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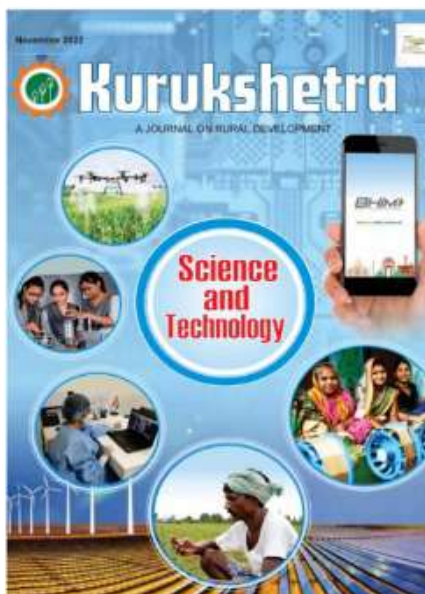
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Schemes

1) Formalisation of Micro food processing Enterprises Scheme

About the Scheme

- In 2020, the **Ministry of Food Processing Industries** launched the PM Formalisation of Micro food processing Enterprises Scheme (PM FME Scheme) for providing financial, technical and business support for **upgradation of existing micro food processing enterprises.**
- With an outlay of Rs. 10,000 crore, it was launched as a **centrally sponsored scheme** aimed at **covering two lakh enterprises over five years** from 2020-21 to 2024-2025.
- Under the scheme, **capacity building of entrepreneurs** will be undertaken through technical knowledge, skill training and hand holding support services.
- **Credit flow to micro food processing industries** will be strengthened along with **support for their integration with organised supply chains** by providing brand and marketing facilitation.
- Apart from individual entrepreneurs, support will also be extended to Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), SHGs, producers co-operatives and co-operative societies engaged in food processing activities.

Potential of the scheme

- The focus will be on **women and SC/ST owned units and those in Aspirational districts** and a **cluster-based approach** (e.g. Mango in UP, Tomato in Karnataka, Chilli in Andhra Pradesh, Orange in Maharashtra etc.) will be followed to reap the benefit of scale in terms of procurement of inputs, availing common services and marketing of products.
- The scheme provides **credit linked grants** to enterprises with provision of seed capital to SHGs for meeting working expenses and purchase of small tools.
- The scheme is set to transform the unorganised micro food processing enterprises for the larger benefit of rural people and rural economy.

Role of Micro food processing industries

- Micro food processing industries represent the **unorganised food processing sector** comprising nearly 25 lakh units. **Nearly 74 percent of the total employment in the food processing sector** comes from these units.
- Micro food processing enterprises are a major contributor to the rural economy as nearly **66 percent of these units are located in rural areas** and **about 85 percent of them are family based enterprises supporting the livelihood of households**.
- These units play a significant role in **checking rural-urban migration.**

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Food Processing Industries has released details about projects sanctioned under the PM Formalisation of Micro food processing Enterprises Scheme.

2) Krishi UDAN Scheme

About Krishi UDAN

- The Krishi Ude Desh Ka Aam Naagrik (Krishi Udan) scheme was launched in 2020 to **assist farmers in transporting agricultural products on international and national routes so that it improves their value realisation.**

- It is an initiative of the **Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA).**
- The objective is to **increase the share of air in the modal mix for transportation of Agri-produce**, which includes horticulture, fishery, livestock & processed products.

Krishi UDAN 2.0

- In a bid aimed at facilitating and incentivising the movement of agricultural produce through air transportation, especially biodegradable food products from **hilly areas, north-eastern States and tribal regions**, MoCA launched the **Krishi Udan 2.0** in 2021.
- Krishi UDAN 2.0, too, will focus on bringing about a **convergence between the agriculture and aviation sectors (A2A: Agriculture to Aviation).**
- Krishi UDAN 2.0 **primarily focuses on the north-eastern States and tribal regions.**
- Under the scheme, the Ministry will be providing a **full waiver** on landing, parking, terminal navigation and route navigation facilities charges for all domestic airlines.

Why in News?

- Under the Krishi Udan Scheme 2.0, 58 airports have been covered till now.

3) Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan

About

- The **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare** launched "Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan" (PMSMA) with an aim to **provide fixed-day, free of cost, assured, comprehensive and quality antenatal care universally to all pregnant women** in their 2nd / 3rd trimesters of pregnancy at designated government health facilities.
- Launched in 2016, PMSMA envisages to improve the quality and coverage of Antenatal Care (ANC) including diagnostics and counselling services as part of the **Reproductive Maternal Neonatal Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A) Strategy.**
- One of the key focus areas of PMSMA is to generate demand through Information Education & Communication (IEC), Inter-personal Communication (IPC) and Behavior Change Communication (BCC) activities.
- Extensive use of audio-visual and print media in raising mass awareness is an integral part of IEC/BCC campaign.
- Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM), Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) and Anganwadi Worker (AWW) play a pivotal role in mobilization of the community and potential beneficiaries in **both rural and urban areas** for availing of services during the PMSMA.

Why in News?

- Since inception, more than 3.6 crore pregnant women have received comprehensive antenatal care under PMSMA across all States and UTs.
- As per the report of National Family Health Survey (NFHS), the **percentage of mothers who had at least 4 antenatal care visits** has increased from 51.2 % in NFHS-4 (2015-16) to **58.1% in NFHS-5 (2019-21)** and the **percentage of pregnant women with institutional births in public facility** has increased from 52.1 % in NFHS-4 (2015-16) to **61.9% in NFHS-5 (2019-21).**

4) PM-KISAN
About the scheme

- Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is a **Central Sector Scheme with 100% funding from Government of India.**
- **Aim :** To augment the income of the farmers by providing **income support to all landholding farmers' families** across the country.
- The Scheme initially provided income support to all Small and Marginal Farmers' families across the country, holding cultivable land upto 2 hectares. Its ambit was later expanded in 2019 to **cover all farmer families in the country irrespective of the size of their land holdings.**
- Under the Scheme an amount of **Rs. 6000/- per year** is transferred in three 4-monthly installments of Rs. 2000/- directly into the bank accounts of the farmers, subject to certain exclusion criteria relating to higher income status.
- **Excluded from the scheme**
    - Institutional land holders,
    - Farmer families holding constitutional posts,
    - Serving or retired officers and employees of state/central government as well as PSUs and government autonomous bodies.
    - Professionals like doctors, engineers and lawyers as well as retired pensioners with a monthly pension of over Rs 10,000 and those who paid income tax in the last assessment year.
- **Identification of beneficiaries:** The responsibility of identifying the eligible beneficiary farmers and uploading their data on PM-KISAN portal lies entirely with the **state governments.**

Why in News?

- PM KISAN through a span of over 3 years has successfully provided assistance of more than Rs. 2 lakh crores of financial assistance to needy farmers.

5) RoDTEP scheme
Background

- Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) was introduced under **Foreign Trade Policy of India (FTP 2015-20),** as a part of Exports from India Scheme.
- The scheme provides **incentive in the form of duty credit scrip** to exporters to compensate for their losses on payment of duties. The scrips can be transferred or used for payment of a number of duties.
- In 2019, a World Trade Organization (WTO) dispute resolution panel ruled that MEIS was **not in compliance with the global trade norms**.
- Additionally, many exporters had persistently complained that the MEIS scheme doesn't offset all the taxes.

RoDTEP scheme

- To address these issues, the government has introduced the **Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme** with a view to give a boost to the country's outbound shipments. It was introduced in 2021.
- This new scheme **reimburses currently un-refunded Central, State, and Local taxes and duties** incurred in the process of manufacture and distribution of exported products in a way that is **compliant with the WTO norms.**

- It aims to provide a level playing field to domestic industry abroad.
- Major components of taxes covered are **electricity duty, value-added tax (VAT) on fuels used in transportation/ distribution, mandi tax, stamp duty, etc.**
- It may be noted that rebate under the Scheme shall not be available in respect of duties and taxes already exempted or remitted or credited.

Mechanism

- RoDTEP has created a mechanism to reimburse such central, state and local taxes, which are not being refunded under any other scheme. The refund would be credited to an exporter's ledger account with the customs, and will be used to pay basic customs duty on imported goods.
- The **credits can also be transferred to other importers.**

Why in News?

- The Centre has further expanded the scope of RoDTEP Scheme by **including the exports made from the Chemical sector, Pharmaceuticals sector and exports of articles of iron & steel.**
- The three sectors were initially left out when the RoDTEP scheme was implemented from January 1, 2021, but the industry had been insisting on their inclusion arguing that remission of input duties on exports would make them more competitive.

Initiatives

1) Digital Shakti Campaign

About NCW

- The National Commission for Women (NCW) is a **statutory body** formed in **1992** under the **National Commission Act 1990.**
- It is the apex national level organisation of India with the mandate of protecting and promoting the interests of women.
- It provides the government with advice to make policies and laws that are more prone to protect and safeguard the rights of women.
- The commission also has the powers that are vested upon with a **civil court**.

Objectives

- The objectives of NCW are as follows:
  1. To suggest the government regarding policies regarding women,
  2. A platform to redress the grievances,
  3. To make recommendations relating to legislation measures,
  4. To review legal and constitutional safeguards for women.

Powers

- Powers of NCW:
  1. Provide consultation on all major policy matters that affect women,
  2. Issuing summons for the examination of documents and the witnesses,
  3. It has the power to make any public record,
  4. Receiving evidence on affidavits,
  5. Discovery and production of documents,
  6. Summoning and enforcement.

Composition

- The commission consists of a **chairperson, a member secretary and five other members.**
- The chairperson of the NCW is **nominated by the Central Government**. The Central Government also nominates the member secretary.

Why in News?

- The National Commission for Women has launched the fourth phase of **Digital Shakti Campaign**, **a pan-India project on digitally empowering and skilling women and girls in cyberspace.**
- In line with its commitment to create safe spaces for women and girls online, Digital Shakti 4.0 is focused on making women digitally skilled and aware to stand up against any illegal/inappropriate activity online.
- NCW launched it in **collaboration with CyberPeace Foundation** (a non-profit civil society organization) and **Meta** (formerly Facebook).

2) National Suicide Prevention Strategy

What's in the news?

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has unveiled the National Suicide Prevention Strategy — the first-of-its-kind policy formulated by the government to prevent suicides as a public health priority.

What is India's National Suicide Prevention Strategy?

- The goal of the strategy is to **reduce suicide mortality in the country by 10 per cent by 2023.**
- The strategy provides a framework for multiple stakeholders to implement activities for prevention of suicides in the country.

Objectives

- The framework seeks to **establish effective surveillance mechanisms** for suicide within the **next three years**.
- It seeks to **establish psychiatric outpatient departments** that will provide suicide prevention services through the District Mental Health Programme in all districts within the **next five years**.
- It aims to **integrate a mental well-being curriculum** in all educational institutions within the **next eight years.**
- It also envisages developing **guidelines for responsible media reporting of suicides**, and **restricting access to means of suicide.**
- The strategy also aims to **develop community resilience and societal support** for suicide prevention and **reduce stigma associated with suicidal behaviours.**

Stakeholders in implementation framework

- The implementation framework of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy envisions **five key stakeholders** responsible for realising the objectives.
- These include national-level ministerial stakeholders, state-level governmental stakeholders, district-level governmental stakeholders, NIMHANS-Bangalore and other top mental health institutes, and strategic collaborators.

Suicides in India: What's the current scenario?

- According to the annual report of the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB),** released in August, 1.64 lakh people died by suicide in 2021 — an increase of 7.2 per cent from 2020. This is 10 per cent higher than the COVID deaths (1.48 lakh) in India in 2020, and 6.8 times the maternal deaths (23,800) in the same year.
- A total of 25,891 suicides were reported in the 53 megacities of the country during 2021, with the highest in **Delhi**.
- In the past three years, the **suicide rate in the country has increased** from 10.2 to **11.3 per 1,00,000 population.**
- Most suicides in India are by **youth and middle-aged adults** — with 65 per cent of the suicides in 2020 being reported in the age group of 18-45 years.
- The most common reasons for suicide include **family problems and illnesses**, which account for 34% and 18% of all suicide-related deaths.

Ongoing suicide prevention initiatives in India

- The **National Mental Health Policy (2014)** sees prevention of mental disorders, reduction of suicide and attempted suicide as core priority areas.
- The **Mental Healthcare Act 2017** brought in some necessary changes. The Act that effectively **decriminalised attempted suicide,** which was punishable under Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code. It ensured that the individuals who have attempted suicide are offered **opportunities for rehabilitation** from the government as opposed to being tried or punished.
- Several national programmes such as the **National Mental Health Program, National Palliative Care Program** and **Ayushman Bharat** are also in place.

3) New India Literacy Programme

About the Scheme

- The Government of India has approved a new scheme "New India Literacy Programme" for the period FYs 2022-2027 to **cover all the aspects of Adult Education to align with National Education Policy 2020.**
- The National Education Policy 2020 has recommendations for Adult Education and Lifelong Learning.
- It is estimated that currently around 18.12 crore adults are still non-literate in India.

Objectives

- The programme has **five objectives:**
  - Foundational Literacy and Numeracy,
  - Critical Life Skills,
  - Vocational Skills Development,
  - Basic Education, and
  - Continuing Education.
- The scheme will be **implemented through volunteerism through online mode.** All material and resources shall be provided digitally for easy access to registered volunteers through easily accessible digital modes, viz, TV, radio, cell phone-based free/open-source Apps/portals, etc.
- The scheme will **cover non-literates of the age of 15 years and above** in all state/UTs in the country.

Why in News?

- The central government has allocated a total financial outlay of Rs.1037 crore for the New India Literacy Programme.
- The **Central and State shares** are in the ratio of **60:40** for all States other than North Eastern Region (NER) and Himalayan States where the sharing pattern between the Centre and the State is in the ratio of **90:10.**
- For UTs with legislature the ratio is **60:40**, except in the UT of Jammu & Kashmir where the ratio is **90:10**, and for all other UTs without legislature the Central share is **100%.**

4) National Edible Oil Mission-Oil Palm

About

- The Government of India launched the National Edible Oil Mission-Oil Palm (NMEO-OP) to **boost domestic oilseed production and make the country self-sufficient in cooking oils.** It was launched in 2021.
- With **palm oil having 55 per cent share in total edible oil imports**, NMEO-OP would ensure that farmers get all facilities, from quality seeds to technology to promote cultivation of palm and other oil seeds.

Significance

- While India has become self-sufficient or Aatamnirbhar in the production of rice, wheat and sugar, it was not enough as the country is dependent on huge imports of edible oils.
- India is the **world's biggest vegetable oil importer.** India **produces less than half of the roughly 2.5 million tonnes of edible oil that it consumes annually.**
- It imports the rest, buying **palm oil from Indonesia and Malaysia, soyoil from Brazil and Argentina, and sunflower oil, mainly from Russia and Ukraine,** with the import bill hovering around Rs 75,000 crore per year.
- The increase in cultivation of oil palm will not only benefit farmers

but also consumers who would get quality cooking oils at a cheaper rate.

- Besides, it would benefit processors and the entire value chain, thereby creating job opportunities.

Why in News?

- The government is aiming at **reducing import dependence on palm oil by 25 to 30%** through the production of 2.8 million tonne (MT) of oil by 2030 under the National Edible Oil Mission. The country imports around 8 MT of palm oil while the domestic production is around 0.5 MT.
- Currently, around 0.35 million hectare (MH) is under palm plantation. Under the mission launched last year, an additional area of 0.65 MH (especially in **Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Assam, Tripura and Mizoram**) will be brought into palm plantations by 2025-26.

5) Semicon India Programme

About the Programme

- In order to **widen and deepen electronic manufacturing and ensure development of a robust and sustainable Semiconductor and Display ecosystem in the country**, the Government of India has launched the Semicon India Programme in 2021.
- The initiative will position the country as a global hub for electronic system design and manufacturing.
- Through the program's scope, the government hopes to attract large global chip makers to make India their production base. India wants to achieve technological leadership in these areas of strategic importance – also **key to the**

security of the country's critical information infrastructure.

- The programme has been approved with an outlay of 76 thousand crore rupees.

Implementation

- **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)** has been set up as a dedicated institution for the Semicon India Programme.
- ISM will coordinate with the applicant companies who have also reached out to states to provide access to world class infrastructure.

Why in News?

- The Government of India is set to invest $30 billion in electronics and semiconductors manufacturing and design as a part of Semicon India Programme.
- The investment will help in creating manufacturing, packaging, verification, design and skill capacities in the country.
- India's semiconductor industry is expected to touch **$300 billion by 2026**, growing at a compounded annual growth rate of 19%.
- This will place the country alongside other major semiconductor-making countries including Taiwan, Korea and the US.

Significance

- Semiconductors are the building blocks of electronic devices ranging from smartphones and cloud servers to modern cars, industrial automation, critical infrastructure and defence systems. They are at the **core of fourth industrial revolution technologies.**
- India, like other countries across the world, **imports most of its chips from Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Vietnam.**

- If a country is looking to be self-sufficient or self-reliant, it cannot do without a vibrant semiconductor industry.
- The Semicon India Programme will not only boost semiconductor manufacturing but will also help India achieve **self-sufficiency, improve data security, and gain digital independence.**
- Developing domestic semiconductor manufacturing capabilities will have a **multiplier effect** across different sectors of the economy and will contribute significantly to achieving a **USD 1 trillion digital economy and a USD 5 trillion GDP by 2025.**

Way Forward
Fab clustering
- Fab clustering, where key semiconductor supply chains and related businesses are in one place to create backward and forward linkages, would play a key role in creating an ecosystem for the semiconductor industry.
- Such a site should be chosen based on
    - Ability of the location to act as a force multiplier
    - High-quality infrastructure along with uninterrupted power availability
    - Availability of semiconductor grade Ultra Pure Water to the extent of 10 MLD per fab is also a key requirement.

Focus on Research and Development
- We need to focus on encouraging Indian manufacturers and start-ups to enter and master complex R&D and manufacturing verticals.
    - Indian engineers must be encouraged to set up their design start-ups with handsome government grants and tax incentives.

- Premier research institutions such as the Indian Institute of Science should also be asked to work aggressively on R&D in chip designing and manufacturing.

6) Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act
Key Provisions of the Act
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 addresses the issue of workplace sexual harassment faced by women in **private institutions and government organisations.**
- The act superseded **Vishakha Guidelines** laid down by the Supreme Court in 1997.
- The Act defines sexual harassment at the work place and creates a mechanism for redressal of complaints. It also provides safeguards against false or malicious charges.

Definition of Workplace
- Under the Act, a workplace is defined as "any place visited by the employee arising out of or during the course of employment, including transportation provided by the employer for undertaking such a journey."
- As per this definition, a workplace covers **both the organised and unorganised sectors.**
- It also includes all workplaces whether owned by Indian or foreign company having a place of work in India.
- As per the Act, workplace includes:-
    - Government organizations, including Government company, corporations and cooperative societies;-
    - Private sector organisations, venture, society, trust, NGO

or service providers etc. providing services which are commercial, vocational, educational, sports, professional, entertainment, industrial, health related or financial activities, including production, supply, sale, distribution or service;-

o Hospitals/Nursing Homes;-
o Sports Institutes/Facilities;-
o Places visited by the employee (including while on travel) including transportation provided by employer;
o A dwelling place or house.

ICC & LCC

- Every employer is required to constitute an **Internal Complaints Committee** at each office or branch with **10 or more employees.**
- Every district will have a **Local Complaints Committee (LCC)** so as to enable women in the unorganised sector or small establishments to work in an environment free of sexual harassment.
- The LCC will receive complaints:
    o From women working in an organisation having less than 10 workers;
    o When the complaint is against the employer himself;
    o From domestic workers.
- At least **50 percent** of the nominated members in any Internal or Local Committee must be women.

- The Complaints Committees have the powers of **civil courts** for gathering evidence.
- The Complaints Committees are required to provide for **conciliation** before initiating an inquiry, if requested by the complainant.

SHe-Box

- To facilitate lodging of complaints under the Act, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) developed an online complaint portal titled Sexual Harassment Electronic Box (SHe-Box) in 2017 to **facilitate the registration of complaints related to sexual harassment of women at work place.**
- Once a complaint is registered in the SHe-Box, it directly reaches the concerned authorities having jurisdiction to take action in the matter. The responsibility to take action on such complaints as well as to ensure updating of status in that regard on SHe Box, is with the concerned authorities.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development conducted an awareness and sensitisation workshop on Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition & Redressal) Act, 2013 in New Delhi.

Environment

1) 27th edition of Conference of Parties (COP27)

About UNFCCC

- The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), signed in **1992** at the **United Nations Conference on Environment and Development** (also known as the **Rio Earth Summit**), constitutes the foundational climate agreement that has provided the platform for most subsequent international climate agreements.
- The UNFCCC entered into force on **21 March 1994.** Today, it has **near-universal membership.** The **198 countries** (including **India**) that have ratified the Convention are called **Parties to the Convention.**
- The ultimate objective of the Convention is to **stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations** at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.
- The UNFCCC endorses the **concept of common but differentiated responsibility** in the climate context. This means that while developing country parties are expected to contribute to climate mitigation, because of superior capacity to undertake mitigation and greater contribution to the problem of climate change as a result of historical emissions, **developed countries are expected to take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof.**

About CoP

- The Conference of Parties, known as COP, is the **decision-making body** responsible for monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- It brings together the 198 Parties – that have signed on to the Framework Convention. The COP has met annually since 1995.

Timeline

1992: Earth Summit, Rio de Janeiro

- The meeting that set up the architecture for negotiations on an international climate change agreement. It **finalised the UNFCCC**, the mother agreement that lays down the objectives and principles on which climate action by countries are to be based.
- It **acknowledged that developing countries had fewer obligations and capabilities to bring down emissions**. **Developed countries agreed to a non-binding commitment** to take measures aimed at returning to their 1990 emissions levels by 2000.

1997: COP3, Kyoto

- Delivered the **Kyoto Protocol**, precursor to the Paris Agreement.
- The Protocol assigned **specific emission reduction targets for a set of developed countries,** to be achieved by 2012.
- Others were supposed to take **voluntary actions** to reduce emissions. The Kyoto Protocol **expired last year** as the Paris Agreement took its place.

2007: COP13, Bali

- It reaffirmed the principles of **common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR)** in the efforts to find a replacement to the Kyoto Protocol, which developed nations were getting increasingly uncomfortable with, especially after the emergence of China as the world's leading emitter.

- Developed countries want **emission reduction targets for everyone, or for nobody**, their argument being that without stringent action from China and India, the success of any climate action would not be possible.

2009: COP15, Copenhagen

- **Developed countries committed to mobilising $100 billion every year in climate finance** for developing countries from 2020.

2015: COP21, Paris

- The successor agreement was finally delivered. The **Paris Agreement does not assign emission reduction targets to any country.** Instead, it **asks all to do the best they can.**
- The Paris Agreement requires all Parties to put forward their best efforts through **nationally determined contributions (NDCs)** and to strengthen these efforts in the years ahead.
- The Paris Agreement's central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century **well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels** and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to **1.5 degrees Celsius.**

2021: COP26, Glasgow

- India at COP 26 expressed to intensify its climate action by updating its **NDCs** to the Paris Agreement and presented to the world **five nectar elements (Panchamrit) of India's climate action.**
- The updated NDCs is as follows:
  - India will increase its **non-fossil fuel power capacity to 500 gigawatts (GW)** by the end of the decade, up from 450GW.

  - **Reduce Emissions Intensity of India's GDP by 45 percent** by 2030, from 2005 level .
  - Achieve about **50 percent cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources** by 2030.
  - The country will also strive to **cut carbon-dioxide emissions by 1 billion tonnes** from business as usual by 2030.
  - By 2070, India will achieve the target of **net-zero emissions.**

Why in News?

- Recently, the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP27) was held in **Sharm-El-Sheik in Egypt.**

Key Outcomes of the Summit

Special Loss and Damage Fund

- COP27 has agreed to establish the **Special Loss and Damage Fund** which will help to **make up for the losses suffered by developing nations that are vulnerable to climate change.**
- Financing or a new fund to deal with loss and damage -- for example money needed for relocating people displaced by

floods -- was a long-pending demand of **Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and small island-nations.**

- This is because these countries have contributed the least to global warming but are now suffering losses in billions of dollars each year. For instance, the cost of the recent floods in **Pakistan** was estimated to be over $46 billion – 13.25% of the country's GDP.
- Rich countries, particularly the US, had long opposed a loss and damage fund fearing legal liability for years of spewing out greenhouse gas emissions. But they reversed their stances, leading to the breakthrough on what vulnerable countries see as a **central matter of climate justice.**
- The agreement sets up a **transitional committee**, with representatives from 24 countries, that will establish how the fund should work, and where the money should come from.

UN's Early Warning System for All initiative

- COP27 also agreed to the creation of **UN's Early Warning System for All initiative,** with an investment of $3.1 billion between 2023 and 2027, to **improve understanding of climate-related risks in developing countries** so that early warnings can be acted upon before disaster strikes.
- The initiative could be particularly useful in **Africa**, where 60% of the population has no early warning systems.

Santiago Network

- An additional positive move was made with the agreement on the institutional arrangements to **operationalise the Santiago Network,** which was established at **COP25** in Madrid to **help developing countries identify their technical needs and connect with providers of assistance to address them.**
- For example, in the case of flooding, improved systems to prepare and implement early warning systems and evacuation processes.

2) Recreating Sacred groves
What are sacred groves?

- Sacred groves comprise patches of forests or natural vegetation – from a few trees to forests of several acres – that are **usually dedicated to local folk deities.** They are mostly situated near a **perennial water source.**
- These spaces are **protected by local communities** because of their religious beliefs and traditional rituals that run through several generations.
- A strong concentration of these groves is found in **Himachal Pradesh and Kerala.**

Significance

- **Conservation of Biodiversity:** The sacred groves are important repositories of floral and faunal diversity that have been conserved by local communities in a sustainable manner. They are often the last refuge of endemic species in the geographical region.
- **Recharge of aquifers:** The groves are often associated with ponds, streams or springs, which help meet the water requirements of the local people. The vegetative cover also helps in recharging the aquifers.
- **Soil conservation**: The vegetation cover of the sacred groves improves the soil stability of the area and also prevents soil erosion.
- **Source of local medicine:** The local tribal population rely upon

some plants in the sacred groves to heal themselves.

- **Carbon sink:** The groves act as an effective carbon sink and are also a self-sustainable ecosystem, which reinforce scientific reasons for conservation.

Why in News?

- The Tamil Nadu state government has embarked on a project to protect forest patches in the state by recreating sacred groves.
- Along with nature enthusiasts and volunteers, the state has now launched a campaign to maintain and protect these fragile ecosystems.

Threats

- Increasingly, the sacred groves are facing threats from the biotic pressure due to **weakening of traditional taboos and belief systems and invasion of exotic weeds.**
- **Indiscriminate grazing** in the last few decades, **uncontrolled felling of trees** for firewood and **urbanization** have also contributed to the dwindling of groves.
- Effective conservation and management practices are thus the need of the hour in order to maintain the groves' functional values. The groves have **great research value** in **in situ conservation of rare, endangered and threatened plant species.**
- It is high time that **public awareness** is created about the importance of these sacred groves, **developmental activities are banned** and the **felling of trees or removal of any other vegetation is completely stopped.**
- This is possible only by way of **enacting a special law for the protection and management of sacred groves.**

3) CITES
About CITES

- CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an **international agreement between governments.**
- CITES, also known as **Washington Convention**, came into force in **1975** with the goal of ensuring that **international trade does not threaten the survival of wild plants and animals.**
- States that have agreed to be bound by the Convention are known as **Parties**. Although CITES is **legally binding** on the Parties, it **does not take the place of national laws.**
- Rather it provides a framework to be respected by each Party, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level.
- There are **184 member Parties** (including **India**) and trade is regulated in more than 38,000 species.
- Representatives of CITES nations meet every two to three years at a **Conference of the Parties (or COP)** to review progress and adjust the lists of protected species, which are grouped into three categories with different levels of protection:
  - **Appendix I:** Includes the **world's most endangered plants and animals**, such as tigers and gorillas. International commercial trade in these species, or even parts of them, is **completely banned, except in rare cases such as scientific research.**
  - **Appendix II:** Contains species like corals that are

not yet threatened with extinction, but which could become threatened if unlimited trade were allowed. Also included are **"look-alike" species** that closely resemble those already on the list for conservation reasons. Plants and animals in this category can be **traded internationally, but there are strict rules.**

- o **Appendix III:** Species whose **trade is only regulated within a specific country** can be placed on Appendix III if that country requires cooperation from other nations to help prevent exploitation.

- The CITES Secretariat is administered by the **United Nations Environment Programme** and is located at **Geneva, Switzerland.**
  - o *The UNEP is the leading environmental authority in the United Nations system. It was founded as a result of the UN Conference on the Human Environment (also known as the Stockholm Conference) in 1972.*

Why in News?

- The 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP19) to CITES was held recently in Panama.
- During the meeting, parties to the Convention reaffirmed their commitment to address the biodiversity crisis by adopting proposals to **regulate international trade in more than 500 new species.**
- This will bring species of, among others, sharks, lizards, turtles, fish, birds, frogs and more than a hundred tree species under CITES regulations.

4) Mangrove Alliance for Climate

What's in the news?

- At the 27th Session of Conference of Parties (COP27), the Mangrove Alliance for Climate (MAC) was launched with **India** as a partner.
- The move, in line with India's goal to increase its carbon sink, will see New Delhi collaborating with Sri Lanka, Indonesia and other countries to preserve and restore the mangrove forests in the region.

About MAC

- An initiative **led by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Indonesia**, the Mangrove Alliance for Climate (MAC) includes **India, Sri Lanka, Australia, Japan, and Spain.**
- It **seeks to educate and spread awareness worldwide on the role of mangroves** in curbing global warming and its potential as a solution for climate change.
- The intergovernmental alliance works on a **voluntary basis** which means that there are no real checks and balances to hold members accountable. Instead, the **parties will decide their own commitments and deadlines regarding planting and restoring mangroves.**
- The members will also **share expertise and support each other** in researching, managing and protecting coastal areas.

Significance of mangroves

- Mangrove is a **tropical tree, essentially adapted to thrive near the coastline, in brackish water and loose and wet soil**. These trees **cannot survive in colder temperatures.**
- A characteristic feature of mangroves is their **tangled prop**

roots. These roots allow the trees to survive the daily tides and also capture sediments while slowing waterflow.

- Mangroves serve a multitude of purposes in their ecosystem, including **coastal protection, filtration of water, and disaster risk reduction.**
- Mangrove forests **stabilize coastlines, reduce erosion, encourage biodiversity growth, and shield coastal communities from sea-level rise, and natural disasters** like hurricanes and cyclones.

Carbon sinks:

- Mangroves are one of the **most carbon-rich forests of the tropics, storing carbon from the atmosphere at up to four times the rate of terrestrial forests.** This makes mangrove forests an indispensable tool in achieving the goal of **net zero carbon emissions by 2050.**
- Part of this carbon is stored in living biomass, while part of it is sequestered in the soil. Dead mangroves decompose very slowly due to waterlogging in the soil, making the accumulation of carbon in the soil last hundreds of years. The **waterlogged soil** is also a reason why mangroves hold more carbon than other forests, such as temperate or boreal ones.

Ecosystems:

- Mangroves usually do not exist in isolation but **support interconnected terrestrial, freshwater, and marine habitats.**
- The roots of mangrove trees capture sediments, resulting in the formation of new, fertile lands. This process also ensures that offshore water is clearer, allowing marine life to thrive.

Disaster risk reduction:

- Not only do mangroves stabilise coastlines by holding sediments together but they also act as **safety nets against storms and surges.**
- In tropical coastal areas, mangroves are the **first line of defence against natural disasters** like cyclones and hurricanes that originate in seas and oceans and impact land.
- Mangrove trees act as a **buffer zone** and arrest winds, slowing them down and hence minimising impact on land.
- The **2022 State of World's Mangroves Report**, prepared by the **Global Mangrove Alliance**, finds that **mangroves prevent more than $65 billion in property damages** and **reduce flood risk to some 15 million people every year.**

Socio-economic importance of mangroves:

- They also support a rich food web, with molluscs and algae-filled substrate acting as a breeding ground for small fish, mud crabs and shrimps, thus providing a livelihood to local artisanal fishers.
- Mangroves are also important resources for timber and fuelwood, when collected sustainably.

Current state of the mangroves

- **South Asia** houses some of the most extensive areas of mangroves globally, while **Indonesia** hosts one-fifth of the overall amount.
- **India holds around 3 percent of South Asia's mangrove population**. **West Bengal** has the highest percentage of mangrove cover in India. It is followed by **Gujarat** and **Andaman, and Nicobar islands**. **Maharashtra, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Goa and Kerala** too have mangrove cover.

Threat to mangroves

- **Agriculture, overfishing, and rapid urbanisation** are some of the glaring threats to mangrove forests around the world.

  Indirect threats to mangroves include **change in sedimentation rates and patterns, rising sea levels, and increase in pollutants,** and these are **often exacerbated by human actions.**

Flora & Fauna

1) Dolphins return to Ganga

Gangetic Dolphin

- The Ganges river dolphin (*Platanista gangetica gangetica*), commonly known as *susu*, is **one of the five river dolphins** found in the world. The species is found in the **Ganga and Brahmaputra river basins** of India, Nepal and Bangladesh.
- The presence of the Dolphin in a river system **signals its good health and biodiversity.**
- The calves are chocolate brown at birth and become grayish brown in adulthood with a smooth and hairless skin. Females are larger than males.
- The Ganges river dolphins **can only live in freshwater** and are **essentially blind.** Instead they use **echolocation** to detect food and navigate, and, to a very small extent, communication.
- The Indian government has declared the Ganges river dolphin as the **National aquatic animal.**
- Despite being a protected species under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, its numbers had dwindled over the last century due to indiscriminate fishing, poaching and development of barrages and dams along with the habitat of the dolphins.
- Their population is estimated to be less than 2000 individuals.
- **Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary**, located in Bihar, is dedicated to the conservation of the species.

- **Protection Status:** IUCN Red List: **Endangered;** Wildlife Protection Act (1972): **Schedule I.**

Why in News?

- Dolphins have started coming back to the Ganga river with improvement in the quality of its water through the **Namami Gange programme.**
- The dolphins which had started disappearing due to pollution in the river have started coming back due to the improvement in the water quality of the Ganga.

Namami Gange Programme

- The Namami Gange programme was launched in 2014 with the objective to **rejuvenate River Ganga** by adopting an **integrated approach** which focused on the twin objectives of effective abatement of pollution, conservation and rejuvenation of National River Ganga.
- It focuses on the interception and diversion of sewage by tapping the drains flowing into the river Ganga.

Economy

1) India's digital rupee pilot project

What's in the news?

- The Reserve Bank of India has recently launched the digital rupee on a pilot basis.
- The digital currency will be offered by a select group of public and private banks in a few major cities initially, which can be used for both person-to-person and person-to-merchant transactions.

What is the digital rupee?

- The digital rupee, or the **e-rupee,** is a **central bank digital currency (CBDC) issued by the RBI.**
- It is similar to the physical cash that you hold in your wallet except that the **e-rupee is held electronically in a digital wallet overseen by the RBI.**
- The digital rupee is recognised as **legal tender** by the RBI, and thus has to be **accepted by everyone in the country as a medium of exchange.**
- It is, however, different from deposits that you hold in a bank. Unlike deposits which are paid interest, the digital rupees in your wallet are **not paid any interest by the central bank.**
- **Deposits held in banks can be converted into digital rupees and vice-versa.**

CBDC can be classified into two types

- **Retail (CBDC-R):** Retail CBDC would be potentially available for use by all;
- **Wholesale (CBDC-W):** Designed for restricted access to select financial institutions.

CBDC vs Cryptocurrency

- The central bank digital currency **should not be mistaken with a cryptocurrency.**

- A CBDC is a **central bank issued digital currency which is backed by some kind of assets** in the form of either gold, currency reserves, bonds and other assets, **recognised by the central banks as a monetary asset.**
- This guarantee from a central bank reduces the CBDC risk, volatility, and ensures a larger acceptance across the globe.
- On the other hand, a **cryptocurrency is issued by a network and backed by a crypto asset which may or may not have the backing of any monetizable asset or physical asset.** Therefore, the **risk is higher and there is more price volatility and less acceptance as a money instrument globally.**

Advantages

- Experts point out that the move to bring out a CBDC **could significantly improve monetary policy development in India** with enhanced surveillance and real-time situational monitoring.
- A CBDC can **increase the transmission of money** from central banks to commercial banks and end customers much faster than the present system.
- **Digital fiat currencies** create **greater barriers to illicit activity**, as physical cash can help conceal and transfer funds outside of regulated financial systems. With the growing adoption of CBDCs, payments and transfers will be easier to identify and trace to previous sources, significantly reducing the risk of fraud and money laundering.
  - *Fiat money is a currency that lacks intrinsic value and is*

established as a legal tender by government regulation.

- Digital currencies have **all the intrinsic advantages of fiat currency** like it is **durable, portable and fungible.** Being digital, it will make it **easily verifiable, more secure and traceable.** Hence, improving upon the existing advantages of paper currency.
  - *Fungibility is the ability of a good or asset to be interchanged with other individual goods or assets of the same type.*

Challenges
- Experts, however, observe that there are also certain negatives attached to the CBDCs.
- The approach of bringing a sovereign digital currency stands in **stark contrast to the idea of decentralisation.** Cryptocurrencies, on the other hand, came into existence intending to eliminate the middleman, thereby establishing a system of trust without the need to depend on any single entity. CBDCs would again rely on the banking system, as these are just the digital version of fiat currency.
- Central banks might indulge in issuing more digital currencies which could **potentially trigger higher inflation.**

2) DICGC
About DICGC
- Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) is a **wholly owned subsidiary of the RBI**, created by an act of parliament in 1961.
- DICGC provides insurance cover on bank deposits. The idea behind the DICGC is to boost the faith of the public in the banking system, and

provide protection against the loss of deposits to a significant extent.
- The DICGC insures **principal and interest upto a maximum amount of Rs 5 lakh.**
- **Banks covered by Deposit Insurance Scheme:** All commercial banks, Local Area Banks, Regional Rural Banks and Co-operative Banks (Primary cooperative societies are not insured by the DICGC).
- Deposit insurance facility of DICGC is **not available to depositors of NBFCs.**

Why in News?
- The Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation has released details of claims cleared by the corporation in the last few years.

3) Windfall Tax
What is a windfall tax?
- Windfall taxes are designed to **tax the profits a company derives from an external, sometimes unprecedented event—** for instance, the energy price-rise as a result of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- These are profits that cannot be attributed to something the firm actively did, like an investment strategy or an expansion of business.
- Governments typically levy a **one-off tax retrospectively over and above the normal rates of tax on such profits**, called **windfall tax.**
- One area where such taxes have routinely been discussed is **oil markets**, where price fluctuation leads to volatile or erratic profits for the industry.

Why in News?
- The Central Government has reduced the windfall tax on crude oil by over 13%.

- India first imposed windfall profit taxes on July 1, joining a growing number of nations that tax super normal profits of energy companies.

4) Payments banks

About Payments banks

- Payments banks are the new age banks with limited facilities. These banks mostly operate through the small vendors and shopkeepers. It exists in between the mobile wallet and regular banks.
- Payments banks are permitted to set up their own outlets such as branches, Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), Business Correspondents (BCs), etc. to undertake only certain restricted activities permitted to banks under the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.
- A payments bank provides following services to its customers:
  - Accept demand deposits (restricted upto **Rs.2 lakhs**)
  - Remittance services
  - Mobile payments
  - Fund transfers
  - Debit card and associated services **(Payments banks, however, cannot issue credit cards)**
  - Net Banking services
  - Sell third-party financial products like insurance and mutual funds
- However, payments banks cannot undertake the following activities:
  - They **cannot undertake lending activities**
  - They **cannot set up subsidiaries to undertake non-banking financial services activities**
  - They are **not eligible to accept NRI deposits.**

Objectives

- The main objective of payments banks is to **widen the spread of payment and financial services to small business, low-income households, and the migrant labour workforce** in a secured technology-driven environment.
- With payments banks, RBI seeks to **increase the penetration level of financial services to the remote areas** of the country.
- The Reserve Bank expects payments banks to **target India's migrant labourers, low-income households and small businesses**, offering savings accounts and remittance services with a low transaction cost.

Eligible promoters

- Existing non-bank Pre-paid Payment Instrument (PPI) issuers authorised under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.
- Other entities such as individuals / professionals; Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs), corporate Business Correspondents (BCs), mobile telephone companies, supermarket chains, companies, real sector cooperatives; that are owned and controlled by residents; and public sector entities may apply to set up payments banks.

Regulations

- Payments banks are registered as a **public limited company** under the **Companies Act, 2013,** and licensed under Section 22 of the **Banking Regulation Act, 1949.**
- Deposits mobilised by the payments bank are covered under the **deposit insurance scheme of the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation of India (DICGC).**
- Apart from amounts maintained as **Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR)** with RBI on its outside demand and time liabilities, Payments banks are

required to invest **minimum 75 per cent of its "demand deposit balances"** in Government securities/Treasury Bills with maturity up to one year for maintenance of **Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR)** and hold **maximum 25 per cent in current and time / fixed deposits** with other scheduled commercial banks for operational purposes and liquidity management.

- The **minimum paid-up equity capital** of the payments bank shall be **Rs. 100 crore.** The payments bank shall be required to maintain a **minimum capital adequacy ratio of 15 per cent of its risk weighted assets (RWA)** on a continuous basis.
- The foreign shareholding in the payments bank would be **as per the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy for private sector banks** as amended from time to time. As per the current FDI policy, the aggregate foreign investment in a private sector bank from all sources will be allowed upto a maximum of **74 per cent** of the paid-up capital of the bank.

Why in News?

- India Post Payments Bank has cautioned its customers of cyber frauds.
- The warning came due to the rise in multiple fraudulent activities where fraudsters open fake accounts in the name of people by giving the impression that account holders would get monetary benefits under various government schemes.

5) National Anti-Profiteering Authority

About National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA)

- Soon after the GST was rolled out from 1 July 2017, the government had approved setting up of the NAA for two years.
- NAA is a **statutory body** constituted under the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017 to **check the unfair profit-making activities by the trading community.**
- The Authority's core function is to **ensure that the benefits of the reduction in GST rates on goods or services made by the GST Council is passed on to the ultimate consumers** by way of a reduction in prices by traders.
- NAA examines and checks such profiteering activities and recommends punitive actions including cancellation of Registration.

Timeline

- Initially, it was set up for two years till 2019, but was later extended till November 2021.
- The GST Council, in September last year, gave another one-year extension till November, 2022, to NAA and also decided to shift the work to Competition Commission of India (CCI) after that.

Why in News ?

- The Competition Commission of India has replaced the National Anti-profiteering Authority and will look into the anti-profiteering measures under the Goods and Services Tax from December 1.

About CCI

- The Competition Commission of India is a **statutory body** established under the **Competition Act, 2002** for the administration, implementation and enforcement of the Act.
- CCI consists of a **Chairperson and 6 Members** appointed by the Central Government.

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- The following are the objectives of the Commission.
  - To prevent practices having adverse effects on competition
  - To promote and sustain competition in markets
  - To protect the interests of consumers and
  - To ensure freedom of trade.
- The Commission is also required to give opinion on competition issues on a reference received from a statutory authority established under any law and to undertake competition advocacy, create public awareness and impart training on competition issues.
- Appeals of CCI lie with the **National Company Law Appellate Tribunal.**

6) National Investment and Infrastructure Fund
About NIIF

- National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) is an **Indian-government backed entity** established in **2016** to **provide long-term capital to the country's infrastructure sector.** It was established with a planned corpus of ₹40,000 crore.
- The NIIF aims to maximize the economic impact mainly through infrastructure development in commercially viable projects such as greenfield and brownfield, including stalled projects.
  It would also consider other nationally important projects in manufacturing, if commercially viable.
- The Indian government has **49 per cent** stake in NIIF with the **rest held by foreign and domestic investors.** NIIF is India's **first sovereign wealth fund.**

  - *Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWFs) are pools of assets owned and managed directly or indirectly by governments to achieve national objectives.*
- NIIF got registered with SEBI as an **Alternative Investment Fund (AIF).**
  - *AIFs are private funds which are otherwise not coming under the jurisdiction of any regulatory agency in India. In India, AIFs are regulated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Alternative Investment Funds) Regulations, 2012.*
- NIIF currently manages three funds each with its distinctive investment mandate.
  - **Master Fund**
    - It primarily invests in operating assets in core infrastructure sectors such as transportation and energy.
  - **Fund of Funds**
    - This fund invests in funds managed by fund managers in infrastructure and associated sectors. Sectors of focus include Green Infrastructure, Mid-Income & Affordable Housing, Infrastructure services and allied sectors.
  - **Strategic Fund**
    - This fund is aimed at growth and development-stage investments in large scale projects/companies

in a broad range of sectors of economic and commercial importance, which are likely to benefit from India's growth trajectory over the medium- to long-term.

Why in News?

- The Union Finance Minister chaired the 5th meeting of the Governing Council (GC) of National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF).

7) India-Australia trade agreement

Context

- The Australian parliament has approved the landmark India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement which was signed between India and Australia in April this year.

About ECTA

- The ECTA is expected to **increase trade between the two sides to $45-50 billion** over five years, from the current estimate of $27 billion, and create over **10 lakh additional job opportunities.**
- Under this agreement, **India will give 85% of Australia's exports zero-duty access** to its domestic market. India is expected to get **zero-duty access to Australia for its goods over five years.**
- As per the agreement, India will get **zero duty benefit on 98.3% of its exports** to Australia from Day 1, and on **100%** of tariff lines within five years; **tariffs on 85% of Australia's exports** to India will be **eliminated immediately**.

What are the main features?

- The ECTA is guided by a **Preamble** and is divided into **multiple sections** that will govern what is

hoped to be the **most expansive bilateral trade** since the two countries established diplomatic ties before India attained independence.

- It has a section on goods exports, and lays out clearly **"Rules of Origin"** that are aimed at creating anti-dumping measures. There are also sections that are aimed at providing **remedies and mechanisms for resolving trade disputes.**
- This is the **first trade deal signed by India that has a compulsory review mechanism after 15 years of implementation.**
- Under this agreement, Australia will get the **opportunity to export certain varieties of agricultural produce** like potatoes, lentils, and meat products with some caveats. However, **bovine meat** is not part of the agreement. Australia may also send **machineries that are required for food processing** under this agreement.
- **Australia will provide 'preferential access' to all the labour-intensive sectors of export items from India** such as gems and jewellery, textiles, leather, footwear, furniture, food, engineering products, medical devices and automobiles.

What is the dispute settlement mechanism in place?

- Both parties have agreed to hold consultations — and make every effort to find a solution — in case of disputes that may emerge in the course of trade in goods or services.
- They have also recognised that in case they have to resort to international arbitration, they may opt for an organisation (i.e, World Trade Organization) where **both are members**.

- The **dispute resolution may range from 45 days to 15 months.**

What are the rules of origin included in the agreement?

- The rules of origin are based on the principle that they should be **wholly obtained or produced in the territory of one or both of the parties.**
- This section ensures that waste material will not be exported by either side unless they contribute to the production of any of the items listed in the ECTA.

Indo-Australian Relations

- India and Australia enjoy excellent historical bilateral relations which have further matured into a friendly partnership. This partnership is also fortified by **shared values of a pluralistic society, parliamentary democracies, and commonwealth traditions.**
- India and Australia are partners in the trilateral **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)** arrangement along with **Japan** which seeks to enhance the resilience of supply chains in the Indo-Pacific Region.
- Further, India and Australia are also members of the **Quad**, also comprising the **US, and Japan,** to further enhance cooperation and develop partnerships across several issues of common concern.
- Currently, Australia is the 17th largest trading partner of India and India is the 9th largest trading partner of Australia. India-Australia's bilateral trade for both merchandise and service trade was valued at **US$ 27.5 billion** in 2021.
- ECTA creates a channel of reciprocal trade benefits for both countries, wherein they gain economic precedence in each other's markets, supporting several sectors and services.
- This also opens up the participating economies for mutual investment and furthers the cause of an interconnected world.
- The passage of ECTA in the Australian Parliament is a significant milestone in **India's aim to achieve the $2 trillion export target by 2030.**

Organisations

1) Financial Action Task Force
What is the FATF?

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an **intergovernmental organization** that designs and promotes policies and standards to combat financial crime.
- The FATF sets **standards or recommendations for countries to achieve in order to plug the holes in their financial systems and make them less vulnerable to illegal financial activities.**
- Recommendations of the FATF target
  - o Money laundering
  - o Terrorist financing
  - o Other threats to the global financial system
- The FATF was created in 1989 by the G7 countries and is headquartered in Paris.
- There are **37 members**, including **India** and **two regional organisations** - European Commission and the Gulf Cooperation Council.
- The decision-making body of the FATF, known as its **plenary**, meets **thrice a year**.

What are FATF's 'grey' and 'black' lists?

- At the end of every plenary meeting, FATF comes out with two lists of countries. The **grey countries** are designated as **"jurisdictions under increased monitoring",** working with the FATF to counter criminal financial activities. For such countries, the watchdog does not tell other members to carry out due-diligence measures vis-a-vis the listed country but does tell them to consider the risks such countries possess. Currently, more than **20 countries** are on the grey list.
- **Black list** means countries designated as **'high-risk jurisdictions subject to call for action'.** In this case, the countries have **considerable deficiencies in their AML/CFT** (anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing) regimens and the body calls on members and non-members to apply enhanced due diligence. In the most serious cases, members are told to apply counter-measures such as sanctions on the listed countries.
- Being listed under the FATF's lists makes it hard for countries to get aid from organisations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the European Union. It may also **affect capital inflows, foreign direct investments, and portfolio flows.**

Why in News?

- During the recent plenary session, the Financial Action Task Force decided to remove **Pakistan** from its **"grey list"** of countries. Pakistan has been on the "grey list" of FATF since 2018 because of "strategic counter-terrorist financing-related deficiencies".
- FATF also moved **Myanmar** from the "grey list" to the **black list** for actions taken by the military junta since they overthrew the government in a coup last February. Currently, **Myanmar, North Korea and Iran** are on the black list.
- The Plenary is the **decision-making body** of the FATF. Its decisions are taken by **consensus.**

2) India-Gulf Cooperation Council FTA

About GCC

- The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a **political and economic union of Arab states bordering the Gulf.**
- It was established in 1981 and its 6 members are the **United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain.**
- The official language is **Arabic**.
- The GCC Charter states that the basic objectives are to have coordination, integration and inter-connection between Member States in all fields, strengthening ties between their peoples, formulating similar regulations in various fields such as economy, finance, trade, customs, tourism, etc.

Why in News?

- India and the Gulf Cooperation Council launched negotiations for a free trade agreement, which aims at promoting two-way commerce and investments between the regions.
- **GCC is currently India's largest trading partner bloc with bilateral trade** in FY 2021-22 valued at over **USD 154 billion** with exports valued at approximately USD 44 billion and imports of around USD 110 billion.
- **Bilateral trade in services** between India and the GCC was valued at around **USD 14 billion** in FY 2021-22, with exports valued at USD 5.5 Billion and imports at USD 8.3 Billion.
- India imports predominately **crude oil and natural gas** from the Gulf nations like Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and exports **pearls, precious and semi-precious stones; metals; imitation jewellery; electrical machinery; iron and steel; and chemicals** to these countries. **GCC countries contribute almost 35% of India's oil imports and 70% of gas imports.**
- Besides trade, **Gulf nations are host to a sizeable Indian population.**
- India has already implemented a free trade pact with **the UAE** in May this year.

Related Information
Levels of Economic Integration

- Economic integration takes the form of the Preferential Trade Area, Free Trade Area, Customs Union, Common Market and Economic Union.
- A **preferential trade area (PTA)** is a trading bloc that gives **preferential access to certain products** from the participating countries. This is done by reducing tariffs but not by abolishing them completely. A PTA can be established through a trade pact. It is the first stage of economic integration.
- A **free trade area** is the region encompassing a trade bloc whose member countries have signed a free-trade agreement (FTA). Such agreements involve cooperation between at least two countries to **reduce/abolish trade barriers**. e.g. South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).
- A **customs union** is defined as a type of trade block which is

composed of a free trade area with no tariffs among members and with a **common external tariff**.

- A **common market** has the same features as a customs union, but, in addition, **factors of production** (labour, capital and technology) are **mobile among members.** Restrictions on immigration and cross-border investment are abolished. e.g. European Common Market (ECM).
- An **economic union** is the last step in an economic integration process. In addition to free movement of goods, services and production factors, it also requires **integration of economic policies, both monetary and fiscal**. Under an economic union, members harmonize monetary policies, taxation and government spending. (e.g. European Economic Union).

3) APEC Leaders' Declaration
About APEC

- The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a regional economic forum established in **1989** to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific.
- APEC's aim is to create greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and secure growth and by **accelerating regional economic integration.**
- APEC operates as a **cooperative, multilateral economic and trade forum.**
- In APEC, all economies have an **equal say** and decision-making is reached by **consensus.**
- There are **no binding commitments or treaty obligations**. Commitments are undertaken on a voluntary basis and capacity building projects help members implement APEC initiatives.
- The APEC Secretariat is based in **Singapore** and operates as the core support mechanism for the APEC process.

APEC Member Economies (21)

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

- 1989
- 1991
- 1993
- 1994
- 1998

APEC Official Observers
- Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat
- Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC)
- Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)

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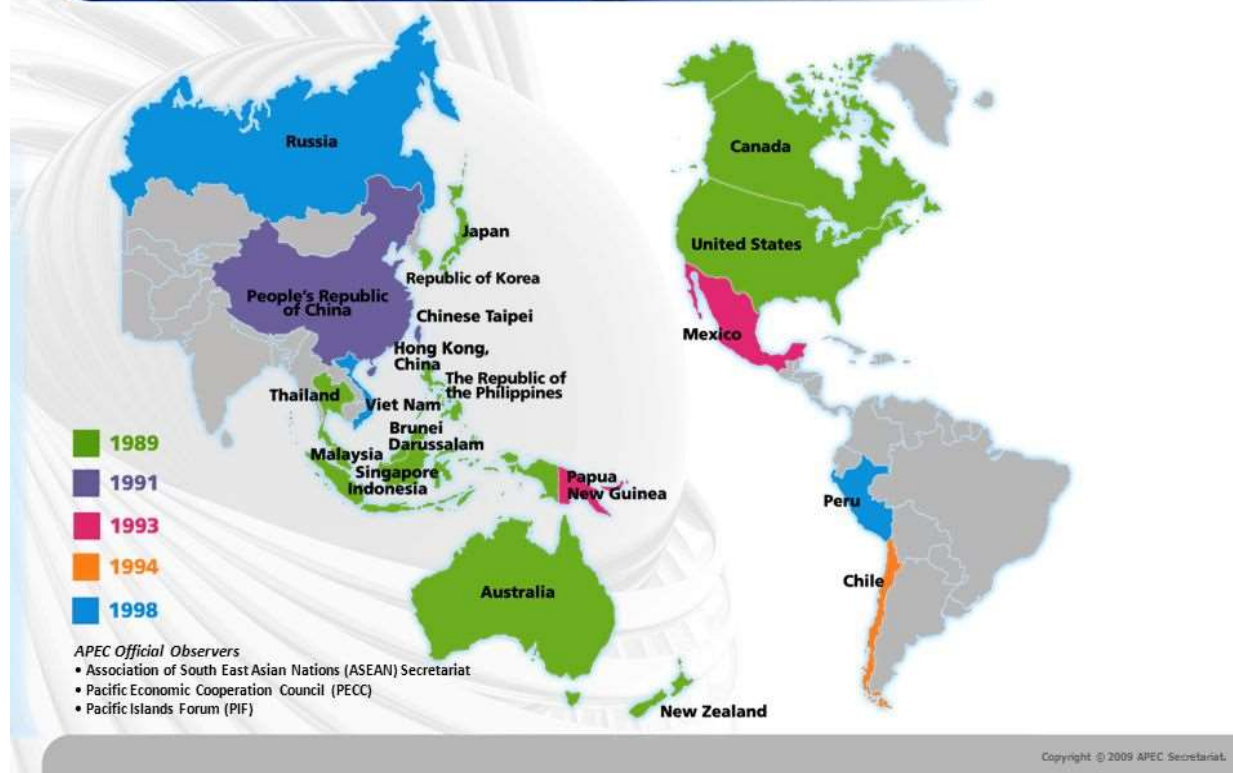
Membership of APEC

- There are **21 member economies** at present. It includes Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; People's Republic of China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; The Philippines; The Russian Federation; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; United States of America; Viet Nam.

- **India is not a member of APEC.**

Why in News?

- The 29th APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting was recently held in Bangkok, Thailand.

Science and Technology

1) Web3
What is it?

- The concept of **Web3,** also called **Web 3.0**, is used to describe a potential **next phase of the internet**.
- The model, a **decentralised internet** to be **run on blockchain technology,** would be different from the versions in use, Web 1.0 and Web 2.0.
- In web3, **users will have ownership stakes in platforms and applications** unlike now where tech giants control the platforms.

What is the difference between Web1 and 2?

- **Web 1.0 is the world wide web or the internet** that was invented in **1989**.
- The internet in the Web 1.0 days was **mostly static web pages** where users would go to a website and then read and interact with the static information. Even though there were e-commerce websites in the initial days it was still a closed environment and the users themselves could not create any content or post reviews on the internet.
- Web 2.0 started in the late 1990s itself though 2004 was when most of its features were fully available. It is still the age of Web 2.0 now.
- The differentiating characteristic of Web 2.0 compared to Web1.0 is that **users can create content**. They **can interact and contribute in the form of comments,** registering **likes, sharing and uploading** their photos or videos and perform other such activities.
- Primarily, a **social media kind of interaction** is the **differentiating trait** of Web 2.0.

Need for Web3

- In Web 2.0, most of the data in the internet and the internet traffic are **owned or handled by very few companies.** This has created **issues related to data privacy, data security and abuse of such data**.
- There is a sense of disappointment that the original purpose of the internet has been distorted. It is in this context that Web3 is significant.

How does it function?

- Web3 will deliver a **decentralized and fair internet where users control their own data.**
- Currently if a seller has to make a business to the buyer, both the buyer and seller need to be registered on a "shop" or "platform" like Amazon or ebay or any such e-commerce portal. What this "platform" currently does is that it authenticates that the buyer and seller are genuine parties for the transaction.
- Web3 **tries to remove the role of the "platform"**. For the buyer to be authenticated, the usual proofs aided by block chain technology will be used. The same goes for the seller. With **block chain, the time and place of transaction are recorded permanently.** Thus, Web3 **enables peer to peer (seller to buyer) transactions by eliminating the role of the intermediary.** This concept can be extended to other transactions also.
- The spirit of Web3 is **Decentralized Autonomous Organization (DAO)** which is that all the business rules and governing rules in any transaction are transparently available for

anyone to see and software will be written conforming to these rules. **Crypto-currency and block chain** are technologies that follow the DAO principle. With DAO, there is no need for a central authority to authenticate or validate.

Concerns

- From a technology perspective, Web3 will require **deviation from the current digital architecture.**
- Another concern is that web3 is built on blockchain, which can sometimes be **very energy-intensive**, contributing to carbon emissions and climate change.

Why in News?

- As per a recent survey released by NASSCOM (non-governmental trade association and advocacy group), Web3 is potentially growing in terms of providing jobs to almost 11 percent of the world's web3 talent.
- This makes **India** the **third largest in the workforce segment in web3**.
- India's rapid adoption of new-age technologies, its growing startup ecosystem, and large-scale digitally skilled talent potential is cementing the country's position in the global Web3 landscape.

2) Measles

About Measles

- Measles is a **highly contagious viral respiratory disease** which **affects mostly children.**
- It is one of the leading causes of death and disability among young children.
- Measles spreads by **coughing and sneezing, close personal contact or direct contact** with infected nasal or throat secretions.
- Death due to measles are caused by the complications associated with the disease like blindness,

encephalitis, severe diarrhoea and pneumonia.

What are the symptoms?

- Symptoms appear around 10 to 14 days after exposure to the virus. The main symptoms are **fever, dry cough, running nose, sore throat and rash.**

How important is it to take measles vaccines?

- There is **no specific treatment** for measles but there is a **vaccine** to stay protected from the disease, which is both safe as well as cost effective.
- The WHO recommends **immunization for all children with two doses of measles vaccine**, either alone, or in a measles-rubella (MR) or measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) combination.
- As per the guidance of National Health Mission, in India, measles vaccination is given under the **Universal Immunisation Programme** at 9-12 months of age and the second dose at 16-24 months of age. India has a target of **eliminating measles by 2023.**

Why in News?

- Over the past few months, several States in India, notably Maharashtra and Kerala, have seen outbreaks of measles and several deaths of children.

Related Information
About UIP

- Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) is one of the largest public health programmes targeting close to 26.7 million newborns and 29 million pregnant women annually.
- Under UIP, immunization is being provided free of cost against **12 vaccine preventable diseases:**
  - **Nationally against 9 diseases** - Diphtheria,

Pertussis, Tetanus, Polio, Measles, Rubella, severe form of Childhood Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B and Meningitis & Pneumonia caused by Hemophilus Influenza type B

- **Sub-nationally against 3 diseases -** Rotavirus diarrhoea, Pneumococcal Pneumonia and Japanese Encephalitis; of which Rotavirus vaccine and Pneumococcal Conjugate vaccine are in process of expansion while JE vaccine is provided only in endemic districts.

3) Neglected Tropical Diseases
What are NTDs?

- Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a **diverse group of communicable diseases** that prevail in **tropical and subtropical conditions** in more than 140 countries.
- NTDs are caused by a **variety of pathogens** including viruses, bacteria, parasites, fungi and toxins.
- NTDs affect **one in five people worldwide** and are a key impediment to economic development. In addition to causing unbearable suffering and death, NTDs **lead to other conditions** like anemia and malnutrition, stunting growth and causing lifelong health and cognitive problems.
- They are called "neglected" because they generally afflict the world's poor and historically have not received as much attention as other diseases.
- More than 70% of countries and territories that report the presence

of neglected tropical diseases are low-income or lower middle-income economies.
- NTD includes Dengue, Blinding trachoma, Human dog-mediated rabies, Leprosy (Hansen disease), Endemic treponematoses (yaws), Human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness), Leishmaniasis, Lymphatic filariasis, etc.

Causes

- The epidemiology of NTDs is complex and often related to **environmental conditions.** Many of them are **vector-borne**, have **animal reservoirs** and are associated with **complex life cycles**. All these factors make their public-health control challenging.
- NTDs are **prevalent mainly in rural areas, in conflict zones and hard-to reach-regions.** They thrive in areas where access to clean water and sanitation is scarce – worsened by climate change.
- Addressing these diseases requires **cross-sectoral approaches** and tackling associated mental health and other issues such as stigma and discrimination.

Control of NTDs

- Most can be controlled or even eliminated through **mass administration of safe and effective medicines or other effective interventions.**
- **Controlling the vectors** (e.g., mosquitoes, black flies) that transmit these diseases and improving basic water, sanitation, and hygiene are highly effective strategies against these NTDs
- The **World Health Organization** has **recommended five interventions** to overcome Neglected Tropical Diseases. These are: preventive chemotherapy; innovative and intensified disease management; vector ecology and

management; veterinary public health services; and provision of safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

Why in News?

- The World Health Organization has urged world leaders to ensure that the poorest and marginalized communities who are mostly affected by neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) receive the health services they need.

Reports and Indices

1) State of Global Water Resources 2021

About WMO

- World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) is a **specialized agency of the United Nations (UN)** with 193 Member States and Territories (including **India**).
- Established in 1950, WMO provides world leadership and expertise in international cooperation in the delivery and use of high-quality, authoritative weather, climate, hydrological and related environmental services by its Members, for the improvement of the well-being of societies of all nations.

Why in News?

- The World Meteorological Organisation has released a new report titled **'State of Global Water Resources 2021'** to assess the effects of climate, environmental and societal change on the Earth's water resources.

Highlights of the Report

- The **impacts of climate change are often felt through water** – more intense and frequent droughts, more extreme flooding, more erratic seasonal rainfall and accelerated melting of glaciers – with **cascading effects on economies, ecosystems and all aspects of our daily lives.**
- **India** also faced extreme events in 2021, mostly due to heavy rainfall.
- Constrained by growing demands and limited supplies, the current pace of managing water resources has left **3.5 billion with inadequate water access** for at least one month per year. This number is **expected to increase to 5 billion by 2050**.

- Between 2001 and 2018, **74% of all-natural disasters were water-related,** a concerning revelation that stresses the **need to integrate water into adaptation efforts.**
- Melting glaciers, tropical cyclones, super typhoons, regional prolonged droughts, and hurricanes are occurring with **increased intensity**.
- Disturbance in hydrological cycles has left **global food security management in a vulnerable state**.

2) Migration and Development Brief

What's in the news?

- The **World Bank** has released its Migration and Development Brief report.

Highlights of the Report

- **India is expected to receive a record $100 billion in remittance in 2022**, the **top recipient** this year.
- **India's remittance will grow 12 per cent** from 7.5 per cent last year, resulting in **$100 billion flow** as compared to $89.4 billion in 2021.
- In the case of India, the largest sources of remittances have been from Indians working in the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries**, **the U.S.** and **the U.K.**
- However, the report has noted, despite reaching a historic milestone at $100 billion and retaining its position as the top recipient of remittances globally, **India's remittance flows are expected to account for only 3 per cent of its GDP in 2022.**
- World remittances are expected to touch **$794 billion** in 2022, up

from $781 billion in 2021. Of the $794 billion, **$626 billion went to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).**

- The **top five recipient countries** this year are expected to be **India** ($100 billion), followed by **Mexico** ($60 billion), **China** ($50 billion), the **Philippines** ($38 billion) and **Egypt** ($32 billion).

Significance

- Remittances are a vital source of household income for low- and middle-income countries. They **alleviate poverty, improve nutritional outcomes,** and are associated with **increased birth weight and higher school enrollment rates** for children in disadvantaged households.
- Studies show that **remittances help recipient households to build resilience,** for example through financing better housing and to **cope with the losses in the aftermath of disasters.**

3) UDISE+ Report
What's in the news?

- The **Ministry of Education** has released the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2021-22 report.
- The report collates data about school education in India.

Highlights of the Report

- The **number of children entering pre-primary classes in 2021-2022 saw a further decline,** resulting in **30% fewer students** in this school section as compared to the pre-COVID period.
- **Enrolment in primary classes,** which include classes 1 to 5, also **saw a drop for the first time—** falling from 12.20 lakh in 2020-2021 to 12.18 lakh in 2021-2022.
- Also for the first time since the pandemic, the report records a

decline in the number of schools due to closures as well as a lack of teachers. There were 20,000 fewer schools in 2021-2022 as the total number of schools dropped from 15.09 lakh to 14.89 lakh.

- **Computer facilities** were available in 44.75% of schools, while **Internet** access was available only in 33.9% of schools. However, their **availability has improved as compared to pre-Covid** when only 38.5% of schools had computers and 22.3% had Internet facilities.
- Further, in 2021-22, the **Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)** stood at 26 for primary, 19 for upper primary, 18 for secondary and 27 for higher secondary, showing an **improvement since 2018-19**. The PTR for primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary was 28, 19, 21, and 30 respectively during 2018-19.
- **Gender Parity Index (GPI) of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** shows the representation of females in school education is in line with representation of girls in the population of corresponding age groups. The GPI value at all levels of school education are **one or more** implying more participation of girls in the school education.

4) Climate Change Performance Index 2023
About the Index

- The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) is developed by non-governmental organizations **Germanwatch** and **NewClimate Institute** (Germany) together with the **Climate Action Network,** a global network of environmental NGOs.
- **Published annually** since 2005, CCPI is an independent monitoring

tool for tracking the climate protection performance of **59 countries and the European Union.**

- The climate protection performance of these 59 countries, which together account for 92% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, is assessed in **four categories**:
  - **GHG Emissions** (40% weightage),
  - **Renewable Energy** (20%),
  - **Energy Use** (20%) and
  - **Climate Policy** (20%).

Why in News?

- The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI, 2023) was released recently.

Highlights of the Index

- India jumps 2 spots higher, and is now **ranked 8th** as per latest CCPI Report.

- The report shows **Denmark, Sweden, Chile and Morocco** ranked above India at **fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh place**, respectively.
- The **first, second and third ranks were not awarded to any country.** In effect therefore, **India's rank is the best amongst all large economies.**
- The ranking given by CCPI places **India as the only G-20 country among the top 10.**
- The aggressive policies of India towards rapid deployment of renewables and robust framework for energy efficiency programs have shown considerable impact.
- As per the report, **India is on track to meet its 2030 emissions targets (compatible with a well-below-2°C scenario).**

Polity

1) Appointment of Election Commissioners

About ECI

- The Election Commission of India is an **autonomous constitutional authority** responsible for administering Union and State election processes in India. The body administers elections to the **Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies in India, and the offices of the President and Vice President** in the country.
- The **President** appoints Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners. They have tenure of **six years**, or up to the age of **65 years**, whichever is earlier.
- They enjoy the same status and receive salary and perks as available to Judges of the **Supreme Court of India.**
- All Election Commissioners have **equal say in the decision making of the Commission.** If the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners differ in opinion on any matter, such matter shall be decided according to the **opinion of the majority.**

Powers and responsibilities

- The Commission's functions and powers with respect to elections are divided into **three categories (Administrative, Advisory, and Quasi-judicial).** In detail, these powers include
    - **Determining** the Electoral Constituencies' territorial areas throughout the country;
    - Preparing and periodically revising **electoral rolls** and **registering all eligible voters;**
    - **Notifying** the schedules and dates of elections and scrutinising nomination papers;
    - Granting recognition to the various political parties and allocating them election symbols;
    - The Commission also has **advisory jurisdiction** in the matter of post-election disqualification of sitting members of Parliament and State Legislatures;
    - It issues the **Model Code of Conduct** in elections for political parties and candidates so that no one indulges in unfair practice or there is no arbitrary abuse of powers by those in power.

Removal

- **Article 324** mentions the provisions to safeguard and ensure the independent and impartial functioning of the Election Commission. The **chief election commissioner** is provided with **security of tenure.**
- He cannot be removed from his office except in the same manner and on the **same grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court.**
- However, the **same constitutional provision is silent** about the procedure for removal of the two Election Commissioners. It only provides that they cannot be removed from office **except on the recommendation of the CEC.**

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court is hearing a series of petitions seeking functional independence for Election Commissioners.
- The court is specifically examining the question of setting up an **Collegium-type body** to appoint

Election Commissioners and the Chief Election Commissioner.

- The top court also referred to **Article 324** that **asks the parliament to make laws for the appointment of CEC.** However, **till the date it has not been constituted.**

Recommendations

- The **Law Commission** had recommended a change in the existing procedure and said in its 2015 report that the appointment of all the election commissioners, including the CEC, should be **made by the President** in consultation with a **three-member collegium or selection committee consisting of the PM, the leader of the opposition of the Lok Sabha (or the leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha) and the Chief Justice of India.**

2) Functioning of the Enforcement Directorate

Context

- The Enforcement Directorate (ED) is in the news now and often.

About ED

- It was constituted in 1956 for handling Exchange Control Laws violations under the **Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA)**. At present, the **administrative control** of the Enforcement Directorate is with the **Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance.**
- The ED today is a multi-dimensional organisation investigating economic offences under the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, Foreign Exchange Management Act and FERA.**

Powers of ED

- The PMLA was brought in to **prevent parking of money outside India and to trace out the layering and the trail of money.** The ED got its power to investigate these crimes under Sections 48 and 49 of PMLA.
- Whenever any offence is registered by a local police station, which has generated **proceeds of crime over and above ₹1 crore,** the ED steps in. The ED can also carry out search (property) and seizure (money/documents) if it suspects money has been laundered.
- A person shall be guilty of the offence of money-laundering, if such person is found to have directly or indirectly attempted to indulge or knowingly assist a party involved in one or more of the following activities — **concealment; possession; acquisition; use; or projecting as untainted property; or claiming as untainted property in any manner.**

Can the ED investigate cases of money laundering retrospectively?

- Since the PMLA was enacted only in 2005, **any ill-gotten property acquired before the year 2005 has no case under PMLA.**

3) Status of remote voting for NRIs

Context

- On the assurance that the Centre is looking at ways to facilitate **distance voting for non-resident Indians (NRIs),** the Supreme Court has disposed of a batch of petitions seeking remote voting for NRIs.
- While some observers ask why those who migrated abroad should be given special privileges in voting, the petitioners argue that NRIs should not be deprived of the franchise because they exercised

their right to freely practise a profession or trade.

What is the size of the NRI electorate?

- According to estimates, **India has the largest diaspora population**, with nearly 1.35 crore non-resident Indians spread across the globe.
- Many of them are in the **Gulf countries, the U.S. and the U.K.**
- As of now there are only 1.12 lakh registered overseas electors.
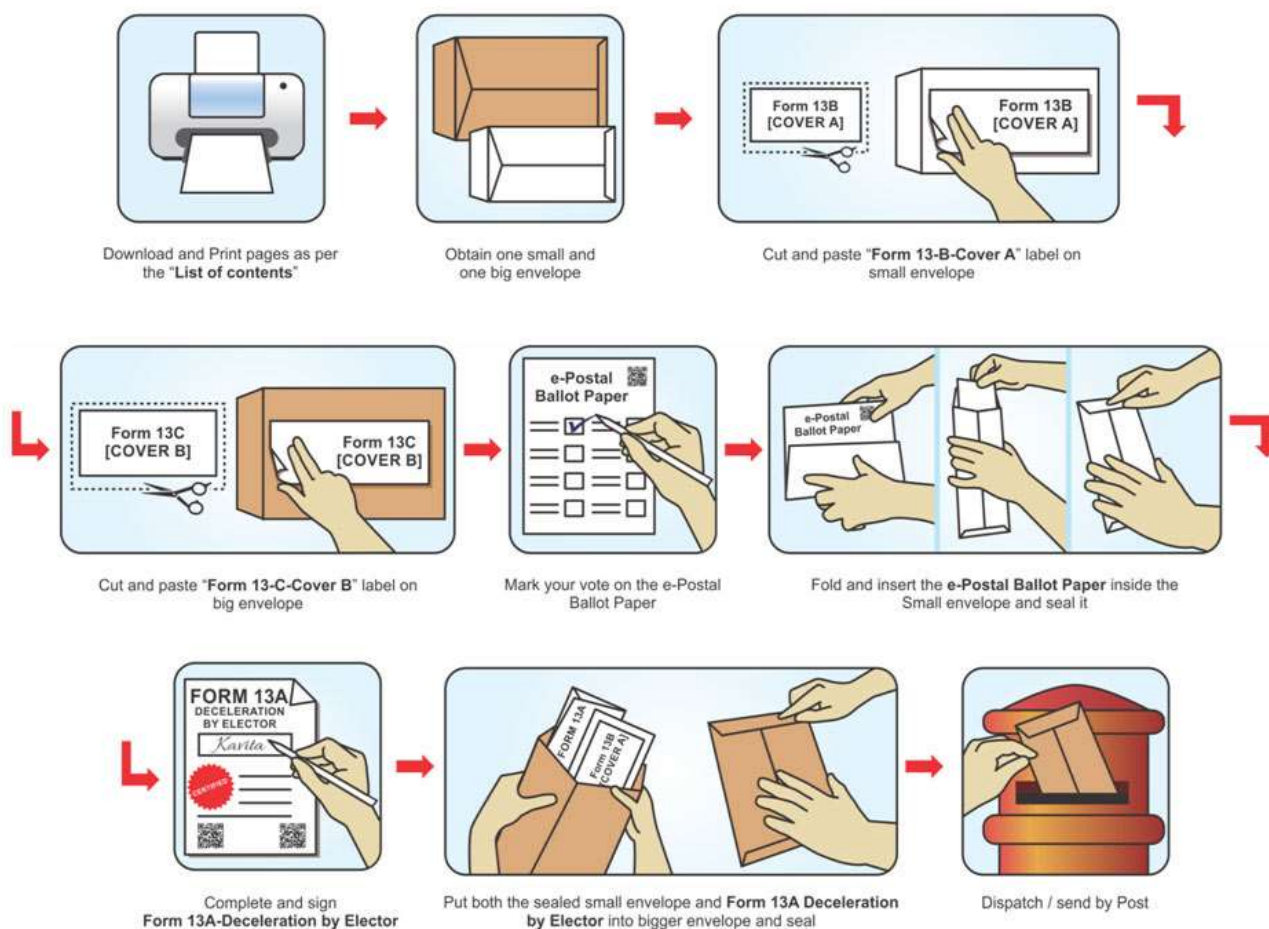
How can overseas voters currently vote in Indian elections?

- **Prior to 2010**, an Indian citizen who is an eligible voter and was residing abroad for more than six months owing to employment, education or otherwise, **would not have been able to vote** in elections. This was because the NRI's name was deleted from electoral rolls if he or she stayed outside the country for more than six months at a stretch.
- After the passing of the **Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 2010**, eligible NRIs who had stayed abroad beyond six months have been **enabled to vote**, **but only in person at the polling station where they have been enrolled as an overseas elector.**

- Yet, the provision of having to visit the polling booth in person has discouraged eligible voters from exercising their mandate. Only a **very low proportion** of eligible overseas residents actually registered or turned up to vote.

What has the government done so far?

- Since the in-person provision of the amended Act discouraged many, petitions were filed in the Supreme Court between 2013 and 2014 by NRIs.
- The Election Commission of India (ECI) formed a Committee in 2014 on the Court's direction to explore the options for overseas electors. The committee narrowed it down to **two remote voting options — e-postal ballot and proxy voting.**
- The **Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS)** is developed by **Election Commission of India** with the help of **Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC)**. It involves the NRI voter sending an application to the returning officer in person or online. The returning officer will send the **ballot electronically.**

Download and Print pages as per the "**List of contents**"

Obtain one small and one big envelope

Cut and paste "**Form 13-B-Cover A**" label on small envelope

Cut and paste "**Form 13-C-Cover B**" label on big envelope

Mark your vote on the e-Postal Ballot Paper

Fold and insert the **e-Postal Ballot Paper** inside the Small envelope and seal it

Complete and sign **Form 13A-Deceleration by Elector**

Put both the sealed small envelope and **Form 13A Deceleration by Elector** into bigger envelope and seal

Dispatch / send by Post

- The voter can then register their mandate on the ballot printout and send it back with an attested declaration. The voter will either send the ballot by ordinary post or drop it at an Indian Embassy where it would be segregated and posted.
- It is a fully secured system, having **two layers of security**. Secrecy is maintained through the use of **OTP and PIN** and no duplication of casted Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot (ETPB) is possible due to the **unique QR Code.**
- **Proxy voting**, meanwhile, enables voters to **appoint proxies to vote on their behalf.**
- **Both ETPBS and proxy voting are currently available to only service voters** (being a member of the armed Forces of the Union; or a member of a force to which provisions of the Army Act, 1950; a

member of an Armed Police Force of a State, and serving outside that State; or a person who is employed under the Government of India, in a post outside India).
- In its report, the ECI said proxy voting would be a **"convenient" and "doable" method.**

Criticisms

- Many political parties consulted by the ECI were against proxy voting as they felt it could **never be guaranteed** that the proxy would vote as per the actual voter's choice.
- In 2017, however, the government introduced a **Bill to amend the Representation of People Act to remove the condition of in-person voting for NRIs** and enable them to vote through **proxies**. The Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha in 2018 but never introduced in the

Upper House, eventually lapsing with the 16th Lok Sabha.

- In 2020, the ECI wrote to the Law Ministry that it was **"technically and administratively ready"** to facilitate ETPBS for NRIs but the External Affairs Ministry flagged **"huge logistical challenges"** relating to identity verification of voters, absence of polling agents, the burden on embassy staff etc.

4) PESA Act
About PESA Act

- The Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, came into existence for **ensuring tribal self-rule for people living in fifth scheduled areas of India.**
- The PESA Act conferred the **absolute powers to Gram Sabha**, whereas state legislature has given an **advisory role** to ensure the proper functioning of Panchayats and Gram Sabhas.
- While the **73rd and the 74th Amendments** to the Indian Constitution passed in 1992 took the three-tier Panchayati Raj governance structure to rural and urban parts of the country, the Adivasi-dominated areas listed under the fifth schedule of the Constitution were **kept out of the purview of the Panchayati Raj Acts.**
- The PESA Act, enacted in 1996, took local self-governance rules to the areas listed under the fifth schedule. The fifth schedule areas, which deals with the administration of the districts dominated by the **Adivasi communities,** is in force in **10 states of the country.** These states include Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Telangana.

Features of PESA Act, 1996

- In pursuance of this objective, PESA **empowers gram sabhas to play a key role in approving development plans and controlling all social sectors.**
- The PESA is considered to be the **backbone of tribal legislation in India.**
- State governments were required to amend their respective Panchayat Raj Acts without making any law that would be inconsistent with the mandate of PESA.
- **Following legal powers** have been given to Gram Sabha under PESA Act:
  - **Safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs** of the people, their cultural identity, community resources and the customary mode of dispute resolution.
  - **Approve plans, programmes and projects** for social and economic development before such plans, programmes and projects are taken up for implementation by the Panchayat at the village level.
  - **Identification or selection of persons as beneficiaries** under the poverty alleviation and other programmes.
  - **Right to be consulted before making acquisition of land** in the Scheduled Areas for development projects and before re-settling or rehabilitating persons affected by such projects in the Scheduled Areas.

- o Right to plan and manage **minor water bodies** in the Scheduled Areas.
- o Recommendations prior to **grant of prospecting licence or mining lease for minor minerals** and for grant of concession for the exploitation of minor minerals by auction in the Scheduled Areas.
- o Power to **enforce prohibition or to regulate or restrict the sale and consumption of any intoxicant.**
- o **Ownership of minor forest produce.**
- o Power to prevent alienation of land in the Scheduled Areas and to restore any unlawfully alienated land of a Scheduled Tribe.
- o Power to **manage village markets.**
- o Power to exercise **control over money lending to the Scheduled Tribes.**
- o Power to exercise **control over institutions and functionaries in all social sectors.**
- o Power to **control over local plans and resources** for such plans including tribal sub-plans.

- The PESA Act thus enables **gram sabhas to maintain a safety net over their rights and surroundings** against external or internal conflicts.

Why in News?
- Madhya Pradesh has notified its PESA Rules recently.

International Relations

1) Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence

About GPAI

- Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) is an international initiative to **support responsible and human-centric development and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).**
- As per the official website, GPAI is a congregation of **29 member countries**, including Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, the Republic of Korea, Senegal, Serbia, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union.
- India had joined the GPAI in **2020** as a **founding member.**
- GPAI brings together engaged minds and expertise from science, industry, civil society, governments, international organisations and academia to **foster international cooperation.**

Why in News?

- India has assumed the Chair of the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence.

Art & Culture

1) Lachit Borphukan
About

महावीर लाचित बৰফুকন
Lachit Borphukan

- The 17th century saw several skirmishes between the **Mughals**, keen to expand their empire into the east, and the **Ahoms**, whose kingdom spanned the **Brahmaputra Valley** in Assam and endured for about 600 years.
- Born on 24 November 1622, Lachit Borphukan rose to become the **Commander in Chief of Ahom Army.**
- He was **commander of the Ahom armies** during the **Battle of Saraighat** that led to victory of the Ahom Kingdom over the Mughals in 1671.
- The battle, which took place during the Mughal emperor **Aurangzeb's reign,** was seen as a decisive Ahom victory.

Why in News?
- The 400th birth anniversary of the Lachit Borphukan was celebrated recently.

2) UNESCO World Heritage sites
UNESCO's World Heritage Convention, 1972

- The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage is an international agreement that was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1972.
- It is based on the premise that certain places on Earth are of **outstanding universal value** and should therefore form part of the common heritage of humankind.
- It basically defines the kind of **natural or cultural sites** which can be considered for inscription on the World Heritage List.
  - o **Cultural sites** include monuments, such as architectural structures, art and science pieces, while **natural sites** include formations that are of outstanding universal value from the aesthetic or scientific point of view.
  - o In addition to these, UNESCO designates some sites as **Mixed heritage sites** which contain elements of both natural and cultural significance.
- The Convention sets out the duties of **State Parties** in **identifying potential sites and their role in protecting and preserving them.**
- By signing the Convention, each country pledges to conserve not only the World Heritage sites

situated on its territory, but also to **protect its national heritage.**

- It explains how the **World Heritage Fund** is to be used and managed and under what conditions **international financial assistance** may be provided.

World Heritage Sites in India

Cultural sites (32)

- Agra Fort
- Ajanta Caves
- Archaeological Site of Nalanda Mahavihara at Nalanda, Bihar
- Buddhist Monuments at Sanchi
- Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park
- Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (formerly Victoria Terminus)
- Churches and Convents of Goa
- Elephanta Caves
- Ellora Caves
- Fatehpur Sikri
- Great Living Chola Temples
- Group of Monuments at Hampi
- Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram
- Group of Monuments at Pattadakal
- Hill Forts of Rajasthan
- Historic City of Ahmedabad
- Humayun's Tomb, Delhi
- Jaipur City, Rajasthan
- Khajuraho Group of Monuments
- Mahabodhi Temple Complex at Bodh Gaya
- Mountain Railways of India
- Qutb Minar and its Monuments, Delhi
- Rani-ki-Vav (the Queen's Stepwell) at Patan, Gujarat
- Red Fort Complex
- Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka
- Sun Temple, Konârk
- Taj Mahal
- The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier, an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement
- The Jantar Mantar, Jaipur
- Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai
- Ramappa temple, Telangana
- Dholavira, Gujarat

Natural sites (7)

- Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area
- Kaziranga National Park
- Keoladeo National Park
- Manas Wildlife Sanctuary
- Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Parks
- Sundarbans National Park
- Western Ghats

Mixed site (1)

- Khangchendzonga National Park

Why in News?

- UNESCO has warned that glaciers at many UNESCO World Heritage sites including Yellowstone and Kilimanjaro National Park will likely vanish by 2050, urging leaders to act fast to save the rest.
- The warning followed a **study of 18,600 glaciers at 50 World Heritage sites -**- covering around 66,000 square kilometres (25,000 square miles) -- which found **glaciers at a third of the sites are likely to disappear.**
- The study shows these glaciers have been retreating at an accelerated rate since 2000 due to CO2 emissions, which are warming temperatures.
- The study noted that it is still possible to save the glaciers in the remaining two thirds of sites if the rise in **temperatures does not exceed 1.5°C** compared to the pre-industrial period.

Defence

1) Malabar Exercise

About the Exercise

- The Malabar exercise started in 1992 as a bilateral drill between the **Indian Navy and the U.S. Navy** in the Indian Ocean.
- **Japan** became a permanent member of the exercise in 2015.
- Following India's invitation, **Australia** participated in the Malabar exercise in 2020, which effectively made it a drill by all four member nations of the **Quad.**

Why is it significant?

- The four democracies in the Indo-Pacific hope the exercise can act as a **counterweight to Chinese military and political influence** in the region.
- India, which is locked in a military stand-off on the disputed land border with China, hopes the exercise will contain what it sees as Beijing's intrusion into its territory.

Why in News?

- The 26th edition of the multinational maritime exercise MALABAR 22 culminated in the seas off Japan.