

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 2

JANUARY
2022

MAINS

- GS-I
 - ANALYSING INDIAN INEQUALITY FROM A GENDER LENS
- GS-II
 - CHINA BUILDS BRIDGE ACROSS LADAKH'S PANGONG TSO LAKE
 - CHILE DRAFTS A NEW CONSTITUTION
 - WORLD POWERS VOW TO PREVENT SPREAD OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS
 - INCREASING RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT AMID SURGE IN COVID-19 CASES
 - SC/ST BENEFITS CAN BE CLAIMED ONLY IN ONE STATE: SUPREME COURT
- GS-III
 - PREPARING FOR A SHIFT IN THE DIRECTION TO GREEN ENERGY IN 2022
 - BRAZIL: DEFORESTATION JUMPS IN WORLD'S LARGEST SAVANNA AS SCIENTISTS RAISE ALARM
 - INDIA'S OLD DAMS
- GS-IV
 - ETHICS OF BOYCOTT

PRELIMS

- HISTORY
 - RANI VELU NACHIYAR
- INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
 - AMENDMENT TO THE JAGANNATH TEMPLE ACT
 - WORLD DAY OF WAR ORPHANS 2022
 - ANTIGUA, BARBUDA JOINS INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE
- POLITY & GOVERNANCE
 - AKSHAYA PATRA FOUNDATION TO HELP ENHANCE EFFECTIVENESS OF MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME
 - LAUNCH OF SMART CITIES AND ACADEMIA TOWARDS ACTION & RESEARCH (SAAR)
 - UJALA COMPLETES 7 YEARS OF ENERGY-EFFICIENT AND AFFORDABLE LED DISTRIBUTION
- ECONOMY
 - RBI UPDATE ITS LIST OF SCHEDULED BANKS
- ENVIRONMENT
 - HIMACHAL BECOMES COUNTRY'S FIRST LPG-ENABLED AND SMOKE-FREE STATE
- SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY
 - TWO PLANT SPECIES DISCOVERED IN KERALA

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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- 2 (JANUARY, 2022)

CONTENTS

Section - A: MAINS CURRENT AFFAIRS			
Area of GS		Topics in News	Page No.
GS I	INDIAN SOCIETY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Analysing Indian inequality from a gender lens	02
GS II	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">China Builds Bridge Across Ladakh's Pangong Tso Lake	04
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Chile drafts a new Constitution	06
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">World powers vow to prevent spread of nuclear weapons	08
	POLITY & GOVERNANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Increasing rate of unemployment amid surge in Covid-19 cases	11
<ul style="list-style-type: none">SC/ST benefits can be claimed ONLY in one State: Supreme Court		14	
GS III	ECONOMY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Preparing for a shift in the direction to green energy in 2022	16
	ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Brazil: deforestation jumps in world's largest savanna as scientists raise alarm	18
	DISASTER MANGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">India's Old Dams	21
GS IV	ETHICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ethics of Boycott	24

Section - B: PRELIMS CURRENT AFFAIRS			
Area of GS		Topics in News	Page No.
GS I	HISTORY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Rani Velu Nachiyar	27
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Amendment to the Jagannath Temple Act	27
GS II	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">World Day of War Orphans 2022	29
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Antigua, Barbuda joins International Solar alliance	30
	POLITY & GOVERNANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Akshaya Patra Foundation to help enhance effectiveness of mid-day meal scheme	32
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Launch of Smart cities and Academia Towards Action & Research (SAAR)	33
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">UJALA completes 7 years of energy-efficient and affordable LED distribution	34
GS III	ECONOMY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">RBI Update its List of Scheduled Banks	35
	ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Himachal becomes country's first LPG-enabled and smoke-free state	36
	SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Two plant species discovered in Kerala	37

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SECTION: A
(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

ANALYSING INDIAN INEQUALITY FROM A GENDER LENS

CONTEXT:

World Inequality Report 2022 highlighted the grave gender inequality in India, which is further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

◎ BACKGROUND

- Gender inequality is one of the oldest and most pervasive forms of inequality in the world and as a result, social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been far from gender neutral.
- As per Inequality Report 2022, while women represent about 50 percent of the population, they earn only about one-third of the labour income for it.
- WEF's Global Gender Gap Report 2021 places India amongst countries with the largest Gender Gaps in Economic participation and opportunity. Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) has declined from 27 % in 2010 to 22 % in 2020.

Though 'women' come from varying socio-economic, cultural, and geographical backgrounds, the pandemic disrupted an already skewed ratio in educational opportunities, access to finance, wage disparities, and other social constraints for them demographically.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is gender inequality?

- Gender inequality is the presence of inequality between male and females in the economic sector which is caused by various economic and non-economic factors.

Recent Findings regarding gender inequality

Though gender inequality is an old phenomenon, the recent findings regarding gender inequality in India can be seen from the following points-

- More time spent on unpaid work:** As per reports, women spend almost twice as much time providing unpaid care work such as cleaning, cooking, providing care to the elderly, fetching water, childcare, etc.
- Labour Market scarring-** It is a concept used by 'Global Gender Gap Report 2021' in which temporary limitation of in-person work has caused permanent and long-lasting effects on women's chances at decent employment in future.

- "State of Working India" report-** According to the report, the imposition of lockdowns has disproportionately affected the feminised sectors, such as the care economy and the gig economy. Only 19 percent of women were able to continue their employment while a vast 47 percent faced a job loss permanently.
- South Asia is hardest hit due to the prevailing social and cultural norms around women's work, aggravated by several other factors.

Impact of gender inequality-

The presence of inequality affects not only women but also other stakeholders like family, society and nation as a whole. The various impact are-

- On women-**
 - Psychological impact-** The presence of barriers affects moral and intellectual growth of women and gains their due place in society.
 - Social mobility-** As economic mobility also affects social mobility, the persistent income gap affects female social mobility, and they are still treated as subordinate sex.
- On nation and society-**
 - Low GDP-** Incomplete participation of women will lead to underestimation of India's GDP as care activities are not accounted for in GDP.
 - It also creates barriers to happiness in the individual and the society which is also reflected in poor ranking of India in Global Happiness index.

Challenges in bridging gender inequality-

Though there is a need to bridge gender inequality, there are several challenges that acts as restraint in this direction. Some factors are deep rooted in Indian society and many are recent challenges. These can be seen as-

- Social challenges-**
 - The social norm of gendered differentiation of labour, thus, makes it harder for women to enter and remain in the labour market. Women are trained in care activities and cooking skills whereas men are trained in economic activities.

- ▶ The conundrum of unpaid care work is only increasing in India given the shrinking family sizes and resulting time poverty faced disproportionately by women.
- ▶ Women are, thus, under the “double burden” of performing paid and unpaid labour
- ▶ Women are considered subordinate to men due to the patriarchal nature of Indian society.
- ▶ Most of the women are socially and economically dependent on men.
- **Economic challenges-**
 - ▶ Most women are offered work in the informal sector, which categorically provides no protection of labour laws, or social benefits like pension, paid sick leave, maternity leave.
 - ▶ There also exists an income difference between men and women in almost every sector.
 - ▶ Factors such as harassment and violence at public spaces or during commute to the workspace further affects working conditions for women.
 - ▶ The Deloitte Global Survey suggests LGBT+ women are much more likely to have experienced jokes of a sexual nature in a workplace.
- **Political reasons-**
 - ▶ Lack of political intention in bridging gender inequality. For instance, the proposed laws for women reservation in state and union legislatures are pending.
 - ▶ Despite the presence of provision of gender budgeting, there is a lack of regular evaluation of laws, rules and schemes.
 - ▶ Less awareness among women about government schemes and measures.

Steps taken by the state-

The government at various levels has taken various measures to bridge gender inequality in the society. These steps are-

- **Political empowerment-**
 - ▶ Reservation for women in panchayats and municipalities.
 - ▶ Proposed Reservation for women in state and central legislative assemblies.
 - ▶ ‘Gender budgeting’ has been introduced as a separate vertical in the annual budgeting by the union government.
- **Social empowerment-**
 - ▶ Legal provisions to empower women have been taken such as banning dowry, minimum age for marriage and creating awareness about constitutional provisions and legal rights.

- ▶ As observed in the Gender gap report (by WEF), the gender gap in primary and secondary education has been largely bridged.

- **Economic empowerment-**

- ▶ According to **Article 39 of** Indian constitution (DPSP), the State shall strive to secure Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- ▶ Entry barriers have been removed for women in many areas such as combat forces and working in night shifts etc.
- ▶ Schemes for education and employment have been initiated like ‘Beti bachao Beti Padhao’ and ‘Stand up India’ scheme.

More needed-

Though various steps have been taken and some progress has been made, many more steps are needed in this direction. Few steps can be-

- **Social security mechanism-**

- ▶ There is a need to enhance the social security mechanisms for informal workers with a special focus on women.

- **Skilling and reskilling-**

- ▶ Upskilling women for ‘hard professions’ and adopting a ‘care lens’ is essential for defeminising care work and would contribute to redistributing it equally amongst family members irrespective of their gender.

- **Political steps-**

- ▶ It is also important to create gender sensitive fiscal policies and educate the masses about the criticality of rising inequalities and formulate a framework of labour laws to sustain in the neoliberal world.
- ▶ There is a need to take affirmative steps such as- reservation in education, employment and in the legislature.

- **Increasing awareness-**

- ▶ There is also a need to create awareness about laws, regulations and government schemes so that effective utilisation of policies can be done.

◎ CONCLUSION-

Women comprise half of India’s population, thus their role and contribution should be recognised and inequality should be bridged by breaking social and economic barriers. To become a developed society, it is essential that Indian society takes everyone in the direction of prosperity.

CHINA BUILDS BRIDGE ACROSS LADAKH'S PANGONG TSO LAKE

CONTEXT:

China is reportedly constructing a bridge near Khurnak Fort in Eastern Ladakh connecting the North and South Banks of Pangong Tso.

◎ BACKGROUND

- Eastern Ladakh has witnessed large-scale troop mobilization after the Galwan Valley incident which resulted in a long standoff between both the Indian and Chinese Army and as per consensus Chinese troops withdrew east of finger 8.
- The construction of such a bridge was expected ever since China started constructing a road near Moldo Garrison this year however its alignment was not clear till satellite images became public.
- This brief aims to understand the importance of where this bridge is going to be located and what are going to be its implications for India?

- The new bridge is being constructed more than 20 km east of Finger 8 on the lake's north bank.
- India claims the Line of Actual Control to be at Finger 8, while China claims it to be at Finger 4.



◎ ANALYSIS

The location

- The location of the bridge is a point of concern. China constructed this bridge at the narrowest point on the lake.
- As per satellite images, the bridge lies east of Khurnak Fort which is considered borderline as per Indian Claims.



- The coordinates of the bridge are 33°45'1N, 79° 1'26E for its northern end and 33°44'51N 79° 1'31E for its southern end.
- Though the bridge does not lie in the Indian Territory however it is located right next to the Indian Claim line which opens another Pandora's box.

Pangong Tso lake

- Pangong Lake, situated at a height of almost 4,350m, is the world's highest saltwater lake.
- Pangong Lake, one of the most famous lakes in Leh Ladakh, derives its name from the Tibetan word, "Pangong Tso", which means "high grassland lake".
- One-third of the nearly 160 kilometres-long lake lies in India, other two-thirds in China.
- It was one of the prominent flashpoints when border tensions between the two countries flared up in June 2020.

How would it help China?

- China has a major base in the **Rutog area** which is taking care of both the southern and northern banks of Pangong Tso lake.
- Reduction in distance:** Earlier, they had to take a detour encircling the lake to reach the northern bank of Pangong Tso from Rutog. But with the construction of this bridge, they would be able to **reduce the distance from Rutog to Khurnak by 120-130 Km or 3 days.**
- Easy troop movement:** It would also facilitate **easy troop movement between both the banks of the lake.**

- **Multiple routes:** A fully constructed bridge means China will have multiple routes to add troops in the contentious area.

Why is it a concerning point?

- **Small step for a bigger goal:** Recently, China also renamed 15 places in Arunachal Pradesh too. And, in light of such current events, the construction of a bridge should not be seen as an isolated case but a small part of a larger game plan.
- **Multiple routes to counter:** With the new

construction, China aims to have multiple routes to counter any possible operations by the Indian forces in the southern banks in future.

How did India react?

- The region where China is building a bridge on East Ladakh's Pangong Tso lake has been under its "illegal occupation for around 60 years", the Ministry of External Affairs.
- The bridge is being built on the Chinese side of the lake.

CHILE DRAFTS A NEW CONSTITUTION

CONTEXT:

The Chilean assembly has elected a new assembly for drafting a new constitution.

Old Chile's constitution is widely unpopular and considered as a source of social inequality.

The new constitution is expected to bring in major changes for Chile; with activists expecting that it will bring new protections for bringing in social equality and Indigenous leaders expecting that it will help establish a new relationship between their communities and the state.

◎ BACKGROUND:-

- Chile, since its transition to democracy in 1990, has amended the Constitution to take out many of its anti-democratic features in the constitution which enshrined the practices of conservative free market philosophies.
- This has allowed the private sector to grow and helped the economy expand.
- But it also led to the concentration of wealth in a minuscule minority, which led to social inequality.
- This led to a mass protest in 2019 for reframing of the constitution
- So, the conservative President, Sebastian Pinera, agreed to hold a referendum on rewriting the country's Constitution.
- Now, 78% of Chileans voted in favour of replacing the charter with a new document.

The Chilean assembly tasked with drafting a new constitution in the South American nation has now elected a new president Maria Elisa Quinteros.



- ▶ An abolition of the private pension fund system
- ▶ Increase the investments in education, healthcare etc.
- ▶ Strengthening of the rights of the indigenous communities.
- This protest led to demand of reframing the constitution which led to plebiscite and majority voted for constitution reframing
- This led to a constitution of 155 drafting members and now they have elected Maria Elisa Quinteros as the new president.
 - ▶ Half the delegates are women in the assembly
- The 155-member Assembly to draft the new document will put the document for plebiscite in 2022.
- Despite the political and procedural challenges, it offers a fresh opportunity for Chile to say goodbye to a dark era.

What will a new charter mean for Chile?

- Through a democratic process, Chileans can bury the old document and introduce a modern democratic charter which can provide a better way for the development of their country.
- It will also pave way for a more inclusive economic and social system that works well for all people for socio-economic development.
- This will give them a new hope for development

Assess the pros and cons of having a Constitution?

- **Pros**
 - ▶ The Constitution is supreme
 - ▶ It avoids dictatorship by rulers
 - ▶ It reduces clash of functions of the arms of government
 - ▶ The Judiciary has more power in order to ensure constitutional supremacy

◎ ANALYSIS

How did the demand rise?

- The initial protests erupted over the issue of small rise in metro fares which soon turned into a mass protest leading to public agitation and demanding reforms such as

- ▶ Constitution is majorly flexible, though there can be instances where even the written Constitution is rigid
- ▶ Constitutions is properly framed and compiled in a step by step manner which idealize the goals of the country
- **Cons**
 - ▶ It is difficult to amend, as it takes time.
 - ▶ It may not favor every part of the state
 - ▶ It may encourage frequent litigation, as people can easily know when their rights have been breached
 - ▶ Delay in government activities
 - ▶ Sometimes it does not allow for flexibility

Way Forward

- The constitution should be framed in such a way that it idealizes the goals of the Chileans and recognizes various rights of individuals which give a prompt space for the development of individuals, thus the country.
- Though various political overreach could take Chile on the path to political radicalism. & lead to turn away business investment and shatter Chile's reputation as business-friendly. Chile is now set for its biggest political change since the transition, the new constitution can pave the way to get rid of authoritarian regimes and socio-economic inequality.

WORLD POWERS VOW TO PREVENT SPREAD OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

CONTEXT:

In a joint statement, permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) pledge to ensure a nuclear war is never fought, amid rising world tensions.

◎ BACKGROUND

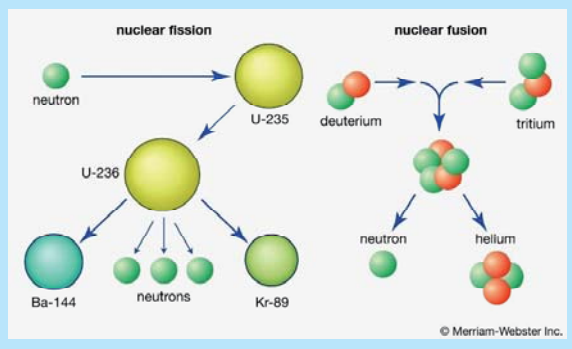
- Nuclear weapons are the most dangerous weapons on earth. One can destroy a whole city, potentially killing millions, and jeopardizing the natural environment and lives of future generations through its long-term catastrophic effects.
- The dangers from such weapons arise from their very existence.
- Although nuclear weapons have only been used twice in warfare—in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945—about 13,400 reportedly remain in our world today and there have been over 2,000 nuclear tests conducted to date.
- Thus, disarmament is the best protection against such dangers. However, achieving this goal has been a tremendously difficult challenge.

The weapon of destruction

- Nuclear bombs are weapons of mass destruction. They harness the forces that hold the nucleus of an atom together by using the energy released when the particles of the nucleus (neutrons and protons) are either split or merged.

Types of Nuclear Energy

- **Nuclear fission** – the nucleus of an atom is split into two smaller fragments by a neutron. This method usually involves isotopes of uranium (uranium-235, uranium-233) or plutonium (plutonium-239).



- **Nuclear fusion** – two smaller atoms are brought together, usually hydrogen or hydrogen isotopes (deuterium, tritium), to form a larger one (helium isotopes); this is how the sun produces energy.

Atomic Bomb

- **Nuclear fission** produces the atomic bomb, a weapon of mass destruction that uses power released by the splitting of atomic nuclei.
- When a single free neutron strikes the nucleus of an atom of radioactive material like uranium or plutonium, it knocks two or three more neutrons free.
- Energy is released when those neutrons split off from the nucleus, and the newly released neutrons strike other uranium or plutonium nuclei, splitting them in the same way, releasing more energy and more neutrons.
- This chain reaction spreads almost instantaneously.

◎ ANALYSIS

Important Treaties to prevent nuclear proliferation

- The United Nations has sought to eliminate such weapons ever since its establishment. The first resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1946 established a Commission to deal with problems related to the discovery of atomic energy among others.
- A number of multilateral treaties have been established since then. These include the

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

- Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests In The Atmosphere, In Outer Space And Under Water, also known as the **Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT)**
- **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)**, which was signed in 1996 but has yet to enter into force

Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

- Other initiatives include:
- the Nuclear Suppliers Group
- the Missile Technology Control Regime
- the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation
- the Wassenaar Arrangement

Key-highlights of the Statements

- The statement said that the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China and France – who are the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council – consider it their primary responsibility to avoid war between the nuclear states and to reduce strategic risks, while aiming to work with all countries to create an atmosphere of security.
- They believe strongly that the further spread of such weapons must be prevented.
- A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.
- The statement also stressed the importance of preventing conflict between nuclear-weapon states from escalating, describing it as a “foremost responsibility.”
- The joint pledge was issued ahead of what was to be the latest review of the Treaty of the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).
- The five pledged to adhere to the 1970 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) which obligates them “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament.”

Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

- The NPT aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to foster the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of disarmament.
- The Treaty establishes a safeguards system under the responsibility of the IAEA, which also plays a central role under the Treaty in areas of technology transfer for peaceful purposes.
- Date of adoption:** 12 June 1968
- Place of adoption:** United Nations, New York
- Date of entry into force:** 5 March 1970
- Depositary Governments:** Russian Federation, United Kingdom, United States
- India never signed the NPT and possesses nuclear arsenals.

What can be the reason behind the statement?

- The statement comes as tensions between the world powers have risen to heights rarely seen in recent decades.
- In Europe, Russia is massing troops along its border with Ukraine, raising alarms in Washington, London and Paris.
- And in Asia, increased Chinese military activity around the self-governed island of Taiwan has spiked tensions between Beijing and Washington and its Pacific allies.

Who has what at a Glance (nuclear weapons)?

- The nuclear-weapon states (NWS) are the five states—China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and the United States—officially recognized as possessing nuclear weapons by the NPT.
- Russia is believed to have the world’s biggest stockpile of nuclear warheads, with 6,255, followed closely by the United States at 5,550, according to the Arms Control Association (ACA).
- China (350), France (290) and the UK (225) round out the top five.

Image - 1 on Next page

The numbers

- France:** About 290 warheads.
- United Kingdom:** About 225 strategic warheads, of which an estimated 120 are deployed and 105 are in storage.
- United States:** 5,550 warheads
- China:** About 350 total warheads.
- India:** Approximately 156 nuclear warheads.
- Israel:** An estimated 90 nuclear warheads, with fissile material for up to 200
- Pakistan:** Approximately 165 nuclear warheads.
- North Korea:** Estimated to have approximately 40-50 warheads (as of January 2021)

Image - 2 on Next page

Significance of the pledge

- Confidence enhancement:** The agreement will “help build confidence and form the foundations of future control over offensive and defensive arms”.
- Building trust and reducing conflicts:** The pledge will “increase mutual trust” and reduce the risk of nuclear conflict.

Image - 1

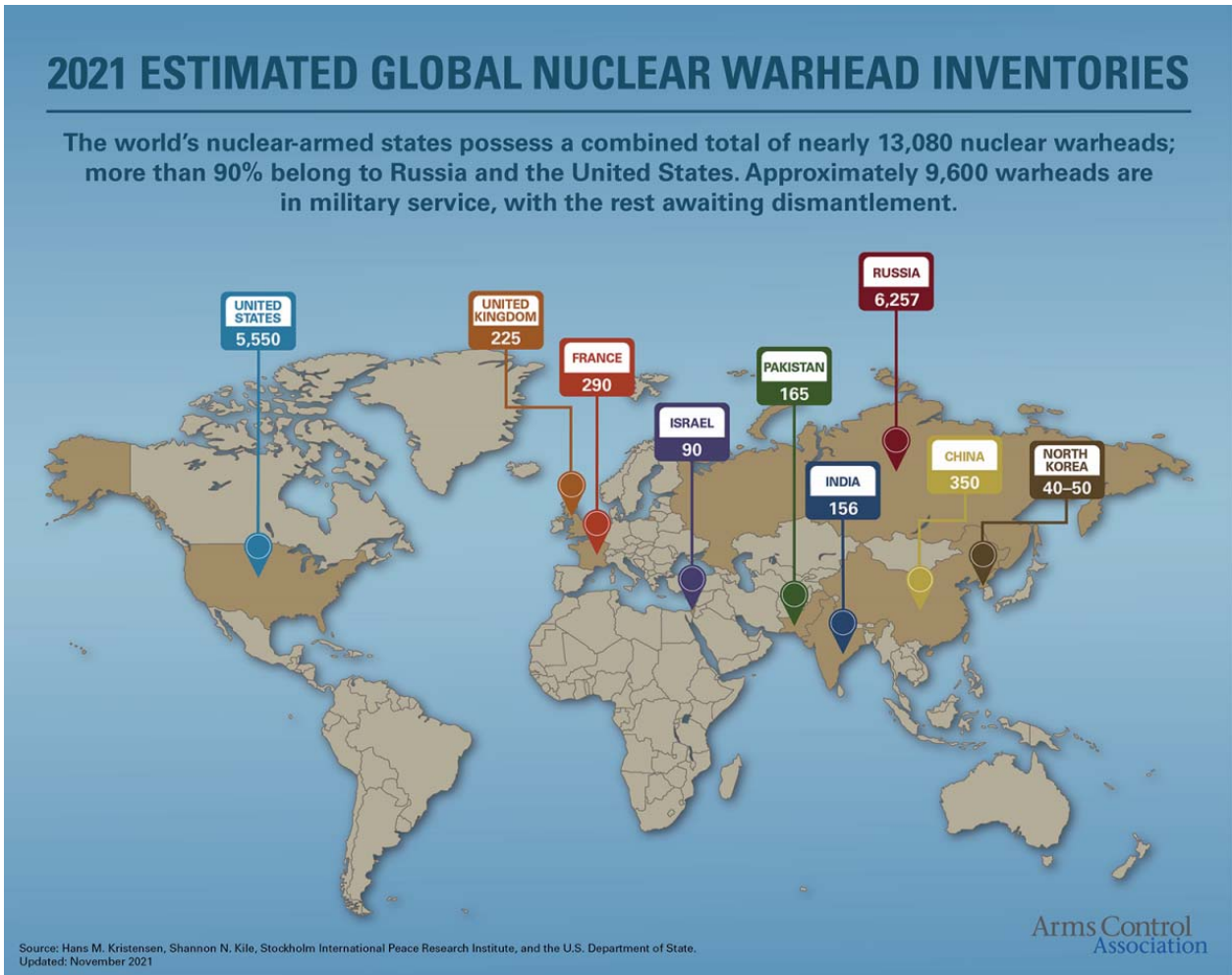
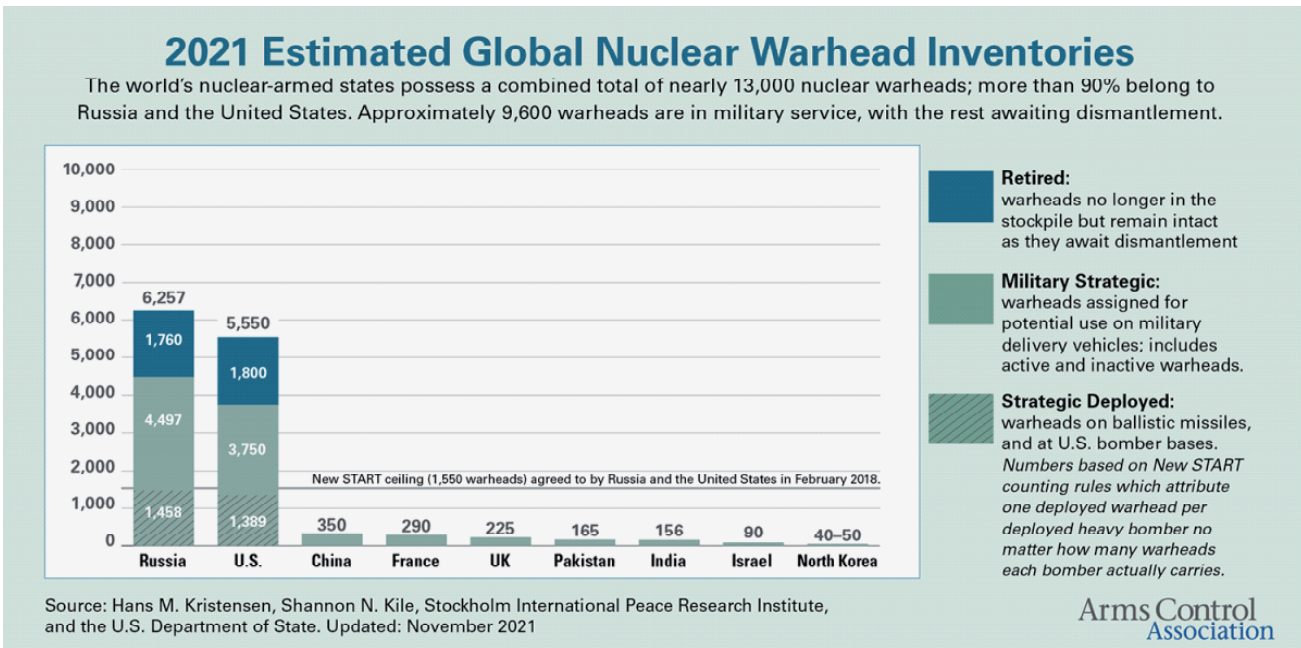


Image - 2



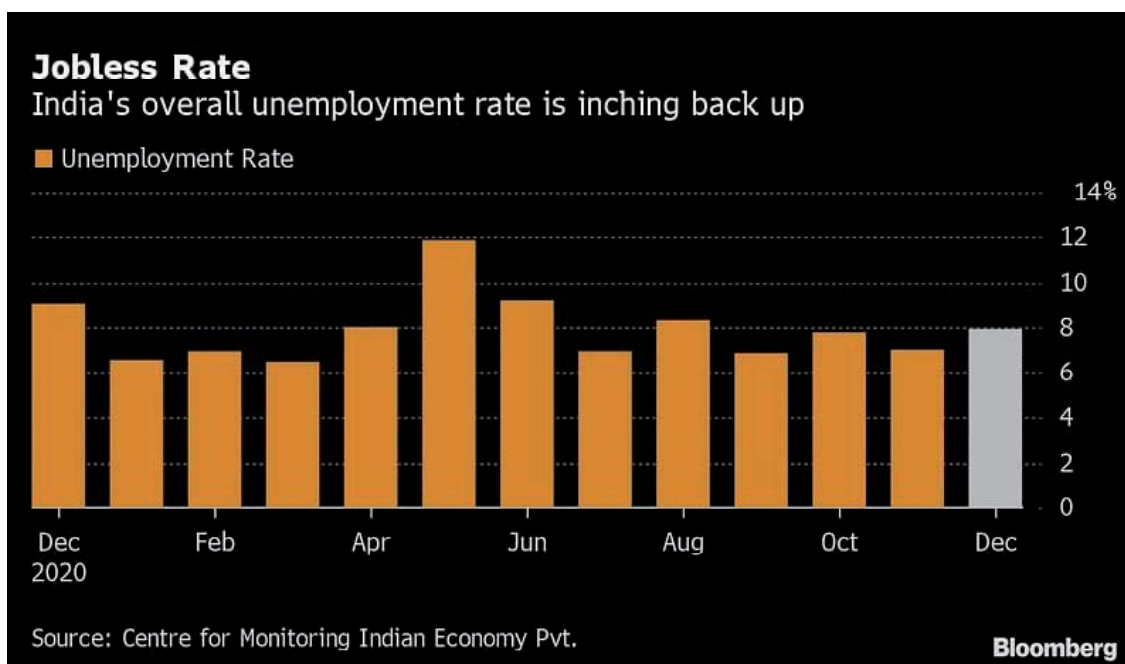
INCREASING RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT AMID SURGE IN COVID-19 CASES

CONTEXT:

Recently Centre for monitoring Indian Economy research has raised issue regarding increasing unemployment in India around 7.9%

◎ BACKGROUND

- Recently the unemployment rate in India has rose both in urban and rural areas signalling risks to the country's economy.
- India's unemployment rate rose to a four-month high in December.
- The jobless rate increased to 7.91% last month, from 7% in November, in both urban and rural areas, according to the data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt.
- The youth have found themselves shut out of the labor market, and the consequences of the pandemic are seen to be lingering for years to come with new variants.
- Although economic growth has rebounded from the depths of the crisis, unemployment has stayed well above 6%.



◎ ANALYSIS

Understanding the concept of unemployment

- The International Labour Organization defines the employed as "those of working age who, during a short reference period, were engaged in any activity to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit" (emphasis added).
- An unemployed individual is under this definition therefore not someone without work, but without employment.
- The difference between work and employment is circumscribed by the boundary of what is considered economically productive, the boundary determined by the UN System of National Accounts.
 - Unemployment rate is the unemployed who are willing to work and are actively looking for a job expressed as a percent of the labor force.
 - The unemployment rate is measured as a ratio of the unemployed to the labour force, where the latter concept is defined as the sum of the employed — not necessarily those undertaking work — and unemployed.

How do we calculate the unemployment rate?

- **Daily Status Approach:** Unemployment status of a person under this approach is measured for each day in a reference week. A person having no gainful work even for one hour in a day is described as unemployed for that day.

$$\text{Unemployment Rate} = \frac{\text{no. of unemployed persons}}{\text{Labor Force}}$$

includes employed and unemployed

- **Weekly status approach:** In the CWS approach, a person is considered unemployed if he/she did not work even for one hour on any day during the week but sought or was available for work at least for one hour on any day during the period.
- **Usual status approach:** In this headline number on employment-unemployment in annual PLFS reports are reported based upon usual activity status. Here usual activity of a person relates to activity status of a person during the reference period of last 365 days preceding the date of survey

What is the labour force?

Labour force refers to the part of the population which supplies or offers to supply labour for pursuing economic activities for the production of goods and services and therefore, includes both employed and unemployed persons.

$$\text{Labor Force Participation Rate} = \frac{\text{Labor Force}}{\text{Working Age Population}}$$

What are the actual challenges in the Indian economy?

- **Inequality:** The first undercurrent: the deepening of income and wealth inequalities.
- **Rupture in labour market:** Second: a rupture in labour markets because of the economic impact of the pandemic.
- **Unemployment:** The third: rising unemployment with weak worker contracts and declining female labour income.

Why is the unemployment rate rising sharply?

- **Pandemic:** Increase in the country's unemployment rate can be mainly attributed to COVID at present. COVID imposed lockdowns led migrants to flee from urban centers to rural areas.
- **Prevalence of unorganised sector:** Absence of a good gauge of jobs in India because India is predominantly an unorganized-sector led economy.
- **Inadequate growth of infrastructure:** Inadequate growth of infrastructure and low investments in the manufacturing sector which led to decrease in employment in the secondary sector.
- **Slow growth:** The rate of industrial growth is slow. Though emphasis is laid on industrialization yet the avenues of employment created by industrialization are very few and not up to its potential.
- **Ailing banking sector:** Issue with increasing NPAs with the banking sector.
- **Lack of women empowerment:** Regressive social norms that deter women from taking or continuing employment.
- **Population increase:** Constant increase in population has been a big problem in India which is one of the main causes of unemployment.
- **Lack of skilled labour:** Lack of skilled laborers to adapt with new technologies and industries.

What are the impacts of unemployment in India?

- **Poverty:** Unemployment can give rise to the problem of poverty and deter the living conditions of the people.
- **Extra burden on government:** The government suffers an extra borrowing burden and rise in fiscal development because unemployment causes a decrease in the production and less consumption of goods and services by the people.
- **Less focus on capital:** Government spending is mainly diverted towards revenue expenditure leading to decrease in spending for capital expenditure.
- **Rise in antisocial elements:** Unemployed persons can easily be enticed by antisocial elements. This makes them lose faith in the democratic values of the country.
- **Increase in crime:** People unemployed for a long time may indulge in illegal and wrong activities for earning money which increases crime in the country.

- **Rise in socio-economic cost:** Unemployment affects the economy of the country as the workforce that could have been gainfully employed to generate resources actually gets dependent on the remaining working population, thus escalating socio-economic costs for the state.

Suggestive measures

- **Increase investment:** A large part of the solution to this lack of adequate jobs is in increasing investments.
- **Spending on Capital formation:** Government should spend on capital formation which can lead to increase in employment and thus the economy can enter into a vicious cycle.

- **Focus on demand size:** The investment climate needs to be business-friendly and government interventions must shift away from supply-side support to spurring demand.

◎ CONCLUSION

- The government needs to come up with policies for generating employment opportunities and stemming the reverse migration from manufacturing jobs to low productivity employment.
- Increase expenditure on MGNREGA and various other schemes which provide direct employability. Skill the workforce based upon the newer technologies and based upon the present requirements of the industries.

SC/ST BENEFITS CAN BE CLAIMED ONLY IN ONE STATE: SUPREME COURT

CONTEXT:

The Supreme Court recently said a person declared as Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe in one state cannot claim benefit of his status for employment, education or land allotment in any other state on migration.

◎ BACKGROUND

- A bench of Justices M R Shah and A S Bopanna dismissed an appeal filed by Bhadar Ram through his legal representative against a Rajasthan High Court's division bench order of April 7, 2011.
- The HC declared a sale transaction in respect of land belonging to a landless SC person was in clear breach or in violation of Section 42 of the Rajasthan Tenancy Act, 1955.

◎ ANALYSIS

Key-takeaways from Supreme Court's Judgment

- Being a Scheduled Caste belonging to Punjab and being an ordinarily and permanent resident of Punjab, cannot claim the benefit of a Scheduled Caste in the state of Rajasthan for the purpose of **purchase of land allotted to a landless Scheduled Caste person**.
- A person belonging to Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe in relation to his original state of which he is permanent or an ordinarily resident cannot be deemed to be so in relation to any other state on his migration to that state for the purpose of employment, education etc.
- The top court's judgement in '**Action Committee on Issue of Caste Certificate to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the State of Maharashtra and Another**' (1994) would apply with full force in the present case.

Who are Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)?

Caste

- Caste is something that is determined by the birth of an individual. According to D.N. Mazumdar

- – 'Caste is a closed class' i.e. class refers to people based on property, business, occupation i.e. one cannot change his own caste system but can change the class system and can be a member of many classes at the same time.

Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are among the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups in India.

Scheduled Caste

- Scheduled castes are sub-communities within the framework of the Hindu caste system who have historically faced deprivation, oppression, and extreme social isolation in India on account of their perceived 'low status'.
- The 2011 Census places the number of scheduled castes in India at 16.6 percent of the total population, or approximately 166,635,700 people.

SC in Varna system

- Scheduled caste communities were considered avarna, or outside the existing varna system.
- They were considered to be a section of people in Hindu society who are not from the four major varnas, i.e.,
 - ▶ Brahmin
 - ▶ Kshatriya
 - ▶ Vaishya
 - ▶ Shudra
- The Hindu four-tier caste system, or varna system, forced these communities into work that predominantly involved sanitation, disposal of animal carcasses, cleaning of excreta, and other tasks that involved contact with "unclean" materials.

Scheduled Tribes

- Scheduled Tribes are classified as marginalised communities on the basis of geographical isolation.

- Primitiveness, geographical isolation, shyness and social, educational & economic backwardness due to these reasons are the traits that distinguish Scheduled Tribe communities of our country from other communities.
- There are over 700 Scheduled Tribes in India according to The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.

Constitutional Provision for SC/STs:

- **Article 341:**
 - ▶ The President may with respect to any State or Union Territory and where it is a State after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State or Union Territory.
 - ▶ Parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of Scheduled Castes specified in a notification issued under clause of any caste, race or tribe or part of or group within any caste, race or tribe, but save as aforesaid a notification issued under the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification.
- **Article 342:**
 - The President may with respect to any State or Union Territory and where it is a State, after consultation with the Governor thereof by public notification, specify the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which shall for the purpose of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes in relation to that State or Union Territory.
 - Parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of Scheduled Tribes specified in a notification issued under clause (1) any tribe or tribal community or part of or group within any tribe or tribal community but save as aforesaid a notification issued under 'the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification.

Constitutional Provisions Related to Reservation in Indian Constitution:

- **Article 15(4)-Special Provision for Advancement of Backward Classes:** It was added by the Constitution (1st Amendment) Act, 1951, as a result of the decision in State of Madras v. Champakam Dorairajan case in which the Madras Government had reserved seats in State Medical and Engineering colleges for different communities in various proportions on the basis of religion, caste and race.
- **Article 16(3)-Reservation of Posts in Public Employment on the Basis of Residence:** Article 16(3) is an exception to clause 2 of Article 16 which forbids discrimination on the ground of residence.
- **Article 16(4)-Reservation for Backward Classes in Public Employment:** Article 16(4) is the second exception to the general rule embodied in Articles 16(1) and (2). It empowers the state to make special provision for the reservation in appointments of posts in favor of any backward class of citizens which in the opinion of the State are not adequately represented in the services under the State.
- **Indra Sawhney vs. Union of India – The Mandal Case:** In the landmark Mandal case, Article 16(4-A) (through 77th Amendment) and Article 16(4-B) (through 81st Amendment) inserted into the constitution:
- **Clause 4-A:** According to clause 4-A, nothing in this Article shall prevent the state from making any provision for reservation in matters of promotion to any class or classes of posts in the service of state in favour of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes which in the opinion of the State, are not adequately represented in the services under the State."
- **Clause 4-B:** Clause 4-B seeks to end the 50% ceiling on the reservation for SCs/STs and BCs in backlog vacancies which could not be filled up in the previous years due to the non-availability of eligible candidates.

PREPARING FOR A SHIFT IN THE DIRECTION TO GREEN ENERGY IN 2022

CONTEXT:

The global price of natural gas has more than doubled in the year 2021 due to gap in demand and supplies. The friction is clearly visible in the transition towards moving to a greener energy.

Thus, there is an urgent need to prepare for a shift towards 'green energy'.

◎ BACKGROUND

- Paris climate treaty 2015 aims to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.
- In this direction, India plans to install 175 GW of renewable energy (excluding large hydro) by 2022 and 450 GW by 2030.
- In 2021, 133 countries pledged to a "net-zero carbon emissions date" and most governments, corporates and civic entities have shown determination to "phase down" and eventually 'phase out' fossil fuels from their energy basket.
- On the other side, a large volatility was observed in the petroleum market. Natural gas prices reached at very high levels as demand exceeded supplies.
- Thus, a paradox is arising where the intention to move towards greener energy is facing a resistance of the fossil fuel energy system.
- For a developing country like India, the challenge is more acute due to the presence of limited finances.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is green energy?

- Green energy is any energy type that is generated from natural resources, such as sunlight, wind or water.
- There are 6 main forms of green energy- Solar Power, Wind Power, Hydropower, Geothermal Energy, Biomass and Biofuels.
- According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Green Energy provides the highest environmental benefit.
- Though natural gas is not a green energy, natural gas plants would be deemed "transitional" green energy sources for investment purposes if they meet certain emissions criteria and replace more polluting fossil fuel plants.

Need for a transition to Green Energy for India-

- The transition towards fossil fuel based on green energy is needed, not only from the environmental perspective but also from the economic and geopolitical reasons. It is visible from the following points-
- Reducing carbon emissions-** Renewable sources of energy like solar energy or wind energy are carbon free and sources like natural gas produce less carbon emission in comparison to fossil fuels, thus a greener economy will be healthy for the environment.
- Economic benefits-**
 - Employment opportunities-** It has the potential to create new sources of employment in production, and manufacturing and supply chain of solar energy or natural gas.
 - Better utilization of natural resources-** India's large barren land in the desert areas of Rajasthan and Ladakh can be utilized for the economic gains for the region and the country.
 - Saving foreign exchange-** As India spends huge amount of foreign reserves on import of fossil fuels, the transition to green energy will not only save foreign reserves but will also improve energy sovereignty
- Geopolitical benefits-**
 - India has set up ambitious targets in the Paris climate summit (2015) and is also a founder of International solar alliance (ISA). Leading from the front to move towards greener energy will highlight a higher geopolitical role for India.

Recent issues visible in transition towards green energy-

As learnt, transition towards a green economy is essential for many reasons. But the global and Indian experience in 2021 showed that there are a number of challenges in this transition.

- **Lack of adequate capital**- The COVID-19 pandemic induced economic issues have impacted pockets of both developing as well as developed countries. This has impacted the capital investments in greener and renewable energy.
- **Impact of geopolitics on energy supplies**- The prices of natural gas are impacted in 2021 for two reasons. First, it was due to a general gap in demand and supply. Secondly, the geopolitics over supply of gas from Russia to Europe has impacted the supply of natural gas.
- **Price volatility in fossil fuels**- The fluctuation in demand and supply of fossil fuel due to pandemic as well as reduced supplies by crude oil suppliers has changed prices.

Challenges on the road towards green energy-

Apart from the recent issues, there are persistent challenges in the transition towards green energy. These challenges are-

- **Unreliable supplies of renewable energy**- Supply of solar energy is not available round the year which thus, can't be used as a perennial source of energy.
- **Lack of capital investment**- The monetary support from developed to developing countries as envisaged in Kyoto protocol and Paris climate treaty has not been met. The transition for a greener future thus is a slow and long process that lacks cooperation.
- **Skewed presence of metals and minerals**- The geology of the minerals and metals required for clean energy is skewed towards few nations, similar to present condition of petroleum reserves. This will create new centers of power in the medium to long run.

How India can move towards green energy (in 2022) by reconciling the paradox-

As the road to greener energy is filled with challenges, India should take slow and clear steps to reconcile the above paradox. Some steps can be-

- **Focus on global investments**- The fossil fuel-based economic system will have to be redesigned and rebuilt for clean energy to achieve scale. The energy transition will be long and expensive which needs collaborative global investment towards solar, wind and bio etc.; and capture and sequester "carbon".
- **Ensuring fossil fuel supplies**- For a developing country like India, fossil fuels will dominate the energy basket in the short to medium term. This market is defined by the "fundamentals" of

demand, supply and geopolitics and the "non-fundamentals" of exchange rates and speculative trade. Thus, India should nurture relations with traditional suppliers of oil and gas to ensure availability at affordable prices.

- **Strengthening strategic reserves**- India is building up strategic reserves of crude oil and natural gas to ensure regular availability despite global price fluctuations. It should accelerate the build-up of the storage capacity as India is largely dependent on imports.
- **Ensuring supply of clean energy**- DRC controls more than 50 per cent of the global supply of cobalt; Australia holds a comparably large share of the lithium market; and China dominates the mining, processing and refining of rare earth minerals. Thus, India's policies should be futuristic and not result in import dependency on China.

Way forward- What more India can do?

In line with the above steps, the government can take more measures at domestic levels to promote green energy in the country. These steps can be-

- **Domestic sources of energy** –
 - ▶ India should create a facilitative ecosystem for the search and development of the minerals and metals in the country so as to reduce import dependency in the long run.
- **Promote alternative sources of energy**-
 - ▶ Multiple sources of energy like solar, wind, hydrogen and biomass should be promoted in isolation or in hybrid mode, so as to promote energy sufficiency.
- **Boosting domestic manufacturing**-
 - ▶ India has already launched many programmes under 'National solar mission' to promote development of solar energy. In line with this, there is a need to promote domestic manufacturing of solar panels

CONCLUSION

In order to reach the path of becoming a US \$5-trillion economy and a key player in the fourth revolution, India should also focus on achieving affordable and sustainable energy supply.

BRAZIL: DEFORESTATION JUMPS IN WORLD'S LARGEST SAVANNA AS SCIENTISTS RAISE ALARM

CONTEXT:

Deforestation last year rose to the highest level since 2015 in Brazil's Cerrado, prompting scientists to raise alarm over the state of the world's most species-rich savanna and a major carbon sink that helps to stave off climate change.

◎ BACKGROUND

- In 2010, the world had 3.92 Global Hectare (Gha) of tree cover, extending over 30 per cent of its land area. In 2020, it lost 25.8 Mha of tree cover.
- Nearly 31% of the Earth's total land area currently constitutes forests, that spans over 15.68 million square miles (40.6 million km²).
- But in last thirty years, more than 4% (685,300 square miles) of it has been lost that is equal to half the size of India.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is Deforestation?

- Deforestation refers to the cutting, clearing, and removal of rainforest or related ecosystems into less biodiverse ecosystems such as pasture, cropland, or plantations.
- Major reasons of deforestation include:
 - ▶ Changing weather pattern
 - ▶ Logging
 - ▶ Mining
 - ▶ Oil and gas extraction
 - ▶ Cattle ranching
 - ▶ Agriculture: Cash crops
 - ▶ Local, National, and International factors: development, land titles, civil wars, debt, lack of resources, and lack of law enforcement

What are the consequences of deforestation?

- **Environmental:**
 - ▶ **Loss of biodiversity, extinction** (microbes (bacteria), plants, insects, animals, indigenous peoples, etc.)
 - ▶ **Habitat fragmentation:** This can further lead to many problems such as territorial conflicts, homelessness (loss of habitat), lack of food availability, migration disturbances, etc.

- ▶ **Degradation:** It leads to soil erosion and loss of ecosystem.
- ▶ **Changes in watershed geomorphology**
- ▶ **Desertification (dry, hot, arid conditions)**
- ▶ **Climate change:** Deforestation simply lead to release of more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, thus increasing the effects of global warming.
- ▶ **Pollution** (ground, water and air pollution)
- **Social impacts:**
 - ▶ Displacement of people (loss of farmland, forest resources, etc).
 - ▶ Loss of culture
 - ▶ Social conflicts and struggles over land and natural resources.
 - ▶ Conflicts over racial and ethnic rights.
 - ▶ Poisoning from oil and mining waste.
 - ▶ Economic uncertainty

What is Brazil's Cerrado?

Image on Next Page

- The Cerrado is the world's largest savanna spread across several states of Brazil.
- It is a vast, tropical savannah stretching diagonally up through the middle of Brazil that covers 2 million sq km, around 22% of the country, as well as parts of Bolivia and Paraguay.
- The biodiversity-rich Cerrado has 11,620 plant, 1,200 fish and 837 fish species and its 200 mammals include jaguars, anteaters, rhea birds and tapirs.
- It is often called an "upside-down forest" because of the deep roots its plants sink into the ground to survive seasonal droughts and fires.

Savannas

- Savannas are a transitional biome, not really a forest and not really a desert – just somewhere in between.
- This habitat is home to many different species of plants and animals around the world.



- The savanna biome, which is a type of grassland biome, consists of areas of open grassland with very few trees. There are two kinds of savannas:
 - ▶ Tropical Savannas
 - ▶ Semi-tropical Savannas

How is the region's landscape changing?

- Over half of its landscape – grassland scrub and dry forest – has been converted to agriculture as it produces soya for China, Europe and other markets.
- The region lost 105,000 square kilometres of native cover from 2008-2018, i.e., 50% more than the Amazon, which has more legal protection.

Deforestation in India

- India reported about 0.38 per cent of annual growth in forest, and saw an increase of about 4,000sq km of forest between 2017 and 2019.

- However, the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown has impacted about 0.67 per cent of global forests, according to the Global Forest Watch Report.
- During this period, India lost about 38,500ha of tropical forest in 2019-2020.
- At present, 24.56 per cent of the geographical land is under forest cover. Still, India is unlikely to reach its goal to cover up to 33 per cent of land under forest cover.

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India pledged to cut its carbon emissions to **net zero by 2070** at the **2021 Conference of Parties (COP) 26** in Glasgow.

◎ CONCLUSION

Deforestation to make way for economic development is a trade-off that the world cannot afford in the wake of the current climate crisis. Forest conservation needs to be prioritised above short-term economic gains from diamond mines, development projects and tiger safaris.

The World's Changing Forests

30 Years of Deforestation and Forest Growth



Where is deforestation happening, and which countries are growing their forests?

Forests are crucial to the balance of the global environment, providing wildlife habitats while being the world's largest carbon absorbers on land.

But over the last three decades, **43%** of countries saw a net reduction in their forest area, while **38%** gained forest area and **19%** had no overall change.

Since 1990, the world has lost more than **4%** of its forests, or **685,300 square miles** of forest area.



New York City's Central Park is about **1.31 square miles**.



685,300 square miles of deforestation is about half the size of India.



INDIA'S OLD DAMS

CONTEXT:

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has recently released a report, which states that Gandhi Sagar Dam on Chambal River in Madhya Pradesh is in need of immediate repair.

India's dams are old and aging and there is an urgent need to assess their safety to prevent dam failure-related disasters. This brief aims to analyze the situation of dams in India and how their grim situation can have a serious threat to the country.

◎ BACKGROUND

- About 55% of the world's dams are in just four Asian countries, including India.
- India has the third-biggest number of large dams in the world, after the US and China.
 - ▶ Of its 5,745 large dams, around 80% are more than 25 years old.
 - ▶ Over 225 large dams are more than a century old but fully functional.
- Older dams in the country pose serious threats. In this backdrop, the Government introduced the Dam Safety Act, 2021.

Dam Safety Act, 2021

- The Dam Safety Act, 2021 deals with engineering, construction, operations, surveillance, maintenance and safety of dams in the country.
- The essential elements of the Act are
 - ▶ **National Committee on Dam Safety:** an overarching National Committee on Dam Safety to be headed by the Chairman, Central Water Commission, to evolve dam safety policies and recommend necessary regulations for the purpose;
 - **National Dam Safety Authority** as the regulatory body to implement the policies, guidelines and standards evolved by the Committee.
 - ▶ **State Committee on Dam Safety** to ensure proper surveillance, inspection, operation and maintenance of all dams in the state for their safe functioning
 - ▶ **State Dam Safety Organisation** to carry out routine inspections, classify dams as per vulnerability and hazard classification and maintain records.

◎ ANALYSIS

What are the points highlighted in the CAG Report?

- Gandhi Sagar Dam on Chambal River in Madhya Pradesh is one of the five water reservoirs of national importance.
- The dam was constructed in 1960 to provide drinking water to several districts of Rajasthan and generate 115 megawatts of electricity.
- Absence of regular checks, non-functional instruments and choked drains are the major problems plaguing the dam for years.
- It has been breached several times in recent years, causing flooding in downstream areas.
- Three districts in the state — Sheopur, Morena and Bhind, with an approximate collective population of 4.35 million (as per the 2011 Census) — lie downstream the dam.
- Gandhi Sagar was put in **Category II** of the dam inspection report.

Category I & II

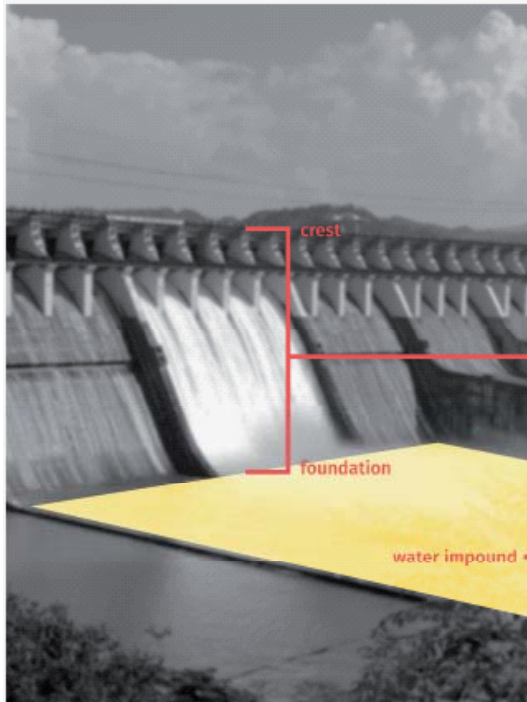
- **Category I:** Dams with major deficiencies, which may lead to complete failure / partial failure and need attention at once, fall under Category I.
 - **Category II:** Those with minor to medium deficiencies, which are rectifiable but need immediate attention fall under Category II.
- The **state dam safety organisation (SDSO)**, the department responsible for its maintenance, did not comply with recommendations by the **Central Water Commission (CWC) and Dam Safety Inspection Pane (DSIP)** on remedial measures.

What are dams?

- Dam is defined as a **barrier built across a stream, river or estuary to confine and check the flow of water for uses such as human consumption, irrigation, flood control and electric power generation.**

- Lately, dams are considered more as **hydropower generators** while mitigation of flood, facilitation of irrigation and supply of drinking water, are considered only as additional benefits.
- A dam could be a central structure in a **multipurpose scheme** designed to conserve water resources on a regional basis.

Definition of Large Dams



Large dams have been defined as per the definition of International Commission on Large Dam (ICOLD)

As per modified definition, a dam which satisfies following criteria is considered to be large dam

¹ A dam with a **height of 15 metres or greater** from lowest foundation to crest

² A dam between **5 metres & 15 metres** impounding more than **3 million cubic metres** of water

What are the pros & cons of Dams?

● Advantages

- **Multiple benefits:** Dams are critical infrastructure, constructed with large investments which provide multipurpose benefits such as irrigation, power generation, flood moderation and supply of water for drinking and industrial purposes.
- **Fulfillment of water demands:** The primary functions of dams are - water supply, irrigation, flood control, hydropower, and recreation.
- **Essential for the agricultural sector:** Dams supply the wealth of **water** to the parched fields of millions of farmers.
- **Meeting water demand of urban and rural areas:** They meet the domestic, municipal and industrial water **needs** of urban and rural areas.
- **Hydropower generation:** They form the backbone of **India's Power Grid Management** since they generate cheap and eco-friendly hydro power across the country.

- **Sustainment of flora and fauna:** Dams sustain the growth of **flora and fauna** in many of the degraded forests.
 - **Controlling depletion of water:** Dams offer a viable solution for **checking unsustainable depletion of groundwater**, which may be inching towards tripping point under the tremendous pressure created due to the growing population.
- ### ● Disadvantages
- **Expensive affair:** Building a dam is very expensive and the government needs to ensure that **strict guidelines** are followed and a very high standard is maintained.
 - **Chances of flooding:** People residing in villages and towns in the nearby area, where there are chances of **flooding**, have to be relocated.
 - ▶ **Loss of land and livelihood:** They lose their businesses and farm lands.
 - ▶ **Forced removal:** Sometimes people are **removed forcibly** to set up hydro-power plants and it poses a serious ethical concern.

- **Geological damage:** The building of large dams can cause serious changes to the earth's surface and lead to geological damage.
- **Acceleration of ageing process:** Climate change would accelerate the dam ageing process.
- **Siltation of reservoirs** is a serious issue, though in most cases the extent of siltation continues to remain unknown.

What are the major problems?

- Absence of regular checks
- non-functional instruments
- choked drains

Why are Indian dams more vulnerable to deterioration?

- **Earthen-built structure:** India's dams are more vulnerable to deterioration because a large proportion of them are earthen--built by compacting successive layers of earth, and not concrete--and are hence more prone to ageing.
- **Concentrated rainfall:** Secondly, the country gets concentrated rainfall every year for a designated time period as opposed to distributed rainfall, which contributes to the dams' vulnerability.
- **Siltation:** Siltation leads to a reduction in the storage capacity of the dams.
 - ▶ Siltation refers to the accumulation of silt and debris behind the reservoir.
- **Flood disasters in downstream areas:** The downstream areas are often exposed to flood disasters even without a dam breach, in which water creates an opening in a dam due to rapid erosion of a section of the embankment.

Flooding causes around 44% of dam failures in India, while the remaining were caused by other factors, including inadequate spillway capacity, piping and poor workmanship, etc., according to the Central Water Commission.

Why are older dams a threat?

Ageing dams could be associated with a number of deleterious and long-term consequences:

- **Safety risks:** Older dams pose greater safety risks, cost higher in terms of maintenance and have declining functionality due to sedimentation.
- **Loss of life and property:** Unsafe dams are a hazard and dam break may cause disasters, leading to huge loss of life and property.

- **Impact on Food Security:** When soil replaces the water in reservoirs, supply gets choked. Consequently, the cropped area may begin receiving less and less water as time progresses. As a result, the net sown water area either shrinks in size or depends on rains and groundwater (which ultimately gets over-exploited).
- **Impact on Farmers' Income:** Since water is a crucial factor for crop yield and credit, crop insurance, and investment, crop yield may get affected severely, and could disrupt the farmer's income.
- **Increased Flooding:** The flawed siltation rates reinforce the argument that the designed flood cushion within several reservoirs across many river basins may have already depleted substantially, due to which floods have become more frequent downstream of dams.

What measures are required?

- **Effective analysis:** There is a need to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of ageing dams, and also to conduct timely safety reviews in order to ensure their operational and ecological safety, as well as the safety of those who inhabit the areas downstream.
- **Structural assessment:** For India, 2025 is set to be a big year as more than 1,000 dams would turn roughly 50 years or older. Therefore, an assessment of the structure should be carried out, and, if needed, the dam should be decommissioned, states the study.

What about Decommissioning of dams?

- Decommissioning is the process of dam removal or demolition and letting the river flow its natural course.
- It is often undertaken when a dam suffers from structural flaws, its maintenance costs are mounting, concerns public safety or poses ecological risks.
- In India, the concept has not caught on as decommissioning of dams is considered a rather sacrilegious act.

◎ CONCLUSION

Dams are a critical infrastructure constructed with large investment for multi-purpose uses such as irrigation, power generation, flood moderation and supply of water for drinking and industrial purposes. An unsafe dam constitutes a hazard to human life, ecology and public and private assets including crops, houses, buildings, canals and roads. The safety of the dam is a matter of great concern. Therefore, the country needs a complete re-look when it comes to dam management.

ETHICS OF BOYCOTT

CONTEXT:

The U.S. government said it will stage what it called a “diplomatic boycott” of the Winter Olympics, set to begin in China

Host city: China was selected as the host city for Winter Olympics 2022 in July 2015 at the IOC session in Kuala Lumpur.

Summit of Democracy: The announcement came days ahead of the U.S. President’s “Summit of Democracy”, with leaders and representatives from more than 100 countries where China and Russia were not invited.

Why has the US announced a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing?

- **Current issue:** The decision was taken because U.S. diplomatic would treat these games as business as usual.
 - ▶ These games could not be treated as such because of China’s human rights abuses and atrocities in Xinjiang.
- **Uyghur population:** The atrocities that are happening particularly against the Uyghur population and the other religious and ethnic minority groups.

The Ethics of Boycotts

- **A boycott:** is an attempt to persuade other people to have nothing to do with some particular person or firm either socially or in agreeing not to purchase the firm’s product.
- **Morally:** a boycott may be used for absurd, reprehensible, laudatory, or neutral goals.
- **Voluntary:** The important thing about the boycott is that it is purely voluntary; an act of attempted persuasion, and therefore that it is a perfectly legal and licit instrument of action.
- **Values:** a boycott may well diminish a firm’s customers and therefore cut into its property values, but such an act is still a legitimate exercise of free speech and property rights.
- **Immoral:** The boycott is a device that can be used by people who wish to take action against those who engage in activities that we consider licit but which they consider immoral.

Boycotts Can’t Be a Test of Moral Purity

- **Cutting ties:** For some people, when they hear about some bad practices, their first reaction is to consider cutting ties.
- **Wrong belief:** If someone is not strong enough to boycott, she lacks standing to object to the behavior of lawmakers and petition them for change.

- **Guilt:** gets in the way of protest, and complicated chains of self-justification take the place of simple chains of democratic demand.

Are boycotts successful?

- **Depends on the success:** The answer depends partly on how you define success.
- **Few changes:** Very few boycotts have led to changes. Most boycotts lack a sustained effort and people lose interest or stop paying attention.
- **Media attention:** most boycotts achieve the more modest goal of attracting media attention.
- **Boycotts are rarely the precipitating factor for change:** Rather, they bring attention to an issue and signal the magnitude and intensity with which a group feels a particular way.
 - ▶ In most cases, a small minority of people call for a boycott that the wider community fails to support by taking substantive action.
 - ▶ **Penalize sportsmen and women:** An international consensus seems to have emerged that sweeping boycotts that include athletes are ineffective and serve only to penalize sportsmen and women.
 - ▶ **Risk of reprisals:** While boycotts may not change policy, they do run the risk of reprisals.

Issues

- **Complete boycott:** A diplomatic boycott, which means no official representation, holds far less weight than a complete boycott which would have meant the absence of American athletes.
- **Other countries:** Australia and New Zealand have also announced that their officials will not be present in China.
- **Power struggle:** It is a reminder of the current state of ties between the world’s two biggest powers, which have clashed over trade, Taiwan and the South China Sea among other issues.
- **Clash of values:** What has complicated that task is a growing clash of values, with ideological differences adding another element to a relationship already in trouble over trade and geopolitical leverage.

Significance

- **Russia:** has announced its presence at the games, underlining the continuing closeness between China and Russia amid their divergences with the West.
- **Counter campaign:** China has seized upon both the U.S. boycott and the democracy summit to launch a counter-campaign.
- **Sympathetic audiences:** China will find sympathetic audiences in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, particularly among those countries left out of the summit including Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.
- **Indian factor:** India has found itself treading the middle ground in this clash of values despite the downturn in ties with China.
 - ▶ While the Prime Minister is among the leaders attending the democracy summit.
 - ▶ India signed off on a statement issued by the Foreign Ministers of Russia, India, and China expressed support for the games.

What other boycotts have happened in past Olympics?

- **Summer Games in Moscow:** The most prominent boycott came in 1980, when more than 60

countries, led by the United States, boycotted the Summer Games in Moscow because the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

- **Boycott of the 1984 Games in Los Angeles:** In 1984, the Soviet Union led more than a dozen countries in a boycott of the 1984 Games in Los Angeles. Although the cited reason was security concerns, there is little doubt the move was essentially a reprisal for the 1980 boycott.
- **Montreal Games:** First major boycott of an Olympics came in 1976 when about 30 mostly African nations sat out the Montreal Games.
 - ▶ They contended that because a New Zealand rugby team had toured apartheid, South Africa, New Zealand should be barred from the Games.

About winter Olympic

- The Winter Olympic Games is a major international multi-sport event held once every four years for sports practiced on snow and ice.
- The first Winter Olympic Games was held in 1924 in Chamonix, France.
- The IOC is the governing body and the Olympic Charter defines its structure and authority.

SECTION: B

(PRELIMS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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RANI VELU NACHIYAR

◎ CONTEXT

Recently, Prime Minister Modi **paid tributes to Rani Velu Nachiyar on her birth anniversary.**

About

- Rani Velu Nachiyar was the **18th century queen from Sivagangai district in Tamil Nadu**, who fought against British rule to recapture her kingdom.
 - She was known as the first queen to fight against the colonial power during that time.
- Velu Nachiyar was born on **3 January in 1730 AD** to the royal couple **Mannar Sellamuthu Sethupathy and Sakandi Muthal**. As she had no brothers, she was brought up like a prince.
- She was the **first Indian queen to wage war with the East India Company in India**.
- She is known by Tamils as **Veeramangai ("brave woman")**.
- **At the age of 16, Velu Nachiyar** was married to **Sivagangai Mannar Muthuvaduganathur**, following which they had a daughter who was named Vellachi.
- **In 1772**, the British troops and the **Nawab of Arcot** came together and invaded **Sivagangai**. During the **Kalaiyar Koil war**, **Muthu Vaduga Arthur** died fighting for his kingdom.
- During this period, **she formed an army and sought an alliance with Hyder Ali** with the aim of **launching a campaign against the East India Company in 1780**.
- She was trained in **war match weapons usage, martial arts like Valari, Silambam (fighting using the stick), horse riding and archery**.
 - She was a **scholar in many languages** and she had **proficiency with languages like French, English and Urdu**.
- **In collaboration with Hyder Ali and Gopala Nayaker**, she **waged a war against the British and emerged victoriously**.
 - During her reign, the queen also formed a **women's only army called Udaiyaal**.
- **For more than 10 years, Velu Nachiyar** proudly ruled **Sivagangai** before she died in **1796 of an illness**.



AMENDMENT TO THE JAGANNATH TEMPLE ACT

◎ CONTEXT

The Odisha state cabinet recently approved amendments to the **Sri Jagannath Temple Act of 1954**, simplifying issues pertaining to **land owned by the Jagannath Temple**.

About Jagannath Temple Act, 1954

- **Jagannath Temple** which was earlier known as **Juggernaut temple by the colonial rulers.**
- **British Rulers in 1806**, issued regulations for management of the Jagannath temple.
- Under these regulations, **pilgrims who visited the temple were expected to pay taxes** and the **British government was entrusted with appointing senior priests** at the temple.
- Later the powers of management of the temple were passed on to the **King of Khurdha** while the colonial government continued to retain some control.
- It was only after **India gained Independence** that the state of Odisha formally introduced the **Jagannath Temple Act in the year 1952**, which came into effect in **1954**.

Recent amendment

- The recent amendment approved by the **state cabinet now decentralizes the power to settle land related issues of the temple.**
- The cabinet has **delegated power to temple administration and concerned officials for sale and lease of land in name of Jagannath temple.**
- Unlike earlier, no approval will be required from the state government for the process. Through the sale of land, used and unused, the temple will also generate additional corpus funds.
- **Earlier**, people who had **occupied or were in possession of the temple land for a long period of time had to approach the state government for sale or transfer of the land.**

About Jagannath Temple

- The temple is believed to have been constructed in the **12th century by King Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva** of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty.
- **Jagannath Puri temple** is called '**Yamanaka Tirtha**' where, according to the Hindu beliefs, the **power of 'Yama', the god of death** has been nullified in Puri due to the presence of **Lord Jagannath**.
- This temple was called the "**White Pagoda**" and is a part of **Char Dham pilgrimages (Badrinath, Dwaraka, Puri, Rameswaram).**
- The temple is a part of **Char Dham (Badrinath, Dwaraka, Puri, Rameswaram) pilgrimages** that a Hindu is expected to make in one's lifetime.
- There are **four gates** to the temple- **Eastern 'Singhdwara' which is the main gate with two crouching lions, Southern 'Ashwadwara', Western 'VyaghraDwara' and Northern 'Hastidwara'**. There is a carving of each form at each gate.
- **The Nilachakra** – Or the Blue wheel perched on top of the **temple is made of eight metals or ashtadhatu**
- In front of the entrance stands the **Aruna stambha or sun pillar, which was originally at the Sun Temple in Konark.**
- Jagannath Puri Yatra is the most famous Vaishnavite rituals observed in India and abroad.
- On the occasion, devotees pray to three deities – **Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Lordess Subhadra.**

WORLD DAY OF WAR ORPHANS 2022

◎ CONTEXT

World Day of War Orphans is observed annually on **January 6** to highlight the problem of children who lost their parents during a conflict making them the most vulnerable and disadvantaged group of society.

- In the COVID-19 pandemic, World Day of War Orphans 2022 has taken even more relevance as the global disasters are sure to have a **greater impact on orphan children**.

Background

- **The World Day of War Orphans** was founded by a **French Organisation SOS Enfants en Detresses** to give the worldwide community an opportunity to address the **difficulties faced by orphan children all over the world**.
- The problem has now further evolved into a **global humanitarian and social crisis** that is worsening day by day.

Facts about Orphans

- **As per UNICEF**, the estimated number of **total orphans increased** from **1990-2001**. However, since 2001, the estimated number of total orphans has **declined consistently - at a rate of only 0.7% per year during that period**.
 - 1990: 146 million
 - 1995: 151 million
 - 2000: 155 million
 - 2005: 153 million
 - 2010: 146 million
 - 2015: 140 million
- **UNICEF** estimates that there are **nearly 9,00,000 children in the Northeast**, all of whom have been **seriously affected by the war**, either through a **lack of education, food, shelter, or direct injury**.
- Children are often neglected, therefore World Day of War Orphans is observed every year to **remember these children and remind them of the responsibility to work hard to diminish the shadow of war** so that no one will be an orphan within the motherland.

Significance

- Civilians in several nations around the world have been the victims of war. Amongst them, **children are the silent victims**.
- As per UNICEF, approx. **140 million orphaned children existed in 2015** and for the **period between 1990-2001**, the numbers of orphaned children have only increased.
- The number of children who have grown up in **war zones is in villages**. These **orphan children are forced to take care of themselves and of their siblings as well**.
- World Day of War orphans is observed every year to **highlight the plight of the orphans and also to remind us that every child must be cared for**.
- Displaced children are a big part of **IDPs (International Displaced Persons)** who are forced to leave everything - **including their homes, places of work, and possessions**.
- It is important that they **don't suffer and die of hunger and disease**.

- World Day of War Orphans 2022 marks a reminder of the issues that are faced by such children and to remind the **world governments of their responsibility to ensure that such kids get equal access to educational and health facilities.**

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund is a special program of the UN devoted to aiding national efforts to improve the **health, nutrition, education, and general welfare of children.**
- **It was created in 1946** to provide relief to children in countries devastated by **World War II.**
- It is **headquartered in New York City.**
- **After 1950**, it directed its efforts toward general programs for improvement of **children's welfare, particularly in less-developed countries and various emergency situations.**
- It was awarded the **Nobel Prize for Peace in 1965.**
- Since 1996 UNICEF programs have been guided by **Convention on Rights of the Child (1989)**, which affirms the right of all children to **enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health.**
- It supports **immunization programs for childhood diseases and programs to prevent spread of HIV/AIDS.**
- It also provides funding for **health services, educational facilities and other welfare services.**

ANTIGUA, BARBUDA JOINS INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE

◎ **CONTEXT**

Antigua and Barbuda recently joined the International Solar Alliance (ISA) as a 102nd member.

About International Solar Alliance (ISA)

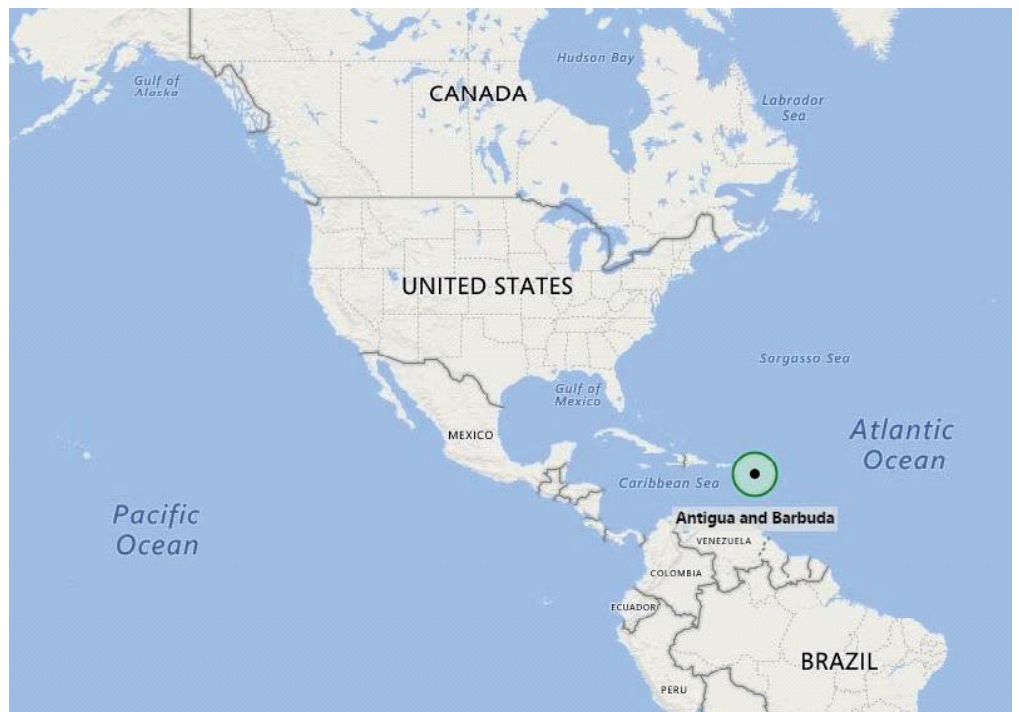
- ISA is an alliance of **more than 120 countries**, most of them being **sunshine countries**, which come **either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.**
- The primary objective is to collectively work for **efficient exploitation of solar energy to reduce dependence on fossil based fuels.**
- This initiative was proposed by our Prime Minister of India first during his speech at **Wembley Stadium, London.**
- This initiative was launched at the India Africa Summit and a meeting was held among them before the conclave of **2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in November 2015.**
- This is a **treaty-based intergovernmental organization.** The alliance will take the shape of an international treaty once its rules are worked out.
- The Headquarters **is in India with its Interim Secretariat being set up in Gurgaon.**
- The agreement will become operational **after at least 15 countries have ratified it.**



- The framework agreement says that the members of ISA would take coordinated actions through programmes and activities that will aggregate the **demands for solar finance, solar technologies, innovation, research and development, and capacity building**.
- The ISA aims to **develop cost-efficient solar technologies and applications**.
- It is also expected to **mobilise \$1 trillion for funding solar energy projects by 2030**.

Why is this important for the small island developing states (SIDS)?

- Antigua & Barbuda is one of the small island developing states (SIDS) in the Caribbean.



- The nation is vulnerable to climate change and its electricity generation is totally from fossil fuels.
- Electricity production and transportation, petroleum is used extensively. And with this agreement in place, the country would have access to not only funding but also new renewable energy technologies.

- India is working with the government of Antigua and Barbuda towards finalizing proposals to avail USD 10 million line of credit assistance in the solar energy sector.

AKSHAYA PATRA FOUNDATION TO HELP ENHANCE EFFECTIVENESS OF MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME

◎ CONTEXT

The Akshaya Patra Foundation (TAPF) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in India have entered into a partnership to enhance the effectiveness of the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (formerly mid-day meal scheme).

Key-points

- India was strategically important for the **School Meals Coalition** that was launched in **2020 with WFP as a coordinating body**, as it implemented the **largest school feeding programme in the world**.
- The partnership is a **strategic force multiplier bringing deep work and experience together**.
- Since its inception in 1961, school meals have been **part of WFP's mission**.
 - **WFP** has six decades of experience **supporting school feeding, and working with more than 100 countries to set up sustainable national school feeding programmes**.

Akshaya Patra Foundation (TAPF)

- The Akshaya Patra Foundation (TAPF) is an **NGO** for children in India which implements the **Mid-day meal scheme in a number of states in India**.
 - **Mid-Day Meal Scheme** is a **centrally-sponsored Scheme** that provides children studying in **Classes I-VIII of government and government aided schools with cooked mid-day meals**.
- The Akshaya Patra Foundation has been awarded the **BBC World Service's Global Food Champion 2019**.
 - **Global Food Champion** is an annual award that honours people or projects that are changing the way the **world produces, processes, consumes or thinks about food for the better**.

Mid-day Meal Scheme

- The **Mid-day Meal scheme** is implemented by the **Ministry of Human resources and Development**.
- The key objectives of the **MDMS** is to-
 - improve the nutritional status of children
 - improve enrollment, attendance and retention rates in schools and EGS/AIE centres (Alternative and Innovative Education Centres)
- **Both the Centre and the state governments** contribute funds for the scheme, with the menu differing in each state according to local factors.

World Food Programme (WFP)

- The **World Food Programme (WFP)** is the **food-assistance branch of the United Nations**.

- It is the **world's largest humanitarian organization**, the **largest one focused on hunger and food security**, and the **largest provider of school meals**.
- **The World Food Programme** Founded in **1961**.
- It is headquartered in **Rome**.
- WFP is an executive member of the **United Nations Development Group**, a consortium of UN entities that aims to fulfil the **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**, with a **priority on achieving SDG 2 for "zero hunger" by 2030**.
- **The World Food Programme** was awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize in 2020** for its efforts to provide food assistance in areas of conflict, and **to prevent the use of food as a weapon of war and conflict**.

LAUNCH OF SMART CITIES AND ACADEMIA TOWARDS ACTION & RESEARCH (SAAR)

◎ CONTEXT

Smart Cities Mission, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) has recently launched the "**Smart Cities and Academia Towards Action & Research (SAAR)**" Program.

What is the SAAR Program?

- The initiative has been launched as a part of the **Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav (AKAM)** celebrations across the country.
- It is a **joint initiative of MoHUA, National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA)** and leading Indian academic institutions of the country.
- **Under the program, 15 premier architecture & planning institutes** of the country will be working with **Smart Cities to document landmark projects** undertaken by the **Smart Cities Mission**.
- The documents will capture the **learnings from best practices, provide opportunities for engagement on urban development projects to students**, and **enable real-time information flow between urban practitioners and academia**.

What is the first activity under the SAAR Program?

- The first activity envisaged under **SAAR is to prepare a compendium of 75 landmark urban projects in India** under the Smart City Mission.
- The compendium will act as the first point of reference for future research in the field and will help disseminate learnings from projects under the Mission.
 - It will also act as a repository for Urban Projects and contribute to the dissemination of best practices and peer-to-peer learning.

Smart Cities Mission

- **MoHUA launched Smart Cities Mission in 2015 to promote sustainable and inclusive cities that provide core infrastructure** and give a decent quality of life to its citizens, a clean and sustainable environment and application of **'Smart' Solutions**.

- The strategic components of the Smart Cities Mission are **city improvement (retrofitting), city renewal (redevelopment) and city extension (Greenfield development) plus a Pan-city initiative** in which Smart Solutions are applied covering larger parts of the city.
- Since the **start of the Mission in 2015, the 100 Smart Cities** have been developing a total of **5,151 projects** with an investment of **Rs. 2,05,018 crores**.

Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

- **Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav** is an **initiative of the Government of India to celebrate and commemorate 75 years of progressive India and the glorious history of its people, culture and achievements**.
- This Mahotsav is dedicated to the people of India who have been instrumental in bringing India thus far in its evolutionary journey.
- **Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav** is an embodiment of all that is progressive about **India's socio-cultural, political, and economic identity**.
- The official journey of "**Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav**" commenced on 12th March 2021 which starts a **75-week countdown to our 75th anniversary of Independence and will end post a year on 15th August 2022**.

UJALA COMPLETES 7 YEARS OF ENERGY-EFFICIENT AND AFFORDABLE LED DISTRIBUTION

◎ CONTEXT

The Ministry of Power has successfully completed seven years of distributing and selling LED lights under its flagship UJALA programme.

About Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All (UJALA)

- UJALA is a zero-subsidy scheme launched by the Government in 2015.
- It is touted as the world's largest domestic lighting project.
- It is spearheaded by Energy Efficiency Services Limited.
- **UJALA** Also known as the LED-based Domestic Efficient Lighting Programme (DELP), it aims to promote the efficient usage of energy for all i.e., its consumption, savings and lighting.
- This scheme is considered as the world's largest, in non-subsidized LED lamp distribution projects.
- Every domestic household having a metered connection from their respective Electricity Distribution Company is eligible to get the LED bulbs under the Scheme.
- The Government of India also expanded the LED distribution scheme to the United Kingdom in May 2017.
- The Scheme was established by replacing Bachat Lamp Yojana.
- It is a joint initiative of **Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) under Power Ministry and Electricity Distribution Company**. EESL has reduced the prices of **LED bulbs by 75%**.

Achievements of the scheme

- **UJALA scheme** has evolved as the world's largest zero-subsidy domestic lighting programme, which addresses concerns such as high electrification cost and high emissions resulting from inefficient lighting.
- Scheme has resulted in significant benefits, through its innovative approach.
- Under the scheme, **more than 36 crore 70 lakh LEDs have been distributed so far across India.**
 - It has resulted in **saving of around 47 thousand Million Kilowatt-hour per annum energy.** It has also **avoided 9 thousand 565 megawatts peak demand.**
- Scheme has also contributed to **substantial reduction in carbon dioxide emissions and has reduced household electricity bills.**

RBI UPDATE ITS LIST OF SCHEDULED BANKS

◎ CONTEXT

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced the inclusion of **Airtel Payments Bank Ltd.** in the **Second Schedule to the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.**

What are Scheduled Banks?

- Any bank which is listed in the **2nd schedule of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934** is considered a **scheduled bank.**
- "Banks which have been included in **the second schedule of the RBI Act, 1934**". The banks included in this category should fulfil two conditions-
 - **The paid up capital and collected fund of the bank should not be less than Rs. 5 lac.**
 - Any activity of the **bank will not adversely affect the interests of the depositors.**
- The Schedule consists of those banks which **satisfy various parameters, criteria under clause 42 of this act.**
- The list includes-
 - **The State Bank of India and its subsidiaries (like State Bank of Travancore)**
 - **All nationalised banks (Bank of Baroda, Bank of India etc)**
 - **Regional rural banks (RRBs)**
 - **Foreign banks (HSBC Holdings Plc, Citibank NA)**
 - **Some co-operative banks**
- These also include **private sector banks, both classified as old (Karur Vysya Bank) and new (HDFC Bank Ltd).**
- To qualify as a scheduled bank, **the paid-up capital and collected funds of the bank must not be less than Rs5 lakh.**
- Scheduled banks are **eligible for loans from the Reserve Bank of India at bank rate,** and are given membership to clearing-houses.
- Scheduled Commercial Banks in India are categorised in **5 different groups according to their ownership / nature of operation.** These bank groups are:
 - State Bank of India
 - Nationalised Banks

- Regional Rural Banks
- Foreign Banks
- Other Indian Scheduled Commercial Banks (in the private sector).

About Airtel Payments Bank

- It is among the **fastest-growing digital banks in the country, with a base of 115 million users.**
- It offers a suite of **digital solutions through the Airtel Thanks app** and a retail network of **over 500,000 neighbourhood banking points.**

What are Payment Banks?

- **Payment banks** were established to **promote financial inclusion** by offering; **‘modest savings accounts and payments/remittance services to migratory labour workforce, low-income households, small enterprises, other unorganised sector entities, and other users.’**
- These banks can accept a **restricted deposit, which is now capped at Rs 200,000 per person** but could be raised in the future.
- These banks are **unable to provide loans or credit cards.** Banks of this type can **handle both current and savings accounts.**
- Payments banks can **provide ATM and debit cards, as well as online and mobile banking.**
- They will not lend to customers and will have to deploy their funds in government papers and bank deposits.

HIMACHAL BECOMES COUNTRY’S FIRST LPG-ENABLED AND SMOKE-FREE STATE

◎ CONTEXT

Himachal Pradesh has become the **first LPG enabled and smoke free-state** in the country due to the **Ujjwala scheme** of the Central Government and housewives welfare scheme of the State Government.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)

- **PMUY** is a programme launched by the **government on May 1, 2016.**
- The implementation of the scheme is under the **Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas through its Oil Marketing Companies.**
- The primary purpose of the scheme is to **distribute LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to the women of low households in India.**
- The programme was initially launched with a **budget of Rs. 80 billion.**
- **Initially, five crores BPL (below poverty line) households** were targeted through PMUY; the target was achieved by March 31, 2019.
- An additional allocation of Rs 4,800 crore was done, and the **target was expanded to benefit 80 million low-income families through the scheme.**
- Under this scheme, towards an initiative for the loss by **Covid-19 outbreak**, the Finance Minister of India, announced to provide cylinders free of cost to the BPL families from March 26, 2020, for three months.

Liquified petroleum gas (LPG)

- Liquified petroleum gas (LPG) is a fuel used in many household appliances for cooking, heating, and hot water.
- It is called liquefied gas because it is easily transformed into a liquid.
- LPG composition is primarily propane, butane, isobutane, butylenes, propylene and mixtures of these gases.
- LPG is composed of liquid or gas (vapor), depending on pressure and LPG gas temperature.
- LPG needs only low pressure or refrigeration to change it into liquid from its gaseous state.

About Mukhyamantri Grihini Suvidha Yojana

- The Mukhya Mantri Grihini Suvidha Yojana was launched on May 26, 2018.
- With the concerted efforts of the Central and state governments, the women of the state had become free from indoor pollution.
- Besides, to conserve the environment, a free LPG connection was given to families with no gas connection.

The progress

- Under the Ujjwala scheme, **1.36 lakh free** domestic kitchen connections were given by the **central government at a cost of Rs 21.81 crore** while **3.23 lakh housewives** were given Rs 120 crore under the **Mukhyamantri Grihini Suvidha Yojana**.

Need of the Scheme

- The objective of launching the scheme was to provide free gas connections to those families which were not covered under the Centre's Ujjwala scheme.
- These schemes have reduced the dependence on wood for fuel.
- The adverse effect of smoke on women's health has also been relieved. Due to these schemes, the standard of living of women has also improved.

Indoor air pollution:

- It refers to the physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of air in the indoor environment within a home, building, or an institution or commercial facility.
- A number of air pollutants have been recognised to exist indoors, including **NO_x, SO₂, ozone (O₃), CO, volatile and semi-volatile organic compounds (VOCs), PM, radon and microorganisms**.

TWO PLANT SPECIES DISCOVERED IN KERALA

◎ CONTEXT

Researchers have recently discovered two new plant species from the Western Ghats regions in Thiruvananthapuram and Wayanad districts of Kerala. These two plant species have been named as

- *Fimbristylis sunilii*
- *Neanotis prabhuii*

About the discovered species

• ***Fimbristylis sunilii***

- It is a perennial plant of the Cyperaceae family.
- It has been named after plant taxonomist C.N. Sunil, retired professor and research guide of Botany, SNM College.
- It has been found from the grasslands of Ponmudi hills, Thiruvananthapuram.
- It stands 20-59 cm tall and was collected from an elevation of 1,100 metres in Western Ghats region.
- **Conservation status:** It has been provisionally assessed as data deficient (DD) under the IUCN Red List categories.

• ***Neanotis prabhuii***

- It is a prostrate perennial herb named after K.M. Prabhukumar, Senior Scientist at CSIR-NBRI, Lucknow, in recognition of his research on flowering plants of the Western Ghats and contributions to biodiversity conservation.
- It was discovered in the Chembra Peak grasslands of Wayanad. It hails from the family Rubiaceae and grows on high-altitude grasslands.
- It grows up to 70 cm in length and is many-flowered with the petals pale pink in colour.
- **Conservation status:** It has been categorised as data deficient (DD) in the absence of any detailed observations and data on populations.

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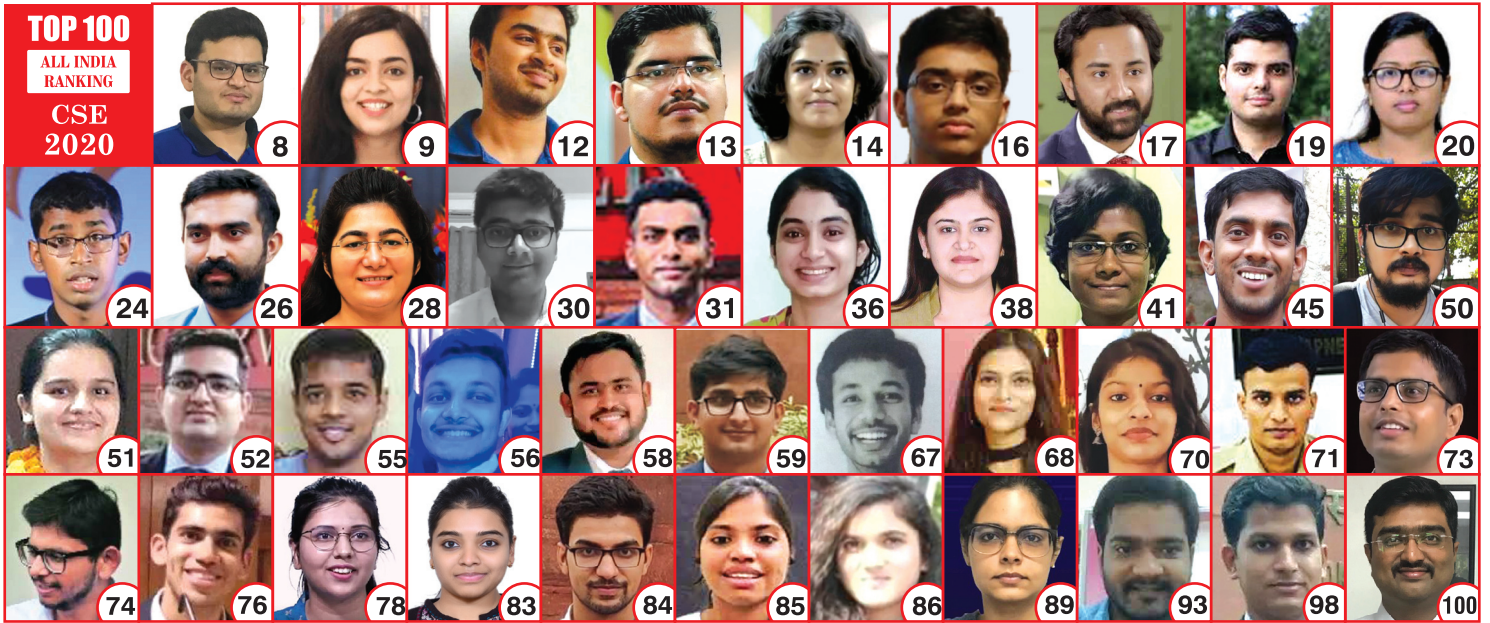
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