

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 3

DECEMBER
2021

MAINS

- GS-I ■ THE CASE OF LEGAL MARRIAGE AGE FOR WOMEN IN INDIA
- GS-II ■ INDIA'S ACT EAST POLICY AND NORTH EAST INDIA OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPEDIMENTS
 - EMERGING TRENDS IN INDO-PACIFIC GEOPOLITICS NAVIGATING THE 'INDIA WAY'
 - CHINA'S INCONSEQUENTIAL BID TO SIGN SOUTHEAST ASIA NUCLEAR WEAPON-FREE ZONE TREATY
 - INTERSECTING GEO-ECONOMICS AND GEOPOLITICS: NORD STREAM 2 AND EUROPE
 - THE SIXTH SCHEDULE OF LADAKH
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 - Why Bengali Could Never Surpass Hindi to Become India's Top Language
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 - US sanctions on Iran have no bearing on India's Chabahar port project
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 - 6 Articles inserted in Constitution: Government
- SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY ■ Assam's tea workers affected by neurocysticercosis (NCC)
- ENVIRONMENT ■ Askot wildlife sanctuary declared eco-sensitive zone

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The current affairs articles are segregated from prelims and mains perspective, such separation is maintained in terms of structure of articles. Mains articles have more focus on analysis and prelims articles have more focus on facts.

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

CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST

WEEK- 3 (DECEMBER, 2021)

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SECTION: A

(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

THE CASE OF LEGAL MARRIAGE AGE FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

CONTEXT:

The Union Cabinet passed a proposal to raise the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years — the same as men.

◎ BACKGROUND

Prior to Independence

- The legal marriage age for women in India was first set to 14 years in 1929. It was defined in **Child Marriage Restraint Act**.
- The same act also set the legal marriage age for men to 18 years.

Post Independence

- After the independence, the law was amended twice i.e., in 1949 and 1978. Both the amendments have increased the marriage age for women.
 - ▶ In 1949, the age for women was increased to 15 and no changes were made to the marriage age of men.
 - ▶ The ages for women and men were increased to 18 and 21 respectively in 1978.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is the current law that defines legal marriage age of women?

- **Section 5(iii)** of the **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955** sets 18 years as the minimum age for the bride and 21 for the groom.
- The **Special Marriage Act, 1954** and the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** also prescribe 18 and 21 years as the minimum age of consent for marriage for women and men, respectively.

What are the reasons for early age marriages?

- **Socio-cultural factor:** The custom of under-age marriage originates from socio-cultural practices with patrilineal households desiring to assimilate women from other families into their households. Early marriage seems preferable due to:
 - ▶ **Ensuring bride's loyalty:** An early age at marriage may ensure a bride's loyalty to her husband's family. In turn, she would be bound by these very ties.

- ▶ **Voiceless:** Her low level of education, autonomy, and empowerment may also contribute to shaping her behavior in her marital home.
- ▶ **Easy molding of character:** A broader spousal age-gap would also facilitate this "character molding" of younger brides, who are likely to be more responsive to these practices.
- **Sexual and physiological development:** In patriarchal societies, marriage is not strictly defined by age. They reflect the social roles expected of girls, and also the timing of sexual and physiological development. These factors may also function as a "social signal" for the readiness for marriage.
- **Economic factor:** The economic wealth of families, which is often related to socio-cultural status, is a common factor cited in the literature on the predictors of under-age marriage.
- **Rural residence:** Also, there is geographic heterogeneity in the prevalence of early marriage.
- **Religious affair:** In India, the practice of child marriage, or **Kanya Dan** (gift of a daughter, in Sanskrit), and the social importance and familial pride and prestige attributed to it, is believed to originate in Hindu religious texts (**Dharmasutras and Smritis**) in 600 AD. These scriptures warned of the social and religious consequences for parents who failed to marry their daughters soon after menarche.
- **Other factors include:**
 - ▶ Lack of education
 - ▶ Less awareness about rights
 - ▶ Lack of empowerment
 - ▶ Lack of say in decision-making

UN Report

- According to a **2017 United Nations report**, India was struggling to stop child marriages and improve the health of its mothers.
- As many as 27 percent of Indian girls were married before they turned 18.

Status and Decadal Trends of Child Marriage in India (2020)

- There are 17.26 million married children and adolescents within the age group of 10-19 years in India.
- Girls between 10-19 years of age account for 75 per cent of all the married children in India.

How does early marriage impact the 'Women'?

- **Mortality:** These vulnerabilities also result in higher risks of mortality among the children of younger mothers. Many of these pregnancy- and childbirth-related morbidities carry a risk of death.
- **Nutritional Status:** In India, at first glance, studies find an inconsistent association of maternal marriage age with childhood stunting and underweight.
- **Impact on overall childhood:** Under-age marriage constrains overall well-being by denying girls their childhood.
- **Lower empowerment:** Together, lack of education and under-age marriage contribute to lower empowerment for women at the individual level throughout the life-course.
- **Low Social Status:** Age at marriage is likely to shape women's empowerment and agency within households and their status in the broader community.

Why so-called 'social norms' are unhealthy for women empowerment?

- As long as families are the main providers of social protection for women, social norms are likely to continue to influence the age at which women marry.
- In India, the role and primary identity of a woman in such social contexts are defined by her purpose in life as a "wife, daughter-in-law, and mother."
- Hence, the principal "option" in life for women may be marriage.
- Social norms will thus continue to shape the age at which this is likely to occur and will also influence other opportunities in life such as education.

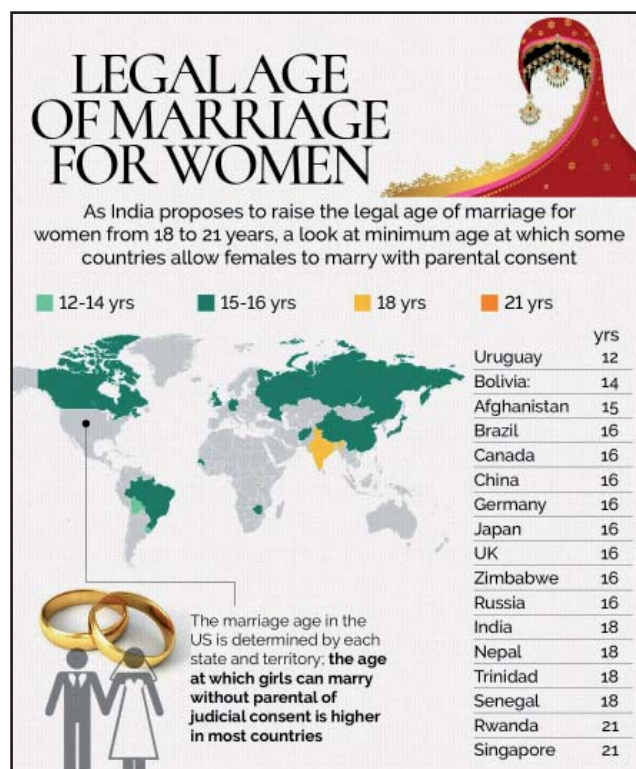
Why women's 'marriage age' matters for public health?

- **Childbirth complications:** Pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading cause of death among girls age 15-19 years globally. Thus, delaying marriage benefits babies as well.

- **High risk of infections:** Mothers age 10-19 years face higher risks of eclampsia, puerperal endometritis and systemic infections than women age 20-24 years.
- **Affected child health:** The health consequences of maternal under-age marriage also extend to their children. When the mother is under 20, there's a higher risk of preterm delivery, low birth weight and severe neonatal conditions.

Legal marriage age for women across the globe

In most parts of the world, child marriage was predominant before the industrial revolution. People used to marry their daughters immediately after they reach puberty. Although it has changed, different marriage ages have been set in countries across the globe.



- The lowest legal marriage age for women across the world is in Trinidad and Tobago, an island country in the Caribbean. The marriage age for women in the island country is 18 years, however, Muslims and Hindus have their own marriage act.
 - ▶ According to the act, the island's Muslim girls can marry at the age of 12 years whereas Hindu girls can marry after they turn 14.
- The second lowest legal marriage age for women is in Iran i.e., 13 years.
- The highest legal marriage age for women is in China i.e., 20 years.

Can raising marriage age end up backfiring instead?

- The idea of a legal fix to postpone girls' marriage might not be a good way to discourage early marriage or improve maternal health and might end up backfiring instead.
- **Criminal prosecution of underage couples:** In India, parents generally arrange marriages, typically within the same religion or caste. So young couples sometimes run away from home to marry, and if they're over 18, their decision to marry is legally sound and can't be disputed by parents.
 - An increase in the legal age for marriage would mean those in the 18-to-21 age bracket who elope to marry would become criminals.
- **Lack of personal decision-making:** The outcome of the law will render girls voiceless in personal decision-making for longer, with legal backing.

What other measures are required?

- **Focus on proper education:** Lack of educational

opportunities is often what drives parents into marrying their daughters at a young age. Keeping girls in school, especially secondary school, is a key strategy in reducing child marriage.

- **Family education and awareness:** Educating families, friends, and community about why early marriage is harmful is essential.
- **More focus on women's empowerment rather than marriage**

Way Forward

- Following the Cabinet's approval, the Government will introduce an amendment to the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**, and consequently bring amendments to the **Special Marriage Act** and personal laws such as the **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955**.
- However, delaying women's marriage age is not going to happen on papers. It will invariably require changing the norms underpinning the practice of early marriage and also the low status accorded to women in society.

INDIA'S ACT EAST POLICY AND NORTH EAST INDIA OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPEDIMENTS

CONTEXT:

The focus on North East India is crucial for inclusive and balanced growth of the country, and Act East Policy is a crucial step in this direction.

This brief attempts to analyse India's Act East Policy, various opportunities and challenges associated with it.

◎ BACKGROUND

- India announced 'Look East policy' in 1991 which was aimed at a shift in foreign policy towards ASEAN and other East Asian countries.
 - Taking this forward, India announced 'Act East policy' in 2014 which is a step forward in this direction.
 - In this background, the policy is crucial for India in general and North East India in particular.
 - Understanding the opportunities and impediments for North East region, India could gain maximum from the policy.
- India is an active member of East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum.
 - It is also involved in other regional forums like BIMSTEC, IORA and Mekong Ganga Cooperation.
 - Infrastructure, Trade & Commerce Ties-
 - India is one of the largest trading partners of ASEAN.
 - ASEAN - India Free Trade Area is in effect since 2010. Some key projects are Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project, Border Haats etc.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is 'Act East Policy' of India?

- It was announced by the government of India in 2014 with a strengthened focus on the eastern region of India.
- It includes countries like ASEAN, Japan, and South Korea etc.
- The key focus areas of the policy are-**
 - Economic ties
 - Social-Cultural ties
 - Political ties
 - Strengthen Security ties

As against other countries, India's leverages G2G contacts as well as P2P exchanges to meet the key areas.

India and the East

In the direction of 'Act East Policy', a vast array of institutional mechanisms binds India's partnership in forums like annual summit, strategic dialogue, defense dialogue, and numerous forums on energy cooperation, counter-terrorism, U.N. reforms, cyber security, and maritime cooperation. Some of these are

- India-ASEAN**
 - Institutional mechanisms, Regional forums-



◎ India-Japan

- India and Japan have institutionalized 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue.
- Both countries are also involved in Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue).
- India-Japan Act East Forum** provides a platform for India-Japan collaboration under the rubric of India's "Act East Policy" and Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy"

- ▶ Japanese Investments are flowing into vital sectors like chemical, automobile, pharmaceuticals and telecommunications.

◉ India-South Korea

- ▶ India and South Korea have forged several bilateral mechanisms to strengthen their partnership.
- ▶ The trade between both is growing at a large pace. South Korea has a huge presence in Indian automobile market through Hyundai and in the electronics segment through Samsung, LG.

◉ India- Australia

- ▶ India and Australia have gotten closer strategically, in an effort to counter China.

Opportunities for North east India from India's Act East policy-

◉ Economic & Connectivity-

- ▶ The region will directly benefit from the economic projects with ASEAN like **Kaladan multi modal project** and Free trade agreement with ASEAN.
- ▶ Infrastructure connectivity projects like **Urja Ganga project** will connect **North east Grid** with **National Grid**. **National waterway 2** will boost affordable intra-region connectivity.
- ▶ The ASEAN region and Japan can act as a ready market for industries in the North east region.



◉ Cultural-

- ▶ The ancient cultural connectivity between North east region and ASEAN will act a key for people to people connectivity and promote regional peace and inter-government relationship.
- ▶ Further, India has historical connectivity with Eastern region through spread of Buddhist values in South East Asia, Japan and China.

◉ Strategic-

- ▶ The eastern region is significant in the changing geopolitical scenario in which significance of Indo-Pacific is growing. North east is the key to connect with the region in the changing scenario.
- ▶ The border dispute as considered by China in the North east region required better cooperation with other regional countries and also boosting infrastructure in the region.

◉ Political-

- ▶ Multiple means of Institutional framework are promoting India's cooperation with the region which acts as a bridge among nations.
- ▶ India has been cooperating with not only democracies but also Military rule in Myanmar reflects flexibility in partnership.

- ▶ India has been able to do surgical strikes in Myanmar against anti India groups due to smooth cooperation between the two.

Impediments for North East in harnessing opportunities-

While the policy is well intentioned, there are certain challenges that need to be tackled at domestic as well as international levels to make it a success. Some of the impediments are-

◉ Political-

- ▶ Chinese intervention in the region as the country considers some areas as part of China.
- ▶ China has gained round among ethnic Chinese across the region. It is also assumed that certain anti- India groups has linkages with groups in Myanmar and China
- ▶ Naga peace talks have not been successful and people protest against AFSPA regularly.

◉ Economic-

- ▶ First, unstable political environment in the region pushes away economic investments in the region from the eastern partners.
- ▶ Second, the pandemic has further tightened the domestic spending in the region.

◉ Others-

- ▶ China views India as a rival in the Indo pacific region and it pushing infrastructure connectivity in border areas at a faster pace. Secondly, deep pockets of China make it easy to connect the region through its projects like Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- ▶ Inadequate connectivity of the region with the mainstream.

Suggestive measures

While there are a lot of domestic and regional challenges, 'Act East policy' act as a catalyst to connect the North eastern India with the ASEAN and beyond. Some more steps can be taken in this direction-

- ◉ Moving along the policy of Non-aligned movement, India can chalk out its own way in connecting with the

region that can boost industrial growth in the region.

- ◉ Highlighting the cultural ties along the Buddhism and Hinduism, and the current connection through Indian diaspora, India can have better people to people contacts than China in the region.
- ◉ Student exchanges with partner countries mainly from the North east, can promote better cooperation and remittances in the region.
- ◉ Lastly, investing in domestic political issues and resolving anti India sentiments can lure sustainable political investments in the region.

◎ CONCLUSION-

North east region with its ethnic, cultural and border connections can act as a gateway to the eastern region and make 'Act East policy' a success.

EMERGING TRENDS IN INDO-PACIFIC GEOPOLITICS NAVIGATING THE 'INDIA WAY'

CONTEXT:

Indo-pacific region has gained significance in the last decade. The pandemic times have showed the emergence of new groups that make it necessary for India to approach the region in its own way.

◎ BACKGROUND

- Recently, AUKUS security pact has been signed aimed at supply of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia which is looked at concern by China.
- Similarly, China showed its willingness to sign **Bangkok treaty** that recognises ASEAN region as the **nuclear weapon free zone**.
- In this background, India has a potential to showcase 'India way' of approaching towards the Indo-pacific region.

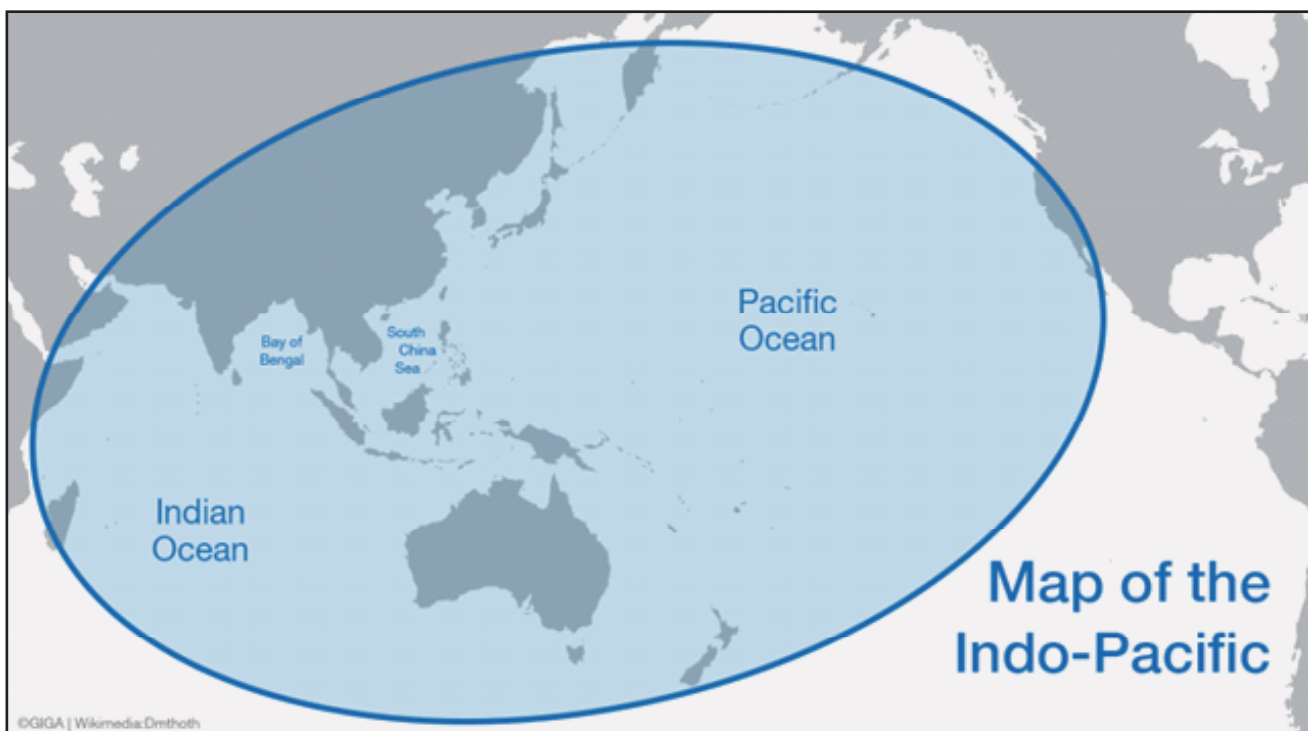
What is 'India way'?

- It is a new feature of policy highlighted by India's foreign minister at the **'Raisina dialogue'**.
- It aims at 'purposeful, pragmatic and proactive' partnerships. It showcases India to be a decider or a stabiliser than a disrupter.
- It also aims India to be a **net security provider** and a dispenser of global good.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is Indo pacific region?

- The Indo-Pacific region refers to the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, which interconnect in Southeast Asia.
- Stretching from the west coast of the United States to the west coast of India, it is a 24 nation's regional framework comprising the tropical waters of the Indian Ocean, the western and central Pacific Ocean, and the seas connecting the two.
- The term "Indo-Pacific" is being used increasingly in the geopolitical discourse.
- As a framework, the Indo-Pacific seeks to create a connected multi-polar region that must be governed by commonly agreed international norms, rules and practices.
- The term "Indo-Pacific" refers to the maritime space stretching from the Indian Ocean, across the littorals of East Asia to the western Pacific Ocean.



The German geopolitician **Karl Haushofer** first used "Indo-Pacific" in the 1920s in multiple works on geography and geopolitics: Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean (1924), Building Blocks of Geopolitics (1928), Geopolitics of Pan-Ideas (1931), and German Cultural Politics in the Indo-Pacific Space (1939).

Significance of the region-

- **Economic-**
 - ▶ Several studies show that at least 50 percent of global GDP will be shared by the Indo-Pacific region. Majority of the world's maritime trade passes through these oceans.
 - ▶ China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has expanded its economic and military foothold in the Indian Ocean.
- **Security-**
 - ▶ Many of the key choke points of maritime trade are present in the region like **Malacca Strait**.
 - ▶ Most of the world population lies in the region and it has also been a key region of geopolitics in the Second World War.

Significance of Indo-Pacific region for India-

- The area is significant for India as it holds solutions to our political, economic, connectivity, travel, and societal interests.
- **Collaborative solutions:** It provides collaborative solutions to shared concerns such as safety and security of the maritime domain. In this light, India is actively engaged in bilateral and multilateral military exercises.
 - ▶ For instance, **Malabar exercise** is a multilateral war-gaming naval exercise held in the Indian Ocean.
- **Showcasing power:** It is also an opportunity to showcase itself as a leading power in the region that is willing to step up.
 - ▶ **For instance,** India is assisting countries with Hydrographic survey support for charting of water, especially in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**
- **Regional leadership:** In the times of pandemic, there is a greater potential for India to showcase regional leadership in the region. The efforts of vaccine development and export can showcase India's ability to rise to the call of burden sharing by global powers.

Emerging trends in the Indo-Pacific-

Realizing the importance of the region, many regional groupings have emerged in the Indo-Pacific region based on different thoughts and ideas. While

everyone focuses on an "Equitable rule based order" and "Free and open Indo-Pacific", there are some differences among them.

• Groupings based on leadership

- **China led groups-** China is keen on expanding its global footprint using Indo-Pacific as its stronghold, similar to USA hegemony in the Americas. Some China led groups are-
 - ▶ Belt and Road initiative (BRI) initiative
- **USA led alignments-** USA views Indo-Pacific as an important region for securing American centrality.
 - ▶ QUAD and QUAD plus
 - ▶ AUKUS security pact
- **ASEAN led groups-** Focus of ASEAN is on maintaining ASEAN centrality in the discussions for the region and spreading ASEAN way. It refers to the consensus-based, non-conflictual and non-interference way of addressing problems by quiet diplomacy rather than bringing into public forum.
 - ▶ ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)
 - ▶ ASEAN plus 6 or East ASEAN summit- ASEAN
 - ▶ Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)- It's a 11 member economic pact among ASEAN and other countries along the Pacific ocean.

• Based on motive-

◦ Issue based coalitions-

These are gaining importance due to greater flexibility and more functional collaboration rather than a rigid and ideology based format. The groupings based on economic, security, tech and strategic partnerships are bound to be more successful than ideology based. Some key examples are-

- **QUAD and its expanded formats, namely Quad plus-** They focus on ways to coordinate on vaccine development and to boost economic recovery in the times of pandemic.
- **Blue Dot Network-** It is aimed to grade infrastructure financing across the Indo-Pacific to ensure transparency and confidence amongst economically weaker countries.
- **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative-** It is an initiative between India, Japan, and Australia was undertaken to build resilience of supply chains to ensure dependable sources of supply and attract investment.
- **Other groups-** There are also some groups working in critical technologies, vaccines, climate change, space, biotech, and 5G—aimed to develop norms and global standards—are a case in point. Pitching India as a trusted source in IT and pharma supply chains, PM of India, in recent COP26 summit in Glasgow, reiterated India's willingness to participate in the clean technology supply chain to reduce over-reliance on China.

Ideology based groupings-

- These include like-minded countries working together in bilateral and multilateral formats to expand global initiatives within their own national agendas.
- A focused effort on building capacity of countries in the Indo-Pacific to give them viable alternatives which go beyond binaries formed around ideological and political contestation.

India led efforts with 'Like-minded countries-

India is keen on expanding in the Indo Pacific region by focusing on India's way and securing her economic, social and security concerns. There is a growing institutionalization of like-minded countries to align with national agenda. For instance

- **India led groups-** India has sought to leverage its bilateral relationships to bolster the India-led multilateral platforms—The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative and The Global Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.
- **Proposed groups-** India also tabled the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI) at the East Asia Summit in 2019, aimed to invite "practical cooperation as an open, non-treaty-based global initiative" building upon ASEAN-led frameworks

- **Cooperation with middle powers-** The growing contestation between democratic countries and authoritarian systems have led middle powers to cooperate and focus on capacity building, going beyond binaries and enable the region to grow peacefully. The new priorities of the post-COVID world—health security and vaccine development, digital delivery, and green growth—all fall in this arena.
- **Infrastructure diplomacy:** India's infrastructure diplomacy and development assistance in the neighborhood is also aimed at synergizing efforts with like-minded partners to provide viable alternatives. India has emerged as reliable cross-border electricity provider to Nepal and other South Asian partners.

◎ CONCLUSION

Whether it's the Quad format or the debate around the AUKUS, India seems to be working on a broader mandate of human security, greater consensus, collaboration and complementarity. India's way as a complimentary to ASEAN's way can lead to a more secure, developed, free and open Indo Pacific region with focus on multilaterals.

CHINA'S INCONSEQUENTIAL BID TO SIGN SOUTHEAST ASIA NUCLEAR WEAPON-FREE ZONE TREATY

CONTEXT:

At the ASEAN–China Special Summit held recently, to commemorate the 30th anniversary of ASEAN–China dialogue relations, Chinese President Xi Jinping said that China is ready to sign the protocol to the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty as early as possible.

◎ BACKGROUND

- In 1971, 5 original members of the ASEAN i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, met in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and signed the declaration on ASEAN's Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN).
- In 1995, SEANWFZ treaty was finally signed by the heads of government from 10 ASEAN member states in Bangkok on December 15, 1995.
 - ▶ It became fully effective on 21 June 2001, after all ASEAN members have ratified it, effectively banning all nuclear weapons in the region.
- China did not sign it initially, but in the recent ASEAN-China Special Summit, it showed its intention to sign the protocol.

This comes in the light of AUKUS security pact and USA interventions in the ASEAN region.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty or Bangkok treaty?

- SEANWFZ is one of the nine Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) that cover the territories, continental shelves, and EEZ of the States Parties within the zone.
- The SEANWFZ Treaty includes two elements that go beyond other existing Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ) agreements:
 - ▶ The zone of application also includes the continental shelves and EEZ of the contracting parties
 - ▶ The negative security assurance implies a commitment by the NWS not to use nuclear weapons against any contracting State or protocol Party within the zone of application. However, the protocol to the treaty explicitly restricts the use of "nuclear weapons within the SEANWFZ" and not outside it
- The treaty includes a protocol under which the five nuclear-weapon states recognized by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT),

namely China, the United States, France, Russia and the United Kingdom undertake to respect the Treaty and do not contribute to a violation of it by State parties.

- Till now, none of the nuclear-weapon states have signed this protocol.

What is Non Proliferation treaty (NPT)?

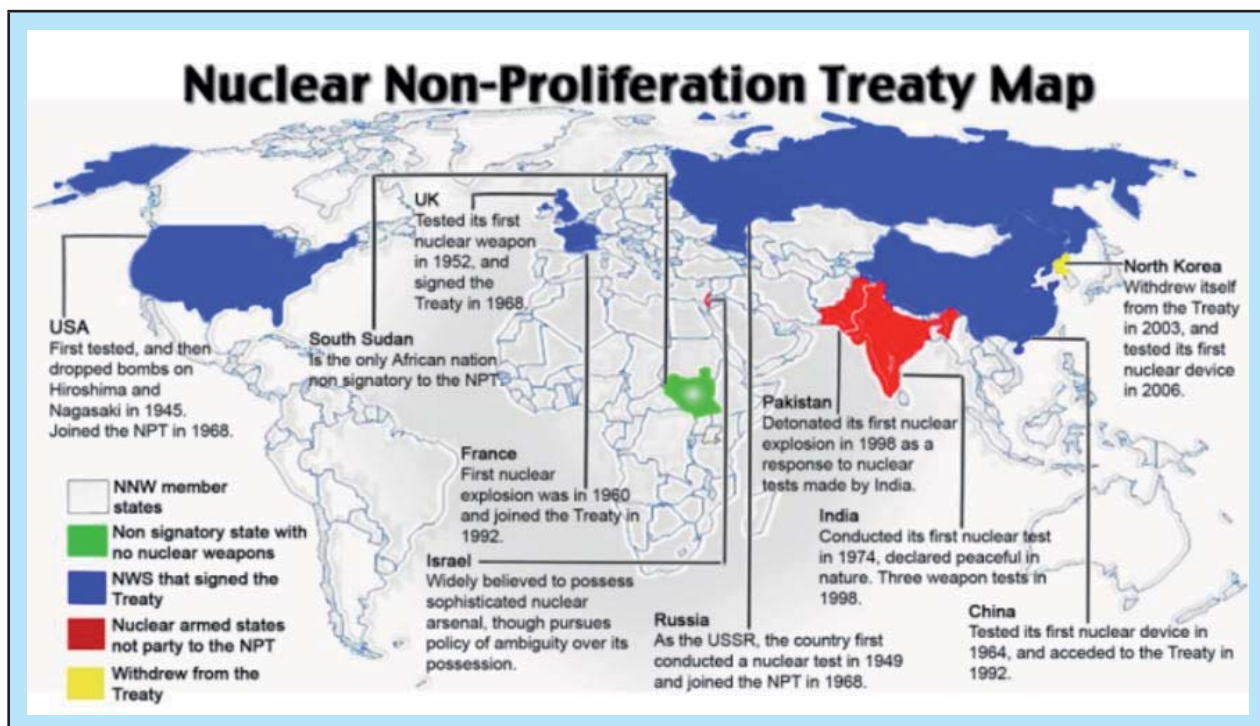
- The NPT aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to foster the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of disarmament.
- The Treaty establishes a safeguards system under the responsibility of the IAEA, which also plays a central role under the Treaty in areas of technology transfer for peaceful purposes.
- It was adopted in 1968 and it came into force in 1970
- India is not a signatory to the treaty.

See Image on Next Page.

Why China wants to sign the treaty?

Though the treaty was opened for signature two decades ago, China was not interested in signing the treaty earlier. But considering the recent geopolitical scenario, and impact of China, it has taken a decision to sign the protocol. The reasons are-

- **First**, the treaty does not bar the rights of any State with regard to the freedom of the high seas, right of innocent passage, archipelagic sea lanes passage or transit passage of ships and aircraft, and consistent with the Charter of the United Nations. Thus, the treaty also allows passage of nuclear-armed vessels or aircraft in accordance with UNCLOS without any hindrance and it won't impact the Chinese nuclear movement in the region.
- **Secondly**, strengthening of a nuclear weapon-free zone in Southeast Asia will reduce Chinese concerns about the recent AUKUS security pact between Australia, UK and USA which will help Canberra to secure a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines.



- **Thirdly**, China's consent to adopt the treaty in 1999 was incumbent upon written assurance from the ASEAN that the accession to the treaty wouldn't affect the territorial boundaries of the states. China has thus enough scope to put conditions while acceding to the treaty.
- It does not put major conditions on Chinese domestic policy. China is the only NPT recognized Nuclear Weapon State (NWS), which has a policy of 'No First Use' of nuclear weapons or not using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states unconditionally. Thus, it fulfills the negative security assurance enshrined in SEANWFZ.

Global impact of the treaty-

This agreement by China has large implications beyond China due to the strategic importance of ASEAN and Indo pacific region. The major implications are-

- **Impact on India-**
 - ▶ India supports 'Conference on Disarmament' and so, it is a step forward in the direction of India's goal of nuclear free world.
 - ▶ It will also allay India's fears over AUKUS security pact; about which India was already was apprehensive due to potential of rising nuclear weapons in Indo pacific region.
- **Impact on ASEAN-**
 - ▶ A growing sense of security and a step forward in the direction of making South East Asia, a completely nuclear free zone.

- ▶ This agreement by China can also promote other nuclear power states to sign the treaty and prevent nuclear proliferation in the region.

◦ Impact on others-

- ▶ It may create concerns over the recent AUKUS security pact, as Australia may be considered a trouble state now instead of China.
- ▶ USA plans of increasing nuclear weapons in the region to prevent Chinese aggression may face a setback.

Challenges Chinese concerns over the treaty-

There are certain issues faced by the ASEAN and China due to this treaty. Some of them are-

- The inclusion of EEZ in the definition has become a major hindrance for China to accept the treaty. The treaty will then cover a far wider region as compared to other nuclear free weapon zone treaties.
- Chinese record over implementation of international law is not encouraging. It has discredited the 2016 verdict by the Permanent Court of Arbitration over SCS maritime claims in favour of imaginary nine-dash line which has no legal sanctity.

◎ CONCLUSION

This statement by China is a positive step towards reduction of nuclear weapons across the world. In short term, it may create apprehension about the intentions of China, but a larger acceptance of the treaty will lead to a nuclear free area in the long run.

INTERSECTING GEO-ECONOMICS AND GEOPOLITICS: NORD STREAM 2 AND EUROPE

CONTEXT:

Recently, the natural gas prices soared in Europe after the Nord stream-2 project faced a setback due to the sanctions by the US administration under 'Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act' of 2019.

◎ BACKGROUND

- The project aims to transport natural gas from Russia to Germany through the sea route bypassing land route covering many countries including Ukraine.
- It has been opposed by East European countries as well as USA administration due to many reasons, primarily to undermine the influence of Russia in Europe.
- In this background, the recent sanctions by the USA government on the project cause new irritants in the USA-Russia relations.

Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act (PEESA)

- PEESA, as amended, provides the United States with the authority to advance U.S. national security and foreign policy objectives, in particular to address Russian pipeline projects that create risks to U.S. national security, threaten Europe's energy security, and consequently, endanger Europe's political and economic welfare

◎ ANALYSIS

What is Nord Stream 2 project?



- This is an extension of Nord Stream project that aims at transporting natural gas from **Russia** to **Germany** through a system of offshore gas pipelines running under the **Baltic Sea**.
- In Nord 2 project, additional pipelines are installed for transporting gas from Russia to Germany.

Importance of the project-

The project holds significant benefits to Germany and Russia due to economic and other reasons. These benefits are-

- **For Germany**
 - Economic- It will be able to get natural gas at a cheaper cost due to elimination of transit fees that were to be provided to the transit countries.
 - **Energy security-**
 - It will lead to energy security in the light of reduced domestic production in Europe. For instance, recent sanction on the project has increased gas prices by 17% in Europe.
 - The Nord 2 stream pipeline bypasses Ukraine, and so the soar Russia- Ukraine relations will not affect the supply of natural gas to Europe as it did in 2006 and 2009.
- **For Russia-**
 - **Political-**
 - Friendly relations with the Germany and thus, Europe can reduce USA's hegemony in the region fueling Russia's geopolitical ambitions.
 - Bypassing of transit countries like Ukraine can lead to greater Russian interference in the region. It will also reduce Russian dependency on the Ukraine to transfer energy to Europe.
 - Economic- In the light of pandemic induced recession, Nord Stream project can lead to greater economic returns for the Russia.

Recent concerns about the project-

- Germany has highlighted that the operator is not organized in a legal form under German law.

- The main assets and human resources had not been transferred from the Swiss-based Nord Stream 2 parent company to its German subsidiary.
- USA feels that the project can lead to long term concerns on energy security for Europe.

Persisting issues about the Nord Stream pipeline-

The project has been criticized since inception by many countries due to the following reasons. The reasons are-

- **Political reasons-**
 - It could be used as a geopolitical weapon against the transit countries like Ukraine.
 - It can also increase Russian interference in Europe and so, can lead to challenges for USA in the long run.
- **Environmental reasons-**
 - Concerns were raised about its effect on under water biodiversity in the Baltic sea
- **Economic reasons-**
 - It could increase Europe's energy dependence on Russia which could be used for political gains in the longer run.

- It is considered that it could result in loss of \$3 billion per year to Ukraine due to elimination of transit fees.

Way Forward-

It is necessary in the present context that fears among the European countries be addressed in a positive manner. In this direction, Russia can take following measures-

- Transferring the main assets and human resources from the Nord Stream 2 parent company to its German subsidiary.
- Discussions and dialogue in a wider manner to ensure that economic project will not be used for political reasons.
- An agreement with the transit countries by which Russia and Germany can provide some minimal transit fees to these countries.

CONCLUSION-

Energy security is essential for any country and its affordable access should be everyone's right. It is therefore necessary, that environmental, economic and human rights should be put above political reasons so that cooperation and collaboration can be promoted for greater human good.

THE SIXTH SCHEDULE OF LADAKH

CONTEXT:

A latest demand has arisen from Ladakh that the region should be included in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to safeguard land, employment, and cultural identity of the local population.

◎ BACKGROUND

- On August 5, 2019, was the day on which New Delhi stripped the state of the special status it had been guaranteed under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution and downgraded it into two Union territories.
 - Jammu & Kashmir with legislature
 - Ladakh without legislature

India has 8 Union Territories (UTs) - Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Lakshadweep, and Puducherry.

- The newly formed Union Territory of Ladakh observed complete shutdown to press their demand for restoration of statehood and implementation of the sixth schedule of the Constitution to safeguard their identity, culture, land and jobs.
- People across the region are fearful of loss of land, jobs and demographic change and are living in a perpetual uncertainty.

◎ ANALYSIS

The region profile

- The region extends from **Karakoram Range** in the northwest to the **Kailash Range** in the southeast, from the Tarim Basin in the north to Kangra-Mahasu Valley in the south.
- It now shares international borders with China, Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- Ladakh has a population of around 300,000 people made up of 52 percent Muslims and 48 percent Buddhists with most of the Muslims based in Kargil.

What is the Sixth Schedule?

- Passed by the Constituent Assembly in 1949, the Sixth Schedule under Article 244 seeks to safeguard the rights of tribal population through the formation of Autonomous District Councils (ADC).
- ADCs are bodies representing a district to which the Constitution has given varying degrees of autonomy within the state legislature.

- Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) are the autonomous administrative divisions that have some legislative, judicial, and administrative autonomy within a state.
 - ADCs have up to 30 members with a term of five years.
 - It can make laws, rules and regulations with regard to land, forest, water, agriculture, village councils, health, sanitation, village- and town-level policing, inheritance, marriage and divorce, social customs and mining, etc.

Exception

The **Bodoland Territorial Council** in Assam is an exception with more than 40 members and the right to make laws on 39 issues.

Powers conferred to Governors

- The governors of these states are empowered to reorganize boundaries of the tribal areas.
- In simpler terms, she or he can choose to include or exclude any area, increase or decrease the boundaries and unite two or more autonomous districts into one.
- They can also alter or change the names of autonomous regions without a separate legislation.

Which areas are under the Sixth Schedule?

- The Sixth Schedule applies to the Northeastern states of
 - Assam
 - Meghalaya
 - Mizoram (three Councils each)
 - Tripura (one Council)

Fifth Schedule of the Constitution

- The Fifth Schedule deals with the administration of scheduled areas where the majority of the population comprises of the tribal communities.
- Currently, the schedule is in force in 10 states of the country.

- These states include Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Telangana

Understanding the 'crux' of Ladakh's demand?

- At the heart of the UT's demand is power. The UT status came without a legislative Council and instead, even the existing powers of LAHDC got shifted to the Lt Governor.
- The demand now is that the local Councils are empowered with legislative power by bringing them under the ambit of Sixth Schedule of Article 244(1) of the Constitution.
- They demand a Bodoland-type power arrangement that protects the rights of indigenous people over their land with legislative subjects that are exclusive to local governments without interference from Central Laws.
 - ▶ A similar provision under Article 371 (A) is given to other areas such as in Nagaland in respect of the religious, social practices, customary law of the Nagas.

Can Ladakhis be described as vulnerable community?

Ladakh is known as a part of the global Buddhist civilisation or Islamic heritage that cannot be described as a 'primitive' or 'vulnerable' community

- **Diverse and rich cultural setting:** Ladakh is historically perceived as a cosmopolitan region with centuries of multiple cultural settings. It was an Asian pivot – the people here traversed diverse cultural boundaries and engaged with ideas.
 - ▶ Its Buddhist community resembles nothing like the Chakma tribes in the Northeast.

- ▶ The Baltis and Purigs of Kargil cherish their rich Persian Shia and Sufi heritages.
- **High education level:** The region had the highest literacy rate (82 percent) in J&K.
- **Social equality:** A great deal of social equality exists; the women enjoy high status in every aspect of life.
- **Elite population:** It has a highly westernised Buddhist and Balti elite which send children to study in India's top-public schools.

- **National leaders:** Ladakh had some famous national leaders like Kushok Bakula, P Namgyal, Kacho Sikander Khan and Munshi Habibullah.
- **Technocrats:** It produced several technocrats, bureaucrats and military leaders like Sonam Norboo, AJ Kundan, Colonel Rinchen, C Phunsog and others who held important political and diplomatic positions in the country.
- **True nationalist:** Ladakhis are also known to be true nationalists. The velour of Ladakh Scout Regiments is well known.

What steps are actually needed for Ladakh?

- **Heritage protection:** Ladakh was once an ancient Western Himalayan Kingdom with a profound cultural backdrop. Its rich Buddhist, Balti and Dardic cultural heritage requires a much higher degree of protection.
- **Policy measure:** A prudent policy step would be to consider Ladakh under the ambit of protecting the Himalayan heritage – its people, culture, environment and security.
- **National Commission:** A national commission is urgently needed to review the issue as also addressing the Ladakhi demand so as to bring about a necessary law by the Parliament.

RELEVANCE AND CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY IN THE PRESENT SCENARIO

CONTEXT:

Recently, India participated in the first stage of the 'Summit for democracy' which was virtually hosted by the President of USA. In the light of recent challenges faced by countries, this summit holds much significance for India and world.

◎ BACKGROUND

Democracies across the world—rich and established, developing and newly established ones—are grappling with serious crises on many key parameters. These include:

- Fall of the democratic governments in states like Myanmar and Afghanistan, weak state capacity, tenuous rule of law, high inequality, and corruption continue to erode democracy.
- Public distrust and the failure of governments to deliver equitable and sustainable economic and political progress have fueled political polarization and the rise of leaders who are undermining democratic norms and institutions.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has created a conflict in the state about ensuring right to life by imposing lockdown or right to work by opening economies.

In this background, Summit for Democracy was hosted by the President of USA as a platform for leaders to announce both individual and collective commitments, reforms, and initiatives to defend democracy and human rights at home and abroad.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is the 'Summit for Democracy'?

- It is a flagship initiative by the President of USA to put democracy and human rights at the heart of U.S. foreign policy. Summit for Democracy will take place in two stages-
 - The first stage of the Summit was leader level event held virtually on December 9-10, 2021. The second will be held approximately one year later.
- **Focus areas of the summit** :
 - Strengthening democracy and countering authoritarianism
 - Fighting corruption
 - Promoting respect for human rights.
- **Aims of the summit-**
 - It aims to show how democracies can deliver on the issues that matter most to people:

strengthening accountable governance, expanding economic opportunities, protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, and enabling lives of dignity.

- It also aims at showing how open, rights-respecting societies can work together to effectively tackle the great challenges of our time, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and growing inequality.
- **Participating members include-**
 - Governments
 - Members of the private sector
 - Human rights defenders, advocates, and civil society organizations
 - Members of the media
 - Influential individuals in politics, arts, culture, and sports, including emerging leaders from the next generation, and
 - Multilateral institutions charged with democracy and human rights advancement.

"D" for Democracy

- Democracy is a system of government in which laws, policies, leadership, and major undertakings of a state or other polity are directly or indirectly decided by the "people."
- USA is the world's oldest and India is world's largest democracies. Many other democracies include Australia and South Africa.
- According to the Indian constitution, India is a democratic state. In a democracy, people are the sovereign authorities and this is reflected in our Preamble
- According to USA President Joseph R Biden, Jr –
"Democracy doesn't happen by accident. We have to defend it, fight for it, strengthen it, renew it"
- Abraham Lincoln defined democratic government as
"a government of, for and by the people"

Importance of the summit

- **Mutual learning**- It has led to sharing of views on democracy and democratic institutions by various participants. It's an opportunity to listen, learn, and speak about the challenges faced by democracies across the world.
- **Bolstering democracy**- Participating governments have pledged to support domestic and international commitments in the shared push to bolster democracy from local to global levels.
- **Human at the center of policy making**- It will also lead to promotion of human rights, reduction of corruption in the public policy and strengthening of global democratic institutions for the greater good of citizens.
- **Sense of safety**: The summit was in recognition of the fact that democracy is on the defensive around the world.

Need of preservation of democracies across the globe

- **Inclusive and relevant**- It is experienced that societies that respect and defend democratic institutions, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and gender equality are more stable, prosperous, secure, and better equipped to confront global challenges.
- **Sense of responsibility**: Individually and collectively, democracies must continually demonstrate that they can deliver for their people.
- **Role of citizens**- While citizens are the key beneficiaries of the democracy, they are also the key participants in a democracy; therefore their empowerment is a crucial aspect of democracy.

Status of India's democracy

- India is the world's largest democracy, with 1.4 billion people.

What does the data say?

- Various democracy indices have placed India on a declining trajectory, including
 - Freedom House's Freedom in the World
 - V-Dem
 - Reporters Without Borders
 - World Press Freedom Index
- The US-based Freedom House's "Freedoms of the World" index categorizes India as only "partly free" and the Swedish V-Dem calls India an "electoral autocracy."
- India was ranked 53rd in Global democracy Index 2020, and has been classified as a 'flawed democracy' along with countries such as the US and France.

Why India is getting criticized?

- India has been criticized for the use of sedition, defamation and counter-terrorism laws such as the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act** to silence critics, and control over citizens privacy including with invasive high-tech surveillance.
- The country is also getting criticized for:
 - crackdown on the protests against the **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)**
 - handling of lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic

Success of India's democracy-

However, Indian democracy has been successful in a variety of ways that can serve as an example for the world. These include-

- **People's participation**: The essence of democracy is the participation of the people in the day to day affairs of the state.
 - **Elections**: India has been successful in carrying out regular elections from local to national level, despite the cultural diversity and vast size of the country.
 - **Reservation**: Affirmative actions like reservation for SC and ST at all levels and for women at local level election has made policy making inclusive and participative.
- **Just Judiciary**: Constitutional values are protected and defended by the judiciary time and again in her various.
- **Right assertion**: Legislations such as RTI and Lokpal have shown political commitment to give voice to common man to assert their rights.
- **Social Security**: Various initiatives by the central government like RTE (right to education) and PDS (public distribution system) have been beneficial in providing physical as well as social security to disadvantaged people.

What measures are essentially required for improved democracy?

As the benefit of people is the key desired outcome of a political state, the following steps can help in bolstering it:

- **Access to basic human rights**: For participation in governance, the citizen has to be equipped at least with basic human rights such as the right to live without fear or insecurity, right to employment and adequate standard of living, right to enough free education, right to free health services and right to clean and decent environment.
- **Effective economic order**: The country must have a rational, planned and scientific economic order which will ensure first and foremost the empowerment of every citizen by providing them with basic human rights.

- **Inclusive development:** Broadening the scope of democratic institutions to include civil society, private agencies and local government to ensure policy making and policy implementation is inclusive.
- **Equality (in every sense):** The next requisite for a democracy is to have social and economic equality and in any case, the least possible inequality.
- **Focusing more on values:** There is a need to focus more on democratic values than as a political institution. The values include respect for human rights, freedom of speech and expression and making citizen at the center of democracy.

- **Collaborative approach at global level:** At global level, the presence of diverse political institutions (like monarchy, communism) needs to be accepted with a broad consensus on minimum rules and rights for the citizens.

◎ CONCLUSION-

As there is no best form of government, there is a need to learn the positive aspects of each form of government and create a society which works for people's wellbeing and growth.

THE REALITY OF MANUAL SCAVENGING

CONTEXT:

Despite the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 (MS Act, 2013), which prohibits the practice of manual scavenging, it is prevalent across the country.

◎ BACKGROUND

- In a latest development, the government informed Parliament that it has been “able to achieve the target of abolition of manual scavenging” as per the prescribed definition under the law.
- However, the reality is different.
- This is far from reality as manual scavengers in the country are not only working as contractual, migrant and casual workers and labourers but also as **bonded labourers** in Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tripura and Bihar.
 - ▶ Jharkhand, with 763 manual scavengers working as bonded labour — the highest in India — puts the new labour codes to shame.
 - ▶ Over 30,356 children in the state still work as labour engaged in direct scavenging; sweeping; railway track, sewer and septic tank cleaning; and assisting jobs.

- They often lack access to proper safety gear and equipment.

Who is to be blamed?

- **Poor governance:** The blame, first and foremost, should lie on the governing structure of the governments.

- In Karnataka, the Social Welfare Minister proposed legalising manual scavenging ‘in an emergency’.
- In Tamil Nadu, attempts to raise awareness about the issue are being thwarted.
 - ▶ Filmmaker-activist Divya Bharathi and her young team crowdfunded and released a documentary on the issue titled *Kakkoos*.
 - Travelling with the movie around Tamil Nadu, she has had a number of screenings shut down by the police on the grounds of possibly leading to “law and order problems”.
 - Screenings that have dodged the police have been violence-free which seems to suggest that the police are simply censoring an uncomfortable truth.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is manual scavenging?

- Manual scavenging in India is officially defined as ‘lifting and removal of human excreta manually’, at private homes and toilets maintained by municipal authorities.
- As per the “**Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 (MS Act, 2013)**” manual scavenging means manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of, or handling in any manner, human excreta in an insanitary latrine.
 - ▶ It is prohibited with effect from December 2013.
- **Commonly associated people:** Dalit men and women (of various sub-castes, most notably Valmiki).

Threats

- Risk of death from **asphyxiation** due to poisonous gases
- **Disease exposure:** cholera, hepatitis, meningitis, jaundice, skin disorders and even cardiovascular diseases.

- **Unequal social structure:** Indian society's deeply unequal social structure based on caste hierarchy and patriarchy is equally culpable.
- **The rich segment:** Moreover, the moral culpability equally lies with the ‘neo-middle’ and other affluent classes who have been so engulfed in their own lives that they do not care about the issue or question the government and ensure accountability.
- **Media:** The media too can be blamed, for not giving adequate importance to social issues such as manual scavenging.

Government measures to end the practice

- **Prevention of Atrocities Act:** In 1989, the **Prevention of Atrocities Act** became an integrated security guard for sanitation workers; more than 90% of the people employed as handicraftsmen belong to Organized Caste.

- **Manual Scavengers and the Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act:** In 1993, the Government of India introduced the **Manual Scavengers and the Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act** prohibiting the hiring of hand-operated scavengers to clean dry toilets and the construction of flush toilets.

Dry Latrines in India

- Dry latrines are not connected to large sewerage systems, which means that they have to be cleaned by individuals.
 - The 2011 census recorded 2,607,612 dry latrines in India.
 - Even after the PMSR Act, 2013, at present, there are more than 1.4 million dry latrines in India.
 - This means that only around 1.2 crore dry latrines have been demolished so far.
- **The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013** prohibits the construction or maintenance of unhygienic toilets, and the hiring of any person by hand cleaning or hazardous cleaning of sewer pipes and swimming pools.
 - **Article 21:** The Article guarantees the 'Right to Life' and also with dignity.
 - **Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan (Clean India initiative)**
 - **Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge**
 - **Swachhta Abhiyan App:** It has been developed to identify and geo-tag the data of insanitary latrines and manual scavengers so that the insanitary latrines can be replaced with sanitary latrines and

rehabilitate all the manual scavengers to provide dignity of life to them.

Sewer-cleaning robots and machines such as the Bandicoot are slowly making their way to different municipalities and local authorities.

What measures are required?

To assume that a ban on paper would abolish a centuries old practice, deeply vested in caste discrimination, is naive. The government with a strong will need to take the following measures:

- **Education:** educating communities against this dehumanizing practice
- **Strict action:** strict enforcement of criminal penalties
- **Financing:** a genuine financial commitment to overcome the technological barriers

◎ CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- In a democracy like India, the existence of manual scavenging is a "national shame", and a blot on the idioms of social, economic and political justice mentioned in the Indian constitution and a contemporary form of slavery. The manual carrying of human faeces is not a form of employment, but an injustice akin to slavery.
- This situation needs to be corrected immediately. At first, the government should come up with the right data about the degree of its persistence. Afterwards, effective steps must be taken to tackle the issue with the required force.

REIMAGINING THE EDUCATION SECTOR WITH ONLINE PLATFORM

CONTEXT:

After a gap of more than a year and a half, educational institutes across India are beginning to open their doors to students once again. Learners are gradually returning to conventional modes of classroom teaching, and are being able to access physical libraries and academic resources.

However, the online trend of education is every indication that this trend is now irreversible. This brief attempts to analyze the rise of platform economy during the pandemic.

◎ BACKGROUND

- After a gap of more than a year and a half, educational institutes across India are beginning to open their doors to students once again.
- Learners are gradually returning to conventional modes of classroom teaching, and are being able to access physical libraries and academic resources.

◎ ANALYSIS

The new trend set by COVID Pandemic

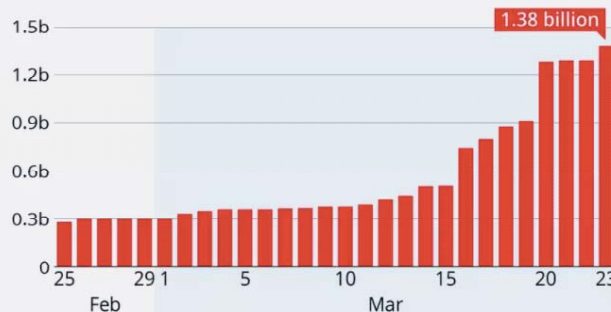
- The COVID pandemic has jump-started a hitherto sluggish trend (both globally and in India)—“the use of digital platforms to access learning materials”.
- However, during the pandemic, 1.6 billion children globally were affected by school closures.
 - As a new study points out, India's online education market for classes 1-12 is poised to grow more than six-fold to become a US \$1.7-billion market by 2030, while higher education is likely to grow almost four-fold to become a US \$1.8-billion market in the same period.

Benefits of online learning

- Cost effectiveness
- Quality education for all
- Access to everyone irrespective of location
- Increase in employment
- Skilled trainers and teachers can expand their reach.
- Limitless scope: Students can receive education by the top notch professors and instructors in the world.
- Updated knowledge

COVID-19's Staggering Impact On Global Education

Number of learners impacted by national school closures worldwide



Figures refer to learners enrolled at pre-primary, primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary levels of education, as well as at tertiary education levels. Source: UNESCO



statista

Type of educational platforms imparting education online (Open and Closed)

- The rise of a platform economy in India has been a key driver of the surge in online learning.

Platform

- A platform can be understood as a business model that creates value by facilitating exchanges between two or more interdependent groups, usually producers and consumers.
- In the sphere of online education, a digital platform translates into a network that brings together educational publishers and content providers on the one hand, and learners on the other, facilitating transactions between them such that the value of the platform grows with the volume of transactions, publishers, and learners on it.

Open educational platforms

- Open educational platforms refer to those whose contents are freely available, and on which publishers or research institutions can place their academic products on the basis of their proven credentials as content providers.

Closed educational platforms

- Closed educational platforms are commercially driven.
- In such platforms, access to content is restricted by paywalls; a commercial publisher or ed-tech firm could be the platform owner; and multiple publishers might enter into an arrangement with the platform to make their contents commercially available.

Spectacular growth witnessed by Closed platform during COVID

- Ed-tech platform upGrad's revenues grew by over 100 percent in 2020.
- BYJU's, India's largest ed-tech company, has reported that 40 million new users have joined its platform since the pandemic began.

Government initiative for e-learning

- SWAYAM:** SWAYAM is a programme designed to achieve the three cardinal principles of Education Policy viz., access, equity and quality. It is the government's national platform for massive open online courses (MOOCS). SWAYAM seeks to bridge the digital divide for students who have hitherto remained untouched by the digital revolution and have not been able to join the mainstream of the knowledge economy.
- National Digital Library of India:** The National Digital Library of India (NDLI)—an open platform offering free access to over 55 million educational resources.
- Diksha:** This is an initiative of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), Ministry of Education, Government of India. DIKSHA can be accessed at diksha.gov.in by the learners and teachers across the country. It currently supports various courses of NCERT, CBSE and SCERTs across India.
- Free and Open Source Software for Education (FOSSEE):** FOSSEE is a project promoting the use of open source software in educational institutions.
- Other initiatives include:**
 - e-ShodhSindhu
 - e-PG Pathshala
 - Swayam Prabha

- National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning

Constitutional provisions regarding 'education'

Till 1976, education was sole responsibility of state but constitutional amendment made it 'concurrent subject'.

Fundamental Rights

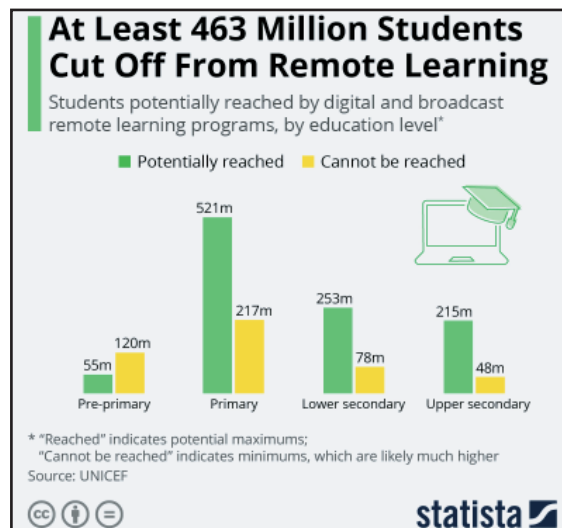
- Article 21A:** Right to Education
- Article 28:** Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions.
- Article 29:** Equality of opportunity in educational institutions.
- Article 30:** Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.

Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP)

- Article 41:** Right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases
- Article 45:** Provision for free and compulsory education for children and Provision for early childhood care and education to children below the age of six years
- Article 46:** It provides for special care to the promotion of education and economic interests of the scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and the weaker sections of society.

What are the challenges of online learning?

- Lack of internet access:** Some students without reliable internet access and/or technology struggle to participate in digital learning; this gap is seen across countries and between income brackets within countries.



- **Good, but only as a supplementary option:** Online education is still not considered permanent alternatives to classrooms. The sector can at best make a useful supplementary learning system.
- **Other issues:**
 - Uncertainty over accreditation and quality control also remain unresolved.
 - Issue for poor households
 - Unstable electricity
 - Lack of awareness on cyber security and other technical glitches

- Lack of cultural experience

◎ CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- COVID-19 pandemic and consecutive lockdowns have caused a lot of disturbance in the education sector. People started leaning towards the digital platforms of learning. But unfortunately, the coverage is still not uniform throughout the country due to various challenges.
- However, in the upcoming future, online education is going to be a part of every person's life and the country needs to be prepared for the changes. It needs to be considered as a need and not an option.

A MORE CONNECTED GLOBAL ECONOMY IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD: WTO

CONTEXT:

In its annual report on the status of global trade, the World Trade Organization finds that the increasing interconnectedness of the world's economies is a double-edged sword.

◎ BACKGROUND

- Globalization is a multifaceted concept that describes the process of creating networks of connections around the world.
- It involves the interdependence of national economies and the integration of information, goods, labour and capital, to name a few.
- In recent years, globalization has been the subject of growing discontent and criticism, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The pandemic has illuminated both globalization (a virus went global in a few weeks thanks to globalization and interconnectedness) and de-globalization (the breakdown of international co-operation and the re-emergence of nationalism when it came to personal protective gear, medical devices and vaccines).

◎ ANALYSIS

WTO's take on connected world

- Shock plus recovery:** While this globalization makes individual countries more vulnerable to short-term shocks, the WTO says, it also allows them to recover far more quickly than they would have in the past.
- Better crisis management:** Yet, globalization was also at the heart of why this virus was met with vaccines in record time. Scientists were able to share ideas and technology across borders, backed by public and private funding for research and development.
- Interconnectedness tied to stability:** The report also found that the more diversified a country's trading relationships were with the rest of the world, the less likely they were to experience significant economic volatility.

Understanding 'Global ization'

- Globalization is the term used to describe the growing interdependence of the world's economies, cultures, and populations, brought about by cross-border trade in goods and services, technology, and flows of investment, people, and information.

- Countries have built economic partnerships to facilitate these movements over many centuries.

India and Globalization

- The wake of globalization was first felt in the 1990s in India when the then finance minister, Dr Manmohan Singh initiated the economic liberalization plan.
 - The new policy was called as **Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization Policy (LPG Policy)** or the **New Economic Policy, 1991**.
- Since then, India has gradually become one of the economic giants in the world.

Components of Globalization

- There are three major components of globalization: economic, social and political.
- Economic globalization:** It involves the flow of goods, services, capital and information through long-distance market transactions. Although the pandemic is global, regions and countries have experienced it differently based on various economic indicators.
- Social globalization:** It pertains to interactions with people abroad including via migration, international phone calls and international remittances paid or received by citizens.
- Political globalization:** It involves the ability of countries to engage in international political co-operation and diplomacy, as well as implementing government policy.

The changing globalization

- Globalization itself is evolving, with changes in global trade flows, capital flows, and the **Fourth Industrial Revolution**.
- More trade flow:** Trade flows have attracted more attention than capital flows and technological changes as drivers of globalization.
- Increasing trade in services:** Trade in services is now increasing at a much faster pace than trade in goods. The cost differential in the production

of services across the world is still enormous. The cost differential in traded services is much greater than in trade in goods. In the past, the only means to narrow such cost differentials was migration.

- **Technology:** Technology has become a bigger force of globalization, changing cross-border mobility of goods and services, and capital flows.
 - ▶ New technological revolution has huge spillovers and externalities.
 - ▶ Data and information technology is now the lifeblood of the global economy, fuelling ideas for new products and services, and advancing the transnational flow of trade, capital, and ideas.
- **Digitalization:** Technology has enabled services to be digitized and transported long distances at low costs without compromising on quality.
 - ▶ The internet has enabled firms to sell services without crossing national borders, and dramatically increased the size and the scope for exploiting cost differentials in services compared to trade in goods.
- India's trade characteristics are well aligned with the new face of globalization.

Challenges faced by India

- Overall, India is much better off today than before, in the new face of globalization. But there are many challenges ahead. India majorly faces a dual challenge—
 - ▶ Demographic dividend
 - ▶ Rapid technological change
- Technological progress is placing a higher premium on skills, and any failure of countries to lay the groundwork for their citizens to lead productive lives will not only carry high cost, it will also generate more inequality and conflict.
- In most countries, children born to more affluent parents start having access to better opportunities early in life, and these lead to lifelong advantages, whereas children born to poorer parents miss out on these opportunities.

- If policy makers make more effort to make early childhood development programmes universal, income inequality would fall.

What are the positive sides of globalization?

- Competitive Markets
- Growing Economies of developing countries
- Diversified workforce
- Better Future to skilled manpower
- Better Products and services
- Sharing of technology and knowledge
- Cultural and heritage exchange

Negative side of globalization

COVID-19 has shown us the darkest side of increasing Globalization:

- Easy spread of vulnerabilities
- Occurrence of a catastrophe can affect the whole world.
- Confusing local system
- Exploitation of manpower
- Immigration challenges
- **Affected culture and language:** Minority languages are dying out because of the necessity of learning internationally recognized language English for carrying on international business and Multi-National Corporations effectively and efficiently.
- **Rapid urbanization:** Levels of pollution are rising as countries strive for economic growth and a competitive edge in the global market, resulting in rapid industrialization.

Wrapping Up

To sum up, globalization is definitely a double-edged sword that has created jobs and promoted international cooperation on one hand, and has led to cultural losses, more environmental damage, increased health risks, and exposure to economic crises, on the other.

IMPACT OF PANDEMIC INDUCED POVERTY AND MITIGATING MEASURES

CONTEXT:

WHO recently stated that around half a billion people were pushed into extreme poverty because they had to pay for rising healthcare costs. Poverty has always been one of the biggest challenges and so, there is a need to study the impact of pandemic and adopt measures to mitigate them.

◎ BACKGROUND

COVID-19 pandemic and its spread

- The disease was declared as a pandemic by WHO in Mar'20 which led to several restrictions on physical movements of people by the countries and also rise in healthcare spending by the states to control the pandemic.
- It had impacted and is still impacting economic and social wellbeing of people and thus, has given rise to pandemic induced poverty.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is poverty?

- According to World Health Organisation (WHO), the proportion of the population living below the international poverty line is the percentage living on less than US\$ 1.90 a day at 2011 international prices.
- This poverty line has fixed purchasing power across countries or areas; hence, it is often called the "international poverty line".

Status of poverty before the pandemic-

- According to the World Bank, "Even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, almost 1 billion people were spending more than 10 per cent of their household budget on health".
- While India has managed to cut poverty sharply from 2011 to 2019 and lifted many people out of poverty line, the recent pandemic could reverse the progresses made.

Impact of pandemic on poverty-

- **Economic reasons-**
 - Loss in employment opportunities and decrease in income has exacerbated crisis for poorest population. According to a report, the middle class in India may have shrunk by 30% in the year 2020 itself.
 - The COVID-19 pandemic pushed a lot of people out of work. CMIE data showed that a whopping 113.6 million people lost their jobs

between March and April 2020 in India. The unemployment rate had also peaked to its highest in over four decades.

➤ Sectoral differences-

- While some industries in Service sector have switched to 'work from home', many were not able to do so like tourism. The impact has been more on blue collar worker workers than white collar workers.
- Similarly manufacturing industries were impacted more mainly MSMEs, due to lockdown restrictions, and reverse migration of workers.

• Health spending-

- **Less insurance penetration-** High 'out of pocket expenditure' on health services due to limited insurance penetration and less state intervention is also a cause of concern. In India, OOP is around 67% which is very high vis-à-vis developed counterparts.

➤ Class variation-

- Differential impact on lower and middle class to absorb pandemic induced shock has given further impetus on poverty.
- The proportion of income spent on health is higher for lower class as compared to middle and upper class thus further increasing inequality.

➤ Social variations-

- Women were affected more due to layoffs by companies and reduced health spending by families which could further increase gender gap in the long run.

• Accessibility gap-

- A gap in access to affordable healthcare across countries and regions has further created variation in proportion of income spent on healthcare. When combined with economic inequality, it has made the situation more worrisome for the poor people.

• Reduced state spending-

- According to WHO, the pandemic made it difficult for countries to run other services such as the general immunisation programmes and

treatment of other communicable diseases. For example, at global level, immunization coverage dropped for the first time in ten years, and deaths from tuberculosis and malaria increased

- In the short term, people can adopt some coping mechanisms like selling of assets, or getting assistance from governments and relatives. But in the longer run, pandemic induced poverty can lead to malnutrition, susceptibility to disease and missed schooling. COVID-19 will accentuate the long-term concentration of poverty in countries that are middle-income, fragile and conflict-affected, and located in Africa.

- **Steps taken to reduce pandemic induced poverty-**

- Various steps have been taken by governments to mitigate the negative effects of pandemic on the poverty levels. Some of the steps taken are-

- **Steps taken for industries-**

- ▶ Financial incentives for industries to prevent layoffs and increase their revenues.
- ▶ Releasing 'Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme' for severely hit sectors like tourism and aviation.

- **Steps taken for Individuals-**

- ▶ Rolling out 'One nation one ration card' scheme for migrants to access PDS facility across the nation.
- ▶ Direct cash transfers under various schemes to eligible people to aid in reducing poverty.

- **Steps related to COVID-19 pandemic-**

- ▶ Free vaccination to all adults in all government hospitals.
- ▶ Creation of PM CARES Fund for everyone to assist state efforts in mitigating COVID induced challenges.
- ▶ Focus on prevention from COVID-19 by increasing awareness and health literacy.
- ▶ Promoting indigenous research on COVID related vaccines and early detection.

Suggestive measures-

However, many more steps can be undertaken to ensure health does not suffer and poverty levels could be reduced. Some suggestions include-

- According to WHO, all governments should immediately resume and accelerate efforts to ensure health coverage for each citizen. It also urged countries to "improve the collection, timeliness and disaggregation of data on access, service coverage, out-of-pocket health spending and total expenditure"
- Further, increasing insurance penetration and direct cash transfers are required to reduce impact on poor people.
- Investing in digital services and enable real time monitoring of beneficiaries to achieve universal immunisation at a faster pace. For India, Unique Aadhar ID and National health portal can be a game changer in this direction.

RELEVANCE OF BRINGING NBFCs UNDER PROMPT CORRECTIVE ACTION (PCA) FRAMEWORK

CONTEXT:

Recently, Reserve bank of India (RBI) has brought Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs) under the Prompt corrective action (PCA) framework, to enable Supervisory intervention at appropriate time and to restore financial health of the country.

◎ BACKGROUND

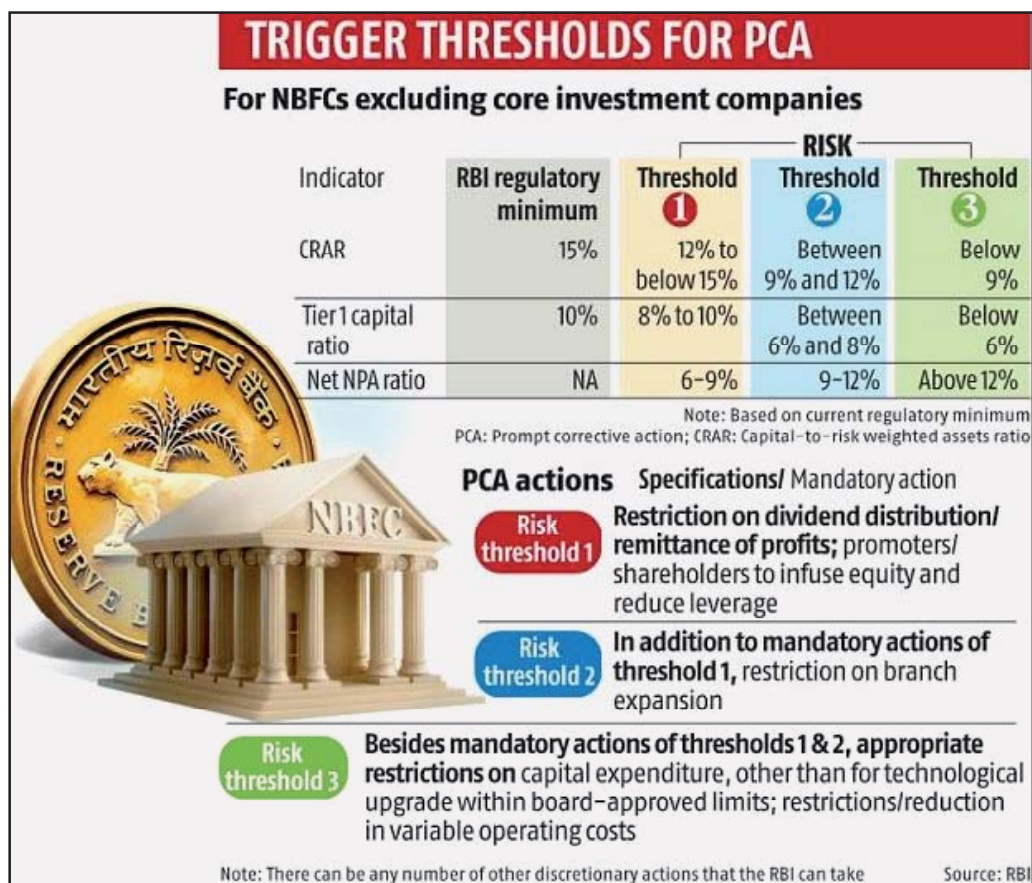
- NBFCs have been growing in size and have substantial interconnectedness with other segments of the financial system.
- Accordingly, it has now been decided by RBI to put in place a PCA Framework for NBFCs to further strengthen the supervisory tools applicable to NBFCs.
- It will come into effect from October 1, 2022.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is PCA Framework?

- Prompt Corrective Action or PCA is a framework under which NBFC with weak financial metrics are put under watch by the RBI.

- NBFCs will face restrictions if they slip below certain norms on three parameters i.e.
 - ▶ Capital Ratios
 - ▶ Asset Quality
 - ▶ Profitability
- PCA Framework has three risk threshold levels (1 being the lowest and 3 being the highest) based on where a NBFC stands. Application of PCA framework-
 - ▶ **Threshold 1**- If NPA is between 6-9 per cent and CRAR falls 300 basis points from the current level of 15-12 per cent
 - ▶ **Threshold 2**- If NPA is between 9-12 per cent and CRAR falls 300-600 bps from the levels of 12-9 per cent.
 - ▶ **Threshold 3**- If NPA is >12% per cent and CRAR falls by 600 bps from 9 per cent.



● Impact on NBFCs-

- ▶ First threshold- It will restrict NBFCs on dividend distribution and promoters will be asked to infuse capital and reduce leverage. The RBI will also restrict issuance of guarantees or taking other contingent liabilities on behalf of group companies, in case of core investment companies.
- ▶ Second threshold- The NBFC will be prohibited from opening branches.
- ▶ Third threshold- Capital expenditure will be stopped, other than for technological upgradation.
- **Exemptions-** NBFC that do not deposits and have an asset size of less than Rs 1,000 crore, primary dealers, government-owned NBFCs, and housing finance companies are exempted from this framework
- Earlier, RBI has also proposed **Scale based regulations (SBR) framework** for NBFCs that was to come into effect in October 22. It takes into consideration capital requirements, governance standards, prudential regulation and other aspects of NBFCs.

What is a Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC)?

- NBFC is a company registered under the **Companies Act, 1956** engaged in the business of loans and advances, acquisition of shares/stocks/bonds/debentures/securities issued by Government or local.
- NBFCs lend and make investments and hence their activities are akin to that of banks; however they are different from banks in the following manner-
 - ▶ NBFC cannot accept demand deposits
 - ▶ NBFCs do not form part of the payment and settlement system and cannot issue cheques drawn on itself
 - ▶ Deposit insurance facility of **Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation** is not available to depositors of NBFCs, unlike in case of banks

What is the need of bringing NBFC under PCA Framework?

There has been debate about the need of bringing NBFCs under the PCA Framework. It is needed in the recent times as-

- As on March 31, 2021, the non-banking finance company (NBFC) sector (including housing finance companies/ HFCs) had assets worth more than ₹54 lakh crore, equivalent to about 25 per cent of the asset size of the banking sector.
- Over the last five years the NBFC sector assets have grown at cumulative average growth rate of 17.91 per cent.
- The NBFC sector's gross bad loans as a proportion of total loans increased from 5.8% in 2017-18 to 6.6% in 2018-19
- Failure of big NBFCs in the recent times likes DHFL and (IL&FS) having multiple impact on the entire financial system.
- NBFCs are the largest net borrowers of funds from the financial system and banks provide a substantial part of the funding to NBFCs and HFCs. Therefore, failure of any large NBFC or HFC may translate into a risk to its lenders.

Reason of recent failures of NBFCs-

In the last few years, country witnessed failure of big NBFCs and declining performance of many others. The main reasons behind this can be-

- Lack of corporate governance and non-disclosure of possible NPA- For instance, IL&FS gave huge dividends to shareholders despite continuous negative cash flows.
- **Timing Mismatch:** NBFCs have been borrowing money short term and have been lending it out long term. This asset liability timing mismatch is obviously a recipe for disaster. However, the NBFCs have been able to roll it over and pay their debts when due.
- **Mutual Funds:** NBFCs also heavily rely on mutual funds, thus resulting in a narrow base.
- **Asset Quality Issues:** A lot of NBFCs have invested heavily in the housing sector and Indian housing sector is not performing well, thus affecting asset quality of NBFCs.

Challenges due to the recent guidelines-

While the intention behind the PCA framework is good, few issues have arisen. These are-

- The recent PCA framework will be applicable for only a few NBFCs while the vast majority of the nearly 10,000 such entities will be excluded. However, the central bank can take any action irrespective of the size of an NBFC
- As NBFCs has been slowly recovering from the COVID pandemic, the new norms may bring new challenges for the sector.

Suggestions and way forward-

Realizing the significance of NBFCs for the financial sector and the Indian economy, following steps can be taken-

- There is a need to create a culture of responsible governance in the organizations where every employee feels responsible towards the customer, organization, and society.
- Self-accountability is needed to be promoted so that early identification of the challenges can be done and the need of RBI intervention can be avoided.

NORMS FOR CENTRAL PUBLIC SECTOR ENTERPRISE (CPSE) DIVESTMENT ANNOUNCED

CONTEXT:

The Finance Ministry has recently released guidelines for the implementation of the new central public sector enterprise (CPSE) policy, aimed at the privatisation, merger, closure or subsidiarisation of non-strategic CPSEs and achieve disinvestment target.

◎ BACKGROUND

- In 2021 Budget, the central government announced the plan to raise Rs 1.75 lakh crore in 2021-22 fiscal through the sale of its stake in PSEs and financial institutions.
- Of the total target, CPSE disinvestment receipts are expected to yield Rs 75,000 crore.
- In this direction, Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) was transferred this year from the Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises Ministry to the Ministry of Finance.
- In this background, the Finance Ministry has released guidelines for the implementation of the new central public sector enterprise (CPSE) policy which is aimed at the privatisation, merger, closure or subsidiarisation of non-strategic CPSE.

◎ ANALYSIS

What are CPSEs?

- These Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) are firms in which at least 51 per cent of the paid-up share capital is held by the central government, either fully or together with one or more state governments.
- These have two more categories:
 - ▶ **Strategic CPSE:** The strategic sectors include:
 - Atomic Energy, Space, and Defence
 - Transport and Telecommunication
 - Power, Petroleum, Coal, and Other Minerals
 - Banking, Insurance, and Financial Services
 - ▶ **Non-strategic CPSE:** All other PSUs apart from the strategic sectors fall under Non-strategic Sector including Power Discoms.
- In the 1950s and 1960s, most CPSEs were greenfield enterprises, set up in the first flush after Independence when the private sector had limited capacity to set up large capital-intensive enterprises.

What are the main highlights of the recent guidelines?

- **Disinvestment**
 - ▶ Under the norms, once the Union Cabinet or Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs clears disinvestment or closure of a CPSE, it will be disinvested completely within seven months.
- **The process**
 - ▶ **Identification & approval:** Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) will identify CPSEs for closure or privatization in non-strategic sector and seek approval from the CCEA (Cabinet committee on Economic affairs).
 - ▶ **Detail analysis:** The administrative ministry of the concerned CPSE will work out the details of any proposed closure, including details of budgetary support required. Based on the inputs of the administrative ministry, the DPE will then prepare a note and submit it to an inter-ministerial committee.
 - ▶ **Final approval:** The final approval is then given by the Finance Minister.
 - ▶ After the final approval, the norms envisage a timeline of two months for the process, including settlement statutory dues, payment to secured creditors, settlement of VRS for employees, and transfer of assets to a holding company.
 - ▶ The guidelines also state that any directors or even the CMDs of the selected CPSEs that do not cooperate may be removed from their roles and replaced by officials from the concerned ministry.

This time bound process will result in faster closure and merger of CPSE in the light of achieving disinvestment targets.

Strategic and Non-Strategic sectors-

- The PSE Policy envisages classification of CPSEs into Strategic and Non-Strategic Sectors.
 - ▶ The strategic sectors as per the policy are as given below:

- ▶ Atomic Energy, Space, and Defence
- ▶ Transport and Telecommunication
- ▶ Power, Petroleum, Coal, and Other Minerals
- ▶ Banking, Insurance, and Financial Services
- ▶ CPSEs in the Strategic Sector/ Non- Strategic Sector are to be taken up for privatisation, merger, subsidiarisation with another CPSE or for closure. Only a bare minimum presence of CPSEs in the aforesaid Strategic Sector is to be maintained

Relevance of establishment of CPSEs in India

Public sector enterprises were called as temples of modern India that were aimed to bring India to the path of industrialization with the key role played by the state. The key benefits envisaged were-

◉ Economic growth-

- ▶ Second five year plan (FYP) has major focus on large industries as the driver of economic growth.
- ▶ Key partnerships with developed countries including Russia and UK were made for import and transfer of technology.
- ▶ In the nascent phase, PSEs served as the main giver of employment to Indian workforce.

◉ Social development-

- ▶ Industries were set up with a focus on regional balance, and local employment.
- ▶ Reservation for various sections in employment ensured financial and thus, socially inclusive growth.

◉ Strategic autonomy-

- ▶ As India was keen on self-reliance in early phases of growth, foreign direct investment directly or through private players were largely avoided.
- ▶ It also gave the central and state government the key control over the path to development through five year plans and licensing restrictions.

Why CPSE are important for India in current scenario?

While some of the goals for creation of CPSEs have been met, they are still relevant in the present scenario for the following reasons-

◉ Strategic reasons -

- ▶ State control is desirable in some sectors for national security and autonomy like defense and atomic energy.

- ▶ In the light of liberal foreign investment, increasing upto 100% in some sectors, state enterprises can protect India from foreign domination.

- ▶ Many PSEs like ONGC are also important for diplomatic foreign investment and relations

◉ Economic reasons-

- ▶ While investment from private companies in many domains like telecom or steel, they invest on cost benefit reasons, thus mandating state investment in sunrise sectors.
- ▶ Many PSE are competitive or even performing better than their private counterparts.

What are the challenges faced by CPSE?

In the light of liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG) policy adopted by the government after 1991, there is a need for reassessment of the CPSEs. In the present times, following changes are faced by CPSE-

◉ Reduced Competitiveness-

- ▶ The cost on employee salaries and allowances are higher with respect to private counterparts.
- ▶ They are also putting a strain on public exchequer due to their failures, duplication of PSE leading to competition within them and thus also impacting fiscal deficit of the government.
- ▶ As per a performance review conducted by the department of public enterprises (DPE) for 2019-2020, only 25 of the 144 central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) in the country have been tagged as "excellent".

◉ Policy and political issues-

- ▶ They have less autonomy for decision making regarding day to day decisions, mergers and acquisitions, and starting new projects.
- ▶ The slow employment hiring and firing policy makes it difficult for them to maintain to ensure optimum performance by the employees.

◉ Declining social relevance-

- ▶ The easy presence of education, health and employment facilities in most of the country makes it unnecessary for the government to invest through PSEs
- ▶ The rise of large base of private companies have resulted in huge investment, thus government spending is not very relevant.

Steps taken by the government-

The central and state governments have taken many steps to ensure the economic and social goals are aligned with the CPSE policy. These are:

- Disinvestment-
 - Multiple disinvestment models were developed like 'Minority stake sale', 'Strategic Disinvestment' etc.
 - Yearly targets were announced in the union budget for disinvestment in CPSEs.
 - Guidelines were announced for the time bound disinvestment of CPSEs.
- **Performance analysis:** Regular performance analysis and ranking of CPSEs to ascertain cost benefit analysis.
- New classification of the CPSEs for better identification and planned disinvestment.
- **Reservation in private industries-**
 - Some states have announced local reservation up to a certain level of pay in the private industries to align the social goals of the state with the private companies. For example, Haryana and Maharashtra.

Way Forward-

There is a need to assess the relevance of CPSEs and adopting measures to ensure CPSEs remain relevant in the light of new national policies and goals. Some suggestions are-

- **Learning from global best practices-**
 - Success of Chinese companies in remaining competitive as well as being flexible in operations can act as a path for the success of India's CPSEs.
- **Talent upgradation-**
 - Easy and flexi options for reskilling, providing mid-level training and assessment at regular intervals can lead to better performance.
- **Strategic partnership-**
 - CPSEs should be allowed to partner with Indian and foreign players for better performance, technology transfer and optimum growth.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND INFECTIOUS DISEASE

CONTEXT:

A new study conducted by researchers from the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) shows that climate change is making children vulnerable to infectious diseases.

◎ BACKGROUND

- As changing climate is moving the comfort zone for many animals (e.g.-disease-carrying mosquitoes that kill about 1 million people a year), the threat of infectious disease is not rise.
- Climate change is responsible for at-least 1,50,000 deaths per year, a number that is expected to get double by 2030.

- A 1 degree Celsius rise in maximum temperature was associated with an increase in diarrhoea and skin-disease cases by 3.97 per cent and 3.94 per cent.
- Climate parameters like temperature, humidity, rainfall, solar radiation, and wind speed were associated with infectious diseases like gastrointestinal diseases, respiratory diseases, vector-borne diseases, and skin diseases

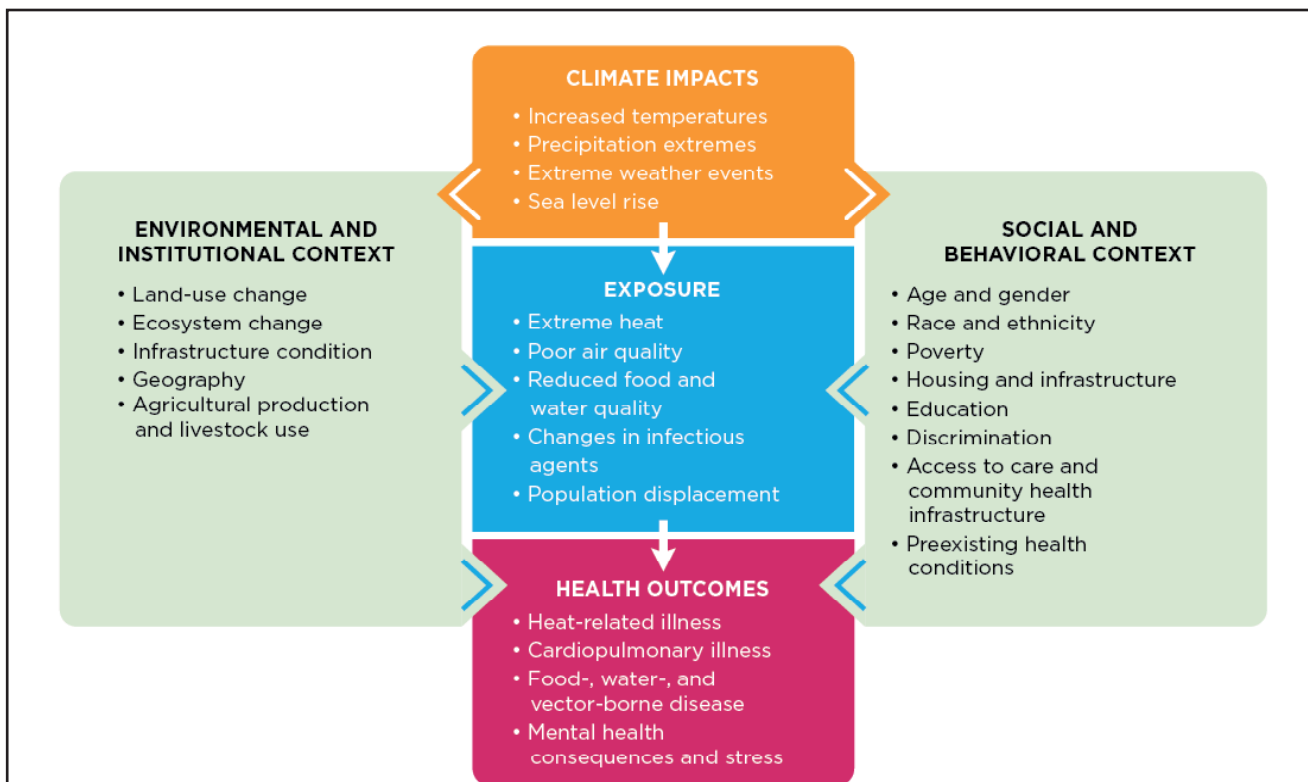
◎ ANALYSIS

Key-findings of the Report

- Driven by human-made activities, climate change may challenge the gains in the public health sector made over the years.
- Globally, it is estimated that children bear most of the burden of disease due to climate change, with the poorest disproportionately affected.
- Maximum temperature and humidity are important drivers leading to infectious disease among children.

Why climate change intensifies the spread of infectious disease?

- Rising temperatures and increased precipitation can promote an array of infectious diseases, from vector-borne diseases (eg, malaria, dengue, and leishmaniasis), to enteric infections and diarrhoea (eg, cholera, vibriosis, and rotavirus infection), and to parasitic diseases such as schistosomiasis.
- Climate-related suitability for dengue transmission in 2018 had globally increased since 1950 by an estimated 8.9%, when considering *Aedes aegypti*, and by 15.0%, when considering *Aedes albopictus*.



- ▶ This increase is partly due to the broadened geographical reach of these vectors—eg, several *Aedes* spp, absent from Europe before 1990, have become established in several European countries.
- ▶ Other vectors, such as *Ixodes ricinus* ticks, carriers of *Borrelia burgdorferi* (causing Lyme disease) and tick-borne encephalitis virus, have also gradually spread to wider regions in Europe.
- ▶ In the past 10 years, Europe has seen a return of malaria, with sustained local transmission of *Plasmodium vivax* infections in Greece in 2012, increased incidence of pathogenic *Vibrio* spp infections in the Baltic region, recurring summer outbreaks of West Nile virus in southern and eastern Europe, cases of local transmission of chikungunya in France and Italy, and a report of local transmission of Zika virus in France in 2019.

Infectious diseases

- Infectious diseases are caused by microorganisms such as viruses, bacteria, fungi or parasites.
- Microorganisms that cause disease are collectively called **pathogens**.
- Pathogens cause disease either by disrupting the body's normal processes and/or stimulating the immune system to produce a defensive response, resulting in high fever, inflammation and other symptoms.

- Infectious diseases can be spread from one person to another

- ▶ **For example** through contact with bodily fluids, by aerosols (through coughing and sneezing), or via a vector (mosquito).

What role is played by temperature?

- Temperature controls several factors that underlie the time it takes for a virus to be transmittable to humans. These include:
 - ▶ how long it takes for a mosquito to ingest a virus during one feeding and then be ready to inject it in a later feeding
 - ▶ the length of the mosquito's life cycle
 - ▶ how often mosquitoes bite
- The traits rely on temperature, but they tend to be nonlinear.
- As temperatures rise with climate change, mosquito season extends past the summer months in many parts of the world.

◎ CONCLUSION

Given the increasing temperature and climate change, it is essential to understand and predict the rise and spread of diseases. In the absence of effective measures, health is going to suffer for sure and the global government would not be able to handle this.

WHY EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IS ON THE DECLINE

CONTEXT:

New research appearing in the latest issue of the Journal of Personality by Khan and colleagues (2021) presents a meta-analysis showing declining levels of emotional intelligence in Western college-student samples in studies that were completed between 2001 and 2019.

◎ BACKGROUND

- The lead author of the present study searched for previous research using the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, which was conducted between 2001 and 2019.
- The researchers also limited inclusion in the meta-analysis to those studies involving college student samples from the US, UK, Canada, and Australia.
- The present research included 70 studies with nearly 17,000 participants.
- The researchers then conducted a “**cross-temporal meta-analysis**” to examine changes in emotional intelligence over time, controlling for the age of the cohorts.
- They sought to determine “whether societal-level changes have coincided with changes in trait EI (emotional intelligence) in young adults.”

◎ ANALYSIS

What is Emotional Intelligence?

- Emotional intelligence (EI) is the capability of a person to assess, manage and control one's own emotions as well as emotions of others.
- It is critical to manage our behaviour and decision making.
- It has 5 components-
 - ▶ self awareness
 - ▶ self regulation
 - ▶ motivation
 - ▶ empathy
 - ▶ social skills
- These 5 components are important to develop emotional intelligence among people.

How can emotional intelligence be developed in people?

- The skills that make up emotional intelligence can be learned at any time. The key skills for building emotional intelligence can be built by:

- ▶ **Self-awareness:** Self-awareness ability allows an individual to know his/her strengths and weaknesses. This helps in managing emotions through using his/her strengths and working upon weaknesses.
- ▶ **Developing Empathy:** Having empathy is critical to understand and manage emotions of other people. Ability to recognize others' emotions help individuals to act accordingly. It helps them to understand their colleagues' feelings and perspectives, which enables them to communicate and collaborate more effectively with their peers.
- ▶ **Stress management:** It's important that one must learn how to manage stress first, so that he can feel more comfortable reconnecting to strong or unpleasant emotions and changing how you experience and respond to your feelings. A person can develop your emotional awareness by practicing mindfulness meditation.
- ▶ **Effective Communication:** An effective communication can help people to develop better strategies and increase their efficiency by synchronising their efforts. By motivating others to communicate how they feel, can help them to know themselves better.
- ▶ **Training to adapt:** People should be able to adapt to changing circumstances. This can be achieved by training to manage different situations. Ability to understand and manage their emotions and of those around them help emotionally intelligent leaders to navigate through difficult circumstances.
- ▶ **Taking responsibility:** Taking responsibility for one's actions is a part of emotional intelligence. One must develop courage to accept his/her deeds. This enables a person to better accept his/her faults and work upon them ultimately leading to emotional intelligence.
- ▶ **Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is the practice of purposely focusing your attention on the present moment and without judgment. The cultivation of mindfulness can be achieved by yoga or meditation technique. Mindfulness

helps shift ones' preoccupation with thought toward an appreciation of the moment, physical and emotional sensations, and brings a larger perspective on life.

How does it help an individual in making ethical decisions?

- **Informed decision making:** Emotions help inform decisions by allowing the decision maker to anticipate the positive and negative emotional consequences of a particular decision on the decision maker and on others. The ability to read others' emotions is critical in responding to others' feelings.
- **Empathy:** More empathic individuals make more ethical decisions because they take into consideration the reactions and feelings of those impacted by the decision. The tendency to feel another's pain helps the decision maker to make ethical decisions.
- **Moral decisions:** Ability to regulate emotion helps a decision maker monitor his/her own emotional state, and serves to inform whether a particular decision feels good or bad. This ability could be used to regulate emotions productively toward more situations.
- **Conflict resolution:** Emotional Intelligence helps individuals in resolving conflict effectively. It enables a person to visualise the effect of his decisions on him and others and help him to manage negative emotions like greed and anger.
- **Objective Decision making:** Emotionally Intelligent people make objective decisions based on accumulated wisdom and understanding with time. A person who manages his or her emotions will take quick and strong decisions without emotions being involved after proper cost-benefit analysis.

Findings of the current study

- The researchers found (when controlling for gender as well as the country where the study was conducted) that **with time three facets of emotional intelligence: well-being, self-control, and emotionality, significantly decreased.**
- Furthermore, the declines in emotional intelligence were "stronger as the proportion of females in the sample decreased."
- The authors also conducted supplementary analyses showing that **access to technology** in each of the countries was "**associated with lower levels of well-being and self-control.**"

Speculations from the Study

- The authors speculate that the rapid rise in young adults' use of social media might be responsible for some of the declines in emotional intelligence. "In-person social interaction provides greater opportunity for emotional closeness and bonding compared to online communication, which is problematic if individuals are replacing in-person social interactions with online communication."
- Changes in society over the past two decades may also be responsible for "generational decreases in empathy and increases in depression and anxiety symptoms" as well as "increases in mood disorders, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts."

◎ CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence is critical for effective decision making. It plays an important role in driving an organisation together towards a goal and helping in conflict resolution. Promoting Emotional Intelligence in children helps them to think clearly, develop socially and learn new skills. It also helps them to develop self-confidence, high self-esteem and a healthy emotional outlook on life. Thus, steps should be taken to support the building of Emotional intelligence at every stage from early childhood to old age.

SECTION: B

(PRELIMS)

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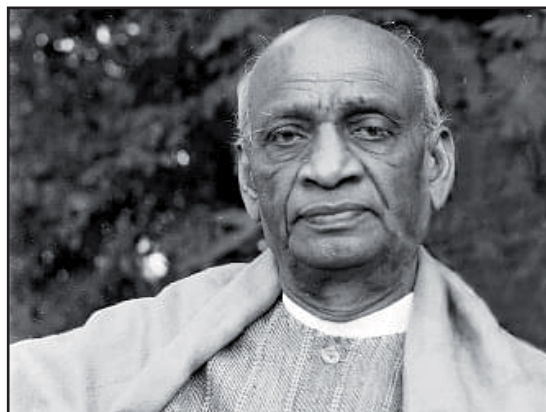
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CELEBRATING SARDAR VALLABHBHAI PATEL'S LEGACY

◎ **CONTEXT:** On Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's 71st death anniversary today, 15 December, Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid homage to India's first home minister.

About India's unifier

- Born in Nadiad, Gujarat on October 31, 1875, Patel finished his schooling in 1897, following which he decided to pursue a course in Law.
- Popularly called as the 'Iron Man of India', Patel was a leader of the Congress party, a lawyer by profession.
- He was India's first home minister and also the first deputy prime minister, and as the first home minister and deputy prime minister of India.
- He is credited largely with the **unification of the princely states** in India after independence from the British.
- Sardar Patel passed away in 1950 in Mumbai (then Bombay) on December 15.



Association with Gandhi

- Patel was a prominent presence in all the protests and satyagrahs against the British, during which his association with Mahatma Gandhi began to grow.
- In his entire political career, Patel accepted the leadership and ways of Gandhi during the independence struggle.

National Unity Day

- His birthday on October 31 is celebrated as National Unity day or Ekta Diwas to honour his contributions in unifying India.

Statue of Unity

- To mark his significance during the independence struggle and his contributions to independent India, PM Modi inaugurated the Statue of Unity, a colossal statue of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on October 31, 2018.

KOLKATA DURGA PUJA ENTERS UNESCO'S 'INTANGIBLE HERITAGE' LIST

◎ **CONTEXT:** Recently, UNESCO announced that the Durga Puja in Kolkata has been inscribed on the agency's list of 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'.

- In total, 14 Intangible Cultural Heritage elements from the country have now been inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List.

Important facts about Durga Puja

- **Durga Puja is a five-day festival** which begins on the **fifth night** of the **nine-day Navratri festival and ends on the tenth day, which is Dashami**.
- During this time, **people collectively worship and invoke Goddess Durga**, who is regarded as the **feminine energy of the cosmos, also known as 'Shakti'**.
- **Originating in West Bengal**, which has the **largest Bengali community** in the country, the **festival is celebrated in many other parts of India, and also the world**.
- During this time, **intricately-designed clay models of the Goddess are worshipped in 'pandals' and pavilions where people get together**.
 - **Folk music, culinary, craft, and performing arts traditions** are a part of the celebration.

What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?

- The Representative List of the **Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity has 492 elements currently**.
- It includes **"forms of expression that testifies to the diversity of intangible heritage and raises awareness of its importance"**.
- UNESCO intends to enhance the **"visibility of communities' cultural practices and know-how"**, aiming to **"safeguard the intangible cultural heritage of communities globally"**.

- According to **UNESCO**, "cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects.
 - It also includes **traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants**, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts".

UNESCO's 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity' list

- Apart from the Kolkata Durga Puja, these were also included in UNESCO's list of 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'.
 - The Saint John celebrations in Venezuela
 - The Corpus Christi festival is celebrated in Panama
 - The Bolivian Grand Festival of Tarija
 - Nora, an acrobatic form of dance theatre from southern Thailand
 - Al-Qudoud al-Halabiya, a form of traditional music from Aleppo (Syria)
 - Congolese rumba and Xòe, a Vietnamese dance form
 - Ceebu Jën, a Senegalese culinary art form
 - Pasillo, a type of music and dance that emerged in Ecuador

WHY BENGALI COULD NEVER SURPASS HINDI TO BECOME INDIA'S TOP LANGUAGE

◎ CONTEXT:

In today's time, the Bengali language is lagging behind in terms of recognition and respect in its homeland, quite unlike the status of other languages in their respective states.

About (The Language Profile)

■ Hindi

- Hindi belongs to the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European family of languages.
- Hindi, along with English, are the official languages of India.
- Hindi became the official language of the Union of India in 1950. The Constitution of India provides for the use of Hindi in the Devanagari script as the official language of the Union.
- According to Article 343, "The official language of the Union shall be Hindi in the Devanagari script.
- The form of numerals to be used for the official purpose of the Union shall be the international form of Indian numerals."
- English was declared an associate language of the Union, and Hindi was supposed to replace English in 1965.

February 21 is **International Mother Language Day**. It has been observed since 1999 to promote "linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism".

■ Bengali

- Bengali is an eastern Indo-Aryan language with around 265 million speakers, mainly in Bangladesh and northern Indian.
- The Bengali alphabet (Bangla lipi) is derived from the Brahmi alphabet. It is also closely related to the Devanagari alphabet, from which it started to diverge in the 11th Century AD.
- The current printed form of Bengali alphabet first appeared in 1778 when Charles Wilkins developed printing in Bengali.
- A few archaic letters were modernized during the 19th century.
- Bengali is included in the Eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

- Globally, English remains the most widely spoken language with 1.13 billion speakers in 2019, followed by Mandarin with 1.17 billion.
- Hindi is third with 615 million speakers while Bengali is seventh with 265 million.
- In India, Hindi is the most spoken language with over 528 million speakers in 2011, as per the Census.
- Bengali had 97.2 million speakers in 2011, followed by Marathi (83 million), while other languages with over 50 million speakers are Telugu (81 million), Tamil (69 million), Gujarati (55.5 million) and Urdu (50.8 million).

INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN DAY 2021

◎ **CONTEXT:** **International Mountain Day is observed on 11 December** annually to spread awareness about the importance of mountains in our lives and to our planet.

About

- The formation of International Mountain Day dates back to **1992** when **Agenda 21 "Managing Fragile Ecosystems: Sustainable Mountain Development"** was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.
- Seeing the increasing attention towards the importance of mountains, the UN General Assembly declared in **2002** the **UN International Year of Mountains** and designated **11 December as International Mountain Day from 2003**.
 - The first time International Mountain Day was celebrated was on **11 December 2003**.
 - Every year it is celebrated with a **particular theme**.

Theme 2021

- **The theme of International Mountain Day 2021 is "Sustainable mountain tourism."**

What are mountains?

- **Mountain** refers to landform that rises prominently above its surroundings, generally exhibiting steep slopes, a relatively confined summit area, and considerable local relief.
- Mountains generally are understood to be larger than hills, but the term has no standardized geological meaning.

Types of mountains

- **Volcanic Mountains:** Volcanic mountains are formed when a tectonic plate is pushed beneath another (or above a mid-ocean ridge or hotspot) where magma is forced to the surface.
- **Fold Mountains:** They occur when two tectonic plates collide at a convergent plate boundary, causing the crust to over-thicken.
- **Block Mountains:** Such mountains are caused by faults in the crust, a seam where rocks can move past each other.
 - Also known as rifting, this process occurs when rocks on one side of a fault rise relative to the other.
 - The uplifted blocks become block mountains (also known as horsts) while the intervening dropped blocks are known as graben (i.e. depressed regions).

Important mountain ranges in India

- **Himalayas:** The world's highest mountain range, the Himalayas, spans five countries including India.
- **Aravalli Range:** The oldest mountain range of India, the Aravalli Range is also the oldest mountain range in the world.

- **Satpura and Vindhaya Range:** The Satpura and Vindhaya Range lies in central India and both these ranges run parallel to each other. Both Satpura and Vindhaya are mainly situated in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra with some extension to Gujarat, Chattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh.
- **Western Ghats:** Western Ghats is 1600m long mountain range that runs from Gujrat to Kanyakumari in south India.
 - This mountain range is also called "Sahyadri Mountains".
 - It comprises the mountain range of Nilgiris, Anaimalai and Cardomom.
- **Eastern Ghats:** Eastern Ghats is mountain range running in eastern part of Indian Peninsula parallel to Bay of Bengal. This range is not continuous and is lower in elevation when compared to Western Ghats.

INDIA ASSUMES CHAIRMANSHIP OF RATS-SCO

◎ CONTEXT:

Recently, India assumed the Chairmanship of Council of Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (RATS-SCO) in 2021 for a period of one year.

About Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

- It was founded in June 2001 by China, Russia, and the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- It aimed to cooperate against non-traditional security challenges, in particular fighting the so-called "three evils" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism.
- The fact that the SCO also strives to strengthen mutual trust and good neighbourly relations between its member states.
- It was preceded by the Shanghai Five mechanism.
- **Permanent Bodies:** The organization has two permanent bodies —
 - SCO Secretariat based in Beijing
 - Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent
- **Dialogue partner:** The SCO has six dialogue partners, namely the Republic of Azerbaijan, the
- **Dialogue partner:** The SCO has six dialogue partners, namely the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the Republic of Turkey, and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

RATS-SCO

- The SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure established by the member states of the Shanghai Convention on 15 June, 2001.
- **Objective:** To combat terrorism, separatism and extremism.
- The Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is the permanent body of the SCO RATS based in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan.

Objectives of SCO

The main objectives of the SCO are to:

- strengthen relations among member states
- promote cooperation in political affairs, economics and trade, scientific-technical, cultural, and educational spheres as well as in energy, transportation, tourism, and environmental protection;
- safeguard regional peace, security, and stability
- create a democratic, equitable international political and economic order

US SANCTIONS ON IRAN HAVE NO BEARING ON INDIA'S CHABAHAR PORT PROJECT

◎ **CONTEXT:** The US sanctions on Iran have not affected India's Chabahar port project, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar told Lok Sabha.

About

- Iran's Chabahar port is located on the Gulf of Oman and is the only oceanic port of the country.
- The port gives access to the energy-rich Persian Gulf nations' southern coast.
- Chabahar port, with road and rail links through Iran, offers a more secure alternative route to Gwadar port in Pakistan, operated by the Chinese.

Significance for India

- **Access to Afghanistan:** It gives India – a key US ally in the region that is assisting with Afghan reconstruction – access to the landlocked, war-torn country.
- **Gateway to Central Asia and beyond:** Other than moving goods and equipment bound for Afghanistan, for India, it is also a trade link to lucrative markets in Central Asia and beyond.
- **Strategic importance:** The Port is of great strategic importance due to its location in the **Gulf of Oman** and at the entrance of the **Strait of Hormuz** and enables Iran to have direct entree to the **Indian Ocean**.



US sanctions on Iran

- The United States reinstated economic sanctions on Iran after the country (under Donald Trump) abandoned a landmark nuclear deal in May 2018.
- In 2015, President Hassan Rouhani agreed a deal with the US and five other world powers to limit Iranian nuclear activities in return for the lifting of those sanctions.

SUPREME COURT ALLOWS WIDENING OF CHAR DHAM ROAD

◎ CONTEXT:

Recently, the Supreme Court of India permitted the Central Government for double lane widening of the roads for the **Char Dham Project** in the light of the security concerns.

The widened route

- Agreeing with security needs highlighted by the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the Supreme Court allowed widening of three hill stretches in Uttarakhand, forming part of the **Chardham Mahamarg Vikas Pariyojna**:
 - Rishikesh to Mana
 - Rishikesh to Gangotri
 - Tanakpur to Pithoragarh
- This will be in the **Double Line-Paved Shoulder (DL-PS) format** with a width of 10 metres (7 metre doubleline carriageway and 1.5 metre paved shoulders on either side) as prescribed by the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH)**.

■ About Char Dham Road Project

- The strategic Chardham project aims to provide all-weather connectivity to four holy towns –
 - Yamunotri
 - Gangotri
 - Kedarnath
 - Badrinath
- **Cost:** Rs 12,000 crore
- **Total Kms:** 900-km approx
- The project was envisaged back in 2016.
- Even though Char Dham road project was **primarily conceived to facilitate tourism and Char dham yatras**, it always had a strategic angle as the highways **will facilitate the seamless movement of troops** to the areas that are closer to the China border.

6 ARTICLES INSERTED IN CONSTITUTION: GOVERNMENT

◎ CONTEXT:

As per latest information provided by the Government to the Lok Sabha, 6 Articles have been inserted in the Constitution through various constitutional orders issued by the President.

◎ ABOUT

The new added articles

- The Constitution (Removal of Difficulties) Order No. II and the Constitution (Removal of Difficulties) Order No. III notified on January 26, 1950 had inserted Articles
 - Article 329A
 - Article 172A
 - Article 238A
 - Article 333A
 - Article 390A
- The **Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1954** notified on May 14, 1954 had inserted **Article 35A** in the Appendix to the Constitution under Article 370 of the Constitution (Temporary provisions with respect to the State of Jammu and Kashmir).
 - This has since been superseded by the Constitution Order No. 272 dated August 5, 2019.

Amendment to the Constitution of India

- Article 368 of the Indian Constitution provides the procedure of Amendment.
- Under Article 368, the Constitution can be amended by a 'simple majority' or by the 'special majority' and by the 'majority of not less than 2/3 members of each house'.
- Later if the bill is passed by the majority it will be sent to the president for his assent.

Types of Majority

- **Simple Majority:** vote by more than half of the members present and voting
- **Absolute Majority:** a majority of more than 50% of the **total membership of the house**.
- **Effective Majority:** a majority of the House's effective strength (total strength minus vacant seats) of more than 50%.
- **Special Majority:** majority of more than 50% of the members **present and voting**. There are four types of special majorities. They are as follows:
 - **Special Majority according to Article 249:** a majority of 2/3rd members present and voting.
 - **Special Majority according to Article 368:** a majority of 2/3rd members present and voting supported by over 50% of the total strength of the House.
 - **Special Majority according to Article 368 + 50 percent state ratification by a simple majority:** This type of majority is needed when a constitutional amendment tries to change the federal structure.
 - **Special Majority according to Article 61:** a majority of 2/3rd of the total strength of the House.

ASSAM'S TEA WORKERS AFFECTED BY NEUROCYSTICERCOSIS (NCC)

◎ CONTEXT:

Neurocysticercosis, triggered by tapeworms has become a challenge for Assam's tea workers, who are already working in a poor condition.

- A study published in the **Nature** journal earlier this year reported higher prevalence (42.2 per cent) of **neurocysticercosis (NCC)** among patients with active epilepsy in the tea gardens of Assam.

About

- **What is neurocysticercosis (NCC)?**
- Neurocysticercosis (NCC) is a preventable disease, which can result in adult-onset epilepsy.
- It is caused when a human consumes meat from — or is indirectly in contact with — a pig infected with tapeworm.
- The eggs of the tapeworm invade the muscles of the human body to make cysts.
- Sometimes these cysts get into people's brains, triggering epileptic seizures, headaches, difficulty with balance and excess fluid around the brain.

Assam's tea workers

- Assam is the world's largest tea growing region, with over 800 estates producing half of India's tea.
- An estimated 1 million plantation workers pick tea on these estates for Rs 205 a day.
- A 2019 study by non-profit Oxfam revealed that Assam's tea workers are one of the state's most marginalised with unsafe working conditions. They lack basic amenities earn low incomes, at high risk of human rights violations.
- To supplement their meager income, many plantation workers — both permanent and temporary — rear pigs. It requires little investment and labor.

Spread of the disease

- The life cycle of a pork tapeworm (*taenia solium*) takes it from pigs to humans and vice-versa.
- Tapeworm eggs are spread through food, water, or surfaces contaminated with faeces. Humans swallow the eggs when they eat contaminated food or put contaminated fingers in their mouth.

ASKOT WILDLIFE SANCTUARY DECLARED ECO-SENSITIVE ZONE

◎ CONTEXT:

Askot Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh has been finally declared as an **Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ)**.

About Askot Wildlife Sanctuary

- **The Askot Musk Deer Sanctuary, established in 1986**, was established to protect the **endangered Musk Deer and its habitat**.
- The sanctuary area is known as '**Green Paradise on the Earth**'.
- It is **located in Askot, a small hamlet in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district**.
- In the sanctuary there are **2600 plants, 250 birds and 37 mammal species** like **snow leopard, Himalayan black bear, Himalayan tahr, blue sheep, serow besides musk deer**.

- Among the fauna are species like loong, monal, kalij pheasant and cheer pheasant.
- The sanctuary also has **rare varieties of 2,600 Himalayan herbs and 250 varieties of birds and 37 varieties of reptiles.**

Area reduction

- The Sanctuary area has been **reduced—a stretch of 146 square kilometers** along which over **111 villages are located has been kept out** of the ESZ ambit with an aim to **make the flagship species habitat safe from human interference.**
- The sanctuary area is now limited **from original area 599.93 square kilometers to only 454.65 square km** giving a comparatively little area for the **fauna to move around.**

Issues/Challenges

Because of the presence of the villages, it had been witnessing:

- increased human encroachment as well as human animal conflicts
- biotic interference

Significance of the development

- The notification will help **control excessive grazing, lopping, fire incidence, unscientific exploitation of land, mining and other activities associated with development in the Askot Wildlife Sanctuary”.**

What Are Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ)?

- **Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ)** is a buffer or transition zone around **highly-protected areas** such as **National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries.**
- The purpose of declaring ESZs is to create some kind of **“shock absorbers”** to the protected areas by **regulating and managing the activities around such areas.**

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