

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 3

JANUARY
2022

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- GS-II
 - ACT NOW, RECAST THE SELECTION PROCESS OF THE ECS
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The current affairs articles are segregated from prelims and mains perspective, such separation is maintained in terms of structure of articles. Mains articles have more focus on analysis and prelims articles have more focus on facts.

However, this doesn't mean that Mains articles don't cover facts and PT articles can't have analysis. You are suggested to read all of them for all stages of examination.

CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST

WEEK- 3 (JANUARY, 2022)

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SECTION: A
(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

SOLVING MIGRANT WORKERS HOUSING CRISIS

CONTEXT:

Urbanisation and the growth of cities in India have been accompanied by pressure on basic infrastructure and services like housing, sanitation and health. Migrant workers are living in precarious conditions and this makes them the worst sufferers in the segment.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- The **mass exodus of migrant workers** from cities after the sudden announcement of a nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of the coronavirus has **amplified the housing crisis for migrant workers** in cities.
- Migrants were forced to leave due to their inability to pay rent for rooms after losing their jobs.
- Despite the nationwide lockdown, in the absence of social protection and adequate state support, migrant workers felt compelled to leave cities to return to their villages, even though they did not have any means of transport.
- Most of them travelled hundreds of kilometres on foot and via other precarious modes, often at great risk to their lives, just to reach 'home.'
- The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the poor housing conditions of the urban poor/migrant workers.
- There is a dire need for a sound policy framework that must take into account the status of human rights, property rights and socio-economic development in India.

◎ ANALYSIS:

Urban Population and Migrant Workers:

- **Homeless Urban Families:** The 2011 Census of India reveals that the urban population of the country stood at 31.16% where there are about 4.5 lakh homeless families and a total population of 17.73 lakh is living without any roof over their heads.
 - ▶ Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh are the two states with an acute housing crisis.

Modes of employment for Migrant Workers:

- Construction
- Casual work
- Domestic work
- Other informal activities

In India, the term '**migrant worker**' generally refers to inter-state labour migrants who move from one part of the country to another for employment.

Migrants and Urban Housing:

- A vast majority of the urban population, especially migrants, live under conditions of poor shelter and in highly congested spaces.
- In India, more than half of the urban households occupy a single room, with an average occupancy per room of 4.4 persons.
- In the case of migrants working in small units, hotels and homes, their workplace is also their place of lodging. Such places are often unhygienic and poorly ventilated.
- Most construction workers stay in makeshift arrangements. Casual workers sleep under bridges and on pavements, often living as a group in unhygienic surroundings.

Problems Of Urban Areas:

- Over-Urbanisation
- Inadequate Housing
- Unsafe and Insufficient Water Supply
- Inefficient and Inadequate Transport
- Pollution

Steps taken by the Government in the area of Urban Housing:

• Smart Cities Mission:

- ▶ The smart cities initiative was launched in June 2015. The Smart Cities Mission identified 100 cities, covering 21% of India's urban population, for a transformation in four rounds starting January 2016.
- ▶ Some of the core infrastructure elements in a smart city include proper water supply, assured electricity supply, sanitation, and affordable housing especially for the poor.

A smart city is an urban region that is highly advanced in terms of urban infrastructure, sustainable real estate, high density of communication network and a wider market.

- **AMRUT Mission:**
 - ▶ Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) was launched in 2015. It is intended to make the process of urbanisation smoother.
 - ▶ It aimed to ensure that every household has access to a tap with an assured supply of water and a sewerage connection.
 - ▶ The mission has now entered its second phase to make cities water-secure and provide better amenities for the marginalised. AMRUT 2.0 aims to provide 100% coverage of water supply to all households in around 4,700 ULBs (Urban Local Bodies).
- **Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs) scheme:**
 - ▶ The scheme was launched in May 2020 after the Covid-19 pandemic led to large scale reverse migration of workers, who mostly live in the slum's clusters or informal settlements in cities.
 - ▶ It is a new rental housing policy targeted towards migrant workers – **as a sub-vertical under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) mission**. This policy aims to achieve **"Housing for all"** and **"incentivise public/private entities to leverage investment for creating affordable rental housing stock"** for the low-income migrant workers in cities.

Obstacles in Affordable Housing for Migrants:

- **Lag in the Implementation of Housing Schemes:** The Government data shows that 49% of 5,196 projects of the Smart Cities Mission for which work orders were issued across 100 smart cities in India remain unfinished. This lag in implementation raises questions about the efficacy of innovative policy prescriptions.
- **Absence of WASH Facilities:** According to a 2020 International Labour Organisation (ILO) report on internal labour migrants, the absence of dignified housing is aggravated by a lack of adequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities.
- **Sudden Increase in Rents:** Migrant workers find housing in slums, which is often subject to a sudden increase in rent, and have access only to the poorest infrastructure and services.
- **Insufficient Public Toilets:** Even though there has been an installation of public toilets through Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, their availability is not adequate in migrant-dense clusters.

Scope for Improvement:

- **Policy framework For Housing Sector:** The existing housing conditions indicate the necessity

of coordinated efforts of the state and the contractors to address housing issues. It calls for long-term policymaking and analysis of the housing sector along with necessitating more transparency in the case of contracts.

- **Reducing Owner-Tenant Conflicts:** Instead of an extreme condition where the owner suddenly increases rent, the state can look into the matter to ensure an optimal condition where the rent evolves for a competitive market for houses. This would make public housing affordable and reduce the conflict between owners and tenants.
- **Redeveloping Small and Medium Cities:** There is no denying that even our non-megacities have inadequate planning, non-scalable infrastructure, unaffordable housing, and poor public transport.
- **Development of Social Rental Housing:** While developing social rental housing, the state should ensure that the location has proper access to transport networks, education and healthcare.

Lessons from international markets:

- **Rental Vouchers:** Chile, Brazil and the US issue "rental vouchers" to low-income groups, which can be exchanged in place of rent in formal, private housing. This enables them to access a range of housing options, assures landlords of steady rental revenue and relieves the pressure on social housing agencies.
- In Thailand, schemes like **"Baan Makong"** enable civil society organisations to skill communities to self-finance and self-construct formal, pucca, affordable homes and last-mile infrastructure (like water and electricity lines), while negotiating with government agencies for secure tenure and provision of trunk infrastructure.

◎ CONCLUSION:

- The working group by NITI Aayog constituted to study internal labour has recommended that rental housing in the public sector could be expanded through the provision of dormitory accommodation. It can make public housing affordable and can reduce the conflict between owners and tenants. Action-oriented policies alone can improve the lives of labouring migrants. Such policy initiatives will also help India to achieve the **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 8.8)** which stands for providing a safe and secure working environment for all workers, particularly migrants.
- To provide viable alternatives to the informal market, efforts should be made to ensure that states adopt reforms like the **National Urban Rental Housing Policy** and the **Model Tenancy Act**, as the government is best placed to facilitate the production of affordable rental housing at large scale.

ACT NOW, RECAST THE SELECTION PROCESS OF THE ECS

CONTEXT:

According to reports, the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and his Election Commissioner colleagues have 'attended' an 'informal' meeting with the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister.

◎ ABOUT

- **Issue:** The informal meeting has brought renewed focus on the independence and the impartiality of the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- **Reason:** ECI is a constitutionally mandated body that should maintain its distance from the Executive, in perception and reality.

What is the need to recast the selection process?

- **Due to Multiple accusations:** The ECI has faced multiple accusations of favouring the ruling party.
 - ▶ For instance, the Citizens' Commission on Elections (CCE), chaired by the retired Supreme Court judge, Justice Madan B. Lokur, in its report titled "An Enquiry into India's Election System", has highlighted several instances of inaction on the part of the ECI while conducting the 2019 general election.
 - ▶ The Government was also accused of hounding (now former) Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa when he favored taking action against the Prime Minister for violations of the electoral code of conduct.
- **Strengthening the institution:** Changes in the appointment process for Election Commissioners can strengthen the ECI's independence, neutrality, and transparency. The appointment of Election Commissioners falls within the purview of Article 324(2) of the Constitution, which establishes the institution.
- **No change in the old structure:** Pertinently, it contains a 'subject to' clause which provides that both the number and tenure of the Election Commissioners shall be "subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf by Parliament, be made by the President". Apart from enacting a law in 1991, which was subsequently amended to enlarge the number of Election Commissioners from one to three, Parliament has so far not enacted any changes to the appointment process.
- **Pending Petition:** Three writ petitions, with one pending since 2015, is urging the Supreme Court to declare that the current practice of appointment of Election Commissioners by the Centre violates Articles 14, 324(2), and democracy as a basic feature

of the Constitution. These petitions argue for an independent system for the appointment of Election Commissioners, as recommended by previous Law Commission and various committee reports.

- **Several recommendations:** In 1975, the Justice Tarkunde Committee recommended that Election Commissioners be appointed on the advice of a committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Lok Sabha Opposition Leader, and the Chief Justice of India. The Fourth Report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission additionally recommended that the Law Minister and the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha be included in such a Collegium.
- **Function of EC:** The "Election Commission is not only responsible for conducting free and fair elections but it also renders a quasi-judicial function between the various political parties including the ruling government and other parties.
 - ▶ Accordingly, the Executive cannot be a sole participant in the appointment of members of the Election Commission as it gives unfettered discretion to the ruling party to choose someone whose loyalty to it is ensured and thereby renders the selection process vulnerable to manipulation".

Suggestive measures

- **Forming a committee:** Establishing a multi-institutional, bipartisan committee for the fair and transparent selection of Election Commissioners can enhance the perceived and actual independence of the ECI.
 - ▶ Similar to a procedure is already the Chief Information Commissioner, the Lokpal, the Central Vigilance Commissioner, and the Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation.
 - ▶ The quasi-judicial nature of the ECI's functions makes it especially important that the appointments process conform to the strictest democratic principles.
- **Law enacted by parliament:** Parliament should do well to pre-empt judicial strictures by going ahead and formulating a law that establishes a multi-institutional, bipartisan Collegium to select Election Commissioners.

© **CONCLUSION**

The ECI's constitutional responsibilities require a fair and transparent appointment process that is beyond reproach, which will reaffirm our faith in

this vital pillar of our polity. The existing veil over the appointment process of Election Commissioners potentially undermines the very structure on which our democratic aspirations rest.

REAPING INDIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

CONTEXT:

A nation's growth requires the productive contribution of all segments of society, particularly the children and the youth which can yield long-term returns in terms of the high productivity of the economically active population till they enter the elderly cohort.

ANALYSIS

What is the demographic dividend?

- It refers to the growth in an economy that is the result of a change in the age structure of a country's population.

What is the overall scenario in India?

- These population parameters indicate the availability of demographic dividends in India, which started in 2005-06 and will last till 2055-56.
- However, according to the Economic Survey 2018-19, India's Demographic Dividend will peak around 2041, when the share of working-age, i.e. 20-59 years, the population is expected to hit 59%.

Important Note:

- India has 62.5% of its population in the age group of 15-59 years which is increasing and will be at the peak around 2036 thereby reaching up to approximately 65%.
- Decline trend in fertility:** The change in age structure is typically brought in by a decline in fertility and mortality rates. As fertility declines, the share of the young population falls and that of the older, dependent population rises. If the fertility decline is rapid, the increase in the population of working ages is substantial yielding the 'demographic dividend'.
- The window of demographic opportunity:** The smaller share of children in the population enables higher investment per child. Therefore, the future entrants in the labour force can have better productivity and thus boost income. With time, the share of the older population rises and that of the working-age population begins to fall and hence the dividend is available for some time.
- Demographic Transition:** With falling fertility (currently 2.0), rising median age (from 24 years in 2011, 29 years now and expected to be 36 years by 2036), a falling dependency ratio (expected to decrease from 65% to 54% in the coming decade taking 15-59 years as the working-age population), India is in the middle of a demographic transition.

Benefits from the demographic dividend

- Economic growth:** Better economic growth is brought about by increased economic activities due to a higher working-age population and lower dependent population thereby increasing labor force along with rising in women workforce.
- Policy Framing:** Effective policy making by strictly implementing schemes and programs for the benefit of the people.
- Rise in employment:** A higher employment-seeking population will lead to the rapid increase of industrialization and urbanization.
- Increased workforce:** The working-age population rising to 65% will increase the workforce.
- Swelling labour force:** India's labour force is swelling as its baby boomers reach working age. It would boost India's growth.
- Effective diversion of resources:** India's population has the potential to divert resources from spending on irrelevant things to investing in physical and human infrastructure.
- Rise in women's workforce:** There is a rise in women's workforce activity that naturally accompanies a decline in fertility.
- Easy accumulation:** The fourth is that working ages also happen to be the prime years for savings, which is key to the accumulation of capital and technological innovation.

Challenges posed by demographic dividends

- However, the realization of the benefits of potential demographic dividends is not automatic and thus presents many challenges.
- Without proper policies, the increase in the working-age population may lead to
 - rising unemployment
 - fuelling economic
 - social risks

This calls for forward-looking policies incorporating population dynamics, education and skills, healthcare, gender sensitivity, and providing rights and choices to the younger generation.

What are the Forward-looking Policies?

- **Lesson from fellow Asian nations:** Countries like Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea have already shown us how demographic dividends can be reaped to achieve incredible economic growth by adopting forward-looking policies and programs to empower the youth in terms of their education, skills, and health choices. There are important lessons from these countries for India.
- **The first** is to undertake an updated National Transfer Accounts (NTA) assessment. India's per capita consumption pattern is way lower than that of other Asian countries. A child in India consumes around 60% of the consumption by an adult aged between 20 and 64, while a child in China consumes about 85% of a prime-age adult's consumption. The NTA data for India needs to be updated to capture the progress made on such investments since 2011-12. State-specific NTAs need to be calculated every year and States need to be ranked for investing in the youth.
- **The second** is to invest more in children and adolescents. India ranks poorly in Asia in terms of private and public human capital spending. It needs to invest more in children and adolescents, particularly in nutrition and learning during early childhood. Given that India's workforce starts at a younger age, a greater focus needs to be on transitioning from secondary education to universal skilling and entrepreneurship, as done in South Korea.
- **The third** is to make health investments. Health spending has not kept pace with India's economic growth. Public spending on health has remained flat at around 1% of GDP. Evidence suggests that better health facilitates improved economic production. Hence, it is important to draft policies to promote health during the demographic dividend. There is a need for more finance for health as well as better health facilities from the available funding.
- **The fourth** is to make reproductive healthcare services accessible on a rights-based approach. We need to provide universal access to high-quality primary education and basic healthcare. The unmet need for family planning in India at 9.4% as per the latest National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21) is high as compared to 3.3% in China and 6.6% in South Korea, which needs to be bridged.
- **Fifth**, education is an enabler to bridge gender differentials. The gender inequality of education is a concern. In India, boys are more likely to be enrolled in secondary and tertiary schools than girls. In the Philippines, China, and Thailand, it is the reverse. In Japan, South Korea, and Indonesia, the gender differences are rather minimal. This needs to be reversed.
- **Sixth**, India needs to increase female workforce participation in the economy. As of 2019, 20.3% of women were working or looking for work, down from 34.1% in 2003-04. New skills and opportunities for women and girls befitting their participation in a \$3 trillion economy are urgently needed. For example, a girl who passes Class 10 needs more choices to learn skills that will help her find appropriate work. She will need safe transport to travel to work. Finding work will likely delay her age of marriage and make her participate in the economy more productively, as also exercise her rights and choices. South Korea's female workforce participation rate of 50% has been built on
 - ▶ Legally compulsory gender budgeting to analyze gender-disaggregated data and its impact on policies,
 - ▶ Increasing childcare benefits, and
 - ▶ Boosting tax incentives for part-time work. It is predicted that if all women engaged in domestic duties in India who are willing to work had a job, female labour force participation would increase by about 20%.
- **Seventh**, India needs to address the diversity between States. While India is a young country, the status and pace of population aging vary among States. The southern states, which are advanced in demographic transition, already have a higher percentage of older people. These differences in age structure reflect differences in economic development and health – and remind us of States' very different starting points at the outset of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda. But this also offers boundless opportunities for States to work together, especially on demographic transition, with the north-central region as the reservoir of India's workforce.
- **Eight**, a new federal approach to governance reforms for the demographic dividend will need to be put in place for policy coordination between States on various emerging population issues such as migration, aging, skilling, female workforce participation, and urbanization. Inter-ministerial coordination for strategic planning, investment, monitoring, and course correction should be an important feature of this governance arrangement.

◎ CONCLUSION

India has already begun to get dividends. In India, the benefit to the GDP from demographic transition has been lower than its peers in Asia and is already tapering. Hence, there is an urgency to take appropriate policy measures.

7th SCHEDULE AFFECTING THE DELIVERY OF PUBLIC GOODS

CONTEXT:

In general terms, the public good is something that must be delivered by the government. Since there are layers in our three-tiered structure of governance. Article 246 of the Constitution mentions three lists in the Seventh Schedule — union, state, and concurrent lists thereby affecting the delivery of public goods.

◎ BACKGROUND

- The provisions relating to power-sharing can be linked to historical antecedents, colonial legislation as well as the socio-political context at the time of the rafting of the Indian Constitution.
- The measures were undertaken by the British Crown after it took over from the East India Company post-1857, formally institutionalizing many aspects of the federal principle.
- **Constitutional backing:** The Constitution provides a scheme for demarcation of powers through three 'lists' in the Seventh Schedule under Article 246.
- **The gist:** The Seventh Schedule is thus indicative of the spirit of cooperation between the Union and the States. Also, it represents a limitation to the powers of both centers and States. Such a limitation is essential to ensure that the different institutional layers in a federation can function autonomously in their respective spheres of influence.

social and economic planning, electricity, marriage, and divorce and others.

Rationale behind the list system contained in the Seventh Schedule:

- The Joint Committee Report of 1934 ('JCR') that preceded the enactment of the 1935 Act explains the rationale for the distribution of legislative powers as "an essential feature of Provincial Autonomy and as being itself the means of defining its ambit".
- For this purpose, an unprecedented, exhaustive statutory allocation was considered necessary.
 - ▶ Further, it was also felt that such a scheme would reduce disputes over the scope of Centre-State jurisdiction. However, the distribution of legislative powers reflects the dominance of the Parliament over the State Legislatures.

How is it affecting the delivery of public goods?

- Items have moved from the state list to the concurrent list and from the concurrent list to the union list. Rather than progressing towards decentralization of power.
- Every public good is optimally delivered at a certain level of government. Delivery becomes suboptimal both above that level and below that level. Most public goods people will think of are efficiently delivered at the local government level, not Union or state level. Most public goods are efficiently delivered at the local government level, not Union or state level.
- Citizens increasingly demand efficient delivery of such public goods. But without delegation of funds, functions, and functionaries, presently left to the discretion of state governments, local governments are unable to respond.

Efforts are taken to reform the 7th schedule

- The Rajamannar Committee — formally known as Centre-State Relations Inquiry Committee suggested the constitution of a High Power Commission to examine the entries of Lists I and III in the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution and suggest a redistribution of the entries.

◎ ANALYSIS

The Three List

Being a Federal Country, in India, the legislative powers are divided between the Centre and the State which is listed under the seventh schedule, Article 246 of the Constitution of India. Based on federalism, Article 246 of the Indian Constitution demarcated the powers of the Union and the State by classifying their powers into the following three lists:

- **Union List:** The Union list comprises those subjects on which only the Union Parliament may enact laws. Under this, subjects of national importance such as foreign affairs, railways, banking, Defence are included.
- **State List:** It comprises those subjects on which the legislature to the state only can make laws such as Public order, police, public health and sanitation, betting and gambling and others.
- **Concurrent List:** This list includes those subjects on which both Union and State have concurrent powers, which includes education, population control and family planning, forests, criminal law,

- B Das (former chief minister of Odisha) stated the need for having general principles involved in the selection of Items under Union, Concurrent, and State lists. Such principles will help us to understand the lists much better. However, it was not accepted.
- However, the 1983 Sarkaria Commission and the 2002 National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution avoided this issue.
- Such limited movements have reflected greater centralization, such as in 1976.
- N K Singh, Chairman of 15th Finance Commission has also often made this point, in addition to scrutiny of Article 282.

◎ CONCLUSION

For the sake of better governance, this is not an issue that should be ducked and the basic structure doctrine doesn't stand in the way but this should be taken care of with utmost importance.

HOW MIGRATION IS A CHALLENGE TO INTERNAL SECURITY

CONTEXT:

In recent years, migration has made its way to the forefront of the security agendas of several states. The perception of immigration as a threat to security has developed alongside the rapid increase in the number of immigrants worldwide.

ANALYSIS

What is Migration?

- Migration is nothing but a simple movement of people from one place to another to settle permanently or temporarily in a new location.
- People can migrate individually, in family units, or large groups depending upon the purpose and nature of migration.
- **Classification:** Migrants, according to their movement can be classified into:
 - ▶ **Nomadic:** In nomadic migration, people migrate not for permanent settlement but mainly in search of food, water, shelter, and better living conditions for both humans and animals. This type of migration is more prevalent in the Himalayan region and is generally done by the people whose livelihood depends on rearing cattle, as they require constant fresh grazing land.
 - ▶ **Permanent and Temporary Migration:** Permanent migration is done with an intention to shift the permanent residence of the migrant to a new country, possibly obtaining the country's citizenship, or within the country in a different state or within the state. In contrast, temporary migration is limited to a time period, perhaps until the end of a work contract or particular program of study. However, both types of migrants significantly impact the economy and society of the destined country and also the country of origin.
 - ▶ **Forced Migration/Displacement or 'Demographic engineering:** Forced migration is involuntary and generally 'conflict induced' (caused by humans) or 'disaster induced' (caused due to natural calamity). However, the concept of 'Demographic engineering' is a deliberate act of the state manipulating population figures for political, ideological, strategic, and economic reasons.

How is it a threat to internal security?

- **Manipulation of migrants:** Migration is also seen worldwide with major incidents of refugee movements due to circumstances of violence, persecution, or environmental disasters. The image of refugees being vulnerable to exploitation by terrorist groups could run the risk of migrants being termed as terrorists themselves. This could also be a part of the agenda of these terrorist organizations to generate xenophobic sentiments to further their divisive objectives.
- **State-centric threat:** The threats to the state could be direct or indirect.
 - ▶ **Direct threats** are associated with the possibility of radicalization of refugees or influx of terrorists through refugee movements across borders.
 - ▶ On the other hand, **indirect threats** are posed by the threats to opportunities or grievances in the receiving population with regard to the distribution and sharing of resources.
- **Clashes due to insecurity:** The influx of migrants especially mass immigration in the North-Eastern states has led to the indigenous people feeling overwhelmed with a change in the demographic profile of the state. Hence, the major concerns in terms of national security pertaining to the economic and social security of the region.
- **Conflict of interest:** With a lack of economic opportunities and the prevailing sense of insecurity in the local population, there are higher chances of instability arising out of fear. Poverty and deprivation can lead to crimes in desperate circumstances. They also are more vulnerable to terror outfits that can recruit them by promising better prospects and an income.
- **Disturbance in Law and Order:** The rule of law and integrity of the country are undermined by the illegal migrants who are engaged in illegal and anti-national activities, such as entering the country fraudulently acquiring identity cards, exercising voting rights in India, and resorting to trans-border smuggling and other crimes.

- **Rise of Militancy:** The persistent attacks against the Muslims perceived as illegal migrants in Assam has given way to radicalization within certain sections of the Muslim community. The formation of militant organizations, such as the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) is a threat to national security.

Measures to Tackle Migration

- **International Organisation for Migration (IOM):** It provides guidelines to the governments to help them tackle the issues associated with migration. One of the areas of its research is border management assistance, capacity building, and identity management. A long-term strategy for better management is the provision of development assistance to countries of origin to address the dearth of economic opportunities which acts as a push factor.
- **Strict border management:** Better border management should be done. Construction of fences close to the zero line with Bangladesh should be completed as early as possible.
- **Improved surveillance system:** A strong surveillance system should be installed with modern and upgraded technological equipment.
- **Border fencing:** Well-built boundary to stop infiltration of the people from the border. The construction of the joint check posts, along with other infrastructure, should be encouraged.
- **Strengthen domestic laws** to manage foreign criminals effectively.

- **Meaningful engagement with neighbouring nations** and solicit its cooperation in resolving all outstanding issues so as to better manage the mutual border.

Way Forward

- Migration as a phenomenon cannot be controlled; however, it can be regulated through the issue of migrant identity and the enactment of provisions discouraging illegal migration. The principles of IOM regarding border management could be adopted for digitization and computerization of records of migrants at the border areas.
- Moreover, the crux of resources necessitates bilateral and multilateral agreements to solve the issue amicably. Issues of violence or economic deprivation can be addressed by providing relief to the country by international lending associations like the World Bank.
- The role of civil society organizations in society becomes important in the context of threat perception and a more welcoming stance towards immigrants.
- While national security is on the top of every country's agenda, there also needs to be a balanced effort at realizing human security for providing assistance to the migrants themselves.

The conditions of war, persecution or economic deprivation in their source countries have to be addressed to ensure their development and the protection of their human rights which are threatened in case of illegal migration and dire conditions of stay in refugee camps.

TELECOM SECTOR AND ITS ISSUES

CONTEXT:

The board of Vodafone Idea (Vi) has approved the conversion of part of their liability owed to the government into equity. Thus, roughly Rs 16,000 crore of the interest on the deferred spectrum and adjusted gross revenue (AGR) liabilities will now be converted to government equity, making it the single-largest stakeholder, owning 35.8 percent of the entity.

◎ BACKGROUND:-

- Telecom sector has become an increasingly important basic industry, which bodes well for its future prospects and continued growth.
- The continuing advances in high-speed mobile services and Internet connectivity between devices keep driving innovation and competition within the sector.
- It can play an important role in the growth of India.

◎ ANALYSIS

Evolution of Telecom Sector in India

- Indian telecom sector is more than 165 years old.
- Telecommunications was first introduced in India in 1851 when the first operational land lines were laid by the government near Kolkata (then Calcutta), although telephone services were formally introduced in India much later in 1881.
- The Indian telecom sector was entirely under government ownership until 1984, when the private sector was allowed in telecommunication equipment manufacturing only.
- The actual evolution of the industry started after the Government separated the **Department of Post and Telegraph** in 1985 by setting up the **Department of Posts** and the **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)**.
- India is currently the world's second-largest telecommunications market and has registered strong growth in the past decade and half with a subscriber base of 1.20 billion
- The liberal and reformist policies of the Government of India have been instrumental along with strong consumer demand in the rapid growth in the Indian telecom sector where key policies are enhancing the use of internet in various sector leading to growth of telecom sector, like:
 - ▶ National optical fibre mission
 - ▶ National digital communication policy 2018
 - ▶ PM-WANI scheme

FDI in Telecom Sector

- In October 2021, the government notified 100% foreign direct investment (FDI) via the automatic route from the previous 49% in the telecommunications sector.
- FDI of up to 100% is permitted for infrastructure providers offering dark fibre, electronic mail and voice mail.
- The deregulation of FDI norms has made the sector one of the fastest growing and a top five employment opportunity generator in the country.
- The Telecom sector is the 3rd largest sector in terms of FDI inflows, contributing 7.1% of total FDI inflow in India.

The telecom sector lies within the sector of information and communication technology is made up of all telecommunications/telephone companies and internet service providers and plays the crucial role in the evolution of mobile communications and the information society.

Why is there a need to strengthen the telecom sector in India?

- **Employment Creation:** The sector contributes 2.2 million direct employment and 1.8 Million indirect employment jobs.
- **GDP Growth:** The sector is expected to contribute 8% to India's GDP in 2022 from ~6.5% currently.
- **Education:** COVID-19 lockdown has further kicked off the dependence on internet for education and was able to reach far ends to connect digitally and provide education.
- **Payment System:** The sector has seen exponential growth in terms of digital payment system through UPI, online net banking etc. which has further ignited the growth of telecom sector in India by making Internet Infrastructure self-reliant, robust and secure.
- **E-Governance:** This sector plays an important part in government E Governance initiative that encapsulate the finer points of Governance, such as citizen centricity, service orientation and transparency

- **Ease of Living:** This sector will play an enhanced role in easing people life with various up-surging technologies such as IoT, AI etc.
- **Electronic & Mobile Manufacturing:** With strengthening of telecom sector the need of electronic devices, mobiles and other data based appliances have a huge demand further boosting up this industry growth.
- **Telemedicine:** Telemedicine has played an important role in providing health based services during Covid-19 which requires further strengthening of the telecom sector.
- **Manufacturing Sector:** Various newer technologies in the manufacturing sector need a higher and better data service for development of the manufacturing sector.
- **Service Sector:** Service sector being one of the prime driven sectors for employment creation, telecom sector can further assure its development in India.

What are the challenges faced by the sector?

- **Poor Financial Health of the Sector:** Gross revenue has dropped drastically in this sector having a sound number of NPAs and lack of funds for the development though the recent SC judgment has paved a way towards its development.
- **Limited Spectrum Availability:** Available spectrum is less and the delay in spectrum allocation for 5g technology has delayed the development of this sector. Hence, it is imperative that spectrum auctioning at sustainable prices is the need of the hour.
- **Higher cost of Spectrum auction:** Government auction spectrum at an exorbitant cost which makes it difficult for mobile operators to provide services at reasonable speeds.
- **High competition and tariff war:** Post entry of Reliance Jio competition between different telecom sectors has further ignited. Other telecom players have to drop tariff rates both for voice and data. This has decreased their net profit and led to a financial crunch which delayed further investment.
- **Lack of Telecom Infrastructure in Semi-rural and Rural areas:** Service providers have to incur huge initial fixed costs to enter semi-rural and rural areas because of lack of infrastructure, issues with power supply etc..
- **Government policies against this sector:** Due to the non-conducive environment resulting from government policies and regulations, roll out of data-based products and services are hampering the progress of telecom sectors.
- **Low Broadband Penetration:** Low broadband penetration in the country is a matter of concern and the government needs to do a lot more work in the field to go up in the global ladder.
- **Newer technologies decrease the revenue:** Various applications such as WhatsApp, OLA, Uber etc. do not need permission or sign a pact with a telecommunications company which leads to decrease in revenue of the telecom sector.
- **License fee:** The license fee of eight per cent of the Adjusted Gross Revenue including five per cent as Universal Service Levy (USL) is one of the highest in the world.

Way Forward

- **Investment:** The number of internet subscribers in the country is expected to double to 829 million and overall IP traffic is expected to grow four-fold at a CAGR of 30% there is need of further investment for growth of this sector
- **Lower License fee:** The license fee of eight per cent of the Adjusted Gross Revenue including five per cent as Universal Service Levy (USL) is one of the highest in the world.
- **R&D:** The government should spend large on R&D and create an environment that makes India capable of manufacturing and even exporting hardware components like mobile handsets, CCTV Cameras, touch screen monitors etc.
- **National Optical Fibre Mission:** The government should increase the network area through optical fibre instead of copper which is expensive. This is necessary to ensure last mile connectivity
- **Reduce price for spectrum auction:** In the past, some of the operators participated recklessly in these auctions leading to exaggerated prices which was much higher. Reduce spectrum auction rates can help in further investment in this sector.
- **Infrastructure Sharing:** Government policies should be amicable in nature which should provide the use of government infrastructure at minimal prices which could help this sector to penetrate in far end areas..
- **Better tariff pricing mechanism:** TRAI should fix a minimum price to save the industry from price war and create a healthy competition with different service providers.
- **Ease of Doing Business:** The government should prepare a ground for easy right-of-way permissions and lower cost of right-of-ways to enhance ease of doing business in this sector.
- **Roll out of Newer Technology:** It is estimated that 5G technology will contribute approximately \$450 billion to the Indian Economy in the period of 2023-2040. Currently, 5G Spectrum Trials are being conducted in India to ensure proliferation of 5G technology across the country. Faster roll out of new technologies can help in growth of this sector.

COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE WITH A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM

CONTEXT:

Several recent reports highlight how food systems and climate change are intrinsically connected while urging for the transformation of our food system if the Paris Agreement objectives are ever to be achieved.

ANALYSIS

How does the food system become a challenge?

- **Hunger & Increased utilization:** Providing sustainable nutritious foods for the world's population without damaging the environment is the biggest challenge of the 21st century.
 - ▶ A growing hungry population across the globe demands increased utilization of agricultural land, more grazing land for livestock, and more utilization of fertilizers and genetically modified crops, which would hurt the environment by increased greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), environmental pollution, compromising biodiversity, amongst other consequences.
- **Food security:** Food security is based on four dimensions—
 - ▶ availability of food
 - ▶ physical and economic accessibility
 - ▶ utilization and bioavailability
 - ▶ sustenance of these three dimensions
- To meet growing nutritional needs, food production per capita has increased by over 30 percent since 1961, accompanied by an 800 percent rise in utilizing nitrogen fertilizers and a 100 percent rise in using water resources for irrigation.

Important Facts

- 821 million people are currently undernourished
- 151 million children under five are stunted
- 613 million women and girls aged 15 to 49 are iron deficient
- 2 billion adults are overweight or obese

What are the environmental impacts of agriculture, food system, and the modern diet?

- **Increased demand:** Food, energy, and water are the three pillars of sustainable development. The increasing world population has led to exponential growth in demand for all three.

- **GHG emission:** More than a quarter (26%) of global greenhouse gas emissions are attributable to food.
- **Resource utilization:** Agriculture uses half of all the habitable, including ice-free and desert-free, land in the world, 70% of the world's freshwater and is responsible for 78% of global **eutrophication** i.e., pollution of waterways with nutrient-rich pollutants.
 - ▶ A study by the **University of Oxford** evaluated data from around 38,000 farms across 119 countries and reported that the agricultural process, including transportation and deforestation, led to the production of 13.7 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide which is equivalent to 26% of the GHG each year.
 - This report also revealed that the production of meat, fish, eggs, and dairy occupies 83% of the world's farmland and contributes to 56-58% of GHG.

Eutrophication

- Eutrophication is the process in which a water body becomes overly enriched with nutrients, leading to the plentiful growth of simple plant life. The excessive growth (or bloom) of algae and plankton in a water body are indicators of this process. Eutrophication is considered to be a serious environmental concern since it often results in the deterioration of water quality and the depletion of dissolved oxygen in water bodies. Eutrophic waters can eventually become "dead zones" that are incapable of supporting life.

A sustainable food system is health-promotive and environment-friendly

- **Addressing climate change with a sustainable diet:** Globally, malnutrition and unhealthy diets are among the top 10 risk factors contributing to disease burden. Addressing climate change with a sustainable diet includes strategies to combat all forms of malnutrition including undernutrition, hidden hunger or micronutrient deficiency; and

diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as obesity, diabetes type 2, and cardiovascular diseases, amongst others.

- **Sustainable eating:** It involves consuming foods that have a little environmental impact or low carbon footprint but are, at the same time, enriched in essential nutrients to fulfill nutritional needs. Sustainable eating is accessible, economic, diverse, nutritionally adequate, safe, healthy, and culturally acceptable.

Measures enumerated as part of sustainable eating and to address climate change

- **Eat local:** Choose seasonal, local, fresh, home-grown foods. A smaller carbon footprint is created by eating locally by reducing food miles and transportation GHG emissions.
- **Gradual shift from red meat:** Reducing consumption of red meats and switching to white meat and fish such as chicken, turkey, seafood and shellfish is a sustainable way for many.
- **Choose climate-smart crops:** Apart from making a shift in choosing meats, it's important to choose climate-smart crops such as millets to reduce carbon footprint and ensure sustainable eating.
 - ▶ The year 2023 has been proclaimed the **International Year of Millets** by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization to make people aware of the health benefits of millets, their sustainability under harsh climate conditions, and their potential as a 'future food' in the context of rapid climate change.

- ▶ Millets such as jawar, bajra, ragi, and barley grow well across the globe; require little crop maintenance; and are gluten-free, rich in protein, dietary fiber, and essential micronutrients – iron, calcium, magnesium, B vitamins, etc.
- ▶ These whole grains hold the potential to address the triple burden of malnutrition by reducing micronutrients deficiency, preventing the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and obesity, and lowering the risk of undernutrition.
- ▶ A 2018 comparative study from India reported that replacing rice cultivation with maize, finger millet, pearl millet, or sorghum reduced irrigation water demand by 33%.

◎ CONCLUSION

The factors that influence eating habits go beyond health and environmental concerns, such as local availability, seasonality, affordability, and preferences. Shifting to foods with zero or minimum carbon footprint is the best course of action to address climate change. However, The key to an environmentally-friendly sustainable diet is growing your food when you can; choosing nutritious whole foods; reducing the consumption of refined carbohydrates, trans-fats, and ultra-processed foods; buying from local vendors; minimizing waste; and eating more plant-based foods.

POTENTIAL CLIMATE CHANGE HOTSPOTS MAPPED FOR THE FIRST TIME

CONTEXT:

Recently, The India State of Forest Report (ISFR) has mapped climate change hotspots in the country for the first time in three future period scenarios of 2030, 2050, and 2085.

◎ BACKGROUND

- Mapping of the climate change hotspots over the forest areas of the nation was executed by the **Forest Survey of India** in collaboration with the **Birla Institute of Technology & Science (BITS) Pilani**
- **Objective:** The collaborative study was carried out to map climatic hotspots over forest cover in India, using a computer model-based projection of temperature and rainfall data for the three future periods.
- **Significance:** The idea behind the mapping was to establish the effect of climate change on forests, species composition, and associated biodiversity.
 - ▶ It will assist policymakers to take appropriate mitigation and adaptation measures to guard the forest areas and biodiversity.

Note:

- It exhibits how the rise in forest cover would improve the carbon sink — an essential pure instrument to combat climate change using carbon sequestration (course of storing carbon in a carbon pool)

Important Information (India State of Forest Report-2021)

- India's forest cover is now 7, 13,789 square kilometers, 21.71% of the country's geographical area, an increase from 21.67% in 2019.
- The states that have shown the highest increase in forest cover are Telangana (3.07%), Andhra Pradesh (2.22%), and Odisha (1.04%).
- Five states in the Northeast—Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland have all shown a loss in forest cover.
- Area-wise: Madhya Pradesh has the largest forest cover in the country followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Maharashtra.

◎ ANALYSIS

What has been found in the Report?

- **Temperature improvement:** It was noticed that Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand are projected to witness the very best temperature improve whereas Andaman & Nicobar Islands, West Bengal, Goa, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh might face the least temperature rise over these quick, medium and very long time intervals.
- **Rainfall pattern:** The report on the hotspots additionally exhibits that northeastern states and Upper Malabar Coast are projected to expertise the very best improve in rainfall whereas half of the northeastern states like Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim and north-west elements of the nation corresponding to Ladakh, J&k, and Himachal Pradesh are projected to expertise "least increase and sometimes even decline" in rainfall.
- **Carbon inventory:** Total carbon inventory in India's forest is estimated to be 7,204 million tonnes. Overall, it exhibits a rise of 79.4 million tonnes in carbon inventory of the nation as in comparison with the final evaluation in 2019, noting an annual improvement of 39.7 million tonnes.

What are Climate Change Hotspots?

- A region whose climate is especially responsive to global warming is typically referred to as a climate change hotspot, hotspots are exposed to greater risk than other regions, compounding the challenges they experience.
- Therefore, finding hotspots and understanding the mechanisms of response enhancement are crucial steps toward understanding, adapting to, and avoiding the risks of future climate change.
- **Type:** There are major three types of climate change hotspots:
 - ▶ Deltas in Africa and South Asia
 - ▶ Semi-arid regions in Africa and parts of South and Central Asia
 - ▶ Glacier- and snowpack-dependent river basins, especially in the Himalayas

- ▶ **Livelihood in this region:** People living in these regions largely depend on their immediate environment for food and income, so they're particularly threatened by any changes to temperatures, rainfall, or the seasons.

India & climate change hotspot:

- According to a recent study on the report "Preparing India for Extreme Climate Events" released by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), over 75% of districts in India are hotspots of extreme climate events such as cyclones, floods, droughts, heatwaves, and cold waves.

Hot Spot Criteria

- **Science Evidence.** Scientific robustness is the most fundamental criterion in considering a hot spot location. To qualify, robust evidence must be there that shows impacts have already occurred in the hot spot region, or are projected to occur in the region as current warming trends continue.
- **Multiple Stresses.** Climate impacts are not occurring in a vacuum—they are affecting a planet already influenced by an array of human activities. The presence of other stresses in a region suggests that the consequences of a warming world will be exacerbated. One example of "multiple stresses" would be unsustainable extraction—such as overfishing key species, inefficient water use

in drought-prone areas, or development that threatens a local species.

- **Climate Change Impacts.** A location qualifies as a hotspot if global warming is already having an impact, or is projected to have an impact. The Climate Hot Map group's impacts are under five broad categories, which each have several subcategories. Thus, for example, a warming world could affect a hot spot by affecting residents' food supplies and putting coastal homes at risk of damage from rising sea levels.

Suggestions:

- Develop a Climate Risk Atlas to map critical vulnerabilities such as coasts, urban heat stress, water stress, and biodiversity collapse.
- Develop an Integrated Emergency Surveillance System to facilitate a systematic and sustained response to emergencies.
- Mainstream risk assessment at all levels, including localized, regional, sectoral, cross-sectoral, macro, and micro-climatic levels.
- Enhance adaptive and resilience capacity to climate-proof lives, livelihoods and investments.
- Increase the participatory engagement of all stakeholders in the risk assessment process.
- Integrate risk assessment into local, sub-national, and national level plans.

VIRTUAL CAMPAIGNING IN ELECTIONS AND ITS OUTCOMES

CONTEXT:

Recently, the Election Commission of India (ECI) came up with a directive of banning physical rallies and roadshows of political parties or probable candidates or any other group related to elections till January 15th. Various political parties have reacted to these directives differently.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- During 2021 India had witnessed its last five legislative assembly elections in the backdrop of a corona-pandemic which is still hovering around with new variants.
- The Madras High Court expressed its dissatisfaction by giving a remark that, the Election Commission should be put up on murder charges.
- On similar lines, Calcutta High Court has also raised concern over the enforcement of Covid-19 health safety norms during the West Bengal assembly election process, including campaigning.
- This time the election commission has preferred to proactively come up with directives beforehand.

◎ ANALYSIS:

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) is responsible for organising free and fair elections under "Article-324" of the constitution of India.** ECI has given ample consideration to its resources and the safety of the voters and came up with the decision of not allowing public gatherings and election rallies.

Article 324: The Constitution provides the Election Commission of India with the power of direction, superintendence, and control of elections to parliament, state legislatures, the office of president of India and the office of vice-president of India. The ECI does not deal with the elections to the urban bodies such as Municipalities and Panchayats in the states and hence, a separate State Election Commission.

- Despite being considered as a timely measure of giving importance to the health of the people, the move must be appreciated. But going a little deeper highlights some concerns, which may defeat the exercise of conducting a fair election as the said directive creates unintentionally a situation where all political parties are finding it difficult to find common ground except-public health.

Issue with online campaigning:

- Difficult to reach people in rural settings:** People in the rural constituency cannot be reached through smartphones and online meetings. The vote base is largely confined in the rural interiors and a sizable number of voters may not be on social media.
- Voters and political parties are not versed with virtual modes:** Neither the candidates nor the people in rural interiors can adapt to such methods of engagement.
- No match to the physical meetings:** Virtual campaigning sessions are no match to the physical rallies and the bond that get formed with the voter might be a miss during virtual campaigning.
- Not ample time given by the ECI to adapt to the directives:** It needs some time to arrange all logistics and permissions for online meetings, as not all parties have enough budgetary backing to do it on such *short notice*.
- Risk of Bias and Influence opinion formation:** There is a risk of bias, manipulation, abusive surveillance and authoritarian control over social networks, the internet and any uncensored citizen expression platform, by private or state actors. Unfortunately, the preparation of the Election Commission in this regard is uncertain when it comes to ensuring vigilance and regulation over social media platforms. Those with the resources will be able to harness technology more effectively resulting in an influenced opinion formation, which may work against the ideals of democracy.
- Doctored Online-preference surveys:** Biased technocratic groupthink may develop doctored online preference surveys to guide the choices of the voters.

Groupthink is a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people in which the desire for harmony or conformity in the group results in an irrational or **dysfunctional decision-making outcome**.

The **Desire for cohesiveness**, in a group, may produce a tendency among its members to agree at all costs. This causes the group to minimize conflict and reach a consensus decision without critical evaluation.

- **Fear of data collection:** Rat race toward the collection of (personal) data, poses a grave threat to the privacy of individuals. It has the potential to enable the suppression of many other rights.
- **Disadvantage to smaller parties:** There are bright chances that many political parties might not be having better online infrastructures due to the availability of funds, and it positions them at a disadvantage when it comes to the conduct of fair elections. New parties will find it difficult to gain momentum as they might be lacking robust organisation.
- **Mundane way of reaching people:** As the online race is relying less on in-person rallies and leaders have to turn to a more mundane way of just a small screen, talking to people. This might not be equally advantageous to those who are not versed with it.
- **Elderly people may not be enthused enough:** There are still people even in urban areas who are not active on social media. The virtual campaign will have an impact on young voters but there is doubt about the elderly ones who may not be enthused enough to come out and vote.

A few Positives:

- **Scope for the engagement with those voters who are otherwise neglected:** The virtual rallies are going to help political leaders and parties to surpass the limitations of location and accessibility.
- **Wider engagement:** Political parties can engage directly with the voters based not just in cities, but across the state.
- **Level playing field (Conditional):** Social media and technology can provide a level playing field, especially for the smaller political parties which can now amplify their reach, given they have the right organisational set-up and funds in place to enforce ECI directives in their campaigns.

Bigger Concerns:

- Some parties are showing their apprehension on the new arrangement of the ban on physical rallies and shows. They do not have any infrastructure to hold virtual rallies. They cannot be expected to hold virtual rallies without the infrastructure in place. This is not in coherence with the idea of giving **equal opportunity to the political parties**

and their leaders to reach out to the voters and engage them.

- Some parties don't face similar issues, for example, according to the poll expenditure report submitted by the BJP to Election Commission in 2015 reveal that the 3-D virtual rallies that they had conducted cost them over Rs 60 crore. It highlights how a handful of parties are way ahead in terms of resources and planning when it comes to conducting virtual rallies. Big political parties enjoy a certain edge in the given situation as they have been focussing on social media for the past few years and almost all their leaders are tech-savvy when it comes to ensuring their presence on social media.

Ethical issues involved in the ECI directives:

- As a public institution, the office of the Election Commission must have faced the dilemma between **Preferential treatment and Non-discrimination**. Preferential treatment, in this case, involves promoting the ethical value of **compassion** towards the safety of people and Non-Discrimination involves the ethical value of **equality and impartiality** among political parties and other stakeholders.
- **Elections**, in any democratic system also act as an **accountability** mechanism, as the representatives become answerable to the public during re-elections. **A corrupt and unethical public representative must lose in elections** and the only way to ensure this is by conducting a **free and fair election**, in which **"equal treatment and fairness"** is ensured for both the stakeholders, that is, **the electors and the public representatives**. This accountability mechanism plays a key role in fostering **ethical governance**. The exercise of **campaigning** supplements the work done by the ruling party and also highlights how **the opposition has ensured the answerability of the party** that was in power during the time. In a fair election, no political party should have an edge based on its **robust funding mechanism** to secure the **pre-emptive defeat of the other parties** participating in the elections.

Alternatives:

- Though **Virtual campaigning** sounds like a promising solution to safely conduct the election, is **not void of biases**. But the ray of hope is that the biases can be worked out to limit their negative impact and can prove to be a blessing in the prevailing circumstances. This will result in better engagement of the political parties with the voter and provide a level playing field for every political party.

- **Free air time on TV channels for opposition parties:** The ruling party already has a huge infrastructure. They are in the government. They also get the maximum electoral bonds. They are ahead of all other parties in incurring election expenditure. **The election commission should cooperate by giving more time to the opposition parties on the TV channels.** The opposition parties should get airtime on these channels for free.
- **Small group meetings in open spaces:** Instead of large rallies and gatherings, the door-to-door campaigns and small group meetings in open spaces could be more effective in terms of giving a level playing field to all the parties.

◎ **CONCLUSION:**

The political parties have welcomed the EC decision and said the constitutional body's instructions would be followed in letter and spirit. They are also prepared that the ban may well extend up to the election dates and are gearing up for that eventuality as well. The technological solution can enhance or erode democracy depending on how it is being used and who holds the authority over it. It can be said that right now, it is controlled by very few. When power is concentrated in the hands of a few, the consequences are not good for the many and it may not be good for the democracy.

SECTION: B

(PRELIMS)

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ADI SHANKARACHARYA'S BIRTHPLACE TO BECOME A NATIONAL MONUMENT

◎ CONTEXT

The birthplace of Adi Shankaracharya in the state is likely to be declared as a monument of national importance.

About

■ Who was Adi Shankaracharya?

- Adi Shankaracharya was born in Kalady in Kerala in 788 C.E and disappeared in the year 820 C.E at the young age of 32.
- He was an exceptional child as Adi Shankara had become fluent in Sanskrit by the age of two. By four, he was comfortably reciting scriptures including Vedas.
- The burning quest for attaining superior knowledge from an early age pushed Adi Shankara to leave his home and set on the search for a guru.
- His quest ended with Govind Bhagvatpad at Omkareshwar (Madhya Pradesh) on the bank of Narmada river.
- Adi Shankaracharya championed the Advait branch of philosophy that declared that god and humans were not two. He then set out to spread the message of his guru.
- From the age of 16 to 32, Adi Shankaracharya travelled across the length and breadth of India with the message of Vedas.

Historical Significance of Adi Shankaracharya

- Adi Shankara helped compile the Advaita Vedanta and revived the Hindu Culture on the verge of decline.
- Along with Madhava and Ramanuja, Shankara formed doctrines that followed and are respected to date in the respective sects.
- The trio is considered the most potent icon of the recent history of Hindu philosophy.

In early November last year, Prime Minister Modi had unveiled a 13-foot statue of Adi Shankaracharya at Kedarnath Temple in Uttarakhand.

How a monument is declared as a monument of national importance?

- The Archeological Survey of India (ASI) designates any monument of national importance and authorises the Central government to 'maintain, protect and promote' the site.
- If mandated by the Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, the monument could be considered of significant historical importance.
- Currently, the ASI protects 3,600 monuments of national importance.
- Last year, the NMA also surveyed important Hindu-Buddhist monuments of the Kashmir Valley.
- The valley reportedly has numerous Hindu sites from the 6th to 8th century and Buddhist temples from the 3rd and 4th centuries.

DECEMBER 26 TO BE CELEBRATED AS 'VEER BAL DIWAS'

◎ CONTEXT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the government decision to mark December 26 as Veer Bal Diwas in the memory of Guru Gobind Singh's sons.

About Guru Gobind Singh

- Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth sixth guru, a spiritual leader, warrior, poet and philosopher.
- He formally became the leader and protector of the Sikhs at the age of nine after his father, **Guru Tegh Bahadur**, the ninth Sikh Guru, was killed by Aurangzeb for refusing to convert to Islam.
- He founded the sixth warrior community called **Khalsa** in 1699.
- The community was created especially for the defence of Sikhism and Hinduism against the Mughals.
- Guru Gobind Singh fought 14 battles against the Mughals and won most of the battles.
- Guru Gobind Singh Ji declared Guru Granth Sahib as Sikhism's holy scripture in 1708, before his death.
- He left his bodily form on October 7 in 1708.

Four Sons

- Guru Gobind Singh had four sons- Baba Ajit Singh, Baba Jujhar Singh, Baba Zorowar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh
- Among Guru Gobind's four sons, two of the eldest (Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh), were martyred at the **Battle of Chamkaur** in December 1704 against the Mughals.

SC EXPANDS MEANING OF VULNERABLE WITNESSES

◎ CONTEXT

The Supreme Court expanded the meaning of vulnerable witnesses to also include among others sexual assault victims, those with mental illness and people with speech or hearing impairment.

About

■ Who is a vulnerable witness?

- A vulnerable witness is a witness to an event such as an accident or crime is a person who saw it.

Issues faced by vulnerable witness

- Vulnerable witnesses find the criminal justice system intimidating, particularly the courtroom experience.
- Under these circumstances, a vulnerable witness may be a poor witness, providing weak testimony and contributing less information than should have been elicited.
- Further, the lengthy process of navigating the formal and adversarial criminal justice system can affect the vulnerable witnesses psychological development and disable this sensitivity in significant and long-lasting ways.

The extended definition

- The vulnerable witnesses will not be limited to mean only child witnesses, but will include
- age-neutral victims of sexual assault
- gender-neutral victims of sexual assault
- age and gender neutral victims of sexual assault under section section 377 IPC (unnatural offences)

- witnesses suffering from mental illness as defined in Mental Healthcare Act
- witnesses with threat perception
- any speech or hearing impaired individual or person suffering from any other disability who is considered to be vulnerable by the court concerned

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR PROTECTION OF CHILD RIGHTS (NCPCR)

◎ CONTEXT

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has taken suo motu cognisance of a video wherein Karnataka Congress president D K Shivakumar met school children during 'Mekedatu Padayatre', indulging children into political activity.

- The commission has said that prima facie there are violations of provisions under the
 - Juvenile Justice Act, 2015
 - Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897
 - Disaster Management Act, 2005

About NCPCR

- NCPCR is a statutory body under the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights (CPCR) Act, 2005 under the administrative control of the Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India.
- The commission's mandate is to ensure that all laws, policies, programmes, and administrative mechanisms are in consonance with the Child Rights perspective as enshrined in the Constitution of India and also the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Child is defined as a person in the 0 to 18 years age group.

- The Commission visualizes a rights-based perspective flowing into National Policies and Programmes, along with nuanced responses at the State, District and Block levels, taking care of specificity and strengths of each region.
- **Composition:** This commission has a chairperson and six members of which at least two should be women.
 - All of them are appointed by the Central Government for three years.
 - The maximum age to serve in commission is 65 years for Chairman and 60 years for members.

Important functions of the Commission

- The functions of the commission are as follows:
 - Examine and review the safeguards provided by or under any law for the time being in force for the protection of child rights and recommend measures for their effective implementation;
 - Present to be central government, annually and at such other intervals, as the commission may deem fit, reports upon working of those safeguards;
 - Inquire into violation of child rights and recommend initiation of proceedings in such cases
 - Under Right to Education Act, 2009, NCPCR inquired into complaints relating to child's right to free and compulsory education.

- It monitors the implementation of Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.

RECUSAL OF JUDGES

◎ CONTEXT

In a recent development, Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and A.S. Bopanna of the Supreme Court recused themselves from hearing a dispute among the States of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka on the allocation of the Krishna river water.

About

■ What is Recusal of Judges?

- There are no written rules on the recusal of judges from hearing cases listed before them in constitutional courts.
- When there is a conflict of interest, a judge can withdraw from hearing a case to prevent creating a perception that she carried a bias while deciding the case.
- The practice stems from the cardinal principle of due process of law that nobody can be a judge in her own case.

Instances of recusal

- The conflict of interest can be in many ways — from holding shares in a company that is a litigant to having a prior or personal association with a party involved in the case.
- Another instance for recusal is when an appeal is filed in the Supreme Court against a judgement of a High Court that may have been delivered by the SC judge when she was in the HC.

Who decides to recuse?

- Since there are no formal rules governing the process, it is often left to individual judges to record reasons for recusal.
- Some judges disclose the reasons in open court; in some cases, the reasons are apparent.
- The decision to recuse generally comes from the judge herself as it rests on the conscience and discretion of the judge to disclose any potential conflict of interest.
- In some circumstances, lawyers or parties in the case bring it up before the judge.
- If a judge recuses, the case is listed before the Chief Justice for allotment to a fresh Bench.

100 YEARS OF INSULIN USE

◎ CONTEXT

It has been successful 100 years after the discovery of Insulin. This discovery and insulin's rapid clinical deployment effectively transformed type 1 diabetes from a fatal diagnosis into a medically manageable chronic condition.

About Insulin

- Insulin is a hormone created by pancreas that controls the amount of glucose in your bloodstream at any given moment.
- It also helps store glucose in the liver, fat, and muscles.

- Finally, it regulates the body's metabolism of carbohydrates, fats, and proteins.

Key-highlights of the discovery of Insulin

- Insulin was discovered by Sir Frederick G Banting, Charles H Best and JJR Macleod at the University of Toronto in 1921 — after which it was purified by James B Collip for safer testing on humans.
- It was the greatest medical breakthrough of the 20th century and remains the go-to treatment for type I diabetes globally today.
- By 1920, scientists had understood the cause of type I diabetes, helping them then put together a cure or treatment for it.
- Islets, a cluster of cells in the pancreas that produces insulin, are destroyed when a person is suffering from type I diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes

- Type 1 diabetes, once known as juvenile diabetes or insulin-dependent diabetes, is a chronic condition in which the pancreas produces little or no insulin.
- Insulin is a hormone needed to allow sugar (glucose) to enter cells to produce energy.
- Different factors, including genetics and some viruses, may contribute to type 1 diabetes.
- Although type 1 diabetes usually appears during childhood or adolescence, it can develop in adults.

WIDENING CAD LED BY RISING DEMAND

◎ CONTEXT

External factors coupled with higher domestic demand has begun to put pressure on India's current account deficit, which is expected to widen further, but it may not be an immediate cause of worry.

About

■ What is the Current Account Deficit?

- The current account measures the flow of goods, services, and investments into and out of the country.
- It represents a country's foreign transactions and, like the capital account, is a component of a country's Balance of Payments (BOP).
- There is a deficit in Current Account if the value of the goods and services imported exceeds the value of those exported.
- A nation's current account maintains a record of the country's transactions with other nations that includes net income, including interest and dividends, and transfers, like foreign aid.
- A country with rising CAD shows that it has become uncompetitive, and investors may not be willing to invest there.
- In India, the Current Account Deficit could be reduced by boosting exports and curbing non-essential imports such as gold, mobiles, and electronics.
- Current Account Deficit and Fiscal Deficit (also known as "budget deficit" is a situation when a nation's expenditure exceeds its revenues) are together known as twin deficits and both often reinforce each other, i.e., a high fiscal deficit leads to higher CAD and vice versa.

Data on India's CAD

- As per the latest RBI data, India's current account balance posted a deficit of \$ 9.6 billion in the second quarter ended September 2021 (Q2Fy22), forming 1.3 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and reflecting a rise in overseas trade.
- The deficit was mainly due to widening of trade gap to \$ 44.4 billion from \$ 30.7 billion in the preceding quarter and an increase in net outgo of investment income.

INCREASING SIZE OF ORANG NATIONAL PARK

◎ CONTEXT

The Assam government has issued a preliminary notification to make Orang National Park more than thrice its existing size for conserving Gharials.

Orang National Park

- The Orang National Park also known as Rajiv Gandhi Orang National Park is located on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River in the Darrang and Sonitpur districts of Assam and covers an area of 78.81 square kilometers.
- It was established as a wildlife sanctuary in 1985 but was declared as a National Park in 1999.
- It is also the 49th Tiger Reserve of the country, being notified in 2016.
- It is also known as the mini Kaziranga National Park since the two parks have a similar landscape made up of marshes, streams, and grasslands.

The notification

- The notification says for adding 200.32 sq. km to the 78.82 sq. km Orang National Park.

What are Gharials?

- Gharials are a type of Asian crocodylian distinguished by their long, thin snouts.
- Crocodylians are a group of reptiles that includes crocodiles, alligators, caimans, and more.

Quick facts

- **State:** Assam
- **Established In:** 1985 as a sanctuary, and in 1999 as a national park
- **Total Area Covered:** 78.81 sq. kms
- **Major Wildlife Attractions:** One-Horned Rhinoceros, Tiger, Maljuria Elephants, Hog Deer, Wild Pig, Civet Cat, Porcupine, Rock Python, Gangetic Dolphin, and 222 species of Birds

Gharial Scientific Classification

- **Kingdom:** Animalia
- **Phylum:** Chordata
- **Class:** Reptilia
- **Order:** Crocodylia
- **Family:** Gavialidae
- **Genus:** Gavialis
- **Scientific Name:** Gavialis gangeticus

PROPOSAL TO TIGHTEN LIMITS FOR POPS

◎ CONTEXT

The European Commission has recently proposed to tighten limits for a range of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) to tackle contamination in recycled products, health and environment.

About**■ What are POPs?**

- Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) are organic chemical substances, that is, they are carbon-based.
- They possess a particular combination of physical and chemical properties such that, once released into the environment, they:
 - remain intact for exceptionally long periods of time (many years)
 - become widely distributed throughout the environment as a result of natural processes involving soil, water and, most notably, air
 - accumulate in the living organisms including humans, and are found at higher concentrations at higher levels in the food chain
 - are toxic to both humans and wildlife

Stockholm Convention on POPs

- The **Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants** is a global treaty to protect human health and the environment from chemicals that:
 - remain intact in the environment for long periods
 - become widely distributed geographically
 - accumulate in the fatty tissue of humans and wildlife
 - have harmful impacts on human health or on the environment
- It sets up a system for tackling additional chemicals identified as unacceptably hazardous.
- The **Global Environmental Facility (GEF)** is the designated interim financial mechanism for the Stockholm Convention.
- **Aim:** The Stockholm Convention is perhaps best understood as having five essential aims:
 - Eliminate dangerous POPs, starting with the 12 worst

- Support the transition to safer alternatives
- Target additional POPs for action
- Cleanup old stockpiles and equipment containing POPs
- Work together for a POPs-free future

Other important Convention

- The Basel Convention on Control of Trans-boundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal was adopted in 1989 and entered into force in 1992.
- The Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure (PIC) for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade was adopted in 1998 and entered into force in 2004.

THAILAND DETECTS AFRICAN SWINE FEVER

◎ CONTEXT

Thailand has detected African swine fever in a surface swab sample collected at a slaughterhouse in Nakhon Pathom province, marking the country's first official confirmation of the disease.

What is African Swine Fever?

- African Swine Fever (ASF) is a highly contagious viral disease of pigs. In its acute form the disease generally results in high mortality.
- ASF is a different disease to swine flu. It does not affect humans.

Transmission

- Its routes of transmission include direct contact with an infected or wild pig (alive or dead), indirect contact through ingestion of contaminated material such as food waste, feed or garbage, or through biological vectors such as ticks.

Symptoms

The disease is characterised by sudden deaths in pigs. Its symptoms include:

- vomiting
- diarrhoea (sometimes bloody)
- reddening or darkening of the skin, particularly ears and snout
- gummed up eyes
- laboured breathing and coughing
- abortion, still births and weak litters
- weakness and unwillingness to stand



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