bargaining power to China in international relations.
  - o Geo engineering experiments to trigger natural disasters such as floods, droughts and tornadoes can weaken an enemy in an event of war.
- **National interests:** Further, the project in the lower stretch is part of the country's significant planned investments in infrastructure for serving national interests.
  - o China's southern regions are water rich in comparison to the water stressed northern part and to solve that, it plans to link the major rivers in these regions through canals, aqueducts and other linking projects to ensure water security.

Rules or statues governing Brahmaputra water sharing

- **No binding agreements:** There is a lack of a cooperative framework for managing river systems in South Asia. There are no binding agreements between India and China on Brahmaputra water sharing.
- **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2002**: India and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2002 for the sharing of hydrological data.
  - Under this China agreed to share information about the discharge of water at three stations from June 1 to October 15 each year. This would improve planning and flood control in India during the monsoon region.
  - The two countries have even singed a MoU in 2013 regarding the sharing of water flow data
- Not sharing data: A unilateral stoppage in data sharing was seen from the Chinese side during the 2017 Doklam Standoff but data sharing resumed in 2018.

Impact of construction of Dams by Chinese on India

- **Regional political tensions:** China's large run-off from river dams can be easily converted into storage dams in the future. This can deprive water to India in dry seasons or flood it with water during the monsoon.
- **Polluting drinking water:** The ecological character of the river in lower courses gets deteriorated. This is proved by the Siang river (Brahmaputra's name in Arunachal) where after the reduction in water level, the river turned black with pollutants. This impacted the drinking water availability for the locals.
- **Reduction in agriculture productivity:** It may also negatively impact the food security and livelihood of people residing across the river.
- **Increase in disaster magnitude:** Dam construction by upper riparian states enhances the disaster's magnitude in lower riparian states.
- **Destabilise Himalayas:** Further, Himalayan region is highly sensitive to construction. Due to this, the probability of disasters will get enhanced if big dams are created by China. This was proved by the recent Uttarakhand floods and the 2015 Nepal earthquake.
- **Possibility of conflict along Arunachal Pradesh:** Managing this would be a complex task for India as it is already struggling to counter China along the eastern Ladakh region.

Challenges in bilateral Cooperation on dam construction

- **Rising mistrust between the countries:** The mistrust reached a new peak especially after the **nine-month-long military stand-off** along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Further, China was reluctant to share the correct information with India under the 2002 MoU.
  - Further, China in the past has rejected the claim of building Zangmu Dam on the Brahmaputra till 2010. But in 2010, China not only admitted the construction of the Zangmu Dam but also completed it in a much rapid phase.

- **Resentment of Sino-US relations are a barrier:** The growing closeness of Indo-U.S. relations and enhanced resentment of Sino- U.S. relations can act as a barrier in concluding a favourable water-sharing agreement.
- **International law of prior appropriation:** Prior appropriation of water rights is the legal doctrine that the first person to take a quantity of water from a water source for "beneficial use" (agricultural, industrial or household) has the right to continue to use that quantity of water for that purpose.
- **Emerging risks:** Emerging risks like climate change, extreme events, landslides, forest fires, and many other environmental threats pose new governance challenges.
- **China tries to encircle India using its neighbours:** It charges approximately $125,000 for the data it provides to India. On the other hand, it sends similar data to Bangladesh for free.

Way Forward

- **Multipurpose reservoir:** The construction of **a** multi-purpose reservoir in Arunachal Pradesh to offset the impact of the Chinese Dam should be done promptly. The proposed 9.2 BCM 'Upper Siang' project on the Siang river in Arunachal Pradesh will be able to take the excess load of water discharge. Further, it can even store water in case of any deficit.
- **Rational use of river water:** As water is a state subject, the riparian states in India should be encouraged to use Brahmaputra's water in a rational way to minimize future shortages.
- **Strengthening relations with Bangladesh:** India needs to re-strengthen its relationship with Bangladesh. India needs to finalise the Teesta river agreement and restore its image as a responsible upper riparian. By doing that, Bangladesh may also cooperate with India against China.
- **Bilateral talks:** The country should engage in bilateral talks and enter into a water-sharing agreement with China similar to the Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan. The new China-India water-sharing agreement should include provisions like,
    - o The treaty should regulate the amount of water to be released, preserve the quality of the water and the aquatic life.
    - o It should have a mechanism for water-sharing during times of droughts and abnormal weather.
    - o If necessary, the international community should also be involved.

We need a new **integrated river basin management**. This should address all the emerging challenges of water security and sustainability. Further, it should go beyond mere political cooperation of State government and involving the local people. Instead, it should focus on India's water needs and its management.

Leveraging the prowess of diaspora

Syllabus: GS II: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora.

In News: Global Indian Progressive Alliance, which represents more than a dozen and a half Indian diaspora organization from across the world, has demanded that the Indian government recognizes the right to peaceful protest.

Introduction

- Indian diaspora constitutes a major component of global diasporas and has evolved as a strategic asset for India in recent decades.
- It is recognized that there is a **convergence of Diaspora policy and Foreign policy** of a country due to the embedded role of Diaspora in the foreign affairs. And, India is no exception.
- The Diasporic communities have emerged as one of the **important elements of foreign policy.**
- They not only play a significant role in strengthening and promoting India's soft power diplomacy but also acts as an agent of catalyst in economic development in their host countries.

What Constitutes Indian Diaspora?

- In India, diaspora is mainly understood to constitute **Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) and Overseas Citizen of India (OCI).**
- PIO and OCI cardholders were merged under one category i.e., OCI in 2015.
- Indian diaspora includes one more category i.e., **SPIO (Stateless Person of Indian Origin).** These are those people who have no documents to substantiate their Indian origin. They are mainly found in Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

Changing Diasporic Policies: A historical perspective

- In the **Pre-independence period**, the focus of foreign policy was through the prism of British interests. However, the plight of Indians abroad was a major issue for the independence movement led by Indian National Congress. The Ghadar Movement, Azad Hind Fauz and Komagata Maru incident had political implications on India.
- **After independence**, there was a paradigm shift in the position of Diaspora policy as a result of India's foreign policy being guided by Nehruvian ideals of anti-imperialism and racial apartheid, respect for Sovereignty and non-alignment. Thus, Indian diaspora played very little role in the political and economic development of India.
- **After the end of the Cold War and LPG Reforms**, Indian government reviewed its Diaspora policy as Indian diaspora supported India in resolving the economic crisis through substantial investment and remittances. Thus, there was renewed focus on engagement with the Indian diaspora.
- However, **after 2014**, the Indian government had initiated major steps to leverage upon the Indian Diaspora for economic growth and also as part of its larger vision of cultural nationalism.

Distribution of Indian Diaspora
- India has the largest diaspora population in the world with 18 million people from the country living outside their homeland in 2020 as per the Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).
- India's diaspora is distributed across the United Arab Emirates (3.5 million), the United States of America (2.7 million) and Saudi Arabia (2.5 million).
- Other countries hosting large numbers of Indian migrants included Australia, Canada, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar and the United Kingdom.

Indian foreign policy and diasporic policies are inextricably linked to each other. Diasporas have played a significant role in shaping India's foreign relations. The implications have been both positive and negative for India.

Positive implications of diaspora in shaping India's foreign relations.
- **Promoting India's Soft Power:** Indian diaspora are deemed as 'Indian ambassadors' and they have played a significant role in creating a positive image of Brand India especially in the UK, USA, Canada, Gulf Countries and African countries.
- **Socio-Economic development:** The transfer of new ideas, knowledge, new skills and innovation between countries gets facilitated due to active participation of diaspora.
  - Indian diaspora sends economic remittances worth $78.6 billion, which assist in socio-economic development.
- **Diaspora Diplomacy:** Diasporas stupendous lobbying efforts iron out differences in the bilateral relations.
  - Example: lobbying efforts of Indian diaspora in the USA were laudable in relation with the cracking of the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, defeating the Burton Amendment and justifying India's nuclear tests in 1998 and the Kargil war in1999. Diaspora aggressively lobbied in favour of abrogation of Article 370.
- **Strengthening bilateral relations:** Long time presence of diaspora anchor bilateral relations. It provides tangible benefits as it becomes easier for the government to justify their cooperation in sensitive areas with India.
  - Example: Defence agreements between India-UAE, setting up of military facilities in Mauritius and Seychelles.
- **Political and economic influence:** Indian diaspora through their influential political and economic positions such as Kamala Harris as the Vice President of the USA, Rishi Sunak (Member of Parliament of UK), Satya Nadela (CEO of Microsoft), Sunder Pichai (CEO of Alphabet), etc., act as mediators and facilitators of international trade and investment, technology transfer and immigration rules.
- **Technology Transfer:** Diasporas are mostly based in foreign countries which are developed and hence, are technologically advanced and rich in innovations. They help in

bringing these technologies and innovations to their country of origin through investment and collaborations.

- **Culture:** Indian diaspora has promoted Bollywood, yoga, Ayurveda, spirituality, cricket, Indian cuisines, etc., all across the globe.
  - o The sizable presence of Sikhs in Canada and Indian Muslims in Gulf countries have created mini-Indias in those countries.

Negative implications of diaspora in shaping India's foreign policy

- **Security implications:** Diaspora groups can fund sub-nationalist or ethno-nationalist movements which can either pose a threat to national security or challenge the territorial integrity of the nation state.
  - o The separatist movements namely Kashmiri, Khalistan, and LTTE had received massive political, financial and material support from large sections of its Diaspora.
- **Disruption of Communal harmony:** Diaspora fund extremist civil society groups like jihadi groups and other extremist political groups for communalization and the growth of violence and religious fundamentalism in the country.
- **Losing strategic upper hand:** India's ability to manoeuvre strategically gets restricted with Gulf countries as they would source labour from other South Asian countries. The welfare needs of the Indian diaspora provide leverage to Gulf states while negotiating with India.
  - o The issue of Madhesi in Nepal led to unofficial blockade, which deteriorated India-Nepal relations.
  - o The issue of violation of human rights of Tamils in Northern Sri Lanka and 13th Amendment also creates irritants in India-Sri Lanka relations.
- **Criticism of Indian policies:** Indian Diaspora have aggressively been vocal against the three controversial farm laws, Citizenship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizens, which force the host country to issue statements against the interest of India.
  - o **Example**: Canadian Prime Minister issuing statements to repeal three farm laws.

Challenges associated with Indian diaspora

- **Exploitation and ill-treatment of Indian workers:** Unskilled and semi-skilled workers endure conditions that violate their human rights. India often has to walk tight rope while negotiating for their human welfare needs.
- **Changes in host country's policy:** Issues related to H1B Visas with USA, policies promoting indigenization of workforce by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and restrictive immigration policies further create irritants in bilateral relations.
- **Security issues:** Due to rising fundamentalism in Gulf countries, the issue of security of Indian diaspora has increased manifold against ISIS.

- **Fear of exodus:** Factors such as economic slowdown, rising unemployment worldwide and crisis such as COVID-19 pandemic creates fear of mass exodus of diaspora from their host countries to India.

Government Initiatives to ensure seamless engagement with Indian diaspora

- **Pravasi Bharatiya Divas**: It is celebrated every year on 9th of January to mark the contribution of the overseas Indian community towards the development of India.
- **Humanitarian Assistance:** India conducted Operation Raahat in Yemen and Sankat Mochan in South Sudan to rescue and evacuate Indian diaspora.
- **Know India Programme:** It aims to help familiarize Indian Diaspora youth, in the age group of 18-26 years, with developments and achievements made by the country and bringing them closer to the land of their ancestors.
- **VAIBHAV Summit:** The VAIBHAV initiative aims to bring out the comprehensive roadmap to leverage the expertise and knowledge of global Indian researbchers for solving emerging challenges.
- **Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana:** It is a skill development initiative to enhance the skill sets of potential emigrants on the lines of global standards.
- **Indian Community Welfare Fund:** The fund assists overseas Indian nationals at the time of distress and emergency. It has also provided critical support in emergency evacuation of Indian nationals from conflict zones. For example, **MADAD** portal to take timely and speedy action on grievances.

Way Forward

- Diaspora policy and Indian foreign policy are **two sides of the same coin** and thus, Indian government needs to utilize the potential of Indian diaspora in achieving its economic and social goals.
- Indian diaspora should be leveraged in achieving **Self-reliance** by increasing India's global footprint by promoting Brand India, strengthening manufacturing through attracting investments and sharing of best practices, knowledge and innovation.
- In nutshell, the destinies of India and its Diaspora are intertwined. It is in the interest of both India and her Diaspora to develop a **mutually beneficial relationship**.

GENERAL STUDIES 3

Changing nature of work: Work from home policy
Syllabus: **GS III- Effects of liberalization on the economy**
In News: The new policy of **work from anywhere** gained momentum during the pandemic. It has multiple benefits for all stakeholders.

More in news:

- Investment banking company **Goldman Sachs** has recently asked its employees working in Bengaluru to return to working from

home, reversing the moves to get staff back to as Covid-19 cases in the Indian IT capital grew.

Why work from anywhere is gaining acceptance?

- **Lack of clarity and flexibility:** Lack of clarity and flexibility in the US H-1B visa Programme remains a major concern for high-skilled Indian migrants, seeking to relocate to the U.S.
  - o Work from home makes employees enjoy greater flexibility and control of their personal and professional lives.
- **Uncertainty during Trump administration:** This uncertainty was high during the Trump administration, with visa denial rates rising significantly.
- **Reforms of the immigration system:** With the new administration in the US, reforms of the immigration system became a priority.
- **Lack of consensus:** Bringing reforms will take more time owing to the lack of consensus among the political forces in the U.S.
- **Acceptance among corporates:** In this scenario, the new **Work from Anywhere** policy is gaining acceptance among corporates. It has the potential to mitigate the dependence on H-1B visas.
- **Women empowerment: Workplace** harassment can be avoided which will improve women's participation in the workforce.

What are the benefits of the Work from Anywhere (WFA) policy to various stakeholders?

- **Benefits for the workers:** It grants individuals the choice to live in their preferred locations without the need of commuting to an office. Whereas the **traditional work-from-home (WFH) model** allows workers WFH a few days every week.
  - o WFA allows workers to relocate to their hometown, be closer to family and friends, **manage dual career situations.**
  - o Workers can also benefit by moving to (or continuing to live in) a **lower cost-of-living location.**
- **Benefits for the organization**: **WFA** allows new companies to access a global pool of talent with relatively low investment in office space.
  - o It can also help to **reduce real estate costs of the organization** as the workforce shifts to remote work.
  - o Also, it helps to **increase the efficiency** of workers. For example, according to research, worker **productivity** under a work-from-anywhere policy increased 4.4% compared to the traditional work-from-home environments.
- **Benefits for the society:** Society, too, can benefit, as daily work commutes are a major source of **carbon emissions.**
  - o According to research, shifting to remote work cut emissions by their employees by more than 44,000 tons.

What are the reforms proposed by the USA to ease the immigration system?

- **Ease the legal immigration**: Easing the legal immigration for both family-based and employment-based migrants.
- **Proposal for the high skilled population**: The proposal is to remove country-specific quotas for employment-based visas. A green card for **STEM Ph.D. students** pursuing from a U.S. institution is also in the proposal.
- **Granting Work permits:** The current H-4 visa holders (spouses and children of H-1B visa holders) will be made eligible for work permits.
- **Partisan divisions:** However, given the partisan divisions in the U.S. legislature, it is unlikely that the proposal in its current form will become a law.

But for those skilled workers hoping to access U.S.-based opportunities have an alternative option of Work from Anywhere.

Case study: TCS

- Recently, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) announced that its 400,000-plus employees will be 75% remote by 2025.
- **Remote-work model:** TCS has rolled out a **'25-25 remote-work model'.**
    - 25% of the workforce will be in a physical office at any one time
    - Also, workers will be expected to work from an office for only 25% of their working hours.
- **Advantages of the TCS model:** The Harvard Business School explored the changes being implemented by TCS and identified the following advantages.
    - One, this model enables TCS clients to **access the best talent** within TCS, independent of the location of talent.
    - Two, the model also offers TCS employees an opportunity to simultaneously work on multiple projects around the globe. It doesn't require relocation to the client site or worrying about immigration.
    - The TCS example shows how work-from-anywhere can help Indian companies and workers **mitigate the challenges of immigration.**

Challenges of "work from anywhere":

- **No legal provision in India**: the proposed **Labour Codes do not recognize work from home** as a viable work arrangement. The laws such as the Shops and Establishment Act, Minimum Wages Act, Payment of Wages Act, Equal Remuneration Act, Payment of Bonus Act, Factories Act, and Contract Labour Regulation and Abolition Act, etc regulate hours of work, payment of wages, leaves, holidays, terms of service and other conditions of work of persons employed. However, these laws have no clear provision for an employee working from a remote location.

- **No well-documented policy:** Organisations also do not have well-documented policies and guidelines to support extended work from home arrangements. The managers are not trained to manage remote workers.
- **Lack of infrastructure**: Poor technological support can lead to frustration among employees working from anywhere.
- **Lack of team support:** It can reduce the performance of the employee and also can be a cause of poor psychological health.
- **Increase inequality:** Lower-income jobs can't be done remotely, such as in food service and brick-and-mortar retail. It will create inequality in terms of both unemployment and exposure to Covid-19.
- **Increase in workload:** People who work remotely often end up putting in more hours than when they go into the office as there is no boundary between job and home life.
- **Quality deterioration:** For example, teaching, to a certain extent, can be done remotely. But it's just not of the same quality as teaching inside the classroom.

Steps taken by the Government to incentivize "work from anywhere":
- **Scheme to boost work from home jobs:** The Indian government is planning to launch a scheme to boost work from home jobs in the IT sector. The scheme is likely to be launched as **phase II of the India BPO Promotion Scheme.**
- **India BPO Promotion Scheme:** India BPO Promotion Scheme (IBPS) was launched in 2016 under the **Digital India Programme**. It aims to create employment opportunities and promotion of BPO/ITES operations across India to have a balanced regional growth of the BPO/ITES sector. Under the scheme, firms are incentivized to set up operations in tier-2 and tier-3 cities in India.
- **Work from the home scheme:** This is a proposed scheme. Under the work from home scheme, it is proposed that employees would be provided with **support for the cost of laptop/ smartphone** and broadband connections. Further, salary-based incentives would be provided to incentivize employees to continue such work-from-home jobs.
    - **Expenditure on technical infrastructure:** Under the proposed scheme, employers would be provided 50% of the actual expenditure on the technical infrastructure required for enabling such work from home jobs, with a cap of ₹10,000 per job. The scheme may also extend the relaxation in labour laws.
    - **Significance**: It would create employment opportunities particularly in the BPO sector, particularly for **women and differently-abled persons.** It would increase the available talent pool for the sector.

Conclusion

Despite many problems, work from anywhere is here to stay. Therefore, the future lies in a **blended model that combines remote and home-based work** in different proportions based on the nature of work and team preferences. Also, the government policy should aim to **ease the transition** to maximize the benefits from the shift to remote work.

Unlocking value of public assets

*Syllabus –*GS II Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development, and employment

In News

- In the budget, the government proposed to launch a '**National Monetization Pipeline' for** its asset monetization strategy to assess the potential value of underutilized and unused government assets.
- The oil sector PSUs would now float an **infrastructure investment trust (InvIT)** as part of the asset monetization exercise announced by the government.

Background

- **Objective** - The objective of the asset monetization programme of the Government of India (GOI) is to **unlock the value of investment** made in public assets which have not yielded appropriate or potential returns so far.
    - o It is expected to **create hitherto unexplored sources of income for the company and its shareholders**, and contribute to a more **accurate estimation of public assets** which would help in the better financial management of government/public resources over time.
- **Definition of Asset Monetizatio**n- Asset Monetization refers to the creation of new sources of revenue by **unlocking the value** of hitherto **unutilized or underutilized public assets**.
- **Definition of Public asset**- A **public asset** is any property owned by a public body, tangible or intangible. These include roads, railways, stations, pipelines, mobile towers, etc., or financial assets like shares in Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs), securities, and dividends.
- **Definition of Under-utilized assets**- A **sub-optimally utilized or unutilized asset** is one that is not using its maximum potential which could otherwise be attained by exploiting it commercially at a market valuation. For example, if a government asset is deriving a net value of Rs 500 crore but has the potential to earn Rs 1000 crore, it will come under this category.

Methods for Asset Monetization

- **InvITs** - An **Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvITs)** is like a mutual fund, which enables direct investment of small amounts of money from possible individual/institutional investors in infrastructure to earn a small portion of the income as a return.
- **Toll operates transfer**- TOT is a **model for monetizing operational national highway projects** where investors make a lump sum payment in return for long-term toll collection rights backed by a sound tolling system.
- **Selling land**- Indian Railways is the forerunner landlord with **approx. 47000 hectares, which can be put for commercial purposes**. The government is targeting to unlock optimal value from these public sector assets which have not yielded a potential return. This process of converting assets into an economic value is termed Asset Monetization.

- **Loan asset monetization via securitization**- It is a process by way of which an originator (bank) pools together its assets and then sells it to a **Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)** – an entity specially created for the process of securitization which further sells it to investors.
- Securitization involves the **transformation of loans**, which are a kind of illiquid assets into liquid assets. The underlying assets are generally secured loans such as home loans, automobile loans, and unsecured loans like personal loans, etc.
- **Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)** - Under REITs, the land assets are transferred to a trust providing investment opportunities for institutional investors.

Monetization Process: A successful monetization process involves four steps:
- First, the **motivation** of the policy formulating government should be understood.
- Second, a **detailed analysis** of assets (both operational and financial) is needed.
- Third, analyzing the **current and future potential** of assets.
- Fourth, carefully **managing all the stakeholders** and executing the project with care to deliver the envisioned objective.

Significance of Asset Monetization Strategy
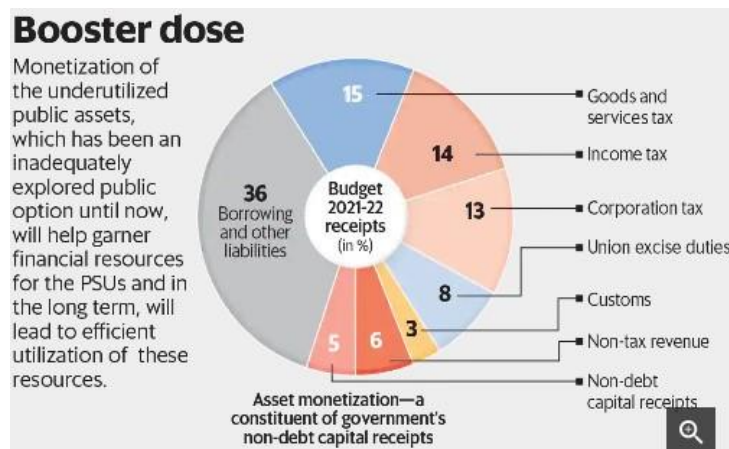
- **Yield appropriate returns for the concerned PSU**- With private entities bidding for underutilized assets, they will be utilized for the creation of productive assets. The concerned PSU will get access to **additional resources** which can be utilized for **restructuring, reinvestment, and expansion**. It can also trim market borrowings by PSUs and bring down the interest payment burden.
- **Promote regional development**- The creation of productive assets by private entities by utilizing under-utilized assets includes **setting up of factories** by the private sector leading to regional economic development and **creating employment opportunities**.

- **Mobilization of resources**- In the **wake of the pandemic**, the government is looking for more revenue avenues. Asset monetization in line with other steps like **disinvestment and strategic disinvestment** aims at mobilizing resources by inviting private sector participation.
- **Infrastructure investment**- A report from **Asian Development Bank** suggests that in Asia alone, infrastructure investment needs from 2016-2030 are estimated at $ 26 trillion, or $ 1.7 trillion per year. Since, **government funding is limited** and banks have already burnt their hands in infrastructure lending; participation in the private sector is inevitable to meet this financing gap.
- **Promotes innovation** - It also leads to a **comprehensive modernization drive** with innovative techniques brought in by private sector players, ideas replacing the obsolete ones, and promoting efficiency in work culture.

Challenges in Asset Monetization

- **Market valuation** –The market valuations are time-specific**. In** a period of slump, the valuations are bound to go down. Selling in such a scenario may create a **moral hazard** for the sellers.
  - o The process for asset monetization needs to take into account the correct valuation of the assets in question and the method used for the same.
- **The capability of the private sector**- The **private sector's ability** to fulfill the targeted objective needs to be assessed methodically, especially in times of COVID pandemic when the private sector has incurred huge losses.
- **Managing public perception-** Equally important is the willingness of the citizens to accept the management of public infrastructure in the private hand. Their grievances, if any, needs to be promptly attended to by the operating private player. Otherwise, one bad experience may cause long-lasting **damage to public perception**.

Conclusion

With the shrinking private investment in the Indian economy, the onus is on the government to step up to **generate revenues** and become a **facilitator to provide avenues** for private sector participation. To handle effectively the task of monetization of assets, the government should constitute an **independent commission clothed** with requisite powers and staffed by professionals and researchers to formulate and implement its monetization initiative.

Farmer Producer Organisations

Syllabus: GS III- 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.

In news

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched 10,000 Farmers Producer Organisations (FPOs) all over the country, on 29 February, in Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh. FPOs Farmer

Producer's Organisations could be a solution to the agrarian distress if they are helped to access credit and markets.

What are FPOs?

- **Farmer producer organisation:** A FPO represents the power of aggregation. Many small farmers come together and form an organisation that collectively purchases inputs required by them and/or sell their produce.
- **Producer Organisation:** It is a Producer Organisation (PO) where the members are farmers. Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) is providing support for the promotion of FPOs.
- **Essential features of a PO:**
  o It is formed by a group of producers for either farm or non-farm activities.
  o It is a registered body and a legal entity.
  o Producers are shareholders in the organization.
  o It deals with business activities related to the primary produce/product.
  o It works for the benefit of the member producers.
  o A part of the profit is shared amongst the producers.
  o Rest of the surplus is added to its owned funds for business expansion.

State of FPOs in India

- **NABARD Report:** According to a 2017 NABARD publication, around 5000 FPOs are operating in the country, which was formed under various initiatives of the central government (including small farmers agribusiness consortium), state governments, NABARD, and other organisations.
- **Y.K. Alagh Committee:** Allowing the formation of Farmer Producer Companies, by amending the Companies Act of 1956, was recommended by Y.K. Alagh Committee which was implemented. But registering FPOs as companies has certain limitations:
- Subjecting farmers to the rigours of company regulations is taxing as they are ill-equipped to handle such issues and have to pay consultants for filing returns.

Need and significance of FPOs:

- **Small and marginal farmers:** Nearly 86% of farmers are small and marginal with average land holdings in the country being less than 1.1 hectares. Small, marginal and landless farmers face tremendous challenges during the agriculture production phase such as access to technology, quality seed, fertilizers and pesticides including requisite finances.
- **Collectivization of farmers:** FPOs help in the collectivization of such small, marginal and landless farmers in order to give them the collective strength to deal with such issues.
- **Managing activities together:** Members of the FPO will manage their activities together in the organization to get better access to technology, input, finance and market for faster enhancement of their income.

- **Support by the Government:** The government has launched a new dedicated Central Sector Scheme titled **"Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)"** with a clear strategy and committed resources to form and promote 10,000 new FPOs.
- **Lack of economic strength:** Marginal farmers also face tremendous challenges in marketing their products due to a lack of economic strength.
- **Subsistence-oriented:** Indian farming is predominantly subsistence-oriented with 86% of individual holdings below two hectares which occupy 47% of the country's total cultivated area.
- **Low production:** The production and productivity of farms owned by small farmers are generally low, with limited marketable surplus and low realizations.
- **FPOs can help small and marginal farmers:**
    - **Institutionalizing FPOs:** FPOs will allow members to gain greater bargaining power in the purchase of inputs, obtaining credit, and selling the produce.
    - **Higher returns:** FPOs in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan have shown positive outcomes. Farmers through FPOs Farmer Producer's Organisations were able to realize higher returns for their produce.
        - For example, tribal women in the Pali district of Rajasthan formed a producer company, and they are getting higher prices for custard apples.

Case Study:

The International Food Policy Research Institutes comparative study of FPOs in Maharashtra and Bihar has revealed the following benefits of FPO's:
- FPO's are doing better than non-FPO farmers. Also, within FPOs, organically evolved FPOs (OFPOs) are more beneficial than pushed or promoted Farmer Producer's Organizations (PFPOs).
- For example, according to the survey, OFPOs increased gross income. While only 2 per cent indicate a decline in the same.
- For PFPOs, 64 per cent report an increase in gross income while 27 per cent report no change in income. Whereas, only 32 per cent of the non-members indicate an increase in gross income.

Challenges faced by FPO
- **Lack of technical skills:** Inadequate awareness among the farmers about the potential benefits of collectivization & non-availability of competent agency for providing handholding support.
- **Inadequate professional management:** Farmers' Organizations are required to be efficiently managed by experienced, trained and professionally qualified CEO and other personnel under the supervision of democratically-elected Boards of Directors. However, such trained manpower is presently not available in the rural space to manage the FPO business.

- **Weak financials, inadequate access to credit:** FPOs are mostly represented by SF/MF with a poor resource base and hence, initially they are not financially strong enough to deliver vibrant products and services to their members and build confidence.
- **Lack of risk mitigation mechanism:** The risks related to production at farmers' level are partly covered under the existing crop/livestock / other insurance schemes, there is no provision to cover business risks of FPOs.
- **Inadequate access to market and infrastructure:** The producers' collectives have inadequate access to the basic infrastructure required for aggregation like transport facilities, storage, value addition (cleaning, grading, sorting, etc.) and processing, brand building and marketing.

What reforms are required in the FPOs?
- **Complete value chain:** FPOs should be created not just for aggregation of produce but for the entire value chain of the produce from raw material stage to final processing stage.
- **Training programmes:** Developing proper training programmes for FPOs, including through producing short videos such as those used in massive open online courses.
- **Issuing equity:** Introducing a system of issuing equity to CEOs or board members of FPCs as a performance incentive.
- **Improving farmers' income:** FPOs require an enabling ecosystem, through sensitising government officials and bankers to the unique potential of these business entities for improving farmers' incomes.
- **Efficacy of FPOs:** FPOs are mostly organized by NGOs who are good at community mobilisation, but whose business acumen is limited, which raises doubts about efficacy of FPOs.
- **Operation as businesses:** FPOs are to operate as businesses but the quality of manpower at their member, board and CEO levels is low which are majorly held by NGO members.
- **Number of FPOs:** For a large country like India, more than one lakh FPOs are required. (currently 10,000 FPO's).
- **Addressing other issues:** To address issues such as working capital, marketing, infrastructure. For that:
  - Banks must be facilitated to come with structured products for lending to FPO's.
  - Also, banks need to focus on capacity building to improve their professional management.
- **Data on markets:** FPO's have to be linked with input companies, technical service providers, marketing/processing companies, retailers etc. This will enable them to access data on markets and prices and other information and competency in information technology.
- **Land consolidation:** FPOs need to look for land consolidation of their members where contiguous tracts of land are available. To some extent, Aggregation can overcome the constraint of small farm size. Women farmers also can be encouraged to group cultivate for getting better returns.

Steps taken by the government in this regard

- **SFAC:** Since 2011, the center has intensively promoted FPOs under the Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC), NABARD, state governments, and NGOs.
- **Central sector scheme titled 'Formation & Promotion of 10,000 Farmer produce organisations (FPO's):** Government of India has launched a new Central Sector Scheme titled "Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Produce Organizations (FPOs)" with a clear strategy and committed resources to form and promote 10,000 new FPOs in the country with budgetary provision of Rs 6865 crore.
- **The FPO is supported through:**
  - **Capital infusion:** up to ₹ 10 lakhs to registered FPOs
  - **Credit guarantee cover** to lending institutions: maximum guarantee covers 85 per cent of loans not exceeding ₹ 100 lakhs.
  - **Budgetary support:** Budget 2018-19 gave a five-year tax exemption for FPO's. Budget 2019-20 targeted to set up 10,000 more FPOs in the next five years.
  - **State support:** In Tamil Nadu, under collective farming, six lakhs small and marginal farmers have been integrated into 6,000 farmer producer groups.

The way forward

- **Strengthening FPOs:** In India, 86 per cent of farmers are small and marginal (less than 2 ha), who do not get the benefit of MSP system. Strengthening Farmer's Producer's organizations (FPOs) at village level, consisting of small farmers, supplemented by the mechanism of new farm laws will be beneficial for agri-growth.
- **Agri-infra fund:** The creation of an additional 10,000 FPOs and the promised Agri-infra Fund of ₹1,00,000 Crore will aid this process.

Operation Green: Prospects And Performance

Syllabus: GS III: Transport and Marketing of Agricultural Produce and Issues and Related Constraints

In News: Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) has recently extended the Operation Greens Scheme from Tomato, Onion and Potato (TOP) to all fruits & vegetables (TOTAL) as a part of Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

What is Operation Green?

- Operation Greens seeks to **stabilize the supply and availability** of Tomato, Onion and Potato (TOP) crops throughout the country round the year without price volatility.
- Operation Green **aims to control fluctuation in TOP prices** by creating linkages and infrastructure involving the growers, food processing industry and market.
- **Objectives:**

- o **Enhancing value realization** of TOP farmers by targeted interventions to strengthen TOP production clusters and their FPOs and linking/connecting them with the market.
- o **Price stabilization** for producers and consumers by proper production planning in the TOP clusters and introduction of dual use varieties.
- o **Reduction in post-harvest losses** by creation of farm gate infrastructure, development of suitable agro-logistics, creation of appropriate storage capacity linking consumption centres.
- o **Increase in food processing capacities** and value addition in TOP value chain with firm linkages with production clusters.
- o **Setting up of a market intelligence network** to collect and collate real time data on demand and supply and price of TOP crops.
- It has been announced on the lines of 'Operation Flood' to promote Farmer Producers Organizations, agri-logistics, processing facilities and professional management.
- The Operation Green comprises of the following strategies:
  - o **Short-term price stabilization measures:** It includes transportation of TOTAL crops from production centers to storage and hiring of storage facilities.
  - o **Market Intelligence and Early Warning System:** MIEWS Dashboard and Portal is a platform for monitoring prices of tomato, onion and potato (TOP) and for generating alerts for intervention under the terms of the Operation Greens scheme. The portal would disseminate all relevant information related to TOP crops such as Prices and Arrivals, Area, Yield and Production, Imports and Exports, Crop Calendars, Crop Agronomy, etc. in an easy-to-use visual format.
  - o **Long term integrated value chain development projects:** It includes capacity building of FPOs, quality production, post-harvest processing facilities, agri-logistics, etc.

Why does India need Operation Green?
- **Vagaries of monsoon:** The vagaries caused due to variability in Monsoon causes fluctuations in the productivity of the TOTAL crops and thereby increasing volatility in the prices of these crops.
- **Lack of storage and transport:** Farmers and consumers incur frequent losses due to a lack of storage and transport facilities as in time of bumper production; prices collapse due to lack of storage facilities.
- **Part of cuisines:** The TOTAL crops form an integral part of cuisines across cultures in India.
- **Consistency in remuneration:** Stability in the prices of the TOTAL crops can ensure consistent and reasonable remuneration for the farmers and would further assist in doubling their incomes.

- **Reduce undisguised unemployment:** India being an agrarian economy earnestly needs integration of agriculture with food processing industries to reduce undisguised unemployment in the agricultural field.
- **Tackle intermediaries:** Low levels of literacy and poor infrastructure at grassroot level render farmers at the mercy of the intermediaries for the determination of the prices of TOTAL crops.
- Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) lack the required human resources and skill to adopt modern scientific practices and state-of the art technologies in the field of agriculture.

Prospects of Operation Green.
- **Enhance Value Realization through efficient value-chain**: Operation Green would supplement the income of the TOP farmers by arresting distress sale through targeted interventions to strengthen TOP production clusters and their FPOs, and connecting them with the market.
- **Price Stabilization**: Stability in the prices of TOTAL crops for producers and consumers by proper production planning in the TOP clusters and introduction of dual use varieties.
- **Reduction in Post-Harvest Losses:** Creation of farm gate infrastructure, development of suitable agro-logistics and creation of appropriate storage capacity linking consumption centers would substantially reduce the losses and in turn boost farmers income.
- **Increase in Food Processing Capacities:** Operation Green would also enhance value addition in the TOTAL crops by developing integrated value chain from farm gate to markets and linkages with production clusters.
- **Strengthening Market Intelligence Network**: Operation Green would enable TOTAL crop farmers to have real time data on demand and supply and price of TOP crops.
- **Strengthen Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)**: Operation Green would strengthen FPOs bargaining power by making them financially and technically capable to take care of their business activities.
- **Convergence with ongoing schemes**: Operation Green would leverage the infrastructures and value chain through integration and synergising with PM Kisan SAMPADA Yojana, e-NAM and Scheme for Formalization of Micro Food Enterprises.
- **Private Sector Participation:** The prospects further enhance with private sector participation in creation of cold storage infrastructures after amendment in the Essential Commodities Act.
- **Boost to exports:** Increase in shelf life due to improved agri-logistics will enhance the prospects of exporting TOTAL crops to nearby countries and earn foreign exchange.
- **Promotion of Horticultural products in the Himalayan and Hilly regions**: Transport subsidy through UDAN Scheme and Kisan Rail Scheme for fruits and vegetables of Himalayan states would further guarantee assured market for their products, which in turn will boost their production.

Performance of Operation Green
- Since its launch in 2018, the Scheme has **yet to scale up** and is far behind its aims and objectives.
- As per the study at ICRIER, **"price volatility"** remains as high as ever, and farmers' share in consumers' rupee is as low as 26.6% in the case of potatoes, 29.1% in the case of onions, and 32.4% in the case of tomatoes.
- The modalities of the Scheme are in **nascent stage** and thus integrated value chains, storage facilities, agri-logistics, processing facilities and e-platform to manage demand and supply are also in nascent stage.

Challenges in Operation Green
- **Variability in the rhythm of Monsoon**: Rising incidences of recurrent droughts and frequent floods due to climate change can adversely hamper the productivity levels of TOTAL crops.
- **Overwhelming marginal and small farmers:** Approximately 85% of all farmers have operational land holdings less than 2 hectares due to lack of land reforms, which may adversely impact creation of clusters in over-populated states like UP, Bihar and West Bengal.
- **Inadequate forward and backward linkages**: Varieties of horticultural products demand varied storage and transportation time unlike milk which is relatively a homogeneous product throughout the year. Thus, one-size-fit all approach may not become productive in varied agro-climatic regions.
- **Inadequate assured market access:** Poor accessibility to urban markets and inefficient functioning of the APMCs may further constrain the TOTAL crop growers to access assured markets in the required time.
- **Rising transportation cost**: Rising oil prices may unfavorably increase the prices of TOTAL crops while transporting from surplus to deficit regions.
- **Lack of Institutional Credit:** Poor access to institutional credit in rural areas may deter FPOs from actively participating in Operation Green despite 50-75% grants in aid from the government.

Way Forward
- Creation of an **institutional set-up** on the lines of the National Dairy Development Board for Operation Flood, to streamline the objectives and strategies of Operation Green.
- Promotion of **TOTAL clusters** through the prism of market gardening in order to meet the rising demands of these products in urban areas.
- Creation of **assured markets in rural areas** to reduce distress sale as per the recommendation of National Commission on Farmers headed by agricultural scientist M.S Swaminathan.

- Learning from the **lessons of Operation Flood** i.e., it failed to disperse geographically. Therefore, the government needs to select TOTAL clusters on quantifiable and transparent criteria to reduce geographical disparities.

Tapping the Space Potential

Syllabus: GS III- Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

In news :Recently, India launched Brazil's Amazonia-1 Earth observation satellite and 18 others into space. From a modest beginning in the 1960s, India's space program has grown steadily, achieving significant milestones.

About the recent mission:

- ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C51) rocket launched Brazil's Amazonia-1 (an earth observation satellite) and 18 co-passenger satellites.
- It was the **first** dedicated mission for **New Space India Ltd (NSIL),** the commercial arm of ISRO.
- The mission was conducted under a commercial arrangement with Spaceflight Inc., USA.

India's space industry:

- **Growth of the sector:** The sector has grown exponentially over the last six decades with considerable expansion in its scope and domain.
  - Today, the Indian space research organisation ISRO's annual budget has crossed ₹ 10,000 crores ($1.45 billion) growing steadily from ₹ 6000 crores five years ago.
- **Diversified services:** It has diversified from simple mapping services in the 1960s, at present to diversified services such as: design and development of launch vehicles, development of satellites and related technologies for earth observation, telecommunication & broadband, entering the domain of navigation, meteorology, and space science.
- **Attribution of success:** The success of the sector can be attributed to Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, and other notable people. All of them believed in the potential of India's Space sector.
- **Satellites launched:** The country on average launched **5-7 satellites per year** in recent years while the figure for the US is around 19 satellites. Similarly, China launches approximately 34 satellites. For example, IRNSS, GAGAN, Chandrayan, NaVIC etc.

Achievements in Space industry:

- **Telecommunication:** The first area of achievement was satellite communication, with INSAT and GSAT as the backbones. This caters to the national needs for telecommunication, broadcasting and broadband infrastructure. Gradually, bigger satellites have been built carrying a larger array of transponders. About 200 transponders on Indian satellites provide services linked to areas like telecommunication, television, broadband, radio, disaster management and search and rescue services.

- **Satellite Based Navigation Application:** With the Satellite constellation established, NaviC system is now fully available for position, navigation and timing solution and for derived location =based services. NavIC signal can be extensively used in a variety of civil and commercial activities related to land transportation, aviation, maritime, scientific research etc.
- **Remote Sensing and National Natural Resource Management System:** The Indian Remote Sensing Satellites (IRS) System, with currently 11 satellites in orbit, is one of the largest constellations of remote sensing satellites in operation in the world today. It provides inputs for management of natural resources and various developmental project across the country using space-based imagery.
- **Mars Orbiter Mission:** India's first interplanetary mission, the Mars Orbiter Spacecraft was successfully launched on PLSV-C25. It made India become one of the four nations in the world to send a space mission to Planet Mars. Mars orbiter Mission is mainly

Initiatives in Space Sector:
- **Opening the Space Sector**: The Government in June 2020 opened up the Space sector. It allowed the participation of the **Indian private sector i**n the entire domain of space activities (satellite creation, launches, and space-based services).
- **Draft Space Activities Bill, 2017**: The bill aims to promote and regulate the space activities of India. It focuses on encouraging the participation of private-sector agencies under the guidance and authorisation of the government through the Department of Space.
- **New Space India Limited (NSIL)**: It is a **Central Public Sector Enterprise** under the Department of Space that was established in 2019. It has been mandated to space-related products and services emanating from Indian Space Programme to global customers. It will enable the Indian industry to scale up a high-technology manufacturing base.
- **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe):** It has been established for promoting industries and attracting private investment in the space sector.
- **Training and Collaboration:** ISRO and its research centers have active programs with academic and research institutes across the country. They are also training personnel from numerous countries around the globe.

Challenges for India's Space Sector
- **Lower Spending:** The funds allocated to the space sector are very less in comparison to other countries. The US spent 10 times and China 6 times more than India in the space sector in 2019-20.
- **Absence of a Clear Legislative Framework**: The draft Space Activities bill was introduced way back in 2017 but hasn't been passed yet.
- **Lack of robust Dispute Settlement Mechanism:** This discourages private investment in the space sector. The void was seen in Antrix – Devas cancelled satellite deal. The

Government of India owes nearly $1.2 billion to Devas Multimedia as per an order of a tribunal of the International Chamber of Commerce.

- **Brain Drain:** India produces the best brains in the world but is unable to retain them. People emigrate from the country for better opportunities and careers that might hamper the development of the space sector.

- **Managing big constellations of satellites:** Although India has a good potential to launch satellites, managing a huge number of satellites in space could be a challenging task in the future. This should be done keeping in mind the **possibilities of a future space war**.

Opportunities for commercialising India's Space Sector

- **Low Cost**: The Indian space sector has the potential of launching space vehicles at a much lower cost. This was seen in Mars Orbiter Mission which was 10 times cheaper than western missions.

- **Good Record and Trust:** India has so far launched 342 foreign satellites for 34 countries using its Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle platform. This has developed a trust in Indian space potential, globally.

- **Presence of Budding Entrepreneurs:** As per industry estimates, there are more than 40 start-ups working in India on space and satellite projects. It can complement the efforts of the government.

- **Rising Demand in the Future:** Technology innovations in the future will increase the need for higher bandwidth capacity, throughput speeds, improved radar, and thermal imaging. This can be readily met by strengthening the space sector.

- **Unrealised Potential**: As per Satellite Industry Association Report (2020), the global space economy in 2019 was valued at US$ 366 billion. However, the Indian space economy is valued at US$ 7 billion, which is around 2 percent, signifying how much the sector can truly achieve.

Why should the private sector be involved in the space industry?

- **Increasing Demand:** Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)'s annual budget has crossed ₹10,000 crores ($1.45 billion) and is growing steadily. However, demand for space-based services in India is far greater than what ISRO can provide. Therefore, private sector investment is critical, for which a suitable policy environment needs to be created.

- **Overall growth of space sector:** Private sector participation is needed to ensure overall growth of the space sector. ISRO has a strong association with the industry, particularly with Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) like Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and large private sector entities like Larsen and Toubro. Role of private industries should be increased.

- **Country's security:** The most basic way to secure our space capabilities is to distribute them across many different satellites and spacecraft, so that continuity is unaffected even if an adversary manages to disable one or more of our satellites.

- For instance, the US is highly vulnerable in space because it depends on thousands of its satellites. But, it is also best equipped to deal with a potential attack on its space assets because it can find alternatives to switch to.

- **International trends and experience:** Elon Musk's "SpaceX" and its high-profile projects have highlighted the increasing significance of the private players in the space sector. In India, despite the various strategic, security and regulatory constraints, a limited private ecosystem has evolved around the ISRO.

- **Greater pool of resources:** Public resources- land, labour, capital is limited. Private sector participation will open a new pool of resources and talent. It will **bring more funding**, and experience into space exploration activities.

- **Human Capital:** Restricting space activities to ISRO, limits proper utilisation of talent all over the country. With demographic dividend, private sector participation can exploit the talent across the nation contributing a lot to space explorations in India.

- **Technological advancement:** Commercialisation will also develop better technologies which are important. It will allow integration of many other technologies like artificial intelligence into space exploration activities. With experience from space activities, the private sector can increase the role of technology in other areas.

- **Risk Sharing:** Every launch consists of various risks. Private sector helps in sharing the risk of cost factor. Failure costs will be distributed. Also, with increased private participation, failures will reduce due to increased available human capital and mind.

- **Commercial demand**: There is a need to enhance internet connectivity for the masses, which is another demand-pull factor for increased commercial interest in space. **Asteroid mining** is also another potential area that looks promising, with scope for monetisation and disrupting commodity markets.

Issues and Concerns of private participation in space industry
- **Data Risk:** Though space it gives an opportunity to entrepreneurs
- but raw data of ISRO in the hands of the public is sensitive and consists of danger of misuse or improper utilisation of data.
- **Regulation:** Though it is a profitable investment, regulation of private sector participation is not easy. The time taken for regulatory clearances and unstable political institutions can cause delays and hurdle in decision making of investors.
- **Revenue loss:** ISRO will lose a fair amount of money it is earning through its space activities. This will reduce government revenue.
- **Unfair commercial practices:** Allowing private sector may lead to lobbying and unfair means to get space projects or launch of any satellite for their own profit. It may also lead to leakage of sensitive information by private players to other countries and companies to make profit.
- **Antrix- devas issue:** The Antrix-Devas scam is one of the most serious crisis ISRO has faced in its history. The deal between Antrix and Devas was signed in 2005 when G

Madhavan Nair was at the helm of affairs in the Department of Space (DoS). He later blamed the UPA-2 government for things going south in the deal.

Way Forward

- **An independent tribunal:** The plan to set up an independent tribunal to adjudicate disputes among private space entities should be implemented promptly.
- **Space activities bill:** The passage of the Space Activities Bill should also be done in order to give private players greater clarity and protection. This should involve proper consultation and discussions with the concerned stakeholders.
- **Space start-ups:** The focus should be on aiding space start-ups to penetrate rural India and encourage youth to build careers in space applications and sciences.
- **Collaboration and research:** The country must do more collaboration and research with pioneer countries like the US, Russia, etc. who are already managing big constellations of satellites.

Indian Space sector possesses huge untapped potential which can be realized with adequate policy measures by the government. This would boost the confidence of the private sector and deliver optimum results, thereby helping the country acquire the top spot in the global space industry.

Issues grappling the green tribunal

Syllabus: GS III- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation
In News: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) instead of protecting the environment is facing trouble due to internal issues.

Background

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) is a dedicated tribunal to deal with matters relating to the environment. The NGT website even mentions that the tribunal has cleared 90% of the cases. But a close look will reveal the tribunal's mandate to protect the environment is not yet fulfilled.

About the National Green Tribunal (NGT):

- **NGT:** National Green Tribunal (NGT) is a quasi-judicial body established on October 18, 2010. It was established under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 to handle environment-related disputes.
- **Objective**: Speedy disposal of cases related to environment and forest conservation.
- **Composition:** The Tribunal comprises of the Chairperson, the Judicial Members and Expert Members. They shall hold office for a term of five years and are not eligible for reappointment.
    - The chairperson is appointed by the Central Government in consultation with the Chief Justice of India.
    - Judicial and expert members are appointed on recommendations by the Selection Committee.
- **Qualifications:**

- o **Chairperson**: A person who is or has been a Judge of the Supreme Court or Chief Justice of the High Court.
  - o **Judicial Member**: A person who is or has been a Judge of a High Court.
  - o **Expert Member:** Qualification and experience in relevant scientific and technological field or practical experience in dealing with environmental matters.
- **Jurisdiction:** The NGT deals with civil cases under the seven laws related to the environment, these include:
  - o The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act,1974,
  - o The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act,1977,
  - o The Forest (Conservation) Act,1980,
  - o The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act,1981,
  - o The Environment (Protection) Act,1986
  - o The Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991 and
  - o The Biological Diversity Act, 2002.

(Note: The Wildlife (Protection) Act,1972 and Scheduled Tribes and Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 have been kept out of NGT's jurisdiction.)

Issues with the working of NGT

- **Never functioned in full capacity:** Since the inception of the NGT Act, the tribunal never functioned in its full capacity. According to the NGT Act, the tribunal should have 10 members in the Judicial and 10 members in the Expert capacity.
  - o At present, the NGT is functioning with three judicial and three expert members only. This is much less than the official requirement under the NGT Act.
- **Inability to solve cases:** NGT has invoked the deadline associated with the technical clause and dismissed 11 petitions last year alone. This shows the inability of NGT to solve the cases in a time-bound manner.
- **Lack of expertise in the functioning of Tribunal**: This is evident in the many decisions of NGT that have been overruled in the Supreme Court. For instance,
  - o The Supreme Court questioned the expertise of NGT in the case of the **Subansiri Hydropower Project** in Arunachal Pradesh 2019. Further, the court also overruled the ban imposed by NGT on that project.
- **No merit-based review:** The tribunal also failed to carry out the merits-based review and discharge of adjudicatory function.
  - o For example, In Mopa Airport Case, the apex court held that the NGT lacks merit-based review on its judgements.
- **Limited Regional Benches:** The NGT is located only in big cities. But environmental exploitation is majorly taking place in the tribal areas in the interiors. There is a limited opportunity for these people to come forward and file a case in NGT.
- **Narrow jurisdiction:** Matters relating to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Indian Forest Act, 1927 and various laws enacted by States relating to forests, tree preservation are not under its jurisdiction.

- **Poor enforcement mechanism:** There is no institutional mechanism to ensure that the environmental regulatory authorities comply with the orders of the tribunal.
  - o For instance, landmark orders of the NGT related to Ganga water pollution, Delhi air pollution, illegal mining, and solid waste management remain unenforced.
- **Issues associated with Visakhapatnam case**: Use of term 'strict liability' in its direction to LG polymers, which is outlawed and now term 'absolute liability' is promoted since Bhopal gas tragedy.
  - o **Strict liability Principle**: companies could claim exemption from liability in case of disaster.
  - o **Absolute liability Principle**: Even if companies took reasonable measures to prevent disaster, in case disaster occurs, company is liable for the payments.
- **Less independence:** The rules of the NGT act allowed the bureaucrats to be appointed to the tribunal while holding their post in the government.
  - o This is problematic in the sense that a government official will never rule against the government because he is also a part of government and faces various kinds of pressure to not to rule against the central government.
- **Issue of funding:** The concept of tribunals is in itself problematic as they are funded by the parent ministry. Hence, it exercises control over the tribunal and its decisions.
- **Need of Environmental experts:** The need for experts in the tribunal is also problematic concept because the NGT has to decide the question of law and does not have to do fact finding.
  - o The expert knowledge is not needed in granting compensation or awarding punishment. For this, there needs to be a knowledge of law.
- **Lack of resources:** The tribunal also faces a lack of resources for its proper functioning. The NGT was operating from a guest house earlier. Also, the members of the tribunal were not given houses and were living in government guest house.
  - o The funds were decreased further without taking into consideration the fact that NGT is already suffering from lack of adequate funding.

The advantages of having a tribunal like NGT
- **Principles followed:** The mandate of NGT is to dispose of the cases related to the environment in an effective and efficient manner. While deciding a case, it applies the **principles of sustainable development, the precautionary principle and the polluter-pays principle.**
- **Easy for petitioners to approach:** It is not bound by the Code of Civil Procedure, nor the principles of evidence in the Indian Evidence Act, thus, it is easier for petitioners to approach it.
- **Order enforcing mechanism:** The major benefit with NGT is that it has a strong order enforcing mechanism. If the orders of NGT are not complied with, it has the power to impose both punishment as well as fine.

- **Heavy penalties:** The punishment is up to three years and the penalty is up to Rupees Ten crores (for firms, it can extend up to twenty-five crores).
  - Also, the director or manager of the firm can be punished or penalized if it is found by the tribunal that the offence has been committed on the orders or with the consent of such officer of the firm.
- **Relief to affected people:** The act also provides various kinds of reliefs to the persons who are affected by the degradation of environment as the inhabitant of that particular area. Any person who has sustained the injury can file a suit in the National Green Tribunal.
- **Filing case:** The government or the government agencies related to environment can file a suit in place of that person such as the central or the state government or the central pollution control board or state pollution control board.
- **Fast delivery of justice**: The act also provides for fast delivery of justice as the act provides that all possible efforts will be made to dispose of the case within six months from the date of filing the suit.
- **Extendable period for filing suit:** The period for filing a suit with NGT is up to 5 years from the date on which the cause for compensation arose. However, if the tribunal has sufficient grounds for believing that the person has reasonable cause that prevented him from filing a suit in NGT, it can extend the period for a maximum of sixty days.
- **Review of decision**: If a person is not satisfied with the orders of the tribunal, he can seek the review of the decision of NGT under rule 22 of the NGT rule. And even then, if he is not satisfied with the decision of the tribunal, he can file an appeal to the Supreme Court of India. But the appeal has to be filed within ninety days of the orders passed by NGT.

Way forward

- **Amendment needed:** The Government needs to reform the provisions of the NGT Act to include a greater number of judicial and expert officials.
- **Filling vacancies:** The government also needs to ensure the filling of Vacancies in a time-bound manner. This will ensure the proper functioning of NGT.

NGT, is an important cogwheel in the environmental governance of India. As the world is bound to experience the effects of climate change in the near future, addressing the challenges faced by NGT would be crucial in tackling the challenges of climate change for India.

From surplus to deficit rivers

Syllabus: GS III- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

In News : The Prime Minister and the Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh signed an agreement to implement the first phase of the Ken-Betwa River Link Project (KBLP).

About Ken-Betwa Link Project

- Under this project, water from the Ken River will get transferred to the Betwa river.
- This project will spread across the districts of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.
- It is the first project under the National Perspective Plan for the interlinking of rivers.

- Both the Ken and Betwa river are tributaries of the river Yamuna.

About National River Linking Project
- The core idea behind interlinking is transfer of 'surplus' water from one basin to another 'deficit' basin.
- The interlinking of rivers project aims to effectively manage water resources in India by building a network of reservoirs and canals through a National River Linking Project (NRLP). It is also known as the National Perspective Plan.
- **Objective:** The main objective is to transfer water from water 'surplus' basins suffering from floods to water 'deficit' basins suffering from drought/scarcity.
- The implementation of the NRLP will form a gigantic South Asian Water Grid with a network of nearly 3000 storage dams
- The NRLP is managed by National Water Development Agency (NWDA) under the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- The plan proposes 30 river links to connect 37 rivers across India under two components:
  - o Himalayan Rivers Development Component: Under this, 14 river links are identified.
  - o Peninsular Rivers Development Component or the Southern Water Grid: This includes 16 river links. Ken Betwa Link Project is one among them.

Expected Benefits of the Interlinking of rivers
- **Ensuring equity:** Judicious Use of Water Resources to ensure greater equity in the distribution of water by enhancing its availability in drought-prone and rainfed areas.
- **Address the water stress:** As per Niti Aayog, India is facing its 'worst' water crisis in history and that demand for potable water will outstrip supply by 2030 if steps are not taken.
- **Improve irrigation:** The NPP is envisaged to give the benefits of 25 million ha of irrigation from surface waters and 10 million ha by increased use of ground waters, raising the ultimate irrigation potential from 140 million ha to 175 million ha.
- **Power generation:** It is also seen to lead to the generation of 34 million KW of power.
  - o The Ken-Betwa link project is expected to provide an annual irrigation facility to 10.62 lakhs hectares, drinking water supply to about 62 lakhs people and also generate 103 MW of hydropower.

- **Improve the inland navigation:** Interlinking of rivers will create a network of navigation channels. Water transport is cheaper, less-polluting compared to the road and railways. Further, the interlinking of rivers can ease the pressure on railways and roads also.

Challenges in the interlinking of projects

- **Impact on rivers:**
  - o **Artificial change of course:** Rivers are living ecosystems that have evolved over hundreds of thousands of years. Shifting their course like roads and power lines may lead to unintended consequences. Only by maintaining "minimum flow requirements" the river ecosystem can be conserved.
  - o **Reduction in water discharge:** Water discharge in 23 out of 29 rivers will reduce considerably. E.g. The Ganga will see a 24% decrease in flow. Its tributaries Gandak (-68%) and Ghaghara (-55%) will be the worst affected.
  - o **Shoreline loss:** As per a study, it will lead significantly reduce the sediments deposited by the rivers in deltas. Fertile deltas will be under threat, with coastal erosion expected to threaten the land and livelihoods of local economies that support 160 million people.
- **Environmental Challenges:** The critics of the interlinking of rivers point out certain major environmental challenges with interlinking. They are:
  - o **Submergence of vast areas of land in reservoirs:** The construction of dams leads to large-scale submergence of land. The government has to acquire large-scale lands for the smooth implementation of the project. But acquiring land for the project is not easy.
  - o **Getting permits from Environmental agencies:** The submergence of land many times falls within the wildlife and protected areas. For example, In the Ken-Betwa Link Project land alone, nearly two-thirds of the land (4,206 ha of the land) falls within the Panna Tiger Reserve. So, getting Environmental clearance and conducting an Environmental Impact Assessment is very hard.
  - o **Increased vulnerability:** Rare ecosystems and vital agricultural areas would become more vulnerable to storm surges, river flooding, and heightened salinity.
- **Impact on Monsoons:** The continuous flow of fresh river water into the sea is what helps maintain a low salinity layer of water with low density in the upper layers of the Bay of Bengal.
  - o This is a reason for the maintenance of high sea-surface temperatures (greater than 28 degrees Celsius), which create low-pressure areas and intensify monsoon activity.
- **Economic Challenges:** NRLP is a highly capital-intensive project. The project will need ₹5.6 lakh crores (estimated cost with the base year of 2000).
  - o A report points out that Climate change will cause a meltdown of 1/3rd of the Hindu Kush Region's glaciers by 2100. So, the Himalayan rivers might not have

'surplus water' for a long time. Considering this, investing billions of money in the interlinking of rivers might yield benefits only for a short time.

- **Social Challenges:** This includes the challenge of loss of livelihood and displacement of people.
  - The large-scale submergence of land has to be compensated by displacing people in that area (especially the poor and tribal people located near the forests).So, the government not only needs to face challenges in **displacing people but also in the rehabilitation of people**.
- **International Challenges:** Countries like Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh will get impacted due to the Interlinking of Rivers project.
  - For example, **Bangladesh strongly objects to transferring the Brahmaputra water to the Ganga**.
- **Federal Challenges:** Water is a state subject in India. So, the implementation of the NRLP primarily depends on Inter-State co-operation.
  - Several states including **Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, and Sikkim have already opposed the NRLP.**

Way Forward

- **Integrated water resource management** is the key for India. India needs to conserve every drop of water, reduce wastage, equitable distribution of resources at the same time enhance groundwater.
- Instead of interlinking rivers, India can try the **concept of virtual water**. For Example: Suppose when a country imports one tonne of wheat instead of producing it domestically, it is saving about 1,300 cubic meters of the local water. The local water can be saved and used for other purposes.
- The government can **invest the money in other areas instead of investing money for the interlinking of rivers.** Such as,
  - Conducting awareness campaigns to reduce water and food wastage. For example, the recent catch the rain campaign.
  - Can create Rainwater harvesting systems like that it created toilets with Swachh Bharat Mission. This will not only increase the groundwater recharge but also reduce soil erosion, stormwater runoff, flooding, etc.

We need to understand the importance of achieving small things. After all, "Big visions are realized through small steps only". So, the government has to conduct a detailed hydrological, geological, meteorological and environmental analysis of the interlinking of rivers. In that, the government must analyze the alternatives also.

The menace of Single Use Plastics

Syllabus: GS III- Environmental pollution and degradation

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an announcement on August 15, 2019, that India would eliminate single-use plastics by 2022. However, the pandemic has increased the use of SUPs.

Single-Use Plastic (SUPs)

- **SUP:** Single-use plastic is a form of plastic that is disposable, which is only used once and then has to be thrown away or recycled.
  - The single-use plastic items include plastic bags, water bottles, soda bottles, straws, plastic plates, cups, most food packaging, and coffee stirrers.
- **State of SUPs in India:** According to the reports for year 2017-18, c**entral pollution control board (CPCB**) has estimated that India generates approximately 9.4 million tonnes per annum plastic waste, (which amounts to 26,000 tonnes of waste per day), and out of this approximately 5.6 million tonnes per annum plastic is recycled (i.e., 15,600 tonnes of waste per day) and 3.8 million tonnes per annum plastic waste is left uncollected or littered.

Problems associated with SUPs

- **Non- biodegradable:** According to World Wildlife Fund (WWF), plastic is harmful to the environment as it is non-biodegradable, takes years to disintegrate. Single-use plastics slowly and gradually break down into smaller pieces of plastic known as microplastics.
  - It can take thousands of years for plastic bags to decompose, thus contaminating our soil and water in the process.
  - As per WWF, the noxious chemicals used to produce plastic gets transmitted to animal tissue, and finally, enter the human food chain.
- **Non-renewable:** Only 1-13% of the plastic items are recyclable, the rest ends up either buried in the land or water bodies, eventually reaching the oceans, leading to polluting of water bodies and killing of marine life.
- **Impact on wildlife:** Birds usually confuse shreds of plastic bags for food and end up eating the toxic debris. Fishes consume thousands of tons of plastic in a year, ultimately transferring it up the **food chain** to marine mammals.
  - Being non-recyclable, plastic bags end up in the oceans. While they reach, they break up into tiny little pieces and are consumed by wildlife. Thereby, leading to health issues or even death.
  - Many animals also get entangled or trapped in plastic bags. Ban will save many marine lives.
- **Pollution:** Plastic bags pollute the land and water, since they are lightweight, plastic materials can travel long distances by wind and water. **Ban will help in tackling air pollution** and water pollution.
- **Energy-intensive: The production** of plastic material is very energy-intensive. They require a lot of water for their production.
- **Harmful to human health:** Toxic chemicals from plastic bags can damage the blood and tissues. Frequent exposures can lead to cancers, birth defects, impaired immunity, hormone changes, endocrine disruption, and other serious ailments.

  o WWF further claims that a person could be consuming 5 grams of plastic a week.

Government's Initiatives against plastic menace:

- Decreasing usage of plastics: Many government offices in various states like Kerala made the switch to ink pens and steel cutlery to ensure articles like plastic water bottles, disposable tea cups and plastic carry bags are no longer used across the office premises.
- Fishing for plastic waste: Kerala's Suchitwa Mission has been engaged in not just finding fish but also takes care of plastic that either gets stuck in the fishing nets or floats in the sea. They have managed to recover 25 tonnes of plastic waste.
- Crackdown on plastic usage: Many states like Maharashtra, Goa, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, and Punjab have imposed some form of a ban on plastic.
- Utilizing plastic for road surfacing: Governments are using plastics for road surfacing and many states are considering implementing this pioneering tactic to manage their plastic waste. Kerala, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu are a few states that have already begun work on these lines.
- Up-cycling plastic for better purposes: From construction materials to threads and fabrics for the textile industry, many organizations across India have been up-cycling plastic for more significant purposes. Even the government's recent proposal to introduce plastic currency notes is a great step in up-cycling plastic waste.
- **Plastic Waste Management Rules 2016:** The Government had notified the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 with the following provisions:
  - **Rural areas have been brought in ambit** of these Rules since plastic has reached to rural areas also. Responsibility for implementation of the rules is given to Gram Panchayat.
  - First time, **responsibility of waste generators** is being introduced. Individual and bulk generators like offices, commercial establishments, industries are to segregate the plastic waste at source, handover segregated waste, pay user fee as per bye-laws of the local bodies.

Flaws in enforcement:

- **Regulations:** Sikkim was a pioneer in banning plastic bags as far back as 1998. Others followed, and so far, around 22 states and UTs have bans in place.
- **Ineffective monitoring:** Due to ineffective monitoring, everybody flouts the rules so the ban does not serve the purpose. In Maharashtra, for example, the ban on single-use disposable plastic was strictly enforced initially. But now,it's back to square one.
- **Pricing of carrying bags:** Plastics Waste Management Rules 2016 included a clause in Rule 15 which called for explicit pricing of carry-bags. This required vendors to register and pay an annual fee to the urban local bodies. But lobbying by the producers of plastics ensured that this clause was removed by an amendment in 2018.
- **Poor compliance:** The Plastic Waste Management Rules of 2016 require creators of such packaging waste to take it back at their cost or pay cities for its management under Extended Manufacturer Responsibility. But there is little compliance.

Plastic control during covid-19

Plastic is important because of its central role in durable goods, medicine and food safety. There are quite a few steps we can take right now during the COVID-19.

- **Firstly, the waste collection should operate at the same speed as waste generation.** Litter is a large part of the plastic pollution ending up in Indian rivers. Improved planning and frequency of waste disposal operations can relieve this.
- **Secondly, the waste should be separated** and used plastic early in the waste-to-value cycle so that the plastic remains suitable for treatment and recycling. It will make recycling much easier and more economically feasible.
- **Thirdly, we need to encourage environmentally-friendly substitutes** to single-use plastics. Business models that avoid plastic waste through alternative product delivery systems should be encouraged.
- **Lastly, plastic pollution be considered as a truly society-wide problem**, it is important for government, businesses, and civ il society to coordinate to find solutions.
  - For example, UNEP and its partners are working with the Indian government towards these goals. They are working with researchers, enterprises and community group to address plastic pollution.
  - The science being created by UNEP and National Geographic is informing policy and decision-making processes at the National, regional and local level.

Way Forward

- **Create awareness**: We need to build awareness of the damage caused by SUPs and develop consumer consciousness to minimize their use.
- **Plastic granules:** SUPs can potentially be converted by thermo-mechanical recycling into plastic granules for blending into other plastic products, usually irrigation piping for agriculture.
- **Replacing thermocol:** Another ingenious idea is to replace the use of thermocol with a totally biodegradable pith from the shola/sola plant (Aeschynomene aspera) — this was used in huge quantities till the 1950s for making sola-topees or pith helmets for colonials and their armies.
- **Monetized collection model:** ULBs could take a cue from some best practices followed in cities like Bangalore where Dry Waste Collection Centres have not only been established but also have a self-sustainable business model. Need to establish a monetized collection model for plastic waste that has economic returns for all those involved.
- **Plastic for road construction:** Promote the use of plastic waste for road construction as per Indian Road Congress guidelines or energy recovery, or waste to oil, etc. for gainful utilization of waste and also address the waste disposal issue.
- **Virgin plastics**: (e.g. those used in food packets, etc) should be collected separately because of the higher value it draws.

These efforts will contribute to strengthening the existing plastic waste management framework in India and to the development of a National Action Plan for Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution in Rivers. We require an approach that includes reducing the manufacture of new fossil fuel-based plastics, improving waste collection and disposal, and developing and using alternatives.

Vehicle Scrappage Policy

Syllabus: GS-III- Environment- Conservation, Environment Pollution and Degradation

In News: Recently, Union Transport Minister announced the vehicle scrappage policy. Previously, The Finance Minister announced the "Vehicle Scrapping Policy" in her Budget speech. The policy will aim to phase out older, inefficient and polluting vehicles.

Need for a Vehicle Scrappage Policy:

- **Reducing congestion on road:** According to the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), **by 2025** India will have **over two crore old vehicles nearing the end of their lives.** Not only that, India adds 1,400 vehicles every day.
- **NGT ruling:** The policy seeks to give effect to various rulings of NGT. Such as:
  - In 2015, **National Green Tribunal** barred diesel vehicles older than 10 years to commute on Delhi NCR roads. The scrappage policy is the next step to prevent them from further commuting on roads.
- **Past efforts:** The government also introduced a draft **Vehicle Fleet Modernization Programme** in 2016. But the project never got materialized.
- **Reducing emissions:** IIT Bombay's conducted a multi-city study in 2014. The study estimated that **pre-2005 vehicles were responsible for 70 per cent of the total pollution load from vehicles**.
  - For example, one 15-year-old vehicle has emissions equivalent to 25 new-generation vehicles. The scrappage policy will reduce the pollution level by 25 per cent as compared to old commuting vehicles.

Salient features of Vehicle Scrappage Policy

- **Scrapping older vehicles: Private** vehicles older than 20 years and commercial vehicles older than 15 years can be scrapped voluntarily. To run these vehicles on the road, a fitness certificate (FC) will be mandatory.
- **Compulsory fitness certification:** Automated vehicle fitness centres belong to the government will issue certificates after conducting fitness tests. Each fitness certificate is valid for five years. After that vehicle will undergo another fitness test.
  - If a vehicle fails the fitness test, the government will not provide renewed Registration Certificates (RC) for those vehicles. As per the Motor Vehicle Act, 1988, driving a vehicle without an RC is illegal in India.
  - Each vehicle is permitted to have three failures in the fitness test. After that, the vehicle might be forwarded to vehicle scrapping.
- **Incentivizing scrapping:** The government is expected to provide monetary incentives to the owners scrapping the vehicles.

- **Taxes and test cost:** Each fitness test will approximately cost ₹ 40,000. If the vehicle passes the fitness test, the owner of the vehicle has to pay road tax, and a possible "Green Tax" (Tax levied on goods that cause environmental pollution).
- **Voluntary scrapping:** The total cost involved in pursuing a Fitness test and paying "Green tax" will act as a deterrent to have older vehicles. This will further facilitate voluntary Scrapping of the old vehicle and buying a newer one.

Benefits of the proposed policy:

- **The Scrappage policy will benefit the following sectors at one go**:
  - o The policy will stimulate the domestic automobile and automotive industry. The **automobile industry is projected to grow at an annual rate of 22%** if this policy is implemented properly.
  - o It will provide a massive opportunity for players in the organised scrappage and recycling industry.
  - o The scrapping will provide **recovery of steel, aluminium, plastic** etc. and boost the industries associated with it.
- **Boosting revenue:** According to an estimate, taxes from the automobile sector will amount to ₹ 10,000 Crores, if the scrappage policy is implemented properly.
- **Containing oil imports:** According to the BEE (**Bureau of Energy Efficiency**) estimates, India has to enforce Scrapping old vehicles and shifting towards higher fuel efficiency norms. If it is achieved, then as per the BEE estimates, "there will be a reduction of 22.97 million tons of fuel demand in India by 2025". This will help in saving oil import and associated costs.
- **Fulfilling India's International commitments**: India has committed to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and provided national targets for reducing emissions.
- **Environment-friendly vehicles**: The policy will also promote the use of more environment-friendly vehicles and reduce the oil import bill.
- **Rising number of old vehicles:** Union Transport Minister, highlighted that there are **51 lakhsvehicles in India which are older than 20 years**, 34 lakhs vehicles which are more than 15 years old and around 17 lakhs vehicles older than 15 years, but do not have vehicle fitness certificates.

The challenges in implementing the vehicle scrappage policy successfully:

- **Requires cooperative federalism: States must support this step by providing road tax** and registration discounts. The automobile industry is expected to offer genuine discounts on new vehicles. The centre has the difficult task of **making sure that the scrappage plan gets the state's support**.
- **Missing funding support: 1.7 million Heavy commercial vehicles** do not have fitness certificates. This poses the biggest challenge. Many of these vehicles cannot get replaced quickly in the absence of financial arrangements for small operators.

- **Limited financial resources:** In rural areas, **old vehicles are being used** as the owners have very limited financial resources to purchase new vehicles.
- **Lack of capacity and no Standard Operating Procedure (SOP):** India so far has only one government-authorized scrappage workshop in Greater Noida. Also, the government do **not have any standard operating procedures (SOP)** for setting up vehicle scrapping centres. Formulating a policy without having the capacity will lead to the accumulation of old vehicles like solid wastes.
- **Regulation of pollutants**: Regulation of pollutants released during scrapping. The scrapping of the Vehicle will release **toxic metals like mercury, lead, cadmium or hexavalent chromium**. If not properly regulated, it will pollute the environment and have long-lasting consequences.

Way Forward

- **Key recommendations of CSE: Centre for Science and Environment** (CSE) released a report titled **"What to do with old vehicles: Towards effective scrappage policy and infrastructure".** In that, the CSE gave a **few important suggestion for vehicle scrapping policy** in India. They are:
  - There should be a separate effort to **include Extended Producer Responsibility** (EPR) in collecting the car for scrapping. Apart from that, there should be legally binding rules **for scrapping**.
  - The scrappage scheme should **incentivise the replacement of old vehicles with Electric Vehicles.** On the other hand, the government should also frame a policy **to reduce the purchasing of traditional petroleum-powered vehicles.**
- **Promoting fuel-efficient vehicles:** The automobile industry is important. Its share before COVID-19 was about 7.5% of GDP with significant downstream employment. **The Centre has to arrive at a balanced solution and incentivize** the manufacturers of fuel-efficient vehicles.
- **Encourage ecological scrapping:** Ecological scrapping, as a concept, must lead to high rates of materials recovery; reduce air pollution, mining and pressure on the environment.
- **Creating infrastructure:** The Scrappage policy has the potential to meet the government-set target of 30-40 per cent **electrification of the vehicle fleet by 2030**. But it can be sustainable only when the government provides adequate support to electric Vehicles such as by creating the necessary infrastructure for charging, manufacturing battery packs etc.

POLITY

Validity of "State's resolution against Central laws"

What is the News?

The Supreme Court has found no harm in State Legislative Assemblies passing resolutions against Central laws. It was seen in the cases of the Citizenship Amendment Act or the new farm laws.

About Seventh Schedule:

- The seventh Schedule under Article 246 of the constitution deals with the division of powers between the union and the states. It contains three lists-
  - **Union List**: It contains the subjects on which Parliament may make laws
  - **State List:** It contains the subjects on which state legislatures may make laws.
  - **Concurrent List:** It contains subjects in which both Parliament and state legislatures have jurisdiction. However, the Constitution provides federal supremacy to Parliament on concurrent list items in case of a conflict. (Unless the State law gets the assent of the President, the Central law will prevail if there is a conflict between the Central law and the State law.)

"MPLAD Scheme" Funds for 2019-20 cleared by Finance Minister

What is the news?

The Finance Minister has said that the funds under the MPLAD scheme (Members of Parliament Local Area Development) Scheme for 2019-20 are clear.

Note: The government of India has decided to make the MPLADS scheme non-operational for two years (2020-21 and 2021-22). These funds will be used to strengthen the Government's efforts in managing the impact of COVID-19 in the country.

About MPLADs Scheme:

- Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) is a Central Sector Scheme. It was launched in 1993.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Key Features of MPLAD Scheme:

- **Under the scheme, an MP receives Rs.5 crores** per annum to identify and fund developmental projects.
- **The funds released under the scheme are non-lapsable**: Non-Lapsable funds should be spent within the current financial year. These funds cannot be carried forward to the next year.

- **The role of the MP is recommendatory in nature.**
- **The focus of the scheme is on the creation of durable community assets** like roads, school buildings, etc. Recommendations for non-durable assets can be made only under limited circumstances.
- **Elected Members of Rajya Sabha** can recommend works in the state from where they have been elected.
- **Nominated Members** of both the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the country.

SC orders Info. on Rule Curve for "Mullaperiyar Dam"

What is the News?

The Supreme Court orders the Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary to give information on the 'rule curve' for the Mullaperiyar dam. It also directed the Supervisory Committee to issue directions or take steps to address the three core safety issues.

What is Rule Curve?

The 'rule curve' in a dam decides the fluctuating storage levels in a reservoir. The gate opening schedule of a dam is based on the 'rule curve'. It is part of the "core safety" mechanism in a dam. Rules curves are used to guarantee the safety of the reservoir as well as water security.

About Mullaperiyar Dam:

- **Mullaperiyar dam** is located on the confluence of the Mullayar and Periyar rivers in Kerala's Idukki district. The dam is located on the Cardamom Hills of the Western Ghats.
- **It** is **operated** and maintained by the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu. Even though, the dam is located in Kerala.
- The dam is **operated by Tamil Nadu following an 1886 lease agreement** for 999 years. It was signed between the Maharaja of Travancore and the Secretary of State for India during British Rule.
- **In** the 1970s, the **lease agreement was renewed** by Tamil Nadu and Kerala. It gave the former, rights to the water from the dam, besides the authority to develop hydropower projects at the site. In return, Kerala receives rent from Tamil Nadu.

Government launches "Mera Ration Mobile App"

What is the News?

The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution launches the 'Mera Ration' mobile app.

About Mera Ration Mobile app:

- **Mera Ration Mobile app** will facilitate the 'One Nation-One Ration Card' system. It aims to help those ration cardholders who move to new areas for livelihoods.
- **Developed by:** Government of India in association with National Informatics Center(NIC).
- **Key Features of the app:** The application allows beneficiaries to
  - Find out the nearest fair price shop available according to the location.

- o Users can check details of **a)** Recent transactions **b)** Status of the Aadhaar seeding and **c)** entitlement of the amount of rations available to them.
  - o Migrant beneficiaries can also register their migration details through the application. There is also an option for beneficiaries to enter suggestions/feedback.
- **Languages:** Presently users get English and Hindi as preferred languages for operating the app. However, the government plans to make the app available to users in 14 different languages.

Report of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development

What is the News?

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development has submitted its report to the Lok Sabha.

Parliamentary report On Pensions to Senior Citizens, Widows and Disabled:

- **Increase in Pension Amount:** The Central Government must increase the small amount of pensions provided for poor senior citizens, widows and disabled people under the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP).

About National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP):

- It was launched in 1995. It is a welfare programme administered by the Ministry of Rural Development. The programme is being implemented in rural areas as well as urban areas.
- **Aim:** To provide financial assistance to the elderly, widows and persons with disabilities in the form of social pensions.
- **Current Schemes under NSAP:** There are five different schemes being implemented as part of NSAP:
- **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS):** Under this, senior citizens of the Below Poverty Line (BPL) households will get Rs 200 to Rs 500 a month.
- **Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS):** Under this, widows aged over 40 years in BPL households will get Rs 300 to Rs 500 a month.
- **Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS):** Under this, Rs 300 a month will be provided for persons aged 18-79 years with severe or multiple disabilities in BPL households.
- **National Family Benefit Scheme(NFBS):** Under this, Rs 20,000 are provided upon the death of a breadwinner aged 18-59 in BPL households.
- **Annapurna Scheme:** Under the scheme, senior citizens not receiving any pension benefit will get 10 kg of food grains (wheat or rice) per month at free of cost.

  Click Here to Read about MGNREGA

Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs Releases "Municipal Performance Index (MPI)"

What is the news?

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs releases the rankings of the Municipal Performance Index (MPI) 2020.

About Municipal Performance Index (MPI), 2020:

- It is a framework to assess and analyze the performance of Indian Municipalities. Performance is evaluated based on their defined set of functions.
- It provides citizens with a better understanding of their local government administration.
- The MPI has been undertaken for the first time in the country.

Coverage:

- The index examined the sectoral performance of 111 municipalities (with Delhi being assessed separately for NDMC and the three Municipal Corporations).
- **Classification**: It has classified municipalities based on their population:
  o Million+ (municipalities having over a million population) and
  o Less than Million Population.

Ranking of Indian Universities in "QS World University Rankings 2021"

What is the News?

The QS World University Rankings 2021 released.

About QS World University Rankings 2021

- **Released by:** Global higher education consultancy Quacquarelli Symonds releases annually.

Key Findings Related to India:

- **Twelve Indian universities** and higher education institutions have achieved top-100 positions in their subject. In total, 25 Indian programs have achieved top-100 positions – two fewer than in 2020.
- **The top-ranked Indian programme globally** is the IIT Madras petroleum engineering program. It is followed by mineral and mining engineering at Bombay and Kharagpur IITs.
- **Engineering and Technology:** Only three institutions made it to the top 100 in this category — the Bombay, Delhi, and Madras IITs. In 2020, 5 institutions were ranked in the top 100.
- **Social Sciences and management: the** University of Delhi is the highest-ranked Indian institution in this category. But it fell 48 places at 208.
- **Life Sciences and Medicine:** All India Institute of Medical Sciences remained the only institution in the top 300 in this category.
- **Natural Sciences:** Indian Institute of Science(IISc) has entered into the top 100 in this category.

- **Arts & Humanities**: Jawaharlal Nehru University(JNU) anthropology program has been ranked 159th in this category.
- **Private Institute:** OP Jindal Global University is the only Indian private institution in the top 100 list. It entered into the top 100 law schools of the world with a rank of 76.

"Sugamya Bharat App"

What is the News?

Union Minister for Social justice and Empowerment is going to virtually launch the "Sugamya Bharat App".

About the Sugamya Bharat App:

- It is a mobile application developed to sensitise and enhance accessibility within the 3 pillars of the Accessible India Campaign. These pillars namely- the transportation sector, building an accessible environment and the ICT ecosystem in India.
- The app will **aid the Accessible India Campaign** towards making a barrier-free and conducive environment for Divyangjans (Persons with Disabilities – PwDs)

Nagaland to revive barbed cages for criminals

What is the News?

Some villages in Nagaland are trying to revive a traditional form of punishment. It involves punishing the criminals by putting them into barbed cages.

About the Nagaland traditional form of punishment:

- Villages in Nagaland practice a traditional form of punishment that punishes social offenders or violators of Naga customary laws. They put offenders into a triangular barbed cage that irritates the skin.
- The cage is made of the logs of **Masang-fung**. It is a **local tree** that people avoid because of the irritation it causes.
- These cages are referred to in Nagaland as khujli Ghar and in Nagamese as **pidgin lingua franca**.
- The cage is usually placed at a central spot in the village, usually in full public view. Hence, the punishment is more of humiliation or loss of face within the community or clan than of spending at least a day inside the barbed cages without any space to move.

Pointly for Polity

- *"Postal ballot" extended to certain people in Tamil Nadu*
  - A postal Ballot is a facility whereby a voter can cast his/her vote remotely. The user cast the vote by recording preference on the ballot paper and sending it back to the election officer before counting.

- o Section 60 of the Representation of People's(RP) Act,1951 provides for the person a postal ballot facility.
- *Justice N.V. Ramana recommended as 48th CJI (Chief Justice of India)*
  - o Chief Justice of India is the chief judge of the Supreme Court of India. He/she is also the highest-ranking officer of the Indian judiciary.
  - o *Constitution on appointment of CJI:*
  - o The Constitution of India **does not have any specific provision** for criteria and procedure for
  - o Appointing the CJI.
  - o **Article 124(1) and the 2008 amendment** of the Indian Constitution states that there shall be a Supreme Court of India consisting of a Chief Justice of India and no. of judges as prescribed by Parliament.
  - o Initially, the prescribed no. of judges was 7 excluding CJI. Now the no. is 34 judges including the CJI.
  - o The closest mention is in **Article 126.** It deals with the appointment of an acting CJI.
- *About Ease of Living Index, 2020:*
  - o **Developed by:** Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs in 2018.
  - o It is an assessment tool. By this tool, quality of life and the impact of various initiatives on urban development are assessed.
- *Saras Aajeevika Mela:*
  - o **Nodal Ministry:** It is an initiative of the Ministry of Rural Development. This initiative is a part of Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM).
  - o **Organized by:** Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART).
    - o **CAPART:** It is an autonomous body. It was established in 1986 by the Ministry of Rural Development. CAPART co-coordinates the partnership between Voluntary Organizations and the Government for sustainable development of rural areas.
  - o **Objective:** Mela will bring the rural women Self Help Groups(SHGs) under one platform. By that, SHGs will be able to showcase their skills and sell their products.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Traffic in "Suez Canal" suspended

What is the News?

A 400 m long "Ever Given vessel" blocked the Suez Canal. The ship blocked the canal due to a lack of visibility created by the bad weather and a sand storm. The officials are still not able to clear the Vessel. So they temporarily suspended the traffic

About the Suez Canal:

- **Suez Canal** is a sea-level waterway running north-south across the Isthmus of Suez in Egypt to connect the Mediterranean and the Red seas. The canal separates the African continent from Asia.

"Gandhi Peace Prize 2020" awarded to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

What is the news?

Gandhi Peace Prize for 2020 has awarded to the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of Bangladesh. Similarly, the Gandhi Peace Prize for 2019 was awarded to the late Sultan of Oman, Qaboos bin Said Al Said.

About Gandhi Peace Prize:

- Gandhi Peace Prize is an annual award. It was instituted by the Government of India in 1995 during the commemoration of the 125th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
  - The prize can be given to individuals, associations, institutions, or organizations.
  - It can also be divided between two persons/institutions. If the Jury considered them as equally deserving for recognition in a given year.
  - It is open to all persons regardless of nationality, creed, race, or sex.
- **Rewards**: The award carries an amount of Rs.1 crore, a citation in a scroll, a plaque. Further, It also consists of an exquisite traditional handicraft/handloom item.

116th meeting of the "Permanent Indus Commission (PIC)"

What is the News?

India and Pakistan will hold the 116th meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) in New Delhi. They will discuss water sharing issues and address each other's concerns with the Indus Water Treaty.

About Permanent Indus Commission(PIC):

- **The Permanent Indus Commission** is a bilateral commission of officials from India and Pakistan. It is created to implement and manage the goals of the Indus Water Treaty, 1960.
- **Meeting**: The Commission according to the treaty must meet regularly at least once a year. The PIC will hold the meeting alternately in India and Pakistan.
- **Functions of the Permanent Indus Commission:**
    o To establish and promote cooperative arrangements for the Treaty implementation;
    o Furnishing or exchange of information or data provided in the Treaty;
    o Promote cooperation between the Parties in the development of the waters of the Indus system
    o Examine and resolve any question in the agreement that arises between the parties.

United Nations SDSN publishes "World Happiness Report 2021"
What is the News?

World Happiness Report 2021 has been released. The report evaluated levels of happiness by accounting factors such as GDP, social support, personal freedom, and levels of corruption in each nation.

About World Happiness Report:
- **The World Happiness Report** is an annual report published by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network(SDSN).
- **The report ranks** countries by how happy their citizens perceive themselves to be.
- **The World Happiness Report 2021** focuses on the effects of COVID-19 and how people all over the world have fared.

Turkey withdraws from "Istanbul Convention"
What is the News?

Turkey withdraws from the Istanbul Convention to combat violence against women.

About Istanbul Convention:
- **Istanbul Convention** is also called the **Council of Europe Convention**. It aims towards preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.
- **Adoption:** The convention was adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in 2011. It came into force in 2014.
- **Purpose:** The convention sets minimum standards for governments to meet when tackling violence against women. Once ratified the Convention is legally binding on the country.
- **Significance:** It is the first legally-binding instrument that creates a comprehensive legal framework and approach to combat violence against women.
- **Members of the Istanbul Convention**: As of March 2019, it has been signed by 45 countries and the European Union.

EU joins "CDRI or Coalition for disaster resilient infrastructure initiative"

What is the news? The 27-member European Union joins the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) initiative. **About Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) Initiative:**

- **Prime Minister of India** launched it in 2019 at the UN Climate Change Summit.
- **What is it?** It is a multi-stakeholder global partnership of national governments, UN agencies, multilateral development banks, private sector, academic and knowledge institutions.
- **Purpose:** It aims to promote the resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks. It also supports sustainable development.
- **Governing Council:** The Governing Council is the highest policy-making body of the CDRI. It is co-chaired by India and a representative of another nation, nominated by rotation every two years.
- **Funding:** A large share of the fund over the first five years has been invested by India. There are no obligations on the part of members to make financial contributions to CDRI. However, at any point, members of the CDRI may make voluntary contributions.
- **Secretariat:** New Delhi, India.

Key takeaways from the "ISRO-JAXA virtual meeting"

What is the news?

Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and the Japanese space agency, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) held a virtual meeting.

About Lunar Polar Exploration(LUPEX) Mission:

- **LUPEX** is a robotic lunar mission by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA).
- **Aim:** The mission aims to send a lunar rover and lander to explore the South Pole region of the Moon in 2024.
- **Objective:** The mission will demonstrate new surface exploration technologies related to vehicular transport. It will also test lunar night survival capabilities for sustainable lunar exploration in the South Pole region of the moon.
- **Contribution**: JAXA is likely to provide the H3 launch vehicle and the rover. While ISRO would be responsible for the lander for this mission.

Pointly for International Relations

- *About the Troika-plus-Pakistan Conference:*
  - Troika-plus-Pakistan meeting involves consultations between the US, Russia, China, Pakistan along with the representatives of the Afghanistan government, Taliban, and other senior Afghan leaders.
  - 2 Such meetings held in 2020.

- o **Purpose:** The meeting is expected to discuss ways to assist in advancing the intra-Afghan talks in Doha. It aims to reduce the level of violence and to end the armed conflict in Afghanistan.
- *About Exercise Vajra Prahar:*
  - o **Exercise Vajra Prahar** is a Special Forces joint military training exercise. It takes place alternately in India and the US since 2010.
  - o **Aim:** The exercise enables sharing of best practices and experience in areas such as joint mission planning capabilities and operational tactics.
- *About UNHRC*
  - o The UNHRC is a United Nations body established in 2006. It replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights.
  - o Read more about UNHRC
- *About Ultimate military strength index:*
  - o The Ultimate military strength index **ranks the strongest military forces in the world**.
  - o The index calculated this after taking into consideration various factors. The factors include budgets, average salaries, number of inactive and active military personnel. The index also includes total air, sea, land, and nuclear resources and the weight of equipment.
- *About Exercise Pabbi-Antiterror-2021:*
  - o **The Council of the Regional Anti-Terrorist** Structure (RATS) held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan announced the exercise Pabbi-Antiterror during their 36th meeting.
  - o **Purpose of Pabbi-Antiterror:** To improve cooperation between the competent authorities of the SCO member states. Further, helping them in identifying and suppressing channels that finance terrorist activities.
- *About Indo-U.S Science and Technology Forum(IUSSTF)*
  - o **Established in:** It was established in 2000. It is an autonomous bilateral organization jointly funded by both the Governments of India and the United States of America.
  - o **Aim**: To promote Science, Technology, Engineering, and Innovation through interaction among government, academia, and industry.
  - o **Nodal Department:** The Department of Science & Technology, Governments of India is the nodal department for IUSSTF in India. Similarly, the U.S. Department of States is the nodal department in the US.
- *"SIPRI Report" - India Remains the 2nd Largest Arms Importer*
  - o **Second Largest Arms Importer:** India remains the second largest arms importer after Saudi Arabia.
  - o **Decrease in Arms Imports:** However, India's arms imports have decreased by 33 % between 2011-15 and 2016-20.
  - o **India's Arms Imports:** India's top three arms suppliers during 2016-20 were Russia (accounting for 49% of India's imports), France (18%), and Israel (13%).
    - o The US was the 4th largest arms supplier to India. Its imports to India reduced by 46% between 2016-20.

- o **India's Arms Exports:** India accounted for 0.2% of the share of global arms exports during 2016-20. It makes the country the world's 24th largest exporter of major arms. Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Mauritius are the top recipients of Indian military hardware.
- *About Exercise Dustlik-II:*
  - o **Exercise Dustlik** is a military exercise between the Indian Army and Uzbekistan Army.
  - o **First Edition:** The first edition of the Exercise Dustlik was held in 2019 at Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
  - o **Aim:** The aim of the exercise is strengthening Counter Insurgency (CI) and Counter-Terrorism (CT) operations. Especially in mountainous, rural and urban scenarios under United Nations(UN) mandate.
  - o **India's Participation:** India has nominated Army's 13 Kumaon regiment. It is also called the Rezang La battalion for its heroic action in the 1962 war with China.
- *El Salvador becomes Malaria Free:*
  - o Malaria is a disease caused by the Plasmodium parasites. It is transmitted to people through the bites of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes.
  - o **Types:** There are five kinds of malarial parasites — Plasmodium falciparum, Plasmodium vivax (the commonest ones), Plasmodium malariae, Plasmodium ovale and Plasmodium knowlesi.

INDIAN ECONOMY

Global Wind Report 2021
What is the News?

The Global Wind Energy Council (GWEC) has released the Global Wind Report, 2021. **The Global Wind Report** highlights the role of wind power on the road to net zero emissions.

Key Findings of the report:
- **Wind Energy:** The world's capacity to generate electricity from wind jumped 53% in 2020. A total 93 gigawatts (GW) capacity was installed in the year.
- **China and the United States** accounted for 75% of the new installations and over half the world's wind power capacity.

About Global Wind Energy Council(GWEC):
- **The Global Wind Energy Council (GEWC)** was established in 2005 to provide a credible and representative forum for the entire wind energy sector at an international level.
- **Aim:** Its mission is to ensure that wind power is established as one of the world's leading energy sources, providing substantial environmental and economic benefits.
- **Headquarters:** Brussels, Belgium.

Union Minister inaugurates Event for "DSIR-PRISM Scheme"

What is the News?

Union Minister for Science & Technology inaugurates the Event for Publicity of the PRISM (Promoting Innovations in Individuals, Startups, and MSMEs) scheme.

About PRISM Scheme:

- **Nodal Ministry:** PRISM is an initiative of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), Ministry of Science and Technology.
- **Aim**: To help an individual innovator to become a successful technopreneur. It promotes, supports, and funds implementable and commercially viable innovations created for society.
- **Who is eligible?** Under the initiative, an innovator of Indian nationality - student, professional and common citizen is eligible.
- **Features:** Eligible candidates are provided with technical, strategic, and financial assistance by DSIR-PRISM. Assistance is provided on the stages like idea development, prototype development, and pilot scaling and patenting.
- **Sectors Covered:** The proposals under the scheme will be accepted for the following sectors:
  - Green technology
  - Clean energy
  - Industrially utilizable smart materials
  - Waste to Wealth
  - Affordable Healthcare
  - Water & Sewage Management and
  - any other technology or knowledge-intensive area.

Finance Minister launched "Central Scrutiny Centre" and "IEPFA App"

What is the news?

The Finance Minister has virtually launched the Central Scrutiny Centre (CSC). She also launched the mobile app for the Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority (IEPFA).

About Central Scrutiny Centre:

- **Central Scrutiny Centre** is an initiative of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. It aims to scrutinize the forms filled by companies under straight-through processes.
- **Objective:** The objective is to ensure that data quality is free from flaws.
- **Features of the Central Scrutiny Centre:**
  - It will Scrutinize the filings made by users under straight-through processes
  - The CSC will identify data quality issues and irregularities.

o Further, it will communicate the data quality issues to the concerned Registrar of Companies. Then the corrective steps can be taken to restore the authenticity and correctness of data.

PM to inaugurate 'Maitri Setu' Bridge

What is the News?

The Prime Minister will inaugurate the 'Maitri Setu' bridge between India and Bangladesh.

About Maitri Setu:
- **Constructed by:** National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd.
- **Maitri Setu** is a bridge between India and Bangladesh. It is a 1.9 km long bridge over the Feni River. This bridge will connect Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh.
- **The name 'Maitri Setu'** symbolizes growing bilateral relations and friendly ties between India and Bangladesh.

About Feni River:
- **Feni River** is a river in southeastern Bangladesh. It is a trans-boundary river with an ongoing dispute about water rights.
- **Origin:** The Feni River originates in South Tripura district and flows through Sabroom town and then enters Bangladesh.

"Index of Economic Freedom" 2021 released

What is the News?

The Heritage Foundation releases The Index of Economic Freedom 2021.

Key Findings of Index of Economic Freedom 2021
- India ranked 121st in the index with a score of 56.5 points under the category of 'mostly unfree'.
- In Asia-Pacific, India ranked 26th among the 40 countries.

Other Key Findings
- Singapore tops the index followed by New Zealand, Australia, Switzerland, and Ireland.
- Hong Kong was left out of the 2021 index calculation for the first time. It is because of China's increasing control over the city's economic policies. Hong Kong topped the index for 25 out of 26 years except for 2020.

About Index of Economic Freedom
- It is an annual index. This index created in 1995 by think-tank The Heritage Foundation and The Wall Street Journal.
- **Purpose**: It measures the degree of economic freedom in countries across the world.
- **Coverage:** The Index covered economic freedoms in 184 countries.

Government released "Rating mechanism for National Highways"

What is the News?

The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) released the first-ever rating mechanism for National Highways.

About the rating mechanism for National Highways:

- Conducted by: National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) under the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH).
- **Objective:** The fundamental objective of highway rating is "Minimum time with maximum safety in a stress-free environment" for the highway users. Apart from that, it will also improve the government's accountability towards road users.

Note: There are **no such criteria that have been developed across the world** to evaluate the performance of highways from the user perspective.

LinkedIn released the "Opportunity Index 2021"

What is the News?

LinkedIn has released the Opportunity Index,2021. The index focuses on the manner in which women perceive their employment opportunities. Further, the opportunity index also focuses on how the gender gap is slowing down the career progress for working women.

About the Opportunity Index 2021:

- The LinkedIn Opportunity Index research was conducted by market research firm GfK.
- The countries that were included in the index include Australia, China, India, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore.
- For India, the index highlighted the difference in understanding regarding the available opportunities for men and women.

Pointly for Indian Economy

About PRANIT Portal:

- o **PRANIT** is an e-Tendering Portal. It aims to make the tendering process more transparent through less paperwork and ease of operation.
- o *About POWERGRID:*
- o Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID) is a central public sector unit and a Maharatna company. The Ministry of Power owns this CPSU.
- o **Objective:** It is engaged mainly in the Transmission of Power. It transmits about 50% of the total power generated in India on its transmission network.
- o **Headquarters:** Gurugram, India.
- *About Shramik Kalyan Portal:*
- o **Launched by:** the Indian Railways in the year 2018.
- o **Purpose:** to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Minimum Wages Act. Also, to ensure that contractual workers of Indian Railways get their rightful due.

- o *How does the Portal work?*
- o The portal enables all Railway contractors to register themselves and subsequently add work orders issued by different Railway units.

- *What is Prompt corrective action(PCA) Framework?*
  - o **PCA** is an RBI framework. Banks with weak financial metrics are put under the PCA framework by the Reserve Bank of India(RBI).
  - o **Aim:** It aims to check the problem of Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) in the Indian banking sector.

- *Cabinet clears 74% FDI in Insurance Sector*
  - o **Conditions:** The increase in the foreign direct investment (FDI) limit in the insurance sector comes with safeguards such as:
  - o The majority of directors on the Board and key management persons in health and general insurance companies would be resident Indians. At least 50% of directors will be independent directors.
  - o The government will also specify a particular percentage of profits to be retained as a general reserve.

- *About Project REHAB launched by KVIC:*
  - o Under this Project, bee boxes will be used as a fence to prevent the attack of elephants.
  - o **Aim:** The project aims to create "bee-fences" to mitigate Human– elephant conflicts in the country. It will reduce the loss of lives of both, humans and elephants.
  - o **Where was it launched?** It was launched as a pilot project at four places located on the periphery of Nagarhole National Park in Karnataka.
  - o **Sub Mission:** The project has been launched as a sub-mission of KVIC's National Honey Mission.

ENVIRONMENT

UN observes "International Day of Forests"
What is the News?
The United Nations observes March 21 as the International Day of Forests.

About International Day of Forests:
- The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed March 21 as the International Day of Forests (IDF) in 2012.
- **Aim:** The day celebrates and raises awareness about the importance of all types of forests.
- **Celebrated by:** The day is celebrated by the United Nations Forum on Forests and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The celebrations are done in collaboration with governments, Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), and other relevant organisations in the field.
- **The theme for 2021: "**Forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being".

About United Nations Forum on Forests:

- **Established by:** Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).
- **Objective:** To promote the management, conservation, and sustainable development of all types of forests. Further, it aims to strengthen long-term political commitment to this end.
- **Membership:** The Forum has universal membership, and is composed of all Member States of the United Nations and specialized agencies.
- **Headquarters:** New York, United States.

"Tiger Reserves" in India

What is the News?

Six tigers are unaccounted for in the Ranthambore tiger reserves in Rajasthan, since March 2020. But State officials are not willing to label them as missing. NTCA has constituted a committee in this regard.

About National Tiger Conservation Authority(NTCA):

- NTCA is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. It was constituted under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- It was established in 2005 following the recommendations of the Tiger Task Force.
- **Objectives of National Tiger Conservation Authority:**
  - Providing statutory authority to Project Tiger so that compliance with its directives becomes legal.
  - Fostering accountability of Center-State in the management of Tiger Reserves by providing a basis for MoU with States within our federal structure.
  - Providing for oversight by Parliament.
  - Addressing livelihood interests of local people in areas surrounding Tigers Reserves.

PM received "Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award"

What is the News?

The Prime Minister received the Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award.

Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award:

- Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award was instituted in 2016.
- **Awarded by:** the Cambridge Energy Research Associates Week (CERAWeek).
- **Purpose:** The Global Energy and Environment Leadership award recognize the commitment of leadership to the future of global energy and the environment.
- **Awarded for:** Providing solutions and policies for energy access, affordability, and environmental stewardship.

"Black-Browed Babbler" rediscovered after 170 years

What is the News?

Black-browed Babbler (Malacocincla perspicillata) has been rediscovered. It is spotted in south-eastern Kalimantan, Borneo in Indonesia after 170 years.

About Black Browed Babbler:

- **Black Browed Babbler** is a songbird species in the family of Pellorneidae.
- **The single specimen** of the bird was first found between 1843 through 1848 during an expedition. However, after that, the species was never seen in the wild again.
- **Features of the bird:**
    - The upper parts of the bird were rich brown while the underparts up to the breast were greyish with fine white streaking.
    - The bird has a broad black eye stripe and the iris was found to be deep red. The legs are dark slate-grey.
- **IUCN Status:** Data Deficient. However, IUCN says that the global population size of the bird has not been quantified, but the species is described as possibly extinct.

"African Forest Elephants" declared Critically Endangered

What is the news?

The IUCN declares African Forest elephants as **'critically endangered'** and Savanna (or bush) elephants as **'endangered'**.

Note: Previously IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) listed both African elephants as "vulnerable". But now it has opted to list them separately. It is after genetic evidence proved that both are different species.

About Asian Elephants:

- **IUCN Red List:** Endangered
- **CITES:** Appendix I.
- **Wildlife** (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I.
- **The Asian elephant** is the largest land mammal on the Asian continent. They inhabit dry to wet forest and grassland habitats in 13 range countries spanning South and Southeast Asia.
- **In India,** the Asian elephant is found in four fragmented populations, in the south, north, central and north-east India.

What is "Earth Hour"?

What is the News?

Earth Hour Day has been observed all over the world on March 27, 2021.

About Earth Hour

- **Earth Hour** is a global movement for environmental conservation. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) started it in 2007.
- It is an annual event, that takes place on **the last Saturday of March**. Millions of people in over 180 countries and territories participate in it by turning off their lights.
- **Aim:** To call attention to global warming, loss of biodiversity, and climate change.
- **During the** Earth Hour, people turn off their lights for an hour as a sign of global solidarity.
- **Theme for 2021: "**Climate Change to Save Earth"

About World Wildlife Fund for Nature(WWF):
- **World Wildlife Fund for Nature(WWF)** is an international non-governmental organization founded in 1961.
- It is the world's largest conservation organization.
- **Aim**: It aims to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment. Furthermore, it also aims to build a future where humans live in harmony with nature.
- **Headquarters**: Gland, Switzerland.

The first "Inter-State Tiger Relocation Project" Suspended
What is the News?
The first inter-state tiger relocation project has been suspended.
About the First Tiger Relocation Project:
- The **National Tiger Conservation Authority(NTCA)** launched the first Tiger Relocation Project in 2018.
- Under the Project, two tigers a male (Mahavir) from Kanha Tiger Reserve and a female (Sundari) from Bandhavgarh from MP, were relocated to Satkosia Tiger Reserve in Odisha.
About Satkosia Tiger Reserve, and why was it chosen for Relocation?
- Satkosia Tiger Reserve comprises two adjoining sanctuaries of central Odisha named Satkosia Gorge Sanctuary and Baisipalli Sanctuary.
- The reserve lies in a transitional zone extending between the Chhota Nagpur Plateau and the Deccan Plateau.
- Satkosia was declared as a Tiger Reserve in 2007. It had a population of 12 tigers then. However, the numbers reduced to two in 2018.

Hence, the purpose of the relocation was to repopulate tigers in the reserve areas. Also, Satkosia was found to fall under reserves where there is a potential for increasing tiger populations.

Himachal Pradesh to start "Seabuckthorn plantations"
What is the News?
The Himachal Pradesh government has decided to start Sea Buckthorn Plantation in the cold desert areas.

About Sea buckthorn:
- It is a shrub that produces an orange-yellow coloured edible berry.

- In India, one can find it above the tree line in the Himalayan region. It is generally in dry areas such as the cold deserts of Ladakh and Spiti.
- In Himachal Pradesh, it is locally called Himalayan chharma and grows in the wild in Lahaul and Spiti and parts of Kinnaur.

Petition in SC for Protection of "Great Indian Bustard"

What is the News?

The Supreme Court gave several suggestions to protect the Great Indian Bustard in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

About Great Indian Bustard:

- Great Indian Bustard is one of the heaviest flying birds in the world. It inhabits dry grasslands and scrublands on the Indian subcontinent.
- **Habitat:** It is endemic to Indian Sub-Continent. In India, the population is confined mostly to Rajasthan and Gujarat. Small population occurs in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- **Conservation Status:**
  - **IUCN Red List:** Critically Endangered species
  - **CITES**: Appendix I
  - **Wildlife (Protection) Act,1972:** Schedule I
- **Threats**:
  - Collision/electrocution with power transmission lines,
  - Hunting (still prevalent in Pakistan),
  - Irrigation and farming technology
  - Mining
  - Wind turbines and Solar farms (photovoltaic power stations)
  - Plantation of exotic shrub/tree species in deserts and grasslands in the name of afforestation.

Conservation Initiatives for Sharks in India

What is the news?

As per a recent study, the global population of sharks and rays reduced by over 70% in the past five decades. But a few conservation initiatives in India show that well-crafted policies and awareness programmes can make a difference.

About Sharks:

- **Sharks** come under a subclass of fish species called **elasmobranchii**. The species in this subclass have skeletons made from cartilage and not bones. They also have five to seven gill slits on each side of their heads. They use gills to filter oxygen from the water.
- **Habitat:** Sharks inhabit three major marine habitats such as continental shelves, deep-sea and open ocean.

- **Timescale:** Based on fossilized teeth and scales, scientists believe that sharks have been around for more than 400 million years—long before the dinosaurs.
- **India** is the second-largest shark fishing nation in the world.

"Miyawaki method" to create dense green patches

What is the News?

Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) has been using the Miyawaki method to create tiny urban forests in Metropolitan areas of Mumbai.

What is the Miyawaki Method?

- Miyawaki is an afforestation method based on the work of Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki in the 1980s.

Process of Miyawaki Method:

- Initially, native trees of the region are identified and divided into four layers — shrub, sub-tree, tree, and canopy.
- After that, the quality of soil is analysed and biomass is mixed with it. Biomass mixing help to enhance the perforation capacity, water retention capacity, and nutrients.
- A mound is built with the soil and the seeds are planted at a very high density. Furthermore, the ground is covered with a thick layer of mulch.
- Multi-layered saplings are planted close to each other. This blocks sunlight from reaching the ground and prevents weeds from growing. It also keeps the soil moist.
- The close cropping also ensures that the plants receive sunlight only from the top. It enables them to grow upwards rather than sideways.

Pointly for Environment

- *About Similipal Biosphere Reserve:*
  - **Location:** Simlipal is a national park and a tiger reserve located in the Mayurbhanj district in the Indian state of Odisha. It is the 7th largest national park in India. It lies in the eastern end of the Eastern Ghat.
  - **Part of:** The Park is part of the Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve. It includes three **Similipal Tiger Reserve, Hadagarh Wildlife Sanctuary, and Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary.**
  - **Origin of Name:** The park derives its name from '**Simul'** which are red silk cotton trees growing in the area.
  - **Flora:** The park has a high biodiversity with about 94 species of orchids and 3,000 species of plants. Among them, Sal is a dominant tree species in the park.
  - **Fauna:** The park is home to the Bengal tiger, Asian elephant, gaur, and chausingha. It is also home to some beautiful waterfalls like Joranda and Barehipani Falls.

- o **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve:** The park was declared a biosphere reserve by the Government of India in 1994. It is a part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves since 2009.
- o **Tribes:** The two tribes namely Erenga Kharias and the Mankirdias inhabit the reserve's forests and practice traditional agricultural activities. Other dominant tribes include the Ho, Gonda, and Munda among others.

- *About Fishing Cat:*
  - o Fishing cats are elusive nocturnal mammals. It is almost twice the size of the house cat.
  - o They are generally found in the marshy wetlands of northern and eastern India and on the mangroves of the east coast.
  - o **Threats:** The loss of habitat due to the destruction of wetlands is a major threat to the fishing cat. Besides, the animal is also killed by people under the wrong assumption that it is a juvenile tiger and thus dangerous.

- *About Chilika Lake:*
  - o **Location:** Chilika Lake is a brackish water lagoon. It spreads over the Puri, Khurda and Ganjam districts of Odisha. The lake is located at the mouth of the Daya River flowing into the Bay of Bengal.
  - o **Significance:** It is Asia's largest and world's second-largest lagoon after The New Caledonian barrier reef.
  - o **Migratory Birds:** The lake is the largest wintering ground for migratory waterfowl found anywhere on the Indian subcontinent.
  - o **Ramsar Sites:** In 1981, Chilika Lake became the first Indian wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.
  - o **Temple:** Kalijai Temple is located on an island in Chilika Lake. It is considered to be the abode of the Goddess Kalijai.
  - o **Bird Sanctuary:** The Nalabana Island (Forest of Reeds) covering about 16 Sq. km of the Chilika lake declared a bird sanctuary in 1987.
  - o **Fauna:** The major attraction at the Chilika lake is Irrawaddy dolphins.

- *About Himalayan Serow:*
  - o Himalayan serow is a subspecies of the mainland serow. It resembles a cross between a goat, a donkey, a cow, and a pig.
  - o **Species:** There are several species of serows in the world. All of them are found in Asia. However, the Himalayan serow is restricted to the Himalayan region.
  - o **Habitat:** They are found at high altitudes between 2,000 metres and 4,000 metres. They are known to be found in the eastern, central and western Himalayas but not in the Trans Himalayan region.
  - o **Diet**: Himalayan serows are herbivores animals.
  - o **IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable
  - o **CITES**: Appendix I
  - o **The Wildlife Protection Act,1972:** Schedule I.

"NISAR Satellite" for Observing Earth's Surface
What is the News?

NASA and ISRO are collaborating on developing the NISAR Satellite.

About NISAR Satellite:

- **NISAR** is a joint Earth-observing mission between NASA and the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO).
- This satellite will be able to detect the earth's surface movement as small as 0.4 inches over an area.
- It will be a three-year mission. It will scan the globe including Earth's land, ice sheets, and sea ice, every 12 days during its mission.
- **Full-Form:** The name NISAR is short for NASA-ISRO-SAR. SAR here refers to the Synthetic Aperture Radar.
  - **SAR** refers to a technique for producing high-resolution images. Because of the precision, the radar can penetrate clouds and darkness. It means, it can collect data day and night in any weather.
- **Launched Year:** The satellite will be launched in 2022 from the Satish Dhawan Space Center in Sriharikota, India into a near-polar orbit.

"Indian Coast Guard Ship Vajra" commissioned
What is the News?

Indian Coast Guard ship 'Vajra' commissioned formally into service. It is the 6th offshore patrol vessel to enhance coastal security.

About ICGS Vajra:

- **Indian Coast Guard Ship Vessel "Vajra"** is indigenously designed and built by Larsen and Toubro Shipbuilding Ltd.
- **ICGS Vajra is the sixth** in the series of seven Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs).

Key Features of ICGS Vajra:

- **It is a 98-meter ship** equipped with state-of-the-art facilities. It is designed to carry one **twin-engine helicopter** and four high-speed boats.
- The vessel can also be used in **Search and Rescue, Law Enforcement,** and Maritime Patrol.
- The vessel is also capable of carrying **Pollution Response Equipment** for oil spill response at Sea.

Deadly drug-resistant superbug "Candida Auris or C.Auris" found in Andamans
What is the News?

Candida Auris (deadly hospital pathogen) identified for the first time in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

About Candida Auris:

- Candida Auris or C.auris is a multidrug-resistant fungus. It presents a serious global threat to human health.

Origin of Candida Auris:

- Candida Auris was first identified in 2009 in a patient in Japan. The fungus emerged in more than 40 countries across five continents in the last decade.
- The fungus is mostly found in tropical marshes and marine environments, outside hospital environments.
- However, It is an emerging pathogen, thus very little is known about the Candida Auris so far.

Vulnerable Population:

- C.Auris can be deadly for immunocompromised patients. The incidence of deaths from this fungal infection is high in countries such as the US and the UK, but its prevalence is less in Indian hospitals.

Genome mapping of Indian Ocean by NIO

What is the News?

National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) has launched its first-of-its-kind project of Genome Mapping in the Indian Ocean.

About the Genome Mapping in the Indian Ocean Project:

- Aim of the Project:
  - To reveal the internal working of the body of the ocean at a cellular level.
  - To understand the biochemistry and the response of the ocean to climate change, nutrient stress and increasing pollution.
- **Duration of the Project:** The project will take three years to complete.

What is Genome Mapping?

- Genome refers to an organism's complete set of DNA that includes all its genes. And mapping these genes simply means finding out the location of these genes in a chromosome.
- Therefore, Genome mapping essentially means figuring out the location of a specific gene on a particular region of the chromosome. It also means to determine the location of and relative distances between other genes on that chromosome.

About National Institute of Oceanography (NIO):

- **NIO** is an autonomous research organization established in 1966. It is one of the 37 constituent laboratories of the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), New Delhi.
- **Focus:** The principal focus of research has been on observing and understanding special oceanographic characteristics of the Indian Ocean.
- **Headquarters:** Goa

"INS Karanj" - the Scorpene-class submarine inducted into service

What is the news?

Indian Navy inducted INS Karanj into service. It is a 3rd Scorpene-class conventional diesel-electric submarine.

About INS Karanj:

- **INS Karanj** is a part of Project-75I. It is the 3rd submarine of the first batch of 6 Scorpene-class submarines under the project, for the Indian Navy.
- **Designed by:** French naval defence and energy group.
- **Manufactured by:** Mazagon Dock Limited, an Indian shipyard in Mumbai.
- **Earlier Version:** The previous INS Karanj (a Russian-origin submarine) was commissioned in 1969 at Riga in the erstwhile USSR. It served the nation for 34 years up to 2003.

What are Scorpene-Class Submarines?

- Scorpene-class submarines are one of the most advanced conventional submarines in the world.
- **Features of Scorpene Submarines:**
  - They have superior stealth features, such as; advanced silencing techniques, low radiated noise levels, and the ability to attack with precision-guided weapons on board.
  - They can also launch crippling attacks on the surface and underwater enemy targets.

About Project 75I:

- **The Project 75I** is a program by the Indian Navy for building six Scorpene-Class attack submarines.
- **Six Submarines:**
  - The first submarine is INS Kalvari. It was commissioned in 2017
  - The second is INS Khanderi. It was commissioned in 2019.
  - The fourth and fifth submarines are INS Vela and INS Vagir. They are undergoing sea trials.
  - The sixth is INS Vaghseer. It is in an advanced stage of outfitting.

Functions of "NSIL | New Space India Limited"

What is the news?

The government clarified the mandate of the New Space India Limited(NSIL) to the Rajya Sabha. It was in response to a query by the Standing Committee on Science and Technology on whether NSIL would replace ISRO.

About New Space India Limited(NSIL):

NSIL was established in 2019. It is a completely Govt. owned Undertaking / CPSE. It is under the administrative control of the Department of Space (DOS).

- **Objective:** To commercially exploit the research and development work of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- **Mandate:**
    - **Owning satellites** for Earth Observation and Communication applications and providing space-based services
    - **Building satellites** and launching them as per demand
    - **Providing Launch Services** for satellite belonging to the customer
    - **Building launch vehicles** through Indian Industry and launch as per satellite customer requirement
    - **Space based Services** related to Earth Observation and Communication satellites on a commercial basis
    - **Satellite building** through Indian Industry
    - **Technology Transfer** to Indian Industry

Russia's "Arktika-M satellite" to monitor Arctic climate

What is the News?

Russia has successfully launched the Arktika-M satellite. The satellite was launched from the Soyuz carrier rocket from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

About Arktika-M Satellite:

- Arktika-M satellite is a remote-sensing and emergency communications satellite
- **Objective:** It is designed to monitor the climate and environment in the Arctic region.
- Russia plans to send up a second satellite in 2023. This satellite will be combined with the Arktika-M Satellite. These two satellites will offer round-the-clock, all-weather monitoring of the Arctic Ocean and the surface of the Earth.

ISRO launches DRDO's "Sindhu Netra Satellite"

What is the News?

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launches the "Sindhu Netra Satellite". It was a part of ISRO's PSLV-C51 mission.

About Sindhu Netra Satellite:

- **Developed by:** Students of Bengaluru based PES University under a contract by Research Centre Imarat, which is a part of the DRDO.
- **Purpose:** The satellite is capable of automatically identifying the warships and merchant ships in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- **Significance:** The satellite enhances India's surveillance capabilities on land borders with China and Pakistan.
- It will be useful to identify suspicious movements of sea-faring vessels close to India's maritime borders.
- Furthermore, It will also be helpful in carrying out surveillance in areas such as the South China Sea or the pirate-infested areas near the Gulf of Aden and the African coast.

ISRO successfully places Brazil's "Amazonia-1 and 18 Satellites" in orbit

What is the News?

ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle(PSLV-C51) rocket launched Brazil's Amazonia-1 and 18 co-passenger satellites.

PSLV-C51:

- It is the 53rd flight of the Indian Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) program.
- It was also the first dedicated mission for New Space India Ltd (NSIL), the commercial arm of ISRO.
- The mission was undertaken under a commercial arrangement with Spaceflight Inc., USA.

Amazonia-1 Satellite:

- It is an earth observation satellite. Brazil's National Institute for Space Research designed, integrated, tested, and operated the satellites.
- **Purpose:** It will provide remote sensing data for users monitoring deforestation in the Amazon forests. Furthermore, it will analyze diversified agriculture across the Brazilian territory.
- The satellite injected into its precise orbit of 758 km in a sun-synchronous polar orbit.
- **Significance:** It is the first commercial venture for New Space India Limited (NSIL).

"International Intellectual Property Index" 2021 Released

What is the News?

The International Intellectual Property Index, 2021 has been released.

About International Intellectual Property Index:

- It is an annual report that the US Chamber of Commerce Global Innovation Policy Centre(GIPC) releases.
- **Aim:** The aim of the index is to evaluate Intellectual Property rights in 53 global economies. These economies represent together over 90% of global GDP.

- **Parameters:** It ranks countries based on 50 unique indicators. These indicators are divided across nine categories of protection: **1)** Patents **2)** copyrights **3)** trademarks **4)** design rights **5)** trade secrets **6)** commercialization of IP assets **7)** enforcement **8)** systemic efficiency and **9)** membership and ratification of international treaties.

Pointly for Science and Technology

- *About INSACOG:*
  - **Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics(INSACOG)** is a grouping of 10 National Laboratories. It was established by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare(MoH&FW).
  - **Coordinated by:** The group is coordinated by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) along with MoH&FW, ICMR, and CSIR.
  - **Significance:** The knowledge generated through this vital research consortium assists in developing diagnostics and potential therapeutics and vaccines in the future.
- *Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data(GISAID) Initiative*
  - The GISAID Initiative was launched on the occasion of the 61st World Health Assembly in 2008.
  - In 2010, Germany became the official host of the GISAID Initiative through a public-private partnership.
  - **Headquarters:** Munich, Germany.

BILLS AND ACTS

Rajya Sabha Clears "National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development Bill, 2021"

What is the News?

Rajya Sabha clears the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NBFID) Bill, 2021.

About National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NBFID) Bill,2021

- **Aim:** The Bill seeks to establish the NBFID as the principal development financial institution(DFIs) for infrastructure financing.
- DFIs are set up for providing long-term finance for segments involving risk beyond the acceptable limits of commercial banks and other ordinary financial institutions.

Structure of the NBFID:

- NBFID will be a corporate body with authorised share capital of Rs. 1 lakh crores.
- Initially, the central government will own 100% shares of the institution. This share may subsequently be reduced up to 26%.

Objectives:

- **Financial Objective**: To directly or indirectly lend, invest, or attract investments for infrastructure projects located entirely or partly in India.
- **Developmental Objective:** Includes facilitating the development of the market for bonds, loans, and derivatives for infrastructure financing.

Functions:

Financial Functions include:

- Extending loans and advances for infrastructure projects.
- Taking over or refinancing such existing loans.
- Attracting investment from private sector investors and institutional investors for infrastructure projects.
- Organising and facilitating foreign participation in infrastructure projects.
- Facilitating negotiations with various government authorities for dispute resolution in the field of infrastructure financing.
- Providing consultancy services in infrastructure financing.

Management of NBFID:

- NBFID will be governed by a Board of Directors. The Chairperson will be appointed by the central government in consultation with RBI.

Source of funds:

- NBFID may raise money in the form of loans or otherwise both in Indian rupees and foreign currencies. It may also raise finances by the issue and sale of various financial instruments including bonds and debentures.
- NBFID may also borrow money from: (i) central government, (ii) Reserve Bank of India (RBI), (iii) scheduled commercial banks, (iii) mutual funds, and (iv) multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

Support from the central government:

- The central government will provide grants worth Rs 5,000 crore to NBFID by the end of the first financial year.
- The government will also provide a guarantee at a concessional rate of up to 0.1%. This facility will be available for borrowing from multilateral institutions, sovereign wealth funds, and other foreign funds.

Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Amendment Bill, 2021

What is the News?

Lok Sabha passes the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Amendment Bill,2021. The Bill seeks to amend the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957. This act regulates the mining sector in India.

What are the key provisions of the Bill?

- Removes distinction between captive and non-captive mine**s**

- o The Act empowered the central government to reserve any mine (other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals) for particular end-use. Such mines are known as captive mines.
- o The Bill removes the distinction between captive and non-captive mines. It provides that no mine will be reserved for particular end-use. All mines will now be able to sell their extra minerals.

- **Sale of minerals by captive mines:** The Bill provides that captive mines (other than atomic minerals) may sell up to 50% of their annual mineral production in the open market after meeting their own needs.
- **National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET):** It will see the functioning of the mining sector.
- **National Mineral Index (NMI):** It will be used for various statutory payments and for future auctions.
- **Transfer of statutory clearances:** Presently, upon expiry of mining lease and transfer of the lease to a new lessee, the statutory clearances issued to the previous lessee are transferred for a period of two years. The new lessee needs to obtain fresh clearances within the two years.
  - o The Bill changes this provision. It makes the transferred statutory clearances valid throughout the lease period of the new lessee.
- **Inclusion of Private Sector:** The bill allows the participation of private players in mining operations with enhanced technology.
- **Auction by the central government in certain cases:** The Bill provides that if the State Government is not able to complete the auction process within a specified time, the Central Government may take over and conduct such an auction.
- **Allocation of mines with expired leases:** The Bill says that mines (other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals) whose lease has expired, may be allocated to a government company in certain cases.

Pointly for Bills and Acts
- *National Institutes of Food Technology Bill, 2019"*
  - o *What does the bill provide?*
  - o The bill declares two institutes of food technology, entrepreneurship, and management as institutions of national importance. These institutes are:
  - o National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management, Haryana
  - o Indian Institute of Food Processing Technology, Tamil Nadu.
  - o *What are Institutions of National Importance?*
  - o It is an institution that serves as an important player in developing highly skilled personnel within the specified region of the country/state.
  - o The status is conferred on a premier public higher education institution in India by an act of the Parliament of India.

Only 5.4% of houses under "PM Awas Yojana Gramin (PMAY-G)" completed this year
What is the News?

The Ministry of Rural Development has informed the Parliamentary Standing Committee about the progress of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin.

Progress under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G):
- **PMAY-G Scheme** has a target of providing Housing for All by March 2022. However, only 55% of the construction target was completed. Although, money was sanctioned for almost 85% of beneficiaries.

About Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin:
- **Launched by:** Ministry of Rural Development in 2016.
- **Aim**: To provide a pucca house with basic amenities to all rural families by end of March 2022. People who are homeless or living in kutcha or dilapidated houses are eligible for benefits.
- **Beneficiaries:** Beneficiaries are identified as per the housing deprivation parameters and exclusion criteria prescribed under Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) 2011. Gram Sabha verifies the eligible beneficiaries.
- **Target:** The scheme had a target of construction of 2.95 crore pucca houses for eligible rural households by March, 2022.
- **Fund sharing pattern** -The grants under the scheme are shared between the Centre and States in the ratio of:
  - 90:10 in case of NE States, Himalayan States & Himalayan UTs.
  - For all other States, funds are shared in the ratio of 60:40 by the Centre and the States.
  - In cases of other UTs, entire funds are provided by the Centre.
- **Monitoring**: The programme implementation is monitored not only electronically but also through community participation (Social Audit), Member of Parliament (DISHA Committee), Central and State Government officials, National Level Monitors, etc.

Initiatives under 'Namami Gange Programme'
What is the News?

The Government of India is currently implementing several initiatives under the Namami Gange Programme to clean the polluted rivers of Ganga.

Namami Gange Programme:
- **Launched in:** The Programme was launched in 2014. It is an Integrated Conservation Mission under the Ministry of Jal Shakti.

- **Aim**: To achieve effective abatement of pollution, conservation and rejuvenation of the National River(Ganga).
- **Main Pillars** of the Programme:
  - Sewerage Treatment Infrastructure,
  - River-Surface Cleaning,
  - Afforestation,
  - Industrial Effluent Monitoring,
  - River-Front Development,
  - Biodiversity
  - Public Awareness among others.
- **Implementation:** National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) is the implementing agency of the Namami Gange Programme at the national level.
  - **National Mission for Clean Ganga(NMCG):** It is a statutory authority. It is established under the National Council for River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Act, 2016.
- **Projects under the programme:** Presently, sewerage infrastructure works for pollution abatement is under execution on 13 tributaries of river Ganga. These include Yamuna, Kosi, Saryu, Ramganga, Kali(West), Kali (East), Gomti, Kharkari, Burhi Gandak, Banka, Damodar, Rispana-Bindal and Chambal.

PM launched Jal Shakti Abhiyan: 'Catch the Rain' campaign

What is the News?

The Prime Minister has launched the 'Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain' campaign on World Water Day.

About Catch the Rain Campaign:

- **Catch the Rain** is a Jan Andolan campaign. It aims to take water conservation at the grass-root level through people's participation. The campaign intends to accelerate water conservation across the country.
- **Aim:** To encourage all stakeholders to create rainwater harvesting structures (RWHS). As it is suitable for the climatic conditions and subsoil strata. These structures will ensure the proper storage of rainwater.
- **Tag line**: Catch the rain, where it falls, when it falls.
- **Implementation:** The campaign will be implemented by the National Water Mission(NWM), Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- **Coverage:** The campaign will be undertaken across the country, in both rural and urban areas. It will be implemented from March 22 to November 30 (the pre-monsoon and monsoon period) in the country.

Power Minister Launches "Energy Efficiency Enterprise(E3) Certifications Scheme"

What is the news?

Minister for Power launches the "Energy Efficiency Enterprise(E3) Certifications Programme" for the Brick manufacturing Sector.

About Energy Efficiency Enterprise(E3) Certification Programme:

- **Energy Efficiency Enterprise(E3)** is a certification scheme. It aims to recognise burnt clay brick manufacturers for adopting energy-efficient manufacturing. Furthermore, it encourages customers to source bricks from such E3 certified manufacturing units.
- **Nodal Agency:** Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) will provide certification.

How will the E3 certification be awarded?

- Brick Manufacturing Enterprises need to meet the minimum Specific Energy Consumption performance criteria.
- The criteria can be met by Brick Manufacturing Enterprises by adopting a combination of measures, such as:
    - improving energy efficiency in manufacturing
    - producing bricks having lower (bulk) densities e.g. porous, perforated and hollow bricks.

Cabinet approves "Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi | PMSSN"

What is the News?

The Union Cabinet approves the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN).

About Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi(PMSSN):

This program will ensure access to universal & affordable health care through a fund that does not lapse at the end of the financial year.

Features:

- It has been set up as a single non-lapsable reserve fund for a share of Health.
- It will be made from the share of health in the proceeds of Health and Education Cess.
- The fund will be administered and maintained by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare

Note: Finance Minister announced the 4% Health and Education Cess during the Budget 2018-19. It replaced the existing 3% Education Cess.

"Mission Shakti, Mission Poshan 2.0, and Mission Vatsalya" - 3 Umbrella schemes of Ministry of WCD

What is the news?

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has decided to classify all of its major programmes under three Umbrella Schemes- Mission Shakti, Mission POSHAN 2.0, and Mission Vatsalya.

This step has been taken to ensure the effective implementation of various programmes and schemes of the Ministry.

What are the three umbrella Schemes?

Mission Shakti:

- Mission Shakti will consist of the schemes and policies for the **empowerment and protection of women**.
- **Schemes:** Mission Shakti will cover schemes under two categories:
  - o **SAMBAL**: This category will include schemes such as One Stop Centre, Mahila Police Volunteer, Women's Helpline, Swadhar, Ujjawala among others.
  - o **SAMARTHYA**: This category will include schemes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana among others.
- Mission Shakti will run in convergence with the other two Umbrella Schemes.

Mission Vatsalya :

- Mission Vatsalya will be looking into the **child welfare services and child protection services** all over the country.
- **Schemes**: Mission Vatsalya will include the **Scheme for Child Protection Services**, a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

Saksham Anganwadi and Mission POSHAN 2.0 scheme:

- **Schemes:** This will include schemes such as Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Anganwadi Services, Poshan Abhiyan, Scheme for Adolescent Girls, National Creche Scheme among others.
- **Mission Poshan 2.0**: The government will be merging the Poshan Abhiyan and supplementary nutrition programme to launch Mission Poshan 2.0.
  - o **Mission Poshan 2.0** will look into the ways and measures for strengthening the nutritional content, outreach, delivery, and outcomes.

"Cyber Volunteer programme" for Citizens

What is News?

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informs the Lok Sabha that a "Cyber Volunteer programme" has been rolled out. The Ministry also informed that the services of Cyber volunteers will be utilized by the State police as per requirement.

About Cyber Crime Volunteers Program:

- **Launched by:** Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)
- **Aim of Cyber Volunteer programme:** To make citizens contribute to the fight against cybercrime in the country. Further, assisting the State/UT Law enforcement agencies in their endeavour to curb cybercrimes.

- **Features:** Under the Cyber Volunteer programme, citizens can register themselves as Cyber Crime volunteers. They will help the law enforcement agencies in identifying, reporting and removing illegal/unlawful online content.

What is Unlawful Content? The unlawful content has been categorised as the following:

- Contents against sovereignty and integrity of India.
- Any digital contents Against defence of India, Security of the State etc.
- Contents affecting friendly relations with foreign States.
- Content aimed at disturbing Public Order and disturbing communal harmony.
- Any Child Sex Abuse materials.

3rd Phase of "Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme (TEQIP)"
What is the News?

The third phase of the Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme (TEQIP) is coming to an end in March 2021.

About TEQIP project:

- It was launched in 2002 by the Ministry of Education. World Banks is assisting in its implementation.
- **Aim:** The TEQIP project aims to upscale the quality of technical education and enhance the capacities of technical institutions.

Phases under the TEQIP project:
Phase I:

- TEQIP project was first launched in 2003. It was implemented in 13 States and covered 127 Institutions including 18 Centrally Funded Institutions.
- It focussed on
  - Promotion of Academic Excellence
  - Networking of Institutions for quality enhancement and resource sharing
  - Enhancing quality and reach of services to Community and Economy.

Phase II:

- Phase II of the TEQIP project was launched in 2010. The coverage was widened to cover 23 States/Union Territories (UTs) and 191 Institutes.
- It focused on
  - Scaling up Post - Graduate education and demand-driven Research and Development innovation
  - Establishing Centres of Excellence for focused applicable research
  - Training of faculty for effective teaching.

Phase III:

- It was started in 2017 and will be completed by 2021. It focused on improving quality and equity in engineering institutions in seven low income, eight north-eastern and three hilly States.
- Under this phase, **graduates from elite institutions** such as NIT and IIT were recruited **to teach in some of the poorest and most remote areas**. They were paid salaries in accordance with the Seventh Pay Commission.

Pointly for Schemes

- *About Tribal TB Initiative*:
  - **Aim:** Tribal TB Initiative aims to address the problem of Tuberculosis in Tribal Population.
  - Initially, the initiative will focus on 161 districts across 18 identified States. It will focus on vulnerability mapping, active case finding & promote behavioral change at the ground level.
  - TB Mukt Bharat initiative aims at the elimination of TB by 2025.
  - **Why was this initiative launched?**
  - Over 104 million tribal populations live in India. It spreads across 705 tribes and accounts for 8.6 % of India's population.
  - This tribal population is highly vulnerable to TB due to physical remoteness, malnutrition, poor living conditions, and lack of awareness. Hence, the initiative was launched to focus on these areas.

- *About SAAMAR Campaign*:
  - SAAMAR is an acronym for Strategic Action for Alleviation of Malnutrition and Anaemia Reduction.
  - **Aim:** The SAAMAR campaign aims to identify anaemic women and malnourished children. Further, the campaign brings together various departments to effectively deal with the major malnutrition problem in the state.
  - SAAMAR campaign has been launched with a 1000 days target. Under this, annual surveys will be conducted to track the progress.
  - Every Anganwadi Centres will be engaged to identify malnourished children. Subsequently, they will be treated at the Malnutrition Treatment Centres.
  - Similarly, anaemic women will also be identified and will be referred to health centres in serious cases.

- **About Stop TB Partnership:**
  - Stop TB Partnership was established in the Year 2000.
  - **Aim:** Its aim is to eliminate tuberculosis as a public health problem.
  - **Significance:** It is a unique international body as it aligns countries all over the world in the fight against TB.
  - **Amsterdam Declaration:** In 2000, Stop TB Partnership gave a call for collaborative action from ministerial delegations of 20 countries with the highest burden of TB.

- o **Partner organizations:** It has 1500 partner organizations. It includes international, non-governmental, and governmental organizations and patient groups.
- o **Secretariat**: Geneva, Switzerland.

- *Centre's 100-day Special Campaign:*
  - o **Launched by:** On 2nd October 2020, the Ministry of Jal Shakti had launched the 100-day Special Campaign.
  - o **Aim:** It aims to provide a 100% potable piped water supply for drinking and cooking purposes. And tap water for washing hands and in toilets in every school, Anganwadi and ashram shala, or residential tribal school.
  - o **Why was the campaign launched?** The campaign was launched as children are more susceptible to water-borne diseases. Moreover, there is also a need for repeated washing of hands as a precautionary measure during the pandemic.
  - o **Duration:** The campaign was to end on January 10, 2021. However, it has been extended till March 31, 2021, as some States/ UTs have asked for more time to complete the task.
- *About Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship:*
  - o The fellowship was launched by the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser under the **"Waste to Wealth" Mission**.
  - o **Aim:** To recognize students, community workers or Self-Help Groups (SHG), and municipal or sanitary workers engaged in tackling the enormous challenge of waste management, scientifically and sustainably. Up to 500 fellows will be recognised under this fellowship initiative.