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1. INDIA AND RCEP

Why in news?

Recently, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was signed into existence by 15 countries.

What is RCEP?

- The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a mega-regional economic agreement being negotiated since 2012, between ASEAN and Free Trade Agreement (FTA) member partners.
- FTA members are led by China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand.
- It aims to cover the trade in goods and services, investment, economic and technical cooperation, intellectual property and dispute resolution.
- To broaden and deepen the engagement among parties and to enhance parties' participation in the economic development of the region, the leaders of the 15 participating countries established the RCEP.
- The RCEP was built upon the existing ASEAN+1 FTAs with the spirit to strengthen economic linkages and to enhance trade and investment-related activities as well as to contribute to minimising development gap among the parties.

What is India's stand on the RCEP agreement?

- India had been a part of RCEP negotiations for almost nine years till it pulled out in November 2019.
- India pulled out from the agreement stating that inadequate safeguards and lowering of customs duties will adversely impact its manufacturing, agriculture and dairy sectors.
- However, by staying out, India has blocked itself from a trade bloc that represents 30% of the global economy and world population, touching over 2.2 billion people.
- Further, as the summary of the final agreement shows that the pact does cover and attempt to address some issues that India had flagged, including rules of origin, trade in services, movement of persons.

What are the primary reasons behind India's withdrawal?

- **Unfavourable Balance of Trade** - Though trade has increased the post-Free Trade Agreement with South Korea, ASEAN countries and Japan, imports have risen faster than exports from India.
- According to a paper published by NITI Aayog, India has a bilateral trade deficit with most of the member countries of RCEP.



- **Chinese Presence** -India has already signed FTA with all the countries of RCEP except China.
 - Trade data suggests that India's deficit with China, with which it does not have a trade pact, is higher than that of the remaining RCEP constituents put together.
 - This trade deficit is the primary concern for India, as after signing RCEP cheaper products from China would have flooded the Indian market.
 - Further, from a geopolitical perspective, RCEP is China-led or is intended to expand China's influence in Asia.
 - **Non-acceptance of Auto-trigger Mechanism** -To deal with the imminent rise in imports, India had been seeking an auto-trigger mechanism.
 - Auto-trigger Mechanism would have allowed India to raise tariffs on products in instances where imports cross a certain threshold.
 - However, other countries in the RCEP were against this proposal.
 - **Protection of Domestic Industry** - India had also reportedly expressed apprehensions on lowering and eliminating tariffs on several products like dairy, steel etc.
 - For instance, the dairy industry is expected to face stiff competition from Australia and New Zealand.
 - Currently, India's average bound tariff for dairy products is on average 35%.
 - The RCEP binds countries to reduce that current level of tariffs to zero within the next 15 years.
 - **Lack of Consensus on Rules of Origin** -India was concerned about a "possible circumvention" of rules of origin.
 - Rules of origin are the criteria used to determine the national source of a product.
 - Current provisions in the deal reportedly do not prevent countries from routing, through other countries, products on which India would maintain higher tariffs.
- What are opportunities in RCEP for India?**
- **Economic Realism** - With global trade and the economy facing a steep decline due to Covid-19 pandemic, RCEP can serve as a bulwark in containing the free fall of the global economy and re-energising economic activity.
 - Further, the RCEP presents a unique opportunity to support India's economic recovery, inclusive development and job creation even as it helps strengthen regional supply chains.
 - India should deter seeing RCEP only from the Chinese perspective.
 - India should acknowledge that the trade bloc represents 30% of the global economy and world population, touching over 2.2 billion people, and staying out of RCEP may result in



suboptimal economic growth without leveraging Asia-Pacific demand.

- In this regard, India can draw inspiration from Japan & Australia, as they chose to bury their geopolitical differences with China to prioritise what they collectively see as a mutually beneficial trading compact.

What lies ahead?

- RCEP's membership is a prerequisite to having a say in shaping RCEP's rules.
- This is necessary to safeguard India's interests and the interests of several countries that are too small to stand up to the largest member, China.
- Moreover, staying out of RCEP may also affect India's Act East policy.
- Acknowledging India's economic heft and value as a market, the RCEP members have left the door open for India for inviting it to be an observer member and also waived a critical 18-month cooling period for interested applicants.
- Thus India has a wide scope in going with RCEP deal, and policy makers need to take right decision in this regard.

2. INDIA'S OPPORTUNITIES IN SOUTH ASIAN TOURISM

What is the issue?

The pandemic provides an opportunity for India to take the lead in promoting regional tourism in South Asia.

What is the economic scope of South Asian tourism?

- According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the travel and tourism sector accounted for 10.3% of global GDP and 330 million jobs in 2019.
- The sector has seen high growth in the last decade, which can be largely attributed to factors such as rising disposable incomes, the emergence of low-cost carriers, etc.
- Over the last two decades, South Asia has emerged as an attractive tourist destination due to its natural and cultural diversity, and price competitiveness.
- The region is home to tourism-based economies such as Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka that attract high spending per traveller.
- In 2019, the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) ranked South Asia as "the most improved region since 2017.
- In South Asia, tourism was one of the fastest-growing sectors in the last decade, with double-digit growth leading to a contribution of \$234 billion or 6.6% of the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2019.

What are the present Challenges in South Asian Tourism?

- **Disruption Caused by Covid-19** - Tourism as an industry is built around mobility and the enabling mechanisms of consumption that are



mostly intangible. The challenge posed to these factors by the Covid-19 pandemic is unparalleled in many ways.

- According to the World Bank estimates, South Asia's T&T sector has lost more than 10 million jobs and is further expected to incur losses of over \$50 billion in GDP.
- This makes the country's most economically dependent on tourism, such as Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka, particularly vulnerable.
- Further, post-pandemic, inter-regional mobility will remain limited due to reduced air connectivity, high costs, and a lack of willingness to travel long distances.
- **Informal Tourism Sector** - Nearly three-fourths of the tourism sector in the South Asian region are in the informal sector.
- It is majorly dominated by bed & breakfast facilities, guest houses and other small-scale units.
- **Geo-Political Tensions** - Hostile political conditions in India's neighbourhood, especially between India & Pakistan, discourages development of a South Asian regional circuit.

What are the opportunities before India?

- Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unforeseen challenges to global tourism.
- With geography gaining significance and the importance of shorter

distances becoming more pronounced, regional tourism is likely to grow.

- Such a push would also contribute locally through employment and revenue generation from foreign exchange earnings.
- There is an opportunity that can be explored to bring back the international traveller to the niche segment of South Asian Countries, Adventure Tourism circuit with Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka
- For example: India's medical, spiritual and Ayurveda tourism, Adventure Tourism circuit with Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka.
- In the last decade, India has witnessed an increase in the share of South Asian tourist arrivals.
- Additionally, tourist spill-overs from India to the rest of the region contribute significantly to the regional tourism economy.
- India, in particular, should leverage geographic proximity and the wide range of cultural similarities with its neighbours such as the regional Buddhist trail and pilgrimage, etc.

What measures can be taken in this regard?

- **Promoting E-Visa** - Currently, only China and Sri Lanka are eligible for an Indian e-visa.
- Considering the rising share of tourists from the neighbourhood in India, the e-visa facility should be



extended to other countries in the region.

- **Inter-Ministerial Coordination** - The Ministry of Tourism should actively work with other ministries such as the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Ministry of Home Affairs to undertake infrastructure-related connectivity initiatives.
- For example by further expanding the UDAN Scheme to neighbouring countries and supporting digital immigration services at the Integrated Check Posts.
- **Regional Initiatives** -India must take the lead in promoting intra-regional tourism through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral, Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) or the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal initiative (BBIN).
- India should also work and cooperate bilaterally with other South Asian countries on joint tourism promotion and advertising campaigns, towards establishing the tourism industry as a regional value chain.
- **Promoting Religious Tourism Circuits** - The historical and cultural linkages between South Asian nations offer the potential to develop religious tourism circuits within the region.
- There has been an interest towards developing a Buddhist circuit between India and Nepal, and a Ramayana

circuit between India, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

3. INDIA MALDIVES RELATION

What is the issue?

Indo-Maldives relations were strained under the pro-China regime of their former President Abdulla Yameen.

What are highlights of existing ties between India and Maldives?

- **Security Cooperation** -In 1988, when armed mercenaries attempted a coup against President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, India sent paratroopers and Navy vessels and restored the legitimate leadership under Operation Cactus.
- Further, joint naval exercises have been conducted in the Indian ocean and India still contributes to the security of the maritime island.
- **Disaster Management** -The 2004 tsunami and the drinking water crisis in Male a decade later were other occasions when India rushed assistance.
- At the peak of the continuing COVID-19 disruption, the Maldives has been the biggest beneficiary of the Covid-19 assistance given by India among its all of India's neighbouring countries.
- When the world supply chains were blocked because of the pandemic, India continued to provide crucial commodities to the Maldives under Mission SAGAR.



- **People To People Contact** - Technology has made connectivity easier for everyday contact and exchanges.
- Maldivian students attend educational institutions in India and patients fly here for super speciality healthcare, aided by a liberal visa-free regime extended by India.
- **Economic Cooperation** -Tourism is the mainstay of Maldivian economy.
- The country is now a major tourist destination for some Indians and a job destination for others.
- Given the geographical limitations imposed on the Maldives, India has exempted the nation from export curbs on essential commodities.

What is the geo-strategic importance of Maldives to India?

- **Location:** Maldives is one of the world's most geographically dispersed countries straddling a 960-km-long submarine ridge running north to south and which forms a wall in the middle of the Indian Ocean.
- Its strategic location defines the geo-strategic importance of Maldives far beyond its physical size, which can be reflected as the following:
- Located at the southern and northern parts of this island chain lies the two important sea lanes of communication (SLOCs).
- These SLOCs are critical for maritime trade flow between the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Hormuz in West Asia and

the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia.

- **Trade Flow** -While the Indian Ocean is considered as the key highway for global trade and energy flow, Maldives virtually stands as a toll gate.
- While SLOCs in the vicinity of the Maldives have broader strategic significance for global maritime trade, these are of vital importance for India since nearly 50% of India's external trade and 80% of her energy imports transit these westward SLOCs in the Arabian Sea.
- As maritime economic activity in the Indian Ocean has risen dramatically in recent decades, the geopolitical competition too in the Indian Ocean has intensified.
- Due to this, China's strategic interests and logistical limitations in the Indian Ocean have prompted it to increase its presence in the Indian Ocean.
- **India's Strategic Priority** - A favourable and positive maritime environment in the Indian Ocean is essential for the fulfilment of India's Strategic priority.
- Thus, India continuously aims at promoting an ever-expanding area of peace and stability around it.
- In addition, Maldives is an important partner in India's role as the net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region.



What are recent irritants in the bilateral relations?

- **Political Instability** -India's major concern has been the impact of political instability in the neighbourhood on its security and development.
- The February 2015 arrest of opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed on terrorism charges and the consequent political crisis have posed a real diplomatic test for India's neighbourhood policy.
- **Radicalisation** -In the past decade or so, the number of Maldivians drawn towards terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS) and Pakistan-based madrassas and jihadist groups has been increasing.
- Political instability and socio-economic uncertainty are the main drivers fuelling the rise of Islamist radicalism in the island nation.
- Events in West Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan have also influenced Maldivian radicalisation.
- This gives rise to the possibility of Pakistan based terror groups using remote Maldivian islands as a launch pad for terror attacks against India and Indian interests.
- Further, India's concern is regarding how radical Islamist forces have been gaining political influence in the neighbourhood.
- **China Angle** -China's strategic footprint in India's neighbourhood has

increased. The Maldives has emerged as an important 'pearl' in China's "String of Pearls" construct in South Asia.

- Given the Maldives's strategic location in the Indian Ocean, there are speculations about China trying to develop strategic bases in the archipelago.
- Given the uncertain dynamics of Sino-Indian relation, China's potential strategic presence in Maldives remains a concern.
- Also, the Maldives have started using the China card to bargain with India.

4. CONCERNS WITH FRENCH SECULARISM

What is the issue?

Recent violence in France has once again brought France's unique model of secularism into spotlight.

What are the reasons behind recent violence in France?

- **Killing of Middle School History Teacher** - Recently, a French schoolteacher was murdered for showing caricatures of the Prophet to his students.
- Condemning the murder, French President defended the freedom of expression and secular values.
- In response, Turkey and Pakistan accused French President of running an anti-Islamic agenda and provoking Muslims.



- Iran and Saudi Arabia too condemned the cartoon and there was a call in the entire Muslim world to boycott French products.
- **Nice City Violence** -Following the killing of the school teachers there was attack on the people who mourned for the murder.
- In the attack 3 people were killed, which the French administration has termed “ Rise of Islamic Terror Attack”

What is the basis of French secularism?

- The French model of secularism was developed during the French Revolution in 1905, when a French law separated the church and the state, thus marking the beginnings of French secularism (laïcité) in modern times.
- Laïcité” derives from the French term for laity—non-clergy or lay people.
- Broadly, the idea refers to the freedom of citizens and of public institutions from the influence of organized religion.
- The new Act defined three essential principles:
 1. Freedom of conscience,
 2. Equality in law for spiritual and religious belief,
 3. Neutrality of political power.
- This secular outlook was strengthened by another constitutional right — the right to freedom of expression.
- In pursuance of this, French school teachers today are thus actively encouraged to foster a fearless spirit

of inquiry, regardless of religion or any other hindrance.

- French laïcité, or secularism is better understood as a project of social cohesion and a key component of French citizenship.
- It encompasses not simply the formal separation of Church and State, but also the removal of religious values from the public space and their replacement with secular values such as liberty, equality, and fraternity.
- This has caused social tension in French society and pushes the country to re-articulate its liberal values in a way that lessens its internal tensions.
- In this pursuit France can derive inspiration from Indian model of secularism.

What are the existing challenges to French secularism?

- **Changed Demographics** - In early 20th-century France—a fairly homogeneous, Christian nation.
- French model of secularism was a straightforward attempt to protect the government from the sway of the Catholic Church.
- However, modern France is a more heterogeneous and multi-religious society.
- Thus, the current model of French secularism is getting into conflict with rights of minorities.
- This French secular tradition was further fortified in the face of new



challenges posed by immigration, largely from former French colonies.

- **Against Freedom of Religion** -Critics of laïcité argue that it is a disguised form of anti-clericalism and infringement on individual right to religious expression, and that, instead of promoting freedom of thought and freedom of religion, it prevents the believer from observing his or her religion.
- **Undermining Civil Liberties** -Laïcité is also criticized for increasing police powers that could endanger respect for civil liberties.
- Laïcité is unintelligible and even shocking to religious minorities, who view it as an injunction to abandon their religion.
- Instead of enhancing social harmony, it may actually be exacerbating religious and racial tensions.

What inspirations can be drawn by France from India?

- **Sarva Dharma Sambhava** -Indian philosophy of secularism is related to “Sarva Dharma Sambhava” (literally it means that the destination of the paths followed by all religions is the same, though the paths themselves may be different) which means equal respect to all religions.
- **Positive secularism** -This concept, embraced and promoted by personalities like Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi is called ‘Positive

secularism’ that reflects the dominant ethos of Indian culture.

- **Religious Plurality** -Indian secularism is not an end in itself but a means to address religious plurality and sought to achieve peaceful coexistence of different religions.
- **Protection of Minority Rights** - Indian Secularism deals not only with the religious freedom of individuals but also with the religious freedom of minority communities.

5. CONCERNS WITH TURKEY’S FOREIGN POLICY

What is the issue?

In recent years, Turkey’s foreign policy has attracted scrutiny because of its aggressive postures in the neighbourhood.

What are incidents of Turkey’s aggressiveness in its neighbourhood?

- Nagorno-Karabakh is an area inside Azerbaijan with a majority ethnic-Armenian population, which has been, since 1994, under the control of an Armenia-backed rebel group wishes to establish an independent Republic of Artsakh in Nagorno-Karabakh.
- The latest example of its bellicose foreign policy was witnessed in the South Caucasus where Turkey provoked a military confrontation between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the long standing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.



- Though Turkey is not a party to the conflict, its role as Azerbaijan's primary backer, the supply of weapons and drones, and statement of unconditional support has been instrumental in the eruption of the latest fighting between the two former Soviet republics.
- The Turkish action in the South Caucasus follows a similar foreign policy pattern witnessed over the past decade in the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region.

What is prompting the display of aggressive foreign policy behaviour by Turkey?

- The behaviour emanates from the ambition to enhance Turkey's comprehensive national power to emerge as a regional power and be recognised as a middle power in global politics.
- Undoubtedly, Turkey possesses the geographic, economic, historical, and economic ingredients, backed by its geostrategic location, to be an important regional actor.
- Turkey wishes to establish a strategic presence in areas that it considers sphere of influence.
- Its military is already involved in northern Cyprus, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, and Libya, has bases in Qatar and Sudan, and is looking to expand its influence in different locations in its entire neighbourhood.

- Turkey is eyeing hydrocarbon resources in the EastMed, the Caspian and Black Seas as well as the market for Turkish civilian and defence products in Africa and Asia that can propel its economic growth.
- Since 2016, the Turkish economy is going through one of the worst slumps in decades and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has further dampened the hopes for recovery.
- Taking a cue from the Chinese handbook, Turkey has sought to use foreign policy to advance its economic agenda.
- The present administration is faced with serious domestic political and economic challenges and is using a confrontationist foreign policy laced with the rhetoric of reviving the historical Turko-Islamic glory of the Ottoman Empire as a diversionary tactic as well as a method of retaining his support base.
- This aggressive foreign policy approach backed by hard power has, however, led to the deterioration of Turkey's relations with friends and foes alike.

6. REFLECTIONS ON CENTRAL ARMED POLICE FORCES (CAPFS)

What is the issue?

For the efficient working of Central Armed Police Forces many issues to be resolved by the government.



What is the organisational setup of CAPF?

- Under the Indian Constitution, police and public order are state subjects.
- However, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) assists state governments by providing them support of the Central Armed Police Forces.
- Apart from this, the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) performs a multidimensional role like protecting the borders of the nation from external aggression & infiltration, aiding in internal security in combating insurgency, anti-naxalism and counter terrorism.
- Further, these forces assist the civil population in various area development programs, community policing programs and disaster management.
- This can be reflected in the role played by these forces in dealing with Covid-19 pandemic.
- Ministry of Home Affairs maintains seven CAPFs:
 1. The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), which assists in internal security and counterinsurgency.
 2. The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), which protects vital installations (like airports) and public sector undertakings.
 3. The National Security Guards (NSG), which is a special counterterrorism force.

4. Four border guarding forces, which are the Border Security Force (BSF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), SashastraSeemaBal (SSB), and Assam Rifles (AR).

What are the issues in CAPF?

- **Operational Bottlenecks**-All CAPFs have set up training institutions to meet their training requirements and impart professional skills on specialised topics.
- However, there is an urgent need to upgrade the curriculum and infrastructure in these training institutes.
- The MHA has been making efforts to provide modern arms, ammunition, and vehicles to the CAPFs.
- In this regard, the Modernization Plan-II, for the period 2012-17, was approved by the Cabinet Committee on Security.
- The Plan aims to provide financial support to CAPFs for modernisation in areas of arms, clothing, and equipment.
- However, the Estimates Committee observed that the procurement process under the Plan was cumbersome and time consuming.
- **Burdened by States' Responsibilities** -There is heavy dependence of states on central armed police forces (CAPFs), even for everyday law and order issues.
- This affects the anti-insurgency and border guarding operations, besides



curtailing the training needs of these forces.

- **Working Conditions** -The Standing Committee on Home Affairs in the year 2017 had expressed concern over the working conditions of personnel of the border guarding forces.
- The Committee observed that they had to work 16-18 hours a day, with little time for rest or sleep.
- The personnel were also not satisfied with medical facilities that had been provided at border locations.
- In addition, the Standing Committee observed that personnel of the CAPFs have not been treated at par with the Armed Forces, in terms of pay and allowances.
- **Cadre Management Issue** -Each of the seven has its own cadre of officers, but they are headed by officers of the Indian Police Service.
- This has a demoralizing effect on the officers of the CAPFs, and impacts the effectiveness of the forces.
- In addition, there was frustration in CAPFs due to stagnation in promotions and lack of cadre review.

What measures are needed?

- MHA should ensure the bottlenecks in procurement should be identified and corrective action should be taken.
- Further, the government should engage in negotiations with ordnance factories and manufacturers in the public or private sector, to ensure an

uninterrupted supply of equipment and other infrastructure.

- Moreover, given the evolution of hybrid warfare, the contents of training should be a mix of conventional matters as well as latest technologies such as ICT, and cyber security.
- States must develop their own systems, and augment their police forces by providing adequate training and equipment.
- The central government should supplement the efforts of state governments by providing financial assistance and other help needed by states for capacity building of their forces.
- Citing the dissatisfaction in Cadre policy, Joshi Committee recommended that top positions should be filled from the respective cadre of the CAPF.
- Further, the Committee recommended that cadre review of all the CAPFs should be carried out within a defined timeline.
- It is high time to implement these recommendations as soon as possible.

7. LABOUR SECTOR REFORMS IN GULF CO-OPERATION COUNCIL

Why in news?

In recent times GCC countries are taking measures to limit the number of expatriate workers.



What is the current scenario of workforce in GCC?

- Expatriate workers form the backbone of the labour force in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.
- According to the World Bank, nearly 75 percent of the work force employed in the private sector in the GCC constitutes expatriates.
- Increasingly, due to economic hardships and growing demands of employment among citizens, the GCC countries are taking measures to limit the number of expatriate workers.
- Trends in the global energy market and sustained lower oil prices have negatively affected the GCC economies.
- The ability of the monarchies to maintain the existing 'social contract' based on no taxation and no political accountability is under stress.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the economic situation raising doubts about possible paths of recovery.
- Furthermore, the GCC monarchies have for long faced global criticism for creating and sustaining an exploitative system for expatriates, especially for the blue-collar and domestic workers.

What are the issues with GCC's measures?

- In response to the economic challenges and external criticism, the

GCC countries have been introducing labour reform measures.

- These have been aimed at increasing employment opportunities for the citizens to mitigate the impacts of lower subsidies and rising unemployment.
- At the same time, efforts are being made to make the laws attuned to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) guidelines pertaining to the rights of workers and universal human rights.
- One of the major challenges facing the labour reforms is the existing social, political and judicial structures that have not evolved since the 1950s when the oil industry was coming up and the GCC governments were concerned about protecting their small national population from the unprecedented labour influx.
- Laws were formulated to facilitate cheap labour and benefit the local economies without compromising the primacy of the needs of the native population.
- In order to regulate the relationship between the employer and the migrant worker, a sponsorship system, known as Nizam al-Kafala, was established.
- This system is recognised as comprising of one of the most exploitative labour laws in the world.



What are the reasons behind the measures of nations?

- **Demographic imbalance:** Except in Saudi Arabia and Oman, the GCC countries have smaller native populations, making them cautious about the presence of a sizable expatriate population.
- The sense of insecurity due to the demographic imbalance has led to the Gulf monarchies adopting the Conditional Migrant Integration Model to restrict political and social integration of the migrants while facilitating economic integration.
- The issue of growing unemployment among educated youth have forced the GCC countries to adopt policies such as naturalisation of the job market to create opportunities for its citizens.

What does this mean to India?

- Indians comprise a sizeable number of the expatriate population in the GCC countries.
- According to estimates by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), as of 2019, 8.5 million Indians were residing in the six GCC countries.
- They constituted 15.17 per cent of the total residents and 29.20 per cent of the total expatriate population in the GCC.
- While greater numbers of Indian professionals and entrepreneurs have joined the GCC labour market, a

majority, estimated at 87 per cent, continue to be employed in unskilled and low-skilled work.

- Recently Kuwait's expat quota bill was approved requiring Indians to constitute merely 15 per cent of the total expatriate workforce, as opposed to their current strength of 37.3 per cent.
- This would directly impact around 800,000 Indians, the bill seeks to reduce the number of expatriate workforce from 70 per cent to 30 per cent.

What measures are needed from the Indian side?

- In terms of policy, it is important that the Government of India, and governments of those states which send the majority of the migrants to the Gulf, understand the trends in the employment market.
- Regular assessment of the changing requirements and laws can help streamline the process of migration and help those seeking employment opportunities in the Gulf.
- Successful implementation of programmes such as
 1. PravasiKaushalVikasYojana,
 2. Pre Departure Orientation and Training,
 3. Skill Training Upgradation,
 4. Overseas Workers Resource Centre and the media campaign,



5. 'SurakshitJaayePrashikshitJaaye'
(Go safe, Trained with Confidence)
are critical.

- **Database development:** A database of Indian migrants going to the Gulf needs to be developed.
- Such a database needs to record details related to the age, educational qualification, vocational training, language proficiency and work experience.
- This will provide information about the kind of skillsets required for the Indian expatriate workers and work as indicators for state governments to develop skilling and training programs. Secondly, details pertaining to the job sector, emoluments, leaves, housing allowance and nature of work should be recorded.
- This will provide an estimation of the sectoral requirements in the GCC countries.
- A start has been made through Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support (SWADES) that aims to create a database of qualified citizens based on their skill sets and experience to empower them with relevant employment opportunities.
- The SWADES Skill Card can be a good starting point for the data collection.
- Moreover, it is likely that the Gulf countries will impose skill certification requirements for the incoming expatriate workforce in near future.
- The burden of skilling can be shared with the expatriate-sending state governments, as ultimately, the states have to grapple with the unemployment problems of the returnees.
- Also, since there is difference in the quality of manpower going to Gulf from various Indian states, the data will help the states in developing skilling programs for the youth population.
- **Greater coordination** is required between states that send large number of expatriates, such as Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, UP, Bihar and Rajasthan, with the central government agencies for better management of the expatriate issues.