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INSIGHTS into EDITORIAL

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INSIGHTS into EDITORIAL

GENERAL STUDIES I

1. Women in armed forces: new strides, miles to go

Context:

- The Indian Navy announced selection of two women officers as Observers in the helicopter stream, making them **first women airborne combatants** who would be **operating from warships**.
- In another significant development in March, the Supreme Court had upheld that the **women Short Service Commission officers in the Navy** were eligible for **Permanent Commission**.
- The Navy had also inducted the first woman pilot in December last year. A look at what these developments mean for women in the Navy, how the situation has evolved and the road ahead.
- Earlier women were not allowed in the Permanent Commission, which had **created a glass ceiling**. That ceiling has now been shattered with a Supreme Court ruling allowing permanent commission for women.

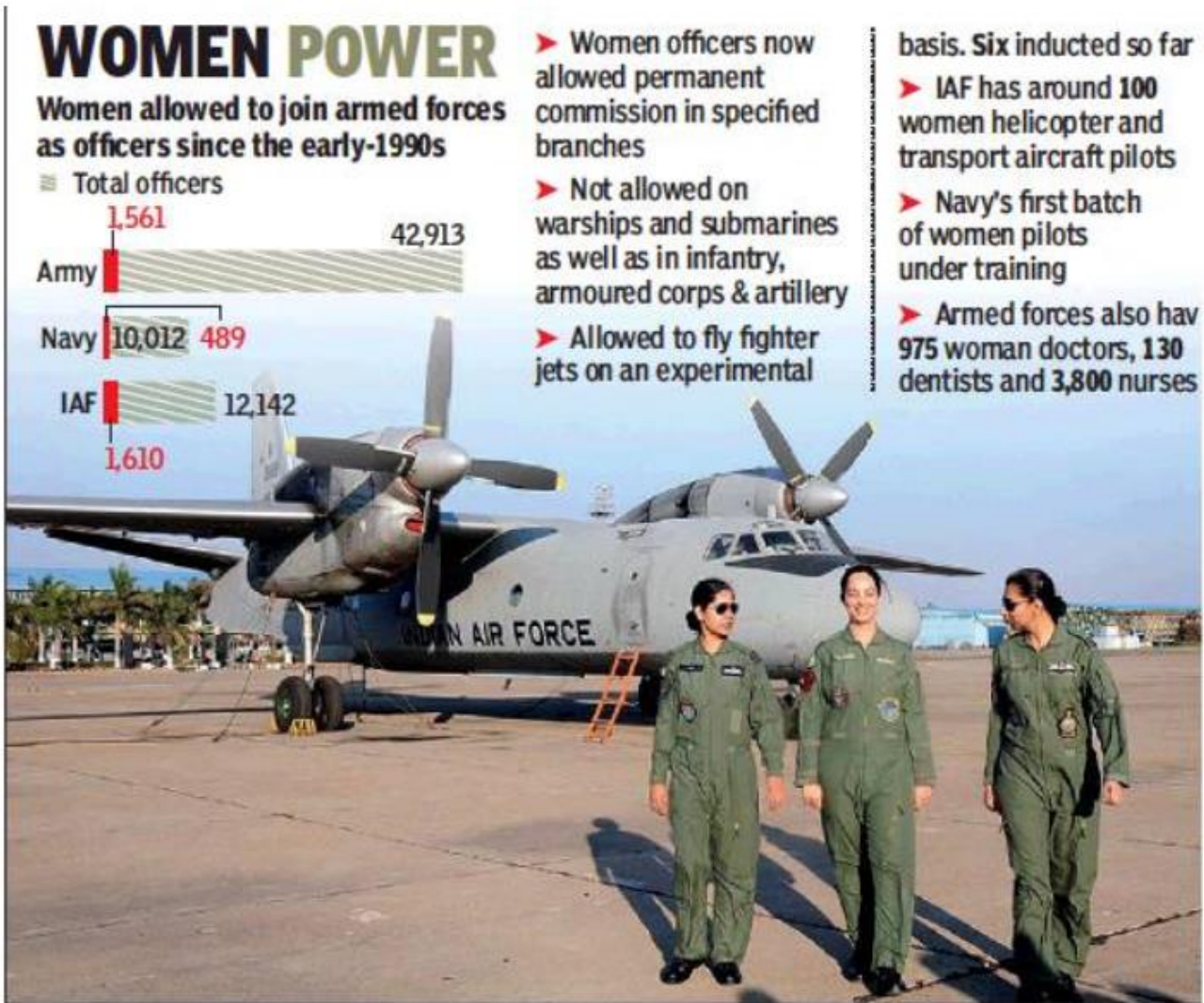
Brief Background: Women in Indian Navy:

- Prior to 1992, women officers were inducted in the Navy **only in the medical stream** from the Armed Forces Medical Service.
- From July 1992, the Navy started inducting women, initially through a special entry scheme and later through the Short Service Commission, in only select branches of the Navy.
- It needs to be noted like in the Army and the Air Force, women are currently only inducted as Commissioned Officers and not in Other Ranks which are of categories of Junior Commissioned Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers.
- In the early 2000s women officers from the Medical and Logistics stream were deployed on board Naval ships. While these deployments went on only for four-five years, they were discontinued for various reasons.
- In terms of **various challenges** towards **deployment of women** onboard warships, the logistics part is not as challenging as one would imagine, especially as most of the large warships of the Navy do have basic living arrangements that can be allocated for women.

Women officers in new streams:

1. Last December, the Navy announced the **induction of a woman officer as pilot of Dornier aircraft**, which are fixed wing aircraft operating from ashore establishments.
2. Now, the Navy announced induction of two women officers as **observers for the helicopter stream**. Observers are airborne tacticians who fly on board helicopters or fixed-wing aircraft operated by the Navy.
3. Till now women were inducted as observers for fixed wing aircraft which take off and land ashore. Entry in the helicopter stream means that women officers can now be deployed on **frontline warships from which helicopters can operate**.

4. The question of mindset and gender sensitization, on the other hand, is something many believe would require concerted efforts, and concrete steps are being taken in that direction.
5. Serving and retired women officers from Armed forces in general and Navy in particular, sound a precautionary note against the celebrations about latest developments.
6. They believe that the developments will have to actually result in more women coming into operational streams and new streams being opened for women in coming days.
7. Some are also concerned that too much media and public attention on these new entrants can put unwanted pressure on them.
8. While women officers appreciate the support of many male military leaders in these processes, they also highlight the resistance from the system as a whole.



Gender equality without adhering to any bias:

1. The spirit of the order is the principle of non-discrimination. According to **Article 16**, Gender only cannot serve as the basis for inequitable and unequal treatment in any sphere, including in defence forces.
2. It also held that **right to equality under Article 14** needs to be prescribed by a right to rationality that forbids any "blanket" and "absolute" prohibition.
3. There are examples of women soldiers in combat roles like in Israel, Germany, US and Australia.

4. This gender equality can be achieved by establishing professional standards and adhering to them without any bias.
5. The framework for the induction of women should be incorporated into a policy. As for the concern of preserving the female officers' **modesty and dignity**, there should be **elaborate codes of conduct** to ensure no adverse incident occurs.

Permanent Commission and the road ahead:

1. In yet another milestone for women in the Navy, the Supreme Court in March this year upheld the right of serving women officers from the Short Service Commission in the Navy to be eligible for the getting permanent commission (PC).
2. Short service Commission tenures in the Armed forces are of 10 years, extendable by four years after which officers can be eligible for permanent commission.
3. In the said ruling in the matter of case Union of India & Others Vs Annie Nagaraja & Others, Apex Court bench have said, The **battle for gender equality** is about **confronting the battles of the mind**.
4. History is replete with examples where women have been denied their just entitlements under law and the right to fair and equal treatment in the workplace.
5. In the context of the **Armed Forces**, specious reasons have been advanced by decision makers and administrators. They range from physiology, motherhood and physical attributes to the male dominated hierarchies.
6. A hundred and one excuses are no answer to the constitutional entitlement to dignity, which attaches to every individual irrespective of gender, to fair and equal conditions of work and to a level playing field.
7. A **level playing field** ensures that women have the opportunity to overcome their histories of discrimination with the surest of responses based on their competence, ability and performance.

Conclusion:

- Women officers hope that these developments would result in them being posted at **commanding positions on the ships** which are a key for career advancements in the **operational streams** and also someday lead to women being deployed for **most challenging of the deployments** including that in the submarines.
- Along with the commanding role, women should also be provided with the same level of training which male officers get.
- Induction of more women in command force will require **updating infrastructure** especially in the case of Navy and Army. In naval ship space is limited and currently, Indian Naval Ships are designed to accommodate male personnel only.
- A woman should be equally equipped to handle the **extraneous psychological and physical process** which a male officer goes through.

2. Impediments to equal productivity, dignity

Introduction:

- As a **disabled person** inhabiting a world designed for the able-bodied, one learns to put up with a **lot of indignities** that others would consider unacceptable.
- These include: the everyday pain of **being excluded** from a whole host of normal life activities, and the challenge of having to constantly find ways of living with **equal**

productivity and dignity as others which the able-bodied often simply do not have to think about.

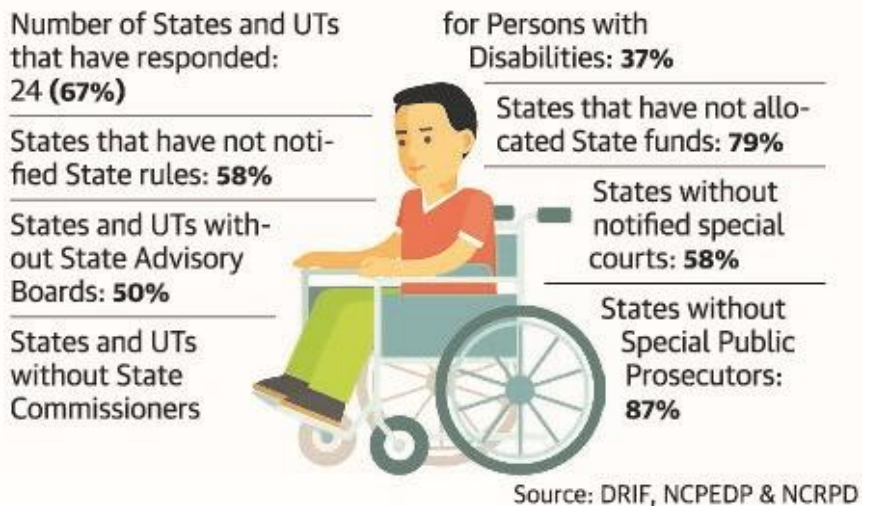
Fundamental issues for Differently abled people:

In general, some incidents vividly bring to light **two fundamental issues** that prevent the disabled from leading lives of equal dignity and productivity:

1. An exclusionary mindset and the inability to recognise the disabled as **rights-bearing citizens**,
2. Entitled to **demand fair and equal treatment** from every service provider, public or private.

Report card

A look at the status of implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016, two years after it came into force:



Vulnerable Differently abled group: Worst-hit group:

- As is the case with most crises, the **COVID-19 pandemic** has had its worst impact on **marginalised communities**.
- For instance, students with disabilities have found it extremely difficult to access remote learning through digital platforms.
- The **UNESCO's 2019 State of the Education Report of India** acknowledges that inclusive education is complex to implement and requires a fine understanding of the diverse needs of children and their families across different contexts.
- India has made considerable progress in terms of putting in place a **robust legal framework** and a range of programmes that have improved enrolment rates of children with disabilities in schools.
- However, further measures are needed to ensure quality education for every child to achieve the targets of Agenda 2030, and more specifically, the objectives of the **Sustainable Development Goal 4**.

Continuous discrimination all over world towards differently abled people:

1. Based on recent estimates, over a **billion people** worldwide are impacted by disability and the stigma surrounding it.
2. The stigma attached to persons with disabilities, compounded by a **lack of understanding of their rights**, makes it difficult for them to attain their valued "functioning's", which Amartya Sen defined as capabilities deemed essential for human development.
3. Furthermore, **women and girls with disabilities** are at a **higher risk** of experiencing sexual and other forms of gender-based violence.

4. About 80% of the estimated one billion persons with disabilities worldwide live in developing countries.
5. The **International Labour Organization**, using data from the latest national Census (2011), reports that 6% of persons living with disabilities in India are outside the labour force.
6. Those with mental disabilities, women with disabilities and those in rural areas are the most neglected.
7. According to the World Health Organization, nearly 15% of the world's population has some or the other form of disability, making **disabled people the largest global minority**.
8. **Continuous discrimination** denies them equal access to education, employment, healthcare and other opportunities.
9. Essentially, what we are looking at is an enormous reservoir of untapped resources excluded from the workforce.

Conventions and Legislations regarding their protection:

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD):

1. The convention seeks to engage member countries in developing and carrying out policies, laws and administrative measures for securing the rights recognized in the Convention and abolish laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination.
2. It requires countries to identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers and ensure that persons with disabilities can access their environment, transportation, public facilities and services, and information and communications technologies.
3. It asks member countries to recognize the **right to an adequate standard of living and social protection** which includes public housing, services and assistance for disability-related needs, as well as assistance with disability-related expenses in case of poverty.

Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016:

1. Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 fulfils the obligations to the United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) to which India is a signatory.
2. It aims to uphold the dignity of every Person with Disability (PwD) in society and prevent any form of discrimination.
3. The act also facilitates full acceptance of people with disability and ensures **full participation and inclusion** of such persons in the society.
4. This Act defines PwD as any person with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which on interacting with barriers hinder effective and equal growth in the society.
5. **Accessible India Campaign**: Creation of Accessible Environment for PwDs:
6. A nation-wide flagship campaign for **achieving universal accessibility** that will enable persons with disabilities to gain access for equal opportunity and live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life in an inclusive society.

Way Forward to eliminate discrimination:

- Preventive health programs need to be strengthened and all children need to be screened at a young age.
- Proper implementation of schemes should be ensured. There should be proper **monitoring mechanisms** and accountability of public funds.

- People with disabilities need to be **better integrated** into society by **overcoming stigma**. There should be **awareness campaigns** to educate and aware people about different kinds of disability.
- Success stories of people with disabilities can be showcased to inculcate positive attitude among people.
- More budgetary allocation for welfare of the disabled. There should be a disability budgeting on line of gender budget.

Conclusion:

- Until each of us is firmly committed to the idea of implementing the two fundamental changes sketched above, we will continue to live in an environment in which, even as we sing praises of the disabled who achieve success despite the obstacles placed on their path.
- Nearly 75 years ago, the United Nations (UN) was created in the face of **intolerance and discrimination** to reaffirm faith in the dignity and worth of humans, and in the equal rights of women and men.
- Its fundamental values postulated that in order to live sustainably, we must practise tolerance and endorse the values of equality.

3. What discovery of phosphine gas in the atmosphere of Venus means?

Context:

- Recently, **phosphine gas** in the **atmosphere of Venus** was discovered by an international team of astronomers. The discovery throws light about the possibility of the presence of life forms on Venus.
- European Space Agency's mission, Venus Express, **found signs of ozone**, made of three oxygen atoms and considered a biomarker, in the upper atmosphere of Venus, in 2011.
- Traces of phosphine, another biomarker, in its atmosphere has just given the search for extra-terrestrial life a shot in the arm.

Importance of Space Missions:

- Space Mission is a journey, by a manned or unmanned vehicle, into space to gather scientific data.
- It is important for global partnerships and exploration capabilities that help global preparedness for protecting the Earth from catastrophic events such as some asteroid strikes, advancing collaborative research on space weather and protecting spacecraft by developing new means for space debris removal.

About the planet Venus:

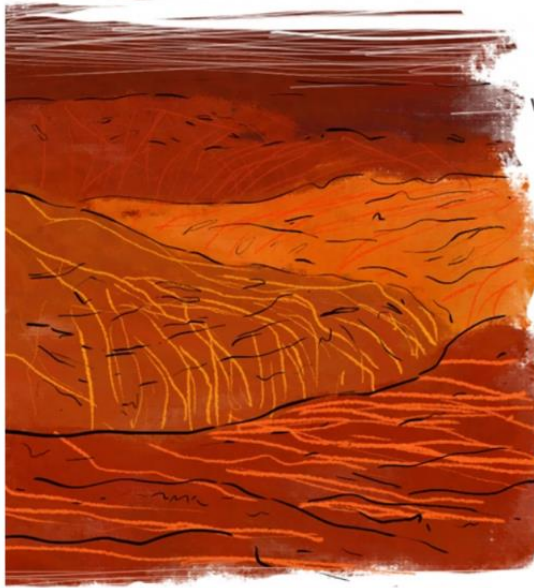
- Venus is **Earth's closest planetary neighbour**. It is also known as **earth's twin**. Venus is wrapped in a thick and toxic atmosphere that traps in heat.
- Surface temperatures reach a scorching 880 degrees Fahrenheit, hot enough to melt lead. It is the hottest planet in the solar system.
- Highly dense, 65 miles of cloud and haze, puts atmospheric pressure more than 90 times what's felt on Earth's surface.

Venus has no moons and no rings.

- Venus' solid surface is a volcanic landscape covered with extensive plains featuring high volcanic mountains and vast ridged plateaus.
- The planet's atmosphere is primarily suffocating carbon dioxide and sulfuric acid clouds.

**About Phosphine (PH₃):**

1. Apart from being produced in industrial processes, phosphine, a **colourless but smelly gas**, is known to be **made only by some species of bacteria** that survive in the **absence of oxygen**.
2. It is a **highly reactive and flammable**, extremely smelly toxic gas, found (among other places) in heaps of penguin dung and the bowels of badgers and fish.
3. It is present in Earth's atmosphere in only trace quantities, because it is rapidly destroyed by the process of oxidation.
4. The fact that this molecule is nevertheless present in our oxidising atmosphere is because it is continuously produced by microbes.
5. The temperature of Venus is too high, and its atmosphere is highly acidic, just two of the things that would make life impossible.



Too early to say.

Presence of phosphine has to be reconfirmed with additional evidence.

It's also possible that other processes, **so far unknown to us**, too produce phosphine

We know very high surface temperatures, extreme pressure and highly acidic atmosphere make Venus unsuitable for sustaining life as of now.

Though it wasn't so in the past.

Phosphine gas discovery is a potential game changer:

- It could be atmospheric chemistry or pollution from unseen volcanoes. But there's a chance — a not insignificant chance that scientists have made the first clear discovery of **life beyond Earth**.
- The presence of airborne phosphine is a little like scat stumbled upon in the desert: a signal that life is in the neighbourhood.
- But if, indeed, living organisms are floating in the dense air of Venus, it would enormously strengthen the argument that life isn't a cosmic miracle.

ISRO's Shukrayaan-1 mission in race to the fiery planet:

1. ISRO's planned **mission for Venus** is scheduled for a mid-2023 launch.
2. Venus is very similar to Earth in terms of its size, density, mass, gravity and bulk composition and is often called Earth's "twin sister".
3. While the surface of Venus is one of the hottest places in the solar system, its atmosphere above the gaseous clouds is a totally different world.
4. ISRO's Venus **mission Shukrayaan** will study atmospheric chemistry, dynamics and compositional variations of Venus and also find out surface/sub surface features and re-surfacing processes.
5. There's one spacecraft currently flying around Venus — **Japan's Akatsuki orbiter**. It's the second dedicated Venus mission.
6. The **European Venus Express mission** operated in orbit around the planet from 2006 through 2014.

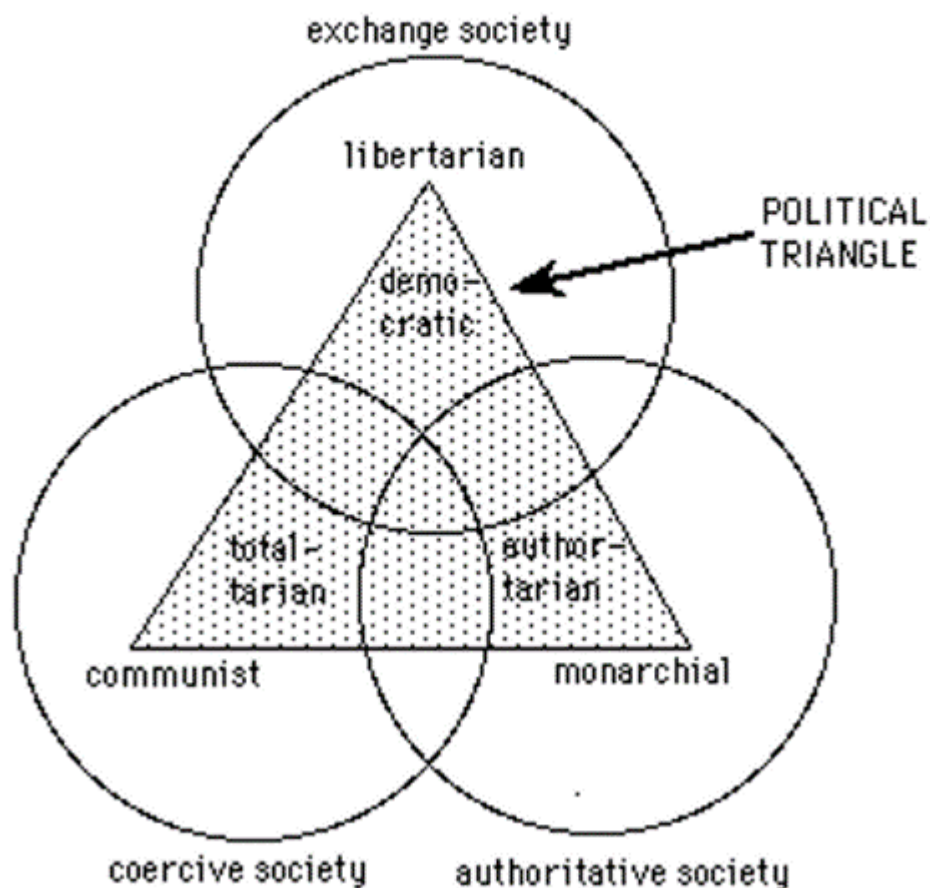
Conclusion:

- On Earth, phosphine is produced by bacteria thriving in oxygen-starved environments. It is considered as a marker for life.
- The researchers said that their research provided evidence “for anomalous & unexplained chemistry” on Venus.
- The finding can further ignite interest in space missions to Venus. Missions to Venus are not new.
- Spacecraft have been going near the planet since the 1960s, and some of them have even made a landing.
- In fact, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is also planning a mission to Venus, tentatively called Shukrayaan, in the near future.

GENERAL STUDIES II

1. A 'new' democracy?

The Political Triagle: Societies and Associated Political Regimes



Introduction:

- The '**democracy**' that a major part of our world swears by comprises free and fair, multi-party, fixed-term elections based on universal adult franchise in its ideal state.
- A contestant party winning the **majority of votes** represents the will of the electorate and **gets to form the government**; others sit in the opposition until the next election. Simple.

Structural flaws in Democracy form of government:

- Its simplicity also conceals some of its structural flaws. The '**majority of votes**' actually boils down to the **majority of seats in the legislature** which, in 99% of the time, comes **riding a minority of votes**.
- Rarely is a government formed backed by a **majority of votes** won in a **free and fair election**.

Example: Rajiv Gandhi's formidable, highest-ever majority in Lok Sabha in 1984 was still short of a majority of votes by about 2%. Narendra Modi in 2014 had the backing of 31% of the votes cast and in 2019, of just about 40%.

- In 2016, Donald Trump won the presidential race in the U.S. with a deficit of over 2.5 million popular votes vis-à-vis his chief competitor, Hillary Clinton. It is the same story everywhere.

What democracy brought:

- Besides the fact that this democracy is far from becoming universal even well into the 21st century, its own life history is short of a hundred years. Universal adult franchise itself is yet to hit the 100-year mark in the most advanced nations.
- Democracy did not come alone; its accoutrements included guaranteed individual rights and freedoms, free market economy, equality of all citizens, freedom of life and property, etc. — inviolable constituents of capitalism.

Elections created space for change of governments even as they **guaranteed security against challenge** to the regime; the challenge could arise only outside of it, **through 'revolutions'**, which in turn had much contracted the space even for a change of government and **none for a change of regime**.

- The unprecedented concentration of wealth at the top 1% around the world knocks the bottom out of competition in the market, so integral to its freedom.

What are the key drawbacks of democracy?

1. A democratic government with a majority, especially a large one, can become as authoritarian as a dictatorial one.
2. The problem with a majoritarian democracy is that it is not designed to find solutions for complex problems with many points of view.
3. It can deny minorities their rights for their views to be considered while framing laws and resolving contentious issues.
4. Those dissatisfied with the governments' decisions go to courts wherever courts are independent, like in India.
5. However, courts are not set up to find policy solutions to complex problems and must interpret the laws as written.
6. In India, there is a concern that courts are venturing into matters of governance that they should not.

7. However, this is a key indicator for the fact that something is missing in India's democracy.
8. Referendums too at times turn out to be ineffective as a small majority determines how all must go.

Rising Inequalities related to present democratic substance: The principle and the form:

1. This high concentration of wealth is in turn getting to **impact the system's political functioning** by replicating the process.
2. The hollowing out of this **foundational principle of capitalism** while retaining its form is also running parallel in the other freedoms, other constituents of 'democracy' by hollowing out the substance of even free and fair elections and individual freedoms while retaining the form.
3. The notion of the free choice of the exercise of vote at the ballot box gets completely distorted with innumerable manipulations of that choice on all sides, all within the four walls of the constitutional provisions.
4. These include **distortions injected into the electoral process** through control and misuse of the institutions responsible for carrying out the process; the creation of an **atmosphere of delegitimisation of dissent or protest** vis-à-vis the government by counter-posing the demands of unquestioning patriotism or nationalism to it; using the sentiment of patriotism to circumscribe the dispensation of fair justice;
5. The control of the flow of information through the 'independent' media; setting up of professionally organised mechanisms for creating and propagating fake news;
6. Creating and promoting hatred between communities of people through patronising identity politics and using frenzy in lieu of reason as a mobiliser of votes;
7. And not least, meting out the harshest treatment to the most prominent dissenting voices by lodging them in prison on fake charges, never mind that they would all be let off a decade later by the courts for want of evidence. The message to society would have been delivered.

A global scenario:

- Today, remarkably **democratic and progressive constitutions** around the world give rulers **enough space for misuse** for achieving those goals and yet making the misuse palatable to voters through media and mobilisation.
- It is interesting that **voters haven't tired of this misuse** anywhere going by the ever-rising voting percentages at election time.
- If this concentration of wealth and political power was the case with one country or society, it could easily be attributed to specific local conditions;
- But this looks like a more generalised, global scenario: in the U.S., China, Russia, India, Brazil, Hungary, Turkey and elsewhere.
- It is therefore futile to argue that this has flown from the personality or personal diktats of one or the other charismatic leader. Its global scale defies that inference.

Regime of democracy being transforming:

1. Clearly then, we are witnessing the transformation of the regime of democracy, a **systemic transformation** from within, from one that had brought us the promise of liberté, égalité, fraternité political, social and economic, to its very opposite:
2. the highest concentration of economic, political and therefore social powers ever in history. Yet 'democracy' remains its trademark.

3. Since independence, India has managed to stay on the **democratic path** in a way unprecedented among states freed from colonialism during the last century.
4. The makers of our Constitution designed the institutions of our democracy with great care and attention to detail.
5. They were designed to endure and it was expected that **these institutions will strengthen the democracy in India.**

Conclusion:

- At a time when politics almost everywhere is leaning dangerously towards a centralised, authoritarian, national security state with a strong leader committed to the ideology of cultural nationalism, the **values and ideas of democracy provided by early leaders becomes important.**
- The values and democratic principles embraced by them are relevant not yesterday or today but forever.

2. Parliamentary scrutiny on the back burner

Parameter	Public Account Committees	Estimate Committees	Committee on Public Undertaking
Origin	1921 – Government of India Act 1919	1921	1964
Composition	22 members (15 Lok Sabha and 7 from Rajya Sabha)	30 (All from Lok Sabha)	22 members (15 Lok Sabha and 7 from Rajya Sabha)
Selection of members	According to the principle of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote. Thus all parties get due representation in it. A Minister cannot be elected as a member.		
Tenure	1(one) year		
Chairman	Appointed by Speaker from amongst its members. Generally from Opposition Party.	Appointed by Speaker	Appointed by Speaker. Member is from Lok Sabha only.

Introduction:

- There must be triumphant laughter in the resting places of those who argued in the 1940s that India is not suited for **parliamentary democracy.**
- Their reasons varied from the political culture to the proverbial social diversity of India, or even the Gandhian idea of swaraj that were construed as not easily amenable to forge **representative institutions characteristic of parliamentary democracy.**
- Given their large-scale implications and the popular protests against them, the three Bills related to agricultural produce and the three labour Bills that overhauled conditions of work, terms of employment, grievance redress and social security in the monsoon session

of Parliament were cases that definitely deserved to be **scrutinised by Select Committees of the Houses**.

Parliamentary Committees system in Indian Parliament:

1. Indian Constitution mentions two kinds of Parliamentary Committees – Standing Committees and Ad Hoc Committees. Any subject related to these committees is dealt with **Article 118 (1)** of the Indian Constitution.
2. Over the years, the Indian Parliament has increasingly taken recourse to the committee system.
3. This was not merely meant for housekeeping, to enhance the efficacy of the House to cope with the technical issues confronting it and to feel the public pulse, but also **to guard its turf** and keep it **abreast to exercise accountability** on the government.
4. Some **committees** such as the Estimates Committee and Public Accounts Committee have a commendable record in this regard.
5. The executive in independent India, irrespective of the parties in power, was not very disposed to committees of scrutiny and oversight, sometimes on the specious plea that they usurped the powers of Parliament.
6. The officialdom in India has often attempted to take cover under political masters to avoid the scrutiny of committees.
7. Besides the standing committees, the Houses of Parliament set up, from time to time, **ad hoc committees** to enquire and report on specific subjects which include Select Committees of a House or Joint Select committees of both the Houses that are assigned the task of studying a Bill closely and reporting back to the House.

Importance of Parliamentary committees:

- Parliamentary Committees are smaller units of MPs from both Houses, across political parties and they function throughout the year.
- They are assigned the task of looking into the demands for grants of the ministries/departments concerned, to examine Bills pertaining to them, to consider their annual reports, and to look into their long-term plans and report to Parliament.
- Parliamentary committees are not bound by the populist demands that generally act as hindrance in working of parliament.
- As committee meetings are ‘closed door’ and **members are not bound by party whips**, the parliamentary committee work on the ethos of debate and discussions.
- Moreover, they work away from the public glare, remain informal compared to the codes that govern parliamentary proceedings, and are great training schools for new and young members of the House.

A gradual marginalisation of committees:

1. It is important to point out that **committees of scrutiny and advice**, both standing and ad hoc, have been confined to the margins or left in the lurch in the last few years.
2. **Data by PRS India** brings this out eloquently. While 60% of the Bills in the 14th Lok Sabha and 71% in the 15th Lok Sabha were wetted by the DRSCs concerned, this proportion came down to 27% in the 16th Lok Sabha.
3. Apart from the DRSCs, the government has shown **extreme reluctance** to refer Bills to Select Committees of the Houses or Joint Parliamentary Committees.
4. Some of the most momentous Acts of Parliament in recent years such as the radical overhaul of Article 370 that revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and divided the State into two Union Territories were not processed by any House committee.

Setting aside a culture of Parliamentary committee:

- There is no dearth of scholarly literature to suggest that the committee system has greatly enhanced the capacity of Parliament to carry out its mandate.
- So, why has the ruling dispensation neglected this?
- One of the reasons given at this point in time is the **novel coronavirus pandemic** and the urgent need to enact safety measures.
- The argument of urgency seems spurious given the fact that some of the most controversial Bills introduced in the House, such as relating to labour and the farm sector, were vehemently opposed by the groups concerned and clearly aimed at market reforms.
- If it is urgency, then the Women's Reservation Bill, on which there was a broad consensus in the House, should have come up upfront.
- Clearly, this regime is not disposed to a reflection and reconsideration of Bills proposed in the House.

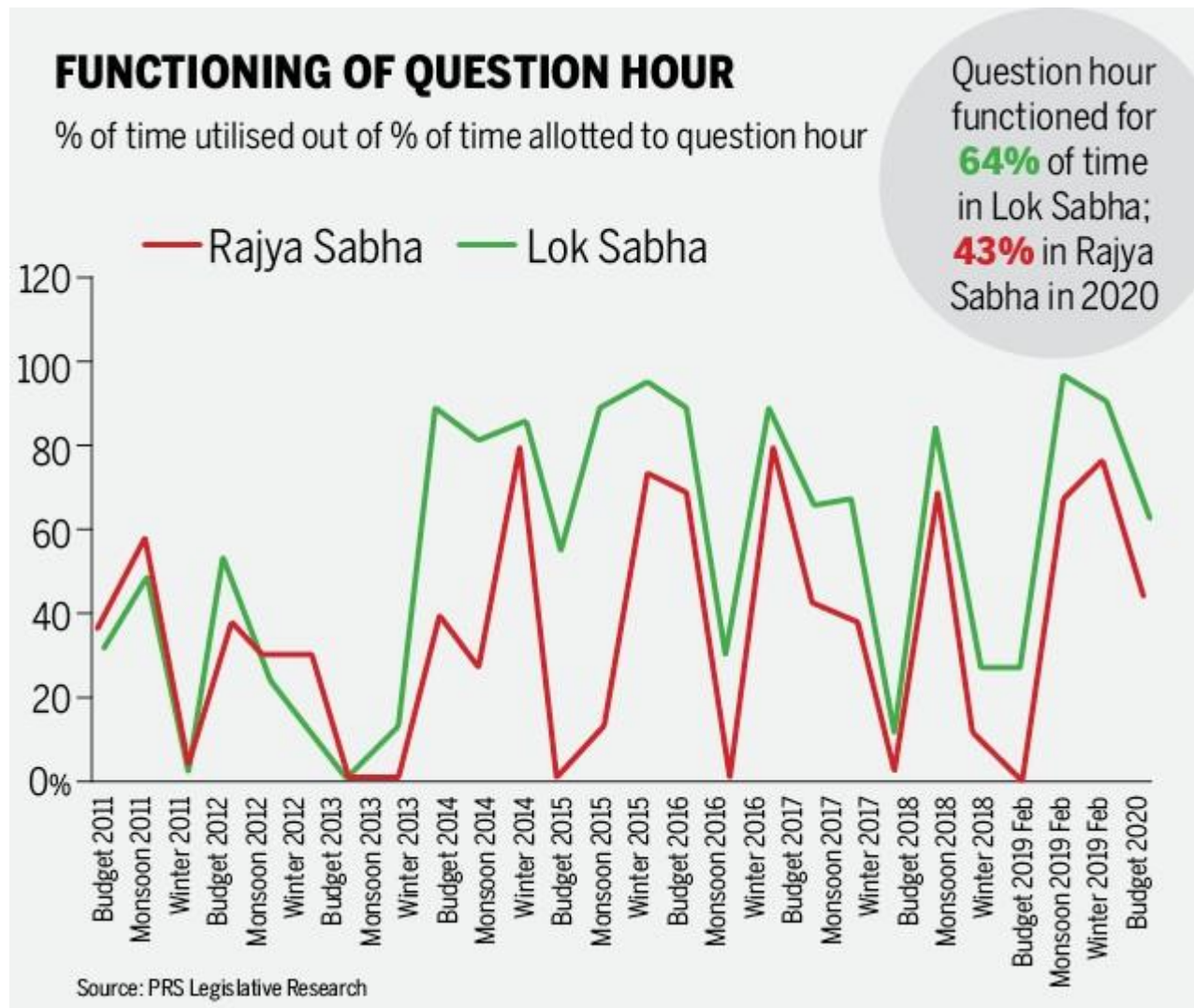
Therefore, Parliamentary committee discussions should be in place with Parliament:

1. The Committees **aid and assist the Legislature** in discharging its duties and regulating its functions **effectively, expeditiously and efficiently**. Through Committees, Parliament exercises its control and influence over administration.
2. Parliamentary Committees have **a salutary effect on the Executive**. The Committees are not meant to weaken the administration, instead they prevent misuse of power exercisable by the Executive.
3. According to the **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC)**, DRSCs should be **periodically reviewed** so that the committees which have outlived their utility can be replaced with new ones.
4. Given the increasing complexity in matters of economy and technological advancement there is a need for setting up new parliamentary committees.
5. Major reports of all Committees should be discussed in Parliament especially in cases where there is disagreement between a Committee and the government.

Conclusion:

- A considerable amount of legislative work gets done in these smaller units of MPs from both Houses, across political parties.
- In most of the Committees, public is directly or indirectly associated when memoranda containing suggestions are received, on-the-spot studies are conducted and oral evidence is taken which helps the Committees in arriving at the conclusions.
- Thus, Parliamentary Committees **acts as vibrant link between the Parliament, the Executive and the general public**.
- Their reports are tabled in both Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha. The Houses do not hold a specific debate on the report, but it is often referred to during the discussions on the bills and the key issues.
- It does not seem to believe that the primary role of Parliament is **deliberation, discussion and reconsideration**, the hallmarks of democratic institutions, but a platform that **endorses decisions already arrived at**.

3. A politics of avoidance that must be questioned



Introduction:

- We, the people of India, gave ourselves a **Constitution** that prescribes for our democracy a **parliamentary form of government** in which the executive is accountable to the electorate through a legislature which in turn is periodically elected by the electorate.
- This **accountability** lies at the **heart of democratic government** and is implemented through **procedures** put in place by the legislature whose functions include law making, controlling the national finances and approving taxation proposals, and having discussions on matters of public interest and concern.
- Each of these functions is discharged, daily or periodically, during sittings of the legislature and cover questions, adjournment motion, calling attention, half-an-hour discussion, motion of no confidence, questions of privilege, etc.

About Question Hour:

With the broadcasting of Question Hour since 1991, Question Hour has become one the **most visible aspects of parliamentary functioning**.

1. The **first hour of every parliamentary sitting** is slotted for the **Question Hour** where Members of Parliament raise questions about any aspect of administrative activity.
2. In a **starred question**, a member **seeks an oral answer** from the concerned minister and this can be followed by **supplementary questions**, whereas in the case of **unstarred questions**, a **written answer** is provided, and no supplementary question can be asked.
3. Short notice question is one that is asked by giving a notice of less than ten days. It is answered orally.
4. Ministries receive the questions 15 days in advance so that they can prepare their ministers for Question Hour.
5. The presiding officers of the both Houses (Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha) are the final authority with respect to the conduct of Question Hour.
6. Question Hour is regulated according to **parliamentary rules**. Question Hour in both Houses is held on all days of the session. But there are two days when an exception is made (Day of President's address & During Budget presentation)

Instruments of accountability:

1. Among these instruments of accountability, the **daily 'Question Hour'** has an unmatched criticality on account of **its regularity and its availability** on a basis of equality to every Member of the House, Rajya Sabha or Lok Sabha.
2. It has a special significance in the **proceedings of Parliament** since it covers every aspect of government activity, domestic and foreign.
3. The government of the day is thus **helped to feel the pulse of the nation** and give the public a view of the performance of both of its elected representatives and of the Ministers.
4. The **Rules of Procedure in both Houses** prescribe the operational details. These include, inter alia, the notice period, conditions of admissibility, balloting, and a host of other procedural or regulatory prescriptions.
5. **Questions are addressed to a specific Minister** of the government and can seek oral answers marked by an asterisk or a written one.
6. The veracity of the answers given are matters of **utmost importance** and rules permit correction of inaccuracies by the Minister concerned.
7. Copies of answers given are available to Members at the Notice Office before the start of the day's proceedings as also on the websites.

Deletion of 'Question Hour': Citing the pandemic is jarring:

- The **gravity of the situation** resulting from the **spread of COVID-19 continues** to be experienced by people the world over and by every citizen of the country.
- New disciplines have descended on us and we have experienced new norms and styles of existence, learnt to live with total and partial lockdowns, and have moved from no activity to partial restoration of essential activities.
- Procedures of social distancing and the wearing of protective masks have been imbibed.
- In this context, the **deletion of 'Question Hour'** from the announced agenda of the day is **baffling** and has understandingly been viewed as curtailment of the right to question the government.
- Subsequent clarifications have stated that the Unstarred Questions will continue to be received and answered and that the change will relate only to Starred Questions and the Supplementary questions emanating from them that require to be answered orally.

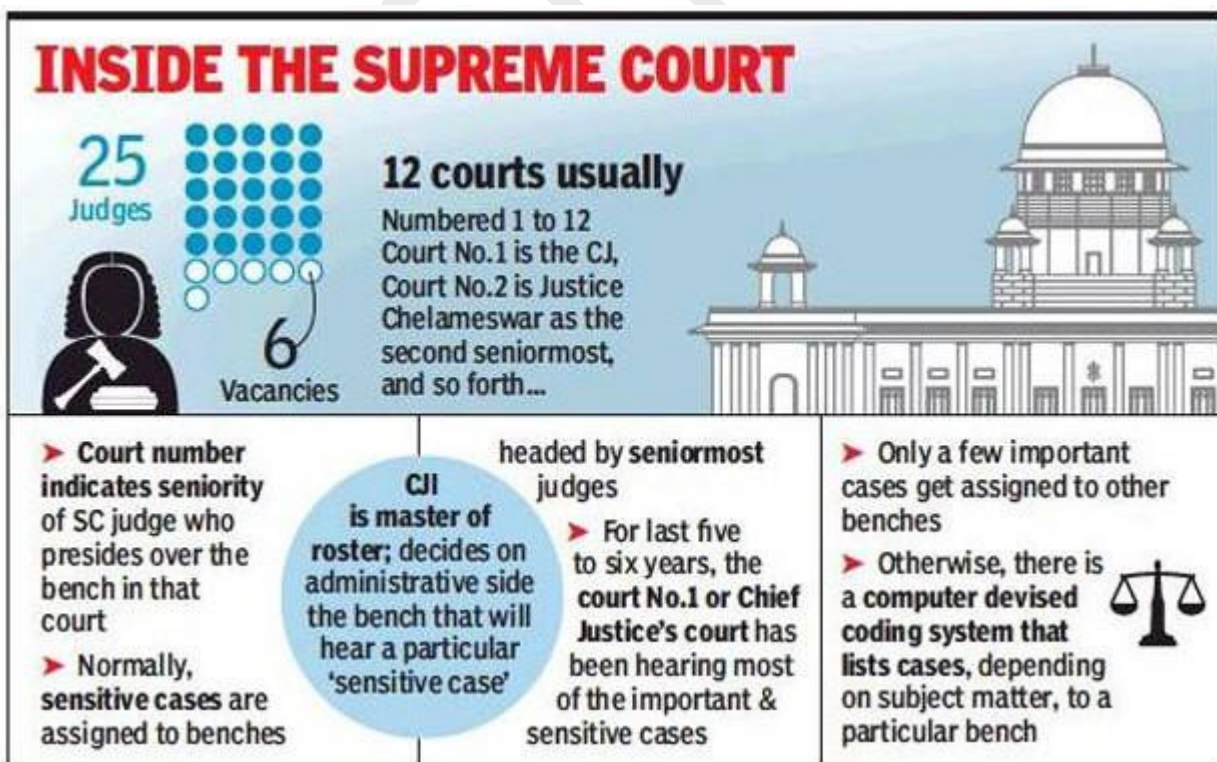
Criticism of government's move to suspend Question Hour:

1. The right of parliamentarians to demand answers from the council of ministers is essential to **maintain parliamentary democracy**, which is premised on the accountability of the executive to the legislature.
2. However, in the upcoming session, the question hour has been suspended, thereby **removing the only avenue** which obliges ministers to immediately respond to queries from the MPs.
3. **Parliament** is the **beacon of legislative functioning** and its functioning will set the precedent for Vidhan sabhas to follow in the future.
4. The rest of the business of Houses was tightly controlled and set by the government, leaving only Question Hour to hold the government accountable.
5. Suspension of Question Hour is not good sign in democratic principles especially in a parliamentary democracy.
6. The move to suspend Question Hour due to pandemic and to find alternate options was not discussed with leaders of political parties and groups.

Conclusion:

- The **test of a functioning democracy** is its ability to face crises — social, economic, political and seek **correctives premised on institutions of democracy**.
- A resort to what has been called '**the politics of avoidance**' does not help the process. **Executive accountability** upfront cannot be allowed to become a thing of the past.

4. Court's drift and chinks in the judiciary's armour



Context:

- Recent past fortnight has seen two significant developments in connection with the Indian judiciary: the first was the decision of the Supreme Court of India in the matter of Prashant Bhushan's contempt case, and the second was the retirement of Justice Arun Mishra.
- These events, in their own way, magnify the chinks in the armour of the Supreme Court.

Meaning of an Executive court:

- An Executive court is a court that fails to keep a check on the executive powers. It means that a court instead of **being neutral and impartial** in its judgements delivers verdicts in the favour of the Government.

This in turn leads to political interference in the functioning of Judiciary, shatters the image of the judiciary in the eyes of people and leads to loss of trust and confidence of people in Judiciary.

- Acceptance of Post-retirement Jobs by the Judges
- Pro-Government CJI
- Master of Roster

Issue to be resolved: The European example: the "master of the roster" system:

There is **enough evidence** that the "master of the roster" system does not work any more.

- What we need today is **legal certainty, and a rules-based mechanism for allocation of cases** (e.g., as followed by the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights, among many other jurisdictions where cases are decided not by full courts but by benches).
- This rule can be that cases are **allocated randomly**. But any kind of rule can be implemented only if judges themselves take a stand and decide.
- There should be agreement that **no discretion can be allowed**, for that is the root cause of so many of our troubles.
- A case allocation system that is **neutral and rules-based** will prevent bench packing, and demonstrate neutrality, impartiality, and transparency.
- All this, in turn, ensures that courts are protected from outside interference; improves public confidence in the impartiality and independence of the judiciary; assures litigants of equality and fairness; and protects basic rights and freedoms by not compromising on them.

Procedure to allocate cases:

- There is **no written procedure** in the top court that is followed to **allocate cases**.
- When a case is filed, its details and subject matter are **scrutinized by the SC registry**, which receives and processes all documents.

Master of Roster system:

- Master of Roster which refers to the privilege of the Chief Justice of India (CJI) to constitute benches to hear cases. Roster is prepared by the Registrar of Supreme Court under the orders of CJI.
- The issue of Master of Roster is quite important since in the year 2018, 4 SC Judges held a press conference to register their differences with the then CJI.
- It was considered to be unprecedented since normally internal conflicts within Judiciary do not come out openly.
- In the press conference, the 4 SC Judges had highlighted that the CJI was misusing his powers as "master of roster" by selectively allocating politically sensitive cases to certain selected benches in order to get a favourable verdict.
- Article 145:** Supreme Court with the approval of the President may make rules regulating the practice and procedure of the Court.

3. The cases are then categorised on the **basis of subject matter**. There are 47 broad categories such as letter petitions, public interest matters, taxation, service matters and criminal appeals. Each category has multiple sub-categories.
4. The registry notifies the roster for the benches, which is done on the basis of the subjects (or categories), and the CJI approves it. More than one bench is allocated the same subject matter.
5. The CJI can issue a specific instruction to list a case before a particular bench. The CJI, as the master of roster, has the right to mark the sensitive cases to specific benches. As the institution's head, the CJI also has the discretion to set-up larger benches.
6. The CJI is informed by registry officials that a case is sensitive. It is then left to the CJI to decide if he wants to mark it as per the roster, retain it with himself or let another bench hear it.
7. As per convention, the CJI, on being **informed in advance**, either hears the matter or refers it to the top four judges in seniority after him.

If malaise within the Judiciary:

1. There is a tendency to view the **threat to judicial independence in India** as emerging from the executive branch, and occasionally the legislature.
2. But when persons within the judiciary become pliable to the other branches, it is a different story altogether.
3. The lack of information in the transfer resolution has led to a barrage of criticism against the collegium and its opaque process of appointments and transfers.
4. While this is true given that all high courts have similar powers under the Constitution, a transfer without delineating proper reasons has an inherent danger to be seen as a punishment.
5. Surely, this is as good a time as any for the judges of the Supreme Court to unite and seriously consider whether self-preservation trumps institutional independence, or whether they truly want to protect the judiciary from outside influence, and hold their own against an overbearing executive.
6. Recall that the **National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act** was struck down by the Court on grounds of excessive executive interference in the selection of judges.
7. But surely, this judgment is of no use if executive interference is anyway possible in more subtle ways.

Way Forward:

- To make the **system more transparent** and declare the reasons for transfer of the judges. Merit and seniority should be given an upper hand while making transfers rather than personal interests.
- Allocation of cases to benches should be **free from bias- random computer allocation**. Allocation based on subject expertise of the Judges. Recuse themselves from hearing of cases on account of perceived conflict of Interest.
- **Politically sensitive cases** should be handled by larger bench. **Cooling-off period for the Judges.**



5. The second chair: On Lok Sabha Deputy Speaker

Indian Legislation	Speakers- Parliament	
	Rajya Sabha	Lok Sabha
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vice President of Nation is the speaker. Administratively 2nd head of nation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaker is elected through voting by elected members. Administratively 3rd head of nation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administrative heads and responsible for flawless workings of Respective houses. Power to take penal actions against members of respective houses. Power to vote for motion in situation of deadlock. Power to suspend the respective houses sine-die or for particular period.
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Context:

- More than a year after the 17th Lok Sabha was constituted, the **constitutionally mandated post of Deputy Speaker** is lying vacant. Now, Harivansh Narayan Singh re-elected as **Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman**
- The post of Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha has been one of the bones of contention between the government and the opposition, which has renewed its campaign for the position ahead of the Monsoon Session of Parliament.
- This is the first time that the Lok Sabha has functioned for over a year without having a Deputy Speaker.

Office of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker:

- It has been said of the **Office of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker** that while the members of Parliament represent the individual constituencies, the Speaker represents the full authority of the House itself.
- The Speaker has **extensive functions to perform** in matters administrative, judicial and regulatory, falling under his/her domain. He/She enjoys vast authority under the Constitution and the Rules, as well as inherently.
- As the conventional head of the Lok Sabha and as its principal spokesman, the **Speaker represents its collective voice**.
- Of course, he/she is the **ultimate arbiter and interpreter** of those provisions which relate to the functioning of the House.

5. His/Her decisions are final and binding and ordinarily cannot be questioned, challenged or criticised.

History of posts: Speaker and Deputy Speaker:

1. The institutions of Speaker and Deputy Speaker originated in India in 1921 under the provisions of the **Government of India Act of 1919 (Montague-Chelmsford Reforms)**.
2. Before 1921, the Governor-General of India used to preside over the meetings of the Central Legislative Council.
3. In 1921, the Frederick Whyte and Sachidanand Sinha were appointed by the Governor-General of India as the first Speaker and the first Deputy Speaker (respectively) of the central legislative assembly.
4. In 1925, Vithalbhai J. Patel became the first Indian and the first elected Speaker of the central legislative assembly.
5. The Government of India Act of 1935 changed the nomenclatures of President and Deputy President of the Central Legislative Assembly to the Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively.
6. V. Mavalankar and Ananthasayanam Ayyangar had the distinction of being the first Speaker and the first Deputy Speaker (respectively) of the Lok Sabha.

Election of Deputy Speaker:

1. **Article 93** of the Constitution provides for the election of both the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker.
2. The constitutional office of the Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha is more symbolic of parliamentary democracy than some real authority.
3. There is no need to resign from their original party though as a Deputy Speaker, they have to remain impartial.
4. While there has not been delay in the election of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker election has seen intense politicking at various times. Delays in Deputy Speaker election became routine thereafter.

Power & Roles of Deputy Speaker:

1. He/she performs the duties of the Speaker's office when it is vacant. He also acts as the Speaker when the latter is absent from the sitting of the House. In both cases, he assumes all the powers of the Speaker.
2. He/she presides over the joint sitting of both the Houses of Parliament, in case the Speaker is absent from such a sitting.
3. He/she is **not subordinate to the Speaker**. He is directly responsible to the House.
4. He/she has one special privilege, that is, whenever he is appointed as a member of a **parliamentary committee**, he **automatically becomes its chairman**.
5. She/he decides whether a bill is a money bill or a non-money bill.
6. She/he **maintains discipline and decorum** in the house and can punish a member for unruly behaviour by suspending him/her.
7. She/he permits the moving of various kinds of motions and resolutions like the motion of no confidence, motion of adjournment, motion of censure and calling attention notice.
8. Like the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, while presiding over the House, **cannot vote in the first instance**; he can **only exercise a casting vote** in the case of a tie.

Election of Deputy Speaker:

1. Deputy Speaker is elected by the Lok Sabha itself from amongst its members. He is elected after the election of the Speaker has taken place.
2. According to the **Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha**, "The election of a Deputy Speaker shall be held on such date as the Speaker may fix.
3. It is by convention that the position of Deputy Speaker is offered to the opposition party in India.
4. **Tenure and removal**– They hold office until either they cease to be a member of the Lok Sabha or they resign.
5. They can be removed from office by a resolution passed in the Lok Sabha by an effective majority of its members.

Conclusion:

- The **Office of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker** occupies a pivotal position in our parliamentary democracy.
- He/She symbolises the dignity and power of the House over which he/she is presiding. Therefore, it is expected that the holder of this Office of high dignity has to be one who can represent the House in all its manifestations.
- The responsibility entrusted to the Speaker is so onerous that he/she cannot afford to overlook any aspect of parliamentary life.
- His/Her actions come under close scrutiny in the House and are also widely reported in the mass media.
- With the televising of proceedings of Parliament, the small screen brings to millions of households in the country the day-to-day developments in the House, making the Speaker's task all the more important.

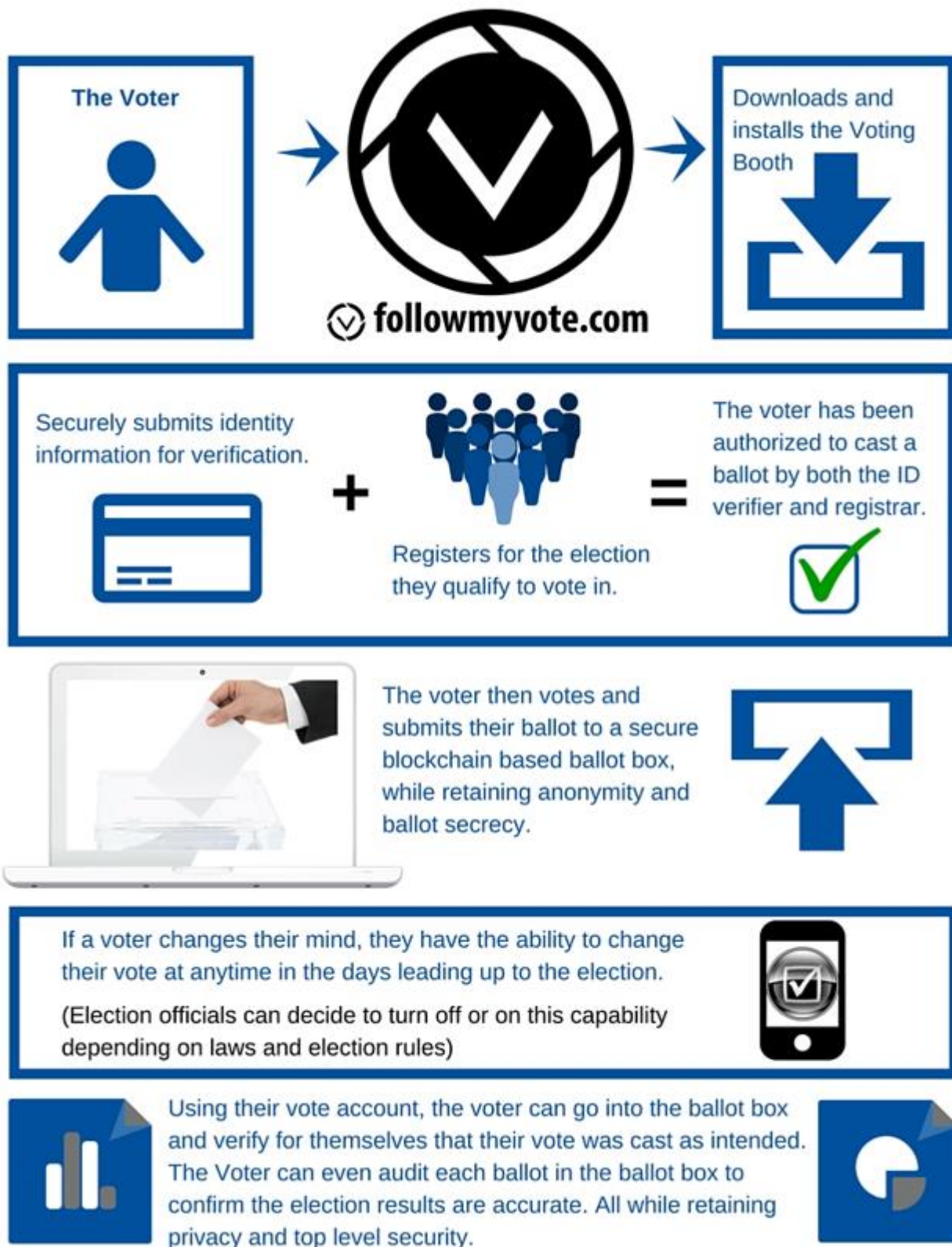
6. In blockchain voting, leave out the general election

Context:

- The **Election Commission of India** has for a while now been toying with the idea of further **digitising the electoral infrastructure** of the country.
- In furtherance of this, the Election Commission had, held an **online conference** in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu e-Governance Agency ("TNeGA") and IIT Madras, through which they explored the possibility of **using blockchain technology** for the purpose of **enabling remote elections**.
- While this exploration is still only in the nascent stages, there are several concerns that must be considered at the offset with utmost caution.

Blockchain technology: Rise in new applications:

- A blockchain is a **distributed ledger of information** which is replicated across various nodes on a "**peer-to-peer**" network for the purpose of **ensuring integrity and verifiability of data stored on the ledger**.
- Blockchain technology is **upcoming & niche technology** and adoption of the same in sectors such as health, finance, agriculture and various other sectors would aid the government in implementing various programmes.
- Blockchain ledgers have traditionally been used as supporting structures for cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin and Ethereum;



Arguments in favour of remote voting are plenty:

- In the way the envisioned system has been described, **'remote voting'** would appear to **benefit internal migrants** and **seasonal workers**, who account for **roughly 51 million** of the populace (Census 2011), and who have, as a matter of record, faced considerable difficulties in exercising their democratic right of voting.

- The envisioned solution might also be useful for some remotely-stationed members of the **Indian armed forces**, though it should be noted that, for the most part, vote casting has not been an issue for those serving in even the **remotest of places** including the **Siachen Glacier**, which, given its altitude, is considered to be the 'highest battleground' on the planet.

However, There are several concerns that must be considered: Key issues, Security concerns:

The problems with the blockchain-based remote voting systems are manifold.

1. The system envisioned by the Election Commission is perhaps only slightly more acceptable than a **fully remote, app-based voting system** (which face a litany of issues of their own, and which have so far only been deployed in a few low-level elections in the West).
2. The systems used in such low-stakes elections have **suffered several blunders too**, some of which could have been **catastrophic** if they had gone undetected.
3. At an earlier event held by the Election Commission, then Senior Deputy Election Commissioner, explained that electors would still have to physically reach a designated venue in order to cast their vote, adding that systems would use "white-listed IP devices on dedicated internet lines", and that the system would make use of the biometric attributes of electors.
4. **Digitisation and interconnectivity** introduce additional **points of failure external to the processes** which exist in the present day.
5. Blockchain solutions rely heavily on the **proper implementation of cryptographic protocols**.
6. If any shortcomings exist in an implementation, it might stand to potentially unmask the identity and voting preferences of electors, or worse yet, allow an individual to cast a vote as someone else.
7. The requirement of **physical presence and biometric authentication** may **not necessarily** make a remote voting system invulnerable to attacks either.
8. An attacker may be able to **clone the biometric attributes** required for authenticating as another individual and cast a vote on their behalf.
9. Physical implants or software backdoors placed on an individual system could allow attackers to collect and deduce voting choices of individuals.
10. Further, while the provisioning of a dedicated line may make the **infrastructure less prone to outages**, it may also make it **increasingly prone to targeted Denial-of-Service attacks** (where an attacker would be in a position to block traffic from the system, effectively preventing, or at the very least delaying the registration of votes).
11. More attack scenarios that the system might be vulnerable to will slowly become evident when additional details about the hypothesised system are disclosed.
12. Apart from lingering security issues, digitised systems may also stand to exclude and disenfranchise certain individuals due to **flaws in interdependent platforms**, flaws in system design, as well as general failures caused by external factors.
13. Naturally, the more levers that are involved in the operation of a system, the more prone it would become to **possible malfunction**.

An obsession: technological solutions may poses a threat:

1. India can characteristically be described as a country obsessed with techno-solutionism. If a solution uses technology, the general consensus is that it must work.

2. However, this optimism for technological solutions **poses a threat** and could stand to **hinder free and fair elections** in the future, if unchecked.
3. It is important to lay stress on the point that further digitisation, in itself, does not make processes more robust.
4. Any solution to electoral problems must be **software independent and fault tolerable**, where failure or tampering of one mechanism or several would not affect the integrity or transparency of the overall process.

Way Forward:

- If the only problem that is to be solved is the one of ballot portability, then perhaps **technological solutions** which involve setting up entirely new, untested voting infrastructure **may not be the answer**.
- **Political engagement** could perhaps be improved by introducing and improving upon other methods, such as **postal ballots or proxy voting**.
- **Another proposed solution** to this issue includes the **creation of a 'One Nation, One Voter ID' system**, though it is unclear whether such a radical (and costly) exercise would be required at all for the mere purpose of allowing individuals to vote out of their home State.

7. Mind the gaps in India's health care digital push

Introduction:

- The Independence Day address of the Prime Minister launching the **National Digital Health Mission (NDHM)** during an unprecedented novel coronavirus pandemic crisis, caught everyone's attention. Yet, despite all his eloquence it was not clear to many what to expect in substantial terms.
- **'Going Digital'** has no doubt been a **magic phrase** that has often been repeated in multiple contexts in the country, and as yet another 'Mission' for the health sector, they waited for more news to emerge.
- Even that leaves insufficient time for discussions among medical practitioners, hospital managements, associations of various stakeholders in the health-care sector and other members of civil society for any meaningful feedback.

What are the probable negatives?

- It can be **highly misused** by the private healthcare sector, diagnostic labs, pharmaceutical and insurance sectors to exploit people in the absence of access to a quality public healthcare system.
- Dealing with ethical issues, breach of privacy, and dealing with social stigma are significant challenges for the NDHM.
- Moreover, experience from Aadhaar and Health Management Information Systems (HMIS) raises doubts on ensuring the quality of registration and maintenance of records and their completeness. Such mistakes might cause more damage than good to the health of the people.



COVID-19 triggered an introspection of India's Healthcare System:

1. Treatment and Viewing of Healthcare System:

The headlines of the tragic loss of lives, the exponential increase in cases, economic morass and social disruptions have emerged a deeper subtext on how the healthcare sector is viewed and treated.

2. Emergence of Reports on Healthcare's Problem:

The pandemic has raised reports on longstanding problem of healthcare workers protesting the shortage of equipment, patients charging doctors and hospitals for profiteering, policy makers issuing edicts against providers and reported cases of hoarding of essential medicines.

3. Increasing lack of interest between stakeholders of the Healthcare System:

The growing lack of trust between patients and their doctors and providers and the wider mistrust between policy makers and the industry found fresh ground during the pandemic.

KEY GOALS

- Establishing and managing the core digital health data and the infrastructure required for its seamless exchange.
- Promoting the adoption of open standards by all the actors in the national digital health eco-system, for developing several digital health systems that span across the sector from wellness to disease management.
- Creating a system of personal health records, based on international standards, and easily accessible to the citizens and the service providers, based on citizen-consent.
- Following the best principles of cooperative federalism while working with the states and union territories for the realisation of the vision.
- Promoting health data analytics and medical research; enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of governance at all levels.
- Ensuring the quality of healthcare.
- Leveraging the information systems already existing in the health sector.

How can the NDHM be made successful?

- The **biggest hurdle for NDHM** is the **meagre health budget of India**.
- How it will **provide 'healthcare for all'** without sufficient health budget sanctions and revamping of existing public healthcare infrastructure.
- Currently, **total health expenditure** (both private and public) **in India is just 3.6 per cent**, while public spending on health is just above 1 per cent of the country's GDP, which is a low compared to the countries that have some of the best digital health systems in the world.
- **Public sector spending on health** in Canada and Australia is **around 8 per cent** and **6.3 per cent of its GDP** respectively. Canada ranks first and Australia ranks eighth among the best healthcare systems in the world.

What are the other challenges?

1. One big challenge is how to bring undiagnosed or untreated ailments into account.
2. Self-reported morbidities from successive National Sample Surveys suggest a large proportion of ailments go unrecognised and undetected.
3. **Enhancing health literacy and knowledge** is the key for reporting, diagnosis and treatment of ailments.

4. Thus, unless the public healthcare system is revamped to **increase health infrastructure and healthcare human resources** and make healthcare affordable to the poor, it is difficult to bring people to seek treatment for all ailments.
5. Mere insurance-based (private) healthcare does not work effectively in a country with multiple social and economic hierarchies where 62 per cent of the total healthcare expenditure is incurred by households.
6. Thus, raising the demand for healthcare and treatment-seeking behaviour will not be possible without enhancing public health provision **from bottom-to-top approach, access to affordable and quality healthcare in rural areas.**
7. Also, the country must **develop a clear framework and pathway** on ways to bring its private sector into confidence under **NDHM-adhering confidentiality and ensuring quality of information.**

Status of India's Healthcare Sector:

1. The general perception behind the inadequate provision and availability of healthcare services is attributed to the country's developing nation status.
2. India lags behind its BRICS peers on the **health and quality index (HAQ index).**
3. As per the **National Health Profile 2018**, India's public health spending is less than 1 per cent of the country's GDP, which is lower than some of its neighbours, countries such as Bhutan (2.5 per cent), Sri Lanka (1.6 per cent) and Nepal (1.1 per cent).
4. According to the World Health Organisation, India finishes second from the bottom amongst the 10 countries of its region for its percentage spending of GDP on public health.
5. As per the **OECD data** available for 2017, India reportedly has only 0.53 beds available per 1,000 people as against 0.87 in Bangladesh, 2.11 in Chile, 1.38 in Mexico, 4.34 in China and 8.05 in Russia.

Indian Healthcare System based on Empathy:

1. The society must **reframe its outlook and notions** about healthcare workers as standard bearers of these professions are not grubby mercantilists, but people wanting to serve with a sense of purpose.
2. The faith in the doctor and trust in the hospital/healthcare system is the bedrock of an efficient non-paternalistic, equitable health delivery system.
3. The governments need to make laws more effective and watchdogs less virulent and **more constructive** as regulation by legislation or through watchdogs has not led to an increase in trust in the system.
4. The social media needs a **dedicated group of health evangelists** to fact check, correct and inform the public, especially when fiction is being passed off for facts.

Public health professionals estimate the cost in thousands of crores for all government and private HIPs to upgrade their hardware and connectivity systems, training of present staff, the entry of data afresh apart from other indirect costs.

Indian healthcare on the cusp of a digital transformation:

1. **Healthcare** has become one of **India's largest sector**, both in terms of revenue and employment.
2. Healthcare comprises hospitals, medical devices, clinical trials, outsourcing, telemedicine, medical tourism, health insurance and medical equipment.
3. The Indian healthcare sector is **growing at a brisk pace** due to its strengthening coverage, services and increasing expenditure by public as well private players.

4. Indian healthcare delivery system is categorised into two major components – public and private.
5. The Government, i.e. **public healthcare system**, comprises limited secondary and tertiary care institutions in key cities and focuses on providing basic healthcare facilities in the form of primary healthcare centres (PHCs) in rural areas.
6. The private sector provides majority of secondary, tertiary, and quaternary care institutions with major concentration in metros and tier I and tier II cities.
7. **India's competitive advantage** lies in its **large pool of well-trained medical professionals**. India is also **cost competitive** compared to its peers in Asia and Western countries.
8. The cost of surgery in India is about one-tenth of that in the US or Western Europe. India ranks 145 among 195 countries in terms of quality and accessibility of healthcare.

Conclusion:

- **Public health practitioners** at the **grass-root level** would continue to wonder if digitisation is the immediate problem facing the health sector or the best way to go about addressing data gaps.
- In their eyes, what millions face in the country are **unreliable health-care facilities** in both the government and private sectors, difficulties in getting **timely care**, availability of beds and hygienically maintained hospital premises, availability of doctors physically or on line, and the continuous neglect of preventive and community health initiatives.
- They may be blamed for trying to delay the inevitable; the inexorable march to digitisation. Perhaps they need to discover that data is the only cure, for all our ills.

8. Why has Japan mooted the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative?

INDIA, JAPAN AND AUSTRALIA TO LAUNCH “SUPPLY CHAIN RESILIENCE INITIATIVE” TO COUNTER CHINA

THE SUPPLY CHAIN RESILIENCE INITIATIVE FIRST PROPOSED BY JAPAN. THE INITIATIVE AIMS TO REDUCE THE DEPENDENCY IN CHINA. JAPAN IS TO BE JOINED BY INDIA AND AUSTRALIA. IT IS A DIRECT RESPONSE TO COMPANIES THAT ARE CONCERNED ABOUT CHINESE POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR AND DISRUPTION TO SUPPLY CHAIN.



Context:

- With COVID-19 and trade tensions between China and the United States threatening supply chains or actually causing bottlenecks, Japan has mooted the **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)** as a **trilateral approach** to trade, with India and Australia as the other two partners.
- The initiative is at the strategy stage and has some way to go before participants can realise trade benefits.

What does Supply Chain Resilience mean?

- In the context of international trade, **supply chain resilience** is an approach that helps a country to **ensure** that it has **diversified its supply risk** across a clutch of supplying nations instead of being dependent on just one or a few.
- **Unanticipated events** whether natural, such as volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, earthquakes or even a pandemic; or manmade, such as an armed conflict in a region that disrupt supplies from a particular country or even intentional halts to trade, could adversely impact economic activity in the destination country.

Proposal of Supply Chain Resilience Initiative:

1. With **Covid-19** and **trade tensions** between China and the United States are threatening supply chains, Japan has mooted the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) as a **trilateral approach to trade**, with India and Australia as the key-partners.
2. The initiative **aims to reduce the dependency on a single nation (at present China)**.
3. SCRI is a direct response to individual companies and economies concerned about Chinese political behaviour and the disruption that could lead to the supply chain.
4. The initiative, first proposed by Japan with India and Australia as partners, potentially see other Asian and Pacific Rim nations later.

Why is Japan proposing?

1. It is significant that Japan has taken the initiative to include India and Australia, and potentially other Asian and Pacific Rim nations later, in a **strategic dialogue**, despite India having pulled out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership that Japan helped stitch together.
2. What has changed now is that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus what was already known that when **assembly lines are heavily dependent on supplies from one country**, the impact on importing nations could be crippling if that source stops production for involuntary reasons, or even as a **conscious measure of economic coercion**.
3. While Japan exported **\$135 billion** worth of goods to China in 2019, it also **imported \$169 billion** worth from the world's second-largest economy, accounting for 24% of its total imports, according to data from tradingeconomics.com.
4. Electrical and electronic gear, and machinery, nuclear reactors and boilers were sectors that clocked up significant imports into Japan.
5. So, any halt to supplies (as it happened when China had to shut down factories in regions hit by the SARS-CoV-2 virus that has caused the COVID-19 pandemic) could potentially impair economic activity in Japan.
6. A Bloomberg report said that Japan's imports from China fell by half in February, a period when the latter was battling the peak of the virus impact.
7. In addition, the **S-China trade tensions** have caused **alarm in Japanese trade circles** for a while now.

8. If the world's two largest economies do not resolve their differences, it could **threaten globalisation** as a whole and have a major impact on Japan, which is **heavily reliant on international trade** both for markets for its exports and for supplies of a range of primary goods from oil to iron ore.
9. As part of the country's economic stimulus package, the Japanese government recently earmarked \$2.2 billion to incentivise its companies to move their manufacturing out of China.
10. This was not a protectionist move the manufacturing could, **but did not have to, return to Japan.**
11. This was a **nudge to diversification of risk** where those manufacturing lines could be relocated out of China to other third countries.

What is likely to have spurred Japan to eye India as a partner for the SCRI?

1. **Japan is the fourth-largest investor in India** with cumulative foreign direct investments touching **\$33.5 billion in the 2000-2020 period** accounting for **2% of inflows in that period**, according to quasi government agency India Invest.
2. Imports from Japan into India more than doubled over 12 years to \$12.8 billion in FY19.
3. Exports from India to the world's third-largest economy stood at \$4.9 billion that year, data from the agency showed.
4. Also, India is carrying forward the sentiments of self-reliance focussing on less dependence on China which is one of the reasons behind SCRI.
5. Japan has included India under the SCRI initiative despite India having pulled out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.
6. Further, India and Japan are a part of QUAD (also includes the USA and Australia) and malabar (naval) exercise (also includes the USA).

Where does Australia stand?

1. **Australia, Japan and India** are already part of another informal grouping, the **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue**, or the Quad, which includes the S.
2. Media reports indicate that China has been Australia's largest trading partner and that it counts for **6% of Australia's exports**, with **iron ore, coal and gas dominating the products** shipped to Asia's largest economy.
3. But relations including trade ties between the two have been deteriorating for a while now. China banned beef imports from four Australian firms in May, and levied import tariffs on Australian barley.
4. China's education Ministry warned its students aspiring to study or already studying in Australia, of '**rising racism**' in that country, urging them to re-assess their aspirations.
5. Prior to that, China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism had said its citizens should by 'no means travel to Australia' on account of rising 'racist incidents'.
6. China's chagrin stems from Australia's push for an enquiry into the origins of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

What does India stand to gain, or lose?

1. Following the **border tensions** between the two highly populous Asian neighbours, partners such as Japan have sensed that India may be ready for dialogue on **alternative supply chains**. Earlier, India would have done little to overtly antagonise China.
2. But an internal push to suddenly cut links with China would be impractical.

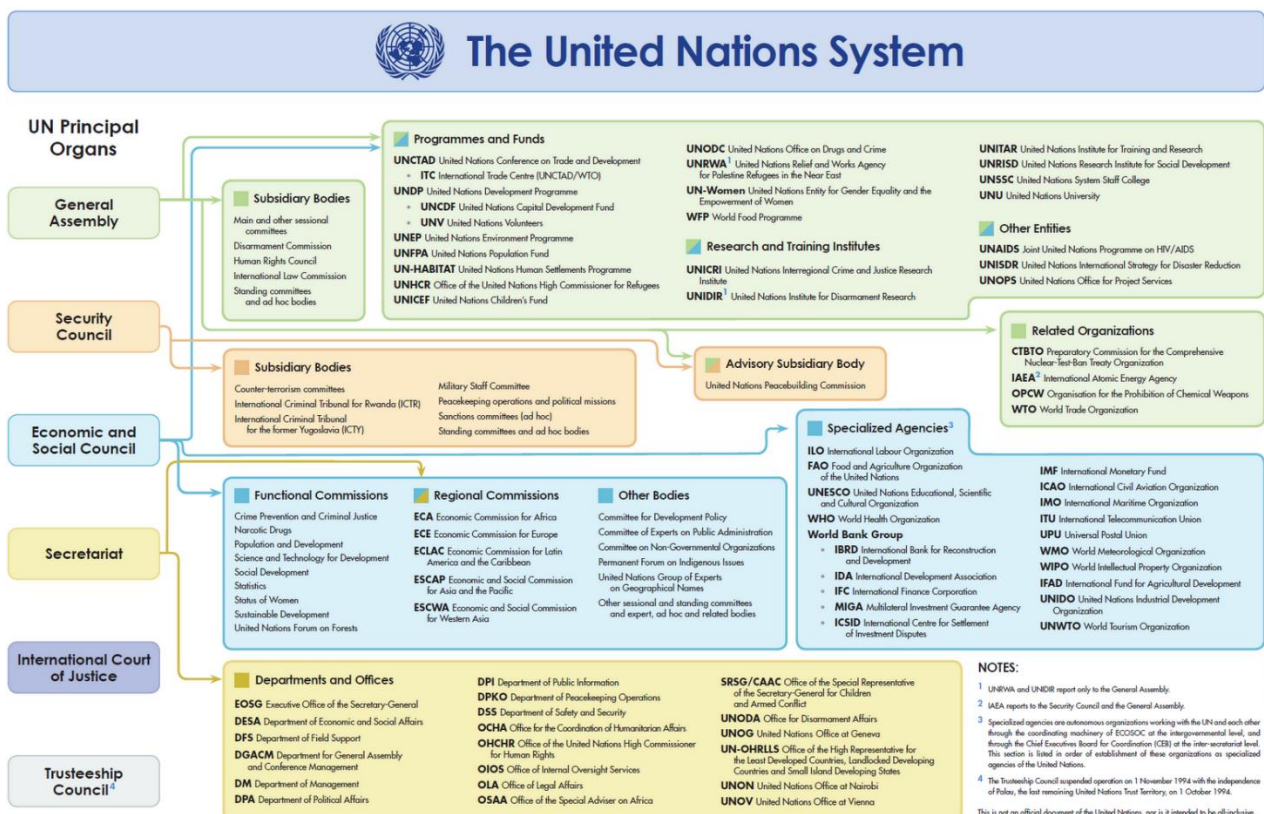


3. **China's share of imports into India in 2018** (considering the top 20 items supplied by China) stood at **5%**, according to an impact analysis by the Confederation of Indian Industry in February 2020.
4. In areas such as Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients for medicines such as paracetamol, **India is fully dependent on China**. In electronics, China accounts for 45% of India's imports, the analysis showed.
5. Chinese supplies dominate segments of the Indian economy. Sectors that have been **impacted by supply chain issues** arising out of the pandemic include pharmaceuticals, automotive parts, electronics, shipping, chemicals and textiles.

Conclusion:

- Over time, if India enhances self-reliance or works with exporting nations other than China, it could **build resilience** into the economy's supply networks.
- While India appears an attractive option for **potential investors** both as a market and as a manufacturing base, trade experts point to the need for India to accelerate progress in **ease of doing business** and in **skill building**.
- **Tax incentives**, as the one recently announced to compete with the likes of Vietnam and the Philippines for investments in manufacturing, alone may not suffice.

9. The birth of the United Nations, and its growth in the last 75 years



Context:

- The United Nations completed **75 years this year**. In order to commemorate the historic moment, world leaders come together, at a one-day high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly.
- The meeting, **themed as “The Future We Want, the UN We Need: Reaffirming our Collective Commitment to Multilateralism”**, is a landmark event, as for the first time in 75 years, the 193-member body would be holding the session virtually on account of the Covid-19 outbreak.

The birth of the United Nations:

- The UN was born out of the ashes of yet another international organisation created with the intention of keeping war away.
- The **League of Nations** was created in **June 1919, after World War I**, as part of the **Treaty of Versailles**.
- However, when the Second World War broke out in 1939, the League closed down and its headquarters in Geneva remained empty throughout the war.
- Consequently, in August 1941, American president **Franklin D. Roosevelt** and British prime minister **Winston Churchill** held a secret meeting aboard naval ships in Placentia Bay, located in the southeast coast of Newfoundland, Canada.
- The heads of the two countries discussed the possibility of **creating a body for international peace effort** and a range of issues related to the war.
- Together they issued a statement that came to be **called the Atlantic Charter**. It was not a treaty, but only an affirmation that paved the way for the **creation of the UN**.
- It declared the realisation of “certain **common principles** in the national policies of their respective countries on which they based their hopes for a better future for the world.”
- The United States joined the war in December 1941, and for the first time the term ‘United Nations’ was coined by president Roosevelt to identify those countries which were allied against the axis powers.

Main goals of the UN since its creation:

- The United Nations finally came into existence **on October 24, 1945** after being **ratified by 51 nations**, which included **five permanent members** (France, the Republic of China, the Soviet Union, the UK and the US) and 46 other signatories. The first meeting of the General Assembly took place on January 10, 1946.

The **four main goals of the UN** included

1. Maintaining international peace and security,
2. Developing friendly relations among nations,
3. Achieving international cooperation in solving international problems and
4. Being at the center for harmonising the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.

Achievements and failures of the UN in the last 75 years:

1. While at the time of its formation, the UN consisted of only 51 member states, independence movements and de-colonisation in the subsequent years led to an expansion of its membership. At present, 193 countries are members of the UN.
2. The UN boasts of several significant achievements in the last 75 years.
3. It has also **expanded its scope** to resolve over a large number of global issues such as health, environment, women empowerment among others.

4. Soon after its formation, it passed a resolution to commit to the elimination of nuclear weapons in 1946.
5. In 1948, it created the World Health Organisation (WHO) to deal with communicable diseases like smallpox, malaria, HIV.
6. At present the WHO is the apex organisation **dealing with the coronavirus pandemic**.
7. In 1950, the UN created the High Commissioner for Refugees to take care of the millions who had been displaced due to World War II.
8. It continues to be on the frontlines of crises faced by refugees from countries across the world. In 1972, the UN environment programme was created.
9. More recently in 2002, the UN established the UN criminal court to try those who have **committed war crimes, genocide, and other atrocities**.

Share of criticisms in UN performance:

- The UN has also met with its share of criticisms. In 1994, for instance, the organisation failed to stop the Rwandan genocide.
- In 2005, UN peacekeeping missions were accused of sexual misconduct in the Republic of Congo, and similar allegations have also come from Cambodia and Haiti.
- In 2011, the UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan was unsuccessful in eliminating the bloodshed caused in the civil war that broke out in 2013.

Need for UN Security Council Reforms:

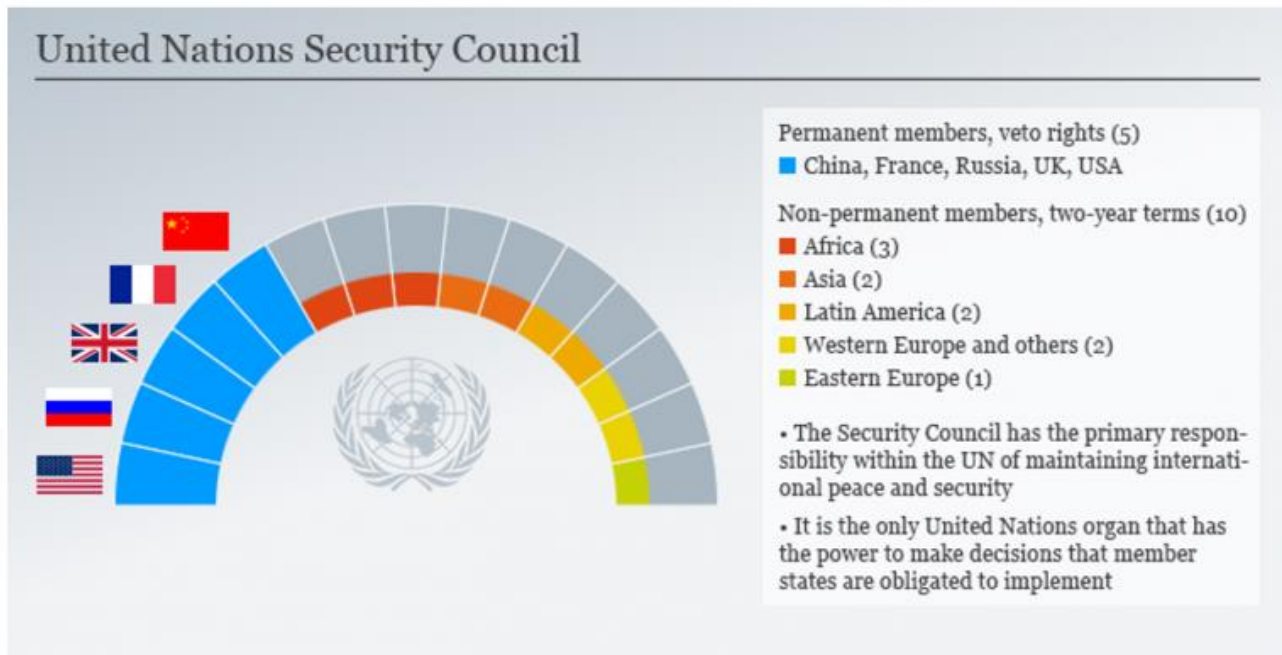
1. UN represents a larger world and the irony is that it has **only 5 permanent members in its such an important body**.
2. Current composition of the Security Council represents the post World War II realities and thus is not in pace with the changing balance of power in the world.
3. The power of veto is frequently cited as a major problem as the P5 members often influence the resolutions making those countries to suffer, which rather need a platform to grow.
4. Member states that have demonstrated credibility and capacity to shoulder the responsibilities of the principal UN organ should have a presence to ensure the legitimacy of the council.
5. Thus, a **new category of “semi-permanent” seats** is intriguing as, if properly structured, could ensure legitimacy without preventing flexibility for a changing world.
6. At the time of the formation of UNSC, big powers were given privileges to make them part of the council. This was necessary for its **proper functioning** as well as to avoid the failure like that of the organization ‘League of Nations’.
7. The regions like far East Asia, South America, **Africa have no representation** in the permanent membership of the council.
8. **Rise of fora like G4** (India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan) as important economies and emerging world powers are pushing after quick UN Security Council reforms.

Conclusion:

- The United Nations was born out of the horrors of World War II. At the time of its foundation, it was primarily tasked with the goal of maintaining world peace and saving future generations from the evils of war.
- The next 10 years, which have been designated as the **decade of action and delivery for sustainable development**, will be the most critical of our generation. It is even more important as we build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The goals listed out for the next ten years include protection of the planet and environment, promoting peace, gender equality and women empowerment, digital cooperation, and sustainable financing.

10. UN and the retreat from multilateralism



Context:

- The **United Nations** commemorated its **75th anniversary** on September 21, 2020 by adopting a Declaration.
- The anniversary comes at a time when the world is witnessing a **retreat from multilateralism**. It also faces an **unprecedented pandemic**.
- In his address to the UN on September 22, the UN Secretary-General called the pandemic “the fifth horseman”. No one could have predicted it. It has also brought in its wake the deepest recession the world has seen since the 1930s. This has made it more difficult to achieve the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** the UN had adopted.
- The Secretary-General said the world is “careening off track” in achieving the SDGs.

Challenge to multilateralism

- The challenge to multilateralism is coming not from the have-nots, but the **main stakeholders of the system**.
- The U.S. is not alone in withdrawing from multilateralism. Brexit has shown that nationalism remains strong in Europe. It has delivered a blow to the idea of Europe, united and whole.
- Nevertheless, the most important development is the position of the U.S. As French President remarked in his speech at the UN General Assembly, the U.S., which created the international system as we know today, is no longer willing to be its “**guarantor of last resort**”.
- U.S. President stressed “America First” in his speech, and suggested that others too should put their countries first.

- China has stepped in to take advantage of the West's retreat from multilateralism.
- But China's assertion of a role on the world stage is **not an embrace of the idea of multilateralism**. Its flagship **Belt and Road Initiative** consists of a series of **bilateral credit agreements** with recipient countries with no mechanism for multilateral consultation or oversight.
- Curiously, President Xi Jinping's speech at the UN General Assembly did not mention it. The European Union's and U.S.'s sanctions against Russia have driven it closer to China.
- The rift between the permanent members of the Security Council has already started affecting the work of the UN Security Council.

Clashing perspectives of the U.S. and China:

1. The speeches at the **regular session** of the UN General Assembly brought out the clashing perspectives of the U.S. and China.
2. President Trump highlighted China's culpability in the **spread of the pandemic**. He pointed out that China had **banned internal flights** but **allowed international flights** from Wuhan to continue.
3. This set the stage for the **spread of COVID-19**. The World Health Organization also failed to provide early warnings.
4. President Xi's speech sought to project the fight against COVID-19 as a **matter of collective responsibility of the international community**. He said China will "honour" its commitment to provide **\$2 billion assistance** to the developing countries over two years.
5. This is not a large amount considering the scale. The actual assistance committed to the UN COVID-19 response fund was a paltry \$50 million in addition to a similar amount pledged earlier.
6. President Macron pointed out that while the U.S. is withdrawing, the world faces China's projection beyond its frontiers.
7. He also highlighted problems nearer home posed by **Turkey's intervention in Syria, Libya, and the Eastern Mediterranean**, which is a breach of international law.
8. The last was a reference to Turkey sending a drilling ship in Greek and Cypriot exclusive economic zones. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan made a detailed reference to the Jammu and Kashmir issue.

World Leaders on Climate change:

- Most world leaders spoke of climate change. President Trump mentioned that China's emissions are nearly twice of those of the U.S., and despite its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the U.S. has reduced its carbon emissions by more than any country in the world.
- President Xi said that after peaking emissions by 2030, **China will achieve carbon neutrality before 2060**.
- President Macron said that he was determined to see the **EU agree on a target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050**.
- The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, in his speech made an extensive reference to Jammu and Kashmir.
- Though this is customary for Pakistani leaders, he brought a particularly uncivil tone to the discourse. Meanwhile, his country has slid to the 134th rank in the UN SDG index, the lowest for any country in South Asia.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Speech:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi focused on **UN reforms and India's contribution to UN Peacekeeping** for which we can be justly proud.
- What does the UN bring to the developing countries? It gives them **greater political space**.
- We need to **support reform** not only to **expand the permanent members' category** of the Security Council but also to **revitalise the role of the General Assembly**.
- The **retreat from multilateralism** would undermine the UN's capacity to face diverse challenges.

Several hurdles and Challenges faced by the UN:

1. The UN Secretary-General's report on the work of the organisation highlights some of the **achievements and challenges** the world body faces.
2. **Over 40 UN political missions and peacekeeping operations** engage 95,000 troops, police, and civil personnel.
3. To be effective, they have to be put on a sound financial basis. The UN peacekeeping budget, a little over \$8 billion, is a small fraction of the \$1.9 trillion military expenditure governments made in 2019. Yet it suffers from a paucity of resources.
4. There was an outstanding assessed contribution of \$1.7 billion for peacekeeping activities by the end of the financial year. Similarly, there was an outstanding \$711 million in the assessed contribution for the general budget.
5. Most of the humanitarian assistance, developmental work, and budgets of the specialised agencies are based on **voluntary contributions**. There are calls for increasing public-private partnerships. This is not a satisfactory arrangement.
6. The UN provides '**public goods**' in terms of **peace and development** often in remote parts of the world. There may not be enough appetite on the part of corporations. The UN remains an inter-governmental body.
7. Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for **reform of its "outdated structures"**, pointing out that in the **absence of comprehensive changes**, the world body today **faces a "crisis of confidence"**.
8. While the words appear harsh given the occasion, they can hardly be faulted. India has been at the forefront of **demanding reform in the UN**, particularly its **principal organ, the Security Council**, for decades, staking its claim as one of the world's largest economies and most populous countries, with a track record in promoting a **rules-based international order**, and contributing to peacekeeping through UN forces.

Conclusion:

- It is some comfort that the **UN's 75th anniversary declaration** passed by all member countries this week pledges to **"upgrade the United Nations"** with a commitment to **"instil new life in the discussions on the reform of the Security Council"**.
- Those words can only be realised if the UNSC's permanent members recognise the deep peril the UN faces and support the reform process, an act that will require looking beyond their own interests for the greater good of the world and its **peace-building architecture**.

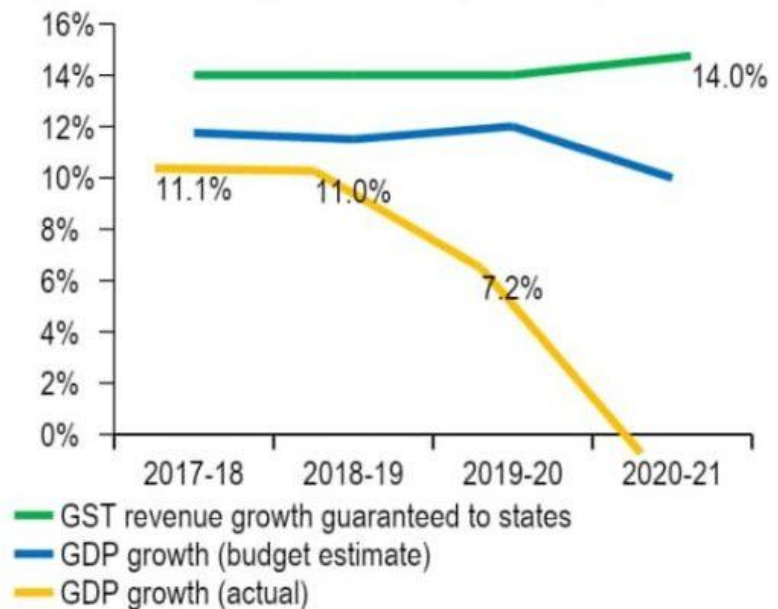
GENERAL STUDIES III

1. The issues in GST compensation

Context:

- With Centre-state friction over pending compensation payments under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) taking a new turn in the 41st GST Council meeting strain on the **finances of states** is likely to continue in the near term.
- Several states have opposed the two options to borrow that were proposed in the meeting as a way to bridge the revenue shortfall.
- GST compensation payments to states have been pending since April, with the pending amount for April-July estimated at Rs 1.5 lakh crore.
- The **GST compensation** requirement is estimated to be around **Rs 3 lakh crore** this year, while the **cess collection** is expected to be around Rs 65,000 crore – an estimated compensation shortfall of Rs 2.35 lakh crore.

Figure 1: GDP growth rate (2017-21)



Sources: Union Budget Documents; MOSPI; PRS.

Background: centre to address this issue of revenue loss:

- Centre promised to **reimburse the shortfall** in tax revenues for 5 years to the states, which was to be **funded by GST Compensation Cess**.
- The tax year on year growth for the states, upon the base, was promised as 14%.
- Now, the Centre is abdicating its responsibility of making up for the shortfall in 14% growth in GST revenues to the states, which makes the position of states perilous.

What was discussed at the meeting?

- The opinion of the Attorney General of India was cited to buttress the argument that GST compensation has to be paid for the transition period from July 2017 to June 2022, but the compensation gap cannot be bridged using the Consolidated Fund of India.
- The AG has suggested the compensation cess levy can be extended beyond five years to meet the shortfall.

Towards the end of the meeting, the Centre offered two options.

- The first was a **special window to states**, in consultation with the RBI, to borrow the projected GST shortfall of Rs 97,000 crore, and an amount that can be repaid after five years of GST, ending June 2022, from the compensation cess fund.
- A **0.5% relaxation** in the borrowing limit under **The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act** would be provided, delinked from the conditions announced earlier as part of the **pandemic package** linked to the **implementation of reform measures** such as universalisation of '*One Nation One Ration Card*', ease of doing business, power distribution, and augmentation of urban local body revenues.
- The second option was **to borrow the entire projected shortfall** of Rs 2.35 lakh crore – both on account of faltering GST collections and the expected shortfall due to the pandemic – facilitated by the RBI.
- No FRBM relaxation has been mentioned for this option so far.

The GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017:

1. Note that under the GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017, Centre can provide **compensation to states** only through the money available in the **Compensation Fund**.
2. The Union Finance Minister, in her budget speech in February 2020, clarified that transfers to the Fund would be limited only to collections of the GST compensation cess.
3. Despite a shortfall of money in the Compensation Fund, the Centre is constitutionally obligated to meet states' compensation requirement for a period of five years.

What are the views of the states on these?

1. Five states and Union Territories: Kerala, Punjab, West Bengal, Puducherry and Delhi have voiced their concerns over the proposals.
2. Finance Minister of Kerala said enforcing a cut in compensation and bringing in a distinction between GST and Covid-related revenue loss is unconstitutional. He has said that the states' FRBM limit should be raised by at least 1.5 percentage points if the entire Rs 2.35 lakh crore has to be borrowed.
3. Finance Minister of Punjab said these options were thrust upon the states, and the borrowing would translate into "mortgaging of the future to live for the present".
4. States have asked the Centre for details of the two options. They will then have seven working days to get back with their views.
5. However, reflecting the original divide at the time of the introduction of GST, poorer, consumption states such as Bihar or West Bengal would be less eager to change this system which still benefits them relatively.
6. To add to this is the fact that India is expecting a long and protracted economic slowdown, which means tax collection would be poor, no matter which regime is in place.

What is the significance of GST for states?

1. States no longer possess taxation rights after most taxes, barring those on petroleum, alcohol, and stamp duty, were subsumed under GST.
2. GST accounts for almost 42% of states' own tax revenues, and tax revenues account for around 60% of states' total revenues.
3. Finances of over a dozen states are under severe strain, resulting in delays in salary payments and sharp cuts in capital expenditure outlays amid the pandemic-induced lockdowns and the need to spend on healthcare.
4. The Finance Secretary said **GST collections** had been **severely impacted** by the

5. Revenues are expected to be hit further; the economy is projected to record a recession this year.
6. Union Finance Minister referred to the **Covid-19 outbreak** as an “**act of God**” that would result in a contraction of the economy in the current fiscal.

Measures for Way Forward:

1. Various measures have been suggested to address the **issue of shortfall in the Fund**, either by reducing the compensation payable to states (which would require Parliament to amend the Act following GST Council's recommendation) or by supplementing the funds available with the Centre for providing compensation to states.
2. The Act allows the GST Council to recommend other funding mechanisms/ amounts for credit into the Compensation Fund.
3. For example, one of the measures proposed for meeting the shortfall involves Centre using market borrowings to pay compensation to states, with the idea that these borrowings will be repaid with the help of future cess collections.
4. To enable this, the GST Council may recommend to the Centre that the compensation cess be levied for a period beyond five years, i.e. post-June 2022.

Conclusion:

- **GST is a crucial and long-term structural reform** which can address the fiscal needs of the future, strike the right and desired balance to achieve co-operative federalism and also lead to enhanced economic growth.
- As stated by the Secretary of the GST Council in the tenth meeting, the central government could raise resources by other means for compensation and this could then be recouped by continuing the cess beyond five years.
- As equal representatives of the citizens State governments expected the Centre to **demonstrate empathy** and provide them relief through the **Consolidated Fund of India**.
- The current design and implementation have failed to deliver on that promise. A new grand bargain is needed.

2. An agriculture-led revival as flawed claim

Context: Agriculture during COVID-19:

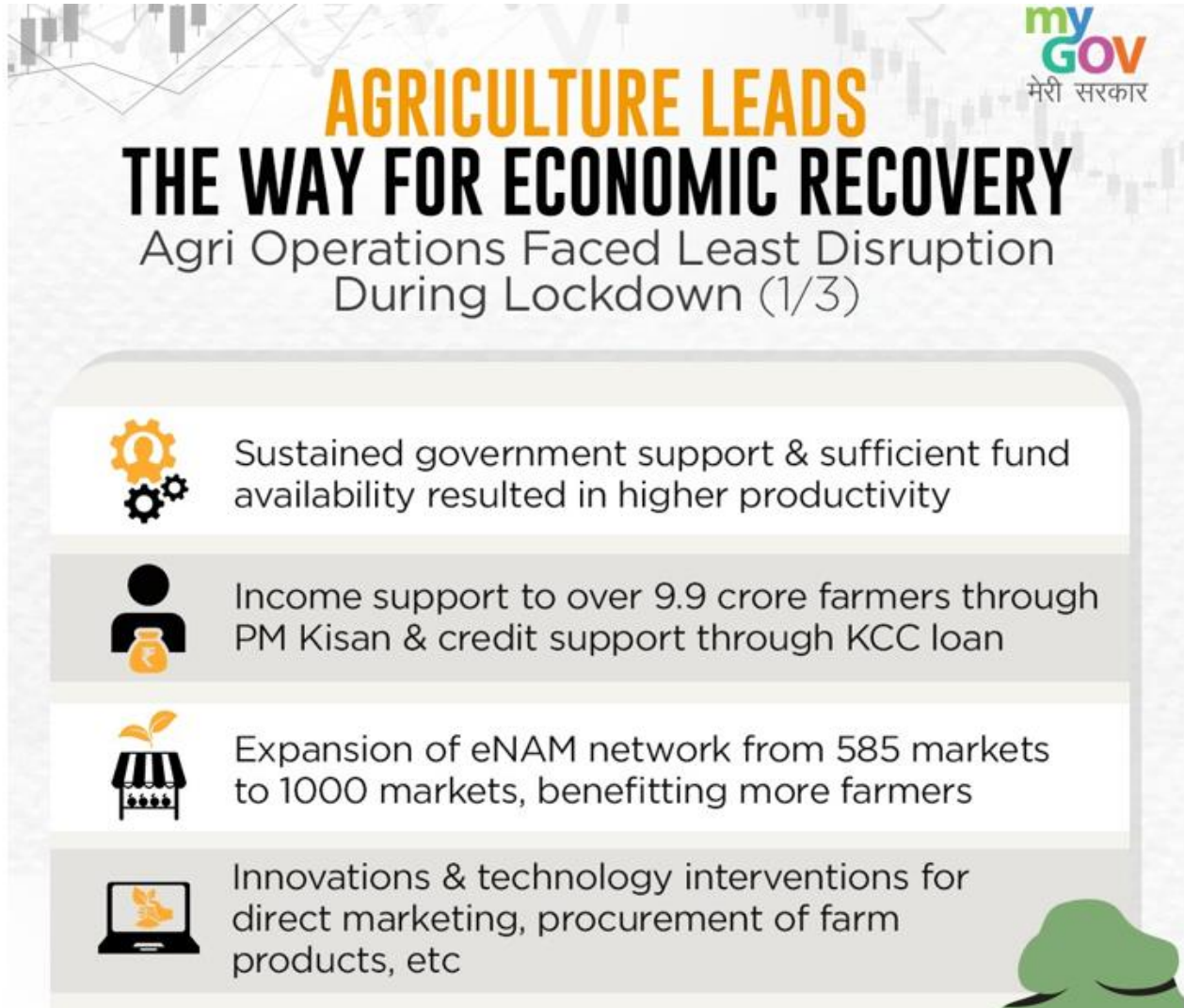
- A rather confident statement heard in the midst of India's COVID-19-induced economic slowdown is this: “Agriculture will lead India's economic revival”.

But how valid is this claim put forward by government spokespersons and some observers?

Four major arguments are offered to highlight the revival through Agriculture:

1. First, India's food grain production in 2019-20 was 3.7% higher than in 2018-19. The **procurement of rabi wheat** in 2020-21 was 12.6% higher than in 2019-20. These indicate, it is argued, resilience in the agricultural sector.
2. Second, **food inflation** in the Q1 of 2020-21, at 9.2%, was higher than in the previous year due to “sustained demand for food”. This shows a shift of terms of trade in favour of agriculture.

3. Third, the **area under kharif sowing** in 2020-21 was 14% higher than in 2019-20. Higher kharif sowing was accompanied by higher tractor and fertilizer sales, which bodes well for economic recovery.
4. Fourth, the **government's economic package for agriculture** as part of the 20-lakh crore Atmanirbhar Bharat package will further position agriculture as the engine of revival.



Let us now consider each of the above claims:

Rabi procurement:

1. During the lockdown, State governments in many northern States put in considerable efforts to **ensure that procurement** did not suffer.
2. As a result, procurement of rabi wheat was higher in 2020-21. However, this claim hides more than it reveals. As per official data, only 13.5% of paddy farmers and 16.2% of wheat farmers in India sell their harvest to a procurement agency at an assured Minimum Support Price (MSP). The rest sell their output to private traders at prices lower than MSP.
3. One should, then, be looking not at procurement but market arrivals. It was only in paddy, lentil, tomato and banana that market arrivals in 2020 constituted more than 75% of market arrivals in 2019.
4. In wheat, barley, potato, cauliflower, cabbage and lady's finger, market arrivals in 2020 were between 50% and 75% of market arrivals in 2019. For gram, pigeon pea, onion, peas and mango, market arrivals in 2020 were less than half of market arrivals in 2019.

5. In wheat, the most important rabi crop, only 61.6% of the arrivals in 2019 was recorded in 2020.

Thus, the most important problem faced by farmers during the lockdown was the **loss of markets**, stemming from the **disruption in supply chains**, closure of mandis and a **fall in consumer food demand**.

- Farmers suffered major loss of incomes, and higher procurement was hardly alleviating.
- In addition, there were major losses in the milk, meat and poultry sectors; industry associations estimate the total loss for the poultry industry at ₹25,000 crore.

Inflation and prices: Higher rural inflation: Reduced food purchases in rural:

1. Inflation rates estimated using **consumer price indices** are **not representative of farmer's prices**. Inflation was largely due to disruptions in supply chains and rise in trader margins.
2. Prices of most crops declined. For example, average paddy prices were about ₹1,730 per quintal on March 23, but ₹1,691 per quintal on June 30.
3. The **dark side of higher rural inflation in India** is that small and marginal farmers are not net sellers, but net buyers of food.
4. So, it was not just that farmer's prices fell; most were also forced to pay more for food purchases.
5. There is also strong evidence from small sample surveys that rural households reduced food purchases during the lockdown.
6. Thus, the claims that **higher rural inflation** benefited farmers, and **that it was due to higher food demand**, are misplaced.

Higher kharif sowing for food- and income-security:

- There is no surprise in the growth of kharif sowings in 2020. Given that rabi incomes fell during the lockdown, many rural households may have returned to farming or **intensified farming for food- and income-security**.
- Lakhs of migrant workers returned to their villages from urban areas. They may have taken up agriculture in previously fallow or uncultivated lands.
- Data on monthly employment released by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) show that the number of persons employed as "farmers" in June and July 2019 were 11.2 crore and 11.4 crore, respectively. But in June and July 2020, these numbers rose to 13 crore and 12.6 crore, respectively.
- These are **indicators of distress, not prosperity**. It is no cause for celebration also because the **rural unemployment rates** rose sharply in 2020, to 22.8% (April), 21.1% (May) and 9.5% (June).
- Even in August 2020, rural unemployment rates were higher than in February 2020 or August 2019.

Trickle from package:

1. Agriculture contributes only about 15% to India's Gross Value Added (GVA). Thus, even if agriculture grows by 4%, it is likely to contribute only 0.6 percentage points to GVA growth.
2. To contribute a full one percentage point to GVA growth, agriculture will have to grow by 6%, which is unlikely in 2020-21.

3. This is not to deny a potential rise in demand from higher rabi procurement, higher kharif sowing and flow of cheap credit, which together appear to have resulted in higher purchase of tractors and fertilizers.
4. But the counteracting tendencies in rural areas i.e., lower crop prices, lower market arrivals and higher unemployment would overwhelm these “green shoots”.
5. Rural expectations were high when the Atmanirbhar Bharat package was announced. However, the details were disappointing.
6. Total fresh spending for agriculture in the package is a trickle: less than ₹5,000 crore.
7. The rest are schemes already included in the past Budgets, announcements with no financial outgo or liquidity/loan measures routed through banks.

Recommendations given by author:

1. The package also failed to provide financial support to farmers. PM-KISAN, or Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, is hardly an ideal scheme.
2. But instead of frontloading the instalments of PM-KISAN, the government should have doubled the payments to farmers from ₹6,000 a year to ₹12,000 a year.
3. Instead of raising the minimum support price (MSP) for kharif paddy by ₹53 per quintal (which, actually, was the lowest rise in over a decade), or cotton by ₹260 per quintal, the government should have **set all MSPs at 150% of the C2 cost (comprehensive cost) of production.**
4. Instead of a moratorium on loan repayments, the government should have waived the interest on loans taken by farmers in 2019 and 2020.
5. Instead of vague loan-based schemes in animal husbandry, the government should have announced a package of direct assistance for the crisis-ridden poultry and meat sectors amounting to at least ₹20,000 crore.
6. Instead of loan-based schemes to support private investment in dairy, the government should have arranged direct financial assistance to small milk producers, for whom milk prices have literally plummeted.

Conclusion:

- In all, the government’s strategy appears to be to squeeze farmers without investing in agriculture or rural employment. Such an approach would not just fail; it would also be **counterproductive.**
- Rural incomes will remain depressed, and push the economy further into a vicious cycle of poor demand, low prices and low growth.
- The government should discard its role as a passive observer, and decisively intervene in rural India with a **substantial fiscal stimulus.** The earlier the better as delays would only compound mistakes.

3. Urban employment as the focal point

Introduction:

- The **contraction of the economy** raises concern on the **employment situation** as the **shrinking sectors** are those that create the maximum new jobs.
- While the ‘**Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan**’ launched in June (aimed to provide livelihood opportunities in rural India) could be an **immediate relief**, the ₹50,000-crore employment scheme cannot be a substitute for decent urban jobs.

- Given the structure of the economy and demographic profile, it is important to focus on reducing the **vulnerabilities of urban informal jobs** in the long run.

Vulnerable of employment in India:

- Vulnerable employment is characterised by inadequate earnings, low productivity and difficult conditions of work that undermine the basic rights of workers.
- They are more likely to be **informally employed** and **lack effective representation by trade unions**.
- According to the **International Labour Organization**, of the 535 million labour force in India in 2019, some 398.6 million will have poor quality jobs.
- The **poor quality of jobs and high informality** are key for the high level of “working poor” or those living on incomes of less than ₹198 in a day.
- Thus, despite higher economic growth in recent years, working poverty in India also remains high.

Path to Recovery

Overall employment is getting better at 38.41%



Though it is still lower than pre-Covid levels

As a result, nearly 18 million people still out of work

During April lockdown, 122 million people had lost jobs



Economy and employment in Covid-19 times:

Recent data on the contraction of the economy raises concern on the employment situation in India.

- The **shrinking sectors** that have been affected the most construction (-50%), trade, hotels and other services (-47%), manufacturing (-39%), and mining (-23%) are those that create the maximum new jobs in the economy.
- In a scenario where each of these sectors is contracting so sharply, it would lead to either a growing number of people losing jobs or failing to get one, or even both.
- That is, there is a possibility of a decline in employment and a subsequent rise in unemployment.
- This sharp contraction has to be seen in the light of India having witnessed a **wave of massive ‘reverse migration’** during the early phase of the lockdown, with millions of workers returning to their home States due to a loss of livelihoods.
- The abrupt announcement of the lockdown **exposed the severe vulnerabilities of urban low-end informal jobs** as the share of vulnerable employment is higher in India than that of the world or the South Asia region.
- Given the contraction and lack of demand in the economy, it is quite plausible that there would be a significant dip in urban employment generation.

Vulnerable Employment Situation in India:

- The high and persistent incidence of vulnerable employment are a reflection of the nature of the **structural transformation process**, whereby **capital and labour** transfer from low to **higher value-added sectors**.
- India presents a curious case in this regard as **capital and labour** are moving from low value-added activities in a sector to another sector, but not to higher value-added activities.
- This leads to a situation where a large proportion of the jobs being created is of poor quality (and is expected to remain so).

4. The **service sector-led growth** in recent years has intensified this as there is **coexistence of strong job creation** in some Information and Communication Technology (ICT)-intensive services, along with a significant portion of the jobs being created in 'traditional low value-added services, where informality and vulnerable forms of employment are dominant.
5. The outcome of such a process is the high incidence of informality which continues to undermine the prospects of reducing working poverty'.
6. The pandemic and associated policy responses have exposed the vulnerability of these urban jobs.

Only NREGA is not enough

- Under the current circumstances, it is not valid to assume that the Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) or its substitutes can absorb a significant proportion of these workers.
- It is important that MGNREGA be expanded by both increasing the budgetary allocations and the guaranteed minimum number of days of work.
- At the same time, it is very idealistic to conclude that the **entirety of the workforce**, which has returned to the respective home States, will be accommodated by an expanded MGNREGA or by a close substitute.
- These workers might have chosen not to take up MGNREGA jobs in the first place and instead opted to migrate and work in other States for higher wages.

Way Forward: Steps to take to create employment opportunities:

Thus, there are two challenges policy interventions in securing the livelihoods of workers in urban areas have to address:

1. First, to generate more jobs and
2. Second, to reduce vulnerabilities by providing decent wages and some form of job security.

The present crisis calls for a **multi-pronged strategy** to tackle the issue of urban jobs.

First, given the scale of urbanisation, the **focus on urban employment generation programmes** should be in coordination with local governments; this is key to 'solving other problems faced by cities.

1. As these problems are daunting, actors at the local level need to have more resources at their disposal.
2. **Resource mobilisation** could be enabled by the formation of local alliances, involving elected representatives, trade unions, entrepreneurs and community groups.

Second, a **major local initiative** would be to design and implement **employment-intensive investment policies**.

1. These policies should embrace the initiatives of both private entrepreneurs as well as by the government.
2. Private investments need to be facilitated by conducive contractual relations between labour and capital.
3. **Enterprise formation** needs to be an **integral part of the strategy**, with converging interests for workers and entrepreneurs on issues related to technology and productivity enhancement.

4. Small and micro enterprises, the fulcrum of industrialisation, need extra support to balance the interests between labour and capital as neither have collective bargaining powers.

The third element, would be **to prioritise urban infrastructure** as it accounts for a large share of total investments in the local economy.

1. **Invest in infrastructure:** However, much of these investments rarely benefit 'poor urban dwellers as housing, roads, sewerage and water systems are inadequate for their needs.
2. A **labour-intensive approach** to building municipal infrastructure can be a cost-effective alternative to capital intensive-approach as wage rates are low.
3. Infrastructure investments would spur employment, generate earnings and contribute to small enterprise formation.
4. **Construction of low-cost housing** is another activity that can be carried out using labour-intensive methods, while yielding substantial collateral benefits for urban dwellers', as an ILO document establishes.

The fourth element could be an immediate launch of an **urban employment scheme** oriented toward building large-scale medical, health and sanitation infrastructure in cities and towns across India.

1. Other immediate employment generation can be **to expand networks of essential services** as a part of welfare interventions of State and local governments.
2. The capacity of our rural economy to absorb workers who returned from cities is low and the viability of agriculture to provide these workers with a decent living is questionable.
3. In fact, many of these workers might have left their traditional work in the farm sector because income from agriculture would be insufficient for their survival.

Conclusion:

- MGNREGA and rural jobs schemes have to be **strengthened** and **their capacity increased**, but only a portion of the workforce might be accommodated in it.
- There will still be a large number of workers who need to be provided with alternative sources of employment, and generating decent urban jobs looks to be the only way out.
- Given the economic contraction, there is a need to generate more jobs and **reduce vulnerabilities** by providing decent wages & job security in urban areas.

4. Why are the Agriculture Bills being opposed

Context:

Three Bills on agriculture reforms –

1. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020;
2. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020 and
3. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020.

These three bills introduced in the Parliament on September 14 to replace the ordinances issued during the lockdown.

- Opposition members in the Lok Sabha plan to move a resolution against the Trade and Commerce ordinance and the Price Assurance ordinance.
- Farmers and farmer associations across the country have protested against the ordinances.

- The tractor protest by farmers of Punjab and Haryana in July was in opposition to these. The Punjab Assembly on August 28 passed a resolution rejecting the Centre's ordinances.

Why are they being opposed?

Provisions of which will override all State APMC laws – entail?

Cooperative federalism

- Since agriculture and markets are State subjects – entry 14 and 28 respectively in List II – the ordinances are being seen as a direct encroachment upon the functions of the States and against the spirit of cooperative federalism enshrined in the Constitution.
- The Centre, however, argued that **trade and commerce in food items** is part of the **concurrent list**, thus giving it constitutional propriety.

CLEARING THEIR STANCE

While the opposition parties have raised several concerns over the passing of the new farm bills, central govt has made some clarification



- Procurement at MSP will continue. The MSP for Rabi season will be announced next week
- Mandis will not stop functioning. Under the new system, farmers will have the option to sell their produce at other places in addition to the mandis

10,000 farmer producer organizations are being formed throughout the country. These FPOs will work to ensure remunerative pricing for farm produce

End to MSP?

1. According to PRS Legislative Research, APMCs were set up with the objective of ensuring fair trade between buyers and sellers for effective price discovery of farmers' produce.
2. APMCs can regulate the trade of farmers' produce by providing licences to buyers, commission agents, and private markets; levy market fees or any other charges on such trade; and provide necessary infrastructure within their markets to facilitate the trade.
3. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance aims at **opening up agricultural sale and marketing outside** the notified Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) mandis for farmers, **removes barriers to inter-State trade** and provides a **framework for electronic trading** of agricultural produce.
4. It prohibits State governments from collecting market fee, cess or levy for trade outside the APMC markets.
5. Critics view the **dismantling of the monopoly of the APMCs** as a sign of ending the assured procurement of food grains at minimum support prices (MSP).
6. To the Centre's '**one nation, one market**' call, critics have sought '**one nation, one MSP**'.
7. Critics argue that ensuring a larger number of farmers get the MSP for their produce and straightening kinks in the APMCs, instead of making these State mechanisms redundant is the need of the hour.
8. Now, government announces 2.6% hike for wheat MSP amid farmers' protests.
9. The Cabinet has approved MSP hikes for six crops, including a 2.6% increase in the rate for wheat. Last year, MSP for wheat had seen a 4.6% increase.

Framework for contract farming

1. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance relates to **contract farming**, providing a **framework on trade agreements** for the sale and purchase of farm produce.
2. The **mutually agreed remunerative price framework** envisaged in the legislation is touted as one that would protect and empower farmers.

3. The written farming agreement, entered into prior to the production or rearing of any farm produce, lists the terms and conditions for supply, quality, grade, standards and price of farm produce and services.
4. The price to be paid for the purchase is to be mentioned in the agreement.
5. In case of prices subjected to variations, the agreement must include a **guaranteed price** to be paid for such produce, and a clear reference linked to the prevailing prices or any other suitable benchmark prices for any additional amount over and above the guaranteed price, including bonus or premium.
6. The method of determining such price, including guaranteed price and additional amount, will be provided in the agreement as annexures.

No mechanism for price fixation: Contract farming:

- Contract farming is not a new concept to the country's farmers – informal contracts for food grains, formal contracts in sugarcane and poultry sectors are common.
- The **Price Assurance Bill**, while offering protection to farmers against price exploitation, does not prescribe the mechanism for price fixation.
- There is apprehension that the *free hand given to private corporate houses* could lead to **farmer exploitation**.
- Critics are apprehensive about formal contractual obligations owing to the unorganised nature of the farm sector and lack of resources for a legal battle with private corporate entities.

Deregulation of food items:

- The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance removes cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from the list of essential commodities.
- The amendment will deregulate the production, storage, movement and distribution of these food commodities.
- The central government is allowed regulation of supply during war, famine, extraordinary price rise and natural calamity, while providing exemptions for exporters and processors at such times as well.

Food security undermined?

- Critics anticipate that on the easing of regulation of food items said, it would lead to exporters, processors and traders hoarding farm produce during the harvest season, when prices are generally lower, and releasing it later when prices increase. He said it could undermine food security since the States would have no information about the availability of stocks within the State.
- Critics anticipate irrational volatility in the prices of essentials and increased black marketing.

Conclusion:

- According to PRS, the bills require that imposition of any stock limit on agricultural produce must be based on price rise.
- The way to **liberalise agricultural marketing** is to create more accessible markets and choice for the farmer. There will be rules to regulate such markets.
- We need to **enlarge** the market for agriculture produce while preserving the 'safety net' principle through MSP and public procurement.

5. Will the farm bills benefit farmers?

WATERSHED MOMENT FOR INDIAN AGRICULTURE: PM

“A watershed moment in the history of Indian agriculture! Congratulations to our hardworking farmers... For decades, the Indian farmer was bound by various constraints and bullied by middlemen. The bills liberate farmers from such adversities... Now, our farmers will have easier access to futuristic technology that will boost production and yield better results — **PM NARENDRA MODI**

“I am also a farmer and was the agriculture minister, and I can never believe that the government of which we are part of will take any step against the interest of farmers. What happened is against the decorum of the House”

— **RAJNATH SINGH, DEFENCE MINISTER**

Modi govt has passed the law to snatch the livelihood of farmers on the basis of number-force, but how will it implement it? The govt has used hooliganism and it has forcibly passed the law and taken away the livelihood of 62 crore farmers... When Parliament becomes hostage, there is no other option but to raise the voice — **RANDEEP S SURJEWALA, CONG SPOKESPERSON**



TMC MP Derek O'Brien attempts to tear the rule book in RS. He later said, “All of us saw today, this was the brutal murder of our parliamentary system and democracy”

Context:

Three farm bills:

President Ram Nath Kovind gave his assent to all the three contentious farm bills, which opposition parties say are anti-farmer and corporate-friendly, after they were recently passed by Parliament during its monsoon session amid vehement protests.

1. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill,
2. The Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill (commonly referred to as the APMC Bypass Bill), and
3. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill were cleared by Parliament amid protests from the Opposition.

What are the concerns about these Bills? Do they hold up?

- These Bills represent fairly important changes in **marketing regulation** and are what many were asking for because of the **flaws in the APMC** [Agricultural Produce Market Committee] system.
- But at the same time, they are **worrying for two reasons**.
- The first is in what they say. The Bills have lacunae: lack of regulation, regulatory oversight and reporting. They’re somewhat non-transparent.
- The second is what they do not say. You can’t have marketing Bills that are devoid of the larger context of State intervention in agriculture, and agricultural policy.

Critics say are anti-farmer and corporate-friendly:

1. **Agriculture falls in the State list**, and hence many argue that the Centre should not be making legislation on this subject at all, as that will compromise on the state’s ability to Tax and Regulate agriculture sector.
2. The APMC bypass Bill is the most controversial. This Bill actually assumes that private players don’t exist today and the APMC is a monopoly.

3. That is a flawed assumption. Private players actually look to the APMC for a reference price to conduct their own transactions.
4. Now through these bills, trying to create an alternative that's outside the APMC, which is on advantageous terms where you don't have to pay mandi fees or taxes.
5. A system of arthiyas or commission agents facilitates procurement, and link roads connecting most villages to the notified markets and allowing farmers to easily bring their produce for procurement.
6. Farmers fear that encouraging tax-free private trade outside the APMC mandis will make these notified markets unviable, which could lead to a reduction in government procurement itself.
7. Most of the slogans at the farmers' protests revolve around the **need to protect MSPs, or minimum support prices**, which they feel are threatened by the new laws.
8. Farmers are also demanding that MSPs be made universal, within mandis and outside, so that all buyers government or private will have to use these rates as a floor price below which sales cannot be made.

Supporting arguments regarding these acts:

1. They have the power to sell their fruits or vegetables **to anyone, and anywhere**.
2. It is this power which is the foundation of their growth, now the same power has been given to farmers across the country.
3. They have got the freedom to sell not only fruits and vegetables but grains, sugarcane, mustard and anything that they grow, they can now sell to anyone and anywhere they like.
4. The Centre has taken the steps to ensure that farmers get the right price for their produce.
5. Government has taken steps to ensure that the farmers get the right price for their produce. The farmers will benefit from it. But some people are trying to mislead the farmers.
6. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, seeks to give freedom to farmers to sell their produce outside the notified APMC market yards (mandis).
7. The government says this is aimed at **facilitating remunerative prices** through competitive alternative trading channels.
8. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, seeks to give farmers the **right to enter into a contract** with agribusiness firms, processors, wholesalers, exporters, or large retailers for the sale of future farming produce at a pre-agreed price.
9. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020, seeks to remove commodities like cereals, pulses, oilseeds, onion, and potato from the list of essential commodities and will do away with the imposition of stock holding limits.

Critics want the MSP to be added to the legal framework so that they have a floor price of sorts. Is that some kind of a solution for now?

1. The FCI was formed in 1965 as a response to a significant food shortage in the country.
2. From that point, we have made progress in food production. In the early 1990s, we were not facing food shortages.
3. That did not mean that the problem of hunger was addressed. It continues to persist because there is mal-distribution of food grain. And that is happening in spite of the PDS.
4. One has to recognise that we have a **different political-economic regime** than the time the FCI was set up.

5. Post-liberalisation, **private players and capital** have a much greater role to play in the economy, which is fine. But then you also **need regulations for those players**.
6. MSP question is larger, more complex, and deserves a very serious consultative process, and its own dedicated Act.
7. One suggestion was, if the APMCs were functioning as they would under the old regime, then you would ensure that all bidding starts at the MSP, which ensures that the MSP starts as a floor price.
8. We've lost that opportunity now because now if you say APMC has a MSP, but outside it, you can do whatever you want, then it makes no sense any more.

Is there any scope for course corrections in these Bills?

- There cannot be minor tweaks; major corrections need to be done. The consultative process that was missing within our federal democratic structure at least some amount of that needs to be done.
- It may sound like an alarmist, but on the face of it, if these acts undermine the grain procurement system, there could be **Balkanisation of the country**. It's not simply a matter of farmers anymore, it's a much deeper concern.
- The biggest worry stems from the fact that **only six per cent of the country's farmers have been able to sell their prices at MSP**.
- That leaves 94 per cent of farmers who are forced to sell their produce at prices lower than the minimum price determined by the government.

Conclusion:

- Even if some experts believe that the newly passed farm bills will improve India's agricultural sector, trusting the government seems to be the real hurdle for the country's farmers.
- Without **strong institutional arrangements**, the free market may harm lakhs of unorganised small farmers, who have been remarkably productive and shored up the economy even during a pandemic.

6. The twisted trajectory of Bt cotton

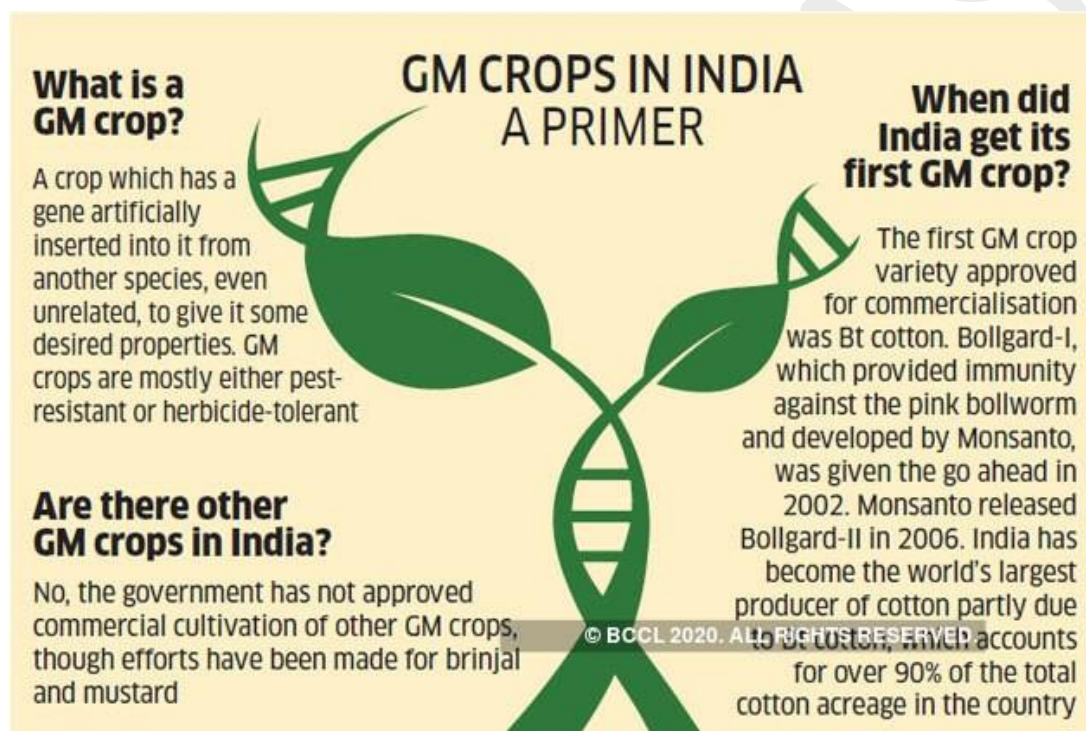
Introduction:

- **Cotton** has been woven and used in India for thousands of years.
- **Cotton fabric** from around **3,000 BCE** has been excavated from the ruins of **Mohenjo-daro**, and archaeological findings **in Mehrgarh, Pakistan**, show that cotton was used in the subcontinent as far back as 5,000 BCE.
- **Indian cotton fabrics** dominated the world trade during the succeeding millennia and were exported to many places, including Greece, Rome, Persia, Egypt, Assyria and parts of Asia.
- Much of the cotton cultivated until the 20th century was of the **indigenous 'desi' variety, Gossypium arboreum**.

Hybrid varieties of Cotton in India:

1. India is the only country that grows cotton in the form of hybrids. Also, India was the first to develop hybrid cotton back in 1970.

2. From the 1990s, hybrid varieties of *G. hirsutum* were promoted. These hybrids cannot resist a variety of local pests and require **more fertilizers and pesticides**.
3. However, **India's productivity** (yield per unit area) is much lower (around one-third) than other major cotton-producing countries. This implies that in order to be the largest producer, a much larger area is used for cotton production in India.
4. Rising debts and reducing yields, coupled with increasing insect resistance, worsened the plight of cotton farmers. It was in this setting that Bt cotton was introduced in India in 2002.
5. With increasing pressure to buy hybrid seeds, the indigenous varieties have lost out over the years. But recently, there has been some resurgence of interest.
6. Resistant Pink and minor pest in the past, began increasing, leading to a growing use of a variety of pesticides.



Growing conditions of Cotton in India:

1. Cotton- fibre, oil and protein yielding crop of global significance.
2. Temperature: Between 21-30°C
3. Rainfall: Around 50-100cm.
4. Soil Type: Well-drained black cotton soil of Deccan Plateau.

Top Cotton Producing States: Gujarat > Maharashtra > Telangana > Andhra Pradesh > Rajasthan.

- **Hybrid Cotton:** Cotton made by crossing two parent strains that have different genetic characters.
- Hybrids are often spontaneously and randomly created in nature when open-pollinated plants naturally cross-pollinate with other related varieties.

GM cotton covers 95% of the area under cotton:

1. The fact is that Indian farmers have voted for **choice of seeds** with biotechnologies by planting hybrid cotton biotech seeds on over 90% of the country's cotton acreage.
2. They want seeds and technologies that provide optimal yield, income and convenience in cultivation.

3. Today, they choose from over 800 hybrid Bt cotton seed brands from over 40 Indian and global seed companies, with five approved 'in-the-seed' insect protection Bt cotton technologies and non-Bt varietal cotton seeds.
4. Farmers have not shown any preference for planting non-Bt cotton seeds including the quantity supplied along with the Bt cotton seed by seed companies as per regulatory guidelines.
5. Due to the combination of high input and high risk, agricultural distress is extremely high among hybrid cotton cultivating farmers.
6. Compact varieties would have significantly reduced this distress as well as increased yield.

Need to review of GM cotton in India:

1. **Genetically modified (GM) cotton**, the plant containing the pesticide gene from the bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), has been grown in India for about twenty years.
2. This pesticide, now produced in each Bt plant cell, ought to protect the plant from bollworm, thereby increasing yields and reducing insecticide spraying on the cotton plant.
3. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, from 2005, adoption of Bt cotton rose to 81% in 2007, and up to 93% in 2011.
4. **Many short-duration studies** examining Bt cotton, in the early years, pronounced that Bt was a panacea for dwindling yields and pesticide expenses.
5. The two-decade mark now provides an opportunity to review GM cotton in India **more comprehensively**.

Real-world challenges with usage of hybrid varieties:

1. It is tough to isolate one particular aspect of a technology and evaluate it properly.
2. A technology that works in the lab may fail in fields since real-world success **hinges on multiple factors**, such as different kinds of pests and local soil and irrigation conditions. The benefits of Bt cotton have been **modest and short-lived**.
3. Changes to the agricultural systems correlate better with positive yields, and countrywide yields have not improved in thirteen years.
4. India's global rank for cotton production is 36 despite heavy fertilizer use, irrigation, chemicals and Bt cotton usage.
5. This is below the national average of some resource-poor African countries that don't have Bt, hybrids or good access to inputs.
6. There is a **strong correlation** between the rise in use of fertilizers in individual States and yields, and this bias increase when it is combined with improvements in irrigation.
7. The total insecticide expenditure per hectare reduced in 2006, and Lepidopteran spraying expenditures continued to fall until 2011.
8. By 2018, farmers were spending an average of \$23.58 per hectare on insecticide 37% more than the pre-Bt levels.

Therefore, there is a need for **better consultation in policy**, be it agriculture as a whole or crop-wise.

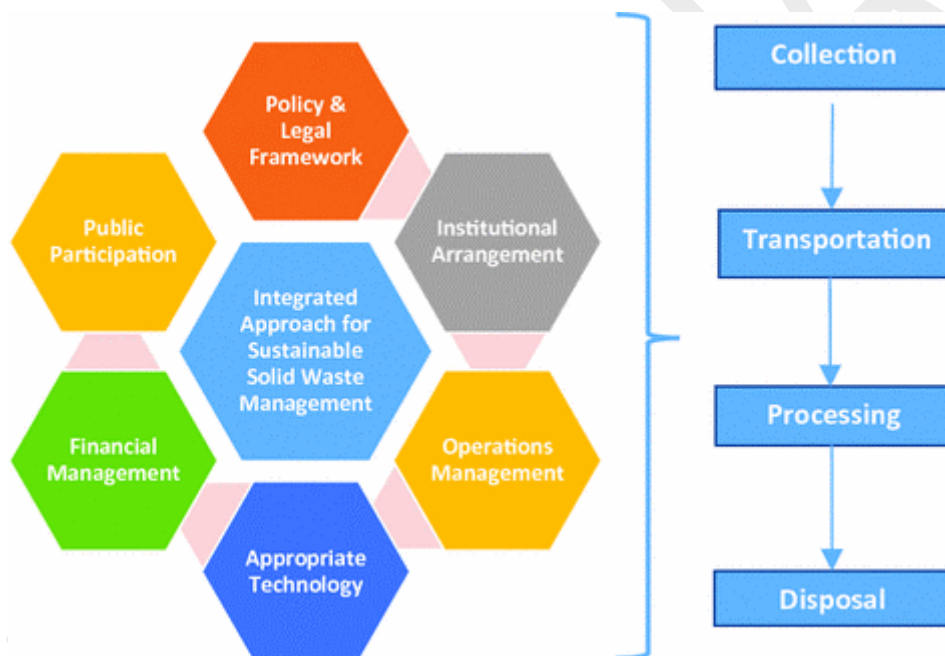
The policy-framers in India could have deliberated upon the **inclusion of socio-economic considerations** being a signatory to international treaties on GMO regulation.

These treaties specifically provide for such considerations in GMO risk assessment.

Conclusion:

- The **cost of ignoring 'desi' varieties** for decades has been **high for India**. These varieties resist many pests and don't present the problems faced with hybrids.
- Research suggests that with pure-line cotton varieties, high density planting, and short season plants, cotton yields in India can be good and stand a better chance at withstanding the vagaries of climate change.
- But government backing for resources, **infrastructure and seeds** is essential to scale up 'desi' varieties.
- It is time to pay attention to science and acknowledge that Bt cotton has failed in India, and not enter into further misadventures with other Bt crops such as brinjal or herbicide resistance.

7. A five-point action plan to manage waste effectively



Introduction:

- Years of neglect, lack of foresight and complete absence of urban planning has left India staring at mountains of waste-landfills, waste-choked drains, water bodies and rivers. This is called "**legacy waste**", a *cumulative* consequence of decades of neglect and lack of foresight.
- There are about 48 recognised landfills across India, together covering nearly 5,000 acres of land, with a total land value of about Rs 100,000 crore.

India generates about 275 million tonnes of waste per year:

1. With current **waste treatment rates** of **about 20-25%**, this leaves majority of waste untreated, in a heap, on landfills, and an equal amount in drains and river bodies.
2. The Deonar dumpsite in Mumbai is an example. This is the **oldest landfill in India**, and was set up in 1929.

3. It covers about 325 acres, receives 5,500 metric tonnes of waste, 600 metric tonnes of silt and 25 tonnes of bio-medical waste daily. Mumbai city generates about 7,500 metric tonnes of waste daily.
4. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has recently commissioned a **waste-to-energy (WTE) plant** which will treat 600 metric tonnes of municipal solid waste every day.

India generates the most waste globally, and by 2050, our waste generation will double:

1. **Drains and water bodies, emptying out into Indian rivers**, also carry with them an unimaginable amount of waste.
2. **The Ganga is among the top 10 polluted rivers in the world**, together accounting for **90% of the total ocean plastic pollution**.
3. India faces a seemingly insurmountable challenge of treating and getting rid of the legacy waste, with simultaneous and continuous accumulation of fresh everyday waste.
4. **Central, state, city and municipal governments**, over decades, have not been able to prevent this situation, nor deal with its scale.
5. For a country the size of India, there are about **92 large WTE plants**. Of these, only a small fraction is operational, and the plants that are operational, run at suboptimal capacity.
6. State governments have, so far, invested an estimated Rs 10,000 crore in such plants.
7. The task now is to be clear on what needs to be done, on what has not been done, or done incorrectly, and to ensure correct execution of a national mission.

Way Forward: Some suggestions that may be pertinent:

First, Municipalities need to have **access to affordable technology** which has been piloted and validated under Indian conditions.

1. Today, most of the technology/equipment needed for waste management is imported, expensive and often not suited in our varied local situations.
2. India needs **affordable, decentralised, customised solutions** for its land-constrained complex city matrix.
3. For example, amphibian equipment to clean water bodies is imported and can work well for large water bodies.
4. Indigenisation of design and manufacturing of such equipment for smaller drains and water bodies is essential.
5. **Robotic long-hand scavenging machines** to unclog drains, booms which filter and prevent waste in our drains entering a larger water body are some examples, where **Atmanirbhar Bharat** (self-reliant India) needs to kick in immediately.
6. Entry to drains in India is choked with pan masala, shampoo sachets, chips/kurkure packets and so on.

These are **major problems unique to India** and require **both community and technological solutions**.

The next suggestion for focused action is the **ease of procurement**.

- Evolving a **less cumbersome process** for the procurement of technology and equipment is imperative.
- State governments are hit by a **double whammy** due to **lack of technology** and an immutable and rigid procurement system.

The third area where speedy change is needed is policy:

1. A direction which can accelerate the **removal of waste exponentially is needed**. One way, used internationally, is to unlock the land value under landfills.
2. Allowing agencies, companies or industry that clear waste, to own the land (fully or partially as per mutually agreed terms) can fund the clean-up.
3. A **land payback** can be a **major incentive** to recover the estimated 5,000 acres of prime land taken up by landfills. Rough calculations suggest that the value of the 77 acres of land under the Ghazipur landfill is worth at least Rs 1500 crore.
4. These calculations **ignore the socioeconomic benefits** of cleaning a site which harbours disease and is a pernicious source of pollution to land, water and air.

Need of skilled and trained professional personnel:

- The fourth area **needing urgent attention** is the **development of skilled and trained professional personnel** to operate and maintain the waste management chain, right from collection, operation and maintenance of waste-handling plants.
- This needs to be done with full use of mechanisation.

The fifth and final focus area is to move to a zero-waste society.

1. India was traditionally a society where little was wasted and everything could be reused and recycled.
2. Sweden is now importing waste for some of its plants and there is definitely value in all the waste generated and any investment needed is an investment for a clean and secure future.
3. Central, and integral to success, is design. **Design** in the collection, of centralised and decentralised waste treatment plants, and of the equipment used.
4. **Design of waste management** should be the bedrock of a well-planned smart city, town or village.

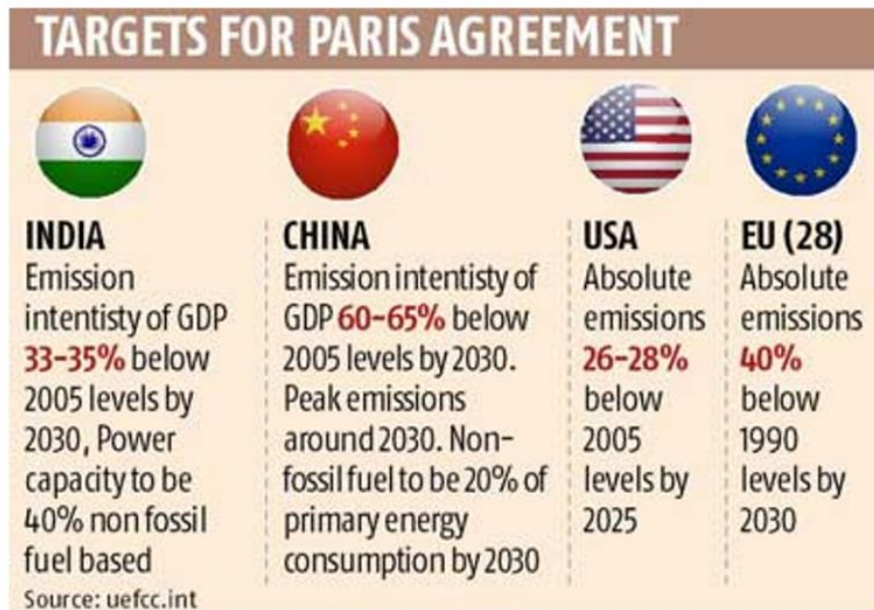
Many of the **Urban Local bodies** are **opting for capping** i.e. covering up the landfill sites as a solution to this problem.

- However, this may prove to be an **ineffective solution** as it leaves methane and leachate to form for decades within the cosmetically covered heap.

Conclusion:

- A **well-designed waste-management strategy**, cognisant of Indian constraints, will be the hallmark of Swachh Bharat, Swasth Bharat and Unnat Bharat.
- **Science and technology** must be the fulcrum to provide **solutions to the waste challenges** faced by the country, a challenge which is **both urgent and important**, and can be ignored at our own peril.
- It is important that the decision-makers **at all levels of government** opt for **more innovative and green approaches** rather than falling for the technology-extensive costly methods of waste disposal which are normally being lobbied for by the manufacturers of such technologies.

8. Reject this inequitable climate proposal



Context:

- In an extraordinary move in climate diplomacy, UN Secretary General, delivering the Darbari Seth Memorial Lecture, at the Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), in New Delhi, called on India to make no new investment in coal after 2020.
- The UN Secretary General call for India to give up coal immediately and **reduce emissions by 45% by 2030** is a call to **de-industrialise** the country and abandon the population to a permanent low-development trap.

The Paris Agreement:

- The Paris Agreement builds upon the Convention and for the first time brings all nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts **to combat climate change and adapt to its effects**, with enhanced support to assist developing countries to do so.
- The **Paris Agreement** 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.
- Additionally, the agreement aims to strengthen the ability of countries to deal with the impacts of climate change.
- 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. This includes requirements that all Parties report regularly on their emissions and on their implementation efforts.
- The Agreement also prescribes that Parties shall communicate their NDCs every 5 years and provide information necessary for clarity and transparency.
- The Paris Agreement reaffirms the obligations of developed countries to support the efforts of developing country Parties to build clean, climate-resilient futures, while for the first time encouraging voluntary contributions by other Parties.
- The agreement also provides that the Financial Mechanism of the Convention, including the **Green Climate Fund (GCF)**, shall serve the Agreement.

India's track record in renewable energy programme:

1. Its renewable energy programme is ambitious while its energy efficiency programme is delivering, especially in the domestic consumption sector.
2. India is one of the few countries with at least 2° Celsius warming compliant climate action, and one of a much smaller list of those currently on track to fulfilling their Paris Agreement commitments.
3. Despite the accelerated economic growth of recent decades India's annual emissions, at 0.5 tonnes per capita, are well below the global average of 1.3 tonnes, and also those of China, the United States and the European Union (EU), the three leading emitters in absolute terms, whose per capita emissions are higher than this average.
4. In terms of **cumulative emissions** (which is what really counts in determining the extent of temperature increase), India's contribution by 2017 was only 4% for a population of 1.3 billion, whereas the European Union, with a population of only 448 million, was responsible for 20%.
5. While talking about their **phasing out of coal**, which is often a decade or more into the future, the **global North** has obscured the reality of its continued dependence on oil and natural gas, both equally fossil fuels, with no timeline for their phaseout.
6. While it is amply clear that their commitments into the future set the world on a path for almost 3°C warming, they have diverted attention by fuzzy talk of "**carbon neutrality**" **by 2050**, and the passage of resolutions declaring a climate emergency that amount to little more than moral posturing.

First World environmentalist opinion in brunt of climate mitigation:

1. Large sections of First World environmentalist opinion, while unable to summon up the **domestic political support** required for climate action, have turned to pressure the developing countries to bear the brunt of climate mitigation.
2. Their strategies include the demonising of coal mining and coal-based power generation, promoting claims that immediate climate mitigation would miraculously lower domestic inequalities and ensure climate adaptation, promoting Third World natural resources as active sites of mitigation and not adaptation.
3. Promoting theories of "de-growth" or the neglect of industrial and agricultural productivity for the pursuit of climate change mitigation.
4. All of these are accompanied by increasing appeals to multilateral or First World financial and development institutions to force this agenda on to developing countries.
5. A section of concerned youth in the developing countries, fearful of their futures, but unsensitised to global and international inequalities, have also helped promote the undifferentiated rhetoric of a climate emergency for which all are held equally responsible.
6. The UNFCCC itself has reported that between 1990 and 2017, the developed nations (excluding Russia and east Europe) have reduced their annual emissions by only 1.3%. This amounts to practically nil, given the inevitable errors in such accounting.

What will be the consequences if India indeed ceases all coal investment from this very year?

1. Currently, roughly 2 GW of coal-based generation is being decommissioned per year, which implies that **by 2030**, India will have **only 184 GW** of coal-based generation.

2. But meeting the 2030 electricity consumption target of 1,580 to 1,660 units per person per year, based on the continuation or a slight increase of the current decadal growth rate, will require anywhere between 650 GW to 750 GW of renewable energy.
3. Unlike the developed nations, India cannot substitute coal substantially by oil and gas and despite some wind potential, a huge part of this growth needs to come from solar.
4. None of this will really drive industry, particularly **manufacturing**, since renewables at best can meet residential consumption and some part of the demand from the service sector.
5. Currently, manufacturing growth powered by fossil fuel-based energy is itself a necessity, both technological and economic, for the transition to renewables.
6. Whether providing 70% to 80% of all generation capacity is possible through renewables depends **critically on technology development**, including improvements in the efficiency of conversion of energy from its source into electricity, in the management of the corresponding **electricity grids**, as well as **advance in storage technologies**.

Conclusion:

- Lacking production capacity in renewable energy technologies and their large-scale operation, deployment on this scale will expose India to increasing and severe dependence on external sources and supply chains.
- It is also a truism that renewables alongside coal will generate, directly and indirectly, far **more employment** than renewables alone.
- Apart from the impossibility of India implementing a 45% reduction in emissions by 2030, the advice by the UN Secretary General, taken all together, amounts to asking for the virtual de-industrialisation of India, and stagnation in a low-development trap for the vast majority of its population.
- India must unanimously reject the UN Secretary General's call and **reiterate its long-standing commitment** to an equitable response to the challenge of global warming.

9. On India banning more China apps

Context:

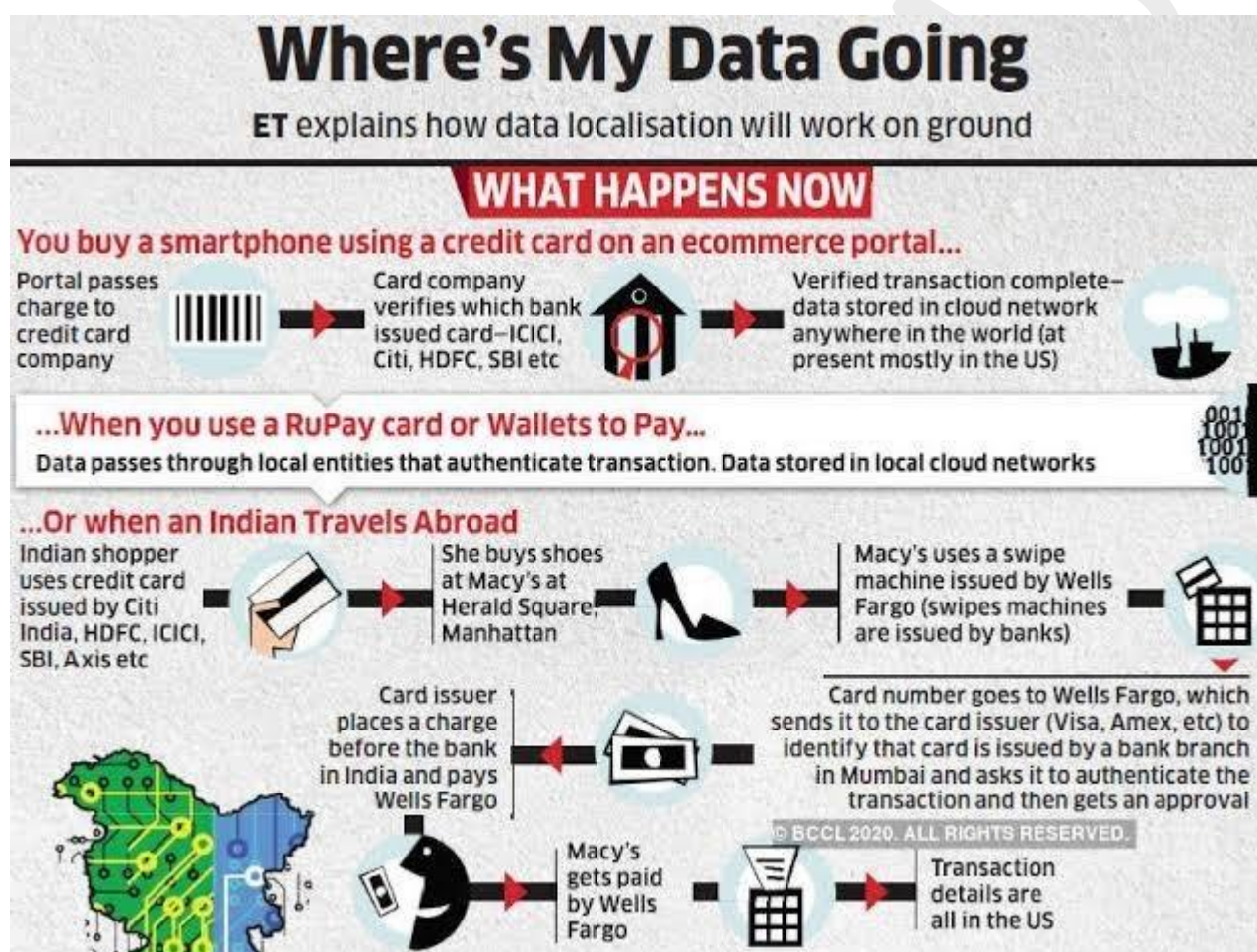
- The government **banned 118 applications** — majority being Chinese, including popular ones such as PUBG, WeChat Work, Baidu, CamCard, Rise of Kingdoms: Lost Crusade and Alipay, stating that these were “prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of State and public order”.
- This is in addition to the ban on 59 Chinese applications, including TikTok, Shareit, Mi Video Call, Club Factory and Cam Scanner, in June last
- The **blocking** of a hundred more Chinese mobile applications suggests that the Indian government, wants to make it amply clear that it will not shy away from leveraging its position as a **massive market for technology** in dealing with **potentially dangerous geopolitical issues**.
- Since June, when border tensions between India and China turned ugly, the government has till now stepped in thrice to block many Chinese applications in one go.

Why were the Chinese apps banned?

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology asserted that it had received “many complaints from various sources, including several reports about misuse of some

mobile apps available on Android and iOS platforms for stealing and **surreptitiously transmitting users' data** in an unauthorised manner to **servers** which **have locations outside India**".

- The Ministry said it had decided to block the apps to safeguard the "sovereignty and integrity of India", invoking powers under **Section 69A of the Information Technology (IT) Act** read with the relevant provisions of the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking of Access of Information by Public) Rules 2009.
- The government also said that several citizens had reportedly **raised concerns** in representations to the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) regarding security of data and loss of privacy in using these apps.
- In addition, the Ministry said it had also **received "exhaustive recommendations"** from the Home Ministry's Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre.



What will be the impact of Chinese apps ban?

- According to a report published by Paulson Institute's MacroPolo think tank, six of the top 10 most downloaded apps in India were from Chinese tech companies, compared with four from US companies.
- India has been the **biggest untapped market** for some of China's quirkiest social-media companies, which had been signing up hundreds of millions of consumers in the **world's second-most populous nation**, looking to capture users who weren't hooked on to US apps such as Facebook and Twitter.

What has China's response been to the ban?

- China has said that it **suspects India's actions** could be in *violation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) rules*.
- Chinese Government said "India's measure selectively and discriminatorily aims at certain Chinese apps on ambiguous and far-fetched grounds, runs against fair and transparent procedure requirements, abuses national security exceptions, and [is suspected] of violating the WTO rules."
- The Chinese government's comments indicate that it could file a formal complaint at the WTO.

India needs to reduce economic dependence on China:

1. The ban on Chinese mobile apps may be construed as low hanging fruit and a relatively soft target, but it is, at the same time, a decision that makes the point without leading to a revenue loss for India or hurting it economically.
2. Nevertheless, tensions on the border, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, have ignited a much-needed debate on India's economic dependencies on China.
3. There is an asymmetry in power, a visible economic disparity. The Chinese economy is roughly five times larger than India's.
4. While India accounts for only 3 per cent of China's exports, China (excluding Hong Kong) accounts for 14 per cent of India's imports, and 5 per cent of exports
5. India remains reliant on Chinese products in several critical and strategically sensitive sectors, from semiconductors and active pharmaceutical ingredients to the telecom sector.
6. Chinese vendors are involved not only in India's 4G network but in on-going 5G trials as well.

Way forward: Data firewall: On need for a data protection law:

1. The report by a German cybersecurity firm that medical details of millions of Indian patients were leaked and are freely available on the Internet is worrying.
2. Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeITY) in July 2017 constituted a ten-member committee of experts headed by former Supreme Court Judge, Justice B.N. Srikrishna to study various issues related to data protection in India and also to draft a Data Protection Law.
3. The report has cited Puttaswamy Judgment and highlighted that sphere of privacy includes a right to protect one's identity.
4. Yet, considering the manner in which **public data** are **being stored** and used by both the state and private entities, a **comprehensive Data Protection Act is the need of the hour**.
5. The **data protection law**, a dire need in this age, is not yet there. All this does not bode well for a country with **aspirations of global leadership of tech**, an industry which thrives on global networks and rules.

Data privacy and security remains to be major challenges emanating from the ongoing digital revolution. Thus, a data protection law is long overdue.

Conclusion:

- China, which for years has unleashed **widespread censorship of information** and kept apps from outside off its Internet, has found a rare chance **to take the moral high ground**. It has criticised India's move, accusing it of "abusing the concept of national security".

- The last thing India needs is to be compared with China as far as its Internet regulation goes. It certainly **needs a more considered approach to tech regulation**.

GENERAL STUDIES IV

1. Mission Karmayogi- National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building



Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved '**Mission Karmayogi**' – the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB).
- It is meant to be a **comprehensive post-recruitment reform** of the Centre's human resource development. Similar to pre-recruitment changes in the form of the National Recruitment Agency.

Objective of the Mission Karmayogi:

1. It is aimed at building a future-ready civil service with the **right attitude, skills and knowledge, aligned to the vision of New India**.
2. It aims to prepare Indian civil servants for the future by making them more creative, constructive, imaginative, proactive, innovative, progressive, professional, energetic, transparent, and technology-enabled.
3. **Comprehensive reform** of the capacity building apparatus at the individual, institutional and process levels for efficient public service delivery.
4. To cover around **46 lakh central employees**, a sum of Rs 510.86 crore will be spent over a period of 5 years from 2020-21 to 2024-25.
5. The expenditure is partly funded by multilateral assistance to the tune of \$50 million.

Need for the introducing Mission:

1. As the Indian economy grows, it will get more complex to govern; the governance capacities will have to be enhanced proportionately which this reform undertakes.
2. There is a need to **develop domain knowledge** besides administrative capacity in the bureaucracy.
3. There is a **need to formalize the recruitment process** and match the public service to a bureaucrat's competence, so as to find the right person for the right job.
4. The plan is to begin right at the recruitment level and then invest in building more capacity through the rest of their career.
5. The reforms in the Indian bureaucracy is the **need of the hour** and It is a major reform undertaken in recent years to transform it.

Impediments that need to correct in present Bureaucratic system:

1. There is a tendency in the Bureaucracy **to resist the change** which challenges their status quo.
2. The bureaucracy too must understand the need of domain knowledge and the importance of moving away **from generalist to specialist approach**.
3. In today's world the governance is getting **technical with each passing day** and hence it's important that the person in authority too should have the **requisite skill and experience** in that particular area.
4. Thus, there should be a **behavioural change** in the bureaucracy too and they must embrace the change as a need of the hour and not an attack on their status quo.
5. Moreover, these **online courses** must not become another opportunity for the officers to go for the sabbatical leaves.
6. It must be ensured that they are actually attending the courses and participating in it so that the purpose doesn't get defeated.

About iGOT- Karmayogi platform:

1. The Karmayogi Programme will be delivered by setting up an Integrated Government Online Training (iGOT) Karmayogi Platform.
2. iGOT-Karmayogi is a **continuous online training platform**, which would allow all government servants from assistant secretary to secretary level to undergo continuous training, depending on their domain areas.
3. Courses from **international universities** will be made available on the platform for officers to take any time
4. The platform is expected to evolve into a **vibrant and world-class market place** for content where carefully curated and vetted digital e-learning material will be made available.
5. Besides capacity building, service matters like confirmation after probation period, deployment, work assignment and notification of vacancies etc. would eventually be integrated with the proposed competency framework.

Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) govern the iGOT-Karmayogi platform:

1. There will be a **wholly-owned Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)**, which will govern the iGOT-Karmayogi platform. It will be set up under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013.
2. The SPV will be a **"not-for-profit" company** and will own and manage iGOT-Karmayogi platform.

3. The SPV will **create and operationalise the content**, market place and manage key business services of iGOT-Karmayogi platform, relating to content validation, independent proctored assessments and telemetry data availability.
4. The SPV will own all Intellectual Property Rights on behalf of the Government of India.
5. To **create an ecosystem** of shared training infrastructure including that of learning materials, institutions and personnel.
6. To calibrate all Civil Service positions to a Framework of Roles, Activities and Competencies (FRACs) approach and to create and deliver learning content relevant to the identified FRACs in every Government entity.
7. Enable adoption of modern technological tools such as digital platforms, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Data Analytics.

Conclusion:

- The ultimate aim of **Mission Karmayogi** is to **ensure “Ease of Living”** for the common man, “Ease of Doing Business” and Citizen-Centricity that is reducing the gap between the government and the citizens.
- Mission Karmayogi aims to prepare the Indian Civil Servant for the future by making him more creative, constructive, imaginative, innovative, proactive, professional, progressive, energetic, enabling, transparent and technology-enabled.
- This can only be achieved by **regular and constructive involvement** by the government and civil servants.

2. Great power, little responsibility



Context:

- The is an occasion for **deep reflection** about the prevalence of war, violence and insecurity in many parts of the world.
- Each year the International Day of Peace is observed around the world on 21st September.
- **Theme for 2020 : Shaping Peace Together.**
- This day is dedicated to fortifying the **principles of peace**, both within and among all member states and peoples.
- This year's celebrations are particularly significant because it is the 21th anniversary of the UN resolution on the programme of action on the culture of peace.

Background:

1. The International Day of Peace was established in 1981 by the United Nations General Assembly.
2. Two decades later, in 2001, the General Assembly unanimously voted to designate the Day as a period of non-violence and cease-fire.
3. The United Nations invites all nations and people to honour a cessation of hostilities during the Day.
4. Otherwise commemorate the Day through education and public awareness on issues related to peace.

Unrest in Global countries:

- According to the **World Population Review**, In the last calendar year, eight countries — Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Turkey, Somalia, Iraq, Mexico and Libya suffered at least 1,000 deaths each (mainly civilians) through **militarised attacks and battles**.
- If one includes the Maghreb and Sahel regions of North and West Africa, over 25 countries are being ravaged by deadly wars today.
- To boot, 79.5 million were displaced at the end of 2019, due to armed conflicts, persecution and other reasons, according to the **UN Refugee Agency**.
- The way the present international system is structured **poses enormous obstacles to peace**. The countries that are escalating violence are predominantly the great powers who have military and economic might.

Fuelling instability by permanent members of the UN Security Council:

1. On paper, the **S., Russia and China** uphold peace and stability as the permanent members of the UN Security Council. But in practice, they fuel instability or have a finger in the pie of most ongoing wars.
2. For example, the tragedy in Yemen, which the UN has declared as the world's worst humanitarian disaster, is the outcome of indiscriminate attacks by the U.S.-backed coalition of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, whose geopolitical goal is to counterbalance Iran.
3. Yet, undaunted by the moral burden, the Donald Trump administration is eagerly selling copious quantities of lethal weapons to its Gulf allies in the name of their 'security'.
4. War is at once a geopolitical game and big business. This holds true not only for the U.S. but also Russia.
5. Libya's descent into chaos is the product of the **active involvement** of mercenaries and weapons pumped in by Russia and the U.S.-allied Gulf Arab monarchies to push back Turkey's influence.

6. Like the calamity in Syria, Yemen and Libya are victims of the conduct of great powers who arm and finance regional actors to prey upon weak states for counterbalancing rivals and sustaining profits of their military industrial complexes.
7. China has catapulted into the ranks of **top sellers of weapons**. Chinese small arms enable ethnic violence and extreme human rights abuses from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo to Pakistan and Myanmar.
8. China also aims to tighten its grip over developing countries through '**internal security aid**', a code for technological tools of domestic surveillance and repression, which in turn build up societal pressure and armed revolts against authoritarian regimes.
9. Moreover, China's own hegemonic expansionism against its neighbours and its 'new Cold War' with the U.S. have significantly raised risks of military clashes in Asia.
10. This year, the UN Secretary General is campaigning for a "**global ceasefire**" so that everyone's attention shifts to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.
11. The UN as well as regional organisations like the African Union and the European Union are trying to negotiate cessation of hostilities in various war zones.

The core problem:

- The targeted **micro-level diplomatic initiatives** cannot ameliorate the underlying macro-level problem of great powers and their allies acting with brazen impunity.
- On the International Day of Peace, we should **diagnose the core problem** the unjust structure which privileges great powers and permits their ghastly machinations and challenge it.
- In India, **Mahatma Gandhi** has been a torchbearer of non-violent movements, harmony, peace, and brotherhood throughout his life.
- He dedicated his life towards world peace, his **philosophy Ahimsa or non-violence** spoke highly about peace and solidarity.

Way Ahead: Actions to foster a culture of peace through education:

1. Reinvigorate national efforts and international cooperation to promote the **goals of education for all** with a view to achieving human, social and economic development and for promoting a culture of peace;
2. Ensure that children, from an early age, benefit from education on the values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life to enable them to resolve any dispute peacefully and in a spirit of respect for human dignity and of tolerance and non-discrimination;
3. Involve children in activities designed to instil in them **the values and goals of a culture of peace**;
4. Ensure equality of access to education for women, especially girls;
5. Encourage **revision of educational curricula**, including textbooks, bearing in mind the 1995 Declaration and Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy for which technical cooperation should be provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization upon request;
6. **Encourage and strengthen efforts** by actors as identified in the Declaration, in particular the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, aimed at **developing values and skills** conducive to a culture of peace, including education and training in promoting dialogue and consensus-building;

Conclusion:

- Celebrate the International Day of Peace by **spreading compassion, kindness and hope** in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Stand together with the UN against attempts to use the virus to promote discrimination or hatred. Join UN peace movement, so that we can shape peace together.
- Altering the **structure and nature** of world politics is not child's play. But we must strive for it.
- Remember that if one fire is doused in Afghanistan through a peace process, 10 more fires can be lit as long as the global 'system' that reproduces violence and aggression is in place.
- Intellectuals, social movements and responsible states should prioritise struggling for an **equitable world order**. Nothing less will suffice to silence the guns.

3. Weighing in on the efficacy of female leadership



Women in Politics...

The Indian Constitution guarantees it, but the reality is little different. Despite being a proponent of gender equity, India is yet to become a nation wherein women have proportional representation in politics. The Parliament hasn't seen a fair percentage of women members that can vindicate the nation's stand on giving a level playing field to women in politics.

Introduction: Women heading governments:

- What do **Germany, Taiwan and New Zealand** have in common? These are all countries that have women heading their governments.
- And although they are located in three different continents, the three countries seem to have managed the pandemic much better than their neighbours.
- Much along the same lines, a detailed recent study by researchers in the United States reports that States which have female governors had fewer COVID-19 related deaths, perhaps partly because female governors acted more decisively by issuing earlier stay-at-home orders.
- The authors of the study conclude that **women leaders are more effective than their male counterparts in times of crises**.
- There will be several critics who will question the reliability of this conclusion by pointing out deficiencies in the data admittedly somewhat limited or the econometric rigour of the analysis.
- Many will also point out that it is dangerous to make sweeping generalisations based on one study.

- The point about the danger of making sweeping generalisations is valid. Of course, studies such as these do not establish the superiority of all female leaders over their male counterparts.
- The important takeaway from the recent experience and such studies is the necessity of **getting rid of inherent biases** and **perceptions** about female effectiveness in leadership roles.

India's gram panchayats:

1. Importantly, female leaders also bring something quite different to the table. In particular, they perform **significantly better than men** in **implementing policies** that promote the interests of women.
2. This was demonstrated in **another study** conducted by Nobel Laureate Esther Duflo, who used the system of mandated reservations of *pradhans* in gram panchayats to test **the effectiveness of female leadership**.
3. Their study was made possible by the 1993 amendment of the Indian Constitution, which mandated that all States had to reserve one-third of all positions of *pradhan* for women.
4. Since villages chosen for the mandated reservations were randomly selected, subsequent differences in investment decisions made by gram panchayats could be attributed to the differences in gender of the *pradhans*.
5. Thus, study concluded that *pradhans* invested more in rural infrastructure that served better the needs of their own gender.
6. For instance, women *pradhans* were more likely to invest in providing easy access to drinking water since the collection of drinking water is primarily, if not solely, the responsibility of women.
7. In addition to the instrumental importance of promoting more space for women in public policy, this is also an important goal from the **perspective of gender equality**.

About suffrage to women (allowed to vote):

1. The **right to vote** is arguably the most important dimension of participation in public life.
2. **Independent India** can rightly be proud of its achievement in so far as women's suffrage is concerned.
3. Women were allowed to vote from 1950 onwards and so could participate on an equal footing with men from the first general election of 1951-52.
4. This is in striking contrast to the experience in the so-called "mature democracies" of western Europe and the United States.
5. In the U.S., it took several decades of struggle before women were allowed to vote in 1920.
6. Most countries in Europe also **achieved universal suffrage** during the inter-war period.
7. Since most able-bodied men went away to the battlefields during the First World War, increasing numbers of women had the opportunity to show that they were adequate substitutes in activities that were earlier the sole preserve of men.
8. This, it is suggested, **mitigated the anti-female bias** and earned women the right to vote in European countries.

However, Underrepresentation of women in Indian legislatures:

1. We have had and have **charismatic female leaders** like Indira Gandhi, Jayalalitha, Mayawati, Sushma Swaraj and Mamata Banerjee among several others.
2. The **female representation** in the current government at the Centre is probably not very far from the typical gender composition in Indian central and State governments. Female members make up only about 10% of the total ministerial strength.

3. The underrepresentation of female Ministers in India is also reflected in the fact that Ms. Banerjee is currently the only female Chief Minister.
4. The **underrepresentation of women** in Indian legislatures is even more striking. For instance, the 2019 election sent the largest number of women to the Lok Sabha.
5. Despite this, women constitute just over 14% of the total strength of the Lok Sabha. This gives us the dismal rank of 143 out of 192 countries for which data are reported by the **Inter-Parliamentary Union**.
6. Tiny **Rwanda** comes out on top with a **staggering 60% of seats** in its lower house occupied by women.
7. As a region, **Nordic countries** (relating to Scandinavia, Finland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands) are leaders with an average of about 40%. The UK and the US are relative laggards with 32% and 23%, respectively.
8. The United States' current tally, though still moderate, is upheld by a very strong showing by women in the recent congressional elections.

The women's Bill languishes:

1. Since women running for elections face numerous challenges, it is essential to create a **level-playing field** through appropriate legal measures.
2. The **establishment of quotas for women** is an obvious answer.
3. Attempts have also been made to extend quotas for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies through a Women's Reservation Bill.
4. Unfortunately, the fate of this Bill represents a blot on the functioning of the Indian Parliament.
5. Although the Rajya Sabha did pass the bill in 2010, the Lok Sabha and the State legislatures are yet to give their approval **despite the 24 years** that have passed since it was first presented in the Lok Sabha.

Steps to reducing prejudice:

There is a simple fix to the problem.

1. The major party constituents can sidestep the logjam in Parliament by reserving say a **third of party nominations for women**.
2. This will surely result in increasing numbers of women in legislatures and subsequently in cabinets. The importance of this cannot be overestimated.
3. There is substantial evidence showing that **increased female representation in policy making** goes a long way in **improving perceptions** about **female effectiveness in leadership roles**.
4. This decreases the bias among voters against women candidates, and results in a subsequent increase in the percentage of female politicians contesting and winning elections.
5. So, such quotas have **both a short-term and long-term impact**. Indeed, voter perceptions about the efficacy of female leadership may change so drastically in the long run that quotas may no longer be necessary!

Conclusion:

- All political parties have to arrive at a consensus and ensure the passage of Women's Reservation Bill, which calls for **reserving 33 percent of seats** in Parliament and all state legislative assemblies for women.
- Over the last few years, more women have taken up science, technology, engineering, and mathematic (STEM) courses and are aspiring to enter the workforce.

- However, dropout rates among women are also high particularly around marriage maternity and motherhood as far as employment is concerned. There are options like working from home yet a lot more needs to be done.
- There is no, one size fits all strategy as women in rural and urban areas have very different issues therefore there needs to be separate policies for different regions.
- If women's workforce participation in India is realised to its full potential and given India's demographic dividend, it can easily achieve the **target of \$5trillion economy**.

RSTV/LSTV/AIR SYNOPSIS

GENERAL STUDIES II

FATF and Pakistan's terror list

Introduction:

- In an attempt to be dropped from the Financial Action Task Force's grey list, Pakistan has banned 88 new terrorists, in compliance with the new list issued by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The banned terrorists include Hafiz Saeed, Masood Azhar and Dawood Ibrahim. Paris-based FATF put Pakistan on the grey list in June 2018 and asked Islamabad to implement a plan of action by the end of 2019, but the deadline was extended later due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Pakistan government issued two notifications on August 18 announcing sanctions on key leaders of terror outfits such as 26/11 Mumbai attack mastermind and Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) chief Masood Azhar, and underworld don Dawood Ibrahim.

FATF:

1. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7.
2. It is a "policy-making body" which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in various areas.
3. The FATF Secretariat is housed at the OECD headquarters in Paris.
4. **Objectives:** The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
5. **Functions:** The FATF monitors the progress of its members in implementing necessary measures, reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures and promotes the adoption and implementation of appropriate measures globally. In collaboration with other international stakeholders, the FATF works to identify national-level vulnerabilities with the aim of protecting the international financial system from misuse.
6. Pakistan was placed on the grey list by the FATF in June 2018 for failing to curb anti-terror financing. It has been scrambling in recent months to avoid being added to a list of countries deemed non-compliant with anti-money laundering and terrorist financing regulations by the Paris-based FATF, a measure that officials here fear could further hurt its economy.

Blacklist and grey list:

1. FATF maintains two different lists of countries: those that have deficiencies in their AML/CTF regimes, but they commit to an action plan to address these loopholes, and those that do not end up doing enough. The former is commonly known as grey list and latter as blacklist.
2. Once a country is blacklisted, FATF calls on other countries to apply enhanced due diligence and counter measures, increasing the cost of doing business with the country

and in some cases severing it altogether. As of now there are only two countries in the blacklist — Iran and North Korea — and seven on the grey list, including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Syria and Yemen.

Issue now:

1. Pakistan is likely to remain on **the grey list of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** for failing to comply with the global terrorist financing watchdog's deadline to prosecute and penalise terrorist financing in the country.
2. **At an FATF meeting in February**, Islamabad had been told that 'all deadlines' had expired and if they didn't prosecute and penalise terrorist financing by June, the watchdog would take action.
3. **At the Paris plenary too**, the FATF had expressed serious concerns over Pakistan's failure to complete its 27-point action plan in line with the agreed timelines – which ended in September 2019.

Why did FATF decide to place Pakistan on its watch list?

1. Pakistan had been on the same list from 2012 to 2015.
2. The decision is overdue, given Pakistan's blatant violation of its obligations to crack down on groups banned by the Security Council 1267 sanctions committee that monitors groups affiliated to the Taliban such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Haqqani network.
3. Their leaders like Hafiz Saeed and Masood Azhar continue to hold public rallies and freely garner support and donations.
4. Both the LeT and JeM, continue to praise and claim credit for terror attacks in India. They have grown their bases in Pakistan, with fortress-like headquarters in Muridke and Bahawalpur that the authorities turn a blind eye to.
5. By doing this, successive Pakistani governments shown disregard for the outcry against terrorism worldwide.
6. One violation was a Pakistani court's bail to Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, LeT operational commander and a key planner of the November 2008 Mumbai terror attacks.
7. Under the 1267 sanctions ruling, banned entities can get no funds, yet Lakhvi received the bail amount, and the authorities have since lost track of him.

What are the implications for Pakistan now?

1. Once placed in the "grey list", countries face risk of downgrade by multilateral lenders like IMF, World Bank, ADB etc. And further reduction in their risk-rating by agencies.
2. It may impede Pakistan's access to global markets to attract foreign investments at a time when its foreign reserves are dwindling and external deficits are widening.
3. Some kind of pressure is increased up with financial censures on its banks and businesses and targeted sanctions imposed against specific law enforcement and intelligence officials.
4. If Islamabad will not comply with the obligations then the country runs the risk of being included on to the blacklist of the FATF that currently features Iran and North Korea.
5. As a reaction to this move, authorities in Pakistan recently confiscated all properties of the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) and its charity arm, the Falah-e-Insaniat Foundation (FIF).

Why Softer Tone on Pakistan?

1. **Geopolitics and bilateral deals** play a role in deciding outcomes.

2. Pakistan's role in ensuring Taliban talks are brought to a successful conclusion soon may have weighed with the U.S. and its allies in the grouping.
3. With **China in the President's Chair**, and the backing of **Turkey and Malaysia**, Pakistan could escape being blacklisted in any case.

India want more scrutiny on removing Pakistan's Grey list:

1. While Pakistan's progress will come as a disappointment to India, it wants **more scrutiny of Pakistan's support to terror groups** lest Islamabad feels it has been let off the hook there are a few points to consider.
2. First, **the grey listing is not new**. Pakistan was placed on it in 2012, and was removed in 2015 after it passed a National Action Plan to deal with terrorism following the 2014 Peshawar School massacre. It was also placed under severe restrictions in the years 2008-2012, after the Mumbai attack.
3. Second, this last grey list period has already seen **some Indian demands met**, including the chargesheeting of Hafiz Saeed for terror financing, and the addition of JeM chief Masood Azhar to the UNSC 1267 list.
4. Finally, although the FATF is a technical organisation, there is no doubting that **geopolitics and bilateral deals play a part** in deciding outcomes.

Link: <https://youtu.be/TTEcEbAeAXI>

GENERAL STUDIES III

1. Indian satellite AstroSat discovers one of the earliest galaxies of Universe

1. As a landmark achievement in Space missions, Indian Astronomers have discovered one of the farthest Star galaxies in the universe.
2. AstroSat is **India's first multi-wavelength space telescope**, which **has five telescopes seeing through different wavelengths simultaneously** — visible, near UV, far UV, soft X-ray and hard X-ray.
3. Onboard the AstroSat is a 38-cm wide **UltraViolet Imaging Telescope (UVIT)**, which is capable of imaging in far and near-ultraviolet bands over a wide field of view.
4. AstroSat was launched on 28 September 2015 by ISRO into a **near-Earth equatorial orbit**.
5. It is a **multi-institute collaborative project**, involving IUCAA, ISRO, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (Mumbai), Indian Institute of Astrophysics (Bengaluru), and Physical Research Laboratory (Ahmedabad), among others.
6. The galaxy called AUDFs01 was discovered by a team of Astronomers .
7. The importance and uniqueness of this original discovery can be made out from the fact that it has been reported in the leading international journal "Nature Astronomy" published from Britain.
8. India's AstroSat/UVIT was able to achieve this unique feat because the background noise in the UVIT detector is much less than one on the Hubble Space Telescope of US based NASA.
9. This discovery is a very important clue to how the dark ages of the Universe ended and there was light in the Universe.

2. ARCI developed high-performance tin anodes for lithium-ion battery used in Electric Vehicles

1. Lithium-ion battery or Li-ion battery is a type of rechargeable battery.
2. Li-ion batteries use an intercalated (Intercalation is the reversible inclusion or insertion of a molecule into materials with layered structures) lithium compound as one electrode material, compared to the metallic lithium used in a non-rechargeable lithium battery.
3. The battery consists of electrolyte, which allows for ionic movement, and the two electrodes are the constituent components of a lithium-ion battery cell.
4. Lithium ions move from the negative electrode to the positive electrode during discharge and back when charging.
5. They are one of the most popular types of rechargeable batteries used for military, battery electric vehicle and aerospace applications.
6. Scientists at the International Advanced Research Centre for Powder Metallurgy and New Materials (ARCI), an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology have developed low-cost micron Tin based anodes which proved to be high-performance and stable anode material for Lithium-ion batteries (LIBs) used in electric vehicles.
7. Electric vehicle (EV) technology demands LIBs with high energy density, long cycle life, and fast charging capability. Existing LIBs use graphite as an anode due to its low operating potential with respect to lithium, high thermal conductivity, and minimal volume expansion (12%) during charge/discharge cycling. However, they have a moderate capacity (372 mAhg^{-1}) and limited fast-charging capability. Tin (Sn) with its low-cost high capacity (993 mAhg^{-1}) and fast charging capability is considered a replacement for graphite anodes in LIBs.
8. The electrode preparation for LIBs involves coating of slurry of the material on to a metallic foil in a roll-to-roll fashion. In the process of fabricating Sn-based anode, the slurry has to be made using micron-sized Sn (bulk form) powders. However, usage of micron-sized Sn is not recommended due to its high-volume expansion (300%) during charge/discharge cycling, as it leads to cracking of electrodes and drastic erosion of capacity within a few cycles.
9. To circumvent such high-volume expansion, nano-size Sn has been used in various studies, which showed a significant enhancement in the cyclic stability. But, it involves a cost-intensive synthesis methodology and low production yields. Switching from nano-Sn to micron-Sn could result in significant cost reduction of the electrode fabrication process almost by 20 times.

3. Centre for Nano and Soft Matter Sciences has developed an invisible and flexible electromagnetic interference shield using Copper metal mesh

1. Scientists have now achieved a feat by designing a metal mesh structure instead of continuous film on desired transparent substrates to make it a transparent shield for electromagnetic interference (EMI).
2. The invisible shield can be used in various military stealth applications and can cover electromagnetic wave emitter or absorber devices without compromising their aesthetics.

3. Scientists from Centre for Nano and Soft Matter Sciences (CeNS), Bengaluru, an autonomous institute of the Department of Science & Technology, Govt. of India have fabricated these transparent and flexible EMI shields made of metal meshes using the crack templating method via spray coating which is pioneered in their laboratory.
4. The CeNS team has developed a copper metal mesh on polyethylene terephthalate (PET) sheet as its substrate, which exhibited a visible transmittance (T), a parameter of visible transparency of about 85% and sheet resistance (R_s) ~ 0.83 ohm per square. These transparent and flexible EMI shields made of metal mesh coatings on desired transparent substrate they have developed through their research published in the journal 'Bulletin of Materials Science' showed remarkably high values for total EMI shielding (SE_T), with the average value being ~ 41 dB over a wide spectral range of the Ku band (12 to 18 GHz).
5. Instead of continuous film of metal (Cu) coating on any transparent substrate (glass, PET) where transparency can be compromised. In this method, the CeNS team has deposited metal mesh networks on the substrate, which covers only 7% area of substrate, unlike 100% coverage of continuous film. This makes metal mesh transparent compare to continuous metal film. Metal mesh provides better electromagnetic shielding compare to same thickness of continuous metal film where transparency can be compromised.
6. This metal mesh can be created on any desired substrates such as acrylic, polycarbonate, glass, etc. without compromising the conductivity of the electrodes.

4. Modelling water levels of northwestern India in response to improved irrigation use efficiency

1. The groundwater crisis in northwestern India is the result of over-exploitation of groundwater resources for irrigation.
2. The Government of India has targeted a 20 percent improvement in irrigation groundwater use efficiency.
3. In this perspective, and using a regional-scale calibrated and validated three-dimensional groundwater flow model, this research provides the first forecasts of water levels in the study area up to the year 2028, both with and without this improvement in use efficiency.
4. Future water levels without any mitigation efforts are anticipated to decline by up to 2.8 m/year in some areas.
5. A simulation with a 20 percent reduction in groundwater abstraction shows spatially varied aquifer responses. Tangible results are visible in a decade, and the water-level decline rates decrease by 36–67 percent in over-exploited areas.
6. Although increasing irrigation use efficiency provides tangible benefits, an integrated approach to agricultural water management practice that incorporates use efficiency along with other measures like water-efficient cropping patterns and rainwater harvesting may yield better results in a shorter period.

Link: <https://youtu.be/Rh7yO1WZhdc>

5. Climate Performance Index

Introduction:

- India has added another feather to its cap by joining the **top 10 countries in this year's Climate Change Performance Index or CCPI for the first time**. As Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar put it, India is walking the talk by **cutting down emission**

intensity by 21 per cent of its GDP. Moreover it is on track to achieve the goal of 35 per cent emission reduction as promised in the Paris summit in 2015. More commendable is the fact that while India has stayed true to its commitments on reducing its carbon footprint, advanced nations like the United States have been included in the worst-performing countries for the first time. Even rich nations like Australia and Saudi Arabia which are running their economies on the basis of coal industries are also among the countries with high carbon emissions. The CCPI report was released at the 'COP 25' climate change conference in the Spanish capital Madrid.

About the CCPI:

The CCPI is an independent monitoring tool of countries' climate protection performance. **It aims to enhance transparency in international climate politics and enables the comparability of climate protection efforts and progress made by individual countries.**

1. Germanwatch, the NewClimate Institute and the Climate Action Network publish the Index annually.
2. Published annually since 2005, the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) tracks countries' efforts to combat climate change.
3. The implementation phase of the Paris Agreement enters a crucial phase in 2020, where countries are due to submit their updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). In light of this, the CCPI aims to inform the process of raising climate ambition. As a long-standing and reliable tool for identifying leaders and laggards in climate protection, the CCPI can be a powerful instrument to hold governments accountable for their responsibility to act on the climate crisis and of stimulating a race to the top in climate action.
4. The CCPI 2020 results illustrate the main regional differences in climate protection and performance within the 57 evaluated countries and the EU.

Methodology:

1. **Country coverage: Covering more than 90% of global GHG emissions**– On the basis of standardised criteria, the CCPI (as of CCPI 2020 edition) evaluates and compares the climate protection performance of 57 countries and of the European Union (EU), which are together responsible for more than 90% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.
2. **Methodological approach and data sources**–
The CCPI assesses countries' performance in four categories:
 - "GHG Emissions" (40% of overall score),
 - "Renewable Energy" (20% of overall score),
 - "Energy Use" (20% of overall score) and
 - "Climate Policy" (20% of overall score).
3. Aiming to provide a comprehensive and balanced evaluation of the diverse countries evaluated, a total of 14 indicators are taken into account
4. The categories "GHG Emissions", "Renewable Energy" and "Energy Use" are each defined by four indicators:
 - Current Level
 - Past Trend
 - Well-Below-2°C Compatibility of the Current Level
 - Well-Below-2°C Compatibility of the Countries' 2030 Target.
5. The remaining 20% of the assessment is based on the globally unique climate policy section of the CCPI. The index category "Climate Policy" considers the fact that climate

protection measures taken by governments often take several years to have an effect on the GHG-Emissions, Renewable Energy and Energy Use indicators. This category thereby covers the most recent developments in national climate policy frameworks, which are otherwise not projected in the quantitative data. This category's indicators are (1) National Climate Policy and (2) International Climate Policy, and the qualitative data for these is assessed annually in a comprehensive research study. Its basis is the performance rating provided by climate and energy policy experts from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), universities and think tanks within the countries that are evaluated.

Key results overall rating:

1. **No country performs well enough** in all index categories to achieve an overall very high rating in the index.
2. Therefore, once again the **first three ranks of the overall ranking remain empty**.
3. **G20 performance**: only two G20 countries rank among high performers (UK and India), while eight G20 countries rank under very low performers.
4. **EU performance**: Poland supersedes Ireland as the worst performing EU country in this year's index. Eight EU countries rank under high performers, while the EU as a whole falls six places and ranks under the group of medium performers in this year's index.
5. CCPI newcomer Chile ranks 11th with an overall high performance.
6. *Top three performers*:
 1. **Sweden** is leading the group of high performing countries, as it has in the past two years.
 2. **Denmark** moves up ten ranks to become the second best performing country in this year's CCPI.
 3. **Morocco** falls one place in the overall ranking but keeps its overall high performance.
7. *Bottom three performers*:
 1. **Chinese Taipei** falls three places and now ranks 59th.
 2. **Saudi Arabia** still ranks very low, but for the first time does not occupy the bottom rank of the index.
 3. **The United States**, after falling three positions in last year's ranking, continues the downwards trend, sinking to the bottom of the ranking.

India:

1. **India, for the first, time ranks among the top ten in this year's CCPI.**
2. The current levels of **per capita emissions and energy use are still comparatively low** and, along with ambitious 2030 targets, result in high ratings for the GHG Emissions and Energy Use categories.
3. While the country receives an overall medium rating in the Renewable Energy category, India's 2030 renewable energy target is rated very high for its well-below-2°C compatibility.
4. National experts commend the government for **strong policies to support the expansion of renewable energy**, which is needed to meet the ambitious targets as recent renewable energy capacity additions are below the level required.
5. Despite an overall high rating for its Climate Policy performance, experts point out that the government has yet to develop a roadmap for the phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies that would consequently reduce the country's high dependence on coal.

Major initiatives of the Government towards combating climate change:

1. We have renewable energy targets of 450GW now.
2. Green cover has been increased.
3. Carbon Sink
4. **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):** The Action plan covers eight major missions on Solar, Enhanced Energy Efficiency, Sustainable Habitat, Water, Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, Green India, Sustainable Agriculture and Strategic Knowledge on Climate Change.
5. **International Solar Alliance (ISA):** ISA was jointly launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the then President of France, Francois Hollande in Paris on the side-lines of CoP 21 in 2015. The vision and mission of the alliance is to provide a dedicated platform for cooperation among solar resource rich countries that lie completely or partial between the Tropics of Capricorn & Cancer.
6. **State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC):** State governments have drafted climate strategies aligned with the eight National Missions under the NAPCC. The strategies focus on issues ranging from climate mitigation, energy efficiency, and resource conservation to climate adaptation.
7. **FAME Scheme for E-mobility:** Union Government in April 2015 launched Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric vehicles (FAME) – India Scheme with an aim to boost sales of eco-friendly vehicles in the country. It is a part of the National Mission for Electric Mobility.
8. **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation & Urban Transformation (AMRUT) for Smart Cities.**
9. **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:** The scheme provides LPG connections to five crore below-poverty-line beneficiaries. The connections are given in the name of women beneficiaries to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels and conventional fuel like cow dung for cooking food, thus reducing air pollution.
10. **UJALA scheme:** The scheme was launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2015 with a target of replacing 77 crore incandescent lamps with LED bulbs. The usage of LED bulbs will not only result in reducing electricity bills but also help in environment protection.
11. **Swachh Bharat Mission:** Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Movement) is a campaign that was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 2, 2014. The campaign seeks to clean the streets, roads and infrastructure of the country's 4041 statutory cities and towns.

Link: <https://youtu.be/xhsb6Y8sxtI>

ESSAYS

Write an essay on the following topic in not more than 1000-1200 words:

1. "The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude."
2. "India Needs Aggressive and Pragmatic Neighbourhood Policy"
3. "In India Agriculture and the Farmer are both the Victims of Narrow Political Vision"
4. "Our World is in a Surplus of Multilateral Challenges and a Deficit of Solutions"

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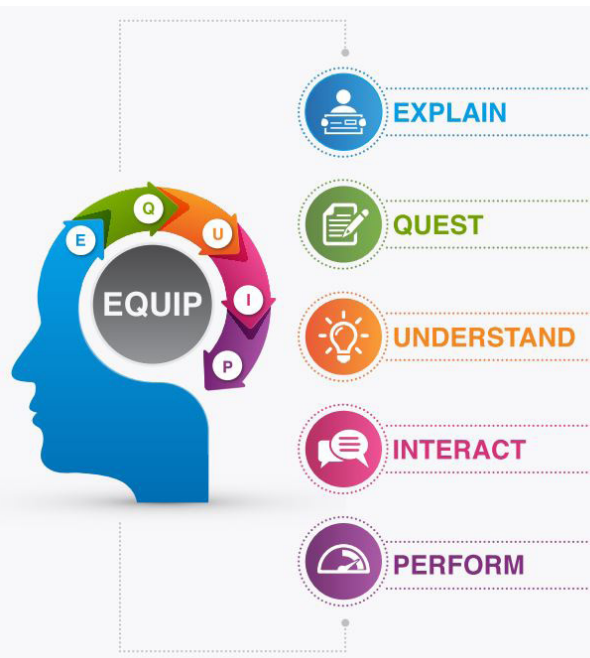
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