INSTA SECURE SYNOPSIS
MAINS 2020

GS- II

JULY 2020
NOTE: Please remember that following ‘answers’ are NOT ‘model answers’. They are NOT synopsis too if we go by definition of the term. What we are providing is content that both meets demand of the question and at the same time gives you extra points in the form of background information.
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Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure. Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries.

What are the merits and demerits of presidential system? Do you think India should adopt presidential system? Examine. (250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Introduction:

Modern democratic governments are classified into parliamentary and presidential on the basis of nature of relations between the executive and the legislative organs of the government. The parliamentary system of government is the one in which the executive is responsible to the legislature for its policies and acts. This type of model is prevalent in Britain, Canada, India and Japan. The presidential system of government on the other hand is one in which the executive is not responsible to the legislature for its policies and acts, and is constitutionally independent of the legislature in respect of its term of office. USA, Brazil and Russia are examples of this type of model of government.

Body:

Features of presidential system:

- President is both the head of the state and the head of the government. As the head of the state he/she occupies a ceremonial position and as the head of the government he/she leads the executive organ of the government.
- The President is elected by an electoral college for a fixed tenure. He/she cannot be removed by the legislature except by the impeachment for the grave constitutional act.
- The President governs with the help of a cabinet or smaller body called ‘Kitchen Cabinet’. It is only an advisory body and consists of non-elected departmental secretaries. They are selected and appointed by him/her, are responsible only to him/her and can be removed by him/her any time.
- The President and his/her secretaries are not responsible to the congress for their acts. They neither possess membership in the legislature nor attend its session.
- The President cannot dissolve the legislature.
- The doctrine of separation of power is the basis of Presidential system. The legislature, executive and judicial powers of the government are separated and vested in the three independent organs of the government.

Merits of presidential system:

- **Stable government**: The Presidential system provides a stable government. There is surety that government would survive for its tenure unless the President commits grave constitutional act and is impeached.
• **Definiteness in policies:** The Presidential system is conducive for the formulation and implementation of long-term policies due certainty of the tenure of the government.

• **Based on separation of powers:** There is complete and rigid separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial organs of the state. This prevents the despotic tendencies of any one organ and balances the distribution of power.

• **Government by experts:** The Presidential system is conducive to the administrative efficiency as ministers or secretaries are the experts in their fields. The President is free to choose his/her secretaries from the wide range of candidates and experts in their respective fields.

**Demerits of Presidential system**-

• **Conflict between Legislature and Executive:** It is biggest drawback of the Presidential system as conflict between legislature and executive can arose due to rigid separation of powers. This may stall the functioning of government and defeat the very purpose of governance.

• **Non-responsible government:** In Presidential system executives are not responsible to the legislature for their acts and policies. Thus it is difficult for elected representatives or legislative organ to exercise control over executives.

• **Autocratic tendencies:** In this system executive authority is vested in single person that is President and when President enjoys support in legislature, could lead to dictatorial tendencies.

• **Narrow representation:** In Presidential system secretaries are not elected members of the legislature but they are appointed by President. This restricts the scope of the wide representation and is limited to President’s favour.

**Need for a shift from Parliamentary to Presidential system:**

• The disgraceful political shenanigans the nation has witnessed, most recently in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, and the horse-trading of MLAs to switch allegiances for power and pelf, are not merely an occasion for breast-beating about morality in politics or the opportunism of the cash-rich ruling party.

• For 25 years till 2014, our system has also produced coalition governments which have been obliged to focus more on politics than on policy or performance. It has forced governments to concentrate less on governing than on staying in office, and obliged them to cater to the lowest common denominator of their coalitions, since withdrawal of support can bring governments down. The parliamentary system has distorted the voting preferences of an electorate that knows which individuals it wants but not necessarily which parties or policies.

• Besides, India’s many challenges require political arrangements that permit decisive action, whereas ours increasingly promote drift and indecision. We must have a system of government whose leaders can focus on governance rather than on staying in power.

• Our parliamentary system has created a unique breed of legislator, largely unqualified to legislate, who has sought election only in order to wield executive power.

• It has produced governments dependent on a fickle legislative majority, who are therefore obliged to focus more on politics than on policy or performance.
It has distorted the voting preferences of an electorate that knows which individuals it wants to vote for but not necessarily which parties.

It has spawned parties that are shifting alliances of selfish individual interests, not vehicles of coherent sets of ideas.

It has forced governments to concentrate less on governing than on staying in office, and obliged them to cater to the lowest common denominator of their coalitions.

The parliamentary system has failed us.

Pluralist democracy is India's greatest strength, but its current manner of operation is the source of our major weaknesses.

**Should India adopt the Presidential system?**

A presidential system centralizes power in one individual unlike the parliamentary system, where the Prime Minister is the first among equals. The surrender to the authority of one individual, as in the presidential system, is dangerous for democracy.

The over-centralization of power in one individual is something we have to guard against.

Those who argue in favor of a presidential system often state that the safeguards and checks are in place: that a powerful President can be stalled by a powerful legislature.

But if the legislature is dominated by the same party to which the President belongs, a charismatic President or a “strong President” may prevent any move from the legislature.

On the other hand, if the legislature is dominated by a party opposed to the President’s party and decides to checkmate him, it could lead to a stalemate in governance because both the President and the legislature would have democratic legitimacy.

A diverse country like India cannot function without consensus-building. This “winner takes it all” approach, which is a necessary consequence of the presidential system, is likely to lead to a situation where the views of an individual can ride roughshod over the interests of different segments.

Thus India is performing well on the scale of Parliamentary system and needs to strengthen it.

**Conclusion:**

India’s constitutional makers adopted the Parliamentary system due to factors like familiarity of the system, preference to more responsibility, need to avoid Legislative-Executive conflict and nature of Indian society. These factors still stand relevant at present for Indian polity. In fact, the matter whether to change for Presidential system was considered in detail by Swaran Singh Committee appointed by the congress government in 1975. The committee opined that the parliamentary system has been doing well and there is no need to replace with Presidential system.
Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions

Is doctrine of ‘separation of powers’ explicitly mentioned in the Indian Constitution?
What are the major provisions in the Indian Constitution which support this doctrine?
Explain. (250 words)

Reference: Indian polity by Lakshmikant

Why the question:
The question is premised on the theme of “Doctrine of separation of power”.

Key Demand of the question:
Explain in detail the concept of “Doctrine of separation of power” and its constitutionality in the Indian system of polity.

Directive:
Explain – Clarify the topic by giving a detailed account as to how and why it occurred, or what is the particular context. You must be defining key terms where ever appropriate, and substantiate with relevant associated facts.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Briefly state about the concept of the doctrine of separation of power.

Body:
Explain what you understand by separation of power; ‘Separation of Power’ is a principle that limits the powers vested in any person or institution. It divides governmental authority into three branches: Legislative (Parliament or Senate) Executive (President or Prime Minister and the Cabinet), and Judiciary (Chief Justice and other judges).

Then move on to examine whether this principle is explicit or implicit in Indian Constitution. In our country the debate about the separation of powers dates as long back as the Constitution itself. It was extensively debated in the Constituent Assembly. It was not given constitutional status in our Constitution finally but it does clearly seem that the constitution of India has been made keeping the separation of powers doctrine in mind, but nowhere is this explicitly stated or embraced by the constitution itself.

Conclusion:
Conclude with its importance.

Introduction

The doctrine of Separation of Power refers to the model of governance where the executive, legislative and judicial powers are not concentrated in one body but instead divided into different branches. The degree of separation varies. ‘Strict separation’ implies branches are independent of each other. On the other hand, ‘checks and balances’ implies that reasonable checks and balances are in place to check misuse of power.

It is not explicitly mentioned in the constitution, yet there is no doubt regarding the intention of the Constitution makers.

Body

Articles in the Constitution facilitating Separation of Powers are as follows- 

- **Article 50**: State shall take steps to separate the judiciary from the executive.
  - This is for the purpose of ensuring the independence of the judiciary.
Article 122 and 212: Validity of proceedings in Parliament and the Legislatures cannot be called into question in any Court.

- Also, Legislators enjoy certain privileges with regard to speech and anything said in the Parliament cannot be used against them.

Judicial conduct of a Judge of the Supreme Court and the High Court cannot be discussed in the Parliament and the State Legislature, according to Article 121 and 211 of the Constitution.

Articles 53 and 154 respectively, provide that the executive power of the Union and the State shall be vested with the President and the Governor and they enjoy immunity from civil and criminal liability.

Article 361: The President or the Governor shall not be answerable to any court for the exercise and performance of the powers and duties of his office.

Analysis of Separation of Power in India

Although prima facie it appears that the Constitution has based itself upon the doctrine of strict separation of powers. But, if studied carefully, it is clear that it is more inclined towards proper checks and balances.

The doctrine has not been awarded Constitutional status. The Constitution doesn’t explicitly back any doctrine.

Article 75 implies the executive is collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha.

Articles 13, 32, 131-136, 143, 226 and 246 imply the doctrine of Judicial Review. Judiciary can strike down any legislation that violates the Constitution.

Judgment of SC in Ram Jawaya Case: —

- Supreme Court of India (SC) had to deal with the question of the extent of executive power and executive function in a situation where the executive was alleged to have violated the fundamental rights of the citizens vested in them by the Constitution of India without a legislative sanction.

- This landmark judgment delivered by our apex court in the wake of our independence is now acting as a touchstone for understanding the federal feature of the Indian Constitution through the separation of powers.

- Even years after this judgment, it becomes an important case not only in understanding the separation of powers in the Indian context but also worldwide as it discusses the basis for the new understanding of the doctrine of separation of powers in present times.

From the above it is clear that:

- First, the Indian constitution ensures that the different branches control each other. This is intended to make them accountable to each other – these are the ‘checks’;

- Secondly, the constitution divides power between the different branches of government – these are the ‘balances’. Balance aims to ensure that no individual or group of people in government is ‘all-powerful’. Power is shared and not concentrated in one branch.
Conclusion

It’s quite evident that the Constitution of India does not accept the principle of strict separation of powers. Though it appears dilatory of the doctrine of separation of powers, it is essential in order to enable a just and equitable functioning and close coordination. All organs of the system are interlinked and work in collaboration for nation building.

Parliament and State Legislatures – structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

Despite upholding the cooperative federalism, the tussle between center and state governments for the rights of states continues. Analyse the factors responsible and suggest suitable way forward to address the same. (250 words)

Reference: Live Mint

Why the question:
The article captures the instances of failure of Federalism in India.

Key Demand of the question:
Discuss in detail the issues being faced by the States with respect to the federal features. Explain why despite upholding the cooperative federalism, the tussle between centre and state governments for the rights of states are being continued.

Directive:
Analyze – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Start by explaining what are the issues being face by states with respect to federalism.

Body:
Discuss the issues one by one such as Tax devolution to States was below the 14th Finance Commission projections. Explain the underlying reasons viz. – Economic slowdown and fall in GST collections, Delay in payments (i.e. GST compensation) to states etc. Explain that COVID-19 has further deepened the crisis. States should spend more to help common citizens and save livelihoods. But the Centre didn’t provide any support specific to the pandemic. Discuss that a crisis shouldn’t undermine the principles of cooperative federalism.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction

Cooperative federalism is the concept which reflects the relationship between centre and state where they both come together and resolve the common problems with each other’s’ cooperation. With the collaborative efforts and cooperation, different level of governments in an amicable manner, contributes towards the growth of the country.

It shows the horizontal relationship between union and states and shows neither is above the other. To ensure this relationship between centre and state, Indian constitution has incorporated certain instruments like inter-state council, Zonal council, 7th schedule etc.

Body

Cooperative federalism in India: Scenario
• Legislative/Administrative
  ▪ **Separation of Power:** Schedule 7 of Constitution provides strict delineation of powers between center and state. (Except during emergencies which comes under judicial review)
  ▪ **Article 131** of the Constitution, which gives the Supreme Court exclusive jurisdiction to hear cases between states and the Centre. *Eg: Chhattisgarh moved SC against NIA Act in Jan 2020.*
  ▪ **Coalition governments:** It has increased states’ bargaining power.

• Political
  ▪ In relation to the imposition of President’s rule under Article 356 of the Constitution, federalism is far more mature.

• Financial
  ▪ **GST Council:** Passing of GST is a shining example of cooperative federalism where States and Centre have ceded their power to tax and come up with a single tax system to realize the dream of one Economic India with ‘One Nation, One Market’.
  ▪ Majority decisions have been based on consensus till now, while states gave 2/3rd of votes.
  ▪ Since 10th FC, state’s share has been continuously increasing till 14th FC by devolving 42%.

• Other Areas
  ▪ **NITI Aayog:** Replacing the erstwhile Planning Commission, the Aayog is promoting bottom-up approach to development planning.
  ▪ **Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas** involves State’s as equal partners of development. There is a move towards competitive and cooperative

**Tussle between centre-state continues**

• **State’s dwindling resources:** The findings suggest that recent changes in India’s fiscal architecture, including the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, and increase in state shares for the Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSSs) had placed state finances in a precarious position, even prior to the crisis.

• **Lockdown without prior notice:** There was no prior consultation with states before the lockdown was imposed on 25th. It caused serious supply chains breakdown and importantly migrant workers chaos.

• **Struggling for fiscal space:** The announcement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the Rs 20-lakh crore Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (Self-reliant India Campaign) package left many scrambling with the fiscal maths.

• **Increasing dependency on Centre:** The dependency of states on the Centre for revenues has increased, with the share of the revenue from own sources declining from 55% in 2014-15 to 50.5% in 2020-21.
• While part of this is inherent in India’s fiscal structure, wherein states are the big spenders and the Centre controls the purse strings, the situation has been exacerbated by the introduction of the GST.

• Barring a few exceptions, such as petroleum products, property tax, and alcohol excise, indirect taxes have, to a large degree, been subsumed under the GST regime, eroding the ability of states to raise their own revenues.

- **Shortfall in devolution:** Adding to state woes is the significant divergence in past periods between the amount of GST compensation owed and the actual payments made, including for states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand that need greater fiscal support.

  • Even before Covid-19 hit, **11 states estimated a revenue growth rate below the estimated 14% level**, implying higher amounts will be owed as GST compensation.

  • With the bulk of the states’ GST coming from goods such as electronics, fashion, and entertainment — all of which have been impacted by the pandemic — these revenues are likely to decline further.

- **Different Post-lockdown agenda:** For instance, when Kerala took a decision to allow restaurants to open based on its own risk assessment, the state was pressured by the Centre to cancel such permit.

**Strengthening Federalism**

- **Strengthening of Inter-State Council:** Over the year multiple committees have recommended strengthening of Interstate Council where the concurrent list subjects can be debated and discussed, balancing Centre state powers. There is far less institutional space to settle inter-state frictions therefore a constitutional institution like ISC can be a way forward.

- **Autonomy to states:** Centre should form model laws with enough space for states to maneuver. Centre should give enough budgetary support to states so as to avoid budgetary burden. There should be least interference in the state subjects.

- **Democratic Decentralization** of administration and strengthening governments at all levels in true spirit. Power should be decentralized based on the principle of subsidiarity.

**Conclusion**

While in certain areas, it might warrant greater powers to the Union(defence, currency etc), on the development front (education, health etc.) the Centre should respect the autonomy of the other two levels of government and consciously avoid the tendency to centralize powers and functions.

**Various parliamentary committees have contributed immensely to the policy debate in Parliament. Discuss their significance, challenges faced and measures needed for effective operations. (250 words)**

**Reference:** [Hindustan Times](https://www.hindustantimes.com)

**Why this question:**

*The Parliament of India has also been a victim of the coronavirus pandemic. But even as having full sessions of both houses must be the goal, it is perplexing that parliamentary committees — which are important pillars in keeping the government accountable, rigorously examining an issue of public interest, and developing a cross-party consensus on issues — have been barely functional.*
Key demand of the question:
The answer must discuss importance of parliamentary standing committees, their key functions, roles and responsibilities and justify their significance.

Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Define what are parliamentary committees. Highlight how the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the meetings of these PCs also to a halt.

Body:
Discuss in detail the following points:
What are Parliamentary standing committees? Their purposes?
Discuss the role and significance of parliamentary standing committees.
Provide alternative measures as to how to go about the parliamentary committee meetings.

Conclusion:
Conclude with their importance.

Introduction:
In the Indian Parliament, a Parliamentary Standing committee is a committee consisting of Members of Parliament. It is a permanent and regular committee which is constituted from time to time according to the provisions of an Act of Parliament or Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business. Both houses of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, and Lok Sabha have similar Committee structures with a few exceptions. Parliamentary committees draw their authority from Article 105 (on privileges of Parliament members) and Article 118 (on Parliament’s authority to make rules for regulating its procedure and conduct of business).

The Parliament of India has been a victim of the coronavirus pandemic. The Budget session ended early — and rightly so, given the surge in Covid-19 cases. The monsoon session has not been scheduled yet. Given the compulsions of social distancing, the predicament of officials in coming up with a workable formula to ensure that India’s most important democratic institution is functional — but safe — is understandable

Body:
Significance of Parliamentary Standing Committees:
- Parliament is the embodiment of the people’s will. Committees are an instrument of Parliament for its own effective functioning.
- Committees are platforms for threadbare discussion on a proposed law.
- The smaller cohort of lawmakers, assembled on the basis of the proportional strength of individual parties and interests and expertise of individual lawmakers, could have more open, intensive and better-informed discussions.
- Committee meetings are ‘closed door’ and members are not bound by party whips, which allows them the latitude for a more meaningful exchange of views as against discussions in full and open Houses where grandstanding and party positions invariably take precedence.
• Members of Parliament may have great acumen but they would require the assistance of experts in dealing with such situations. It is through committees that such expertise is drawn into law-making.

• Executive accountability to the legislature is enforced through questions in Parliament also, which are answered by ministers. However, department standing committees go one step further and hear from senior officials of the government in a closed setting, allowing for more detailed discussions.

• This mechanism also enables parliamentarians to understand the executive processes closely.

Role of committees:

• Support Parliament’s work.

• Examine ministerial budgets, consider Demands for Grants, analyse legislation and scrutinise the government’s working.

• Examine Bills referred to by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha or the Speaker, Lok Sabha.

• Consideration of Annual Reports.

• Consideration of national basic long term policy documents presented to the House and referred to the Committee by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha or the Speaker, Lok Sabha.

Challenges faced:

• Current challenges during COVID-19:
  • virtual meetings of panels have not been allowed, and physical meetings are difficult given that Members of Parliament (MPs) are spread out across the country, with difficulties in mobility and state-specific quarantine rules
  • The Parliamentary rules doesn’t allow virtual meetings of the Parliamentary committees.
  • The need for secrecy — which may not be possible during a virtual meeting is another major concern.
  • Insisting on physical meetings — just recently, MPs who attended a committee meeting had to go into quarantine because a staff of a committee secretariat tested positive — isn’t wise.

• Other challenges:
  • Persistent absenteeism from meetings of department-related standing committees should cost MPs their spot on these parliamentary panels was a strong view that emerged during a meeting of chairpersons of the committees with Rajya Sabha chairman M Venkaiah Naidu recently.
  • Eleven of the 22 Bills introduced in the ongoing session of Parliament have been passed, which makes it a highly productive session after many years.
  • But these Bills have been passed without scrutiny by parliamentary standing committees, their purpose being to enable detailed consideration of a piece of legislation.
• After the formation of the 17th Lok Sabha, parliamentary standing committees have not been constituted as consultations among parties are still under way.

• Partly as a result of this, the Bills were passed without committee scrutiny. They were discussed in Parliament over durations ranging between two and five hours.

Measures needed:

Immediate measures:

- Ensuring the use of technological platforms which are secure, and owned and vetted by the government.

- The prime minister, for instance, uses video conference facilities for a range of meetings; same can be replicated for the legislature too.

Long-term measures:

- Parliamentary committees don’t have dedicated subject-wise research support available. The knowledge gap is partially bridged by expert testimony from government and other stakeholders.

- Their work could be made more effective if the committees had full-time, sector-specific research staff.

- The national commission to review the working of the Constitution has recommended that in order to strengthen the committee system, research support should be made available to them.

- Currently, the rules of Parliament don’t require every bill to be referred to a parliamentary committee for scrutiny. While this allows the government greater flexibility and the ability to speed up legislative business, it comes at the cost of ineffective scrutiny by the highest law-making body.

- Mandatory scrutiny of all bills by parliamentary committees would ensure better planning of legislative business.

Conclusion:

India is confronted by a range of serious issues, from the pandemic to economic distress, from the security threat from China to rapidly changing global geopolitics. All of them require careful examination. MPs have a role in providing inputs, scrutinizing the executive’s approach, involving domain experts in the discussion, and ensuring accountability. Thus, the PSC act as check and balance which must be constituted at the earliest.

Despite unique constitutional position, the Governor is sometimes not seen as willing or able to discharge his functions as impartial and efficient as envisioned by the framers of the Indian constitution. Critically Analyse. (250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why this question:

Rajasthan Governor Kalraj Mishra’s refusal to accept the Ashok Gehlot government’s recommendation for convening a session of the Assembly, ostensibly to go for a trial of strength to checkmate the rebels led by Sachin Pilot, has once again brought into focus controversial decisions by Governors in formation and dismissal of state governments over the years.
Key demand of the question:
One has to critically analyse the role often played by the Governor in the Indian setup.

Directive:
Critically Analyse – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary. When ‘critically’ is suffixed or prefixed to a directive, one needs to look at the good and bad of the topic and give a fair judgement.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Give brief introduction of Governor in Indian Polity.
Body:
Highlight first the significance of the post of Governor as enshrined in the Indian constitution. Discuss the issues related to abuse of post of Governor in federal polity failing to the functions impartially and efficiency. Explain the misuse of Article 356, Power of Reserving bill, Partisan role in Hung assemblies etc. with examples of recent times.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction

Article 154 of the Constitution envisages Governor as the executive chief of the state. All executive actions are taken in his name. B R Ambedkar called the office of the Governor as the “office of dignity”. He is not an agent of the Centre, but the governor's post in an independent Constitutional office. His office is the linchpin of Indian Cooperative Federalism.

Body

Reasons for controversy surrounding the Governor’s role.

- Gubernatorial powers: The task of inviting the largest party/alliance post-election is a discretion of the Governor which is wrought in controversy. Eg: Karnataka, in 2018 election presented a hung assembly. Ultimately the issue had to be resolved in Supreme Court leading to fall of the government that couldn’t prove its majority.

- Governor’s appointment: Article 155 says that governor should be appointed (not elected) from amongst persons of high status with eminence in public. The elected government at the state is not even consulted while making appointment of the Governors. Further successive governments have reduced this important constitutional office to a sinecure and resting place for loyal and retired / about to retired / about to retire politicians apart from docile bureaucrats.

- Appointment and dismissal of the Chief Minister: Governor appoints Chief Minister, other ministers, Advocate General, Chairmen and members of the State Public Service Commission in the state. After elections in the state, there is a convention to invite the largest party to form government in the state. This convention has been flouted many times at the whim of the governor: The recent episode Maharashtra where Governor induced a new government at 5:00 am without ascertaining the requisite numbers for the government.

- Reservation of Bills for Consideration of President: As per Article 200 of the Constitution, the governor can reserve certain types of bills passed by the State Legislature for the President’s consideration. Centre, through the governor in case of different parties ruling, used this provision to serve partisan interests.
Misuse of Article 356: Article 356 is the most controversial article of the Constitution. It provides for State emergency or President’s rule in State if the President, on receipt of report from the Governor of a State. But since the SR Bommai case, this has been sparsely used.

Removal of the Governor: Article 156 says that the governor will hold office during the pleasure of the President for five years. The governor has no security of tenure and no fixed term of office. This prevents to uphold neutrality of the governor, fearing retribution. E.g.: The mass changing of the governors of state whenever a new government comes to power at Centre.

Recommendations for reforms

Rajamannar Committee: Consultation of the CM must become mandatory before the appointment of the Governor.

Punchhi Commission: The phrase “during the pleasure of the President” should be deleted from the Constitution.

- Governor should be removed only by a resolution of the state legislature.
- Qualification for the post must be laid down in Constitution while giving security of tenure. This will enable the Governor to take impartial and neutral decisions.


- Governor should be an eminent person and not belong to the state where he is to be posted.
- State chief minister should have a say in the appointment of governor.
- Governor should be a detached figure without intense political links or should not have taken part in politics in recent past.
- Governor should not be a member of the ruling party.

Conclusion

As Ambedkar said, Governor must be a representative of not just the centre but of the people as a whole of the state. It must be ensured that the Constitutional post envisaged for cooperative federalism must not be used and turned into bargaining federalism.

Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary—Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

Discuss the significance of Implementation of DK Basu judgments with respect to custodial deaths in India. (250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why the question:
The article highlights how Implementation of DK Basu judgments, monitoring by civil society, can protect against custodial torture, death.

Key Demand of the question:
Explain and discuss in detail the issue of custodial death in the country and in what way of Implementation of DK Basu judgments holds great significance in addressing the issue.

**Directive:**

**Discuss** – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**

In brief quote the recent incident of custodial death that was witnessed in the State of Tamil Nadu.

**Body:**

Custodial torture is a naked violation of human dignity and degradation which destroys, to a large extent, the individual personality.

Talk about the implementation of Section 176(1A) of the CrPc, which calls for a mandatory judicial inquiry related to incidents of death, disappearance, rape etc. in police and judicial custody.

Discuss the types of Custodial Violence and its illegitimate use in the country.

Explain the relevance and details of the D K Basu judgement with respect to it. D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal: Under this case, the Supreme Court of India observed in this widely publicized death in police custody that using torture to impermissible and offensive to Article 21.

**Conclusion:**

Conclude with importance and way forward.

**Introduction**

In the current context of the reprehensible custodial deaths in Tamil Nadu, the important DK Basu judgment needs to be inspected closely. For many years now, custodial torture leading to deaths have become ongoing phenomenon and the question of “Who will guard the guardians”, the so-called “rakshak bhakshak” syndrome remains unanswered and unresolved.

**Body**

**Background**

- A letter was received in 1986 from an organization regarding the matter of lock up deaths in the state of West Bengal.
- This letter was treated as a writ petition and taken as a PIL.
- Additionally, it led to at least 5 other procedural, monitoring and coordinating judicial orders.
- These have created a valuable and seamless web of legal principles and techniques.
- All of them are aimed at reducing custodial death and torture and to have control on police and a set of guidelines for arresting a person.
- According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau, 1,727 people died in police custody between 2001 and 2018. However, just 26 policemen were convicted of custodial violence during the same period

**Provisions under the judgment: Commandments**

- The police personnel carrying out the arrest and handling the interrogation of the arrestee should bear accurate, visible and clear identification and name tags with their designations.
  - The particulars of all such police personnel who handle interrogation of the arrestee should bear accurate, visible and clear identification and name tags with their designation.
The particular of all such personnel who handle interrogation of the arrestee must be recorded in a register.

- That the police officer carrying out the arrest shall prepare a memo of arrest at the time of arrest and such memo shall be attested by at least one witness, who may be either a member of the family of the arrestee or a respectable person of the locality from where the arrest is made.
  - It shall also be counter signed by the arrestee and shall contain the time and date of arrest.
- The person detained shall be entitled to have one friend or relative or other person known to him or having interest in his welfare being informed, as soon as practicable, that he has been arrested and is being detained at the particular place, unless the attesting witness of the memo of arrest is himself such a friend or a relative of the arrestee.
- The time, place of arrest and venue of custody of an arrestee must be notified by the police where the next friend or relative of the arrestee lives outside the district or town through the Legal Aids Organization in the District and the police station of the area concerned telegraphically within a period of 8 to 12 hours after the arrest.
- An entry must be made in the diary, regarding the arrest of the person which shall also disclosed the name of the next friend of the person who has been informed of the arrest and the names land particulars of the police officials in whose custody the arrestee is.
- The arrestee should, where he so requests, be also examines at the time of his arrest and major and minor injuries, if any present on his body, must be recorded at that time.
- The arrestee should be subjected to medical examination by the trained doctor every 48 hours during his detention in custody by a doctor on the panel of approved doctor.
- The arrestee may be permitted to meet his lawyer during interrogation, though not throughout the interrogation.

Other Intermediate orders

- Precise detailed compliance reports of above orders to be submitted by all states and UT and any delayed responses to be looked into by special sub-committees appointed by state human rights body.
- Also where no SHRC existed, the chief justice of the high courts to monitor it administratively.
- It emphasised that existing powers for magisterial inquiries under the CrPC were lackadaisical and must be completed in four months, unless sessions court judges recorded reasons for extension.
- It also directed SHRCs to be set up expeditiously in each part of India.
- All prisons had to have CCTVs within one year. Non-official visitors would do surprise checks on prisons and police stations. Prosecutions and departmental action to be made unhesitatingly mandated.

Operationalisation and implementation status

- Little more by way of theoretical structure is required if DK Basu’s comprehensive coverage is genuinely implemented.
- But the real problem is in operationalising the spirit of DK Basu. This encompasses –
  - punitive measures
  - last mile implementation
breaking intra-departmental solidarity with errant policemen
ensuring swift, efficacious departmental coercive action plus criminal prosecution

  - This gave way for raising a rebuttable presumption of culpability (guilty) against the police if anyone in their custody dies or is found with torture.
  - This has still not become law, despite a bill introduced as late as 2017. This should be processed soon.

- We still have abysmally deplorable rates of even initiating prosecutions against accused police officers. Actual convictions are virtually non-existent.

Conclusion

The fundamental idea behind these guidelines was to prohibit police personnel from flagrant abuses of power, but there is little evidence to suggest that they have had the effect that the Supreme Court judges in 1986 had imagined. Until concerted efforts are made to de-normalise custodial brutality in India, and hold the watchmen accountable to their actions, India is doomed to continue repeating the cycle, with the latest incident in Tamil Nadu only likely to be drowned out by the cacophonous news round.

“Live streaming of court proceedings is part of the right to access justice” Evaluate and give your opinion with suitable substantiation. (250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Introduction:

India stands alone amongst leading constitutional democracies in not maintaining audio or video recordings or even a transcript of court proceedings. Court hearings can be turning points in the life of a nation. As the lockdown began, the Court had to quickly find the technology and create protocols for virtual courts and e-hearings. Before this, the judicial system assumed that litigants, judges, lawyers, and court staff could come together in a physical place for the administration of justice. Indian legal system is built on the concept of open courts, which means the proceedings are open to all members of the public. But in reality only a handful of people can be physically present and are allowed in the courtroom.

A PIL was sought in 2018 in the Supreme Court for live streaming and/or video recording of Supreme Court cases of national importance that impact the public at large.

Body:

Need for Live Streaming:

- Most citizens have no idea how some of the biggest decisions that impact them are taken.
- Judicial process plays a crucial role in our lives.
- Recent controversies surrounding the judiciary have fueled interest in the common people for live streaming.
- Justice should not only be done, it should also be seen to be done.
The possible manner to achieve this goal is to live stream the proceedings in important cases.

International examples show that this exercise is not so difficult.

Streaming of Parliamentary proceedings has generated awareness amongst the people about the work of their elected representatives, as well as enhanced transparency.

Now technology is the game changer and India should utilise it to the maximum extent.

**Merits:**

- It promotes transparency as live-streaming is allowed for both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha proceedings since 2004.

- Right to receive information under Article 19(1)(a) and the principle of open courts and access to justice as protected under Article 21.

- Such an exercise would inspire confidence in the functioning of the judiciary as an institution and help in maintaining the respect that it deserves as a co-equal organ of the state.

- It educates common people on how the judiciary functions.

- The access to justice, the need to build the right perception, along with the need to educate common people on how the judiciary functions are all strong reasons in favour of allowing live-streaming of court proceedings.

- This leads to avoiding multiple versions or wrong projections of facts, or the menace of fake news or faulty reporting.

- We can avoid wrong projections of facts, or the menace of fake news or faulty reporting.

- The Indian legal system can deliver on its promise to empower the masses.

- It helps to build the right perception among the public.

- When people understand how the judiciary functions it gives them more power, it gives them the tools to protect their rights, it gives them more respect and confidence in the judiciary.

- It could be an important educational resource as well.

- It will empower and provide access to citizens who cannot personally come to the court due to socio-economic constraints.

**Challenges involved:**

- The role of Judiciary cannot be equated to the role of executive and legislature.

- Judiciary is not accountable to the general public. They are accountable only to the rule of law and to the constitution.

- Live streaming will make judges subject to popular public opinion.

- The individuality of judges is likely to become a subject of public debate. Whereas the focus should be on judgement delivered and not on judges.

- The objectivity may be lost as the lawyers will now address not only judges but also the public.
Constitutional debates are technical and ordinary citizens cannot be expected to understand the legal proceedings.

India has digital divide and technical glitches can lead to poor quality of the streaming hampering the purpose itself.

Some experts criticise the move they fear with this the court will be reduced to a spectacle.

There is the lack of infrastructure needed to initiate this process.

Indian judiciary is already overburdened and it is very difficult to implement this.

**Way Forward:**

- Live-streaming need not be called for in all types of matters nor in all courts. Therefore, matters which have a privacy dimension can be kept out of its scope. But matters which have a bearing on important public interest issues such as entry of women to the Sabarimala temple, or the constitutionality of the Aadhaar scheme etc can be available for all to watch.

- If live streaming of top court’s proceedings is not possible, then alternately the video recording should be allowed.

- It can be used at the time of review or appeal of a case.

- The judiciary must employ a press officer and issue summaries of its judgements to the media to facilitate greater public understanding.

**Conclusion:**

Technology promises to be the game changer if those in power understand its importance and use it right. It also presents a hope for the Indian legal system to finally deliver on its promise to empower the masses.

**Do you think the criminal justice system still is a residual remain of the colonial legacy in our country? Discuss the need to reform criminal justice system in the country. (250 words)**

*Reference: The Hindu*

*Why the question:*

Union home ministry constituted a committee for the reform of criminal laws. Thus the context of the question.

*Key Demand of the question:*

Discuss in what way criminal justice system still is a residual remain of the colonial legacy in our country. Explain the need to reform criminal justice delivery system.

*Directive:*

Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

*Structure of the answer:*

**Introduction:**

Various groups related with criminal justice system raised concerns against the constitution of the committee by the ministry due to shorter time frame and limited scope for Public consultation.

**Body:**
Explain first in what way the existing criminal law system—Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure and Indian Evidence Act—are of colonial origin and reforms in these laws are very much needed.

Discuss the persistent issues in the system in detail.

Explain steps taken in this direction so far; bring out the concerns and issues involved.

Conclusion:
Conclude that wider public consultation and clear mandate are needed for any committee that is constituted to bring in genuine reforms in the criminal justice system, which is still a residual remain of the colonial legacy.

Introduction

Criminal Justice System refers to the agencies of government charged with enforcing law, adjudicating crime, and correcting criminal conduct. Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay is said to be the chief architect of codifications of criminal laws in India. Criminal law in India is governed by Indian Penal Code, 1860, Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, and Indian Evidence Act, 1872, etc.

Body

Colonial legacy in criminal justice system

Though 1200 archaic laws were scrapped in bulk, Indians are still following many obsolete laws that have been prevalent from the time of British colonial rule.

- The criminal justice system is a replica of the British colonial jurisprudence, which was designed with the purpose of ruling the nation and not serving the citizens.

- **Sedition:** Section 124A of IPC is being used even today to repress dissent, in the largest democracy of the world.
  - The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) recorded 165 arrests made on the charge of sedition in the last three years.

- **Blasphemy:** Controversial for curtailing freedom of speech, **Section 295A of the IPC** has been time and again imposed for banning publication of several books and other content.

- It was only recently that **Homosexuality under section 377 and Adultery** was decriminalised.

Need for reforms

- **Pendency of Cases:** According to Economic Survey 2018-19, there are about 3.5 crore cases pending in the judicial system, especially in district and subordinate courts, which leads to actualisation of the maxim “Justice delayed is justice denied.”

- **Huge Undertrials:** India has one of the world’s largest number of undertrial prisoners.
  - According to NCRB - Prison Statistics India (2015), 67.2% of our total prison population comprises **undertrial prisoners**.

- **Investigation:** Corruption, huge workload and accountability of police is a major hurdle in speedy and transparent delivery of justice.

- **Ineffectiveness:** The purpose of the criminal justice system was to protect the rights of the innocents and punish the guilty, but nowadays the system has become a tool of harassment of common people.
• The existing system “weighed in favour of the accused and did not adequately focus on justice to the victims of crime.” This was as per Malimath Committee report

Measures needed

• **Penal code**: Penal code should be modified to incorporate the present day societal, economic, and other changes. The Penal code can be divided into various codes incorporating social offences, correctional offences, economic offences and an Indian penal code (which will deal with cases that warrant 10 years punishment or more).

• **Police processes**: Institutional reform including **proper investigation** of crimes, **rationalisation of court systems** by inducting technology, limiting appeal procedures to a minimum.
  - In Prakash Singh vs Union of India, Supreme Court ordered that reform must take place.
  - The states and union territories were directed to comply with seven binding directives that would kick start reform.

• **Victim centric**: The system should be **victim centric** to ensure that the victims get justice. The victim should get a chance to put forth his case and quick completion of trials is needed to ensure that they do not lose faith in the system.
  - Fixing responsibility quickly and transparently will maximise the sense of justice to the victim.
  - **Witness protection** is another area, where in if made robust, victims are more likely to get justice.

• **Prison reforms**: Reforming the property-based bail system, provision of proper legal support to remove problem of undertrials, improvement of prison conditions is needed. Thus, India needs to reform its archaic system to incorporate more efficient practices like restorative justice, plea bargaining, etc. that will ensure a more robust criminal justice system.

• **Malimath committee** has recommended many reforms which need to be implemented. Some of the important recommendations of the Malimath committee are as follows:
  - Need for more judges to dispose-off a large number of pending cases.
  - Constitution of a **National Judicial Commission** to deal with the appointment of judges to the higher courts and amendment of Article 124 to make impeachment of judges.
  - Creation of **separate criminal division in higher courts** that have judges specialising in criminal laws.
  - Article 20 (3) of the Constitution, which protects the accused from being compelled to be a witness against himself/herself, needs to be modified.
  - The courts should be given freedom to question the accused to give information and draw an adverse inference against the accused in case the latter refuses to answer.

• **Victim Compensation Fund** should be created under the victim compensation law and the assets confiscated from organised crimes should be made a part of it.

**Conclusion**
The reforms should not only make CJSI more efficient but also be sensitive to both the innocent and the needs of the law enforcing officers. Our policy makers need to focus on **reformative justice** in order to bring all around peace in the society.

**Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies. Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.**

Accountability is a **sine qua non** – an essential condition – to good democratic governance. However, the appointment of a CAG has always been treated in utmost secrecy since Independence. Critically Discuss. (250 words)

Reference: *The Wire*

**Why this question:**
The question is based on the appointment procedure of CAG which has always been treated in utmost secrecy since Independence which goes against the accountability needed in a democratic setup.

**Key demand of the question:**
Explain in what way CAG is instrumental in securing accountability of the executive to the Parliament in the sphere of financial administration. And discuss the provisions associated with it in the constitution. Also one must discuss about the flaws in the process of appointment of CAG which is currently happening. Provide solutions using the cases in other countries.

**Directive:**
Critically discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments. When ‘critically’ is suffixed or prefixed to a directive, one needs to look at the good and bad of the topic and give a fair judgement.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**
Briefly explain the composition of CAG and its origin.

**Body:**
Highlight the importance of CAG as an institution in ensuring financial accountability in India. Discuss about the procedure of appointment of CAG in India. Talk about the conflict of interest that arises in current appointment procedure and the possible implications of the same. Provide measures to correct the procedure using examples of the other countries.

**Conclusion:**
Reassert the significance of CAG in the Indian constitutional setup.

**Introduction:**
The Constitution of India provides for an **independent office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)** in chapter V under Part V. The CAG is mentioned in the Constitution of India under Article 148 – 151. He is the head of the Indian Audit and Accounts Department. He is the **guardian of the public purse and controls the entire financial system** of the country at both the levels- the centre and state. His duty is to uphold the Constitution of India and the laws of Parliament in the field of financial administration.

**Body:**

Telegram: https://t.me/insightsIAStips
Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpoccbCX9GEIwaile4HljwA
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/insightsonindia
The CAG of India is an independent constitutional authority who is neither part of the legislature nor executive, though appointed by the President under his hand and seal and can be removed only through a motion of impeachment. Dr B.R. Ambedkar described the CAG as the most important functionary under the constitution. The CAG is the Supreme Audit Institution or SAI of India.

Appointment and Term of CAG:

- The CAG is appointed by the President of India by a warrant under his hand and seal.
- The CAG, before taking over his office, makes and subscribes before the president an oath or affirmation: to bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India; to uphold the sovereignty and integrity of India; to duly and faithfully and to the best of his ability, knowledge and judgement perform the duties of his office without fear or favour, affection or ill-will; and to uphold the Constitution and the laws.
- He holds office for a period of six years or upto the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- The present CAG of India will be demitting office on August 8, 2020.
- Somehow, appointment of a CAG has always been treated in utmost secrecy since Independence.

Challenges in appointment of CAG:

- The constitution of India protects the independence of the CAG. However, there is no laid down criteria for selection of the CAG.
- Independence can be ensured if there is a well laid out criteria for this. Such criteria would include required qualifications which an individual should possess to be appointed as CAG and also a procedure through which selection should be made. The procedure must be transparent.
- The current practice adopted for the appointment of the CAG is that the Cabinet Secretary prepares a shortlist for the finance minister who then submits it before the prime minister.
- The prime minister recommends one name from that list to the finance minister. If the finance minister approves the same, the appointment of the CAG is made by warrant under the hand and seal of the president.
- Such a procedure is faulty as there is a conflict of interest.
- The CAG is an auditor to the government of India, which is headed by the prime minister.
- If the head of the auditee is to select an individual for auditing his organisation, there is a danger of some ‘pliable’ person becoming the CAG and it may dilute the accountability process.
- It may never happen, but independence and objectivity in the selection process must not only be there but also appear to be there.
- Our Constitution provides that the president acts on the aid and advice of the council of ministers. However, by inserting the words that the ‘CAG shall be appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal’, the makers of the constitution probably wanted the appointment of the CAG to be made in an independent manner.
- 217 provides for appointment of a High Court Judge by the President by warrant under his hand and seal after consultation with the Chief Justice of India. No such consultation has been
provided for the appointment of the CAG and the selection is a matter of choice by the Prime Minister alone.

**Appointment of CAG in other countries:**

- Internationally, most countries have enacted laws putting in certain qualifications and also the process of appointment of the head of their SAI, so that he works independently and is not under the influence of the Executive, whose performance he is required to evaluate and provide audit opinion on achievement of the objectives.

- The Exchequer and Audit Act of the United Kingdom, as amended in 1983 provides that the CAG will be jointly selected by the Prime Minister and Chairman of the Committee of Public Accounts and thereafter ratified by the House of Commons.

- In the USA, under Section 302 of the Budget and Accounting Act, 1921, and the subsequent amendment of the General Accounting Office Act, 1980, the Comptroller General of the United States is appointed by the President on the consent of the Senate. Further, under an amendment carried out through Section 104 of the General Accounting Office Act of 1980, a commission has to advise the President.

- From these examples, it is clear that the Executive does not have exclusive discretion in the appointment of the head of the Supreme Audition Institution.

**Way forward:**

- To bring about transparency and objectivity in the selection process of the CAG, an institutional mechanism needs to be put in place.

- A list may be prepared of persons possessing such qualifications.

- Thereafter, a high-level committee may examine the personalities and recommend to the president a panel of three names out of which one can be appointed.

- This will be a step forward towards achieving the objective of selecting the most suitable candidate.

**Conclusion:**

CAG helps the parliament/state legislatures hold their respective governments accountable. He is one of the bulwarks of the democratic system of government in India. It is for these reasons Dr. B R Ambedkar said that the CAG shall be the most important Officer under the Constitution of India and his duties are far more important than the duties of even the judiciary.

**Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.**

Do you agree that it’s high time to reset rural job policies in India and recognise women’s Work? Elaborate. (250 words)

*Reference: The Hindu*

*Why the question:*

The question is based on the dimension of Social Justice and issues related to vulnerable sections.

*Key Demand of the question:*
The article must explain the urgent need to reset rural job policies in India and special attention required to recognize the work of women.

**Directive:**

**Elaborate** – Give a detailed account as to how and why it occurred, or what is the particular context. You must be defining key terms where ever appropriate, and substantiate with relevant associated facts.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**

Explain the Situation of rural Women workers before COVID-19 briefly.

**Body:**

Discuss the role of women in rural India and explain why often their contributions are ignored or ill recognized.

Discuss the impact of lockdown on rural women. They became mostly jobless as the employment availability is limited.

Highlight the existing rural policies with respect to employment and explain what changes are expected and how and why it becomes important for us to recognize the role of women.

**Conclusion:**

Conclude with way forward.

**Introduction:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on women’s work, but as official statistics do not capture women’s work adequately and accurately, little attention has been paid to the consequences of the pandemic for women workers and to the design of specific policies and programmes to assist them. As India emerges from the COVID-19 lockdown, the labour market policy needs to reverse the pandemic’s gender-differentiated impact.

**Body:**

**Impact of women labour force due to Pandemic:**

- A survey by the Azim Premji University, of 5,000 workers across 12 States — of whom 52% were women workers — found that women workers were worse off than men during the lockdown.

- Among rural casual workers, for example, 71% of women lost their jobs after the lockdown; the figure was 59% for men.

- Data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) also suggest that job losses in April 2020, as compared to April 2019, were larger for rural women than men.

- **Agricultural and allied sectors:**
  - A rapid rural survey conducted by Foundation for Agrarian Studies (FAS) showed that in large parts of the country where rain-fed agriculture is prevalent, there was no agricultural activity during the lean months of March to May.
  - In other harvest operations, such as for vegetables, there was a growing tendency to use more family labor and less hired labor on account of fears of COVID-19 infection.
  - During the COVID-19 lockdown, the demand for milk fell by at least 25% (as hotels and restaurants closed), and this was reflected in either lower quantities sold or in lower prices or both.
Also for women across the country, incomes from the sale of milk to dairy cooperatives shrank.

Among fishing communities, men could not go to sea, and women could not process or sell fish and fish products.

**Non-agricultural sectors:**

- Non-agricultural jobs have suddenly come to halt as construction sites, brick kilns, petty stores and eateries, local factories and other enterprises shut down completely.
- In the last few years, women have accounted for more than one-half of workers in public works, but no employment was available through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) till late in April 2020.
- The first month of lockdown thus saw a total collapse of non-agricultural employment for women. In May 2020 there was a big increase in demand for NREGS employment.

**Government scheme workers:**

- The government schemes have been a major source of women’s employment in the last few decades, especially in the health and education sectors, where women work as Anganwadi workers or mid-day meal cooks.
- During the COVID-19, Accredited Social Health Activists or ASHAs, 90% of whom are women, have become frontline health workers, although they are not recognised as “workers” or paid a regular wage.

**Challenges faced by women labour force in India:**

**Crisis of regular employment:**

- When women are not reported as workers, it is because of the lack of employment opportunities rather than it being on account of any “withdrawal” from the labour force.
- This crisis of regular employment will have intensified during the pandemic and the lockdown.

**Nonfulfillment of particular criteria required for women:**

- Younger and more educated women are often not seeking work because they aspire to skilled non-agricultural work, whereas older women are more willing to engage in manual labour.

**Unequal pay:**

- Women’s wages are rarely equal to men’s wages, with a few exceptions. The gender pay gap was 34 per cent in India, that is, women get 34 per cent less compared to men for performing the same job with same qualifications.
- The gap between female and male wages is highest for non-agricultural tasks — the new and growing source of employment.

**Exceedingly long woman’s workday:**
Counting all forms of work — economic activity and care work or work in cooking, cleaning, child care, elderly care — a woman’s workday is exceedingly long and full of drudgery.

In the FAS time-use survey, the total hours worked by women (in economic activity and care) ranged up to a maximum of 91 hours (or 13 hours a day) in the peak season.

No woman puts in less than a 60-hour work-week.

Safety Issues:
- Concerns about safety and Harassment at work site, both explicit and implicit.

Social norms:
- Social norms about household work are against women’s mobility and participation in paid work. Childbirth and taking care of elderly parents or in-laws account for the subsequent points where women drop off the employment pipeline.
- The cultural baggage about women working outside the home is so strong that in most traditional Indian families, quitting work is a necessary precondition to the wedding itself.
- When increases in family incomes are there, due to the cultural factors, women leave the work to take care of the family and avoid the stigma of working outside.

Way forward:
- Non-farm job creation for women:
  - There is a need to generate education-based jobs in rural areas in the industrial and services sectors
  - The state governments should make policies for the participation of rural women in permanent salaried jobs.
  - The governments should also generate awareness to espouse a positive attitude towards women among the public since it is one of the most important impediments in women’s participation in economic activities.
  - Local bodies, with aid from state governments, should open more crèches in towns and cities so that women with children can step out and work. The crèches will open employment opportunities for women.

- Recognition of the contribution of women:
  - As we emerge from the lockdown, it is very important to begin, first, by redrawing our picture of the rural labor market by including the contribution of women.

- Generate women-specific employment with proper conditions:
  - The immediate or short-run provision of employment of women can be through an expansion of the NREGS.
  - On the other hand, a medium and long term plan needs to generate women-specific employment in skilled occupations and in businesses and new enterprises.
In the proposed expansion of health infrastructure in the country, women, who already play a significant role in health care at the grass-root level, must be recognized as workers and paid a fair wage.

In the expansion of rural infrastructure announced by the Indian government recently specific attention must be paid to safe and easy transport for women from their homes to workplaces.

- **Reduce the drudgery of care work:**
  - As the lockdown is lifted, economic activity is growing but the young and old women still remain at home.
  - Further, as the COVID-19 infection spreads, given a higher likelihood of cases among men than women, the burden on women as earners and carers is likely to rise.
  - There is a need for immediate measures to reduce the drudgery of care work. For example, healthy meals for schoolchildren as well as the elderly and the sick can reduce the tasks of home cooking.

- **Skilling the women:**
  - Initiatives such as **Skill India, Make in India, and new gender-based quotas from corporate boards to the police force** can spur a positive change. But we need to **invest in skill training and job support**.
  - The private sector could also take active part in training women entrepreneurs. For example: Unilever’s Shakti program, which has trained more than 70,000 rural women in India as micro-entrepreneurs to sell personal-care products as a way of making its brands available in rural India.

- **Equal pay:**
  - The principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value that is protected by Indian law must be put to actual practice. Improved wage-transparency and gender neutral job evaluation is required to achieve this end.

**Conclusion:**

With more than 75% women not contributing to the economy, the nation is not only losing on the economic part but also the development of 50% of our population. The numeric consequences of reducing obstacles to women’s full economic participation far exceed the demographic advantages of having a larger pool of young workers. It is thus high time to talk of the gender dividend along with the demographic dividend.

**The Centre’s recent move to block 59 Chinese apps has brought to the fore the inherently tricky ‘national security versus digital rights’ question. How do you view this? Give your opinion. (250 words)**

**Reference:** *The Hindu*

**Introduction:**
The Government of India on Monday banned 59 applications, most of them popular Chinese applications such as TikTok, Shareit, Mi Video Call, Club Factory and Cam Scanner, citing threat to national security and sovereignty. This ban has once again spotlighted the vulnerability of Internet freedom at a time of national security.

Body:

**Rationale of Government behind the ban and how it upholds national security:**

- The ban comes amid continuing tensions on the border between India and China and covers a variety of applications from e-commerce to gaming, social media, browsers, instant messaging and file sharing.
- The IT Ministry said that this move will “safeguard the interests of crores of Indian mobile and internet users”.
- The IT ministry’s move was based on receiving recent credible inputs that such apps pose threat to sovereignty and integrity of India. Consequently, the Government of India had decided to disallow the usage of these apps both on mobile and non-mobile Internet-enabled devices.
- The Ministry said it was invoking its power under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act read with the relevant provisions of the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking of Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009.

**Implications on Internet Freedom:**

- **Responsibility of a democracy:**
  - India is not only a constitutional democracy, but also one that is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
  - There is a certain basic understanding that regulation of the Internet or Internet-based services by governments has to respect basic human rights standards.
  - Therefore, the necessity of blocking the app must be very clearly made out by the government.

- **Non-following of the standards of Three Part Test:**
  - For a government to block service or to block any access to content or take other coercive steps that may intrude upon people’s fundamental rights and freedoms, it has to follow what in international law is called the three-part test.
    - Less intrusive
    - Proportionality test
    - Standard of necessity

- **Against right to freedom of internet:**
  - Recently, the Kerala High Court in Faheema Shirin v. State of Kerala recognised that interfering with someone’s access to the internet violates inter alia their fundamental right to privacy.
Subsequently, the **Supreme Court in Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India** observed that an indefinite suspension of the internet could amount to an abuse of power.

### Against right to freedom of expression:

- The decision to block access to Chinese apps has significant consequences since a large part of the Indian population accesses those services regularly.
- For instance, TikTok has more than 100 million active users in India. Combined with more affordable internet recently, TikTok has brought marginalised people online in a way no other app has been able to.
- **Trans, lower caste, independent artists from rural areas** are creating and broadcasting content on TikTok in a way that was previously the monopoly of groups with greater social capital.
- Not only is the short-form video app convenient to use, but it is also more accessible for it has given people who don’t lead Instagrammable lives or even speak English the confidence to share their work and showcase their skills.
- Since apps that provide a platform for expression and allow for the dissemination of information are protected by Art.19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution.

### Against right to information:

- Another group that is severely impacted by the app ban are the Tibetan refugees in Delhi who use WeChat to connect with their families and friends back in Tibet.
- They also rely on this app to get access to news and information. They cannot use other global social media applications like Facebook or WhatsApp since it is banned in Tibet.
- Further, WeChat is easy to use, and voice messages do not require literacy in Tibetan, enabling refugees who do not read Tibetan to participate in groups.
- Similarly, in the past decade or so, many Indian students have enrolled in Chinese universities.
- They too depend on apps like WeChat to communicate with their colleagues and administrations.

### Right to livelihood affected:

- Reports demonstrate how TikTok gave a voice to entrepreneurs and small business owners in rural India.
- That the ban has come into being during the pandemic is particularly unfortunate given the sense of community that the platform brings people during isolation.

### Internet freedom vs. National Security:

- In order to know whether the diplomatic and security interests sought to be achieved through the geoblock outweigh civil liberties affected by the move, a careful examination of the procedural and the substantive safeguards relied upon to curtail the right is crucial.
• The adequacy of existing safeguards help in understanding whether the geoblock in the manner in which it has been imposed excessively curtails civil liberties when compared to the interest sought to be achieved.

• In Justice Puttaswamy (Retd.) v Union of India as well as the decision concerning Modern Dental College the Supreme Court has reaffirmed that rights cannot be viewed as distinct compartments.

• They must be viewed as a network of interconnected freedoms that complement each other.

• The most obvious right to get implicated by a geoblock is the fundamental right to access the internet.

• While granularly tailored geoblocks could be constitutionally permissible and proportionate, whether the decision to block access to these 59 Chinese apps specifically without any clear and cogent classification invites a closer constitutional inquiry.

• At present, the precise scale at which cyber threats could result in a public order breakdown is not clear. There is a potential concern about users amplifying disinformation on platforms such as TikTok which is no doubt corrosive to the democratic process.

• However, this concern persists on virtually every internet platform (e.g WhatsApp) which deals with misinformation and it is unclear how a ban will solve anything. News reports have also highlighted how TikTok perpetuates existing hierarchies and promotes hate mongering.

• While these are valid concerns, stray instances of cybercrime using these apps could at best be considered to compromise law and order, a threshold not adequate to legitimately restrict the fundamental right to access the internet.

• A restriction on access to the internet also has to be fair, just and reasonable and not arbitrary at the very least. Consequently, a restriction which is arbitrary also affects the right to equality under Article 14 of internet users in India, since they are entitled to fair, just and reasonable restrictions to access to the internet.

Way forward:
• The Supreme Court in the issue of Internet shutdowns in the Anuradha Bhasin judgment said very clearly that any order blocking people’s rights to liberty, especially in relation to the Internet, requires it to be published.

• The restriction must be on access to specific platforms on the internet and not access to the internet as a whole.

• There is an urgent need to review the Section 69A of IT act to bring clarity and wider reforms.

• The need of the hour is to bring in clear strategy on cyber security.

Conclusion:
The differential treatment of Chinese apps results in arbitrary and unjust denial of access to the internet realistically. While there may be valid national security concerns, a content-agnostic and category-agnostic measure sets a worrying trend of executive discretion.
The existing law is inadequate to deter incidents of custodial torture. Critically analyze.
(250 words)
Reference: The Hindu

Why this question
Custodial torture is an inhuman and barbaric practice, which has been in vogue since ages, except in most of the modern liberal democracies, where it has been abolished. In this context it is important to discuss whether India also needs an anti-torture legislation or not. It is therefore essential to examine whether the existing law is inadequate to deter incidents of custodial torture.

Directive word
Critically analyze- here we have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts, and present them as a whole in a summary. based on our discussion we have to form a concluding opinion on the issue.

Key demand of the question.
The question wants us to dig deeper into the issue of custodial torture in India and bring out the reasons as to why there is a need for an anti-torture legislation in India.

Structure of the answer

Introduction:
Mention about the huge pendency of cases in Indian courts of law and mention the prevalence of 3rd degree as an accepted form of custodial torture in India. Mention the alleged torture of a father-son duo in Sattankulam town in Tamil Nadu has once again given rise to the demand for a separate law against torture.

Body-
Discuss in points as to why custodial torture is an inhuman practice. E.g
The practice of custodial power is about men — and sometimes, women — who are in positions of power, even if for a brief while and over a limited terrain, having custody over a powerless person. It is about the use of custodial opportunity to torture the captive’s body and mind.
And there, in that arena of wantonness, it becomes something of a sport for the human “Gods” that rule mere humans.
Custodial death, when not ‘natural’, is the extreme end-point of custodial torture.
The death penalty, notwithstanding ‘due process’, is a close kin to this lawless and heartless game etc.
Discuss why there is a need for an anti-torture legislation in India.
Torture is not defined in the Indian Penal Code, but the definitions of ‘hurt’ and ‘grievous hurt’ are clearly laid down.
India has practised and continues to practise the ‘third degree’ with impunity.
India has signed but not ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
Without such a law, there is no meaning to signing the Convention.
Mention about the lapsed bill.
Mention some Human Rights Commission reports which highlight custodial torture in India etc.

Conclusion:
Based on your discussion, form a fair and a balanced conclusion on the given issue.

Introduction
The alleged torture of a father-son duo in Sattankulam town in Tamil Nadu has once again given rise to the demand for a separate law against torture.

Body
Custodial Torture: Inhumane policing
• Common Cause’s recent large national-level survey on the Status of Policing in India affirms the force’s easy camaraderie with violent means.
  ▪ Three out of five personnel believe there is nothing wrong with beating up criminals and four out of five think it’s okay to bash them up to extract a confession.
  ▪ One in five even believes that killing dangerous criminals is better than a legal trial.
• These widely held attitudes show up how flimsy the orientation to working within the law is at training; how deep is the sub-culture of ferocious machismo; and how high the tolerance for illegality within the supervisory cadre is.

Need for anti-custodial torture legislation in India
• Torture is not defined in the Indian Penal Code, but the definitions of ‘hurt’ and ‘grievous hurt’ are clearly laid down.
• Though the definition of ‘hurt’ does not include mental torture, Indian courts have included psychic torture, environmental coercion, tiring interrogative prolixity, and overbearing and intimidatory methods, among others, in the ambit of torture.
• Torture is an endemic characteristic of Indian policing. A commitment to eradicating it requires the police force as a whole to have zero tolerance for the practice besides a specific anti-torture law.
• India took its time to sign on the 1984 UN Convention Against Torture and signed on only in 1997 even though the absolute prohibition against the use of torture has long been established as a worldwide But ratification, the next step, obligates countries to pass laws at home that reflect the articles in the UN law. For 22 years, ratification has been left pending.
• The few sporadic attempts to pass a brand-new law have come to naught. In 2010, a weak and much criticised Prevention of Torture Bill lapsed. In 2016, the Law Commission drafted its own even more diluted version.
• Meanwhile, the NHRC has consulted with civil society to make its own suggestions to the home ministry and there the matter lies — and has lain for a long time. In the meantime, Parliament has heard that for 2019, the NHRC has registered over 400 cases of alleged deaths in police custody and over 5,000 cases pertaining to deaths in judicial custody.
• All these points to an urgent need for anti-torture bill in India.

Way Forward
• Preventing torture needs old hands in the force to be reoriented, investigators to be skilled up with modern techniques of detection and forensic capacities across the country to be ramped up.
• At present, the national infrastructure is sorely wanting. The long-delayed human rights courts need to be set up with specially trained judges in place.
• Agencies like local legal aid authorities must have clear guidelines to assist where there are allegations of torture and be proactive and not continue with bureaucratic procedures that delay service.
There is a need for overseeing bodies like the many human rights commissions and police complaints authorities to do the same. It is not as some may imagine a mammoth task but rather one of making changes systematically down the line.

Conclusion

The temptation to use third-degree methods must be replaced with scientific skills. Thus, the need of the hour is to strike at the root cause of the problem and implement recommendations of various commissions to bring in necessary reforms.

The struggle of the migrants in India is far from over as they still continue to be vulnerable and abandoned even after going back to their hometowns. Comment. (250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why this question:

Even though Governments announced more than once that needy people will get ration even without a ration card, the fact is that the returnee migrant labourers who don’t have ration cards or their names have been struck off from ration cards because they were not staying in their village, are neither getting the regular quota of ration nor the free quota made available during the coronavirus crisis period.

Key demand of the question:

One must discuss why the lives of migrants are still vulnerable despite moving back to their hometowns and the government assurances. Discuss the reasons

Directive word:

Comment—here we have to express our knowledge and understanding of the issue and form an overall opinion there upon.

Structure of the answer:

Introduction:

Briefly explain the issue of Migrants in the country and the recent reverse migration that took place in India due to the pandemic.

Body:

To start with, explain the issues that are being faced despite Government assurance. An interaction with around 200 migrant workers from Unnao, Sitapur, Varanasi, Lucknow, Kushinagar and Saharanpur districts in UP, gives a picture very different from what the government has been claiming. Not one of the workers surveyed in these districts has been approached by the government for skill mapping or for providing them guidance for any kind of livelihood options in their home state. Only one of them had received monetary support of Rs 1,000 twice, though about half of them were provided with the 35-kg ration kit — benefits promised to all the returning migrant workers. However, the cash benefit could be availed only by those who had used state-owned transport, which was near absent.

Discuss the various factors behind these issues – lack of political will, administrative hurdles, bureaucratic attitude, illiteracy, etc.

Provide the measures that needs to be taken up immediately and in long term to improve the lives of the migrants.

Conclusion:

Conclude by suggesting solutions and emphasize that migrant issues should be urgently looked into in the country.

Introduction

The critical vulnerabilities of Indian society that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed are undoubtedly those laid bare by the humanitarian crisis that unfolded as the nation-wide lockdown
took effect. The searing images of the endless ordeal of tens of thousands of famished and exhausted “migrant workers” trying to make their way back to their home villages to escape starvation in cities where they work, will endure long after the pandemic is over.

Body

Migrant crisis during pandemic

- The world’s severest lockdown dealt a body blow to their insecure and fragile urban livelihoods, and many of them also faced imminent eviction.

- With public transportation shut down, many began their long journeys on foot over distances that could span hundreds of miles.

- A large number of them died of heat, exhaustion and starvation; and quite a few were killed in horrific accidents. Eg: Migrants killed on rail tracks and road accidents.

- Extreme poverty and hunger: Without constant source of income or social security, it is the lowest strata of society that is the most affected.
  - Due to lockdown, most essential items were also unavailable for many and led to hunger problems.

- The multitudes escaping Indian cities more than a century later, however, are mostly employed in an informal labour regime in industries and service sectors increasingly characterised by outsourcing and contracting-out arrangements.

- The informal or the unorganised sector now accounts for nearly half of India’s GDP and 80 to 90 per cent of the labour force (including non-plantation agriculture).

- Loss of wages: A report by the Stranded Workers Action Network, found the majority of them to be factory or construction workers on a daily wage.
  - The rest earned their daily wages as drivers, domestic workers, and self-employed workers — among them were street vendors and those engaged in zari embroidery work.

Factors that are responsible for the crisis

- Political exclusion: The political class ignores them because they don’t count as votes, especially in the case of inter-state migrants.

- Language barrier: Many migrants—especially those who relocate to a place where the local language and culture is different from that of their region of origin—also face harassment and political exclusion.

- No say in the big decisions: The cities were built on the hard labour and exploitation of migrant workers, but they never entered the consciousness of the architects; instead, they are considered part of the problem in cities.

- Unrepresented: Due to their mobile nature, they don’t find any place in the manifestos of trade unions. They spend their whole day on worksites and silently sneak into perilous shelters at night, without the cities even noticing them.
Bureaucratic apathy: The current crisis shows how the most vulnerable are the most excluded from the decision making. Even the support for migrants came late and was marred by shoddy implementation.

Measures to be taken

- **Non-farm employment:** The government could try and make accessible non-farm employment closer to the migrants’ native places. This might require various forms of infrastructure upgrade in some of India’s most under-developed areas.
  - *Atmanirbhar Bharat* has a special component from migrants. Recently, housing was to be made available them under *Awaas*
  - Food security will be taken care once *One Nation One Ration Card* is implemented throughout the country.

- **Immediate relief for distressed:** Cash transfers can *protect traditional supply chains for essential goods.* In Delhi, for example, the local government is *setting up shelters and food distribution points to stop rural migration,* though not at a fast-enough rate.

- **Easing migration:** A more realistic route would be for the government itself to help ease the process of migration. This should be done in partnership with the private sector.
  - There are mechanisms across the world that can be examined for effectiveness in this regard.
  - One such would be the creation and management of dormitory-style housing.
  - This could be made from low-cost and pre-fabricated materials to a standard design. It must be ensured that the roll-out is rapid and the final product familiar to workers.

- **Prioritising dedicated transport** options for migrants to prevent overcrowding, especially along high-intensity migration corridors.

- **Special Measures** should also take into account the particular situation of migrant women, who are among those most economically vulnerable and impacted by the situation.

- **Community engagement and NGO participation:** City governments must work more closely with community leaders and NGOs that work in informal settlements and other at-risk communities – both to better understand what’s happening on the ground and communicate key health messages.

Conclusion

Governments at all levels must ensure that any policy intervention must be inclusive of all and especially the most vulnerable sections of the society. The immediate concern should be to address the issue of poverty, hunger and unemployment. A good social security scheme backed by welfare measures for migrants will truly help achieve Atmanirbharta and India would finally tread the path of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas and Sabka Vishwaas.

*India achieved “food security” decades ago, it’s now time to plan for “nutritional self-reliance”*. Analyze. (250 words)

Reference: *Indian Express*
Why this question
Overflowing granaries give us the smug satisfaction of having solved the food security problem — it is actually a momentary cereal surplus phase. It appears so only because India’s per capita consumption of protein, meat, poultry, fruit and vegetables is amongst the lowest in the world, limited by the still appallingly low purchasing capacity of the majority.

Directive word
Analyze — When asked to analyze, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary.

Key demand of the question.
The answer must discuss how India has already the overflowing granaries indicating the achievement of food security. However, the need of the hour is nutritional security of the people as we have few of the highest indicators of stunting, wasting etc. One must provide the necessary steps needed to ensure the nutritional security which could help people as well as the farmers in becoming self-reliant.

Structure of the answer
Introduction:
Start by showing that we have been having a cereal surplus phase leading to overflowing granaries, wastage of grains due to rotting etc. However, India’s per capita consumption of protein, meat, poultry, fruit and vegetables is amongst the lowest in the world, limited by the still appallingly low purchasing capacity of the majority.

Body
Discuss a few points about the India’s nutritional status and argue that we are still talking of “food security” which was achieved decades ago, it’s time to plan for “nutritional self-reliance”.

Now, discuss the measures that are needed to make Indian people and the farmers nutritionally self-reliant.

Conclusion:
Conclude with a balanced way forward.

Food security in India
• The country went through a Green Revolution in the late 1960s and early 1970s, enabling it to overcome productivity stagnation and to significantly improve food grain production.
• Subsidies for agricultural inputs, such as fuel and fertilisers, have enhanced food security.
• Since the mid-1990s it has consistently been able to ensure that there is enough food (in terms of calories) available to feed its entire population.
• It is the world’s largest producer of milk, pulses and millets, and the second-largest producer of rice, wheat, sugarcane, groundnuts, vegetables, fruit and cotton.
• In 2017-18, total food grain production was estimated at 275 million tonnes (MT). India is the largest producer (25% of global production), consumer (27% of world consumption) and importer (14%) of pulses in the world.
Nutrition status in India

- India, currently has the **largest number of undernourished people in the world**, around 195 million.
- Nearly 47 million or 4 out of 10 children in India do not meet their full human potential because of **chronic undernutrition or stunting**.
- 9% of children under 5 years are stunted and 20.8% are wasted, compared to the Asia average of 22.7% and 9.4% respectively.
- Rate of overweight and obesity continues to rise, affecting almost a fifth of the adults, at 21.6% of women and 17.8% of men.
- Inequities in food and health systems increase inequalities in nutrition outcomes that in turn can lead to more inequity, perpetuating a vicious cycle.

Measures taken

- The government has also taken significant steps to combat under- and malnutrition over the past two decades, through the introduction of **mid-day meals at schools**.
  
  - **Anganwadi systems to provide rations** to pregnant and lactating mothers, Subsidised grain for those living below the poverty line through a public distribution system.
  - **Food fortification** to ensure essential micro nutrients reach the body.

- **The National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013**, legally entitles up to **75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population** to receive **subsidized food grains** under the Targeted Public Distribution System.

- **Poshan Abhiyaan**: POSHAN stands for Prime Minister’s Overreaching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment. The POSHAN Abhiyaan is a multi-ministerial convergence mission with a targeted approach by 2022.
  
  - **Rashtriya Poshan Maah** was conducted in September 2019. This initiative is aimed at sensitising public on healthy eating, addressing twin issues of malnutrition and undernutrition and obesity in some sections and also intensifying existing nationwide campaign for ‘malnutrition-free India’.

- **Eat Right Movement**: It is voluntary and collaborative movement built on two broad pillars – “Eat Healthy and “Eat Safe”. It is collective effort to encourage people towards making right food and dietary choices.

Conclusion

Having attained food security, India must now take up nutrition self-sufficiency on war footing. Increasing incomes of farming households, diversifying production of crops, empowering women,
strengthening agricultural diversity and productivity, and designing careful price and subsidy policies that should encourage the production and consumption of nutrient rich crops is the right way forward.

**Discuss in brief the objectives of Green-Ag project?** While enumerating the recent initiatives of the Government, Discuss the necessity of sustainable agriculture in India to build resilience against threats of climate vagaries. (250 words).

**Reference:** downtoearth.org.in

**Why this question:**
The Union government on July 28, 2020, launched the Green-Ag Project in Mizoram, to reduce emissions from agriculture and ensure sustainable agricultural practices. Mizoram is one of the five states where the project will be implemented. Other states include Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Uttarakhand. The project is designed to achieve multiple global environmental benefits in at least 1.8 million hectares (ha) of land in five landscapes, with mixed land use systems. It aims to bring at least 104,070 ha of farms under sustainable land and water management.

**Key demand of the question:**
The question is straightforward and aims to discuss about the newly launched Green-Ag project by the Government. Also, one must list out the other initiatives taken with regards to Sustainable Agriculture in India. Finally, one must discuss the necessity for Sustainable agriculture in India, especially with increasing climate change vagaries.

**Directive:**
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**
Start with an introduction talking about the Green Ag project.

**Body:**
Taking cue from the article, explain the objectives of the Green-Ag Project.
List out the initiatives taken by Government with respect to Sustainable agriculture in India.
Discuss the need for sustainable and climate resilient agriculture and how it can be achieved?

**Conclusion:**
Conclude with a balanced way forward.

**Introduction**
The Union government on July 28, 2020, launched the Green-Ag Project in Mizoram, to reduce emissions from agriculture and ensure sustainable agricultural practices. Mizoram is one of the five states where the project will be implemented. Other states include Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Uttarakhand.

**Body**

**Background**
- The Green-Ag Project is funded by the Global Environment Facility, while the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation, and Farmers’ Welfare (DAC&FW) is the national executing agency.
- Other key players involved in its implementation are Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).

**Objectives of Green-Ag project**
• To catalyse transformative change of India’s agricultural sector to support achievement of national and global environmental benefits and conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes.

• Institutionalization of intersectoral mechanisms (agricultural and allied sectors, forestry and natural resources management, and economic development) at the national and five States to facilitate continued mainstreaming of environmental concerns and priorities related to resilience into the agriculture sector beyond project end.

• This will include one national platform and one platform each in Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand.

• At least six key national and state level agricultural programmes (missions) will have been strengthened with results based environmental indicators integrated in their policy and planning frameworks (or through revised guidelines and other tools based on project support).

• Key missions that will be targeted for strengthening include the National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture; National Livestock Mission; National Food Security Mission; National Initiative on Climate-resilient Agriculture, National Mission for Horticulture and Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana.

• At least 10 community led initiatives to support conservation of globally important species such as the tigers, elephants and the Great Indian Bustard.

• Such initiatives could include community led actions such as community anti-poaching patrolling, community led communication/ awareness activities, habitat and species monitoring activities.

• These will be strongly linked to Tiger Reserve and Elephant reserve management plans in at four landscapes that the project will be working.

• Ten percent reduction in the threat index from baseline (as measured through Green Landscape monitoring programme) at key sites of high biodiversity importance will be demonstrated at five target Green Landscapes (Rajasthan: 277,930 (grassland and orans); Mizoram: 13,725 (Jhum); Madhya Pradesh: 18000 ha (ravines) and the following areas of High Value Forests: Madhya Pradesh (35,000ha); Mizoram (50,000ha), Odisha (1,75,000ha), Uttarakhand (90,000ha).

• At least 104,070 Hectares of farms will be under sustainable land and water management (including organic farming and agrobiodiversity conservation) (Madhya Pradesh: 9000 ha; Mizoram: 13725ha; Odisha: 34200ha Rajasthan: 34145 ha; Uttarakhand: 13000 ha).

• Nearly 49 million tCO2eq Greenhouse gas emission reduction (Mt CO2e newly sequestered or avoided) will be achieved through improved agroecosystems management, including climate resilience issues.

Necessity of Sustainable Agriculture

• Sustainable agriculture is designed with the intention of preserving the environment, expanding the earth’s natural resources, all while creating a quality of life for animals and humans.

• Sustainable agricultural allows for the desires of society’s food and textile needs to be met without the fear of inhibiting the earth’s natural resources for future generations.
• In addition to preserving the earth’s natural resources, sustainable agriculture benefits the environment through helping maintain soil quality, reducing erosion, and preserving water.

• In order to maintain a sustainable lifestyle, agriculturalists focus on certain criteria in order to compete with current sustainability practices.

• This criterion consists of creating a healthy environment, while ensuring economic profitability in addition to maintaining social and economic equity.

• Every member of the food system can manage a sustainable lifestyle through remaining consistent within this criterion.

**Government measures in this regard**

• **National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)** has been formulated for enhancing agricultural productivity especially in rainfed areas focusing on integrated farming, water use efficiency, soil health management and synergizing resource conservation.
  - NMSA will cater to key dimensions of ‘Water use efficiency’, ‘Nutrient Management’ and ‘Livelihood diversification’ through adoption of sustainable development pathway by progressively shifting to environmentally friendly technologies, adoption of energy efficient equipment, conservation of natural resources, integrated farming, etc.

• **The Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)**, an initiative to promote organic farming in the country, was launched by the NDA government in 2015.
  - According to the scheme, farmers will be encouraged to form groups or clusters and take to organic farming methods over large areas in the country.
  - The aim is to form 10,000 clusters over the next three years and bring about five lakh acres of agricultural area under organic farming.
  - The government also intends to cover the certification costs and promote organic farming through the use of traditional resources.

• **Micro Irrigation Fund (MIF)** The government approved a dedicated Rs5,000 crore fund to bring more land area under micro-irrigation as part of its objective to boost agriculture production and farmers income.
  - This will also lead to sustainable use of water and “Per drop more Crop”.

• **Zero budget natural farming** is a method of chemical-free agriculture drawing from traditional Indian practices.
  - It was originally promoted by agriculturist Subhash Palekar, who developed it in the mid-1990s as an alternative to the Green Revolution’s methods that are driven by chemical fertilizers and pesticides and intensive irrigation.
  - It claims that there is no need for expensive inputs such as fertilisers, pesticides and intensive irrigation.
  - It is a unique model that relies on Agro-ecology.

**Conclusion**
In regards to the future of sustainable agriculture, many believe by the time earth’s population reaches 9 billion we will be fully depleted of many natural resources that will require alternative sustainable solutions. This gives us 40 years to make a change towards sustainable lifestyles in preserving our agriculture and food sources. Sustainable agriculture is not the only step in the wave of preserving our planet, but it is an important building block in taking preventative measures in order to maintain the resources we have left.

The National Education Policy lays particular emphasis on the development of the creative potential of each individual, in all its richness and complexity. Discuss the key highlights of the policy and how does this policy overcome the lacunae in previous education policies. (250 words)

Reference: pib.gov.in, Live Mint

Why this question:
The Union Cabinet chaired approved the National Education Policy 2020 recently, making way for large scale, transformational reforms in both school and higher education sectors. Built on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability, this policy is aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and aims to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by making both school and college education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, suited to 21st century needs and aimed at bringing out the unique capabilities of each student.

Key demand of the question:
One must explain the key highlights of NEP, 2020. Later, one must also assess as to how the NEP is different from the previous education policies of 1986.

Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Talk about the introduction of NEP 2020 and how it was much needed one since there has been a lot of changes in knowledge landscape since last education policy 34 years ago.

Body:
Highlight the features of NEP 2020.
Discuss how the new NEP is trying to overcome the lacunae in the previous policies.

Conclusion:
Conclude with a balanced way forward.

Introduction:
The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister recently approved the new National Education Policy 2020, making way for large scale, transformational reforms in both school and higher education sectors. This is the first education policy of the 21st century and replaces the 34-year-old National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986. Built on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability, this policy is aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and aims to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by making both school and college education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, suited to 21st century needs and aimed at bringing out the unique capabilities of each student. A panel headed by former ISRO chief K. Kasturirangan submitted a draft in December 2018, which was made public and opened for feedback after the Lok Sabha election in May 2019.
Key highlights of the NEP 2020 are:

- **School Education**
  - Ensuring Universal Access at all levels of school education:
    - NEP 2020 emphasizes on ensuring universal access to school education at all levels - preschool to secondary.
- About 2 crores out of school children will be brought back into mainstream under NEP 2020.

- Early Childhood Care & Education with new Curricular and Pedagogical Structure:
  - With emphasis on Early Childhood Care and Education, the 10+2 structure of school curricula is to be replaced by a 5+3+3+4 curricular structure corresponding to ages 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years respectively.
  - This will bring the hitherto uncovered age group of 3-6 years under school curriculum, which has been recognized globally as the crucial stage for development of mental faculties of a child.
  - The new system will have 12 years of schooling with three years of Anganwadi/pre-schooling.

- Attaining Foundational Literacy and Numeracy:
  - Recognizing Foundational Literacy and Numeracy as an urgent and necessary prerequisite to learning, NEP 2020 calls for setting up of a National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy by MHRD.

- Reforms in school curricula and pedagogy:
  - The school curricula and pedagogy will aim for holistic development of learners by equipping them with the key 21st century skills, reduction in curricular content to enhance essential learning and critical thinking and greater focus on experiential learning.
  - Students will have increased flexibility and choice of subjects.
  - There will be no rigid separations between arts and sciences, between curricular and extra-curricular activities, between vocational and academic streams.
  - Vocational education will start in schools from the 6th grade, and will include internships.

- Multilingualism and the power of language:
  - The policy has emphasized mother tongue/local language/regional language as the medium of instruction at least till Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond.
  - Sanskrit to be offered at all levels of school and higher education as an option for students, including in the three-language formula.
  - Other classical languages and literatures of India also to be available as options.
  - No language will be imposed on any student.

- Equitable and Inclusive Education:
  - NEP 2020 aims to ensure that no child loses any opportunity to learn and excel because of the circumstances of birth or background.
  - Special emphasis will be given on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) which include gender, socio-cultural, and geographical identities and disabilities.

- Robust Teacher Recruitment and Career Path:
• Teachers will be recruited through robust, transparent processes.
• Promotions will be merit-based, with a mechanism for multi-source periodic performance appraisals and available progression paths to become educational administrators or teacher educators.
• A common National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) will be developed by the National Council for Teacher Education by 2022, in consultation with NCERT, SCERTs, teachers and expert organizations from across levels and regions.

• School Governance:
  • Schools can be organized into complexes or clusters which will be the basic unit of governance and ensure availability of all resources including infrastructure, academic libraries and a strong professional teacher community.

• Standard-setting and Accreditation for School Education:
  • NEP 2020 envisages clear, separate systems for policy making, regulation, operations and academic matters.
  • States/UTs will set up independent State School Standards Authority (SSSA).
  • Transparent public self-disclosure of all the basic regulatory information, as laid down by the SSSA, will be used extensively for public oversight and accountability.
  • The SCERT will develop a School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework (SQAAF) through consultations with all stakeholders.

Higher Education

• Increase GER to 50% by 2035:
  • NEP 2020 aims to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education including vocational education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035. 3.5 Crore new seats will be added to Higher education institutions.

• Holistic Multidisciplinary Education:
  • The policy envisages broad based, multi-disciplinary, holistic Under Graduate education with flexible curricula, creative combinations of subjects, integration of vocational education and multiple entry and exit points with appropriate certification.
  • UG education can be of 3 or 4 years with multiple exit options and appropriate certification within this period.
  • For example, Certificate after 1 year, Advanced Diploma after 2 years, Bachelor’s Degree after 3 years and Bachelor’s with Research after 4 years.

• Regulation:
  • Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) will be set up as a single overarching umbrella body the for entire higher education, excluding medical and legal education.
• HECI to have four independent verticals – National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC) for regulation, General Education Council (GEC) for standard setting, Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) for funding, and National Accreditation Council (NAC) for accreditation.

• HECI will function through faceless intervention through technology, & will have powers to penalise HEIs not conforming to norms and standards.

• Public and private higher education institutions will be governed by the same set of norms for regulation, accreditation and academic standards.

▪ Rationalised Institutional Architecture:
  • Higher education institutions will be transformed into large, well resourced, vibrant multidisciplinary institutions providing high quality teaching, research, and community engagement.
  • The definition of university will allow a spectrum of institutions that range from Research-intensive Universities to Teaching-intensive Universities and Autonomous degree-granting Colleges.

Other Provisions:
• Motivated, Energized, and Capable Faculty:
  ▪ NEP makes recommendations for motivating, energizing, and building capacity of faculty through clearly defined, independent, transparent recruitment, freedom to design curricula/pedagogy, incentivising excellence, movement into institutional leadership.
  ▪ Faculty not delivering on basic norms will be held accountable

• Teacher Education:
  ▪ A new and comprehensive National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education, NCFTE 2021, will be formulated by the NCTE in consultation with NCERT.
  ▪ By 2030, the minimum degree qualification for teaching will be a 4-year integrated B.Ed. degree.
  ▪ Stringent action will be taken against substandard stand-alone Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs).

• Mentoring Mission:
  ▪ A National Mission for Mentoring will be established, with a large pool of outstanding senior/retired faculty – including those with the ability to teach in Indian languages – who would be willing to provide short and long-term mentoring/professional support to university/college teachers.

• Financial support for students:
  ▪ Efforts will be made to incentivize the merit of students belonging to SC, ST, OBC, and other SEDGs.
The National Scholarship Portal will be expanded to support, foster, and track the progress of students receiving scholarships.

Private HEIs will be encouraged to offer larger numbers of free ships and scholarships to their students.

**Professional Education:**

- All professional education will be an integral part of the higher education system.
- Stand-alone technical universities, health science universities, legal and agricultural universities etc will aim to become multi-disciplinary institutions.

**Adult Education:**

- Policy aims to achieve 100% youth and adult literacy.

**Financing Education:**

- The Centre and the States will work together to increase the public investment in Education sector to reach 6% of GDP at the earliest.

**Open and Distance Learning:**

- This will be expanded to play a significant role in increasing GER.
- Measures such as online courses and digital repositories, funding for research, improved student services, credit-based recognition of MOOCs, etc., will be taken to ensure it is at par with the highest quality in-class programmes.

**NEP 2020 vis-à-vis the older Education policies:**

- The implementation of previous policies on education has focused mainly on issues of access and equity, with a lesser emphasis on quality of education.
- The unfinished agenda of the National Policy on Education 1986, Modified in 1992 (NPE 1986/92), is appropriately dealt with in this Policy.
- A major development since the last Policy of 1986/92 has been the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 which laid down the legal underpinnings for achieving universal elementary education.

**Way Forward:**

- The New Education Policy 2020 aims to facilitate an inclusive, participatory and holistic approach, which takes into consideration field experiences, empirical research, stakeholder feedback, as well as lessons learned from best practices.
- It is a progressive shift towards a more scientific approach to education.
- The prescribed structure will help to cater the ability of the child – stages of cognitive development as well as social and physical awareness.
- If implemented in its true vision, the new structure can bring India at par with the leading countries of the world.
The National Education Policy 2020 has emphasized the integration of technology in all levels of learning. Providing the highlights of Digital education, critically analyse whether the digital divide would ensure ‘Equitable and universal access to education’.

(250 words)

Reference: *The Hindu, Times Now*

Why this question:
The National Education Policy (NEP), approved by the Cabinet yesterday, has a new section on digital education to ensure “equitable use of technology”.

Key demand of the question:
One must explain the new features under the Digital education of NEP, 2020. One has to critically analyse whether equitable and universal access to education will be ensured with the digital education. Discuss the challenges and provide the solutions for the same.

Directive:
Critically Analyse – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary. When ‘critically’ is suffixed or prefixed to a directive, one needs to look at the good and bad of the topic and give a fair judgement.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Talk about the introduction of NEP 2020 and inclusion of digital education section in it. Highlight its importance in the current times of pandemic.

While education will play a critical role in this transformation, technology itself will play an important role in the improvement of educational processes and outcomes; thus, the relationship between technology and education (at all levels) is bi-directional.

Body:
Highlight the features of digital education section under NEP 2020.
Discuss the challenges present in ensuring equitable and universal access to education using digital means.
Provide solutions to overcome the same.

Conclusion:
Conclude with a balanced way forward to ensure that digital education is used to reach greater number of people and make India emerge as a knowledge economy.

Introduction:
The closure of schools and universities over the last four months has highlighted the inequities in the Indian education system, with some students able to continue the learning process via online tools, while others being left out. The National Education Policy (NEP), approved by the Cabinet on Wednesday, has a new section on digital education to ensure “equitable use of technology”.

Body:
India is a global technology leader in information and communication and in other cutting-edge domains such as space. The Digital India Campaign is helping to transform the entire nation into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. While education will play a critical role in this transformation, technology itself will play an important role in the improvement of educational processes and outcomes; thus, the relationship between technology and education (at all levels) is bi-directional.

Highlights of Digital education under the NEP 2020:
• New technologies involving artificial intelligence, machine learning, block chains, smart boards, handheld computing devices, adaptive computer testing for student development, and other forms of educational software and hardware will not just change what students learn in the classroom but how they learn.

• An autonomous body, the National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT), will be created to provide a platform for use of technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning, administration, and so on, both for school and higher education.

• The aim of NEAT will be to provide on a single portal various educational technology solutions that are tested for their robustness for improving the learning experience, with a special focus on the needs of the students with disabilities.

• To remain relevant in the fast-changing field of educational technology, NEAT, through its expert body, will maintain a regular inflow of authentic data from multiple sources including educational technology innovators and practitioners, particularly at the grass-root level, and will engage with a diverse set of researchers to analyse this data.

• It will act as a forum for harnessing the distributed energy that democratising technology can unleash, particularly among the youth of the country who continually prove their capacity to innovate and lead, while also bringing a scholarly emphasis to ensure that the overall impact of these efforts is positive.

• To support the development of a vibrant body of knowledge and practice, NEAT will organise multiple regional and national conferences, workshops, etc. to solicit inputs from national and international educational technology researchers, entrepreneurs, and practitioners.

• The National Research Foundation will initiate or expand research efforts in the technology, including fundamental research in the domain, development of the technology (including possible mega-projects), and assessment of its socio-economic impact.

• Particular attention will need to be paid to emerging disruptive technologies that will necessarily transform the education system and what it teaches to students.

Challenges:

• India is far behind some developing countries where digital education is getting increased attention.

• In countries where e-learning is popular, students have access to various online resources such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) which help students, teachers and professionals upgrade their skills.

• The major challenge in EDTech reforms at the national level is the seamless integration of technology in the present Indian education system, which is the most diverse and largest in the world with more than 15 lakh schools and 50,000 higher education institutions.

• Further, it is also important to establish quality assurance mechanisms and quality benchmark for online learning developed and offered by India HEIs as well as e-learning platforms (growing rapidly).
• Many e-learning players offer multiple courses on the same subjects with different levels of certifications, methodology and assessment parameters. So, the quality of courses may differ across different e-learning platforms.

• Democratization of technology is now an important issue, comprising internet connectivity, telecom infrastructure, affordability of online system, availability of laptop/desktop, software, educational tools, online assessment tools, etc.

• Since our education system has not trained our teachers and students to think creatively and manage in a crisis situation, and has underplayed the importance of e-learning, they are unprepared for the transition from the classroom to online.

• Parents feel too pressed, having to support their children’s classes while working from home themselves.

• The physical classroom does not only impart the syllabus. Children are also socialised, and there is an element of sport and play which is absent in virtual learning.

• The matrix for socialisation is not replicated on an LCD screen.

• Poor are disconnected and irrespective of background, some children cannot relate to the online classroom, and many more are losing out on midday meals.

Measures needed:

▪ There should be ease of digital access and the ability of parents to support learning at home.

▪ Online classes offered as live teaching can be sustained only with a mix of activities, worksheets and interactive sessions.

▪ Teachers should have a structured plan which does not suffocate or burden them and also keep the students involved.

▪ All institutions will have to chalk out an infrastructure plan which can be used in such a crisis.

▪ Teachers need to be considerate about how children feel or what they are going through these days so an understanding should be developed.

Going forward, the use of technology in teaching or recruitment will lead to a new era wherein the best of faculty will be available from across the globe to students. Education quality will be gauged not just by the quality of faculty but will also have quality of IT infrastructure and familiarization of the faculty with digital teaching technologies as important parameters.

Conclusion:

To summarize, education must continue. Students should keep learning. The lockdown period should be productive. Educators should think creatively and introduce innovative ways of learning. In a country where access to the Internet and high-speed connectivity is a problem, and the digital divide is an issue, it is important to address the challenges. Those who are involved in education planning and administration should give a serious thought to reducing the digital divide in the country and popularize digital learning.
While the National Education Policy talks of social inequalities at length, its political and economic goals are diffused. Critically analyse. (250 words)

Reference: The Hindu, Indian Express

Why this question:
The National Education Policy 2020 announced by the Ministry of Human Resource Development sets for itself the goal of transforming the system to meet the needs of 21st Century India. Nevertheless, it requires closer scrutiny, in terms of its implications for the marginalised, disciplinary spaces, autonomy, and constitutional values, among other things.

Key demand of the question:
One must critically analyse the features of the NEP and possible challenges that could arise during its implementation. One must also try and provide the solutions for the same.

Directive:
Critically analyze – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary. When ‘critically’ is suffixed or prefixed to a directive, one needs to look at the good and bad of the topic and give a fair judgment.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Briefly talk about the new NEP 2020 that was recently rolled out.
The NEP 2020 is the first omnibus policy after the one issued in 1986, and it has to contend with multiple crises in the system. The policy, inter alia, aims to eliminate problems of pedagogy, structural inequities, access asymmetries and rampant commercialisation.

Body:
Now provide the highlights of the NEP 2020.
Discuss the possible challenges that could arise during the implementation.
In a federal system, any educational reform can be implemented only with support from the States, and the Centre has the giant task of building a consensus on the many ambitious plans.
Where the policy fails to show rigour, however, is on universalisation of access, both in schools and higher education; the Right to Education needs specific measures to succeed.
Moreover, fee regulations exist in some States even now, but the regulatory process is unable to rein in profiteering in the form of unaccounted donations.
The idea of a National Higher Education Regulatory Council as an apex control organisation is bound to be resented by States.
Similarly, a national body for aptitude tests would have to convince the States of its merits.
Provide the feasible solutions for the same.

Conclusion:
Conclude with what should be the way ahead.

Introduction:
The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) announced by the Ministry of Human Resource Development sets for itself the goal of transforming the system to meet the needs of 21st Century India. The NEP 2020 is the first omnibus policy after the one issued in 1986, and it has to contend with multiple crises in the system. The policy, inter alia, aims to eliminate problems of pedagogy, structural inequities, access asymmetries and rampant commercialisation.

Body:
Highlights of the NEP 2020:
• In structural terms, the NEP’s measures to introduce early childhood education from age 3, offer school board examinations twice a year to help improve performance, move away from rote
learning, raise mathematical skills for everyone, shift to a four-year undergraduate college
degree system, and create a Higher Education Commission of India represent major changes.

- The policy also says that wherever possible, the medium of instruction in schools until at least
  Class 5, but preferably until Class 8 and beyond, will be the home language or mother tongue or
  regional language.
- Provision of an energy-filled breakfast, in addition to the nutritious mid-day meal, to help
  children achieve better learning outcomes, is one.
- Creation of ‘inclusion funds’ to help socially and educationally disadvantaged children pursue
  education is another.

**Diffused political and economic goals:**

- There is also an emphasis on vocational training, but to make it effective, there has to be close
  coordination between the education and skills ministry.
- In the higher education segment, NEP aims to improve the Gross Enrolment Ratio from 26.3%
  (2018) to 50% by 2035. However, increasing GER drastically — almost adding the same number
  of seats that India has had in the last 70 years in the next 15 years — may lead to a focus on
  quantity rather than quality.
- The new policy also talks about creating several regulatory bodies. This is a sound idea; but to
  make these institutions successful, it is imperative that they are built better, and staffed with
  people who have the vision to implement the policy mandate.
- While NEP aims to increase public investment in education from the current 4.3% to 6% of GDP,
  there is no time-frame given.
- Only increasing the investment, however, will not be a panacea; to improve the quality of
  education, there has to be realistic budgeting, flexibility in the tweaking of priorities when
  required; strong leadership; and a singular focus on outcomes.
- The idea of a National Higher Education Regulatory Council as an apex control organisation is
  bound to be resented by States.
- Similarly, a national body for aptitude tests would have to convince the States of its merits.

**Way Forward:**

- Education is a concurrent list subject. Apart from a consensus between the centre and the
  states, all the other stakeholders including institutions, public and academicians should also be
  consulted.
- Natal and prenatal studies should also be included in the country’s education system to ensure
  awareness about the issues related to mother and infants, considering the high MMR and IMR in
  the country.
- There should be a course of Masters of Teacher Education.
- Also, there is a need to build good teacher training institutions.
- The education policy should maintain a symbiotic relationship between the different regions of
  the country through the study of different languages.
The quality of education provided in the country shall be such that it not only delivers basic literacy and numeracy but also creates an analytical environment in the country.

Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Write a short note on Garib Kalyan Rojgar Yojana and its implications. (250 words)

Reference: Live mint

Why the question:
The question is straightforward and is about the importance and key features of Garib Kalyan Rojgar Yojana.

Key Demand of the question:
The question is straightforward and must in detail explain the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Yojana and its implications.

Directive:
Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the mega ‘Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan’ aimed to boost livelihood opportunities in rural India amid the ongoing Covid-19 crisis.

Body:
The question is straightforward and there isn’t much to deliberate, one must discuss the highlights of the scheme. The scheme will be a coordinated effort by 12 different ministries including rural development, Panchayati Raj, Road transport and highways, mines, drinking water and sanitation, environment, railways, petroleum and natural gas, new and renewable energy, border Roads, Telecom and agriculture. Discuss the significance of the scheme.

Conclusion:
Conclude with its importance.

Introduction

The world today has been severely affected by the covid-19 pandemic and India is no exception. Amid this crisis, the most-affected has been the labour class. The plight of the migrant labour class has shocked the country. The Government of India has decided to launch a rural public works scheme ‘Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan’ through video-conferencing from village Telihar in Khagaria district of Bihar on 20th June 2020.

Body

- Target Beneficiaries: The scheme will empower and provide livelihood opportunities to the returnee migrant workers and rural citizens who have returned to their home states due to the Covid-19 induced lockdown.

- Duration and Corpus of the scheme: This campaign will work in mission mode for 125 days with an outlay of 50,000 crore.

- Total Coverage: A total of 116 districts across six states, namely Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Odisha (where maximum migrant workers have returned) have been chosen for the campaign.
These districts are estimated to cover about 2/3 of such migrant workers.

The chosen districts include 27 Aspirational Districts.

Aspirational Districts are those districts in India which are affected by poor socio-economic indicators. These are aspirational in the context, that improvement in these districts can lead to the overall improvement in human development in India.

**Implementation:** It will involve intensified and focused implementation of 25 different types of works to provide employment to the migrant workers on one hand and create infrastructure in the rural regions of the country on the other hand.

- The workers will help build gram panchayat bhawans and anganwadi centres, national highway works, railway works and water conservation projects, among others across six states.

**Participants:** 12 different Ministries/Departments, namely, Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Road Transport and Highways, Mines, Drinking Water and Sanitation, Environment, Railways, etc. will be coordinating for the implementation of the scheme.

**Connectivity:** The villages will join this programme through the Common Service Centres (CSCs) and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) maintaining the norms of social distancing in the wake of the pandemic.

**Implications**

**Livelihood for migrant labourers:** As per the data, more than 1 crore migrants have returned to their native place as on date and are unemployed.

- Their desperate escape from cities within weeks of the lockdown also put forth a major issue that is alarming.
- These people neither had savings, nor access to welfare schemes or proper healthcare in the cities which led them to rush back to the villages.
- Thus the programme Garib Kalyan Rojgar Yojana will provide employment and wages to the poor migrant workers, who may not be able return back to the cities.

**Employment:** Going by the present situation, where we see no sign of the pandemic slowing down, or demand picking up in near future, ensuring employment opportunities for migrant labourers back in their villages seems to be the only plausible response to sustain their livelihoods.

**Stimulus by government:** The economic revival seems possible only through massive public investments by the government at this juncture.

- As critics of the government have pointed the fiscal stimulus to be skewed towards addressing the supply side of the chain, neglecting the demand side, a massive public investment by the government could also be a signal to put money in the hands of poor and taking a step towards reviving demand.
- This will take care of the demand side of the chain, eventually creating productive capital assets.
Towards Atmanirbharta: First, this program is targeted towards giving a headstart to the governments ambitious Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

- Twenty-five core works of the government which are instrumental in realizing the “Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan” comprising projects like Jal Jeevan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, rural housing, railway works, community sanitation, fibre optics, Ganga cleansing, poultry farming etc. will employ returnee migrants in jobs of their expertise through skill mapping.

Towards Gram Swaraj: The initiative will serve as the foundation to strengthening the rural economy by providing livelihood generation opportunities and public infrastructure in the villages eventually leading to “self-reliant villages”.

- This could take India one step closer to the Mahatma Gandhi’s grand vision of “Gram Swaraj” which even our Prime Minister has continuously emphasized upon.

Conclusion

The intent behind the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Yojana seems noble and a much needed one. The success of the program depends upon whether its benefits reach the migrant labours in time and is able to revive rural demand by the second quarter.

Critically analyse the violation of the non-discrimination clause of the disaster law with respect to Prison Under trials in India in the current scenario of COVID-19 Pandemic.

(250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why the question:
The article brings to us the dismal condition of prisons and a special case of the sufferings of the under trials in the Indian prisons.

Key Demand of the question:
One must present a critical analysis of the violation of the non-discrimination clause of the disaster law with respect to Prison Under trials in India in the current scenario of COVID-19 Pandemic.

Directive:
Critically analyze – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary. When ‘critically’ is suffixed or prefixed to a directive, one needs to look at the good and bad of the topic and give a fair judgment.

Structure of the answer:

Introduction:
Briefly define the context of the question.

Body:
Explain how the conditions of prisoners amidst the tough covid-19 situation are worsening.
Discuss the dimensions of Disaster management act that deal with provisions related.
Explain how in violation of the non-discrimination clause of the disaster law, many under trials are constructed as “undeserving” and condemned to inhuman, cruel and degrading treatment.
Suggest what needs to be done to address such a situation.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction:
Undertrials account for nearly 70 per cent of India’s prison population. States including Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi have recorded Covid-19 cases in their prisons. However, several ailing or elderly undertrials are denied bail due to the gravity of their offence, as the contagion reportedly sweeps through several prisons.

Body:

Challenges faced by prisoners in times of pandemic:

- **Overcrowding:**
  - Before the lockdown, the state’s jails were accommodating 50% over their capacity.
  - This is much higher than the national average occupancy in central prisons, which on an average house 13 prisoners against a capacity of 10.
  - The Maharashtra Prison Department’s report said the capacity in state jails is 23,547 while there were 35,239 prisoners before the lockdown. It warned against an outbreak in other prisons if they are not decongested.
  - A total of 1,341 prisons were functional in India as on 30th November, 2018. The total population of prisoners in India was 4.68 lakh against total sanctioned strength of 3.83 lakh.

- **Poor infrastructure:**
  - These cramped and crowded jails — mostly British-era central prisons in Maharashtra — are a ticking time bomb for the spread of infectious diseases.
  - The barracks are very crowded, so are spaces of eating and cleaning.

- **Highest number of undertrials:**
  - India’s under-trial population remains among the highest in the world and more than half of all undertrials were detained for less than six months in 2016.

- **Shortage of Prison Staff**
  - The Prison Department has a perennial average vacancy of 30%-40%. This hinders implementation of Model Prison Manual and various jail reforms.
  - Physical production of an accused for a trial in a court remains far below the aspired 100% in several States, mainly because of unavailability of sufficient police guards for escort and transportation.

- **Unhygienic Food**
  - The preparation of food in kitchens is “primitive and arduous”. The kitchens are congested and unhygienic and the diet has remained unchanged for years now.

The Supreme Court, with consideration of above challenges, ordered all states and Union Territories to set up high-level panels which would consider releasing all convicts who have been jailed for up to seven years on parole to decongest jails in an attempt to contain the Covid-19 outbreak. The bench suggested that undertrials awaiting trial for offences entailing maximum sentence of seven years also be extended a similar benefit. The undertrial review committee must meet every week, it said.
High Power Committees (HPC) were created in each state interpreted the SC’s orders as a direction for creating a classification on the basis of offence and sentence. These HPCs have not adopted a prisoner-centric approach even towards terminally ill, pregnant and lactating women, foreigners, the elderly or disabled, or the undertrials who are in prison for years. In Delhi, all foreigners, who are largely South Asians and Blacks, are excluded from the HPC’s classification as deserving of interim bail, irrespective of offence or sentence, even though Article 21 protects all persons. Nor are women treated as a class.

Recent incidents of an undertrial pregnant women who was coerced to undergo a premature delivery in the prison, and her baby died of injury from an unassisted delivery. This inhuman and cruel treatment has not been accounted for in our legal history.

**Non-discrimination law of Disaster Management Act, 2005 (DMA) and undertrials:**

- Section 61 of DMA is operative and it says, “while providing compensation and relief to the victims of disaster, there shall be no discrimination on the ground of sex, caste, community, descent or religion”.
- Prisons are “affected areas”, and relief and compensation to prisoners is a statutory obligation.
- The HPC classification needs urgent review to ensure there is no discrimination as per the DMA.
- Women, children, senior citizens, gender and sexual minorities, Dalits, religious minorities and the disabled must be treated as custodial minorities.
- Strangely, the government’s COVID policy that specifically identifies senior citizens, the co-morbid, pregnant, lactating women as high-risk populations is silent on prison inmates.
- In violation of the non-discrimination clause of the disaster law, many undertrials are constructed as “undeserving” and condemned to inhuman, cruel and degrading treatment.

**Way forward:**

- The **Supreme Court appointed Justice Amitava Roy (retd.) Committee** has given recommendations to reform prisons.
- The Court appointed the Committee in 2018 to examine the various problems plaguing prisons, from overcrowding to lack of legal advice to convicts to issues of remission and parole.
- **Speedy trial:** Speedy trial remains one of the best ways to remedy the unwarranted phenomenon of overcrowding.
- **Lawyer to prisoner ratio:** There should be at least one lawyer for every 30 prisoners, which is not the case at present.
- **Special courts:** Special fast-track courts should be set up to deal exclusively with petty offences which have been pending for more than five years. Further, accused persons who are charged with petty offences and those granted bail, but who are unable to arrange surety should be released on a Personal Recognizance (PR) Bond.
- **Unified prison management system:** There should be a unified prison management system that has records of all inmates so they don’t have to run from pillar to post for copies of documents like court orders. The project has been recommended by NALSA as well. Also, this project has worked well in Delhi’s Tihar jail.
Avoid adjournment: An adjournment should not be granted in cases where witnesses are present and the concept of plea bargaining, in which accused admits guilt for a lesser sentence, should be promoted.

Accommodative Transition: Every new prisoner should be allowed a free phone call a day to his family members to see him through his first week in jail.

Legal aid: Providing effective legal aid to prisoners and taking steps to provide vocational skills and education to prisoners.

Use of ICT: Use of video-conferencing for trial.

Alternatives: The courts may be asked to use their “discretionary powers” and award sentences like “fine and admonition” if possible instead of sending the offenders to jails.

Post-release financial security for prisoners: Wages that are paid to prisoners who are serving sentences should be increased and should be on par with global benchmarks. So that when they come out, they have some better finances.

Skill development of the prisoners: The major role prisons should play is of reformation and making sure that, once out, inmates are properly integrated into society. That is possible when more skill development programs are introduced in the jails to enhance their chances of earning.

Conclusion:

India is the champion of human rights causes all across the world, but the dismal condition of Indian prison reflects the paradox that exists in the Indian criminal justice system. So prison reforms need to see the light of the day, but it must be accompanied by the judicial system reforms and police reforms, as trio forms the pillars of the criminal justice system.

“The lack of government welfare schemes or one-time monetary assistance to domestic workers has compounded their woes during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic”, discuss the issue and suggest measures to address it. (250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why the question:
The article titled “No help for the helps” brings to us the dismal picture of domestic workers amidst pandemic.

Key Demand of the question:
Explain in what way the lack of government welfare schemes or one-time monetary assistance to domestic workers has compounded their woes during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic and suggest solutions to address the same.

Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
In brief set the context of the question.

Body:
List down first the issues being faced by the domestic workers.
Unfortunately, domestic workers fall within the large informal sector where nearly 90% of Indian workers are placed. Therefore, they do not have any recourse to law for safety, payment or welfare.
There is a need to include all domestic workers, irrespective of the category, in the social security net. Suggest measures to address the issue.

**Conclusion:**
COVID-19 is going to result in a new normal in many ways, it presents an opportunity and challenge – to enhance the value of the work of care and domestic work, address its deeply gendered nature, and reflect on ensuring their basic rights.

**Introduction:**

Domestic worker is a person who is employed in any household on a temporary or permanent basis to do the household work. In the decade after liberalisation, there was a nearly 120% rise in the number of domestic workers in India. Women constitute over two-thirds of the workforce in this unorganized sector. As per the National Sample Survey Organization Statistics-2011-2012 (68th round) an estimated 39 lakhs people are employed as domestic workers by private households, of which 26 lakhs are female domestic workers.

**Body:**

**Challenges faced by Domestic workers during pandemic:**

- Domestic workers struggle to make ends meet as employers choose to keep them away even during the ‘unlock’ phase.
- About 80%-90% domestic workers in Delhi and Mumbai have lost their jobs.
- The lack of government welfare schemes or one-time monetary assistance has only compounded their woes.
- The lack of social security for domestic workers in Delhi has made the blow harder on them. Though States such as Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have welfare boards for domestic workers and many others have unorganised workers’ welfare boards, Delhi does not have either.
- The national capital has also not fixed minimum wages for domestic workers as done by other States such as Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, among others, according to officials.
- While several legislations such as the Unorganized Social Security Act, 2008, Sexual Harassment against Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 and Minimum Wages Schedules notified in various states refer to domestic workers, there remains an absence of comprehensive, uniformly applicable, national legislation that guarantees fair terms of employment and decent working conditions.
- About half the states have included domestic workers as labourers under the Minimum Wages Act, which sets out terms of payment, hours of work and leave. Yet, this law is grossly inadequate.
- The law does not, for instance, require domestic workers and employers to register with any authority, which is crucial for monitoring whether both parties are fulfilling their contractual obligations and for adjudicating conflicts.
- Absence of proper documentation, which also increases their reliance on employers to access social security benefits. As employment is largely through word of mouth or personal referrals, employment contracts are rarely negotiated, leaving the terms of employment to the whims of the employer.
• Unlike work in a formal setting, domestic work is not guided by clear and agreed production or output goals.

Other challenges:
• Domestic workers are commonly referred to as servants and maids which has resulted in their feelings of insecurity and inferiority.
• Domestic work as an economic activity is too vast and employs too many to remain unregulated.
• Neither the Maternity Benefits Act nor the Minimum Wages Act or any other labour laws apply to domestic work.
• Domestic workers can be hired and fired at will. The employer has no legally binding obligations.
• Organising domestic workers has been a huge challenge as the work place is inaccessible and multiple
• India’s domestic workers are overworked, underpaid and abused. There are many cases of torture, beatings, sexual assault, and incarceration.
• Poor bargaining power, with no provision for weekly holidays, maternity leave and health benefits.
• If anything is missing in the house, they are the first to be accused with threats, physical violence, police interrogation, conviction, and even dismissal.
• Most of these are from vulnerable communities – Adivasis, Dalits or landless Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Nearly all of them are migrant workers. And an overwhelming number are women. This makes them easy to replace, and easier still to exploit.

Measures needed:
• A draft National Policy on domestic workers is under consideration of the Central Government. This policy, if finalised, will benefit 50 lakh domestic workers in the country including maids and drivers amongst others.
  ▪ The policy proposes legal status to domestic workers.
  ▪ It would facilitate recognition of part-time and full-time domestic help as “workers”.
  ▪ It would enable them with the right to register with the state labour department.
  ▪ It also plans to ensure minimum wages and equal remuneration to the domestic workers.
• Minimum wage provisions are important instruments to protect the most vulnerable and lowest-paid workers – such as domestic workers – from unduly low wages.
• Social security schemes like National Old Age Pension Scheme (Ministry of Rural Development); National Family Benefit Scheme (Ministry of Rural Development); Janani Suraksha Yojana (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare), Ayushman Bharat (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare).
• Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana (AABY) with Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) provide life and disability coverage to the unorganised workers for the age group of 18 to 50 years depending upon their eligibility.
Domestic Workers have also been included as a specific category of workers (with home as the workplace) in the Sexual Harassment of women at workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (2013).

In several States, trade unions are organizing domestic workers and unions have been registered exclusively for domestic workers.

Domestic Workers Sector Skills Council has been established under the Ministry of Skills Development to enable professionalization of domestic workers and enable their career progression.

The State governments are mandated under the Act to formulate suitable welfare schemes for unorganised sector workers relating to provident fund, employment injury benefits, housing, education schemes for children, skill upgradation of workers, financial assistance and old age homes.

Way forward:

- Amend existing labour laws to ensure that domestic workers enjoy all the labour rights that other workers do.
- Recognition of domestic workers as workers.
- Decent working conditions, including specified working hours, leave, paid holidays, protection against harassment, social security and access to benefits.
- Ensuring progressive policy and legislation while enabling better enforcement of existing legislations.
- The domestic workers should be given daily and weekly rest hours and their payment must meet the minimum wage requirement.
- States must take protective measures against violence against domestic workers.
- Policymakers, legislative bodies and people need to recognize the existence of an employment relationship in domestic work.

Analyse the consequences of demographic transition that India is going to witness in the near future, what measures should the government take to ensure it harnesses this opportunity. (250 words)

Reference: Economic Times

Why the question:
The article brings to us detailed analysis of demographic transition that India is about to witness.

Key Demand of the question:
Discuss the possible consequences of demographic transition that India is going to witness in the near future, suggest measures and initiatives that to harness the demographic potential.

Directive:
Analyze – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Discuss the nuances of the question.

Body:
Explain briefly what you understand by demographic transition. Take cues from the article and explain what Indian demographic is about to witness. Explain the transition; its pros and cons.
Discuss why there is need to recognise the importance of skill development at this point. Discuss the dimensions associated with it.

Explain what needs to be done in terms of policy measures, highlight the efforts of the government in this direction.

**Conclusion:**
Conclude with way forward.

**Introduction:**

**Demographic transition** refers to a population cycle that begins with a fall in the death rate, continues with a phase of rapid population growth and concludes with a decline in the birth rate. India is in transition phase between 3rd and 4th stages of demographic transition. Population exploded in 1970s/80s, but has shown a declining rate of population growth in the last two decades. According to Census 2011, the decadal population growth rate has declined by about 5 percentage points to 16-17%. India has one of the youngest populations in an aging world. By 2020, the **median age** in India will be just **28 years**. Demographics can change the pace and pattern of economic growth.

**Body:**

**The demographic transition in 5 stages**

![Demographic Transition Chart]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Birth rate</th>
<th>Death rate</th>
<th>Natural increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Stable or slow increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Falling</td>
<td>Very rapid increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Falling</td>
<td>Falling</td>
<td>Increase slows down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Falling and then stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rising again</td>
<td>Rising again</td>
<td>Stable or slow increase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stages of demographic transition:**

- **Stage I:** It is characterized by high birth rate, death rate and low rate of population growth.
- **Stage II:** It is characterized by high and stationary birth rate, rapidly declining death rate and very rapid increase in population.
• **Stage III**: It is characterized by a falling birth rate, low and stationary death rate and rapidly rising population. *India* is currently in this stage of transition.

• **Stage IV**: It is characterized by low birth rate and low death rate with stationary population at a low level.

• **Stage V**: It is characterized by death rate slightly exceeding the birth rate, and this causes population decline. This stage has only been recently recognised, and there are very few countries that are considered in stage 5.

**Consequences of demographic transition in India:**

- India is one of the largest developing countries in the world and a country of growing economic and political importance not only in Asia, but in the world at large. It is in the midst of a momentous demographic transition.

- As a consequence of baby boom, reduction in infant and child mortality rates, increase in access to better medical aid, improvement in hygiene and better education the age structure of a country is transformed which reflects the demographic transition.

- India’s demographic transition is reflected in its changing age composition, specifically in the share of the working-age population, which we refer to as the **economically productive population or Active Asset**.

- This “active asset” of our country has the potential to enhance our countries growth prospects. The greater the share of the population in the working –age group; the more will be the savings and investments in the economy.

- Though, India is the second most populous country of the world, it is 1210.6 million according to 2011 census and its population is increasing continuously; out of the total population, the Active Asset/economically productive age group of 15-59 years constitute of 729.9 million people that is 60.3 percentage of the whole population.

- On the other hand, the 60+ age people constitute only 8.6 percentage of the population. Thus we can say that India is experiencing its “first demographic dividend”.

- A study on demographic dividend in India by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) throws up two interesting facts.
  - The window of demographic dividend opportunity in India is available for five decades from 2005-06 to 2055-56, longer than any other country in the world.
  - This demographic dividend window is available at different times in different states because of differential behaviour of the population parameters

**Challenges in India to reap the demographic dividend:**

- **Poor human capital**: Formation reflected in low employability among India’s graduates and postgraduates. According to ASSOCHAM, only 7 % of MBA graduates have employable skills in India, and only around 20-30 % of engineers find a job suited to their skills. Technological change is making labour partially or wholly redundant in a number of sectors, across the world.
• **Low human development** reflected in the human development report of UNDP. According to the Human Development Index of 2016, India stood at 131 out of 188 countries. Life expectancy at birth in India (68 years) is much lower than other developing countries (Sri Lanka – 75 years, China – 76 years). The mean years of schooling and the expected years of schooling are still low at 6.3 years and 11.7 years respectively.

• **Jobless growth**: India’s high growth rate phase (2004-05 to 2010-11) has created significantly fewer jobs as compared to previous decades of economic growth. Around 47% of India’s population is still dependent on agriculture which is notorious for underemployment and disguised unemployment. Majority of the workforce is employed by the unorganized sector where workers are underpaid and lack any kind of social security.

• **Falling female labour force participation**: According to data from International Labour Organization and World Bank, India’s female labour force participation rates have fallen from 34.8% in 1990 to 27% in 2013. This has further declined to 23.7% in 2016, as per the data from the Labour Ministry. Socio-cultural factors and rising family incomes have been identified as the main reasons for this decline. Another appalling concern is that a significant proportion of qualified women drop out of the workforce for reasons ranging from no suitable jobs in the locality—particularly in rural areas—to family responsibilities and marriage.

• **Poor Socio-Economic factors**: The quality of primary schooling and teachers in India is very poor. ASER reports show the quality of education among children. Moreover, because modern ailments such as obesity are increasing in many developed countries, there is no guarantee that adult longevity will continue to increase perpetually.

**Way forward:**

• To be able to harness the potential of this large working population, which is growing by leaps and bounds, new job generation is a must. The nation needs to create jobs to absorb the addition of young people into the workforce.

• **Improved infrastructure, skill development, access to easy finance, reducing barriers to entrepreneurship and forums for mentorship of emerging entrepreneurs** in partnership with corporates are some of measures.

• India has to **invest more in human capital formation at all levels**, from primary education to higher education, cutting-edge research and development as well as on **vocational training to increase the skill sets of its growing working-age population**.

• The current situation calls for more and better schools, especially in rural areas. It also calls for better transportation links between rural areas and regional urban hubs.

• **Equally important focus on elderly people** to make use of their wisdom and experience.

• Increasing the number of formal jobs in **labour intensive, export-oriented sectors such as textiles, leather and footwear, gems and jewellery** These sectors also have a higher share of the female workforce.

• The flagship schemes such as **Skill India, Make in India, and Digital India** have to be implemented to **achieve convergence between skill training and employment generation**.

• Increased use of technology in all sectors.
The government must also ensure better quality of jobs with a focus on matching skill-sets and job opportunities.

There is a need to look into these qualitative issues of job satisfaction, job profile and skill matching, and the creation of opportunities for entrepreneurship in order to be able to harness the vast potential of human resources.

**Conclusion:**

A multi-pronged approach is imperative to reap the second demographic dividend. There is also a need to engage with the youth and create an enabling environment for entrepreneurship. The demographic dividend offers them a unique opportunity to boost living standards, but they must act now to manage their older populations in the near future by implementing policies that ensure a safe and efficient transition from the first demographic dividend to the first demographic dividend.

The recognition by Supreme Court to equate physical or mental disability with the social disability and experience of untouchability suffered by marginalised sections for centuries, although raises a question, is a laudable one. Critically analyze. (250 words)

**Reference:** The Hindu, The Hindu

**Why this question:**

The Supreme Court, in a significant decision, has confirmed that persons suffering from disabilities are also socially backward and entitled to the same benefits of relaxation as Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe candidates in public employment and education. The Court has upheld a 2012 judgment of the Delhi High Court in Anamol Bhandari (minor) through his father/Natural Guardian v. Delhi Technological University in a significant decision.

**Key demand of the question:**

One must discuss about the recent decision by Supreme Court that persons suffering from disabilities are also socially backward and entitled to the same benefits of relaxation as Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe candidates in public employment and education. Discuss about the pros and Cons of the decision and provide a way forward.

**Directive word:**

Critically analyze—here we have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts, and present them as a whole in a summary.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**

write a few introductory lines about the ruling of the Supreme court.

**Body:**

Highlight the issues faced by the Disabled in accessing the education and public employment. Substantiate your argument by providing the supporting facts and figures. Now discuss the pros and cons of the decision of equating physically/mentally disabled vis-à-vis the socially disabled.

Provide the measures that India must take to empower the disabled.

**Conclusion:**

based on your discussion, form a fair and a balanced conclusion on the given issue.

**Introduction:**

The Supreme Court recently upheld that people suffering from disability are entitled to the same benefits and relaxations as candidates belonging to the Scheduled Castes. This has helped recognize the travails of the disabled in accessing education or employment, regardless of their social status. The SC has upheld the Anamol Bhandari (minor) through his father/Natural Guardian v. Delhi Technological University, 2012 judgment of the Delhi High Court, holding that persons with
disabilities are socially backward and hence are entitled to the same benefits of relaxation as Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe candidates in public employment and education.

Body:

Challenges faced by the Divyaangs in accessing Education and employment:

- 45% of India’s disabled population is illiterate, according to Census 2011, compared to 26% of all Indians. Of persons with disability who are educated, 59% complete Class X, compared to 67% of the general population.

- Some 600,000 (28%) special-needs children between six and 13 years of age are out of school, according to the 2014 National Survey of Out of School Children report, at a time when India has almost universal primary school enrolment.

- Among children with special needs, as many as 44% of children with more than one disability are out of school, and children with mental (36%) and speech (35%) disabilities are more likely to be out of school than those with other kinds of disability.

- A higher percentage of children with hearing disability, orthopaedic/locomotive disability and visual disability go to school, with only 20%-30% failing to do so, according to this 2014 United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization report.

- Thus, the current system doesn’t allow equal access for children with special needs to various education-related programmes.

- According to a study, only 34 lakh of the about 1.34 crore people with disabilities (PwDs) in the employable age have a job in India.

Rationale behind the decision of equitable treatment of Supreme Court:

- Through this judgment, the Supreme Court has recognised the difficulties faced by the disabled in accessing education or employment, regardless of their social status. People suffering from disability have always been an under-privileged and under-represented section.
• Hitherto, candidates with disabilities were often not able to get the benefit of reservation in education and employment because of not meeting the general standards

• The larger principle behind the judgement was that without imparting proper education to those suffering from disabilities, there cannot be any meaningful enforcement of their rights.

• The judgment could help alleviate some of the difficulties faced by this section through this affirmative action.

However, there have been concerns regarding the judgment:

• The ruling is seen as eliminating the distinction between the disabled and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

• It is seen as an attempt to equate physical/mental disability with the social disability and experience of untouchability suffered by marginalised sections for centuries.

• This would allow disabled persons from a traditionally privileged community an advantage over those suffering from a historical social disability.

Conclusion:

Many think that persons selected under reserved categories, especially under the differently abled category, are not meritorious candidates and their selection brings down the quality of institutions in which they are selected. If this mindset prevails, we must expect the systemic violation of disability reservation to continue. The Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 sought to address this by raising the quota for the disabled from 3% to 5% and envisaging incentives for the private sector to hire them too. It is vital that this is fully given effect to so that this significant segment of the population is not left out of social and economic advancement.

Covid-19 may make it too ambitious and unrealistic for India to achieve its aim of eradicating tuberculosis (TB) by 2025. Critically analyse. (250 words)

Reference: Live Mint
Why this question:

Covid-19 may make it difficult for India to achieve its aim of eradicating tuberculosis (TB) by 2025. The notification of TB cases has sharply declined in January-June, compared to the same period in 2019, according to real-time data available with the Union health ministry, indicating that the pandemic has severely hit TB notification services. While 914,000 TB cases were reported between January and June, 1.25 million cases came into light in the same period in 2019, representing a 26% fall in case notifications, showed government data.

Key demand of the question:
The question expects us to discuss in detail the current scenario of tuberculosis prevalence in India, the efforts being taken by the government in this direction to eliminate it by 2025. You must critically analyse using facts and figures and justify whether the goal set by the government of India is achievable in near future.

Directive word:
Critically analyze – When asked to analyze, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary. When ‘critically’ is suffixed or prefixed to a directive, one needs to look at the good and bad of the topic and give a fair judgement.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Re-assert the importance of TB elimination in India.

**Body:**
Explain Briefly the current status of TB in India – use the facts from the article. Then justify how eliminating TB by 2025 is a laudable vision, but difficult to achieve, considering the complexities of managing the situation, which requires equitable high quality of care to every person from diagnosis to treatment, cutting the transmission rapidly with a combined strategy of early diagnosis treatment of latent tuberculosis infection (LTB) and improving socioeconomic conditions. Highlight the features and lacuna of National Strategic Plan prepared by the center in 2017. What needs to be done – leveraging private partnership, increased political will, financial resources and increasing research to develop new ways to diagnose etc.

**Conclusion:**
Conclude with optimism that such a goal is not unachievable if right set of actions are taken.

**Introduction:**
Tuberculosis (TB) remains the biggest killer disease in India, outnumbering all other infectious diseases put together — this despite our battle against it from 1962, when the National TB Programme (NTP) was launched. According to the World Health Organization’s “Global Tuberculosis Report 2018”, India accounted for 27% of the 10 million people, who had developed TB in 2017, besides making up 32% of global TB deaths among HIV-negative people, and 27% of combined TB deaths. Covid-19 may make it difficult for India to achieve its aim of eradicating tuberculosis (TB) by 2025.

**Body:**
**Tuberculosis scenario in India during the COVID pandemic lockdown:**
- From April to June, 340,000 TB patients were notified to govt, down 47.6% compared to April-June 2019.
- While 914,000 TB cases were reported between January and June, 1.25 million cases came into light in the same period in 2019, representing a 26% fall in case notifications, showed government data. Private sector notifications have dipped by 106,729 cases, or 30%.
- Close to 340,000 TB patients were notified to the government during the nationwide lockdown from April to June, down 47.6% compared to April-June 2019, when 648,000 patients were notified.
- Private sector notifications dipped during that time— from 65,598 cases in April 2019 to 17,883 cases in April this year, a drop of 72%.
- As TB and covid have common symptoms, it may have given rise to fears of stigma for both diseases, affecting early reporting.
- during the peak of the lockdown in April, TB notifications saw a major dip—only 80,725 TB patients were notified in India as compared to 221,632 cases reported in April 2019, which is a huge dip of 63% cases notified to the government.
- Notifications from the private sector also plunged during that time—from 65,598 cases in April 2019 to 17,883 cases in April this year, a drop of 72%.

**India’s efforts to eliminate TB:**
• In 2018, Indian government launched Joint Effort for Elimination of Tuberculosis (JEET), to increase the reporting of TB cases by the private sector.

• **National Strategic Plan (NSP) for TB Elimination (2017-2025)** was launched in 2017. The government also called for the elimination of TB by 2025, five years prior to the international target (2030).
  
  o The NSP plans to provide incentives to private providers for following the standard protocols for diagnosis and treatment as well as for notifying the government of cases.
  
  o Further, patients referred to the government will receive a cash transfer to compensate them for the direct and indirect costs of undergoing treatment and as an incentive to complete treatment.

• “Nikshay,” (2012) an online tuberculosis reporting system for medical practitioners and clinical establishments was set up. The aim is to increase the reporting of tuberculosis, especially from the private sector.

• In 1992, the WHO devised the **Directly Observed Treatment-Short Course (DOTS) strategy** and advised all countries to adopt the strategy to combat the menace of tuberculosis. The DOTS strategy is based on 5 pillars:
  
  o political commitment and continued funding for TB control programs
  
  o diagnosis by sputum smear examinations
  
  o uninterrupted supply of high-quality anti-TB drugs
  
  o drug intake under direct observation
  
  o accurate reporting and recording of all registered cases

• The Indian government has been implementing Programmatic Management of Drug Resistant TB (PMDT) services, for the management of multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) and TB-HIV collaborative activities for TB-HIV.

**Challenges to achieve TB free India by 2025:**

• **Poor socio-economic conditions:**
  
  o Poverty remains a stark reality in India with associated problems of hunger, undernourishment and poor and unhygienic living conditions.

  o According to GTB Report, 2018, a majority of TB patients (6lakhs) in India are attributable to undernourishment.

• **Underreporting and misdiagnosis:**
  
  o According to GTB Report 2018, India is one of the major contributors to under-reporting and under-diagnosis of TB cases in the world, accounting for 26% of the 3.6 million global gap in the reporting of tuberculosis cases.

  o Biomarkers and other diagnostics that identify individuals at highest risk of progression to disease are inadequate.
• Treatment:
  o Inequitable access to quality diagnosis and treatment remains a major issue in combating tuberculosis. Further, the private sector which contributes a major part of TB care is fragmented, made up of diverse types of healthcare providers, and largely unregulated.
  o Standard TB treatment is not followed uniformly across the private sector, resulting in the rise of drug resistance.

• Follow-up treatment:
  o Though the reporting of TB cases has increased lately, the reporting of treatment outcomes has not been robust.
  o The absence of consistent follow-up of treatment regimens and outcomes may result in relapse of cases and MDR-TB and XDR-TB. India has already been facing the problem of increasing MDR-TB cases.

• Drugs:
  o The drugs used to treat TB, especially multidrug-resistant-TB, are decades old. It is only recently that Bedaquiline and Delamanid (drugs to treat MDR-TB) has been made available. However, access to such drugs remains low.

• Funds:
  o The RNCTP remains inadequately funded. There has been a growing gap between the allocation of funds and the minimum investment required to reach the goals of the national strategic plan to address tuberculosis.

• Issues with RNCTP:
  o Weak implementation of RNCTP at state level is another major concern. The Joint Monitoring Mission report of 2015 pointed out that the RNCTP failed to achieve both the main goals of NSP 2012-2017- Providing universal access to early diagnosis and treatment and improving case detection.
  o Major issues with RNCTP include: human resource crunch, payment delays, procurement delays and drug stock-outs.

• R&D:
  o R&D for new methods and technologies to detect the different modes of TB, new vaccines, and new drugs and shorter drug regimens have been slow, as compared to other such diseases like HIV/AIDS.

• Social Stigma:
  o According to a study which assessed social stigma associated with TB in Bangladesh, Colombia, India, India had the highest social stigma index.
  o Patients often hesitate to seek treatment or deny their condition altogether for fear of social discrimination and stigmatization.
Way forward:

- It is important to **address the social conditions and factors** which contribute to and increase vulnerability to tuberculosis. Concerted efforts should be made to address the issues of undernourishment, diabetes, alcohol and tobacco use.

- **Increased political will, financial resources and increasing research** to develop new ways to diagnose, treat and prevent TB will help achieve the goal.

- **Private sector engagement** in combating TB needs to be strengthened. The private sector should also be incentivised to report TB cases. Example: **The Kochi Model**— Increasing TB cases reporting from private sector

- There is an urgent need for **cost-effective point-of-care devices** that can be deployed for TB diagnosis in different settings across India.

- **Universal access to drug, susceptibility testing at diagnosis** to ensure that all patients are given appropriate treatment, including access to second-line treatment for drug-resistant TB.

- To ensure public participation — a missing element in the RNTCP — in public-private participation mode.

- **Mass awareness campaigns** like ‘TB Harega Desh Jeetega’ can play an important role in breaking social taboos regarding TB.

Conclusion:

India has the highest TB burden in the world. Given our inter-connected world and the airborne spread of TB, we need collective global action. Ending TB in India will have massive global impact in addition to saving the lives of tens of millions of India’s people over the next 25 years. Even if ending TB by 2025 is not complete, pulling the TB curve down by 2025 and sustaining the decline ever after is a possibility.
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Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

It has been argued that private sector reduces education to the status of a commodity. In this context, discuss why education should be seen as a necessary public good. (250 words)

Reference: The Hindu, researchgate.net

Why the question:
The question is based on the importance of education to the country and in what way it should necessarily been seen as a public good.

Key Demand of the question:
Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
The private sector in the education domain has supplemented the state’s efforts in India’s progress towards universal education. Private sector has brought various positive aspects in the education sector such as more funding, better infrastructure, curriculum flexibility, increased focus on teaching quality among others.

Body:

Give a brief background of privatization of education in India.

Briefly state how private sector reduces education to the status of a commodity.

Discuss arguments in favour of education as a necessary public good. Explain the efforts of the government in this direction.

Conclusion:

All the stakeholders working in the sector should treat education as a public good, as also discussed by the draft New Education Policy. The private sector should work in tandem with the public sector in achieving the goal of universalization of education.

Introduction:

Education is one of the vital services that a modern state is expected to provide to its people. It is a service that every welfare democracy is obliged to give in the most accessible form. In simple terms, privatization of education refers to the state’s policy of allowing educational institutions, both higher and lower, to be run by non-state or private parties for monetary benefits. In contemporary times, many liberal democratic countries across the world are increasingly trying to privatize this basic service.

However, education as a public good benefits spread across society in terms of employment, economic prosperity, health and social cohesion.

Body:

The education system has been commercialized where the buyers purchase the ‘education’ at prices. Economist Prabhat Patnaik termed the process as ‘commoditization of education’. According to him, “the privatization of education which means handing the education sector to profit making entities. It is a desire to attract direct foreign investment. Likewise, in India, policy makers in education sector often talk about ‘the striving for excellence, which is nothing other than making ‘education’ as a commodity.”
Importance of Education as a necessary public good:

- Education, for most of us, is a necessary public good central to the task of nation building and, like fresh air, is necessary to make our communities come alive.

- It should not be driven solely by market demand for certain skills, or be distracted by the admittedly disruptive impact, for instance, of Artificial Intelligence.

- This form of education should be unshackled from the chains of deprivation, and “affordable” education is vital to ensure access to even the most marginalized sections of our country.

- Education is a basic fundamental right. If we want to see the world as a fair place where everyone is given equal opportunities, education is what we require. Education should be free to all – both in elementary and secondary stages. It is essential for the development of human personality and moral living. If education is restricted to only a privileged section, it will be a huge injustice to the rest of the society.

- Education, in essence, must aim to produce sensitive, creative and upright citizens who are willing to take the less-travelled path and whose professional “skills” will endure revolutions in thinking and technology.

- There is no developed country where the public sector was not in the vanguard of school and higher education expansion, in ensuring its inclusiveness, and in setting standards.

- Increasing literacy rates, for example, leads to improved health outcomes, broader participation in democratic processes, reduced crime and poverty rates, environmental sustainability and social equality.

- In a recent report, UNESCO outlined how education performs much more than an economic function, by enabling individuals, especially women, to live and aspire to healthy, meaningful, creative and resilient lives. It strengthens their voices in community, national and global affairs. It opens up new work opportunities and sources of social mobility.

- Affirmative action is required for quality of opportunity. It is an action that helps the underprivileged people to compete with others with respect and dignity. Reservation in educational institutions is an affirmative action. It helps the backward communities and section of people to come to acquire education and compete with the privileged classes.

Conclusion:

An education that privileges one child over another is giving the privileged child a corrupted education, even as it gives him or her a social or economic advantage. India’s past, and its unique, culturally diverse matrix provide a rich framework, but delivering on a holistic liberal education programme requires much more than just proclamations.

“COVID-19 crisis has exposed the weaknesses in the institutional and human capacity of Indian cities to handle a public health emergency.” Give your opinion with suitable substantiation. (250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why the question:
The opinion from The Hindu newspaper presents a detailed picture of the weaknesses in the institutional and human capacity of Indian cities to handle a public health emergency.
Key Demand of the question:
Explain in detail the factors responsible for weaknesses in the institutional and human capacity of Indian cities to handle a public health emergency.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Start by explaining that despite the renewed policy focus on cities, the pandemic has exposed the weaknesses in handling a public emergency.

Body:
Even after easing the lockdown restrictions and were given lot of policy attention, with Dedicated national-level programmes on urban development since a decade compared to rural Areas, the Indian mega cities are still facing economic and livelihood issues along with Public health crisis. Explain how the COVID-19 crisis has largely been an urban crisis. Explain that Indian cities are not only facing a public health crisis but also a larger emergency of economic issues and livelihoods. A high percentage of urban residents have lost employment during the lockdown and continue to face an uncertain future.
Discuss why the Cities are not capable enough of handling the crisis. Suggest solutions to address the issues associated.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way ahead.

Introduction
The novel coronavirus pandemic has largely been an urban crisis so far, with megacities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai accounting for most of the COVID-19 positive cases. Indian cities are not only facing a public health crisis but also a larger emergency of economic issues and livelihoods. A high percentage of urban residents have lost employment during the lockdown and continue to face an uncertain future.

Body
Glaring weakness in institutional and human capacities of Cities in India

- **ULB's not fully equipped:** Despite the renewed policy focus on cities, India’s urban local bodies continue to be financially and administratively weak and heavily understaffed.

- **Vacancies of frontline workers:** There is also high level of vacancy of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers, the frontline public health workers carrying out contact tracing, in urban areas, especially in COVID-19 hotspot cities such as Mumbai.
  - Recently, many ASHA workers staged protest regarding lack of social security and low honorarium.

- **Migrant crisis:** Indian cities are not only facing a public health crisis but also a larger emergency of economic issues and livelihoods.
  - Flocks of helpless migrants fleeing the city during lockdown showed the complete lack of unpreparedness on the part of public authorities.
  - A high percentage of urban residents have lost employment during the lockdown and continue to face an uncertain future.

- **Policy outcome untenable:** The ‘Smart Cities Mission’ has given short shrift to basic services such as public health. An analysis of the smart city projects under the Mission shows that only 69 of over 5,000 projects undertaken under the Mission were for health infrastructure.
These projects are for an estimated cost of ₹2,112 crore, amounting to just around one per cent of the total mission cost.

- **Public health infrastructure**: There is a shortfall of about 44.4% of U-PHCs as per the urban population norms.

**Strengthening local capacities and institutions**

- The relative success of Kerala in containing the pandemic has shown how a decentralised political and administrative system with strong local governments and high investment in local public health care can be effective.

- In the absence of such participative local government institutions, authorities in some cities have roped in **resident welfare associations** to monitor COVID-19 cases.
  - In Bengaluru, citizens were roped in to volunteer for enforcing lockdown, by the BBMP.

- To tackle the COVID-19 crisis, it is important to **strengthen local government capacities**, invest heavily in urban public health systems, and promote programmes that improve the livelihoods of urban vulnerable communities.

- Programmes such as the **National Urban Livelihoods Mission and National Urban Health Mission**, which have lately received limited focus and resources, need to be strengthened.

- Further, it is time to consider the **introduction of a national urban employment guarantee programme** that assures jobs for urban residents and strengthens the capacities of urban local bodies.
  - Kerala has been running such a scheme since 2010 and States such as Odisha, Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand have also recently launched similar initiatives in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

**Conclusion**

As Indian cities face an unprecedented challenge, it is important to get the priorities of urban development right and invest in programmes that improve the health and livelihoods of its residents.

Universities should be a place for ‘creativity’, ‘out of the box thinking’ and ‘ideological disruptions’. Comment in the light of existing higher education scenario in India. (250 words).

*Reference: The Hindu*

*Why this question:*

*The question aims to discuss the significance of universities as platforms for creative thinking.*

*Key demand of the question:*

*The answer must discuss the Indian scenario of higher education, what way they are places for creative thinking.*

*Directive:*

*Comment— here we have to express our knowledge and understanding of the issue and form an overall opinion thereupon.*

*Structure of the answer:*

*Introduction:*

*Begin with brief introduction on the current status of universities in India.*
Introduction:
India is a rapidly changing country in which inclusive, high-quality education is of utmost importance for its future prosperity. The country is currently in a youth bulge phase. It has the largest youth population in the world—a veritable army of 600 million young people under the age of 25.

Body:
Evolution of “critical thinking ethos” in the Indian Universities:
- In the 19th and 20th centuries, Indian universities emerged as institutions where a privileged generation of colonial subjects trained to serve the colonial regime and further Western political ideals.
- Some graduates went on to serve the colonial state, while others contributed to the nationalist movement.
- In the 20th century, the growth of nationalism, liberal education and the process of de-colonialization offered universities with an opportunity to revise the curriculum and to define new goals.
- Over the years, these institutions gradually discarded their elitist character and became more representative.
- In the initial decades after Independence, the government was conscious of various social, economic and financial challenges.
- It strongly supported these institutions, encouraging them to further develop an academic rigour that would shape a new generation and contribute to the nation-building process.
- The Indian Institutes of Technology and Indian Institutes of Management along with other distinctly envisioned institutions of academic excellence like the Indian Institute of Science, Indian Statistical Institute, and Jawaharlal Nehru University emerged as model institutions that defined the new academic ethos and the vigour of the modern Indian nation.

Challenges posed to the ‘Critical thinking ethos’:
- From 2005 onwards, these changes that infused a new vigour in institutional academia were undermined by government policy that displayed an eagerness to impose a new intellectual regime.
- The constitution of the National Knowledge Commission and a very strong emphasis on privatisation of education undermined the deliberative and independent character of these institutions of higher education.
Administrative and academic decisions were imposed from above and discussions within various academic bodies were discouraged.

The imposition of the semester system across India and the introduction of a four-year undergraduate programme in many public and private universities were hallmarks of this new era of bureaucratic centralisation.

The government of the day undervalued the academic achievements of scholars from Indian universities, romanticised American academia and undermined all the progress, new academic traditions and culture that had shaped Indian universities since Independence.

It justified governmental intervention arguing that Indian academia had stagnated. Those in positions of authority within the universities were encouraged to undermine academic bodies and limit their role in revising and regulating matters pertaining to curricula, teaching and academic life in their institutions.

The imposition of the ‘cafeteria system’ associated with the Choice Based Credit System and renewed attempts to privatise higher education linked to an emphasis on rankings were highlights of this new thrust.

It became apparent that the government’s desire for intervention now included the determination of minute details pertaining to academic curricula, the teaching-learning process and the parameters that governed academic research within the university.

Academicians were disenfranchised of their role in designing curricula and their own academic work was removed from the regulatory gaze of peers to that of the government bureaucracy.

During this period, the university emerged as an extension of government.

The manner in which the Central government and the University Grants Commission have imposed themselves on the daily functioning of all higher educational institutions (Central, State and private) represents a new government-oriented bureaucratic centralisation.

Decisions about the conclusion of academic term, the modalities for evaluation and the conduct of the teaching-learning process have become exclusive government prerogatives overnight.

The various academic bodies that had original jurisdiction over these matters and were being subjected to decisions by higher authorities in the last few years have, in the last few weeks, been made redundant.

How and whether examinations are to be conducted has become an issue of contention between State and Central governments.

The general public now no longer appeals to the administrators of these institutions.

The university administration has been replaced by the Education Minister and his bureaucratic apparatus.

Measures needed to improve status of Indian Universities:

- The best Indian universities would require a kind of “cultural revolution” to join the ranks of global world-class universities and to be able to lure top faculty.
• It is virtually impossible for India to attract large numbers of international professors of high standing and ability without dramatic changes in many aspects of the existing governance structure in higher education. **Dramatically enhanced funding would also be required.**

• The Ministry of Human Resource Development should be working closely with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to have a road map that incentivizes CSR funding to be made available for universities.

• There need to be an immediate move to attract more candidates, such as the faculty recruitment drive in the US, and monetary incentives like the **Young Faculty Incentive Fellowship Scheme.**

• **Parallel development in infrastructure** is necessary to accommodate the research needs of incoming faculty.

• The **structural and practical realities of Indian universities** make them generally unattractive to academic talent from abroad, this must be rectified at the earliest.

• The key motivation for hiring foreign faculty must be to improve international competitiveness and secure positions in global rankings, which in turn would also attract more motivated students.

• Attracting foreign nationals, Indians who studied at prestigious foreign universities by offering higher salaries and other benefits.

• The moral and motivation of the academics have to be maintained. Not only attract the quality but also retain the quality of teachers. For this, the recruitment and the promotion policy have to be looked into. Recruitment policy on merit, kind of promotion on merit and in intervals would retain good teachers.

**Conclusion:**

If universities become center of fresh knowledge production, then things change. Complete freedom of thought in direction and ideas is need of the hour. There is a prevailing culture that knowledge is finite and job of student is to master pre-existing knowledge. This has a limiting problem in educational culture which needs to be challenged.

**COVID-19** is both a crisis and an opportunity for health-care reform as well as understanding the interplay of health outcomes with social and economic support interventions, and limitations of law enforcement in managing epidemics. Critically analyze. (250 words)

**Reference:** *The Hindu*

**Why this question**

Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Ahmedabad and Bengaluru are among India’s major metropolitan agglomerations and are also the current foci of the pandemic within the country. This points to both the speed and the scale of the epidemic moving within densely populated areas as well as success in the way sustained municipal efforts and community participation can together blunt the spread of the virus. The case of Dharavi is an example. If innovations to help manage the current crisis are suitably capitalised on, they can enable India to move far ahead in health-care delivery and related outcomes.

**Directive word**
Critically analyze- here we have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts, and present them as a whole in a summary. based on our discussion we have to form a concluding opinion on the issue.

**Key demand of the question.**
The question wants us to dig deeper into the lacunae of public healthcare in India and provide solutions as to how the current crisis can be turned into an opportunity.

**Structure of the answer**

**Introduction:**
Mention about the pandemic situation in India and failure of the healthcare facilities. Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Ahmedabad and Bengaluru are among India’s major metropolitan agglomerations and are also the current foci of the pandemic within the country. This points to both the speed and the scale of the epidemic moving within densely populated areas. the overall case numbers have moved steadily past the million mark and India is now third in global case standings. Despite this position, and the daily accretion of new infections that are upwards of 30,000 in the past few days, the distribution of cases also presents itself as the world’s biggest opportunity to intervene and blunt the global toll of the epidemic.

**Body**
Discuss in points the lacunae in the healthcare system of India.

Using the points from the article, discuss how the pandemic situation can be used to revamp the healthcare system in India.

**Conclusion:**
Based on your discussion, form a fair and a balanced conclusion on the given issue.

**Introduction:**
The current Covid-19 pandemic which has affected more than 10 million people worldwide has manifestly exposed the crisis in global health systems. In India, the pandemic exposed the chinks in the healthcare system such as lack of Critical Care units, hospital beds and healthcare workers to patient ratio leaving them overwhelmed.

Despite the challenges, India did well recently and the Director-General of World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledged the success of Mumbai’s densely populated Dharavi slum in containing the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Body**

**Current Status of Healthcare System**

- India’s expenditure on the health sector has risen meagerly from 1.2 per cent of the GDP in 2013-14 to 4 per cent in 2017-18. The National Health Policy 2017 had aimed for this to be 2.5% of GDP.

- There is a massive shortage of medical staff, infrastructure and last mile connectivity in rural areas. Eg: **Doctor: Population 1:1800** and 78% doctors cater to urban India (population of 30%).

- Massive shortages in the supply of services (human resources, hospitals and diagnostic centres in the private/public sector) which are made worse by grossly inequitable availability between and within States.
  - For example, even a well-placed State such as Tamil Nadu has an over 30% shortage of medical and non-medical professionals in government facilities.
Absence of primary care: In the northern States there are hardly any sub-centres and primary health centres are practically non-existent. First mile connectivity to a primary healthcare centre is broken. For eg, in Uttar Pradesh there is one PHC for every 28 villages.

Out of pocket expenditure high: Even the poor are forced to opt for private healthcare, and, hence, pay from their own pockets. As a result, an estimated 63 million people fall into poverty due to health expenditure, annually.

Pandemic scenario in India:

Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Ahmedabad and Bengaluru are among India’s major metropolitan agglomerations.

This points to both the speed and the scale of the epidemic moving within densely populated areas.

After nearly 100 days of the first 14-hour janata curfew, the Minister of Health highlighted how 49 districts out of the 733 in India accounted for 80% of the nearly eight lakh cases with eight States accounting for 90% of all the incident cases.

Numbers have moved steadily past the million mark and India is now third in global case standings.

There are on average roughly 250 cases per district in about 700 districts.

Many of these districts may be closer to having no cases.

Others may be at a significantly higher incidence.

The low numbers in a large number of districts present officials the opportunity of stemming the epidemic and preventing morbidity, mortality and economic distress in a significant way. COVID-19 can be an opportunity to improve our healthcare system. The following steps can be taken up in this regard:

- At the ground level:
  - Disaggregate the COVID-19 tracking mechanisms and the national level tables and graphs that are updated daily.
  - Encouraging the District Magistrates to use the full range of social support schemes available in support of the District Health Officer and team. To be able to prevent anyone from facing situations of hunger or economic distress.
  - Health as a reliable career opportunity should be promoted for emerging talents in educational institutions in tier 2 and tier 3 towns in many districts in India by training them both in terms of training and nurturing ambitions.

- Strengthening the testing:
  - Scaling up the testing capacity in the district by coopting science departments of college and university. Chemistry and zoology-allied departments such as microbiology and biochemistry can lend their laboratory services to carry out basic polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based tests.
• Increased testing stems the tide of morbidity and mortality and it is seen that Incidence rates have risen wherever testing has been constrained.

**Chance for biotech:**

• Without compromising the standards or rigor of evidence needed for regulatory and manufacturing approval: The emphasis should be to encourage innovators and entrepreneurs to bring out and scale up their products.

• The world is increasingly looking at personalised diagnostics and therapeutics.

**Increasing spending:**

• There is an immediate need to increase the public spending to 2.5% of GDP, despite that being lower than global average of 5.4%.

• India should take cue from other developing countries like Thailand to work towards providing **Universal Health Coverage**. UHC includes three components: Population coverage, disease coverage and cost coverage.

**Telemedicine and ICT:**

• Leveraging the **benefits of Information Technology** like computer and mobile-phone based e-health and m-health initiatives to improve quality of healthcare service delivery.

• **Start-ups** are investing in healthcare sector from process automation to diagnostics to low-cost innovations.

• Policy and regulatory support should be provided to make healthcare accessible and affordable

**Conclusion:**

COVID-19 is both a crisis and an opportunity for health-care reform as well as understanding the interplay of health outcomes with social and economic support interventions and limitations of law enforcement in managing epidemics. Innovations in managing the COVID-19 pandemic can help India revolutionize care delivery and related outcomes.

India needs a holistic approach to tackle problems in healthcare industry. This includes the active collaboration of all stakeholders viz. public, private sectors, and individuals. A more dynamic and pro-active approach is needed to handle the dual disease burden. A universal access to health makes the nation fit and healthy, aiding better to achieve the demographic dividend.

The COVID-19 pandemic can contribute to food shocks leading to malnourishment, the next big public emergency in India. Examine and also discuss the significance of food fortification to tackle the issue of Malnourishment. (250 words)

**Reference:** *Down to Earth*

**Why the question:**

The nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic can contribute to such food shocks and, in turn, increase the chances of malnutrition, said the study published in journal Global Health Science July, 2020. The study is based on possible weight loss due to the immediate food shock children may face because of the pandemic.

**Demand of the question:**
The question is about discussing the issue of Malnourishment, its prevalence in India and in what way it has become a public health emergency. One must emphasise on how fortification of food is a way forward to tackle the menace.

**Directive word:**
Examine – When asked to ‘Examine’, we must look into the topic (content words) in detail, inspect it, investigate it and establish the key facts and issues related to the topic in question. While doing so we should explain why these facts and issues are important and their implications.

Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction**
Start with brief introduction of the current scenario in the country.

**Body**
Discuss the following points in detail:

- How pandemic leads to food shocks which in turn could lead to malnutrition?
- Highlight how Malnutrition affects Indian population
- Why would it become a public health emergency?
- Discuss why other missions to tackle malnutrition haven’t been able to succeed fully – National Food Security Act (NFSA), a free Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDM), National nutrition mission etc.
- Discuss what is Food fortification and its importance and relevance to Indian case.

Conclude by listing governments efforts in this direction.

**Conclusion**
Conclude with way forward.

**Introduction**
The nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic can contribute to such food shocks and, in turn, increase the chances of malnutrition, said the study published in journal Global Health Science July, 2020. The study is based on possible weight loss due to the immediate food shock children may face because of the pandemic.

**Body**

**Malnutrition in India**

- India, currently has the **largest number of undernourished people in the world**, around 195 million.
- Nearly 47 million or 4 out of 10 children in India do not meet their full human potential because of **chronic undernutrition or stunting**.
- 9% of children under 5 years are stunted and 20.8% are wasted, compared to the Asia average of 22.7% and 9.4% respectively.
- Rate of overweight and obesity continues to rise, affecting almost a fifth of the adults, at 21.6% of women and 17.8% of men.
- Inequities in food and health systems increase inequalities in nutrition outcomes that in turn can lead to more inequity, perpetuating a vicious cycle.

**Pandemic and malnourishment**
The situation could also lead to massive disruptions in continuity of food availability and livelihood.
UNICEF warned in its report that a staggering, **1.2 million additional children under five** could die in just six months in low and middle-income countries due to reduction in routine health services coverage and increased in child wasting.

- Malnutrition is still one of India’s biggest challenges and is the predominant risk factor for death in children younger than five years in every state in 2017, accounting for 68.2% of the total under-5 deaths, according to the Global Nutrition Report, 2020, released on 12 May.

- The rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, as well as the measures adopted to contain its spread have put many families at risk by impacting their food supply, livelihoods and household incomes and their ability to access critical services for health and nutrition, early childhood care, education and social protection globally and in India.

- This is especially true for the migrants and poor urban populations as well as many rural poor and other disadvantaged populations in India.

- The mid-day meal program, which served as the primary source of supplementary nutrition for millions of school-going children in India suffered, had to be put on hold as schools were closed and states have imposed restrictions on the congregation of more than five persons.

- The secondary impacts of the COVID-19 crisis are aggravating the challenges faced by many families, especially in terms of access to affordable and nutritious food. This could reverse some of the recent gains in reducing malnutrition.

- Overall, severe disruption of these programmes serving hot cooked food under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) at the village level and in urban slums is bound to worsen both the incidence and magnitude of the acute under-nutrition among children and women in the country.

**Food Fortification**

Fortification is the addition of key vitamins and minerals such as iron, iodine, zinc, Vitamin A & D to staple foods such as rice, milk and salt to improve their nutritional content. These nutrients may or may not have been originally present in the food before processing. India’s National Nutritional strategy, 2017, had listed food fortification as one of the interventions to address anaemia, vitamin A and iodine deficiencies apart from supplementation and dietary diversification.

**Significance of food fortification to tackle malnourishment**

- Over 70 percent of India’s population still consumes less than 50 percent of RDA for micro-nutrients.

- One third of about two billion people who are suffering from vitamin and micro-nutrient deficiencies globally, are in India.

- **Prevalence of malnutrition**: Malnutrition is a prominent issue in India — 38 per cent of children under five years are stunted i.e. too short for their age, 36 per cent are underweight and 21 per cent are wasted i.e. too thin for their height, which is a sign of acute under-nutrition. 59 per cent women and 53 per cent children are anemic.

- Reduces the risk of death from infectious diseases.
Standards-based fortification can help advance overall health goals, starting with maternal health.

Fortified foods can help fill the gaps, in need of speedy remedial nutrition. It prevents and eliminates the nutritional deficiencies.

These measures when scaled up on pan-India level can help alleviate the current distress due to the pandemic and raise the general nutrition level in the country.

Conclusion
Malnutrition is not a condition which will wait for the virus to end its game. It will worsen the woes of children and women unnerved by the invisible virus and threaten their survival. Time to save the lives of millions of children, trapped in a vicious circle of poverty and malnutrition complicated further by the COVID-19 challenge, is running out.

Frontline government workers such as Anganwadi workers, teachers, nurses etc face issues in their working conditions which need to be alleviated for better social sector indicators. Critically examine. (250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Introduction:
Frontline workers providing basic services through various government programmes form the backbone of the country’s social welfare system. The various frontline workers ensure health, nutrition, well-being, education and all round development of every child and her parent to ensure better human development.

There is not enough attention paid to the conditions under which they work or the value that is attributed to their work.

Body:

The frontline government workers are the true implementers of the various welfare schemes and public service delivery. They work at the grass-roots level, thus aware of needs of the citizens’ better, thereby acting as a primary feed-back collector.

The issues faced by such workers are:

- **Low salary:**
  - Anganwadi workers provide a long list of services, ranging from teaching pre-schoolers to visiting homes of young children for nutrition and health counselling. Despite that, these workers get about Rs 5,000 a month, which is less than the minimum wages.
  - Despite the importance of the work, their positions are considered “honorary” and their emoluments kept out of all norms of minimum wages and pay grades.
  - Government school teachers with salaries presumed at Rs 40-50,000 a month and upwards, their lack of commitment to teaching is seen as unpardonable.

- **Delay in funds allocation:**
• Salaries delayed: A study of six states by the Centre for Equity Studies in 2016 revealed that 35 per cent of the workers had not received their previous month’s salary.

• Inadequate funds to run the program at ground-level: 50 per cent of the workers felt that the funds they received for running the day-to-day activities of the centre were inadequate.

• Spending at Own Cost: 40 per cent reported spending their own money to keep the centre’s activities going.

• Overburdened:
  ▪ Low financial allocations to the education sector (about 3% of GDP) have meant that state governments cannot afford to hire teachers at the Pay Commission scales.
  ▪ Over the years, they have hired fewer teachers, leading to huge vacancies and overburdening the hired teachers.
  ▪ There are no fixed timings of work and this upsets their work-life balance.
  ▪ The anganwadi, school teachers are saddled with a host of administrative work like election duties, census work etc.

• Poor Infrastructure:
  ▪ Infrastructure is a major concern. The lack of buildings or dilapidated buildings poses grave threats to workers as well as the children patients etc.
  ▪ To add to this, basic facilities like electricity, drinking water, sanitation, internet connectivity is mostly absent.
  ▪ Lack of adequate training facilities lead to poor-quality work, increased risk to the service-recievers.

• Job Insecurity:
  ▪ Most of them are hired as contractual
  ▪ The RTE banned contract teachers; non-regular teachers were no longer referred to as contract or para teachers, but in fact continue to function as such.
  ▪ Their contracts are “permanent”, but their terms are not that of a regular government employee.
  ▪ The lack of safe work environment makes them vulnerable to sexual harassments.

Impacts of such issues faced by the frontline workers result in

• Rampant absenteeism.
• Poor attention to core responsibilities.
• Lack of commitment to work.
• Corruption and bribery to satiate their needs.
• Strikes, protest and unrest.
Poor Human Development Indicators like high IMR, MMR, wasting, stunting and underweight.  
High levels of preventable diseases incidences like polio, TB etc.  
Poor quality of education outcome as shown in ASER survey.

Way Forward:
- **Government spending on education and health** must be increased to 6% and 4% respectively as recommended by many expert committees.  
- **Timely allocation of funds** must be done to reduce spending from frontline worker’ pockets.  
- **Salaries must be uniform and fixed across the country** based on pay commission recommendations. The **salaries must be disbursed on fixed date of month**.  
- Use of **NSQF for Trainings and certifications** must be mandated as per existing laws. **Intermittent trainings must be provided** for the frontline workers to keep themselves updated with new trends.
- **Measures like RTI, Social Audit, Citizens Charters** can help keep a check on such delays as accountability of government increases.  
- **Increase digital penetration** to reduce administrative overhead and planning of activities to coincide with cultural calendar of the region.  
- Infrastructure can be improved by **collaborating with the NGO’s, using CSR funds of companies and philanthropists**.  
- **Grievance Redressal Mechanism** to address the woes of the frontline workers.

Conclusion:
India’s ability to **achieve its SDGs** or to have a **healthy skilled workforce** that contributes towards economic progress or social and human development depends to a large extent on the performance of teachers, nurses, anganwadi workers, panchayat secretaries and PWD staff. Thus, a closer look at their governance architectures is necessary.

Account for the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Discuss the measures needed to achieve the global goals in these turbulent times. (250 words)

Reference: *The Hindu*

Why this question:
*With the pandemic derailing us, we need big initiatives to achieve sustainable development goals. The virtual High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development recently convened governments and stakeholders to focus on the imperative to build back better while keeping an eye on the global goals.*

Key demand of the question:
The question is straightforward and aims to examine the impact of the pandemic on the SDGs. One must also provide the feasible solutions that can help achieve the SDGs.

Directive:
Account – Weigh up to what extent something is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant research but also remember to point out any flaws and counter-arguments as well. Conclude by stating clearly how far you are in agreement with the original proposition.
Structure of the answer:

Introduction:
Explain that besides having a devastating effect on Global Health, the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected almost all the SDGs.

Body:
To start with, explain briefly the SDGs and map the concerns posed by the pandemic that range from health that has a significant place in the 2030 agenda (via SDGs) to education to climate change. Explain that in order to contain the pandemic, various countries have gone for lockdown affecting economic activity. The pandemic has exposed fragility and systemic gaps in many key systems. Though everybody is feeling the pinch of a tottered economic activity, the people from lower socio-economic strata are finding it very hard and unaffordable. As the situation is today, hunger, unemployment and inequality stand exacerbated. Children and youth are getting deprived of quality education due to the closure of schools and colleges. The reports of domestic violence against women are on the rise.

Discuss the measures taken by countries during these turbulent times:
However, there are many workable strategies that countries have used to accelerate progress related to development goals and strengthen resilience. Countries have taken steps to extend universal health care systems and strengthen social protection systems, including cash transfer and food distribution systems for vulnerable households. Accurate and regular data have been key to such efforts. Innovating to help the most disadvantaged access financing and small and medium-sized enterprise credits have also been vital. Several countries have taken comprehensive approaches to various forms of discrimination, particularly related to gender and gender-based violence. Partnerships, including with the private sector and financing institutions, have played a critical role in fostering creative solutions. These experiences provide grounds for optimism.

Provide solutions to overcome the same:
We need a revolution in policy mindset and practice. Inclusive and accountable governance systems, adaptive institutions with resilience to future shocks, universal social protection and health insurance, and stronger digital infrastructure are part of the transformations needed.

Conclusion:
Conclude that to summarize, human health is inextricably linked to environment, ecosystems and biodiversity which in no case be allowed to get spoiled. It has become all the more imperative that in order to achieve SDGs, a population growth which is sustainable and which goes well with our environment, biodiversity and ecosystems be determined and defined.

Introduction
Amid the coronavirus pandemic, the SDGs are even more relevant today than ever before. The primary cost of the pandemic as seen in the loss of human lives is distressing, but the secondary effects on the global economy, on livelihoods and on sustainable development prospects are even more alarming. The International Monetary Fund estimates that our world has entered into a recession, the costs of the pandemic will be astronomical, with preliminary estimates placing it at a whopping US$2 trillion.

Body
The coronavirus disaster undoubtedly infects the SDGs’ Agenda 2030 at the very core. Hence the pandemic poses a major threat of delaying the whole process, which was already facing tremendous hardships in its implementation in the first place due to issues of scarce financial resources and political will, technological impediments and monitoring loopholes.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Sustainable Development Goals
• **Health:** Although in the present scenario, **SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being)** acts as the linchpin that supersedes all the other development objectives across the world.
  - This pandemic has manifestly exposed the crisis in global health systems.
  - And while it is severely undermining prospects for achieving global health by 2030, critically it is having direct far-reaching effects on all the other SDGs.

• **Poverty:** Preliminary projections from the UN system indicate that COVID-19 could lead to the first increase in global extreme poverty in over 20 years, since the Asian financial crisis of 1981.
  - It could push 40 to 60 million people into extreme poverty and could double the incidence of food insecurity in the world.
  - In the worst scenario of a 20 percent economic decline, 419 million more people would be living in extreme poverty on less than $1.90 a day.

• **Marginalization:** Quite inadvertently, marginal groups are more vulnerable than ever – **women, migrants, informal workers, refugees, indigenous tribes,** etc.
  - This in essence comes in direct conflict with the SDGs’ social-inclusivity sermon of “leaving no one behind”.

• **Education:** UNESCO estimates that some **25 billion students** are affected by this pandemic, posing a serious challenge to the attainment of **Goal 4, Quality Education.**

• **Unemployment:** According to the **International Labour Organisation (ILO)** some **25 million people could lose their jobs** with those in informal employment suffering most from lack of social protection during this pandemic. Unfortunately, these might just be the tip of the iceberg.

• **Interlinkage:** Crucially, in many parts of the world, the pandemic and its effects are being exacerbated by the crisis in delivering on **clean water and sanitation targets (Goal 6),** weak economic growth and the absence of decent work (Goal 8), pervasive inequalities (Goal 10), and above all, a crisis in poverty (Goal 1) and food security (Goal 2).

The COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily **reduced pollution, emissions and exploitation of resources as a result of lockdown.** But this should not be a moment of reprieve. Rather, recovery efforts need to build a new reality, embedded in sustainability.

Even at this stage in this deadly pandemic, we cannot deny the fact that the crisis is fast teaching us, as global citizens, the utmost value in being each other’s keeper, in working to leave no one behind, and in prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable in society.

**Build Back Better: Measures needed in these turbulent times**

• Priority must be given to placing vulnerable populations at the centre of social policy reform packages in the short- and medium-term, including by establishing systems for **universal health care and universal social protection.**

• In the long-term, the note suggests that countries invest in **strengthening social protection and enhancing emergency preparedness** to minimize the impact of future health emergencies and enhance resilience of economies.
• Nations must start investing in **reducing the digital divide**, observing that digital communication has played a key role in enabling social distancing.

• The need of the hour is to bring together development agencies, national governments, civil society and the private sector in a global effort to protect the livelihoods and lives of the poorest of the poor in the Global South

**Conclusion**

Although the Covid-19 disaster will delay the timeline for the global goals, the SDGs have to stand the test of time to see how global partnerships in the future can make Agenda 2030 successful. While readjusting to the changing world orders after this pandemic, it is of utmost importance for nations to strive toward the SDGs with a renewed vigor, capitalizing on the fact that this huge challenge in the present is an immense learning opportunity for the entire human race in the future.

India is rightly acclaimed to be the “pharmacy of the world”, with its huge private sector capacity for producing branded and unbranded generic drugs. However, India has seen the decline and near disappearance of public sector capacity for manufacture of drugs and vaccines. Why is healthy and robust public sector drug manufacturing important for India especially during the current pandemic? How can India boost this sector?

Examine. (250 words)

Reference: **The Hindu, Indian Express**

**Why this question?**

Anthony Fauci, top infectious disease specialist and senior adviser to U.S. President Donald Trump on COVID-19, recently said that India would play a critical role in supplying the world with a COVID-19 vaccine. However, most of the manufacturing capability is with the private industries vis-à-vis the public sector.

**Key demand of the question:**

Write importance of India’s drug manufacturing capability and how the entire world is looking forward to India for vaccine manufacturing in the wake of COVID pandemic. One must discuss how the private drug companies holds majority (around 70%) of manufacturing capabilities. One must analyse the

**Directive Word:**

Examine – When asked to ‘Examine’, we must look into the topic (content words) in detail, inspect it, investigate it and establish the key facts and issues related to the topic in question. While doing so we should explain why these facts and issues are important and their implications.

**Structure of Answer:**

**Introduction**-

write in 2-3 lines about India’s drug manufacturing capabilities

As the “world’s leading manufacturer of vaccines”, India’s private sector has a “very important role” in the global battle against Covid-19.

**Body**-

Discuss how the private manufacturing companies in India are the major players and the possible implications of this especially during the pandemic and equitable access of the vaccines.

Talk about the importance of reviving the public sector drug companies. Categorise into points such as Universal Healthcare, Affordability, etc.

Now talk about how government should revive these.

**Conclusion**-

Talk about the uncertainty that exists in private sector and how public sector can be a saviour if a possible situation of drug scarcity were to arise.
Introduction:

India has been an active player in the pharmaceutical industry and has contributed globally towards making life saving drugs and low cost pharmaceutical products accessible and affordable for those in need. As the “world’s leading manufacturer of vaccines”, India’s private sector has a “very important role” in the global battle against Covid-19 said one of the world’s leading experts on infectious diseases.

Body:

Despite, advances Indian biopharmaceutical industry is still 10-15 years behind their counterparts in the developed countries and faces stiff competition from China, Korea and others. The lacuna primarily exists due to disconnected centers of excellence, less focus on translational research and staggered funding.

Need for healthy and robust public sector drug manufacturing:

- To ensure that Indian population is not denied access to drugs that the Indian private sector is unable to produce or supply at affordable cost.
- To curb the rising “vaccine nationalism” that has been engulfing the nations today that could affect the equitable, affordable and universal access of the vaccines.
- These include drugs where compulsory licences may need to be issued by the government for patent protected drugs or even off-patent drugs which are commercially unattractive to private manufacturers.
- With the acquisition of Indian drug companies by foreign manufacturers, or ‘strategic alliances’ which place shackles on the Indian partners, public sector capacity for manufacturing lifesaving drugs under a CL is the much needed fall-back option.
- Drugs for neglected tropical diseases are of little interest to the commercially driven private drug industry.
- Active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), which are needed for drug manufacture (formulation), are now mostly imported from China. This makes India highly vulnerable to disruptions in supply and cost escalations in import.

Measures needed to boost the Indian public pharma sector:

- India needs to develop both public and private sector capacity within the country, with suitable government support and incentives, to ensure uninterrupted and inexpensive availability of APIs.
- The High Level Expert Group Report on Universal Health Coverage for India (2011) clearly articulated the need for strengthening public sector units (PSUs).
- The use of PSUs will offer an opportunity to produce drug volumes for use in primary and secondary care facilities as well as help in ‘benchmarking’ drug costs.
- Effective implementation of the Ayushman Bharat initiative calls for investment in expanding public sector capacity for producing essential drugs and APIs.
• The UN report also urges member states of WTO to adopt a permanent revision of Paragraph 6 of the TRIPS agreement to enable swift and expeditious export of pharmaceutical products produced under compulsory license. India should take the lead in ensuring universal access to affordable drugs through such measures.

• National Biopharma mission needs effective implementation.

• Innovate in India(i3) will witness an investment of USD 250 million with USD 125 million as a loan from world Bank and is anticipated to be a game changer for the Indian Biopharmaceutical industry. It aspires to create an enabling ecosystem to promote entrepreneurship and indigenous manufacturing in the sector.

Conclusion:
Investment in public sector capacity is essential to ensure that the country can exercise that leadership even on occasions when the private pharmaceutical sector does not fully align with that objective. There was an immediate need felt to focus on consolidated efforts to promote product discovery, translational research and early stage manufacturing in the country to ensure inclusive innovation.

Issues relating to poverty and hunger.
Discuss the risks to food security in modern day India. (250 words)
Reference: pib.gov.in

Introduction:
“Food Security” is one of crucial factors of development and poverty alleviation around the globe. The right to food is a principle of international human rights law. Food security, as defined by the United Nations’ Committee on World Food Security(CFS), is the condition in which all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Our current understanding of food security includes the four dimensions of access, availability, utilisation and stability.

As a state party to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, India has the obligation to ensure the right to be free from hunger and the right to adequate food.

Body:
Food security has been a major concern in India.

• According to UN-India, there are nearly 195 million undernourished people in India, which is a quarter of the world’s hunger burden.

• Roughly 43% children in India are chronically undernourished.

• People Below Poverty Line in India decreased to around 22% in 2011-12. The Poverty percentage was calculated using Tendulkar methodology.

• India ranked 76th in 113 countries assessed by The Global Food Security Index (GFSI) in the year 2018, based on four parameters—affordability, availability and quality and safety.
As per the Global Hunger Index, 2018, India was ranked 103rd out of 119 qualifying countries.

According to FAO estimates in ‘The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2018” report, about 14.8% of the population is undernourished in India.

**Challenges:**

- **NFSA issues:**
  - The NFSA does not guarantee universal right to food: Targeted – Restricts the right to food to only 75% of rural and 50% of urban population in India.
  - Act would not apply in times of “war, flood, drought, fire, cyclone or earthquake”. This a highly problematic clause given that food is becomes utmost necessary during these circumstances.
  - The Act focuses primarily on distribution of rice and wheat and fails to address the ‘utilization’ dimension of food security. Given that a major reason for micronutrient deficiency in India is because of a cereal-based diet; the NFSA does not address the issue of malnutrition and nutritional deficiency adequately.
  - Under the National Food Security Act, the identification of beneficiaries is to be completed by State Governments. As per findings of Comptroller and Auditor General in 2016, a massive 49% of the beneficiaries were yet to be identified by the State Governments.

- **Quality issues:**
  - Inadequate distribution of food through public distribution mechanism, food adulterations in distributed food.
  - Beneficiaries have complained of receiving poor quality food grains.

- **Issues with procurement:**
  - Open-ended Procurement: All incoming grains accepted even if buffer stock is filled creating a shortage in the open market.
  - The recent implementation of Nation food security act would only increase the quantum of procurement resulting in higher prices for grains.
  - The gap between required and existing storage capacity.
  - The open market operations (OMO) are much less compared to what is needed to liquidate the excessive stocks.

- **Issues with storage:**
  - Inadequate storage capacity with FCI.
  - Food grains rotting or damaging on the CAP or Cover & Plinth storage.
  - The money locked in these excessive stocks (beyond the buffer norm) is more than Rs 1 lakh crore.

- **Issues with allocation of food grains:**
- Inaccurate identification of beneficiaries.
- Illicit Fair Price shops: The shop owners have created a large number of bogus cards or ghost cards (cards for non-existent people) to sell food grains in the open market.

**Issues with transportation:**
- Leakages in food grains distribution to be reduced as most leakages in PDS takes place in initial stages.

**Climate Change:**
- Higher temperatures and unreliable rainfall makes farming difficult. Climate change not only impacts crop but also livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, and can cause grave social and economic consequences in the form of reduced incomes, eroded livelihoods, trade disruption and adverse health impacts.

**Lack of access to remote areas:**
- For the tribal communities, habitation in remote difficult terrains and practice of subsistence farming has led to significant economic backwardness.

**Increase in rural-to-urban migration**, large proportion of informal workforce resulting in unplanned growth of slums which lack in the basic health and hygiene facilities, insufficient housing and increased food insecurity.

**Corruption:**
- Diverting the grains to open market to get better margin, selling poor quality grains at ration shops, irregular opening of the shops adds to the issue of food insecurity.

**Important recommendations made by Shanta Kumar Committee.:**
- Reduce the number of beneficiaries under the Food Security Act—from the current 67 per cent to 40 per cent.
- While the poor under the Antyodaya category should keep getting the maximum food subsidy, for others, the issue price should be fixed at, say, 50 per cent of the procurement price (as was done under Atal Bihari Vajpayee for the BPL category)
- Allow private players to procure and store food grains.
- Stop bonuses on minimum support price (MSP) paid by states to farmers, and adopt cash transfer system so that MSP and food subsidy amounts can be directly transferred to the accounts of farmers and food security beneficiaries.
- Limit the procurement of rice particularly in the north-western states of Punjab and Haryana where the groundwater table is depleting fast, and invite private sector participation in grain management
- FCI should involve itself in full-fledged grains procurement only in those states which are poor in procurement. In the case of those states which are performing well, like Haryana, Punjab,
Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, the states should do the procurement.

- **Abolishing levy rice**: Under levy rice policy, government buys certain percentage of rice (varies from 25 to 75 per cent in states) from the mills compulsorily, which is called levy rice. Mills are allowed to sell only the remainder in the open market.

- Deregulate fertiliser sector and provide cash fertiliser subsidy of Rs 7,000 per hectare to farmers.

- **Outsource of stocking of grains**: The committee calls for setting up of negotiable warehouse receipt (NWR) system. In the new system, farmers can deposit their produce in these registered warehouses and get 80 per cent of the advance from bank against their produce on the basis of MSP.

- Clear and transparent liquidation policy for buffer stock: FCI should be given greater flexibility in doing business; it should offload surplus stock in open market or export, as per need.

- **Cooperative societies** play an important role in food security in India especially in the southern and western parts of the country. The cooperative societies set up shops to sell low priced goods to poor people. The cooperatives should be encouraged.

- Fostering rural-urban economic linkages can be an important step towards ensuring food security by-
  - enhancing and diversifying rural employment opportunities, especially for women and youth,
  - enabling the poor to better manage risks through social protection,
  - leveraging remittances for investments in the rural sector as a viable means for improving livelihoods

**Way forward:**

- Food security of a nation is ensured if all of its citizens have enough nutritious food available, all persons have the capacity to buy food of acceptable quality and there is no barrier on access to food.

- The right to food is a well-established principle of international human rights law. It has evolved to include an obligation for state parties to respect, protect, and fulfil their citizens’ right to food security.

- As a state party to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, India has the obligation to ensure the right to be free from hunger and the right to adequate food.

- India needs to adopt a policy that brings together diverse issues such as inequality, food diversity, indigenous rights and environmental justice to ensure sustainable food security.

Do you agree with the view that the Covid-19 crisis and its associated world’s most stringent lockdown have revealed the plight of the vulnerable Indian migrant labour force? Give reasons in support of your arguments. (250 words)

*Reference: Hindustan Times*
Why the question:
The article brings to us the dismal picture of the migrant workers amidst the lockdown.

Key Demand of the question:
Discuss in detail the sad and worrisome state of the migrant worker’s life amidst the covid-19 crisis.

Directive:
Give Reasons – Weigh up to what extent something is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant research but also remember to point out any flaws and counter-arguments as well. Conclude by stating clearly how far you are in agreement with the original proposition.

Structure of the answer:

Introduction:
Present some key facts/data to represent the migrant worker’s crisis in the country.

Body:

- Explain the alarming issues being faced by them – They are underpaid and overworked, from marginalized communities, sustained by an invisible economy of care.
- In India, many of these migrants — about 100 million in total — work seasonally and circulate between their rural homes and faraway work sites for a part of the year.
- workers treated the worst often come from regions of India like Jharkhand, Odisha or Chhattisgarh which have long suffered a form of internally oppressive structures as their indigenous wealth — minerals, forests, other natural resources — has been extracted by outsiders, leaving little but high levels of poverty for the locals etc.
- Discuss the efforts of government in this direction.

Conclusion:

Conclude with way forward.

Introduction

The world’s most stringent lockdown in India, revealed the plight of the vulnerable our migrant labour force. With no work and no way to feed themselves, removed from family support, millions had no choice but to defy the lockdown and return to their villages. One estimate suggested that nearly 8 crore migrant workers returned to their native villages.

Body

Plight of Indian migrant labour force

- **Low wages**: First, business and industry is dependent on migrant labour that is paid less, works longer and harder, and is more flexible than local labour.

- **Second-class citizens**: Though, in many parts of the world, such a precarious migrant workforce travels across national borders, in India, it is a huge internal migrant force traversing state borders for informal contract work in more developed parts of the country where they are treated as second-class citizens.

- **Unrepresented and harassed**: Usually unable to speak the lingua franca of where they migrate to, rarely represented by any union or social movement, they are easily harassed by employers, government institutions and by other workers.
  - This vulnerability makes them more easily controlled, cheap and dispensable.

- Workers treated the worst often come from regions of India like Jharkhand, Odisha or Chhattisgarh which have long suffered a form of internally oppressive structures as their indigenous wealth — minerals, forests, other natural resources — has been extracted by outsiders, leaving little but high levels of poverty for the locals.
Plight of the SC/ST's: The hardest work in the worst living conditions is done by India’s historically disadvantaged minorities.

- Dalits and Adivasis are overly represented as seasonal labour migrants; they make up more than 40% of the seasonal migrant workforce even though they are only 25% of the population.

These seasonal migrant workers are, in turn, supported by a further invisible economy, i.e. the household.

- Seasonal migrants can only be workers because of all the work undertaken across generations at home, including care provided by the spouse, children, siblings and elderly parents.
- This unpaid care work goes unnoticed and unaccounted.

Labour Laws Relaxed: Rather than protecting migrant workers, the government is now making things worse as labour legislation is dismantled further in favour of business and industry.

No social-security: Recently, lockdown resulted in a tragedy of a train running over 16 migrant workers. Leaving their families orphaned and devoid of bread-winners.

Measures being taken

- Employment: Creating short-term job opportunities for migrants based on their skills will be one of the key focuses of Prime Minister Narendra Modi government’s Atma Nirbhar Abhiyan that will target 116 districts with over 25,000 migrant workers.

- Skill-mapping: Besides, the government will also provide skill training to those who are unskilled or semi-skilled. The state governments have already started mapping the skills of the migrant workers who have returned.

- Food Security: Under AtmaNirbhar Bharat package, the Centre had decided that 8 lakh tonne of food grains will be provided to about 8 crore migrant labourers, stranded and needy families who are not covered under NFSA and PDS.
  - Five kgs of food grains per person were to be distributed free of cost for the months of May and June.
  - One kg pulses per month per family were also to be supplied.
  - “One Nation-One Ration Card’ scheme has also been expanded to enable migrant beneficiaries access public distribution system from any fair price shop in the country.

- Housing: The government also plans to launch a scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana that will provide houses at affordable rent for migrant labourers/urban poor.
  - The proposal is to convert government-funded housing in the cities into Affordable Rental Housing Complexes under the PPP mode through concessionaire.

Conclusion

Right from the start, the fight against COVID-19 has suffered from the invisibilising of the poor. When social distancing was made a central point of the covid campaign, the impossibility of it in...
slums was overlooked. Worst of all, was the lack of the anticipation that without work, savings or food, migrant workers and their families would want, and attempt, to rush home. Care must be taken to ensure that the most vulnerable are not further harassed and must become the focal point of future measures.

Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

“The COVID-19 crisis has brought out the nation’s strengths, resilience and innovative spirit nowhere more evident than in education”, Comment. (250 words)

Reference: indian express

Why the question:
The author explains in what way Covid crisis has showcased the resilience and innovation of the education system.

Key Demand of the question:

Directive:
Comment– here we have to express our knowledge and understanding of the issue and form an overall opinion thereupon.

Structure of the answer:

Introduction:
Explain the effect of pandemic, it leading to lockdown and effects thereafter.

Body:
Discuss the general impact of COVID-19 on the education system of the country.
Explain that the focus on the girl child’s education, modernisation of the educational infrastructure, and improvements in the field of teacher training are some of the notable measures of the government in the realm of education.
Discuss the policies and initiatives of the government in this direction.

Conclusion:
Conclude with a positive note that the COVID has exposed our education system to newer reaches and have aided us to innovate the current system in a more progressive way.

Introduction:
The coronavirus pandemic has shuttered educational institutions across the globe. Closure of schools, colleges and universities, shutdown of routine life of students and teachers, disruptions in education and the education ministry remaining incommunicado, have created an unprecedented situation and thrown many unexpected challenges to administrators, educators, teachers, parents and students.

Body:
Impacts on education due to COVID-19 pandemic:

- school and university closures will not only have a short-term impact on the continuity of learning for more than 285 million young learners in India but also engender far-reaching economic and societal consequences.
- The pandemic has significantly disrupted the higher education sector as well, which is a critical determinant of a country’s economic future.
A large number of Indian students—second only to China—enroll in universities abroad, especially in countries worst affected by the pandemic, the US, UK, Australia and China. Many such students have now been barred from leaving these countries. If the situation persists, in the long run, a decline in the demand for international higher education is expected. The bigger concern, however, on everybody’s mind is the effect of the disease on the employment rate. Recent graduates in India are fearing withdrawal of job offers from corporates because of the current situation. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy’s estimates on unemployment shot up from 8.4% in mid-March to 23% in early April and the urban unemployment rate to 30.9%.

**Measures taken for education earlier:**
- The Government has laid much emphasis on education, especially school education.
- Schemes to construct more than 400 new Ekalavya Model Residential Schools for tribal children by 2022 are a case in point.
- Make in India, Digital India, Skill India and the Aatmanirbhar Bharat project are other endeavours to make the country self-reliant.
- With the strong foundation in education laid over the last few years, the nation has been able to cope with the challenges and even turn some problems into advantages.
- The focus on the girl child’s education, modernisation of the educational infrastructure, and improvements in the field of teacher training are some of the notable measures of the government in the realm of education.

**Steps taken by Government during the pandemic for sustainable flow of education:**
The approach to education during the pandemic has relied on short-term and strategic initiatives.

- **Portals and Apps:**
  - The government has initiated the YUKTI web portal, the Aarogya Setu app has been made available for free and the National Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission aims to boost literacy.
  - The National Curriculum and Pedagogical Framework and the Bharat Padhe online campaign are bringing knowledge to the grass roots.
  - The previous experience and administrative skills helped the HRD ministry turn a potential disaster into a productive time for 3.3 million students, and others.
  - The Prime Minister’s e-Vidya scheme synergises and strengthens several distance-education projects — digital, online, and mass media.
  - Benefitting 25-crore school children, it focuses on developing permanent assets for quality education for generations to come.
  - A dedicated channel for every class will ensure easy, customised lessons and study material. Importantly, it focuses on equity in education.
  - This endeavour also individualises the teaching-learning experience to a considerable extent.

- **Divyang students:**
• This scheme provides bespoke materials under the Digitally Accessible Information System (DAISY). Webinars, podcasts, and online classes enrich the learning experience.

• It can be said with some confidence that the losses caused by the pandemic have been minimised, if not eliminated completely, at least as far as the education sector is concerned.

▪ Mental Health:

• In line with its comprehensive approach, the government has tried to address the equally important issue of psychological health with Manodarpan, a programme that covers both parents and students at a time when unprecedented challenges and stress have raised mental health issues.

• Continuously monitored, running along clear guidelines developed by experts, and available round the clock, Manodarpan is a true welfare measure of a government that is responsive to its people.

▪ University Social Responsibility (USR):

• Under this scheme, free online open educational resources in English, Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Russian, and Spanish have been developed for those interested in learning the basics of these languages.

• EnglishPro, a free mobile app, is ready for launch to help those around the SSC/Class X level in improving their English pronunciation in the Bharatiya way.

• Stepping beyond academics, the English and Foreign Languages University created the University Social Responsibility Endowment Fund.

▪ Online examinations:

• EFLU is perhaps the first Central University to have completed end-semester examinations online and to have declared their results as well.

However, there are challenges too:

▪ India is far behind some developing countries where digital education is getting increased attention.

▪ In countries where e-learning is popular, students have access to various online resources such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) which help students, teachers and professionals upgrade their skills.

▪ The major challenge in EDTech reforms at the national level is the seamless integration of technology in the present Indian education system, which is the most diverse and largest in the world with more than 15 lakh schools and 50,000 higher education institutions.

▪ Further, it is also important to establish quality assurance mechanisms and quality benchmark for online learning developed and offered by India HEIs as well as e-learning platforms (growing rapidly).

▪ Many e-learning players offer multiple courses on the same subjects with different levels of certifications, methodology and assessment parameters. So, the quality of courses may differ across different e-learning platforms.
Democratization of technology is now an important issue, comprising internet connectivity, telecom infrastructure, affordability of online system, availability of laptop/desktop, software, educational tools, online assessment tools, etc.

Since our education system has not trained our teachers and students to think creatively and manage in a crisis situation, and has underplayed the importance of e-learning, they are unprepared for the transition from the classroom to online.

Parents feel too pressed, having to support their children’s classes while working from home themselves.

The physical classroom does not only impart the syllabus. Children are also socialised, and there is an element of sport and play which is absent in virtual learning.

The matrix for socialisation is not replicated on an LCD screen.

Poor are disconnected and irrespective of background, some children cannot relate to the online classroom, and many more are losing out on midday meals.

Measures needed:

- There should be ease of digital access and the ability of parents to support learning at home.
- Online classes offered as live teaching can be sustained only with a mix of activities, worksheets and interactive sessions.
- Teachers should have a structured plan which does not suffocate or burden them and also keep the students involved.
- All institutions will have to chalk out an infrastructure plan which can be used in such a crisis.
- Teachers need to be considerate about how children feel or what they are going through these days so an understanding should be developed.

Going forward, the use of technology in teaching or recruitment will lead to a new era wherein the best of faculty will be available from across the globe to students. Education quality will be gauged not just by the quality of faculty but will also have quality of IT infrastructure and familiarization of the faculty with digital teaching technologies as important parameters.

Conclusion:

To summarize, education must continue. Students should keep learning. The lockdown period should be productive. Educators should think creatively and introduce innovative ways of learning. In a country where access to the Internet and high-speed connectivity is a problem, and the digital divide is an issue, it is important to address the challenges. Those who are involved in education planning and administration should give a serious thought to reducing the digital divide in the country and popularize digital learning.

Elucidate upon the idea of ‘One Nation One Voter ID’, also suggest how ensuring domestic ballot portability can empower migrant voters in the country? (250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why the question:
The article discusses the difficulties faced by the migrant laborer class in exercising their franchise and suggests policy measures to mitigate these challenges.

Key Demand of the question:
Explain in detail the idea of ‘One Nation One Voter ID’ and its relevance to migrant voters.

Directive:
Elucidate – Give a detailed account as to how and why it occurred, or what is the particular context. You must be defining key terms where ever appropriate, and substantiate with relevant associated facts.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
In the light of the pandemic crisis, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has made it possible for senior citizens above the age of 65 to vote by postal ballot, given that they are at greater risk from exposure to the novel coronavirus. Previously, this option was available only to disabled citizens and those above 80 years.

Body:
Explain the concept of ‘One Nation One Voter ID’.
The article argues for a similar empowering approach towards migrant workers.
Talk about the voter-turn out; explain the relevance of such a novel idea to the migrants, explain how it can empower them.
Discuss the associated challenges. Suggest policy measures to address it

Conclusion:
Voting must be viewed as a civic right. Well-thought-out initiatives that facilitate voting and remove obstacles to voters exercising their franchise must be emphasized on. Ensuring that every Indian voter can participate in elections is imperative to ensure a democratically inclusive India.

Introduction:
In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has made it possible for senior citizens above the age of 65 to vote by postal ballot, given that they are at greater risk from exposure to the novel coronavirus. Hitherto, this option was available only to disabled citizens and those above 80 years. Now, there is an opinion that the same empowering approach be extended to another group which faces enormous difficulties in exercising its franchise: migrant workers. The idea of ‘One Nation One Voter ID’ to ensure ballot portability would ensure franchisee rights for them too.

Body:
Migrant workers and their voting challenges:
- Migrant workers constitute about 13.9 crore as in the Economic Survey of 2017, that is roughly a third of India’s labour force.
- They have, for long, been forgotten voters, given their conditions of work.
- Migrant workers often toil in exploitative low-wage jobs, lacking identity and proper living conditions and without access to welfare
- Internal migrant workers do not enroll as voters in their place of employment since they find proof of residence hard to provide.
- This group also does not constitute a vote bank worthy of attention.
- Many are seasonal migrants who would rather vote in their villages if they could afford to return home.
- They are often unable to exercise their voting rights.
- Therefore, Migrant workers become quasi-disenfranchised, forgotten voters because they cannot afford to return home on election day to choose their representatives.
Ensuring domestic ballot portability can empower migrant voters in the country:

- **Equality and Inclusivity:**
  - Ensuring that every Indian voter can participate in elections is imperative to ensure a democratically inclusive India.
  - Once migrant workers get to exercise their franchise, there would also be a change in how they are treated.

- **Socio-economic welfare:**
  - Provision of Voter Id card linked to their Aadhar card would help get easy form of proof of identity which could be used to access health and education benefits for themselves and their wards.
  - This could in turn ensure proper living conditions and access to welfare schemes.

- **Ensures safety:**
  - Since they do not have a vote where they work, their concerns are easy to ignore in their host State.
  - Sometimes, they are targeted for allegedly taking jobs away from the local population.

**Measures needed:**

- ‘One Nation One Voter ID’:
  - On the lines of ‘One Nation One Ration Card’ the ‘One Nation One Voter ID’ can be arranged to ensure native ballot portability and empower the forgotten migrant voter.
  - Migrants should be able to physically vote in their city of work based on the address on their existing voter IDs and the duration of their temporary stay.

- **Proxy voting method similar to NRIs:**
  - To enable NRIs to exercise their franchise, the government brought in legislation in the previous Lok Sabha to enable voting through authorised proxies.
  - While the legislation lapsed, it is interesting to contrast the concern for NRIs with the lack thereof for poor migrant workers.

- **New blend of existing models:**
  - Blend of existing models of voter portability and new innovations needs to be adopted.
  - Currently, Service voters (government employees) posted away from home can vote through the **Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS)**.
  - On the other hand, classified service voters (e.g., military personnel) can do so through their proxies.

- **Aadhaar-linked voter-ID based solution:**
The ECI has said that it is testing an Aadhaar-linked voter-ID based solution to enable electors to cast their votes digitally from anywhere in the country.

While developing this solution, we need to ensure that the linkage with Aadhaar does not result in the exclusion of eligible individuals.

- **Outreach measures and removing procedural hurdles:**
  - To facilitate voting by migrant workers, the ECI could undertake substantial outreach measures using the network of District Collectorates.
  - Migrants should be able to physically vote in their city of work based on the address on their existing voter IDs and duration of their temporary stay.
  - Also, it seems technologically feasible to record and transfer votes to their respective constituencies without compromising on the credibility of the election process.

Conclusion:

**Voting must be viewed as a civic right.** Well-thought-out initiatives that facilitate voting and remove obstacles to voters exercising their franchise must be emphasized on. Ensuring that every Indian voter can participate in elections is imperative to ensure a democratically inclusive India. The **One Nation One Voter ID,** approach would help empower the forgotten migrant voter. Once migrant workers get to exercise their franchise, there would also be a change in how they are treated.

Debate upon the arguments in favour of a decentralized form of governance. Also examine the challenges in the implementation of such a governance model in the Indian setting. (250 words)

**Reference:** The Hindu

**Why the question:**
The author Arun Maira, a former member of the Planning Commission, in the article argues for a more decentralized form of governance model in India.

**Key Demand of the question:**
Discuss and present arguments in favor of a decentralized form of governance. Also examine the challenges in the implementation of such a governance model in the Indian setting.

**Directive:**
Débate – Weigh up to what extent something is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant research but also remember to point out any flaws and counter-arguments as well. Conclude by stating clearly how far you agree with the original proposition.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**
Explain about decentralization in short.

**Body:**
The author argues that the existing institutional structure which has been put through a stress test by the current global health and economic crises has failed to live up to the expectations. The pandemic has brought to light the existing flaws in current governance institutions.

Breakdowns in subsystems during the pandemic such as health care, logistics, business, finance, and administration had to be managed at the same time. The complexity of handling so many subsystems at the same time has overwhelmed governance.

Discuss what could be the possible solutions.

Present Arguments in favour of decentralization and conclude with solutions.

**Conclusion:**
Conclude that local system of governance is the only way humanity will be able to meet the new ecological and humanitarian challenges looming over it in the 21st century.

Introduction:

Decentralization can be defined as transfer or dispersal of decision-making powers, accompanied by delegation of required authority to individuals or units at all levels of organization even if they are located far away from the Power Centre. In the context of the present discussion, decentralization signifies the devolution of powers and authority of governance of the Union Government and State Governments to the sub-state level organizations i.e. Panchayats in India.

Body:

Decentralized form of Governance is a win-win for both people and country:

- Decentralization is necessary to strengthen participatory democracy, facilitate responsive governance, ensure greater accountability and enable public service delivery according to diversified preferences of the people.
- It is also seen as a means to strengthen the democratic fabric through participatory governance and responsive public service delivery. Village Panchayats can prioritize and execute the development plan curated as per the needs of the people.
- People led Development: Moving away from one size fits all approach and a top-down developmental model will go a long way in addressing region specific issue.
- 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (11th and 12th Schedule), by constitutionally establishing Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India, mandated the establishment of panchayats and municipalities as elected local governments.
- They devolved a range of powers and responsibilities to the local governments and made them accountable to the people for their implementation.
- The Constitution assigns decentralization including funding entirely to the discretion of State governments. The constitutional framework does not prescribe any pattern, standard or model of decentralization which is left to the discretion of State governments.
- A democratic form of government must be sustained by a system of vigorous local self-government institutions.
- Local government institutions provide an opportunity to the people to participate freely and actively in the governance and policy making which they formulate for their respective areas.
- These are necessary to encourage and foster initiative, independence, and enterprise on the part of the people.
- Laski said “local government offers the best opportunity to the people to bring local knowledge, interest and enthusiasm to bear on the solution of their problems.
- It not only relieves congestion at the centre but it also checks the increasing power of democracy. It stands positively for the distribution and diffusion of power leading to administrative de-concentration and de-centralization. Being closer to the original base, it finds solution for local problems more efficiently (No ‘one size fits all’ approach).
- There have been lots of positives like improvement in women participation, building the foundation for participatory democracy, utilization of local resources, customization of projects to local needs.

Current Issues with governance system amid the pandemic:
Governance systems at all levels, i.e. global, national, and local, have experienced stress as a fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.

Architectural flaws have been revealed in their design. Breakdowns in many subsystems had to be managed at the same time in health care, logistics, business, finance, and administration.

Consequently, the complexity of handling so many subsystems at the same time have overwhelmed governance.

Also when we devise solutions for one subsystem, it backfired on other subsystems.

For instance, lockdown was invoked to manage the health crisis but have made it harder to manage economic distress.

On the other hand, the diversion of resources to focus on the threat to life posed by coronavirus pandemic has ultimately increased vulnerabilities to death from other diseases, and even from malnutrition in many parts of India.

Other challenges faced by the local Self-governance institutions

Even after 25 years of existence, they have failed to be effective instruments of governance. The factors mentioned below combinedly resulted in ineffectiveness of local self-governments.

- **Systemic issues:**
  - State finance commissions are not as effective as central finance commission
  - State election commissions are alleged over issues like delimitation of constituencies.

- **Issues related to funds functions and functionaries**
  - Devolution of powers as per eleventh schedule except in few states like Kerala, Madhya Pradesh is not satisfactory.

- **Capacity building of both panchayats and urban local bodies is not proportional to the responsibilities they are assigned.**

- **Departmentalization of development:** A lot of government bodies have sidelined local bodies. For example, recently in Haryana, a rural development agency, presided over by the Chief Minister, to enter into the functional domain of panchayats.

- **Legislative approval of these parallel bodies legitimises the process of weakening decentralised democracy.**

- **Mani Shankar Aiyar committee** observed that decentralization has led to decentralization of corruption

- There are criticisms that initiatives like smart city projects affect the autonomy of urban local bodies.

- In urban areas, participation from people in elections as well as in governance is very limited.

- **Structural lacunae:**
  - No secretarial support – No dedicated carder of people or service is working for Panchayati raj. This make administrative and documentation work very difficult.
  - Low technical knowledge – has restricted the aggregation of planning from village to block to district to state to centre. Hence bottom up approach of planning is very limited.
- Adhoc meetings – lack of clear setting of agenda in gram sabha, gram samiti meetings; there is lot of adhocism; no proper structure

**Measures needed to strengthen local self-governance:**

- **Inclusive decision making:**
  - Ward committees and area sabhas should be activated with a technology-enabled ‘Open Cities Framework’ and the use of digital tools for feedback and reporting.
  - There must be active contributors of knowledge for, and active participants in, the creation of the solutions.
  - In case of Gram Sabhas, their functions and roles must be clearly defined as in the PESA Act, to enable to function effectively.
  - In addition, the knowledge of different experts about the environment, the society, and the economy must come together to fit realities on the ground.

- **Governance by the people by Citizen Participation:**
  - Governance of the people must not only be for the people. It must be by the people too.
  - Social Audit: The power of social audit was proven by Jan Sunwai in Rajasthan. Transparent, third party Social Audit can enable people to hold the representatives accountable.
  - Gandhiji and his economic advisers, J.C. Kumarappa and others, had developed their solutions of local enterprises through observations and experiments on the ground.
  - Elinor Ostrom, the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Economics, in 2009, had developed the principles for self-governing communities from research on the ground in many countries, including India.

- **Condition-specific problem solving:**
  - Solutions must fit the specific conditions of each country, and of each locality within countries too, to fit the shape of the environment and the condition of society there.

- **Learning from the best practices:**
  - A hypothesis is that those States and countries in which local governance was stronger have done much better than others.
  - The COVID-19 pandemic has not passed yet, but evidence is emerging that some States in India, such as Kerala, have weathered the storm better than others.
  - Also, countries such as Vietnam and Taiwan have performed better than others.

- **Proactive role of the government:**
  - The government has to support and enable people to govern themselves, to realize the vision of ‘government of the people, for the people, by the people’.
  - This is also the only way humanity will be able to meet the ecological and humanitarian challenges looming over it in the 21st century.
• **Changing Roles of public officials and functioning of schemes:**
  - The officials need to realize that there needs to be a change of their role as ‘deliverers of good government’ to ‘enablers of governance’.
  - The District collector’s task has become complicated when the numbers of government schemes multiplied of which some are designed by the central government, and others by the State government.
  - The citizens currently also do not know how many schemes there are and what they are entitled to. Therefore, awareness generation also needs to be prioritized.

• **Urban Local bodies:**
  - Metropolitan governance systems are needed in million-plus cities. There is a strong case for having a two-tier governance structure where all local functions are transferred to the ward committees and citywide services, such as transportation, water supply, sewerage, etc., are vested with the city council or regional authorities.
  - Each city needs to be recognized as a distinct unit of the economy. In larger cities, **City Economic Councils** can serve as a clearinghouse.

**Conclusion**

Local self-government institutions are expected not only to provide for the basic civic amenities for the safety and convenience of the citizens but also mobilize local support and public cooperation for the implementation of various programmes of welfare. Another benefit of the local government is that the transmission of power from bureaucrats to the democratically formed local government has positively checked the influence of bureaucracy. Thus it can be said that the local government ensures close relationship between the people and the higher level of governments through this device of communication.

**India and its neighborhood- relations.**

To attain the central role and face the expansionist policies of enemy nations, India should involve in sustained engagements with its neighbors. Discuss if it’s easy to reinstate with SAARC in such conditions? What are the challenges ahead for India? (250 words)

**Reference:** *The Hindu*

**Why the question:**
The article talks about ways for India to deal strategically with China.

**Key Demand of the question:**
*Explain in detail the importance of expansionist policies of the enemy nations and in what way it will affect India and its engagements with its neighbors. Discuss the possible role of SAARC in such a situation.*

**Directive:**
*Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.*

**Structure of the answer:**

*Introduction:*
On one side continuing its fight with India in the border, china is moving ahead with its goal of global expansionism. Explain factors associated with it.

**Body:**
Discuss what are the ways available for India to deal with china?
Explain that to deal with china, India has to begin with South Asia by reinvigorating SAARC which is in doldrums since 2014. This can be done by reviving the South Asian Economic Integration.
Discuss in what way India should involve in sustained engagements with its neighbors.
Explain the nuances associated with it.

**Conclusion:**
Conclude with what should be India’s way forward.

**Introduction:**
According to a Brookings India study, most South Asian nations are now largely dependent on China for imports despite geographical proximity to India. **India-China border tensions** continue to fester, a hegemonic China, as part of its global expansionism, is chipping away at India’s interests in South Asia. Several foreign policy experts argue that India’s strategic dealing with China has to begin with South Asia by reinvigorating SAARC, which has been inactive since 2014.

**Body:**
Current relevance to revive SAARC:

- It is important to **reinvigorate SAARC**, which has been in the doldrums since 2014.
- The increasing influence of China in the South Asian region is a major cause of concern for India given the fact that it results in the decrease of India’s influence in South Asia.
- China’s contemporary relations with India’s neighbors is increasing.
  - China’s proximity to Pakistan has been strengthened by the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project.
  - Nepal is also moving closer to China for ideational and material reasons.
  - China is wooing Bangladesh by offering tariff exemption to 97% of Bangladeshi products
  - China has also intensified its ties with Sri Lanka through massive investments.
In the last few years, due to increasing animosity with Pakistan, India’s political interest in SAARC dipped significantly.

India started investing in other regional instruments, such as BIMSTEC, as an alternative to SAARC.

However, BIMSTEC cannot replace SAARC for reasons such as lack of a common identity and history among all BIMSTEC members. Moreover, BIMSTEC’s focus is on the Bay of Bengal region, thus making it an inappropriate forum to engage all South Asian nations.

SAARC has failed in achieving its objectives because:

- **India-Pakistan rivalry:** This has become a bottleneck in achieving effective coordination. India has conveyed that terrorism and talks cannot go on simultaneously.

- **Bilateral issues:** Long pending issues between members like fishermen issue between India and Srilanka, Teesta water sharing between India and Bangladesh, lack of direct access to Afghanistan to other members except Pakistan have restricted in arriving at common ground for regional integration.

- **SAARC charter doesn’t allow discussion of bilateral issues as a result of which the contentious issues continue to simmer and countries are not able to come forward.**

- **Perceived Big-Brother attitude of India:** Asymmetry in the region due to sheer size of Indian economy and stature in international arena requires India to play an over active role. However, this is perceived as big brother attitude by other members creating mistrust.

- **Internal Crises:** Almost every member is facing numerous internal crises like Tamils issue in Srilanka, Constitutional crisis in Nepal, religious fundamentalism in Pakistan and Bangladesh, Terrorism and instability in Afghanistan. Consequently, there is no much enthusiasm to achieve collaboration in the sub-continent.

- **China’s inroad into SAARC countries:** Increasing presence of china in the region and reservations of India with China is creating roadblocks. India cannot match the levels of financing by China. China with its grand plan of BRI has lured the small nations.

- **Poverty- Ridden:** Even though the region accounts for 21% of world population, its share in global GDP is just around 3%. Being one of the poverty ridden areas of the world, there is limited avenues to achieve synergy.

- The lack of finance, research and technology has also hampered trade facilitation, monitoring etc

- The non-availability of adequate infrastructure in the form of roads and cargo/ship handling equipment has also hindered the progress.

- Due to **same agriculture produce** like Basmati rice in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the scope of trade is also inherently less.

- **Tariff and non-tariff barriers** have also played their role in keeping the level of integration low, especially since Pakistan hasn’t extended MFN status to India and therefore, with so many items been put under the ‘negative list’.

Effective grouping like SAARC will be beneficial for India:
The importance of regional cooperation particularly in the spirit of South-South cooperation between geographically contiguous countries cannot be belittled.

**Seamless physical connectivity**: Connectivity between regions increases the economic interaction and collective growth of region. This increases the economic and political bonhomie between nations and its people.

**Trade and Commerce**: Trade liberalizations under SAFTA, operationalization of SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services (SATIS) have the potential to tackle the developmental deficit together.

Common threats of Terrorism, Climate Change impacts, Poverty and Socio-Economic backwardness can be fought together as the problems plague all countries equally.

Unexplored and high-potential areas like **Power generation, Science & Technology, Sports, Culture** can be strengthened through agreements and MoUs.

**Measures needed to revive SAARC:**

- **India** should take the lead and work with its neighbors to slash the tariff and non-tariff barriers.
- SAARC should also seek **free and preferential trading arrangements** with other regional bodies, notably the EU and the ASEAN. It should also remain fully focused on the **SAARC social charter to spread out its reach to the common man**.
- There is a need to focus on small politics instead of big politics to resolve conflict in conflicting regions. This would mean that they focus on **economic cooperation and other small ways that can create cooperation and more peace**
- SAARC cannot be effective unless it places itself on a managerial position to achieve regional order, forcing all the members to act mutually in making the region a ‘zone of peace’ and the center for world business.
- All countries should come together to sort out their differences, either multilaterally or bilaterally. It’s not necessary to sort out the differences but despite that, it is necessary to work with the differences like that of India-China, Japan and China, Russia and Japan.
- The **bilateral issues** between member nations should be resolved. Bilateral Issues between India- Pakistan, India- Sri Lanka, Pakistan- Afghanistan etc. must be improved with serious engagement and collaboration – working together to bring peace and stability as a common good in the region.
- Information on terrorism, trafficking, smuggling etc. must be shared and joint exercises must be conducted to build mutual trust and capability.
- SAARC needs to work on **Improving infrastructure and regional connectivity** – Collaboration in scientific research, universities exchange programs, tourism etc. will have a positive effect on relations among countries.

**Conclusion:**

SAARC has the potential to transform the South Asian Region. Mutual mistrust and non-cooperation should not be allowed to undermine this potential. Deeper regional economic integration will create greater interdependence with India acquiring the central role, which, in turn, would serve India’s strategic interests too. SAARC should function as an autonomous institution by which driving principles, strategic actions, and rules of law can be implemented in a way that is relevant to both, its own members and other rising powers.
The Chabahar project is important for India’s regional goals, and for its relations with Iran. That is reason enough to act quickly. Critically analyze. (250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Key demand of the question:
Iran’s decision to drop India from a plan to build a rail link from the strategic Chabahar port to Zahedan on the Afghan border is a wake-up call for Delhi.

Directive word:
Critically analyze- here we have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts, and present them as a whole in a summary.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
write a few introductory lines about how Iran recently dropped India from its plan to build a rail link from the strategic Chabahar port to Zahedan on the Afghan border.

Body:
Discuss the strategic importance of Chabahar port to India.
Highlight how Chabahar will not be the first time delays in the completion of ambitious infrastructure projects undertaken by India in the region have inflicted setbacks on India’s strategic goals.
Discuss the reasons behind such delays.
India dragged its feet on building the rail link from Chabahar to Zahedan.
The delays were over contract disagreements.
then the fear of US sanctions.
Later, after the US provided a “carve-out” to India on the port and the rail link, the difficulty under the sanctions regime in finding international suppliers for material
Discuss the strategic implications of this for India
Provide the immediate measures that India must take to further avoid such mishaps in future.

Conclusion:
based on your discussion, form a fair and a balanced conclusion on the given issue.

Introduction:
Chahbahar, which is located 72 kilometres west of Pakistan’s Gwadar port, holds immense strategic and economic significance for India. Chahbahar port is a seaport located in southeastern Iran, on the Gulf of Oman. It serves as Iran’s only oceanic port and consists of two ports Shahid Kalantari and Shahid Beheshti and ten berths. The US recognised the importance of Chahbahar and exempted Indian firms involved in the port from sanctions

Recently, Iran has decided to proceed with the Chahbahar rail line construction on its own, citing delays from the Indian side in beginning and funding the project. The development of the port, and the link overland through Iran to the Afghan border, was supposed to be India’s answer to Pakistan’s denial of the trading route through Wagah to Khyber Pass into Afghanistan and beyond, to Central Asia.

Body:
Significance of the port for India:

Geo-strategic Importance:

- Chahbahar Port is of particular significance to India because of its location as it is the only oceanic port of Iran that can be accessed from the western coast of India bypassing Pakistan.
- In short, it is an unobtrusive gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia. Pakistan denies overland transit facility to India through its soil and India’s commerce with Afghanistan and Central Asia gets hampered.
- Herein lays the elevated strategic importance of Chahbahar port for India as it can open new frontiers of engagement with the region bringing in shared prosperity.
- Chahbahar port can be used by India to launch humanitarian operations in Afghanistan and also in Horn of Africa regions.
- The Zaranj-Delaram highway constructed by India can be an access point to four major cities in Afghanistan namely Kabul, Heart, Kandahar, and Mazar-e-sharif which can be accessed via the Garland highway in Afghanistan.
- Keeping this geostrategic significance India’s transport minister has termed the port as ‘a gateway to golden opportunities’.

Geo-Political Importance:

- Chabahar’s geopolitical significance rises considerably as it is also a gateway to INSTC (International North-south Transport Corridor).
- It will boost India’s presence in the region and hence this strategic project has been pursued by India in the right earnest.
Chahbahar port will also act as a check for increasing Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea as China is heavily involved in the construction of the Gwadar, a deep sea port in the Balochistan area of Pakistan. The location of Chahbahar and Gwadar ports in close vicinity of each other underlines the intense competition between India and China in the region with Pakistan siding with the Chinese. India’s spirited efforts in development of Chahbahar port underscores the point that on the strategic chessboard of geopolitical competition India is not to be left far behind.

The chances of an extension of ties to Indian Iran military cooperation is also possible and will be highly beneficial to counter Chinese navy in the Indian ocean too.

**Geo-Economic Importance:**

- Costs of imports of products like iron ore, oil, sugar, and rice to India will be significantly lowered. A study commissioned by the Ministry of Commerce has found that cost of imports via Chahbahar port along with INSTC is 30% cheaper than those via Mediterranean-Suez route.
- Economic ties between India and Afghanistan which were in limbo due to political uncertainty will significantly improve once Chahbahar is completely operationalized. India will link Chahbahar port to Zaranj-Delaram highway in Afghanistan and is keen on developing a rail link there with the cooperation of Iran.
- India will also be developing various industries (aluminum and urea plants) in the Chahbahar Economic Zone.

**Reasons for Iran dropping India:**

- Despite several site visits by IRCON engineers and preparations by Iranian railways, India never began the work, worrying that it could attract sanctions by the USA.
- India has already zeroed out its oil imports from Iran due to USA sanctions.
- The USA had provided a sanctions waiver for the Chahbahar port and the rail line but it was difficult to find equipment suppliers and partners due to worries of being targeted by the USA.
- The ‘Comprehensive Plan for Cooperation between Iran and China’ which is a 25-year and USD 400 billion strategic partnership deal is another reason.
- Both nations are close to finalising the deal, which will include Chinese involvement in Chabahar’s duty-free zone, an oil refinery nearby and possibly a larger role in Chahbahar port as well.
- The cooperation will extend from investments in infrastructure, manufacturing and upgrading energy and transport facilities, to refurbishing ports, refineries and other installations and will commit Iranian oil and gas supplies to China during that period.
- Iran proposed a tie-up between the Chinese-run Pakistani port at Gwadar and Chahbahar in 2019 and offered interests to China in the Bandar-e-Jask port 350 km away from Chahbahar, as well as in the Chahbahar duty-free zone.

**Way forward:**

- It will be important to operationalise the port quickly and smoothen the route to Afghanistan.
• Keeping timelines and delivery of New Delhi’s commitments will be key to the port becoming a regional hub for transit trade, steel and petrochemicals.
• It will be necessary to encourage Afghan companies to use the route more.
• Given all the competing interests over Chahbahar, it will require sustained and nuanced diplomacy to stay ahead in this game.
• As an emerging power, India cannot remain confined to South Asia and a peaceful extended neighbourhood (Iran-Afghanistan) is not only good for trade and energy security but also plays a vital role in India’s aspirations of becoming a superpower.

**India should pursue its largely successful policy of maintaining positive relations with Iran and guard against hasty conclusions while monitoring the ties between China and Iran. Analyse. (250 words)**

*Reference: Indian Express, ids.in*

**Why this question:**
Reports that Iran and China are close to concluding a 25-year strategic partnership — which may involve a trade and investment partnership totalling a massive $400 billion — have generated considerable angst in India. This is being linked to reports that Iran has decided to undertake the construction of the Chahbahar-Zahedan railway line to the border with Afghanistan on its own because India continues to delay its implementation of the project.

**Key demand of the question:**
One must discuss the healthy relations that has existed between India and Iran in the past. Despite the USA sanctions, India continued the oil trade with Iran in past. In the recent days, there have been a few hiccupps w.r.t to the Chahbahar port railway line being awarded to China. India must not act in haste but in the meantime we must also be wary of the growing bonhomie between Iran and China.

**Directive:**
Analyze – When asked to analyze, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary.

**Structure of the answer:**
**Introduction:**
Start with brief introduction about India Iran ties and recent happenings of Chahbahar railway line project and alleged involvement of China.

**Body:**
Discuss in detail the ties that exists between India and Iran.
Discuss how China’s increasing closeness with Iran.
**Now argue as to why India must not act in haste and take knee-jerk reactions.**
Discuss how we should be watchful of the China-Iran ties.
Provide measures to strengthen the India-Iran ties.

**Conclusion:**
Conclude with way forward.

**Introduction**
Reports that Iran and China are close to concluding a 25-year strategic partnership — which may involve a trade and investment partnership totalling a massive $400 billion — have generated considerable angst in India. This is being linked to reports that Iran has decided to undertake the construction of the Chahbahar-Zahedan railway line to the border with Afghanistan on its own because India continues to delay its implementation of the project.

**Body**
India-Iran ties

- India shares civilisational ties with Iran.
- Their contemporary relations, however, have been especially relevant in India’s energy security. This is reflected in the trade between the two countries, where the balance tilts for Iran through its oil sales to India.
- Between 2014 and 2018, the two countries signed a total of 21 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), many relating to the development of Chabahar.

What is the current issue?

- The development of the solo rail development by Iran comes at a time when Iran is seeking to finalise a 25-year economic and security partnership with China. The deal is worth $400 billion.
- The deal between Iran and China — if finalised — could result in a vast expansion of Chinese presence in various sectors of Iran including banking, telecommunications, ports, railways and numerous other projects.
- Considering that Iran has been an important strategic ally for New Delhi, the deal could hurt India’s prospects in the region, especially at a time when its relations with China have soured further in the aftermath of the recent border standoff.
- China already has expanded its reach in the region through Gwadar Port. The plan is to overcome its Malacca Dilemma by connecting Gwadar Port to CPEC corridor all the way to Xinjiang.
- Moreover, Iran is miffed with India, as it had to zero-down its oil trade with Iran. USA successfully arm-twisted India in stopping oil imports from Iran, even though India doesn’t recognize unilateral sanctions.

Significance of Iran for India

- With Chabahar, India can bypass Pakistan in transporting goods to Afghanistan.
- It will also boost India’s access to Iran, the key gateway to the International North-South Transport Corridor that has sea, rail and road routes between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.
  - Having signed the International Transit and Transport corridor and Ashgabat agreement, port development and ultimately the rail line would help India increase its footprint in the region.
- With Iran and India aligned on the same lines against Taliban; it will help India to manoeuvre the rough tides in case Taliban rule comes in Afghanistan. Iran is also a second front, in a potential conflict with Pakistan.
- It also helps India counter Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea which China is trying to ensure by helping Pakistan develop the Gwadar port. Gwadar port is less than 400 km from Chabahar by road and 100 km by sea.
- From a diplomatic perspective, Chabahar port could be used as a point from where humanitarian operations could be coordinated.
India’s balancing act

- India needs to play a balancing act between the USA and Iran. India can ask for an oil import waiver from USA.
- Further, India needs to closely watch the space created by its exit.
- In a world where connectivity is seen as the new currency, India’s loss on account of these projects can become gain for some other country, like China.
- As an emerging power, India cannot remain confined to South Asia and a peaceful extended neighbourhood (Iran-Afghanistan) is not only good for trade and energy security but also plays a vital role in India’s aspirations of becoming a superpower.
- India can offer Iran to *enhance its investments* in the Chabahar Port development project as well as consider initiating other developmental and connectivity projects to strengthen linkages to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
  - This must be first revived through faster implementation and adhering to strict time-period for executing the projects. India must overcome the rhetoric of “India promises and China delivers”
- This will ensure that India’s relationship remains favourable. And it can also strengthen India’s commitment towards strategic autonomy and will assert India’s role as a *global power pursuing independent foreign policy*.
- **Mediating Role:** India has a very strong case to appeal for de-escalation between US-Iran as it had equity on both sides of the Gulf (with a trade of over $200 billion) and large diaspora in Iran. Hence, India should play a proactive role in mediation for long-term gains. However, India talked to both sides but is avoiding playing the role of a mediator.
- The Indian side reaffirmed its support for full and effective implementation of the JCPOA, which has been endorsed by the UN Security Council and is crucial contribution to the non-proliferation framework and international peace, stability and security.

**Conclusion**

New Delhi should aggressively promote the cause of the Chabahar port in Washington, and link the success of the port projects with that of Trump’s Afghanistan policies. Absent India in Chabahar, Iran may be tempted to link the port with China’s BRI, an outcome that is undesirable for the US and its nascent Indo-Pacific strategy. Geostrategic reality will ensure Iran’s continued importance. But the renewal of continued American hostility provides India an opportunity to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Indo-Iranian relations.

*Though the defence trade deals forms the bedrock of the growing India-Israel partnership, both states are progressively relying on each other or find ways to allude to their entente cordiale. Critically Discuss. (250 words)*

*Reference: The Print, Hindustan Times*

**Introduction:**
Israel and India are exploring to open new vistas of partnership in the world of finance, including collaboration between market regulators and allowing Israeli investment in corporate bonds, taking advantage of a favourable climate in both countries.

During these testing times of pandemic, a team of high-ranking Israeli Defence Ministry research and development team is coming to India to develop rapid testing for COVID-19 in under 30 seconds along with their Indian counterparts. They will also deliver the breakthrough emerging Israeli technologies for combating COVID-19, which have been donated by the Israeli Foreign Ministry (MFA) and private sector, meant to bolster India’s response to the outbreak. Lastly, mechanical ventilators, which were given special permission by the Government of Israel for export to India is also being sent to India.

Most recently, India is making emergency military purchases from several countries including Israel to bolster the military’s capabilities amid border tensions with China in eastern Ladakh.

Body:

Evolution of defence ties between India-Israel:

- Defence relations between India and Israel are longstanding.
- The strategic communication between the two countries began during the Sino-India War of 1962 when PM Jawaharlal Nehru wrote his Israeli counterpart David Ben-Gurion for shipments of arms and ammunition.
- In 1965, Israel supplied M-58 160-mm mortar ammunition to India in the war against Pakistan.
- It was one of the few countries that chose not to condemn India’s Pokhran nuclear tests in 1998.
- It continued its arms trade with India at a steadily increasing rate even after the sanctions and international isolation that followed the nuclear tests.
- For India, the credibility of Israel as a reliable defence partner was reinforced during the Kargil War of 1999 when it supplied the Indian Air Force (IAF) with the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) ‘Searcher’ and surveillance systems for Jaguar and Mirage squadrons.
- It also upgraded the MiG-21 combat aircraft for the IAF.
- The Indian Army also received Laser Guided Bombs (LGB) and 160-mm mortar ammunition.
- In the 2000s, the India-Israel arms trade mostly involved surveillance and intelligence-related equipment – notably Super Dvora-class patrol vessels and the airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) system EL/M-2075 Phalcon.
- India also purchased 98 Searcher and 50 Heron UAVs.
- Israel supplied Barak surface-to-air missile system with the Vertical Launching System (VLS) module for the modernisation of the Indian Navy during the period 2003-2006.

India- Israel Defence ties in recent times:

- India and Israel’s military research and development cooperation is well known for its success.
- There has been great progress in strategic cooperation between the two countries and there are possibilities of further strengthening defence engagements.
• India already has robust defence ties with Israel which is expected to strengthen further.
• India is the largest arms buyer from Israel; trade is to the tune of approximately $600 million.
• If defence ties keep increasing at the same rate, Israel may replace Russia as India’s largest arms supplier.
• Last year, India signed the biggest weapons deal in Israeli defence history, which is nearly $2 billion.
• This will provide India with an advanced defence system of medium-range surface-to-air missiles, launchers and communications technology.

• Space:
  o The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) has teamed up with the Israel Space Agency (ISA) for joint programmes in space cooperation. ISRO launched TecSAR – the Israeli Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) satellite – in January 2008, which was followed by the launch of the IAI-assisted India’s own radar imaging satellite RISAT-2.

• Counter Terrorism and Cyber Security:
  o In counter terrorism, intelligence gathering and retaliation, Israel has an exceptional good record and India need to learn from Israel how they have been able to mount surgical strikes all over.
  o Both India and Israel are vulnerable to cyber-attack. Cyber security would be very important concern of all governments.
  o Following the 2008 Mumbai attacks, Israel offered a team of about 40 special-operations forces and assistance in the investigation. Paramedics, medics and other professionals from Israel were also sent to aid India.

However, the depth and cooperation in the India-Israel bilateral ties doesn’t end here. The ambit of India-Israel defence cooperation has widened to include other domains like economy, agriculture, etc.; however, the cornerstone remains Israeli arms sales to India.

Other Areas of Co-operation:

• Economic Relations:
  • Trade, technology and tourism are the three key areas in India-Israel economic relations.
  • Over the last 25 years, bilateral trade has increased from $200 million to more than $4 billion (excluding defence) in 2016-17.
  • Given India’s large market and huge consumer base, the numbers are low compared to India’s economic relations with other countries.
  • Israel will invest $68.6 million to boost cooperation with India in areas like tourism, technology, agriculture and innovation over a period of four years.
  • The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and its Israeli counterpart are exploring partnerships and the two sides are also focusing on cyber security collaboration to safeguard their financial markets.

Telegram: https://t.me/insightsIASTips
Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpoccbCX9GEIwaile4HlJwA
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/insightsonindia
Water and Agriculture:

- India and Israel are set to jointly develop new crop varieties and share post-harvest technologies following the success of the 10-year-old Indo-Israeli Agriculture Project (IIAP).
- Israel has become one of the foremost technology superpowers in areas such as rainwater harvesting, use of oceanic water and using that for irrigation in the driest land.
- Israel has mastered water conservation techniques and India can learn from it.
- It helps India to face its water stressed condition.
- Another area of potential cooperation is cleaning polluted rivers.

Challenges:

- It is difficult to delink Israel and Palestine in India’s foreign policy, making it a significant consideration while strategizing the diplomatic relationship with Israel and other nations in the Middle East.
- India’s ties with Iran are challenged in the current situation due to its close ties with Israel and the US, making it choose between these nations.
- Israel’s politics dominated by its antagonistic attitude towards the Palestinians is also making it difficult for India to enhance the diplomatic relationship.
- Israel’s discrimination towards minorities, especially the Jewish minorities from India is hindering the diplomatic ties.
- The inflexible stance by the current government in Israel and the US makes it highly difficult for India to manoeuvre and balance its ties with Iran and other nations that are against Israel.

Way forward:

- Together, the existing Indian and Israeli innovation ecosystem can create a global impact.
- Israeli companies can join hands with India’s manufacturing sectors to scale up the innovations.
- Greater partnership in new R&D projects in India in areas like digital healthcare, agriculture and water.
- India can leverage its space technologies to Israel for its developmental purposes where India enjoys upper hand.
- India could well take a cue from how Israel maintains stringent external and internal security, allowing Israeli settlements right up to the border of conflict zones.
- Israeli defence industries are well inclined towards joint ventures to give a boost to the ‘Make in India’ campaign.
- India-Israeli deal to jointly develop a medium range surface-to-air missile system is a good business model to work on.
- A joint research and development fund can work wonders.
Indian-Israeli companies with their innovation can together stimulate domestic manufacturing and agriculture sector.

The Israeli dairy genetic material can revolutionise the dairy industry in India.

Israel will be benefited from large pool of skilled Indian engineers and doctors as Israeli PM quoted “Indian talent and Israeli technology equals India-Israel ties for tomorrow.”

Conclusion:

For too long, India has, under the guise of maintaining its strategic autonomy, shied away from explicit friendships in the international scenario. The India-Israel relationship must continue to expand. What just needs to be done away with is the normative posturing of the relationship which could potentially endanger India’s international relations and also its domestic situation.

The story of bilateral ties between India and Sri Lanka is the story of ups and downs. The pandemic presents an opportune time for Sri Lanka and India to nourish the roots of the relationship using modern toolkits, but leveraging age-old wisdom and experience. Examine. (250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why this question:
The unique India-Sri Lanka relationship, de jure, is between equals as sovereign nations. But it’s asymmetric in terms of geographic size, population, military and economic power, on the one hand, and social indicators and geographical location, on the other. It is steeped in myth and legend, and influenced by religious, cultural and social affinities. This is an opportune time for Sri Lanka and India to nourish the roots of the relationship using modern toolkits, but leveraging age-old wisdom and experience.

Key demand of the question:
The question is straightforward and aims to examine the bilateral ties between India and Sri Lanka. One must talk about the historical hits and misses in the bilateral ties. Further, one must discuss how the pandemic presents an opportunity in strengthening the ties using modern tools.

Directive:
Examine – When asked to ‘Examine’, we must look into the topic (content words) in detail, inspect it, investigate it and establish the key facts and issues related to the topic in question. While doing so we should explain why these facts and issues are important and their implications.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Start with an introduction talking about the bilateral ties between India and SL. India and Sri Lanka, despite having past common colonial experiences, have certain strategic imperatives, and differing policies dictated by national interests, at times conflicting with each other.

Body:
Taking cue from the article, explain the highs of bilateral ties since Independence. Talk about the irritants that are still persisting in the bilateral ties. What are the prospective and potential areas of co-operation and common interests. Discuss how the pandemic provides an opportune time to overcome the same.

Conclusion:
Conclude with a balanced way forward.

Introduction:
The relationship between India and Sri Lanka is more than 2,500 years old. Both countries have a legacy of intellectual, cultural, religious and linguistic interaction. In recent years, the relationship
has been marked by close contacts at all levels. Trade and investment have grown and there is cooperation in the fields of development, education, culture and defence. Both countries share a broad understanding on major issues of international interest. In recent years, significant progress in implementation of developmental assistance projects for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and disadvantaged sections of the population in Sri Lanka has helped further cement the bonds of friendship between the two countries.

Body:

Uniqueness of India-Sri Lanka bilateral ties:

- The India-Sri Lanka relationship, de jure, is between equals as sovereign nations.
- However, the relationship is asymmetric in terms of geographic size, population, military and economic power, on the one hand, and also social indicators and geographical location, on the other.
- The relationship is also steeped in myth and legend, and influenced by religious, cultural and social affinities.
- Hardships of COVID-19 present an opportune time for Sri Lanka and India to nourish the roots of the relationship using modern toolkits, but leveraging age-old wisdom and experience.

Evolution of the ties:

- Historical times:
  - The advent of Buddhism in Sri Lanka during the time of Emperor Ashoka was the result of cross-border discourse.
  - For many centuries, later on, the ancient capital city of Anuradhapura housed an international community that included traders from India, China, Rome, Arabia, and Persia.
  - Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka also contain shrines for Hindu deities.
- Colonial era:
  - Labor from south India was brought to Sri Lanka to work in plantations.
  - The Indian freedom struggle had its influence on Sri Lanka as well. There was cross-border support for the revival of culture, tradition, local languages, spiritual practices and philosophies, and education.
  - Both countries transformed into modern nations with constitutional and institutionalized governance under colonial rule.
  - Process engineering by colonial powers for identification and categorization of people was a factor in the emergence of separatist ideologies based on ethnicity, language, and religion.
  - This mindset is now ingrained and accentuated in politics. Episodic instances of communal hostility are referenced often to suit tactical political gain.
Contemporary times:

- Sri Lanka’s strategic location makes it apparent that not only economic fortunes but the security of both countries are inextricably linked. Therefore, the calamity in one country can adversely impact the other.

- Currently, freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific together with a rules-based international order and peaceful settlement of disputes are of common interest.

Issues and Conflicts:

- In recent years, China has extended billions of dollars of loans to the Sri Lankan government for new infrastructure projects, which is not good for India’s strategic depth in Indian Ocean Region.

- Sri Lanka also handed over the strategic port of Hambantota, which is expected to play a key role in China’s Belt and Road Initiative, to China on a 99-year lease.

- The opposition parties and trade unions in Sri Lanka have already dubbed the port deal as a sellout of their country’s national assets to China.

- China has also supplied arms as well as provide huge loans to Sri Lanka for its development.

- China also invested sufficiently in the infrastructure of Sri Lanka, which included building of Colombo international container terminal by China Harbor Corporation.

- However, the relation between Sri Lanka and India are improving. In order to allay Indian concerns that the Hambantota port will not be used for military purposes, the Sri Lankan government has sought to limit China’s role to running commercial operations at the port while it retains oversight of security operations.

- The two countries have signed civil nuclear cooperation agreement which is Sri Lanka’s first nuclear partnership with any country.

- India is also investing into Sri Lanka’s infrastructure development in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

- India is also planning to build Trincomalee Port to counterweight the Chinese developments at Hambantota Port.

Measures needed to strengthen the bilateral ties during the pandemic:

- As both countries have a democratic setup there is scope for broadening and deepening the ties.

- Both countries should try to work out a permanent solution to the issue of fishermen through bilateral engagements.

- Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) must be signed to improve the economic cooperation between both countries.

- India needs to focus more on its traditional and cultural ties to improve relations with Sri Lanka.

- Starting of ferry services between India and Sri Lanka can improve people to people linkages.

- Mutual recognition of each other’s concerns and interests can improve the relationship between both countries.
Way forward:

- The socio-economic development of Sri Lanka has remained linked to India.
- Though robust partnerships with other countries have been often sought in line with the non-alliance foreign policies of both countries, such efforts must be bounded by an atmosphere needed for peace, prosperity, and stability.
- Sri Lanka can also encourage Indian entrepreneurs to make Colombo another business hub for them, as logistical capacities and facilities for rest and recreation keep improving in Sri Lanka.
- Integrating the two countries but with special and differential treatment for Sri Lanka due to economic asymmetries can be fast-tracked for this purpose.
- There is immense potential for both countries to accentuate or create complementariness, using locational and human resource potential, for harnessing benefits in the modern value chains.
- Robust partnerships across the economic and social spectrum can also promote people-to-people bonhomie.

India’s partnership with Bangladesh stands out as a role model in the region for good neighbourly relations and very few countries in the world share such close fraternal ties. Discuss the present areas of co-operation along with the associated concerns. Also explain where should the future focus lie? (250 words)

Reference: Hindustan Times, The Hindu

Why this question:
India recently handed over 10 railway locomotives to Bangladesh at a virtual ceremony. The external affairs minister said India’s concessional lines of credit of close to USD 10 billion to Bangladesh are the largest it has extended to any country.

Key demand of the question:
The question demands elaboration on India-Bangladesh ties in detail from past to present.

Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
In brief explain the background of the question, the present context of relations between the two countries.

Body:
Explain in detail the ties across different domains like – Sharing of River Waters, Bilateral Trade, Institutional Mechanisms, India’s Economic Assistance to Bangladesh, areas of conflicts. Discuss the areas of concern between the two – border issues, refugees, NRC of Assam etc.

Conclusion:
Conclude with what the two countries should focus in terms of future engagements and that Bangladesh and India are crucial landmark in the determination of the geographic and political contours of South Asia.

Introduction:
India’s links with Bangladesh are civilisational, cultural, social and economic. India and Bangladesh today enjoy one of the best periods of their relationship, with positive development in the areas of
diplomatic, political, economic and security relations. India played the great role in emergence of independent Bangladesh and was the first country to recognise Bangladesh as separate state.

The historic land boundary agreement signed in 2015 opened a new era in the relations. Both the countries are the common members of SAARC, BIMSTEC, IORA and the Commonwealth. India has always stood by Bangladesh in its hour of need with aid and economic assistance to help it cope with natural disasters and floods.

Body:

Bilateral relations:

- India and Bangladesh today enjoy one of the best periods of their relationship, with positive development in the areas of diplomatic, political, economic and security relations.

- Bilateral trade was a little over $9 billion in FY 2017-18 and Bangladeshi exports increased by 42.91%, reaching $1.25 billion in FY 2018-2019.

- The India-Bangladesh border is one of India’s most secured.

- By signing of the Land Boundary Agreement in 2015, the two neighbours amicably resolved a long-outstanding issue.

- In 2018, in addition to the 660 MW of power imported by Bangladesh, Indian export of electricity increased by another 500 MW.

- Train services on the Dhaka-Kolkata and Kolkata-Khulna are doing well, while a third, on the Agartala-Akhaura route, is under construction.

- Today, Bangladesh contributes 50% of India’s health tourism revenue.

- India and Bangladesh share 4096.7 km. of border, which is the longest land boundary that India shares with any of its neighbours. The India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) came into force following the exchange of instruments of ratification in June 2015.

- Relations between the two border guarding forces are at their best right now.

- India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers. A bilateral Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) is working since June 1972 to maintain liaison between the two countries to maximize benefits from common river systems.

- India and Bangladesh share the historical legacy of cooperation and support during the Liberation War of 1971. Various Joint exercises of Army (Exercise Sampriti) and Navy (Exercise Milan) take place between the two countries.

Concerns:

- Teesta waters issue remains a big problem due to continuous protest by the West Bengal government.

- National Register of Citizens has left out 1.9 million people in Assam and they are being labelled as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

- But Bangladesh is firm in its stance that no migrants travelled to Assam illegally during the 1971 war of independence and NRC may risk the relations.
The Rohingya issue and India’s remarks in 2017 on the issue have been upsetting for Bangladesh which has been facing the challenge of providing shelter to more than a million Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution.

Bangladesh is overwhelmingly dependent on China for military hardware. China’s economic footprint is growing.

Since 2010, India approved three Lines of Credit to Bangladesh of $7.362 billion to finance development projects. But, because of bureaucratic red tape, just $442 million have been disbursed until December 2018.

Though Bangladesh is slow in implementation, India’s requirement of the disbursement process to be approved by Exim Bank has not helped either.

Since the ban by India on cattle export, cattle trade has fallen from 23 lakh in 2013 to 75,000 till the end of May this year.

Way Forward:

- India’s attempts to equate Bangladesh to fundamentally theocratic Muslim nations such as Pakistan and Afghanistan is something that is unacceptable to Bangladeshis, where religious and racial harmony have always been a priority, unlike in many neighbouring countries so we not need to equate it with Pakistan.

- Bangladesh-India relations have reached a stage of maturity. Bilateral ties can be expected to grow stronger in the future. It is for India to take the lead to remove these irritants.

- There is scope for India-Bangladesh ties to move to the next level, based on cooperation, coordination and consolidation.

- India’s continued partnership with Bangladesh benefits both countries.

- New Delhi must keep up the partnership that allows for economic growth and improved developmental parameters for both countries.

- It is important to address specific issues like Teesta and to respond to Dhaka’s call for help on the Rohingya issue.

- The two countries share 54 transboundary rivers, and water management is the key to prosperity.

- Effective border management for ensuring a tranquil, stable and crime free border.

Conclusion:

The shared colonial legacy, history and socio-cultural bonds demand that the political leadership of the two countries inject momentum into India-Bangladesh relations.
Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.
It’s not the reputation alone, but the ability to deal with the challenges in a unique manner in an uncertain world will make India more significant placing it next to permanent members in influence. Do you agree? Comment. (250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Introduction:

India has been elected to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as a non-permanent member from the Asia-Pacific category. India has been elected with an overwhelming majority of 184 votes out of 192, where the minimum requirement was 128. This was for the eighth time that India has been elected to UNSC. India had last assumed the role of a non-permanent member at the UNSC in 2011-12. India’s membership of the UNSC comes at a critical time in the history of the UN. By 2021, it is likely that COVID-19 would have subsided and the contours of a new world order may have emerged. India should work with all member countries to promote global peace, security, resilience and equity.

Body:

Current significance of being elected as non-permanent member of UNSC for India:

- India will have a higher profile at the UN for the next two years as the non-permanent members have a collective veto over every resolution in the Council.

- Permanent members can prevent the adoption of resolutions by themselves, but they need at least nine votes to get a resolution passed.

- India will also have a rare peep into the consultations chamber of the UNSC, which is closed to non-members of the Council.
India’s election as a non-permanent member has ignited the hope that its quest for permanent membership of the Council may succeed.

Significance for UNSC:
- India has a record of contributing to some of the seminal resolutions of the UNSC.
- India’s reputation for taking balanced positions and consensus building will be welcomed by the other members.

India’s new approach towards UNSC as non-permanent member:
- Keeping in the mind the massive changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic both geopolitically as well as economically, External Affairs Minister said India has plans for a ‘Five S’ approach to the world from the UNSC seat — Samman (respect), samvad (dialogue), sahayog (cooperation), shanti (peace) and Samriddhi (prosperity).
- External Affairs Minister asserted that India’s overall objective during the fresh tenure in the UN Security Council will be the achievement of O.R.M.S. – New Orientation for a Reformed Multilateral System.
- India will strive to achieve a “concrete and result-oriented action at the security council for an effective response to international terrorism”.
- In the COVID and the post-COVID world, India will work towards a new orientation for a reformed multilateral system.
- There is a need to reform multilateralism to reflect contemporary realities and make a comprehensive approach to peace and security guided by dialogue, mutual respect and commitment to international law.
- As a rule-abiding democracy and as a positive contributor to the security of the global commons, India will work constructively with partners to overcome old and new fault-lines.
- New opportunities for progress, an effective response to international terrorism, reforming the multilateral system, comprehensive approach to international peace and security and promoting technology with a human touch as a driver of solutions have been underlined as the key priorities for the country in its stance at the UN Security Council.

Challenges:
- **Strategic aspects:**
  - India will get involved in many issues in which it may not have any direct interest.
  - Since India does not have a veto, it shall have to proceed cautiously not to offend anyone, lest they should go against it when a matter of vital interest for the country comes up in the Council.
- **Permanent membership:**
  - The debate on extending the permanent membership has thrown up many ideas, but till today, none of the proposals has the possibility of securing a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly and the votes of the five permanent members.
  - The permanent members are being adamant about protecting their privileged positions and also a majority of the UN members are against the privileges of the permanent members, particularly the veto being extended to new members. The opposition to the expansion is not India-specific.

Way forward:
India should once again become a consensus-builder, instead of being detached as it has become to be.
India’s singular objective as a non-permanent member should be to help build a stable and secure external environment.
In doing so, India will promote its own people’s prosperity, regional and global security and growth, and a rule-based world order.
It could emerge a partner of choice for developing and developed countries alike.
There is a deficit of international leadership on global issues, especially on security, migrant movement, poverty, and climate change.
Given this, India has an opportunity to promote well-balanced, common solutions.

Conclusion:
In recent times the credibility of UNSC has suffered a severe blow as it has been ineffective and inefficient in tackling the conflicts in different parts of the world such as Syria, Ukraine etc. in most of these situations UNSC has remained mere a mute spectator. Therefore, the demand for reforms in the council has become a necessity to restore its credibility and effectiveness in maintaining international peace and security.

Write a short note on WHO. Also discuss what are seen as its major successes and failures? (250 words)
Reference: Economic Times
Why the question:
The article brings to us detailed narration of the working of WHO as a global health organisation and its major successes and failures of the recent past.

Key Demand of the question:
The question is straightforward; one must write a short note on WHO and bring out its major successes and failures.

Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Explain briefly the background of WHO.

Body:
The WHO is an agency of the United Nations set up in 1948 to improve health globally. Its primary aim is “to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable”. It has no power to impose health policies on national governments, but acts as an adviser and offers guidance on best practice in disease prevention and health improvement. It has three main strands of work: aiming for universal health coverage in every country, preventing and responding to acute emergencies, promoting health and wellbeing for all.
Discuss its constitution; explain its mode of working.
List down its major successes and failures. Present case study on recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction:
The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that is concerned with international public health. It was established on 7 April 1948, and is headquartered
in Geneva, Switzerland. The WHO is a member of the United Nations Development Group. The WHO’s stated aim is “to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable”. It has three main strands of work: aiming for universal health coverage in every country, preventing and responding to acute emergencies, promoting health and wellbeing for all.

It has been at the forefront of coordinating global response against the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet the role and its response were criticized for being inadequate.

Body

WHO: Organization, objectives and role

- The World Health Assembly (WHA) is the legislative and supreme body of WHO. It meets annually and reviews various works of WHO. It also appoints the Director-General every five years.
- The WHO operates “Goodwill Ambassadors”; members of the arts, sports, or other fields of public life aimed at drawing attention to WHO’s initiatives and projects.
- The WHO supports the development and distribution of safe and effective vaccines, pharmaceutical diagnostics, and drugs, such as through the Expanded Programme on Immunization.

Objectives:

- Its primary objective is “the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health”.
- To act as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work.
- To establish and maintain effective collaboration with the United Nations, specialized agencies, governmental health administrations, professional groups and such other organizations as may be deemed appropriate.
- To provide assistance to the Governments, upon request, in strengthening health services.
- To promote cooperation among scientific and professional groups which contribute to the advancement of health.

Role played by WHO

- Providing leadership on global health. Initiatives like triple billion goals for better health, convention on tobacco control, TB elimination, campaign and awareness on Anti-microbial resistance are some examples.
- Shaping research agenda
- Advocating for Evidence based and ethical policy.
- Monitoring and assessing health trends.
- However, it has no power to impose health policies on national governments, but acts as an adviser and offers guidance on best practice in disease prevention and health improvement.

Major successes and failures of WHO:
Successes:

- The WHO is widely credited with leading a 10-year campaign to eradicate smallpox in the 1970s and has also led global efforts to end polio, a battle that is in its final stages.
- In the past few years, the WHO has also coordinated battles against viral epidemics of Ebola in Congo and Zika in Brazil.
- In response to the yellow fever outbreak in Brazil, some 3.5 million doses of vaccine from the emergency stockpile were deployed to the country through the International Coordinating Group on Vaccine Provision for yellow fever in 2017.
- The WHO has also mounted increasing efforts against cancer, which now takes as many lives in the developing countries as in the affluent ones.
- The fight against tobacco, the largest single cause of preventable death in both men and women, is part of WHO effort in every country.
- In 1997, WHO (in collaboration with Canada) rolled out the Global Public Health Intelligence Network (GPHIN), which took advantage of information on the Internet to function as an early warning system for potential epidemics.
- The WHO’s condemnation of the promotion of artificial infant-formula products in developing countries also attracted widespread attention.
- The worldwide control of infantile diarrhea with oral rehydration therapy was another great advance, based on very simple principles.

Failures:

- In the current COVID-19 disease outbreak, while many have praised the WHO’s leadership, Trump has accused it of being China-centric and giving bad advice about the emerging pandemic.
- Despite initially declaring that Malaria would be eradicated, the WHO has had to concede that the disease has proved more persistent and resistant to drugs than it originally realized.
- There is also the depressing fact that Cholera, Diarrhea and Tuberculosis are still killing thousands of children and adults each year in the developing world despite cures being available.
- In the case of TB, misuse of antibiotics has caused severe problems with the disease becoming resistant to the initial treatments.

Challenges faced by WHO:

- **Donor dependency**: with only 30 percent of its budget under WHO control, the organization’s agenda is guided by donor priorities. This goes against the principle of equity, which requires all countries’ requirements to be included in its agenda.
  - *Eg.*: With USA suspending its WHO contribution, especially during global pandemic it becomes even more important to ensure WHO has a stable financial resource.
- **Unable to respond effectively** to existing and anticipated global health challenges-
  - *Eg.*: faulted response to the 2014 Ebola outbreak. It also failed in insisting more transparency by China regarding Coronavirus and the morbidity attached.
It took till about the middle of January for WHO to suggest human-to-human transmission of the virus, toeing the China line for the first few weeks of the year, as per reports.

- **WHO cannot enforce accountability** for nations’ actions. For instance, delayed reported of covid-19 and gagging of media and press from reporting it at the earliest.

- **Widening gap between the agency’s mandate and capabilities**: A report by independent experts concluded that WHO lacks the capacity to deliver a full emergency public health response. WHO requires a systematic overhaul of its structure and practices to build this capacity.

- **Lack balance of staff skills**: nearly half of WHO staff includes medical specialists with only 1.6% social scientists, and 4% lawyers. Although medical specialists are crucial for technical expertise, other staff composition is needed to understand the local traditions and culture, manage international relations and perform some of its core functions such as creating rules and principles for global health.

- **Emergence of new global institutions**: which have challenged the WHO’s leadership in global health such as Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, GAVI Alliance, and Unitaid etc.

**Measures to empower WHO:**

- **Increase the WHO’s technical capacities and capabilities**: Creating new departments focused on science, antimicrobial resistance and digital health will also broaden the WHO’s range of expertise and keep up with the latest public health challenges and opportunities.

- **Help focus on the mission of WHO**: which does not have the capacity to do everything and has frequently found itself responding to situations rather than setting its own agenda. It may also encourage member states to provide additional resources if they have a better idea of where that money is going.

- **Coordinate with other global players**: as these reforms do not address how the organization should interact with major global health players like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Doctors Without Borders.

- **Mobilize more resources**: WHO’s current biennial budget is 4.42 billion, with overwhelming majority dictated by donors and their priorities, which leaves the organization limited control over the funding.

**Conclusion**

The countries should stop politicizing the virus and ramp up their capabilities to fight the pandemic without overwhelming the healthcare infrastructure. What is needed now is global cooperation on the issue rather than issuing blame on each other. It augurs well for nations if WHO was strengthened with adequate finances.

**Discuss the consequences of US withdrawal from the WHO on the global public health. (250 words)**

**Reference:** *The Hindu*

**Introduction:**

The United States (US) has decided to cut off US payments to the World Health Organisation (WHO) during the Covid-19 pandemic. US President halted his government’s funding of the multilateral body accusing it of “severe” mismanagement of the COVID-19 epidemic. The US has also
criticised the WHO for being China-centric and has alleged that earlier WHO had criticized US’s ban on travel from and to China. However, the US has made it clear that it would continue to engage with the WHO in pursuit of meaningful reforms.

Body:

India refused to criticise the United States defunding of the World Health Organisation (WHO), saying that it was currently occupied with the domestic campaign to defeat the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Funding of the WHO:

There are four kinds of contributions that make up funding for the WHO.

- **Assessed contributions** are the dues countries pay in order to be a member of the Organization. The amount each Member State must pay is calculated relative to the country’s wealth and population.

- **Voluntary contributions** come from Member States, in addition to their assessed contribution or from other partners. They can range from flexible to highly earmarked.

- **Core voluntary contributions** allow less well-funded activities to benefit from a better flow of resources and ease implementation bottlenecks that arise when immediate financing is lacking.

- **Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP) Contributions** were started in 2011 to improve and strengthen the sharing of influenza viruses with human pandemic potential, and to increase the access of developing countries to vaccines and other pandemic related supplies.

Impact of US’ halting funds to WHO:

- The capricious decision to withdraw from WHO will have dire consequences for global public health.
- The US contributes almost 15% of the WHO’s total funding and almost 31% of the member states’ donations.
- The departure of the U.S. will be a significant blow to the WHO in terms of loss of technical expertise and an annual funding of about $450 million.
- The WHO now will have to suspend the country’s voting rights and deny access to its services, as per Article 7 of its Constitution.
- The halt of this fund comes when the global caseload of COVID-19 approaches 2 million, with the most cases in the US.
- For the WHO, the loss of about 15% of its total funding is bound to have an impact the world over.
- However, unless other countries do the same as the US, the move may not severely restrict the WHO operations.
- Halting that payment is expected to hit many health initiatives across the world, including in India.

Weaknesses in the Global Health Body

- The capricious decision to withdraw from WHO will have dire consequences for global public health.
The departure of the U.S. will be a significant blow to the WHO in terms of loss of technical expertise and, according to Mr. Trump, an annual funding of about $450 million.

The pandemic has clearly brought to the fore several shortcomings and weaknesses in the global health body.

For instance, the 2005 revision of the International Health Regulations made it mandatory for countries to notify the WHO of all events that may constitute an international public health emergency and to “respond to requests for verification of information regarding such events”.

Yet, the WHO has limited power to ensure compliance by member States, including limitations in independently verifying member states’ official reports.

Impacts on USA:

- If the U.S. was majorly involved in the 2005 IHR revision, it will now have no role to play in strengthening the WHO.
- It will lose a seat at the table to determine the virus strain to be used for developing influenza vaccines (flu killed over 34,000 people in the U.S. in 2018-19), and have no access to new influenza virus samples for research.
- With no more U.S. scientists embedded in the WHO in key roles, including outbreak response teams like the one that visited Wuhan, it will lose out on health intelligence that will compromise the country’s response to international disease outbreaks. In the end, none gains from a further weakened WHO.

However, there are contrary views too:

- Administration statements reaffirming U.S. support for NATO, as well as Administration actions to improve U.S. military capabilities in Europe for deterring potential Russian aggression in Europe;
- the Administration’s willingness to impose and maintain a variety of sanctions on Russia;
- the Administration’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) construct for guiding U.S. policy toward the Indo-Pacific region;
- the Administration’s more confrontational policy toward China, including its plan to increase funding for U.S. foreign assistance programs to compete against China for influence in Africa, Asia, and the Americas;
- S. trade actions that, in the view of these observers, are intended to make free trade more sustainable over the long run by ensuring that it is fair to all parties, including the United States;
- the Administration’s belated support of Hong Kong’s prodemocracy protestors, its criticism of China’s human rights practices toward its Muslim Uyghur population, and its emphasis on religious freedom as a component of human rights.

Conclusion:

Although, the trend of transition from Unipolarity to multipolarity is good, the lack of finances, US’s clout does matter. In a multipolar world, it is difficult to rely on USA for leading the global institutions and global alliances. The other nations should work together in tandem and help achieve the sustainable development goals.
Covid can be a catalyst for change to ensure a more sustainable & equitable world.

Comment. (250 words)

Reference: The Print

Why this question:
The coronavirus has shone a spotlight on inequalities of all kinds. It poses maximum risk to the health of the most vulnerable, and its social and economic impact is concentrated on those who are least able to cope. Unless we act now, 100 million more people could be pushed into extreme poverty, and we could see famines of historic proportions.

Key demand of the question:
One must discuss how the high levels of inequality have created the global fragility that is being exposed and exploited during the Covid-19 pandemic. What needs to be done in this regard to ensure the global unity through a new social contract.

Directive word:
Comment– here we have to express our knowledge and understanding of the issue and form an overall opinion there upon.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Briefly explain the issue of inequality and other issues being faced in the world due to the pandemic.

Body:
To start with, explain the issues that are being faced as a fallout of the pandemic.
more than 50 per cent of 20-year-olds in countries with very high human development are in higher education. In low human development countries, that figure is 3 per cent. Even more shocking, nearly 17 per cent of the children born 20 years ago in those countries have already died.

The anger fueling recent social movements, from the BlackLivesMatter and anti-racism campaign that has spread around the world in the aftermath of George Floyd’s killing, to the #MeToo movement, which featured a chorus of brave women calling out the powerful men who have abused them, is yet another sign of utter disillusionment with the status quo.
And the two seismic shifts of our age – the digital revolution and the climate crisis – threaten to entrench inequality and injustice even more deeply.

Provide the measures that needs to be taken up immediately and in long term to improve the lives of the migrants.

Covid-19 is a human tragedy. But it has also created a generational opportunity to build a more equal and sustainable world, based on two central ideas: a new social contract, and a new global deal.

A new social contract will link together governments, their people, civil society organisations, businesses and others in common causes.

Education and digital technology must act as the two great enablers and equalisers, by providing lifelong opportunities on how to learn, to adapt and take on new skills in the knowledge economy.

We need fair taxation on income and wealth, and a new generation of social protection policies, with safety nets that include universal health coverage and the possibility of a universal basic income extended to everyone.

Discuss what new role can the global institutions like UN, WHO can play in future.

Conclusion:
Conclude with a balanced way forward.

Introduction:
COVID-19 pandemic is set to drastically alter geopolitics and human society. The pandemic is unprecedented and has led to radical uncertainty. COVID-19 would change the world and reshape the human society. The pandemic has shone a spotlight on inequalities of all kinds. It poses
maximum risk to the health of the most vulnerable, and its social and economic impact is concentrated on those who are least able to cope.

Body:

**Challenges being faced across the globe:**

- It is estimated that around 100 million more people could be pushed into extreme poverty, and we could see famines of historic proportions.
- Between 1980 and 2016, the world’s richest 1 per cent have captured 27 per cent of the total cumulative growth in income.
- Multiple inequalities intersect and reinforce each other across the generations, defining the lives and expectations of millions of people before they are even born.
- For instance, more than 50 per cent of 20-year-olds in countries with very high human development are in higher education. In low human development countries, that figure is 3 per cent. Even more shocking, nearly 17 per cent of the children born 20 years ago in those countries have already died.
- The anger fueling recent social movements, from the BlackLivesMatter and anti-racism campaign that has spread around the world in the aftermath of George Floyd’s killing, to the #MeToo movement, which featured a chorus of brave women calling out the powerful men who have abused them, is yet another sign of utter disillusionment with the status quo.
- And the two seismic shifts of our age – the digital revolution and the climate crisis – threaten to entrench inequality and injustice even more deeply.

**COVID as a catalyst for change:**

- Covid-19, a human tragedy, has also created a generational opportunity to build a more equal and sustainable world, based on two central ideas:

  **A new social contract:**
  
  - A new social contract will link together governments, their people, civil society organisations, businesses and others in common causes.
  
  - Education and digital technology must act as the two great enablers and equalisers, by providing lifelong opportunities on how to learn, to adapt and take on new skills in the knowledge economy.
  
  - Fair taxation on income and wealth, and a new generation of social protection policies, with safety nets that include universal health coverage and the possibility of a universal basic income extended to everyone.

  **A new global deal:**
  
  - To make the new social contract possible, we need a new global deal to ensure that power, wealth and opportunities are shared more broadly and fairly at the international level.
• The new global deal must be based on a fair model of globalisation, on the rights and dignity of every human being, on living in balance with nature, on respect for the rights of future generations, and on success measured in human rather than economic terms.

• We need global governance that is based on full, inclusive and equal participation in global institutions.

• Developing countries must have a stronger voice, from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to the boards of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and beyond.

• We need a more inclusive and balanced multilateral trading system that enables developing countries to move up global value chains.

• Reform of the debt architecture and access to affordable credit must create fiscal space to generate investment in a green, equitable economy.

Conclusion:
The COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, involving as it does far too many variables. The very complexity of the novel coronavirus leads to radical uncertainty. Hence, it unlikely that the world will ever be the same again. Thus, there is a need for the global community to work together by taking all the countries into confidence and supporting them. The new global deal and the new social contract will put the world back on track to realise the promise of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals — the globally-agreed vision of peace and prosperity to be achieved by 2030. **Together we stand, divided we fall** – the adage holds perfectly apt for the coming times.

A formal revival and re-invigoration of the Quad is called for to maintain peace and tranquillity and to ensure observance of the UN Law of the Seas. Examine. (250 words)

Reference: *Indian Express*

**Why this question:**
The time for ambivalence is over and while India will have to fight its own territorial battles with determination, this is the moment to seek external balancing. It is also time to seek an enlargement of this grouping into a partnership of the like-minded.

**Key demand of the question:**
The question wants us to dig deeper into the lacunae of public healthcare in India and provide solutions as to how the current crisis can be turned into an opportunity.

**Directive word:**
*Critically analyze*— here we have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts, and present them as a whole in a summary. Based on our discussion we have to form a concluding opinion on the issue.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**
write a few introductory lines on what is the QUAD.

**Body:**
Discuss in points the need for revival of QUAD for India and the other like-minded nations. Given Chinese intransigence and our misreading of their imperialist-expansionist intent, Sino-Indian tensions are likely to persist.

If India is not to cede ground physically or diplomatically, it must muster all elements of its “comprehensive national power”, including the maritime, and create a strong negotiating position.
Apart from the balance of forces on land favouring China, there is also the Beijing-Islamabad Axis that awaits activation.

Keeping tensions confined to the Himalayan arena is, therefore, not only militarily advantageous to China but a continental focus also helps to keep India contained in a “South-Asia box”.

If Exercise Malabar and the Quadrilateral concept are at long last going to be leveraged to make common cause in the maritime domain, the provenance of both needs to be seen in perspective.

Now discuss the challenges in organizing the multi-country group like QUAD.

Discuss the possible solutions and how India can incorporate other like-minded countries to join QUAD.

**Conclusion:**
Based on your discussion, form a fair and a balanced conclusion on the given issue.

**Introduction**

The past year has seen the revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a mechanism which enables dialogue between four major democracies within the Indo-Pacific region, Australia, Japan, India, and the US, on issues of regional security. Known more colloquially as “the Quad” - its revival signals an important development within the Indo-Pacific, and reflects a convergence of strategic interests between four major democracies of the region.

**Body**

**Quad: Significance**

- The Quad first emerged as a cooperative response to the devastation of the 2004 tsunami, with the navies of India, Australia, Japan, and the US engaged in the coordinated delivery of humanitarian and disaster relief.

- In 2007, Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, an early advocate of the Indo-Pacific, took steps to formalise the grouping through an initial summit and joint naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal.

- Underscored by principles of openness, freedom of movement, and respect for the rules-based international order, the Quad builds on a complex and overlapping web of bilateral and trilateral alliances and partnerships between the four nations.

- Its revival, albeit at officials level only, offers a constructive platform for embedding core principles into the narrative of the emerging regional order, while building the trust and confidence needed to support cooperative initiatives between the nations involved, and others.

**Formal revival and re-invigoration of the Quad is the need of the hour**

- In the current scenario, given Chinese intransigence and our misreading of their imperialist-expansionist intent, Sino-Indian tensions are likely to persist.

- If India is not to cede ground physically or diplomatically, it must muster all elements of its “comprehensive national power”, including the maritime, and create a strong negotiating position.

- Apart from the balance of forces on land favouring China, there is also the Beijing-Islamabad Axis that awaits activation.

- Keeping tensions confined to the Himalayan arena is, therefore, not only militarily advantageous to China but a continental focus also helps to keep India contained in a “South-Asia box”.

- It is also time to seek an enlargement of this grouping into a partnership of the like-minded.
Other nations feeling the brunt of Chinese brawn may be willing to join an “Indo-Pacific concord” to maintain peace and tranquillity and to ensure observance of the UN Law of the Seas.

News of Australia being re-invited to participate in the Quad deserves a conditional welcome, given Canberra’s past inconsistency and political flip-flops.

Way forward

- Any ambition to formalise the Quad as a substantive manifestation of a free and open Indo-Pacific is likely to encounter difficulties. The future of the Quad beyond its current consultative format is not certain.
- Given the complex array of interests at play across the dynamic region, key partners are more likely to preference loose coalitions based on dialogue and cooperation over more fixed, institutionalised formats.
- The opportunity to discuss emerging regional issues, from piracy to maritime pollution and disaster management, through such a platform should be seen as a positive.
- At the same time, assuring ASEAN of its role and relevance to Indo-Pacific, including through established dialogue mechanisms like the EAS, could reinforce notions of inclusivity, build support for the key rules shaping behaviour, and mitigate against the threat of strategic drift within the region.
- Engaging others, including China, in dialogue about the Indo-Pacific project through such mechanisms will be integral to realising the long-term vision for a stable and inclusive region.

Conclusion

The time for ambivalence is over and while India will have to fight its own territorial battles with determination, this is the moment to seek external balancing. It is also time to seek an enlargement of this grouping into a partnership of the like-minded.

Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.

What can be the geopolitical and geo-economic consequences of COVID-19? Discuss.
(250 words)

Reference: weforum.org

Why the question:
The question is amidst the current pandemic the entire world is witnessing and its effect on the geopolitics and geo-economics of the world.

Key Demand of the question:
Explain in detail with relevant examples the effect of covid-19 on the geopolitics and geo-economics of the world.

Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
As the COVID-19 corona virus outbreak continues to accelerate its spread worldwide, the international community is facing a global crisis with public health geopolitical changes/shifts and global economic repressions.

Body:
Discuss in detail the possible impacts of covid-19 on the geopolitics and geo-economics. COVID-19’s geopolitical impact depends heavily on the nature of the public response and the effectiveness of international cooperation. Discuss the tensions between US-China, India-China etc. Discuss how it will impact the politics around the world. Suggest solutions to address these issues. Explain how a coordinated global environment response would reinvigorate internal institutions such as WHO etc. Discuss the impact of COVID-19 on geo-economics; economic slump, impact on markets, falling oil demands etc.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction:
The COVID-19 epidemic is now growing exponentially. Its economic impact is already more severe than SARS or MERS. The political consequences are harder to predict, but could be significant and long-lasting. The COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed human misery, social disruption and economic devastation on the world.

Body:
The geopolitical consequences of COVID-19:

- **Threat of Deglobalization: Globalization could face strong criticism.**
  - The pandemic will impact human values and conduct.
  - The diminution in human values could have a negative impact on the concept of an international community. Each nation would tend to look inwards, concentrating on its narrowly defined national interests rather than looking for cooperation and collaboration with other countries.

- **International Institutions under fire:**
  - Existing international institutions such as the United Nations, the United Nations Security Council and the World Health Organization (WHO) are being blamed of having failed to measure up to the challenge posed by the pandemic.
  - The UN Security Council has not been able to take any concrete action in dealing with the situation.
  - WHO has been blamed of being China-centric. WHO’s underestimation and inaction during the initial phase could have amplified the pandemic to such large scales.
  - The UN and other global organizations have not been able to ensure a common vision or approach among the many nations. They have failed to ensure cooperation and collaboration among its members.
  - That prestigious global institutions are under attack, even in such critical times, speaks about the mood prevailing across the world.
• Economic shock:
  ▪ Given the disruption in the global economy, the World Bank has predicted negative growth for most nations. India’s growth forecast for the current fiscal year has been estimated at 1.5% to 2.8%.
  ▪ Globalization, global trade and global value chains have been a major cohesive force in integrating the world. Contraction of the economy and the loss of millions of jobs across all segments will complicate the situation.

• China’s dominance:
  ▪ Far-reaching changes due to the pandemic can be anticipated in the realm of geo-economics and geopolitics.
  ▪ By offering medical aid and other essential supplies to several Asian and African countries during the current pandemic threat, China would gain a geopolitical advantage by its action.
  ▪ China with its Belt and Road Initiative, which seeks to combine regional connectivity alongside gaining a virtual economic and substantial stranglehold across Asia, is ostensibly preparing the way for a China-centric multilateral globalisation framework.

• A faltering West:
  ▪ COVID-19 would effectively change the existing global order that has existed since the late 1940s. The geopolitical fallout of this pandemic could be the decreased dominance of the west.
  ▪ The U.S. has been weakened economically and politically due to COVID-19. The U.S.’s capacity to play a critical role in world affairs seems to have diminished. The United States will be compelled to cede ground to the rising Chinese power.
  ▪ The Brexit came as a body blow to the EU. Europe too has been badly affected by the pandemic. Germany which has played a major role in promoting EU is turning inwards. Both France and a post-Brexit United Kingdom will also be focusing more on domestic issues. Europe, in the short and medium term, will prove incapable of defining and defending its common interests, leaving it with very little influence in world affairs.

• West Asia:
  ▪ In West Asia, both Saudi Arabia and Iran are set to face difficult times.
  ▪ The oil price meltdown will aggravate an already difficult situation across the region.
  ▪ Given Israel’s non-dependency on oil and it being relatively less impacted due to the pandemic, it might emerge stronger out of the pandemic.

The geo-economic consequences of COVID-19:
• The 2003 SARS outbreak, which infected about 8,000 people and killed 774, cost the global economy an estimated US$50 billion.
• The 2015 MERS outbreak in South Korea, meanwhile, infected 200 people and killed 38, but led to estimated costs of US$8.5 billion.
Already the coronavirus epidemic has had a greater economic effect than either of their predecessors. Wall Street has joined a global sell-off; the S&P 500 index of US companies fell by 11.5% the week commencing on February 24, the worst week since the 2008 crisis.

The supply chain consequences are real, however, and affect some sectors and assets more than others, from commodities such as oil to supply chains vulnerable to such interruptions as those that cause problems for just-in-time auto manufacturing.

The fragility of the global economy, which has high levels of indebtedness and asset bubbles, is a legacy of the way in which the 2008 global credit crisis was managed rather than solved.

As pointed out in the World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report 2020, there are a number of tipping points in the economic system and the economic consequence of a shock to the global system is likely to be a correction.

China, which is already one of the most prominent nations of the world and an important player in international institutions, could grow even stronger.

China is considered indispensable as the world’s supplier of manufactured goods.

China now seeks to benefit from its early recovery from the pandemic to take advantage of the problems of the rest of the world, by using its manufacturing capability to its geo-economic advantage.

The current pandemic could hollow out the financial viability of many companies, institutions and banks across the world. There are reports of China’s intentions to acquire financial assets and stakes in banks and companies across the world, taking advantage of the scaled-down value of their assets.

Impacts on India:

- The economic downturn might reduce India’s room for manoeuvring in global affairs.
- The increasing Chinese investment in South Asia could see its influence grow in the South Asian region and diminish India’s influence in the region.
- India’s leverage in West Asia will suffer due to the declining oil prices.
- The large Indian expatriate community in West Asia would be severely affected and may seek repatriation back to India. This would substantially reduce the inflow of foreign funds to India from the region.

Conclusion:

The relative ability of nations to recognize and respond to the geopolitical risks and opportunities created by the COVID-19 pandemic—especially the relative economic, political, and social outcomes between the U.S. and China—may prove critical to defining an emergent global equilibrium. Because the pandemic is still evolving, its final impact will remain unknown for months, if not years, in terms of how resulting changes may fundamentally transform the balance of global influence and resulting equilibrium. The responses by major and regional powers to the pandemic and how they are interpreted domestically and internationally are already having and will continue to have significant geopolitical and geo-economic implications. Those responses will prove to be highly consequential in the long term, especially when it comes to how nations manage the central levers of geopolitical power—credibility, economic performance, social cohesion, military capability, diplomatic engagement, and global leadership—and great powers’ relative global influence.
The Economic Survey for 2019-20 has pointed out that generally Free Trade Agreements have been beneficial for India. Explain the underlying reasons and discuss what should be the way ahead to change this experience into a positive outcome. (250 words)

Reference: The Print

Why this question:
The Economic Survey for 2019-20 has pointed out that generally FTAs have been beneficial for India. Between 1993 and 2018, India’s exports of manufactured products grew at an annual average of 13.4% to partners with which it has trade agreements and such imports grew 12.7%, it says. In comparison, its overall goods exports grew at an average of 10.9% and imports 8.6% during this period.

Speaking at an online interaction, the External Affairs Minister said era of multilateralism is over, and there are ways of engaging with the world that are not FTA-centric.

Key demand of the question:
India signed a series of Free Trade Agreements (FTA) in Asia that came into force in the 2000s. Across industry and policy-makers, a view has emerged that these FTAs have not served India well, and even actively damaged Indian industry. Thus one has to analyse in detail the aspects of FTAs with respect to Indian economy.

Directive word:
Explain – Clarify the topic by giving a detailed account as to how and why it occurred, or what is the particular context. You must be defining key terms where ever appropriate, and substantiate with relevant associated facts.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
In brief define what FTAs are and present the views of the Economic Survey 2019-20 about the same.

Body:
Explain in what way the success of an FTA should be judged against its objective of enhancing trade. Discuss the factors responsible for such an effect and also suggest what steps should be taken to ensure better realization of the FTAs.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction

A free trade agreement is a pact between two or more nations to reduce barriers to imports and exports among them. Under a free trade policy, goods and services can be bought and sold across international borders with little or no government tariffs, quotas, subsidies, or prohibitions to inhibit their exchange.

Body

Free Trade Agreements

How FTAs have been beneficial for India

- The Economic Survey for 2019-20 has pointed out that generally FTAs have been beneficial for India. From the perspective of trade balance, India has gained in terms of 0.7 per cent increase in the trade surplus per year for manufactured products and of 2.3 per cent increase in trade surplus per year for total merchandise

- Between 1993 and 2018, India’s exports of manufactured products grew at an annual average of 13.4% to partners with which it has trade agreements and such imports grew 12.7%, it says.
In comparison, its overall goods exports grew at an average of 10.9% and imports 8.6% during this period.

At least seven of the fourteen trade agreements with partners including Bhutan, Singapore, Chile, Nepal, the ASEAN, the MERCOSUR and Afghanistan have benefited exports of manufactured products from the country.

Four of the agreements including ones with Sri Lanka, Thailand, SAFTA and BIMSTEC have not affected exports. It is only in the case of Japan and South Korea that exports of manufactured goods have suffered.

Future prospects of Free Trade Agreements

The government is very clear that ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ is neither protectionist nor isolationist. It’s about getting our act together to improve domestic production of finished goods, gain from better integration with the global value chain and ensure fair trade.

After its pull-out from the China-dominated Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement in November last year, New Delhi had decided to step up talks for a slew of “balanced and fair” trade pacts, in contrast with earlier FTAs that “worsened India’s trade deficit”.

India had aimed at a “limited” deal with the US, which had been in the works for several months, and a broader free trade agreement (FTA) after the presidential elections there in November. Recently the commerce minister suggested that India and US were close to closing the limited trade deal.

Similarly, India wanted to clinch a trade deal with Australia—an RCEP member—this year and revive stalled talks with the EU. New Delhi wants to speed up talks with European Free Trade Association members – Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein – for a separate trade pact in parallel to its discussions with the EU.

It had also planned to launch or fast-track bilateral talks for FTAs with the UK, South Africa and Mexico.

Conclusion

India’s tactical shift from multilateralism to bilateral engagements comes at a time of heightened uncertainties in global trade, as countries world-over increasingly resort to protectionism to help local industries. It’s also seeking to rework its existing FTAs with Asean, Japan, Malaysia and South Korea to trim its trade deficit with these nations. With the above negotiations in place, India hopes to have a greater foothold in the world trade and pull the economy further.

Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian Diaspora.

Explain the key features and importance of CAATSA. Also discuss its implications to India. (250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why the question:
The US has urged all its allies and partners to forgo transactions with Russia that risk triggering sanctions under the Countering America’s Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). Thus the question.

**Key Demand of the question:**
The question is straightforward; one must explain the key features and importance of CAATSA and discuss its implications to India.

**Directive:**
**Explain** – Clarify the topic by giving a detailed account as to how and why it occurred, or what is the particular context. You must be defining key terms where ever appropriate, and substantiate with relevant associated facts.

**Structure of the answer:**
*Introduction:*
Start by discussing what CAATSA is.

*Body:*
Enacted in 2017, it is a US federal law that imposed sanctions on Iran, North Korea and Russia. It includes sanctions against countries that engage in significant transactions with Russia’s defence and intelligence sectors. The Act empowers the US President to impose at least five of the 12 listed sanctions on persons engaged in a “significant transaction” with Russian defence and intelligence sectors. Discuss in detail the nuances associated with it. Explain in detail its implications upon India.

*Conclusion:*
Conclude with way forward.

*Introduction:*
The Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) is a US federal law, enacted in 2017 and came into effect from January 2018, that imposed sanctions on Iran, North Korea and Russia. It includes sanctions against countries that engage in significant transactions with Russia’s defence and intelligence sectors. The Act empowers the US President to impose at least five of the 12 listed sanctions on persons engaged in a “significant transaction” with Russian defence and intelligence sectors.

Recently, the USA has reiterated its position and asked all its allies and partners, including India, to stop transactions with Russia.

*Body:*

**Importance of CAATSA:**
- This bill was an amendment to the underlying Iran sanctions bill.
- The main aim of this bill is to counter the acts of aggression through prescribed punitive measures.
- The sanctions represent the implementation of multiple legal authorities.

**Key features of CAATSA:**
- The Countering America’s Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), aims at taking punitive measures against Russia, Iran, and North Korea.
- The Act primarily deals with sanctions on the Russian oil and gas industry, defence and security sector, and financial institutions, in the backdrop of its military intervention in Ukraine and its alleged meddling in the 2016 US presidential elections.
The Act empowers the US President to impose at least five of 12 listed sanctions enumerated in Section 235 on persons engaged in a “significant transaction” with the Russian defence and intelligence sectors.

The State Department has notified 39 Russian entities including almost all major Russian defence manufacturing and export companies/entities.

It includes sanctions against countries that engage in significant transactions with Russia’s defense and intelligence sectors.

The bill also provides sanctions for activities concerning: cybersecurity, crude oil projects, financial institutions, corruption, human rights abuses, evasion of sanctions, transactions with Russian defence or intelligence sectors, export pipelines, privatization of state-owned assets by government officials, and arms transfers to Syria.

Various kinds of sanctions include:

- prohibition on loans to the sanctioned person.
- prohibition of Export-Import bank assistance for exports to sanctioned persons.
- prohibition on procurement by United States Government to procure goods or services from the sanctioned person.
- denial of visas to persons closely associated with the sanctioned person.

Importance of CAATSA for India:

- Seventy per cent of Indian military hardware is Russian in origin.
- India is set to receive the S-400 Triumf air defence system.
- While the US has become its second-largest defence supplier, mainly of aircraft and artillery, India still relies heavily on Russian equipment, such as submarines and missiles that the US has been unwilling to provide.
- Recently India had planned for the purchase of Mig-19 fighter aircraft with Russia at an estimated Rs. 18,148 crore. The U.S has reacted to countries, including India, on sanctions for the purchase of Russian arms has not changed.

Implications of CAATSA on India:

- The USA President was given the authority in 2018 to waive CAATSA sanctions on a case-by-case basis. However, the USA has repeatedly stated that India should not assume it will get a waiver.
- Now India could also face USA sanctions for purchasing the S-400 Triumf missile defense system from Russia under the CAATSA.
- If implemented stringently, CAATSA would impact Indian defence procurement from Russia.
- Apart from S-400s, India has procurements like 1135.6 frigates and Ka-226T helicopters as well as joint ventures like Indo Russian Aviation Ltd, Multi-Role Transport Aircraft Ltd and Brahmos Aerospace.
- It would also affect purchase of spares, components, raw materials and other assistance.
- The bulk of India’s military equipment is of Soviet/Russian origin including the nuclear submarine INS Chakra, the Kilo-class conventional submarine, the supersonic Brahmos cruise missile, the MiG and Sukhoi fighters, MiG helicopters, and the Vikramaditya aircraft carrier.
• Although the sanctions are not directly imposed on India, it affects India nevertheless. The major reason for this is the nature of relationship India has with Iran and Russia. India happens to have strong trade ties with both these nation states.
• No, as per the provisions of the bill, US imposes sanctions on all its adversaries, as well as all countries and firms dealing with these adversaries.
• So, if India does not remove ties with Russia and Iran, the US may invoke sanctions against India. India cannot afford to lose the growing diplomatic relations with the US, but neither can it afford to forego supplies of defence and oil from Russia and Iran.

Impact on India-US bilateral ties:
• CAATSA impacts Indo-US ties, and dents the image of the US as a reliable partner at a time when it is projecting India as a key player in its Indo-Pacific strategy.
• US administration for countries like India has favoured relief, citing the “strategic opportunity” that India presents, and also the opportunity “to trade in arms with India”.
• Indeed, the US defence industry sees India as a major market, Over the last decade, deals with India have grown from near zero to $15 billion.
• Both in term of the number and value of contracts, the US is way ahead of other major suppliers.
• The CAATSA exemption also underlines the growing defence and security cooperation that has seen India sign a logistics pact with the US.
• Also US designated India as a Major Defence Partner, and both countries coming together on Indo-Pacific strategy, the newly resurrected Quad.

Conclusion:
The defence procurement for India has become significant amid deadly clashes with China on Line of Actual Control (LAC). Russia is an all-weather defence partner of India. However, India needs to balance its relation with both Russia and USA, so that its national interest is not compromised.

Discuss the relevant options available before India to curb the growing Chinese muscularity in the South China Sea. (250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why the question:
The question is based on the ongoing issues in the South China Sea (SCS) region and the growing influence of China over it.

Key Demand of the question:
Discuss the growing muscularity of China in the SCS region; explain the relevant options available to India to tackle the situation.

Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Start by explaining the importance of SCS – The South China Sea (SCS) is important not just to its littoral countries. It has been a transit point for trade since early medieval times, contains abundantly rich fisheries, and is a repository of mineral deposits and hydrocarbon reserves.

Body:
Explain the implications of growing Chinese muscularity in the SCS region.
From India’s perspective, foreign and security policy in its larger neighborhood covers the entire expanse of the Asia-Pacific and extends to the Persian Gulf and West Asia. India straddles, and is the fulcrum of, the region between the Suez and Shanghai, between West and East Asia, and between the Mediterranean and the SCS. The SCS carries merchandise to and from India. It follows that India has a stake in the SCS, just as China has in the Indian Ocean.

Take hints from the article and explain the available options before India.

Conclusion:
Conclude with solutions and way ahead.

Introduction:
South China Sea is an arm of western Pacific Ocean in Southeast Asia. It is south of China, east & south of Vietnam, west of the Philippines and north of the island of Borneo. In the middle of the global coronavirus pandemic, China has been busy increasing its presence in the South China Sea. If the dispute were to aggravate, Asia-Pacific researchers believe it could have serious consequences for diplomatic relations and stability in the region.

Body:

China claims most of the contested sea, reaching almost to the Philippines shores and has built artificial islands with heavy military developments on them which worries the neighboring nations and it rejects the UN backed international tribunal ruling as well. The nine dash line asserted by China violates the principle of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ).

Developments in the past in SCS:

- Growing Chinese assertiveness in the SCS is visible in the increased patrolling and live-fire exercising by Chinese naval vessels; ramming and sinking of fishing vessels of other claimant countries; renaming of SCS features; and building of runways, bunkers, and habitation for the possible long-term stationing of personnel on the atolls claimed by China.
- Chinese exploration and drilling vessels compete aggressively with those of other littoral countries in the disputed waters.
- The Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled that Chinese claims over 90 percent of the South China Sea area are illegitimate and under UNCLOS, China is intruding into the Philippines’ sovereign waters as the 9-dash line which includes the Scarborough shoal and crosses into the Philippines EEZ.
- China out rightly rejected the ruling. China prefers bilateral negotiations with the other parties. But many of its neighbors argue that China’s relative size and clout give it an unfair advantage.

Recent developments in the SCS:

- The focus this time is on two disputed archipelagos of the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands in the middle of the South China Sea waters, between the territory of Vietnam and the Philippines.
- Beijing unilaterally renamed 80 islands and other geographical features in the area, drawing criticism from neighbouring countries who have also laid claim to the same territory.
- The Philippines invoked the dispute settlement mechanism of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 2013 to test the legality of China’s ‘nine-dash line’ regarding the disputed Spratly islands.
Strategic importance of SCS:

- This sea holds tremendous strategic importance for its location as it is the connecting link between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. (Strait of Malacca)
- According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) one-third of the global shipping passes through it, carrying trillions of trade which makes it a significant geopolitical water body.
- According to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Philippines, this sea has one-third of the entire world’s marine biodiversity and contains lucrative fisheries providing food security to the Southeast Asian nations.
- South China Sea is believed to have huge oil and gas reserves beneath its seabed.

India’s stakes in the SCS:

- The South China Sea (SCS) is important not just to its littoral countries. It has been a transit point for trade since early medieval times, contains abundantly rich fisheries, and is a repository of mineral deposits and hydrocarbon reserves.
- The SCS carries merchandise to and from India. It follows that India has a stake in the SCS, just as China has in the Indian Ocean.
- From India’s perspective, foreign and security policy in its larger neighbourhood covers the entire expanse of the Asia-Pacific which includes the SCS.
- Despite China’s protests, India continues its oil exploration in Vietnam’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea from where ONGC Videsh Limited supplies oil to Vietnam.
- In the aftermath of The Hague Tribunal’s verdict on the South China Sea, India obligated to take a principled stand on the issue of freedom of navigation and commercial access enshrined in the UNCLOS.
Measures needed for India to curb Chinese muscularity in SCS:

- **Building military capacity:**
  - India must improve the military capacity of the tri-service Andaman and Nicobar Command given its immense geostrategic value, as it overlooks Asia’s maritime strategic lifeline and the world’s most important global sea lane.

- **Regional diplomatic outreach:**
  - India must continue to actively pursue its defence diplomacy outreach in the Indo-Pacific region.
  - Increasing military training and conducting exercises and exchanges at a higher level of complexity
  - Extending Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief activities
  - Sharing patrolling responsibilities of the Malacca Strait with the littoral countries.

- **Strengthening partnerships:**
  - The Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships that India has concluded with Australia, Japan, Indonesia, the U.S. and Vietnam could be extended to Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore.
  - India must actively pursue its Act East policy by playing the role of the mediator in the region. Further the active engagement of India with Vietnam and Philippines made it inevitable for India to actively participate in the issue to adore its bilateral ties.

- **Cultural factor:**
  - Buddhism is the dominated religion of the countries engage in the dispute. India can leverage the cultural factor as a driving force for the constructive and positive end of the dispute.

- **Multilateral associations:**
  - India can also use the regional blocks like ASEAN and SAARC to pressurize the concerned associates to resolve the issue in more magnified manner.

**Conclusion:**

Located very close to the southern tip of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the South China Sea is very much a part of India’s “extended neighborhood”. It is of critical geopolitical, geo-economic and geostrategic importance and has a direct bearing on our relations with a host of strategically relevant countries. A combined policy involving defence, economic and cultural cooperation is needed from India’s side for ensuring peace in the South China sea region in future.
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