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# **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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## **GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations**

### **1. Rural health care needs fixing, and now**

#### **Background:**

**The pandemic has exposed the lack of robust healthcare infrastructure in India:**

- The two consecutive waves of COVID-19 and the lack of adequate and timely health care infrastructure in the country have led to a health crisis in India.
- The second wave of the pandemic has also affected the rural areas and the **rural people are struggling to get timely and quality health care.**
- A key takeaway from the pandemic is that India needs to focus on improving its health infrastructure more so in the rural areas.

#### **Lacunae in rural health infrastructure:**

- Despite the rural areas supporting a substantial share of the Indian population, **rural areas continue to be plagued by the issue of inadequate and poor health infrastructure.** As a result, our vast rural populace remains deprived of critical health interventions.
  - Out of the 139 crore population of India, around 91 crore people are living in 649,481 villages of India accounting for **about 65% of the Indian population.**
- As against the ideal of one Primary Health Centre (PHC) for every 10 villages, India has only one PHC for 25 villages. As per this metric India has a shortfall of 3,594 PHCs.
- Similarly, there is a shortfall of community health centres (CHCs) as well.
  - CHCs act as a referral centre covering a population of 80,000 people to 1.20 lakh people.
- The CHCs are also **grossly understaffed.** There is a shortfall of 81.8% specialists at CHCs.
- **The number of hospital beds per capita continues to be low in India** with rural areas having far lesser hospital beds as compared to urban areas.
  - As per the Human Development Report 2020, India has eight hospital beds for a population of 10,000 people. While for China the number stands at 40 beds for a population of 10,000 people.
- The number of medical colleges and hospitals continue to be low in rural areas.

### Significance of primary health care:

#### Lessen the burden on tertiary level:

- If the SHCs work effectively, there will be less pressure on PHCs. If the PHCs function well, then there will be minimal pressure on CHCs and so on.
- **PHC system can tackle up to 80% of health needs** and can reduce the need for specialized health care services. Thus strengthening the primary health infrastructure will help lessen the burden on hospitals.

#### Economic viability:

- A robust rural healthcare infrastructure with a healthy linkage between the SHCs, PHCs and CHCs will help treat the disease/s at the primary level itself. This will help India **save money and resources being spent at tertiary level health care** which is often costly.

#### Correction of the inverted pyramid pattern in India:

- The focus on primary health care will help correct the **inverted pyramid of Health Services provision and utilization pattern** being observed in India.
  - **A large proportion of health services in India are delivered at the secondary and tertiary levels whereas the demand is high at the primary level.** Thus, the pattern of service utilisation and delivery is inverted in India.
- The reorganization and strengthening of the health services at the primary level (supply side) while also changing the behaviour of people to use the services at the primary level (demand side) will help India correct the inverted pyramid as discussed above.

#### Better health outcomes:

- A robust primary health infrastructure has the **advantage of early detection of diseases and timely interventions.** Thus it will invariably lead to better health outcomes for the patients.

#### Potential for adoption of preventive and health promotion approach:

- Given that primary healthcare acts as the **first point of contact between the health infrastructure and a large proportion of the general populace** in our country, they can be used to promote a preventive approach to healthcare.
  - As per an estimate of WHO, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases cause nearly 5.87 million (60%) of all deaths in India. Given the difficulty of a healthcare

infrastructure being able to cater to such a large population, a preventive and promotive healthcare approach becomes inevitable.

- As part of **Ayushman Bharat**, the Government is supporting the States for **strengthening Sub Centres and Primary Health Centres as Health and Wellness Centres** for the provision of comprehensive primary care that includes preventive and health promotion at the community level with a continuum of care approach. Under this scheme, universal screening, prevention and management of common non-communicable diseases have been rolled out across the country.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Primary healthcare approach:**

- **The 2018 Astana Declaration** acknowledges Primary Health Care (PHC) approach as being the most effective way to sustainably solve today's health and health system challenges. Hence such an approach becomes inevitable for a healthy India.
- As per WHO, primary health care is a whole-of-society approach to health and well-being centred on the needs and preferences of individuals, families and communities. It ensures that people receive comprehensive care – ranging from promotion and prevention to treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care – as close as feasible to people's everyday environment.

#### **Sub-district based health system in India:**

- Considering the large size of districts in India, effective planning in health services and tackling inequities in health outcomes need a sub-district unit-level planning. Thus the planning and implementation of funding and human resources should focus on these lines.
- There should be a greater focus on establishing block level health units.

#### **Addressing the shortfall in rural healthcare infrastructure:**

- Villages need adequate health services.
- The number of PHCs should be expanded and also these PHCs should have the provision of some beds and other minimum necessary facilities.
- The CHC must be **equipped with the necessary infrastructure and trained medical personnel**.
- **Regular health camps** need to be organized for areas without necessary access to the healthcare infrastructure.
- The chain of SHCs, PHCs and CHCs must be designed to take care of the multiple health needs of our people.

### **Focussing on health outcomes:**

- Apart from higher budgetary allocations to the health sector, there is also a need to ensure that the money being spent **improves health facilities and improves health outcomes**.
  - In India, the recent National Health Policy 2017 has proposed to spend two-thirds or more of Government spending on the PHC system.
- The healthcare facilities in the rural areas must be able to provide regular and comprehensive healthcare needs based on the World Health Organization (WHO)'s **principle of Universal Health Coverage**.
  - Universal Health Coverage ensures that all people have **access** to needed health services (including prevention, promotion, treatment, rehabilitation and palliation) of sufficient **quality** to be effective while also ensuring their affordability.

### **Collective responsibility:**

- Despite **health being a State subject**, the state and central governments must take up the task of improving the healthcare infrastructure in rural areas as a collective responsibility.
- Additionally, the governments must also engage with all kinds of rural community organisations such as panchayats, gram sabha, notified area committees, municipal bodies and non-governmental organisations to realize the potential benefits that such a collaborative approach can yield.

## **2. Recognising caste-based violence against women**

### **Intersectionality:**

- Intersectionality is an analytical framework for understanding how **aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege**.
- Intersectionality identifies multiple factors of advantage and disadvantage. Examples of these factors include gender, caste, sex, race, class, sexuality, religion, disability and physical appearance. These intersecting and overlapping social identities may be both empowering and oppressing.

### **Intersectional approach to feminism:**

- An intersectional approach to feminism acknowledges that while women share similar experiences of discrimination, harassment, sexism, inequality

and oppression on the basis of their sex and gender, not all women are equally disadvantaged or have equal access to resources, power and privilege.

- For example, intersectional discrimination faced by black women in the U.S., intersectional discrimination faced by women from SC and ST classes in India.
- Thus intersectionality approach seeks to **recognise the multiple grounds of marginalisation faced by women.**

### Patan Jamal Vali v. State of Andhra Pradesh case:

- The Supreme Court in its judgement in the Patan Jamal Vali v. State of Andhra Pradesh case addresses this **intersectionality of caste, gender and disability.**
- The Supreme Court, argued for such an intersectional approach, to take into account the multiple marginalities that the rape victim had to face and which could have contributed to her facing sexual violence. It noted how multiple sources of oppression operated cumulatively to produce a specific experience of subordination for the blind Dalit woman.

### **3. Comments to avoid in long-standing ties**

#### Context:

- The article authored by the former High Commissioner to Bangladesh and Foreign Secretary Krishnan Srinivasan analyzes the India-Bangladesh bilateral relations.

### Challenges in the India-Bangladesh relationship:

#### **Border issue:**

- India and Bangladesh share an approximately **4,100-kilometre land border.**
- Despite the friendship remaining solid, the border has been sensitive. At least 25 Bangladeshis were killed in the first six months of 2020 along the border by Indian forces, according to a rights watchdog.
- **Human trafficking and smuggling of arms, cattle, drugs** through the unfenced borders is a serious security threat for India.
- **Illegal migrants** from Bangladesh pose socio-economic challenges in the bordering states.

#### **River water sharing:**

- The **Teesta water dispute** remains unresolved. This has had a drag on taking the relationship to a higher level.
- India and Bangladesh share almost **54 Transboundary rivers**.

#### **Trade imbalance:**

- Despite robust trade relations between the two neighbours, there is a **highly skewed balance of trade in favour of India**. This has been a cause of concern for Bangladesh and there have been repeated calls from it to urgently address the **trade imbalance** by India adopting favourable trade policies.
  - Bangladeshi Foreign minister had recently called on India to provide a tariff-free facility for exports from Bangladesh.

#### **China factor:**

- China is making deep inroads into Bangladesh by ramping up infrastructure investments (energy projects) and expanding economic cooperation.

#### **Increasing radicalization:**

- Bangladesh has continued to face challenges from Islamist factions.
- Recently an Islamist group, Hifazat-e-Islam, organised mass protests against French President Emmanuel Macron and opposed the government's plan to build a statue of the country's founding father, Bangabandhu Mujibur Rahman, in Dhaka's suburbs.
- Groups like **Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI)** operating out of Bangladesh have been espousing **anti-India sentiments**.

#### **Turbulent past:**

- The turbulent **history of Partitions**; East Bengal that became East Pakistan and then Bangladesh, attended by enormous bloodshed and the abuse of human rights, has left emotional wounds.

#### **Irritants in the relation:**

- **The Citizenship (Amendment) Act** and the proposed National Register of Citizens have created a negative impression about India in Bangladesh.
- Statements being made by the politicians have strained the otherwise friendly relationship between the two neighbours.

#### **Significance of the relationship:**

#### **For India:**

- Can provide easy **connectivity to the landlocked Northeastern states**.
  - There has been considerable improvement in connectivity between India and its Northeast by land, river and the use of Bangladeshi ports.
- Important for the **security of NE India** as cooperation with Bangladesh can help neutralise/tackle the insurgent groups which otherwise seek refuge in neighbouring countries.
- Partnership can help **balance China's growing influence in the region**.
- Bangladesh is India's largest trading partner in South Asia. It offers a **large market for Indian goods and also an avenue for investment**.
- There are at least 100,000 Indian nationals now living and working in Bangladesh.

### **For Bangladesh:**

- Bangladesh is nearly surrounded on all territorial sides by India.
- India is a **major source of FDI into Bangladesh**.
- Receives **developmental assistance and lines of credit from India**.
- Co-operation in the power sector:
  - It imports over 1200 MW of electricity from India.
  - Joint collaboration over Roopur nuclear plant.
- Humanitarian aid in times of need.

### **Unique relationship between India and Bangladesh:**

- India shares a unique relationship with Bangladesh given the otherwise troubled bilateral relations in the Indian subcontinent.
  - India played a **leading role in Bangladesh's liberation struggle** and was its sole economic supporter in its early years of independence.
  - A significant proportion of the Bangladeshi population treasure the **linguistic and cultural ties** with adjacent India.
  - The **cordial resolution of the dispute regarding the delimitation of the maritime boundary between India and Bangladesh** marks a high mark of the bilateral relationship wherein international relations have been marred by an otherwise hostile approach to such issues. Eg. – South China Sea dispute.
  - The **implementation of the Land Boundary Agreement** is also a landmark event in the bilateral relationship in a region otherwise marked by border disputes.

### **Conclusion:**

- To a certain degree, both India and Bangladesh depend on each other for security and stability.



- As quid pro quo for India's support to Bangladesh, while India expects that Bangladesh would keep India's concerns in mind when devising and pursuing its policies, India too should respect the sensibilities of the neighbouring country.
- **India-Bangladesh relationship as a major pillar of India's 'neighbourhood first' policy.** It is imperative for India to bolster ties with Bangladesh as a priority.
- India should leverage its unique relationship with Bangladesh to revive the bonhomie and address the issues adversely affecting the partnership.

#### 4. 'Journalists need protection against sedition charges'

##### Context:

The **Supreme Court (SC)** quashed a **sedition case** registered against senior **journalist** and Padma Shri awardee Vinod Dua for his **critical remarks against the Prime Minister and the Union government** in a YouTube telecast.

##### Details:

- By doing so, the SC underscored its 59-year-old verdict (1962 Kedar Nath Singh verdict) that **"strong words" of disapproval about the ruling regime did not amount to sedition.**
  - The 1962 judgment said Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (sedition) was intended only to punish subversion of a lawfully established government through violent means.
- It **upheld the right of every journalist to criticise, even brutally, the measures of the government** with a view to improving or altering them through legal means.
- Stating that the time is long past when the mere criticism of governments was sufficient to constitute sedition, it said that the **free speech of a journalist should be protected from charges of sedition.**

##### **Sedition**

The **IPC Section 124 A** says, "Whoever, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite **disaffection towards the Government established by law in India** shall be **punished with [imprisonment for life], to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine.**

## 5. Information Technology Rules: a case of overreach?

The article analyzes the **privacy versus security issue** brought to light by the **recent IT rules mandating traceability provisions**. This issue has been previously discussed in the following articles.

### Details:

- The one major cause for concern raised by WhatsApp is Rule 4(2) of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.
  - Rule 4(2) of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 imposes an obligation on significant social media intermediaries providing a messaging function, to ensure **traceability of the originator of information** on their platforms.
    - A “significant social media intermediary” is one with more than 50 lakh registered users.
  - Failure to implement the traceability obligation by the intermediaries can lead to them being held responsible for any illicit content on their platforms and thus the companies could lose their ‘safe harbour’ protection.
    - The safe harbour protection gives the social media intermediaries protection against liability (civil as well as criminal) for content posted on their platform by third party users. The safe harbour protection is granted under Section 79 of the IT Act.

### **WhatsApp’s arguments:**

- WhatsApp’s argument is that the traceability provision of the new rules would require it to **break its end-to-end encryption service** which would **amount to the encroachment of user privacy**.
  - End-to-end encryption service allows messages to be read only by the sender and the receiver thus enabling privacy protections.

### Government’s argument:

- The Government primarily relies on the argument that **privacy is not an absolute right**, and that the traceability obligation is only a reasonable restriction on the right to privacy.

- The government argues that the traceability provision is in line with the K.S. Puttaswamy judgment which held that any restriction to the right of privacy must be necessary, proportionate and includes safeguards against abuse.
  - The government's main line of argument in favour of the traceability guidelines is that such powers would be **vital to law enforcement in dealing with and tackling harmful online content**.
  - The Ministry of Electronics and IT has stated that the traceability measure will be **used by law enforcement as the "last resort"** and in the absence of any alternatives. Also, it will only be **used in specific situations**, such as for prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution or punishment of offences related to the sovereignty and integrity of India, child sexual abuse material, etc.
  - The intermediaries are mandated to undertake traceability **subject to an order being passed by a court or government agency**.

#### Counter arguments:

- The article discusses some of the major concerns regarding the new IT rules.

#### **Against the judiciary's observations in the K.S. Puttaswamy case:**

- As against the government's claim that the concerned provision is in line with the K.S. Puttaswamy judgement, the article argues that a closer analysis reveals that the **traceability provision in fact goes against the basic tenets of the judgement**.
  - The Supreme Court of India in the K.S. Puttaswamy judgement has clarified that **any restriction on the right to privacy must be necessary, proportionate and includes safeguards against abuse**.

#### *Not proportionate:*

- The general obligation to enable traceability as a systemic feature is not proportionate.
- There could be an immense adverse impact of the traceability provision on the general digital ecosystem in terms of the overall cybersecurity and privacy concerns.
- **The general weakening of the encryption regime would compromise the privacy and security of all individuals at all times**, despite no illegal activity on their part.

#### *Lack of safeguards:*

- The Rules lack effective safeguards by **failing to provide any system of independent oversight over tracing requests** made by the executive.

- The lack of safeguards like independent or judicial oversight in enforcing traceability would allow government agencies to seek user's identity and this could compromise the anonymity of whistle-blowers and journalistic sources.

*Availability of alternate avenues for government:*

- The Government already has **numerous alternative means of securing relevant information to investigate online offences.**
  - The Government is empowered to seek access to encrypted data under **Section 69(3) of the IT Act, and Rules 17 and 13 of the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Interception, Monitoring and Decryption of Information) Rules, 2009** under which intermediaries are required to assist the administration with decryption when they have the technical ability to do so and when law enforcement has no other alternative.
  - The administration is also empowered to seek unencrypted data, metadata and digital trails from intermediaries.
- The **Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee report of 2018** recognizes the surveillance powers of the Government as being vast and overreaching.

**Lack of scrutiny:**

- There has been a **lack of adequate consultation** with the stakeholders prior to the introduction of the traceability provision under the new rules.
- Ideally, the new Rules should have been put through a period of consultation before being notified.

**Conclusion:**

- While there are problems in the digital ecosystem that are often exacerbated or created by the way intermediaries function, ill-considered regulation such as the new IT Rules is not the way forward.
- While the weakening of encryption systems will no doubt make it easy for law enforcement agencies in dealing with online challenges, **the costs involved in weakening the encryption regime seem to be high.**
- The Government needs to revisit the provisions on traceability and instead **revise and reform the IT Act, 2000** in line with existing global best practices, also legislate the long-pending **Data Protection Bill**. This would be a more viable long term solution to tackle the challenges in the digital ecosystem.

## GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

### 6. Significant progress in SDGs on clean energy, health: NITI index

#### Context:

NITI Aayog has launched the third edition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index 2020.

#### Sustainable Development Goal Index

- The index was first launched by NITI Aayog in 2018.
- The index has been comprehensively documenting and ranking the **progress made by States and Union Territories towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals**.
- 100 being the highest score, it implies that the State/UT has achieved the targets set for 2030. '0' score implies that the state is at the bottom of the table.
- **NITI Aayog has the twin mandate to oversee the adoption and monitoring of the SDGs in the country, and also promote competitive and cooperative federalism among States and UTs.**
- The SDG India Index 2020-21, developed in collaboration with the United Nations in India, tracks the progress of all States and UTs on **115 indicators that are aligned to MoSPI's National Indicator Framework (NIF)**.
- In the current edition, **115 indicators incorporate 16 out of 17 SDGs**, with a qualitative assessment on Goal 17 and cover 70 SDG targets.

#### Highlights:

- This edition of the index report focuses on the **significance of partnerships** as its theme.
- India's overall SDG score improved by 6 points – from 60 in 2019 to 66 in 2020-21.
- According to the 2020 SDG Index, **India saw significant improvement** in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to **clean energy, urban development and health** in 2020.
  - All the States showed some improvement from last year's scores.
  - Mizoram and Haryana saw the biggest gains.
- The SDGs on **eradication of poverty and hunger both saw significant improvement.**

- The SDGs that deal directly with wages and industrial growth reflect the fact that India's economy has taken a beating over the last year.
- There has been a **major decline in the areas of industry, innovation and infrastructure** as well as **decent work and economic growth**.
- **Clean Water and Sanitation SDG** also saw a drop.
- **Kerala** retained its position at the **top of the rankings**, with a score of 75, followed by **Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh**, both scoring 72.
- **Bihar, Jharkhand and Assam** were the **worst performing States**.

States and Union Territories are classified as below based on their SDG India Index score:

- Aspirant: 0–49
- Performer: 50–64
- Front-Runner: 65–99
- Achiever: 100

### Issues:

- Although the index shows improvement on the inequality SDGs, the **NITI Aayog has omitted key economic indicators used to measure inequality in income and expenditure** last year.
  - In 2019, the indicators for inequality included the **growth rates for household expenditure per capita among the bottom 40% of rural and urban populations**, as well as the **Gini coefficient** (a measure of the distribution of income) in rural and urban India.
  - The 2018 indicators included the **Palma ratio** (metric for income inequality).
- Such economic measures have been omitted from the indicators used for this SDG for 2020.
- **Greater weightage is given to social equality indicators**, such as:
  - The percentage of women and Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe representatives in State Legislatures and the Panchayati raj institutions.
  - Levels of crime against the SC/ST communities.
- The only economic indicator in 2020 is the **percentage of the population in the lowest two wealth quintiles**.

### **Sustainable Development Goals**

- The SDGs were developed by a global consultative process on holistic development and are **17** in number.
- They have a **2030 deadline**.

## 7. Strong policies on black carbon can sharply cut glacier melt: World Bank study

### Context:

World Bank has released a report titled “Glaciers of the Himalayas, Climate Change, Black Carbon and Regional Resilience”.

### Details:

- The research covers the **Himalaya, Karakoram and Hindu Kush (HKHK) mountain ranges**, where glaciers are melting faster than the global average ice mass.
- The rate of retreat of HKHK glaciers is estimated to be 0.3 metres per year in the west to 1.0 metre per year in the east.
- Industry and residential burning of solid fuel together account for 45–66% of regional anthropogenic [man-made] BC deposition, followed by on-road diesel fuels (7–18%) and open burning (less than 3% in all seasons) in the region.
- **Glacier melt produces flash floods, landslips, soil erosion, and glacial lake outburst floods.**

### Issue:

- **Black carbon (BC) deposits** produced by human activity **accelerate the pace of glacier and snow melt in the Himalayan region.**
- BC is produced by **incomplete combustion of fossil fuels and biomass and emissions.**
- It is a **short-lived pollutant** that is the **second-largest contributor to warming the planet after carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)**. Unlike other greenhouse gas emissions, **BC is quickly washed out and can be eliminated from the atmosphere if emissions stop.**
- It is **part of a larger basket of aerosols that impact climate change directly and indirectly.**
- Anthropogenic black carbon deposits such as soot are **changing temperatures, precipitation patterns and accelerating glacier melts.**
- Deposits of BC act in two ways hastening the pace of glacier melt: **by decreasing surface reflectance of sunlight and by raising the air temperature.**

### Policy Measures to cut BC emissions:

Some of the ongoing policy measures to cut BC emissions are:

- **Enhancing fuel efficiency** standards for vehicles

- **Phasing out diesel vehicles and promoting electric vehicles**
- **Accelerating the use of liquefied petroleum gas** for cooking and through clean cookstove programmes
- **Upgrading brick kiln technologies**

#### Way Forward:

- **Full implementation of current policies** to mitigate BC can achieve a **23% reduction**.
- With all existing measures, water from glacier melt is still projected to increase in absolute volume by 2040, with impacts on downstream activities and communities.
- However, **enacting new policies** and incorporating them through **regional cooperation among countries** can achieve **enhanced benefits**.

### **8. DoT issues operational guidelines for PLI scheme**

#### Context:

The Department of Telecom issued **operational guidelines** for the **performance-linked incentive (PLI) scheme** for the sector.

#### Details:

- The scheme would take effect from **April 1, 2021**.
- The scheme stipulates a **minimum investment threshold of ₹10 crore for MSMEs and 100 crore for non-MSME applicants**.
  - Land and building costs will not be counted as investment.
- Eligibility would be further subject to **incremental sales of manufactured goods**.
- DoT would grant approvals to **10 eligible applications each in the MSME and non-MSME categories**. Out of the 10 applications in the non-MSME category, **at least three** would be **eligible domestic companies**.



## THE INDIAN EXPRESS

### GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

#### 1. Mega Food Park Scheme

##### Why in News

Recently, the Union Minister for Food Processing Industries virtually inaugurated the **Indus Best Mega Food Park at Raipur, Chhattisgarh**.

- It is built under the **Mega Food Park Scheme**. By this food park, about **5000 people will get employment and about 25000 farmers will be benefited**.

##### Key Points

- **About:**
  - It was launched in **2008-09** to give a major **boost to the food processing sector** by adding value and reducing food wastage at each stage of the supply chain with a particular focus on perishables.
    - The **Ministry of Food Processing Industries** is implementing the Mega Food Park Scheme in the country.
  - Mega Food Parks **create modern infrastructure facilities for food processing along the value chain** from farm to market with strong forward and backward linkages through a cluster-based approach.
- **Aim:**
  - To provide a **mechanism to link agricultural production to the market** by bringing together farmers, processors and retailers so as to **ensure maximizing value addition, minimizing wastage, increasing farmers income** and creating **employment opportunities** particularly in the rural sector.
- **Approach:**
  - The Scheme is **based on the "Cluster" approach** and envisages creation of state of art support infrastructure in a **well-defined agri/horticultural zone** for setting up of **modern food processing units** in the industrial plots provided in the park with a **well-established supply chain**.
- **Components:**

- A Mega food Park typically consists of supply chain infrastructure including **collection centers (cc), primary processing centers (ppc) central processing centers (cpc), cold chain** and around **25-30 fully developed plots** for entrepreneurs to set up food processing units.
- **Financial Assistance:**
  - The **central government provides financial assistance upto Rs. 50 Crore** per Mega Food Park (MFP) project.
  - The MFP project is **implemented by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)** which is a Body Corporate registered under the **Companies Act, 2013**.
    - SPV is a subsidiary company that is formed to **undertake a specific business purpose or activity**.
- **Present Status:**
  - Presently, **22 Mega Food Parks are operational**. It is in line with the 'Make in India' and 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' vision of the Government of India.

## 2. What is the EAGLE Act of US Visas?

Legislation to remove the per-country cap on permanent residency visas, or green cards, for the US has been introduced in the House of Representatives.

### What is the EAGLE Act?

- Eagle stands for Equal Access to Green cards for Legal Employment (EAGLE) Act, 2021.
- The act seeks to phase out the seven percent per-country limit on employment-based immigrant visas and raises the per-country limit on family-sponsored visas from seven percent to 15 percent.
- It provides for a nine-year period for the elimination of this limit.
- The seven percent limit was introduced in the mid-20th century, which has led countries with relatively small populations to be allocated the same number of visas as a relatively large-population country.

### Benefits of the act

- It will benefit the US economy by allowing American employers to focus on hiring immigrants based on their merit, not their birthplace.
- The bill will be advantageous for Indian job-seekers who currently rely on temporary visas or await green cards to work in the US.

### How does it help Indians?

- 75 percent of the backlog for employment-based visas was made up of Indians.
- Backlogged Indian workers face an impossible wait of nine decades if they all could remain in the line.
- More than 200,000 petitions filed for Indians could expire as a result of the workers dying of old age before they receive green cards.
- With the EAGLE Act, the per-country cap would be removed, which may expedite the petitions for those applying for employment-based green cards.

### 3. The Kedar Nath Sedition Ruling

The Supreme Court has quashed the case of sedition filed against a journalist in Himachal Pradesh for allegedly making remarks against PM and the government's handling of the migrant crisis during the Covid-19 lockdown last year.

#### What is the story?

- In a video, the journalist had criticized PM Modi and the Centre for the handling of the migrant crisis last year.
- A sedition case was filed against him under Section 124A of the IPC which penalizes sedition as punishable with either imprisonment ranging from three years to a lifetime, a fine, or both.
- He was charged for spreading misinformation or incorrect information and cause panic in the perception of the general public.

#### What has the court ruled?

- The case was quashed by SC. It held that his remarks constituted genuine criticism of the government and could not be labeled seditious.
- In doing so, the court also reiterated the principles in the landmark case on sedition – Kedar Nath Singh v Union of India (1962).

#### What are the Kedar Nath Singh guidelines?

- In the landmark 1962 Kedar Nath Singh case, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the sedition law, it attempted to restrict its scope for misuse.
- The court held that unless accompanied by incitement or call for violence, criticism of the government cannot be labeled sedition.

**Seven principles** in the Kedar Nath Singh ruling specify situations in which the charge of sedition cannot be applied:

1. The expression “ ‘the Government established by law’ has to be distinguished from the persons for the time being engaged in carrying on the administration. ‘Government established by law’ is the visible symbol of the State. The very existence of the State will be in jeopardy if the Government established by law is subverted.”
2. The effect of subverting the Government by bringing that Government into contempt or hatred, or creating disaffection against it, would be within the penal statute because the feeling of disloyalty to the Government established by law or enmity to it imports the idea of a tendency to public disorder by the use of actual violence or incitement to violence.
3. Comments, however strongly worded, expressing disapprobation of actions of the Government, without exciting those feelings which generate the inclination to cause public disorder by acts of violence, would not be penal.
4. A citizen has a right to say or write whatever he likes about the Government, or its measures, by way of criticism or comment, so long as he does not incite people to violence against the Government established by law or with the intention of creating public disorder.
5. The provisions of the Sections read as a whole, along with the explanations, make it reasonably clear that the sections aim at rendering penal only such activities as would be intended, or have a tendency, to create disorder or disturbance of public peace by resort to violence.
6. It is only when the words, written or spoken, etc. which have the pernicious tendency or intention of creating public disorder or disturbance of law and order that the law steps in to prevent such activities in the interest of public order.
7. The court proposed to limit its operation only to such activities as come within the ambit of the observations of the Federal Court, that is to say, activities involving incitement to violence or intention or tendency to create public disorder or cause disturbance of public peace.

### **What has been the impact of that verdict?**

- The significance of the verdict lies in the Supreme Court’s subsequent reiteration of the Kedar Nath Singh principles.
- A fresh constitutional challenge by two journalists against the sedition law pending before the Supreme Court, and the ruling in Dua’s case, make a strong case against keeping the colonial law in the books.

#### 4. Devika River Project: J&K

##### Why in News

Recently, the Minister of State for Development of North Eastern Region has asked for suggestions for the **Devika River project in Udhampur, J&K.**

- This project is compared with the **Namami Gange Project.**

##### Key Points

- **About:**
  - This is a **Rs. 190 crore Project.**
  - The work on the project was **started in March 2019 under the National River Conservation Plan (NRCP).**
  - Under the project, bathing “ghats” (places) on the banks of the Devika River will be **developed, encroachments will be removed, natural water bodies will be restored and catchment areas will be developed along with cremation ground.**
  - The project includes the **construction of three sewage treatment plants, sewerage network** of 129.27 km, development of two cremation ghats, protection fencing and landscaping, **small hydropower plants and three solar power plants.**
  - On completion of the project, the rivers will see **reduction in pollution and improvement in water quality.**
- **About Devika River:**
  - Devika river **originates from the hilly Suddha Mahadev temple in Udhampur district of Jammu and Kashmir** and flows down towards **western Punjab** (now in Pakistan) where it **merges with the Ravi river.**
  - The river holds **religious significance** as it is revered by Hindus as the **sister of river Ganga.**
  - In June 2020, **Devika Bridge** was inaugurated in Udhampur. Apart from taking care of traffic congestion, the Devika Bridge was also meant to **help smooth passage of Army convoys and vehicles.**

##### National River Conservation Plan

- **About:**
  - National River Conservation Plan (NRCP) is a **centrally funded scheme launched in 1995** aimed at **preventing the pollution of rivers.**
  - Programs for river conservation are being implemented under National River Conservation Plan (NRCP) and NGRBA (National Ganga River Basin Authority).
- **Activities under NRCP:**

- Interception and Diversion works to capture the raw sewage flowing into the river through open drains and divert them for treatment.
- Sewage Treatment Plants for treating the diverted sewage.
- Low Cost Sanitation works to prevent open defecation on riverbanks.
- Electric Crematoria and Improved Wood Crematoria to conserve the use of wood and help in ensuring proper cremation of bodies brought to the burning ghats.
- River Front Development works such as improvement of bathing ghats.
- Public awareness and public participation.
- Human Resource Development (HRD), capacity building, training and research in the area of River Conservation.
- Other miscellaneous works depend upon location specific conditions including the interface with human population.

## **GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment**

### **5. World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2021**

The report titled World Employment and Social Outlook was recently released by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

#### **About the report**

- The report analyses the impact of the crisis on the labour market across the world.
- It offers projections for recovery and gives details of the unequal impact of the crisis on different groups of workers and enterprises and calls for a broad-based human-centred recovery.

#### **Findings of the report**

- There has been an unprecedented disruption to labour markets worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected the lives of the younger generation and brought about disruption to their education.
- Also made it more difficult for them to enter the labour market and hold on to their jobs.
- The pandemic worsened long-standing inequalities with many women workers dropping out of the labour force.
- For informal and low-skilled workers, working from home was not an option.

- Many had to face huge health risks to keep their jobs, often with no access to social security benefits.

### **Major highlights of the report**

- Global unemployment is expected to be at 205 million in 2022, surpassing the 2019 level of 187 million.
- The jobs shortfall induced by the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic was 75 million in 2021 and is expected to be 23 million in 2022.
- An estimated additional 108 million workers and their family members now live in poverty.

### **The long road to recovery**

- The recovery would remain fragile in many countries due to the uneven rollout of vaccination campaigns and higher levels of public debt and deficits that would make it difficult to tackle the effects of the pandemic.
- There is an urgent need to build back better — create productive employment opportunities and foster long-term labour market prospects for the most vulnerable.
- There is a need to strengthen social protection schemes like the MGNREGS in India and make sure nobody is left behind.
- This would require strong institutions and social dialogue and strong international cooperation to fight global disparities.

## **6. RBI supervision of Cooperative Banks**

Maharashtra government has approved a plan to set up a task force to prepare an action plan against a recent change in the law that has brought cooperative banks under the supervision of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

### **What are Cooperative Banks?**

- Co-operative banks are financial entities established on a cooperative basis and belonging to their members.
- This means that the customers of a cooperative bank are also its owners.
- These banks provide a wide range of regular banking and financial services. However, there are some points where they differ from other banks.
- They came into being with the aim to promote saving and investment habits among people, especially in rural parts of the country.

## Structure of co-operative banks in India

- Broadly, cooperative banks in India are divided into two categories – urban and rural.
- Rural cooperative credit institutions could either be short-term or long-term in nature.
- Further, short-term cooperative credit institutions are further sub-divided into State Co-operative Banks, District Central Co-operative Banks, Primary Agricultural Credit Societies.
- Meanwhile, the long-term institutions are either State Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (SCARDBs) or Primary Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (PCARDBs).
- On the other hand, Urban Co-operative Banks (UBBs) are either scheduled or non-scheduled.

## Who oversees these banks?

- In India, cooperative banks are registered under the States Cooperative Societies Act.
- They also come under the regulatory ambit of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) under two laws, namely, the Banking Regulations Act, 1949, and the Banking Laws (Co-operative Societies) Act, 1955.
- They were brought under the RBI's watch in 1966, a move that brought the problem of dual regulation along with it.

## How has The Banking Regulation Act been amended?

- Cooperative banks have long been under dual regulation by the state Registrar of Societies and the RBI.
- As a result, these banks have escaped scrutiny despite failures and frauds.
- The changes to The Banking Regulation Act approved by Parliament in September 2020, brought cooperative banks under the direct supervision of the RBI.

## Changes brought

- The amended law has given RBI the power to supersede the board of directors of cooperative banks after consultations with the concerned state government.
- Earlier, it could issue such directions only to multi-state cooperative banks.
- Also, urban cooperative banks will now be treated on a par with commercial banks.
- And a cooperative bank can, with prior approval of the RBI, issue equity shares, preference shares, or special shares to its members or to any other



person residing within its area of operation, by way of public issue or private placements.

- It can also issue unsecured debentures or bonds with a maturity of not less than 10 years.
- This essentially means non-members can become shareholders of the bank, and this will allow the RBI to merge failing banks quickly.

### What triggered the need for the changes in the law?

- India has some 1,540 urban cooperative banks, with a depositor base of 8.6 crore and deposits of at least Rs 5 lakh crore.
- Finance Minister told Lok Sabha last year that the financial status of at least 277 urban cooperative banks was weak, and around 105 cooperative banks were unable to meet the minimum regulatory capital requirement.
- According to RBI's latest financial stability report, the gross non-performing asset ratio of urban cooperative banks deteriorated from 9.89 percent in March 2020 to 10.36 percent in September 2020.
- Not only do these banks have high levels of bad loans, they also have a small capital base – something that the changes in the law have tried to address by allowing these banks to issue shares with RBI's approval.
- Political interference in staff appointments is also a problem with these banks, which has added to inefficiencies.

## 7. China's 'Artificial Sun' EAST

### Why in News

Recently, China's **Experimental Advanced Superconducting Tokamak (EAST)** achieved a peak temperature of **288 million** degrees Fahrenheit, which is over **ten times hotter** than the sun.

- **China is not the only country** that has achieved high plasma temperatures. In 2020, **South Korea's KSTAR (Korea Superconducting Tokamak Advanced Research) reactor** set a new record by maintaining a plasma temperature of over 100 million degrees Celsius for 20 seconds.

### Tokamak

- The tokamak is an **experimental machine** designed to harness the **energy of fusion**.
- Inside a **tokamak**, the energy produced through the fusion of atoms is absorbed as heat in the walls of the vessel.

- Like a conventional power plant, a **fusion power plant** uses this heat to produce steam and then electricity by way of **turbines and generators**.

### Key Points

- **About:**
  - The EAST reactor is **an advanced nuclear fusion experimental research device** located at the Institute of Plasma Physics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (ASIPP) in Hefei, China.
- **Establishment:**
  - EAST first became operational in 2006.
- **Purpose:**
  - The purpose of the artificial sun is **to replicate the process of nuclear fusion, which is the same reaction that powers the sun**.
  - This is part of the **International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER)** facility, which will become the world's **largest** nuclear fusion reactor when it becomes **operational in 2035**.
    - The **ITER Members** include China, the European Union, **India**, Japan, Korea, Russia and the United States.
- **Working:**
  - It is **based on the Nuclear Fusion Process** that is carried out by the Sun and the Stars.
  - For nuclear fusion to occur, **tremendous heat and pressure are applied on hydrogen atoms** so that they fuse together. The **nuclei of deuterium and tritium** - both found in hydrogen - are **made to fuse together to create a helium nucleus**, a neutron along with a whole lot of energy.
  - The gaseous hydrogen fuel **is heated to temperatures of over 150 million degrees Celsius** so that it **forms a hot plasma** (electrically charged gas) of **subatomic particles**.
  - With the help of a strong magnetic field, the plasma is kept away from the walls of the reactor to ensure it does not cool down and lose its potential to generate large amounts of energy. The **plasma is confined for long durations for fusion to take place**.
- **Other Tokamaks in China:**
  - Apart from the EAST, China is currently operating the **HL-2A reactor** as well as **J-TEXT**.
  - In **December 2020, HL-2M Tokamak**, China's largest and most advanced nuclear fusion experimental research device, was **successfully powered up for the first time** — a key milestone in the **growth of China's nuclear power research capabilities**.
- **Significance:**
  - It is significant as far as **China's Green Development** is concerned.

- **Nuclear fusion** is a process through which **high levels of energy are produced without generating large quantities of waste**. Unlike fission, fusion **also does not emit greenhouse gases** and is considered a safer process with lower risk of accidents.

## Nuclear Reactions

- **Description:**
  - A nuclear reaction is the process in which **two nuclei, or a nucleus and an external subatomic particle**, collide to produce **one or more** new nuclides.
  - Thus, a nuclear reaction must cause a **transformation** of at least one nuclide to another.
- **Types:**
  - **Nuclear Fission:**
    - The nucleus of an **atom splits** into **two daughter nuclei**.
    - This decay can be **natural spontaneous splitting** by radioactive decay, or can actually be simulated in a lab by achieving necessary conditions (bombarding with neutrons, alpha particles, etc.).
    - The resulting fragments tend to have a combined mass which is less than the original. The **missing mass** is usually converted into **nuclear energy**.
    - Currently **all commercial** nuclear reactors are based on **nuclear fission**.
  - **Nuclear Fusion:**
    - Nuclear Fusion is defined as the **combining of two lighter nuclei** into a **heavier one**.
    - Such nuclear fusion reactions are the source of energy in the Sun and other stars.
    - It takes considerable energy to force the **nuclei to fuse**. The conditions needed for this process are extreme – **millions of degrees** of temperature and millions of pascals of pressure.
      - The **hydrogen bomb** is based on a thermonuclear fusion reaction. However, a nuclear bomb based on the fission of uranium or plutonium is placed at the core of the hydrogen bomb to provide initial energy.

**Prelims Practice Questions**

**1) Recently there was a proposal to translocate some of the lions from their natural habitat in Gujarat to which one of the following sites?**

- a. Corbett National Park
- b. Kuno Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary
- c. Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary
- d. Sariska National Park

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- In 2017, there was a proposal to translocate some of the lions from their natural habitat in Gujarat to Kuno Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Kuno Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary lies in the Sheopur district of northwestern Madhya Pradesh.
- It received the status of a national park in 2018.

**2) “India Cycles4Change Challenge”, sometimes seen in the news recently, was launched under which of the following ministries?**

- a. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- b. Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
- c. Ministry of New and Renewable Energy
- d. Ministry of Road Transport and Highways

**Answer : b**

- The India Cycles4Change challenge is beginning to gain momentum in Indian cities.
- The challenge was launched last year under the Smart Cities Mission by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- It was launched as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic that was gaining ground in the country.
- Over the last year, a cycling revolution has taken over India, with cycling being seen as an important mode of safe and healthy personal transport medium that ensures social distancing, while being environmentally sustainable.
- In this backdrop, with the launch of India Cycle4Change challenge, 107 cities registered to be a part of the cycling revolution and 41 cities undertook initiatives vis. surveys, discussions, pop-up cycle lanes, safer

neighbourhoods, open street events, cycle rallies, or online campaigns that were aimed at creating a cycle friendly city.

- Cities as part of the campaign have initiated work covering approx. 400 kms of arterial roads and more than 3500 kms of neighbourhood streets.
- The Smart Cities Mission, in association with Institute for Transport and Development Policy (ITDP) conducted training modules and other capacity building initiatives to guide 107 cities on various cycling initiatives.

### 3) Consider the following statements with respect to Testosterone

1. It is used as a medication in the treatment of hypogonadism in men and breast cancer in women.
2. Lower level of the hormone will lead to higher severity of Covid-19 in men.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

**Answer : c**

#### Testosterone

- Testosterone is the primary sex hormone and anabolic steroid in males.
- In addition, testosterone in both sexes is involved in health and well-being and in the prevention of osteoporosis.
- According to a recent research those with the lowest levels testosterone were at highest risk of going on a ventilator, needing intensive care or dying.

### 4) Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary is situated in which of the following states?

- a. Telangana
- b. Andhra Pradesh
- c. Maharashtra
- d. Jharkhand

**Answer : c**

#### Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is a wildlife sanctuary and natural World Heritage Site, which is located in Satara district of Maharashtra.

- It forms the northern portion of the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve, with Chandoli National Park forming the southern part of the reserve.
- The rivers Koyna, Kandati, and Solashi meander through the sanctuary.
- Recently, a Eurasian Griffon Vulture was spotted in Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary in the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve.

**5) Bnei Menashe, ethnolinguistic group of people are found majorly in which of the following North Eastern States?**

- a. Sikkim
- b. Arunachal Pradesh
- c. Mizoram
- d. Nagaland

**Answer : c**

**Bnei Menashe**

- They are an ethnolinguistic group in India's North-Eastern Border States of Manipur and Mizoram.
- The Chin, Kuki, and Mizo peoples of this particular group claim descent from one of the Lost Tribes of Israel and have adopted the practice of Judaism.

**6) Indian Seasonal Energy efficiency ratio (ISEER) is the energy performance index used for which of the following?**

- a. Electric Vehicles
- b. Water Heaters
- c. Microwave Ovens
- d. Room Air Conditioners

**Answer : d**

ISEER (Indian Seasonal Energy efficiency ratio) is the energy performance index used for Room Air Conditioners (RACs). The Central Government in consultation with the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) has recently notified new energy performance standards for Room Air Conditioner (RACs). The 24°C default setting has been made mandatory from Jan 1, 2020 for all room air conditioners covered under the ambit of BEE star-labelling program. Additionally, the Indian Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio (ISEER) as per the new standards will range from (3.30 -

5.00) for split and (2.70 – 3.50) for window air conditioners, which will be applicable from 1st January 2021 onwards.

### **Mains Practice Questions**

1. Domestic abuse is one among many other social challenges posed by the conditions created by the pandemic. Discuss

#### **Approach:**

- Define the term violence against women with an emphasis on domestic abuse.
- Establish the link between the recent surge in domestic violence cases and COVID-19.
- Briefly explain the causes behind domestic violence and challenges associated.
- Discuss various steps need to be taken.
- Conclude suitably.

2. “Wherever the art of medicine is loved, there is also a love of humanity.” Analyse this statement in light of India’s pharmaceutical capabilities and responsibilities amid the novel coronavirus pandemic across the world.

#### **Approach:**

- Discuss India’s position in the global pharmaceuticals sector.
- Mention the issues involved like rising demand for medicines, the moral obligation of India and challenges.
- Mention India’s response to the global crisis.
- Conclude the answer with advantages associated.

