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# MONTHLY MAINSTORMING

JULY  
2022

A compilation of Mains questions with model answers, from Current Affairs of the month



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## MONTHLY MAINSTORMING

**JULY 2022**

**G.S PAPER I**

### **1. SOCIETY**

***What are the significant takeaways for policymakers on improving citizens' quality of life? Analyse in context of the recent UN report***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- A UN report's prediction of India replacing China as the most populous country by next year four years earlier than predicted in 2019.
- This means that nations like India must invest in their human capital. Per the projections, the share of the older population will increase to 16% in 2050, and this age group is growing most rapidly.
- As per the National Family Health Survey 5, the total fertility rate (TFR), or the births per woman, have declined nationally from 2.2 in NFHS 4 (2015-2016) to 2.0 currently.
- NFHS 5 data show Bihar and Jharkhand have more stunted, wasted, and underweight children than the national average, with UP following suit except for the percentage of wasted children.
- For education, per the Annual State of Education Report (ASER) 2021, compared to the national average, both Bihar and UP had more unenrolled children, with UP's percentage doubling from ASER 2018.
- According to a UN report from 2019, 79% of the elderly population felt that the social security schemes were not enough to meet their basic needs.
- The UN's Human Development Index (HDI) 2019 ranks India 131st—within the medium-human development cohort. It considers factors such as life expectancy, education, and per capita income.
- Policymakers must understand that a large population becomes a huge dividend only when the young are taught well, acquire useful skills, and find regular employment.

***More workforce participation rate has the ability to close the gender gap imbalance. Justify the statement***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- India's five-rank improvement on the World Economic Forum's latest Global Gender Gap Index detracts from the fact that its performance on gender equality remains among the worst in the world.
- At rank 135 out of 146 countries against 140 out of 156 countries in 2021, it ranks above only 11 countries.
- The country performs decently on political empowerment, which measures the percentage of women in Parliament or holding ministerial positions.
- On the index labelled educational attainments, which measures literacy and enrolment rates at all levels, India ranks 107 out of 146.

- Both these indices are a reflection of persistent traditional patriarchal attitudes towards women, including their chances of being born.
- Here, India ranks 143 out of 146 countries, though this is, inexplicably, an improvement from its 2021 ranking. At 20.6 per cent, the female labour force participation rate represents a fall from its pre-Covid level of 22.8 per cent, which is hardly a healthy trend.
- Though it is true that the pandemic-induced job and income losses impacted women around the world, they appear to have had a disproportionate impact in India. During the post-pandemic recovery, it's the men who have returned to the workforce where jobs are still scarce .

***It is necessary to increase representation of women in leadership positions at all levels for better gender equality in the country. Discuss***

**KEY POINTS**

- India has got another opportunity to do much better for half of its population with the Global Gender Gap Index for 2022, released by the World Economic Forum .
- India's ranking in 2021 was 140 out of 156 countries hardly brings cheer as India has fared the worst in at least one of the parameters 'health and survival' in which it took the last spot.
- The latest NFHS data (2019-2021) show that 57% of women (15-49 age bracket) are anaemic, up from 53% in 2015-16; though 88.7% of married women participate in key household decisions.
- Only 25.4% of women, aged 15-49 years, who worked in the last 12 months (2019-2021), were paid in cash.
- Women having a bank account or savings account that they themselves use have increased to 78.6%, with schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana helping, but women participation in the labour force has shrunk.
- According to Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data, in 2016-17 about 15% women were employed or looking for jobs; this metric dipped to 9.2% in 2021-22.
- The best way to improve India's abysmal ranking is to do it right by women. For that, it is imperative to increase representation of women in leadership positions at all levels.

**2. GEOGRAPHY**

***Manipur landslide is a wake-up call for governments in States that are prone to landslides regularly. Analyse***

**KEY POINTS**

- The landslide that occurred last week in the Tupul area in Manipur's Noney district will go down as one of the severest natural disasters in the State.
- The fact that such a disaster occurred in a railway construction site in a landslide-prone area should give development planners and government officials in the State pause.

- The relatively high number of casualties accompanying these landslides and the fact that the Environment Ministry has itself acknowledged that the disasters were “anthropogenically” induced are a matter of serious concern for the State.
- Researchers have corroborated the fact that the areas in western Manipur abutting the national highways fall under very high, high or moderate hazard zones.
- The severe landslide occurred in the Tupul area despite the government identifying susceptible areas in the State through the National Landslide Susceptibility Mapping project.
- An early warning system for landslides is still being developed and refined by the Geological Survey of India and this could help reduce the scale of such disasters, once deployed across vulnerable States.
- While it is understandable that States in the Northeast are keen on accelerating connectivity projects to uplift a relatively economically backward region, disasters such as the landslide in Tupul point to the dangers of not taking ecological challenges related to deforestation seriously enough.

## **G. S PAPER II**

### **3. GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

***India's growth rate can be improved by not only exporting software services but also a major exporter of manufactured goods. Explain***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- In FY21-22, Indian merchandise exports jumped 43.18 per cent year-on-year, going up from \$291.81 billion to \$417.81 billion.
- Merchandise exports have played only a supporting role. Service exports largely IT services have been a redeeming factor in India's export story.
- India's share in global merchandise trade has firmly remained below 2 per cent which is abysmal considering the size of our economy.
- Foreign manufacturers in India have largely focused on the domestic market, instead of treating it as a low-cost, high-quality manufacturing base for exports.
- The changes in wheat, petroleum products and steel export policies or tariffs are recent examples, though all of them have been justified by the government as being absolutely necessary given the current domestic requirements of the economy.
- In sectors ranging from pharmaceuticals and drugs to automobiles to food and cosmetics Indian manufacturers have a lower quality bar to meet than their global counterparts.
- An Indian automaker or a generics drug company exports higher quality goods to other countries than it sells in the Indian market
- The government should focus on removing hurdles that increase the cost of manufacturing or just doing business in India. At the same time, it should set higher quality standards and monitor them stringently.

***Do you think that the scale of municipal finances is inadequate to run the local self-governments? Comment***

**KEY POINTS**

- Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) analysed data from 80 ULBs across 24 States between 2012-13 and 2016-17 to understand ULB finance and spending, and found some key trends.
- The ULBs' key revenue sources are taxes, fees, fines and charges, and transfers from Central and State governments, which are known as inter-governmental transfers (IGTs).
- There was a 7% increase in own revenue from 2012-13 to 2016-17, but ULBs still lacked revenue buoyancy as their share in GDP of own revenue was only 0.5% for the five-year period.
- It is essential that ULBs leverage their own revenue-raising powers to be fiscally sustainable and empowered and have better amenities and quality of service delivery.
- While dependence on IGTs dipped over the years due to modest increase in own revenue, the scale of IGTs in India remained at around 0.5% of GDP, which is far lower than the international average of 2% to 5% of GDP.
- This can be improved by increasing the revenue assigned to ULBs from the State governments, and by allocating a share of the State and Centre's GST proceeds to ULBs.
- The scale of municipal finances in India is undoubtedly inadequate. A ULB's realised own revenue resources are far below the estimated potential.

***Ignoring the plight of RTI users facing death for keeping our democracy alive is a threat to democracy itself. Analyze***

**KEY POINTS**

- The RTI empowers us to participate in the policymaking process, by providing access to information relating to the functioning of all public authorities.
- Ordinary citizens have the law to make public authorities accountable and transparent in their functioning.
- The widespread understanding and use of the RTI is a shining example of a participatory democracy in spite of our current realities.
- Since the implementation of the Act, some 100 RTI activists across the country have been killed and several are harassed on a daily basis.
- Bihar is turning out to be one of the most dangerous States for RTI activists despite being one of the earliest promoters of the law.
- In 2018, six RTI users were killed for seeking information related to the functioning of public programmes and institutions.
- After all, the whistle blowers were performing a basic civic duty of public vigilance that the government should encourage and initiate timely action on.
- The Supreme Court observed that there was an "absolute vacuum" which could not be allowed to go on.

- The Central government was called upon to decide on a specific time frame to establish an administrative set-up to protect whistle blowers. The court recognised that the concept of a whistle blower is a global phenomenon and has become a reality.

## 4. GOVERNANCE

***India's criminal justice system needs to be reformed in the country to prevent the large scale under trial prisoners. Examine***

### KEY POINTS

- Over 75% of India's prison population are undertrials while overcrowding in Indian prisons stands at 118%.
- The Supreme Court of India recently acknowledged, in *Satender Kumar Antil vs CBI*, the ineffectiveness of India's bail system and its contribution to this crisis.
- The Court provided comprehensive guidelines on laws related to bail, such as mandating timelines for the disposal of bail applications and laying emphasis on the need to enact a separate legislation.
- Of the undertrials (2,313) represented by the FTP, 18.50% were migrants, 93.48% did not own any assets, 62.22% did not have any contact with family, and 10% had a history of previous incarceration.
- This is important because marginalised persons bear the brunt of these broad exceptions. They are either denied bail or granted bail with onerous conditions, in absolute disregard of their realities.
- Lack of means to arrange for money/property and local sureties are the most significant reasons accounting for an undertrial's inability to comply with bail conditions, realities borne out by our experience in the FTP.
- However, factors such as lack of residence and identity proof, abandonment by family and limitations in navigating the court system also undermine an undertrial's ability to comply with bail conditions.

## 5. JUDICIARY

***The recent judgment by Supreme Court related to freebies of medicines to doctors will help checking unethical and illegal practices in the pharma sector. Discuss***

### KEY POINTS

- The judgment by a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India in *M/s Apex Laboratories Pvt. Ltd. vs Deputy Commissioner of Income Tax*, has struck a blow for public good.
- Upholding a decision by the Madras High Court, the Bench said that the act of pharmaceutical companies giving freebies to doctors is clearly 'prohibited by the law'.
- Pharmaceutical companies' gifting freebies to doctors, etc. is clearly 'prohibited by law' and not allowed to be claimed as a deduction under Section 37(1).
- The uncovered field in this judgment and it was not the controversy in hand before the Court is the sale of medicines at Maximum Retail Price, or MRP.
- This is a scam and a case of underhand dealing that happens in the pharma world (the giving away of freebies is a smaller part of it) because drugs are invariably sold in pharmacist shops at MRP only.

- Even though the Drug Price Control Order and Drugs and Cosmetics Act are there on the statute book, there is hardly any action to keep the sale price of medicines under control with due and proper investigation.
- It should be debated and applied to other unethical practices and expenditure out of public funds. The strategy here should be to use financial tools such as income-tax provisions for disallowing such expenditure and taxing the same as perquisites or taxable income.

## 6. POLITY

***The Chile's draft Constitution is an example of a framework for an enduring and egalitarian democracy. Elaborate***

### KEY POINTS

- One of the demands of the Chilean protesters was to replace Pinochet's Constitution with a democratic Constitution, written by the People of Chile, for themselves.
- This led to the formation of a directly-elected Constituent Assembly, which was strikingly representative: 51% of the Constituent Assembly members were women, and there were 17 reserved seats for indigenous peoples.
- Constituent Assembly members also included people from across the socio-economic and geographical spectrum of Chile, sexual minorities too.
- The Chilean draft Constitution draws upon this past wisdom, and decades of trial and error across the world, to craft a document that can serve as the framework for an enduring and egalitarian democracy.
- For example, the Constitution grapples with the pervasive role of technology in our lives by stipulating the existence of a National Data Protection Authority, as well as guaranteeing a right to digital connectivity.
- The need for an independent data protection body is being felt in countries across the world, and the draft Constitution's move to enshrine it within the constitutional text is, therefore, important.
- It is, in many ways, a model for how Constitutions in the modern world ought to be drafted, and a lesson to the rest of the world.

## 7. HEALTH

***The problem of under-nutrition can be effectively dealt with complete involvement of various stakeholders in the society. Elaborate***

### KEY POINTS

- The Fifth National Family Health Survey 2019-21 (NFHS-5) reports 35.5 per cent children under five are stunted, 19.3 per cent wasted, and 32.1 per cent under-weight.
- Infants in their growing age and pregnant women need a range of vitamins, minerals and proteins that are not there in foodgrains alone.
- They need a balanced and diverse meal where fruits and green vegetables, milk, eggs, pulses, oil and *paneer* are all an integral part of the food. Diversity of food in adequate quantity and of appropriate quality is the way forward.

- The efforts at local nutrition kitchen gardens and fruits and vegetables grown in school premises and on other public lands will create a societal impact on under-nutrition. Food diversity and in appropriate quantities are critical for child survival.
- With more women in Panchayats and a large presence of women SHGs under the Livelihood Mission in rural areas, it is an opportunity to make a difference in gender relations.
- The National Education Policy 2020 has emphasised the continuum of learning and views pre-school learning as integral to primary learning.
- The use of technology for monitoring is needed. And immediate rectification ought to be the focus. Support for immunisation and health services and periodic health assessments by trained local community frontline workers will be helpful.

***Analysis of data on Maternal Mortality Rate should lead to restructuring health-care systems for women in the country. Explain***

**KEY POINTS**

- Maternal mortality indicates a woman's ability to access health care, contraceptive devices, nutrition, and, in a sense, is a mark of the efficiency of a health-care system in responding to demands made of it.
- Researchers from the International Institute for Population Sciences triangulated data from routine records of maternal deaths under the Health Management Information System, with Census data and the Sample Registration System (SRS) to provide the MMR for all States and districts of India.
- The analysis suggests that 70% of districts (448 out of 640 districts) in India have reported MMR above 70 deaths a target under the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).
- Similar heterogeneity was observed in other States as well. According to the SRS (2016-18), only Assam (215) has an MMR of more than 200, while in this district-level assessment.
- There is adequate proof that improvements in access to contraceptives, antenatal care, post-delivery health care, body mass index, and the economic status.
- The message during this milestone anniversary year is two pronged: improve overall care for women, and keep real time track of such crucial health data.
- There are people mothers and infants, entire families behind these numbers who will benefit from such an urgent and intense action on reducing eminently preventable deaths.

***An inter-agency framework FRESH, can be implemented in the schools of the country to revamp the health services. Analyse***

**KEY POINTS**

- UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank have published an inter-agency framework called FRESH an acronym for Focusing Resources on Effective School Health.
- The FRESH framework and tools propose four core areas and three supporting strategies.
- The supporting strategies include effective partnerships between the education and health sectors, community partnership and student participation.

- Indian State needs to review the status and then draw up a road map to revamp and strengthen school health services, along with a detailed timeline and dedicated budgetary allocation.
- build upon the existing school health infrastructure; the renewed focus has to have comprehensive, preventive, promotive and curative services with a functioning referral linkage.
- Health talks and lifestyle sessions ( by schoolteachers and invited medical and health experts) should be a part of teaching just as physical activity sessions.
- school health clinics should be supplemented with online consultation for physical and mental health needs. This could be an important starting point to destigmatise mental health services.
- Ayushman Bharat programme, a school health initiative was launched in early 2020, but its implementation is sub-optimal.
- A convergence of the National Health Policy, 2017 and National Education Policy, 2020 should result in the provision of comprehensive school health services in every Indian State.

## 8. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### ***India's participation in I2U2 summit shows a new orientation of foreign policy towards West Asia. Elaborate***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- The I2U2 was launched when the foreign ministers of the four countries met when External Affairs Minister visited Israel.
- What stands out sharply in India's new thinking in the Middle East is that the summit involves three countries that Delhi had traditionally kept a safe political distance from.
- The problem was never with the Middle East but Delhi's ideological preconceptions that distorted India's view of the region.
- None of them was more consequential than the belief that the contradiction between Israel and the Muslim world is enduring and irreconcilable. But the regional reality was always more complex.
- The I2U2 then marks a big break from the anti-Western tradition in India's approach to the region.
- Even those who supported India's engagement with the US in the Indo-Pacific through the Quad in recent years had insisted that there was no room for working with Washington in the Middle East.
- India's participation in the West Asian Quad brings Delhi in line with other major powers including Europe, China, and Russia to try and engage all parties in the region.
- India's past ideologically driven exclusion of regional partners was a strange aberration. The I2U2 sets the stage for a new and dynamic phase in India's relations with the Middle East.

### ***A strong partnership of South Korea with India can add significant value to India's Indo-Pacific strategy. Examine***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- During the past five years, India and South Korea have experienced considerable divergence in their respective national objectives.
- South Korea's new willingness to become a global pivotal state and play an active role in regional affairs is bound to create multiple opportunities for a multi-dimensional India- Korea partnership.

### **Indo-Pacific outlook**

- South Korea's participation in additional maritime security activities in the Indian Ocean, such as the annual Malabar and other exercises with Quad countries, will further strengthen India's naval footprint in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The shift in South Korean policies will enable a strong India, South Korea and Japan defence policy coordination that could effectively forge new joint regional security policies.
- India has evolved excellent strategic partnerships with Japan, Vietnam and Australia.
- South Korea could be the fourth pillar in India's Indo-Pacific strategy along with Japan, Australia, and Vietnam. This can bring about a paradigm shift in India's position and influence in the region.
- With South Korea's emergence as a leader in critical technologies, cybersecurity and cyber-capacity building, outer space and space situational awareness capabilities, South Korea can contribute immensely to enhance India's foundational strengths in the Indo-Pacific.
- An independent, strong, and democratic South Korea can be a long-term partner with India, that will add significant value to India's Indo-Pacific strategy.

### ***India must reach out to the freedom fighters in Myanmar who are spearheading a civil disobedience movement to restore democracy. Elaborate***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- Myanmar has been an unprecedented schism between the Indian government and the Mizoram state government.
- The state has been in the eye of a storm that has gathered over its decision to take in Chin refugees their number has swelled to more than 30,000.
- The Chin refugees currently in Mizoram are not refugees who have simply run away to save their lives.
- The roots of the state government's open defiance lie in the common history of the Mizos and Chins and the unique social-political realities between the two people at the India-Myanmar international border.
- The Free Movement Regime (FMR) in 2018 between India and Myanmar legalised this practice. The FMR allows both the Mizos and Chins on either side to go up to 16 km on the other side and stay up to 14 days.
- This has facilitated ease of movement wherein a large number of borderlanders routinely cross over on either side for work and to meet relatives. Cross-border marriages are common, and so is trade in essential commodities.
- It may do even better by owing up to the refugees and helping the state government sustain the relief work, which the latter might not be able to carry out on its own in the long run.

***Social media is becoming a new medium for diplomacy. Do you agree with this view?  
Comment***

**KEY POINTS**

- External Affairs Minister Twitter handle has taken an interesting turn lately, both in terms of its messaging for a domestic audience as well as for those outside the country.
- It shows that the government sees foreign policy as a tool with domestic political implications.
- The image of him as a world leader that this extensive coverage has conveyed in India has been a major factor in his popularity.
- However, it is the foreign affairs ministers who have been at the interface of international and domestic politics.
- It makes diplomacy politically relevant by making it less elitist and easily digestible.
- In this context, it is worth noting that foreign policy is rarely a matter for discussion on Prime Minister's Mann Ki Baat (on radio), which reaches the grass roots.
- On the other hand, the only beneficiaries of this emerging personalised communication are the 23.6 million Twitter users in India, perhaps largely scattered in urban areas with decent literacy levels.
- The lessons we derive from the Indian case have universal implications. Many in the foreign office are adopting this personalised form of diplomacy.
- What remains to be seen is if the increased involvement of the populace in foreign affairs leads to its democratisation.
- A potential politicisation of foreign policy might end up adding more ambiguity to the world order.

***As India pursues its Act East Policy, Vietnam has become a valuable partner in the Indo-Pacific region. Analyse***

**KEY POINTS**

- India and Vietnam are celebrating the 50th anniversary of their diplomatic relations.
- India is essentially a maritime nation and the oceans hold the key to India's future. India's external trade (over 90% by volume and 70% by value) is by sea.
- Vietnam is of great strategic importance because its position enables it to control 'the South China Sea a true Mediterranean of the Pacific'.
- India's maritime strategic interests in the region are well established, including the fact that almost 55% of India's trade with the Indo-Pacific region passes through the South China Sea.
- The signing of 'Joint Vision for Defence Cooperation' and a memorandum of understanding on mutual logistics support in 2022 has further strengthened mutual defence cooperation.
- While a U.S.\$100 million Defence Line of Credit has been implemented, India has also announced early finalisation of another U.S.\$500 million Defence Line of Credit to enhance Vietnam's defence capability.

- New Delhi has also agreed to expand military training and assist the Vietnam Navy's strike capabilities. For example, it is providing 'comprehensive underwater combat operation' training to Vietnamese sailors at INS Satavahana in Visakhapatnam.
- The road map agreed upon by the leaders will be helpful in addressing common challenges and decisively navigating towards making an India-Vietnam partnership that helps in stability in the Indo-Pacific.

***The newly elected President of Sri Lanka in a crucial parliament vote gives India an opportunity to take the lead in the foreign aid game in its neighbourhood. Explain***

**KEY POINTS**

- Sri Lanka has been facing economic turbulence since its pre-emptive default on its foreign debt obligations.
- Inflation has spiralled to over 50%, translating into higher food and fuel prices. Many families are surviving on one meal a day.
- Stabilising Sri Lanka's economy could prove to be a major win for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'neighbourhood-first' policy.
- Despite gaining benefits from commercial loans for Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in Sri Lanka which has fuelled a 'debt trap' narrative, China faces a dilemma in bailing out Sri Lanka.
- It has to implement structural reforms to make the economy more open to trade and investment and allow market forces to determine resource allocation.
- This means reducing barriers to trade and investment, cutting red tape hampering business and privatising loss-making state-owned enterprises such as Sri Lankan Airlines and the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation.
- It has to build national consensus on implementing the IMF programme and reforms by explaining that this is the only solution to the crisis.
- It has to restore the rule of law and enforce strong anti-corruption policies (including asset declarations for all parliamentarians and a strong anti-corruption office supported by the United Nations).

***Do you think that its time for India and Japan to rethink about their nuclear policy?***  
***Comment***

**KEY POINTS**

- At the root of that common nuclear challenge is the continuing growth in Chinese military power and the rapid modernisation of Beijing's nuclear arsenal.
- China's tactics of coercive diplomacy came into sharp view in the East China Sea that Beijing shares with Japan and the vast Himalayan frontier with India.
- Ukraine crisis has revealed that if a nuclear weapon power invades and seizes the territory of a neighbour, the rest of the world is reluctant to directly confront the aggression for fear of an escalation to the nuclear level.
- Both Indian and Japanese positions are imbued with deep ambivalence. Despite its call for total nuclear disarmament, India never agreed to give up its own nuclear weapons.

- As China closes the economic and military gap with the US, there is a darkening shadow over the credibility of the US-extended deterrence for Japan.
- The idea of “minimum deterrence” is one of those. In the wake of the nuclear tests of 1998, India quickly announced a policy of minimum deterrence and a doctrine of no-first-use of nuclear weapons.
- While the resistance to his ideas will be strong, Delhi and Washington will have to respond, sooner than later, to the dramatic changes in the global environment triggered by the rise and assertion of China.

## **G. S PAPER III**

### **9. ECONOMY**

***Productive linked incentive scheme needs to be extended to services sector in the country. Do you agree with this view? Comment***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- The commerce ministry expects services exports to overtake merchandise and manufacturing, or at least be on par. This is possible only if services are viewed the same as manufacturing in terms of fiscal encouragement and incentives.
- Even though it comprises over 50% of the GDP, dwarfing agriculture and manufacturing, the services sector doesn't receive the recognition or the encouragement in the form of the incentives it deserves.
- Services exports had exceeded \$254 billion, an increase of over 20% year-on-year, despite the contribution being from just three sectors education, healthcare, and travel and tourism.
- Even though SEIS is under the Foreign Trade Policy, it was only through intense advocacy that a sum of Rs 2,000 crore was earmarked for services exports for 2019-20, largely on compassionate ground as sectors like travel and tourism had suffered immensely due to Covid restrictions.
- While the government can work on physical connectivity through public-private partnerships by building more airports and highways, it will require individual entrepreneurship to increase the hospitality quotient by adding more hotel rooms.
- Policymakers have incentivised manufacturing by introducing the Productivity Linked Incentives (PLI) scheme with a well laid out process that ensures investment in capex, resulting in increased productivity and avenues for employment.

***Discuss the various sectoral impacts of recent Goods and Services Tax council's decisions.***

#### **KEY POINTS**

The GST Council also rationalised several exemptions in the service sector and has suggested an increase in tax rates on specified goods.

### **Automobiles**

- The GST rate on electric vehicles whether fitted with batteries or not shall be 5 per cent.
- This will bring certainty to GST rates in the case of electric vehicles where the space is evolving in terms of battery swapping technology.

### **Agriculture**

- The rate on various machinery used in agriculture operations is rationalised to correct the inverted duty structure.

### **Construction**

- The rate on works contract service provided to government is rationalised to correct inverted duty structure and bring it at par with construction services provided to other than government.

### **Defence**

- GST exemption is provided to specified defence items imported by private entities to make products cheaper for defence forces.

### **E-commerce**

- Small traders (turnover lower than Rs40 lakh) have been allowed to make an online sale through e-commerce platforms without the need for mandatory registrations.

### **Healthcare**

- GST rate on orthopaedic and other appliances is reduced from 12 per cent to 5 per cent.
- GST exemption on service by the cord blood bank by way of preservation of stem cells is withdrawn.
- The service of common bio-waste treatment facilities shall be taxed at 12 per cent with ITC.

***Import cover must be looked in conjunction with International Investment Position which gives a true picture of the adequacy of foreign exchange reserves. Discuss***

### **KEY POINTS**

- It is prudent to measure the adequacy of reserves with reference to the dynamics that prevails in the accretion of the reserves.
- IIP is a summary statement of the net financial position of a country viz. net of, the value of financial assets of residents of an economy that are claims on non-residents and, gold held in reserve assets and liabilities of the residents of an economy to non-residents.
- Positive IIP indicates that the country's assets are more than liabilities while negative IIP means that the country's liabilities are more than assets. India is a net IIP negative country with its liabilities exceeding assets.

- Out of \$1.3 trillion of liabilities within IIP, as of December 2021, approximately 30 per cent comprises short-term debt and portfolio investments. In absolute terms, outstanding portfolio investments is \$277 billion and short-term debt of \$110 billion.
- Against the backdrop of \$591 billion of reserves, it leaves a cushion of \$199 billion, which at the current rate of \$60-63 billion of imports leaves an import cover around 3.25 months.
- Thus, import cover is not an appropriate metric to measure the adequacy of reserves for a country like India. Import cover must be looked in conjunction with IIP which gives a true picture of the adequacy of reserves

### ***To what extent the phenomena of reverse migration can influence the urban economy in the country? Analyse***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- The NSO defines a migrant as an individual residing at the 'present place of enumeration (PoE) that is different from his/her usual place of residence (UPR)'.
- Categorization of migrant based on gender and level of education reveals interesting results. Female migration is much higher (81.1 per cent) than male (18.8 per cent), the main reason being 'marriage'.
- A significant number of migrants had a harrowing time when the first ever lockdown was imposed on March 24, 2020, to restrain the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The returned migrants are those who moved to their earlier UPR (where they have resided any time in the past) from their last UPR.
- The main reasons for Covid-induced migration after 'March 2020' are loss of job/closure of unit/lack of employment opportunities (19.35 per cent), health (14 per cent), migration of parent/earning member of the family, etc.
- The Worker Population Ratio (WPR) in rural areas rose to 41.3 per cent in 2020-21 from 35 per cent in 2017-18.
- On the other side, the urban economy is facing a shortage of skilled and unskilled labour especially in the secondary sector; and the absence of technological development of the secondary sector may hit industrial production.

### ***Equity crowd-funding provides a viable funding channel for start-ups in the country. Do you agree with this view? Comment***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- Crowdfunding, , asks the crowd to give funds for specific projects, businesses, social ventures etc.

- In community crowdfunding, funds are raised for a social or charitable causes and money given here is akin to donations with no expectation of return. Some community crowdfunding platforms give rewards or gifts to donors.
- SEBI had floated a consultation paper on equity crowdfunding in 2014, but not much progress has been made after that. This could be due to the myraid challenges in opening this route.
- There is a risk of the platforms being misused by fraudsters to dupe investors in to putting money in to dubious projects.
- The Companies Act, 2013 which lays down rules for public and private placements of equity shares and the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act need to be modified to permit businesses to issue equity through these platforms.
- Financial statements of the issuer should be disclosed on the company website every six months and SEBI should also lay down the networth and other criteria for entities eligible to launch equity crowdfunding platforms.
- The stocks issued through these campaigns can be listed and traded on the ITP platform. Not only will this provide liquidity to investors in crowdfunding campaigns, the ITP platform can also become an active hub for start-up investing.

***Open Network for Digital Commerce is a positive move undertaken by the government to expand India's digital ecosystem. Analyse***

**KEY POINTS**

- ONDC will act as a neutral platform that will allow products and services from all registered e-commerce businesses and platforms to be displayed together.
- Favourable exchange and return policies, guaranteed speedy delivery and enhanced post-sales services have provided customers on these platforms with highly satisfying retail experiences.
- ONDC will also be expected to operate at the same efficiency of supply chains, functioning of warehouse systems, payment gateways.

**Challenges**

- There is a lack of clarity regarding the mechanisms that will govern ONDC, including whether ONDC or the seller will take accountability and responsibility in case of counterfeit or damaged products.
- Furthermore, the utilisation of AI-enabled tools, such as chatbots and customer preferences synced with almost every social media and or digital platform of the customer, may present strong challenges to ONDC.
- In its current form, ONDC appears to be marketplace-agnostic with network-based discovery of sellers and catalogues.
- India's e-commerce policy is still a work in progress and in such an environment, there needs to be more understanding on the potential role of ONDC in this ecosystem.
- Thus, this calls for greater collaboration between existing and emerging players of the digital ecosystem to build a more robust online retail environment.

## ***Discuss about the India's success in securing its interest in fisheries subsidies at World Trade Organization***

### **KEY POINTS**

- The UN SDG target 14.6 had given a mandate to prohibit by 2020 subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing and to eliminate subsidies for illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, recognising that special and differential treatment (S&DT) to developing countries including LDC members has to be an integral part of the negotiations at the WTO.
- India had high stakes in this Agreement as the country ranks sixth in the global marine capture/production and has over four million fishermen and a coastline of 8,118 km.
- The Agreement lays down rules for prohibition of subsidies under two pillars for IUU fishing and when fish stocks are overfished.
- The third pillar being negotiated was for prohibition of subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing (OCOF).
- Under this third pillar, subsidies for fishing in areas beyond national jurisdiction (beyond EEZ exclusive economic zone) and beyond the area of competence of an RFMO (regional fisheries management organisations) are prohibited.
- In the final outcome, many members including the US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Saudi Arabia opposed the inclusion of horizontal fuel subsidies in the disciplines as it could lead to complexities, and thus was dropped to arrive at consensus.

## ***The Business Reforms Action Plan (BRAP) is better than Ease of Doing Business index. Do you agree with this view? Comment***

### **KEY POINTS**

- BRAP is a more decentralised than the World Bank's now-discontinued Ease of Doing Business report the latter would do its country rankings on the basis of surveys in a clutch of major cities in countries, using 10 broad parameters, to arrive at its conclusions.
- Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Jharkhand, Punjab and Chhattisgarh find a mention for the steps taken under some of these heads.
- In this time's report, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Telangana, Haryana, Karnataka, Punjab and Tamil Nadu emerged as the 'top achievers'.
- The report says it is based on '100 per cent feedback in multilingual format'. This time, the assessment areas include access to information, besides single window clearance, labour, environment, sectoral reforms and others.
- Such a criticism has been voiced with respect to other indices, such as the NITI Aayog's State Energy and Climate index. In order to ensure that cooperative federalism works in practice, it is important that these indices are drawn up with care and clarity.
- Surely, a broader institutional environment too plays a role here in terms of day to day governance capacity, infrastructure, logistics, law and order, education and health systems, and above all, a climate of civic responsibility.

***Reserve Bank of India has made a good beginning in internationalisation of rupee. Explain***

**KEY POINTS**

- The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) move to permit the invoicing, payments and settlement of exports and imports in rupees is aimed at preventing dollar outflows and addressing the immediate liquidity mismatch in the local dollar market.
- RBI's immediate objective is, of course, to enable importers to pay for expensive oil and coal in rupees, thereby preserving dollar assets.
- The mechanism, therefore, should work out, given the good political relations between the two countries.
- Bankers have also highlighted a potential problem in that the importing country's banks may need to buy rupees from the market in the event their special Vostro accounts don't already have a rupee balance.
- While the RBI is supporting the market, much of the dollar sales seem to be in the forward market rather than in the spot market.
- The trade facilitation measures follow the central bank's moves last week to ease the rules to attract dollar deposits and foreign portfolio flows (FPI).
- While there could be some inflow of dollar deposits, it might not meaningfully help stem the depreciation of the rupee.
- Right now the rupee's trajectory is being determined more by the strength of the dollar index, which hit a new high of 108. Nonetheless, it's worth exploring ways to bring in the dollars.

***Government can consider reviewing its fiscal capacity and to stimulate growth and mitigate the effects of high inflation and interest rates. Analyse***

**KEY POINTS**

- The Government's cautious optimism is with impending concerns of a speedier tightening of monetary policies by the U.S. Federal Reserve and the resultant dip in asset markets.
- Despite excise duty cuts on petrol and diesel, the Ministry believes India's fiscal math for the year will not unravel thanks to the recent tax levies, and healthy Goods and Services Tax collections.
- Industrial metal prices slipping to 16-month lows, prices for some food items falling off their peaks.
- India's current account deficit will deteriorate in 2022-23 on account of costlier imports and tepid exports on the merchandise account.
- India's high import dependence for fuel means oil price trajectories affect most macro parameters, including inflation, growth, current account balances, fiscal management and the rupee.
- And economic policymakers are rightfully concerned about the current account deficit (CAD) widening sharply from the 1.2% of GDP last year.
- The CAD may have hit 2.7% of GDP in the first quarter, some reckon, but if developed economies slow down as expected and shale oil supplies pick up.
- If the fiscal deficit is not a concern, and tax revenues may, in fact, overshoot Budget estimates owing to high inflation, the Government can consider reviewing its fiscal capacity.

***With a depreciating currency and rising inflation, prospects of sustaining investment and economic recovery are likely to get harder. Comment***

**KEY POINTS**

- Government sustained the investment tempo even during the novel coronavirus pandemic (2020-21 and 2021-22).
- The National Accounts Statistics provides disaggregation of gross capital formation (GCF) by sectors, type of assets and modes of financing; over 90% of GCF consists of fixed investments.
- The rise in the services sector is almost entirely on transport and communications. The share of transport has doubled from 6.1% to 12.9% during the same period.
- India's position did go up, from 142 in 2014 to 63 in 2019, but it failed to boost industrial investment, let alone foreign investment.
- The recent upturn in the aggregate fixed capital formation to GDP ratio is positive, though the rate is still lower than its mark in the early 2010s.
- The lack of domestic capacity for essential raw industrial materials and capital goods could prove costly. It will likely test India's ability to withstand external economic challenges.
- With a depreciating currency and rising (imported) inflation, prospects of sustaining investment recovery are likely to get harder. The deficit on balance of payment is already well above policy makers' comfort level of 2.5% of GDP.

***Reserve Bank of India's notification regarding settling transactions in rupees has the potential to create positive impacts in the economy. Discuss***

**KEY POINTS**

- Internationalisation refers to the phenomenon of a national currency trading beyond its borders and actively used in the invoicing of trade and financial transactions, commodities, and foreign exchange reserves.
- The central bank unveiled a mechanism for international trade settlements in rupees at market-determined exchange rates.
- RBI's move means that Indian importers can now make payments in the rupee, which will be credited to the special Vostro account of the correspondent bank of the partner country, while Indian exporters will be paid from the balances in the designated Vostro accounts.
- A vostro account is an account maintained in rupees by a local bank for a foreign bank.
- The surplus rupee balance Vostro accounts can be used for investments in government securities, payments for projects and investments and for export-import advance flow management.
- It has potential to internalise rupee in the long-term. Without free exit, other countries may not find this mechanism attractive.
- The mechanism can also come in handy for trade with certain African and South American countries facing severe forex shortages.
- With Russia unable to access its foreign currency reserves, trade settlement in rupees can emerge as a win-win deal for both the countries as India ramps up its purchases of crude oil from the sanctions-hit nation.

***The International Financial Services Centre Authority (IFSCA) has been making gradual progress since its inception and is of critical importance. Discuss***

**KEY POINTS**

- IFSC has been making gradual progress since its inception in 2015, but it has gathered significant momentum since 2020.
- This has smoothed out the regulatory process and resulted in a spike in business activity in the GIFT IFSC. Financial players are interested in coming to GIFT City, and now it is easier to do so.
- The IFSC was set up by the Indian government under the leadership of prime minister with the ambition of developing a world-class financial services hub to connect IFSC in India with the global financial centres.
- Conceivably, Indian corporates or start-ups will have considerably more flexibility in considering listing venues with viable access to global funds located in their backyard and the same tax implications as overseas destinations.
- While traditional financial services remain at the core of the prospects of GIFT City, new tactics to encourage fintech and trade financing entities to set up shop are welcome innovations.
- A total of 22 banks, including eight international ones, have set up operations there. The insurance sector is also well represented, with four reinsurers and 17 intermediaries already registered with IFSC.
- Milestone moments like 75 years of Indian independence offer a good opportunity to reflect on the past and consider the future.

***Internalisation of climate risk in the banking sector is a much needed task. Explain***

**KEY POINTS**

- RBI's 2021 decision to join as a member of Network for Greening the Financial System (NGFS) a coalition that brings together central banks and supervisors working on climate and green finance issues from across the globe.
- According to the 11th Annual EY/IIF bank risk management survey released in 2021, over 91 per cent of the chief risk officers (CRO) and 96 per cent of the board members viewed climate change as the top emerging risk in the next five years.
- RBI titled 'Green Transition Risks to Indian Banks' there is a clear mention of the transition risk due to the cost of adjustment that falls in the production processes of industries that are directly or indirectly exposed to excessive use of fossil fuel.
- For instance, De Nederlandsche Bank (DNB) established a Climate Risk Working Group in 2016 and People's Bank of China (PBC) standardised green disclosures and green credit ratings since 2018.
- However, given the complexity in climate risk modelling, the biggest challenge for a bank would be to measure the impact of climate risk while undertaking lending and investment decisions and further integrating that risk in the existing risk and valuation frameworks.
- According to a recent Bloomberg survey for European banks, most banks reported that they could only confine themselves to a qualitative assessment of climate risks during the loan approval processes, which could at best be considered as subjective.

## 10. AGRICULTURE

***Farm ponds can act as agent of rural transformation in the country. Justify the statement with examples.***

### KEY POINTS

- In districts like Dharwad, Bellary, Kalaburagi and Karim Nagar, farm ponds of the size of 100 feet by 100 feet with a depth of 12 feet, constructed under the aegis of the NGO Foundation are now helping farmers draw water for their crops without even the availability of large irrigation systems.
- Apart from improving water availability and efficiency of usage, the most impressive outcome has been the increase in the income of small and marginal farmers, following the Deshpande Foundation's intervention.
- In Karnataka, NABARD's experience with the farm pond initiative by Deshpande Foundation has also been good.
- According to CGM of NABARD, it has signed a tripartite MOU with SBI and Deshpande Foundation, under which it will provide incentives for formation of 1,000 Joint Liability Groups (JLGs), credit linkage after formation and monitor repayment.
- A JLG is an informal cohesive group of 4-10 members who agree to be responsible for the credit taken, ensuring that the group has a close peer-to-peer engagement. In the present project, the JLGs would take up construction of another 10,000 farm ponds in water stressed areas to be facilitated by the Foundation and financed by SBI.
- From a banking perspective, these are replicable national models for credit-support if mediation of such NGOs, functioning on scientific and disciplined lines, is ensured.

***The concept of climate smart farming has created a substantial impact on farming in the country. Substantiate***

### KEY POINTS

- According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the premier international agency for climate change assessment, agricultural activities account for around a fifth of the greenhouse gases emitted because of human action.
- Paddy fields are the most significant source of methane emissions, accounting for 15-20% of global emissions generated as a direct result of human activity.
- With this very intent, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations created the concept of Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) 12 years ago, to manage farming, livestock, forests, and fisheries holistically.
- In India as well, especially in states like Odisha and Tamil Nadu, there has been a growing list of initiatives to champion renewable energy, develop sustainable and resilient infrastructure for agriculture, build smart-cities so as to adapt to climate-change impacts with greater resilience and, at the same time reduce, the collateral damage to the ecology.

- ITC has been a vocal supporter and champion, ensuring that ITC implements a Climate-Smart Sustainable Agriculture programme.
- In 600 villages in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra, the CSV programme has covered seven key crops—soybean, paddy, wheat, sugarcane, onion, mango, and gram.
- The outcomes have been notable and encouraging, and this intervention in MP increased soybean and wheat yields by 38% and 15% above the baseline, respectively.

***Do you think that the Deficiency Price Payments can be considered as an alternative to Minimum Support Price? Comment***

**KEY POINTS**

- The problems with MSP, a legacy of the green revolution since the late 1960s, are several. They mainly benefit large surplus-producing farmers in the vanguard agrarian regions of Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh.
- Extending them to more crops, besides wheat and rice, also has serious implications for the exchequer if it is backed by open-ended procurement.
- For such reasons, there is a need to rethink MSPs and consider DPPs. The latter compensates farmers for the difference between the MSPs for select crops and their mandi price if it rules at lower levels, and does not entail physical procurement.
- This is inspired by Madhya Pradesh's Bhavantar Bhugtan Yojana, introduced in October 2017 following violent agrarian protests in the state against falling crop prices.
- Subsequently, a price deficiency scheme (largely for oil seeds) formed part of the Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sankrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA).
- Scaling up a DPP to the national level clearly calls for a closer examination how it worked in MP and on a limited scale for oilseeds.
- In MP, BBY was given up the very next season as traders had gamed the system, widening the gap between mandi price and MSPs, causing an enormous amount of expenditure by the state government.
- The method of calculation of compensation and paperwork involved also needs to be simplified to enable more small farmers to register for the scheme.

***Linking Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) with the market place is vital for a robust agricultural value chains. Discuss***

**KEY POINTS**

- Children across India are back to school for in-person classes after an unnecessarily prolonged and arguably unwarranted closure in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank have published an inter-agency framework called FRESH, Focusing Resources on Effective School Health.
- The FRESH framework and tools propose four core areas and three supporting strategies.

- The core areas suggest that school health services need to focus on school health policies, i.e., water, sanitation and the environment; skills-based health education and school-based health and nutrition services.
- The supporting strategies include effective partnerships between the education and health sectors, community partnership and student participation.
- According to WHO, school health services should be designed based on local need assessment; should have components of health promotion, health education, screening leading to care and/or referral and support as appropriate.
- Health talks and lifestyle sessions (by schoolteachers and invited medical and health experts) should be a part of teaching just as physical activity sessions are.
- It is an opportunity to bring children, parents, teachers, health and education sector specialists and the Departments of Health and Education on a common platform to ensure better health and quality education for every child in India.

## 11. ENERGY

***As coal is unavoidable in the near future renewable energy goals need to be gradual ensuring an orderly transition. Explain***

### KEY POINTS

- The introduction of the national coal index (NCI) was created to provide a benchmark for revenue-sharing contracts being executed after the auctions for commercial mining of coal.
- The NCI had to be introduced as the wholesale price index (WPI) for coal has no component of imported coal.
- NCI has jumped from about 165 to about 238 reflecting the sharp increase in international coal prices.
- The domestic coal industry has responded to this situation with an increase of over 30 per cent in coal production. This has helped reduce inflationary pressures in the economy.
- This development shows the importance of increasing domestic coal production to reduce the exposure of the domestic economy to the price volatility of international markets.
- The Ministry of Power recognised the need to increase coal-based generation in the country in its draft National Electricity Policy released in May 2021, before the present crisis erupted.
- Looking at coal from a singular focus on GHG emissions will give a myopic view of energy requirements for a growing economy like India.
- The path to achieving 500 GW of renewables needs to be gradual, ensuring an orderly transition as coal is unavoidable in the near future.

***The Green Open Access Rules 2022 is a framework with potentially game-changing implications in the renewable energy sector of the country. Analyse***

### KEY POINTS

- India's Electricity Act, enacted in 2003, provided for large customers to access their own source of electricity through a mechanism known as the "open access" route.

- Large industrial consumers are looking to procure renewable energy from a renewable developer, with the twin objectives of both greening their energy source while also reducing the cost of electricity.
- Some of the world's most influential companies, known as the 'RE100', have committed to going 100% renewable, and their India manufacturing facilities, warehouses, and offices are presently soliciting partners to obtain green power.
- Against this background, the Union government has thrown down the gauntlet and notified the new "Green Open Access Rules 2022".
- Among its many features, industrial and corporate customers with a demand of over 100 kilowatts can now set up their own solar plants and wheel power to their establishment.
- Under the new Rules, connectivity approval for renewable plants, when sought, shall not take more than 15 days to be granted.
- This is not just an initiative to green corporate power consumption that presently accounts for 45% of India's total electricity consumption.
- Regulators would do well to realise that true public interest lies in efficient distribution of public goods, and cross-subsidies have never helped the overall development of any sector.

***Digital technologies have immense potential to overcome the critical challenges in the Indian agriculture. Explain***

**KEY POINTS**

- The agricultural sector is vital for the Indian economy to sustain the livelihoods of some 58 per cent of families and ensure food security for 1.3 billion people.
- In 2021, the World Economic Forum's Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR) in partnership with the Telangana government initiated a first-of-its-kind PPP to scale digital technologies in the State's agriculture sector.
- The lessons from this project highlight that in such a PPP framework, the government should play the role of an enabler that creates a sustainable market for technologies by addressing systemic challenges that impede scaling up.
- A Bain and Company 2021 report estimates that the Indian agritech sector will attract \$30-35 billion in investment by 2025.
- Rabo Foundation's multiple financing programmes with leading Indian financing institutions for agritech and sustainable agriculture.

- PPP for digital agriculture provides a perfect platform to initiate blended finance programmes that take advantage of different types of capital.
- The envisioned blended finance framework can be coordinated by a government agency or multilateral institution acting on behalf of a government.
- The potential for such a partnership is immense and the first step is the need to further investigate the resource requirements, specific value propositions and set-up of a governance structure for such partnerships.

## 12. INFRASTRUCTURE

***Aviation sector in the country has an inexhaustible market and largely untapped potential. Do you agree with this view? Comment***

### KEY POINTS

- The growth of aviation has been affected by choking regulations, tough entry barriers for new entrants, high fuel prices on account of sky high taxes, and inefficient public sector airports that are paving the way for monopoly airports that are extortionist in the absence of robust competition.
- The 'Start-up India' initiative is by and large the driving force in hi-tech companies and disrupting many conventional businesses.
- Aviation is integral to equitable economic growth, for a country to be globally competitive and to change the situation in swathes of India that are struggling with poverty and unemployment.
- Passenger airlines and air cargo overcome geography and connect remote areas are alienated from the mainstream.
- They can drive investment deep into the country, giving people access to markets. More importantly, they boost tourism, which is the largest employment generator in the unorganised sector.
- Despite the regional airport development plan, 'Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik ( UDAN) initiative, there is not much regional connectivity. And where slots are made available with difficulty.
- India has not kept pace with modern technology in aerospace, increasing costs to the industry and ultimately affecting passenger growth. Regulators are not popular in any country.
- India's statutory regulatory authority, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, needs to be modernised, well-staffed, motivated and incentivised.

***It is laudable that the government's vision of ropeways as transportation solutions covers congested urban areas and river-crossings. Explain***

### KEY POINTS

- National Ropeways Development Programme, is a preferred ecologically sustainable alternative to conventional roads in difficult hilly areas. It will be taken up in PPP (public-private partnership) mode.
- The aim is to improve connectivity and convenience for commuters, besides promoting tourism. This may also cover congested urban areas, where a conventional mass transit system is not feasible.

- The ropeway enables travel in 10 minutes a journey that otherwise takes 45 minutes by ferry, or over an hour by road.
- Passenger ropeways are classified according to their operational characteristics. The more common forms are aerial tramways, gondolas, funiculars, and chair lifts.
- Ropeways can handle steep gradients. Where a road or railroad needs switchbacks or tunnels, a ropeway can negotiate the same in a straight line.
- In urban settings, the fact that only narrow-based vertical supports are needed at intervals, leaving the rest of the ground free, makes it possible for ropeways to be constructed in built-up areas and in places where there is intense competition for land use.
- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has been made responsible for the development of ropeways and alternative mobility solutions.
- It thus now has the responsibility for crafting a regulatory regime for the sector, including issues related to choice of technology, safety and operational guidelines.

***The investments in road infrastructure have huge multiplier effect in the country. Justify the statement***

**KEY POINTS**

- One aspect of cities that we know very little about, which contributes to their economic productivity, is that they are labour markets where the labour force exchanges their labour and creates knowledge spillovers.
- There is no doubt that the commute time for the labour force to the workplace plays a very important role in determining their productivity in cities.
- There is no doubt that the larger a city's effective labour market, the greater its agglomeration economies and knowledge spillovers will be.
- In recent research, taking the case of Karnataka's cities, we found that road length has a positive effect on the city's tax base.
- This is because roads lead to easy access to jobs and increased economic activity; that also gives the public more confidence and motivation to pay taxes.
- So, cities should not view investment in road networks as expenditure; rather, roads add to the city's revenue base which the city can use to improve infrastructure and public services.
- Even simple things such as fixing potholes and puddles on roads lead to significant reductions in travel time and should be an important city government priority.
- Investing in roads not only reduces travel time and enlarges effective labour markets of cities and their economic output, but also improves access to schooling for children as well as healthcare, thereby upgrading human development.

**13. ENVIRONMENT**

***Ban on single-use plastic by the Government of India has to be backed up by awareness and incentives. Justify the statement.***

**KEY POINTS**

- The health hazards of consuming food or cosmetics packaged in thin plastic are only too well known; such plastic also clogs drains and ends up in landfills as it cannot be easily collected, and therefore recycled.
- The advantages of plastics its strength, lightness, malleability and protective qualities are undeniable, but its impacts on health and the ecosystem are truly alarming.
- A 2018 UNEP report on plastics points out that some European countries have chosen economic incentives and disincentives instead.
- The annual plastics consumption of about 20 million tonnes, about half is plastic waste, with little reliable data on how much is recycled.
- EPR mechanism is modelled on carbon credits, wherein a producer, importer or brand owner who exceeds the stipulated recycling target can sell 'credits' to a defaulter.
- The same discount can run all the way up the value chain back to the producer, who in turn can be given a tax break or a CSR benefit to more than offset this discount if she processes the waste.
- This effort should be accompanied by an awareness campaign against the needless use of carry bags. Such a campaign has worked in curtailing the purchase of crackers.

***Forest landscape restoration plays a pivotal role in regaining ecological functionality and improves human welfare. Substantiate***

**KEY POINTS**

- According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), deforestation and forest degradation contribute around 12% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The total area occupied by primary forests in India has decreased by 3.6%.
- Forest landscape restoration seeks to involve communities in the process of designing and executing mutually advantageous interventions for the upgradation of landscapes.
- Tree planting prevents erosion and stems flooding. Sustainable forest crops reduce food insecurity and empower women, allowing them to gain access to more nutritional diets and new income streams.
- Agroforestry lessens rural-to-urban migration and contributes to an increase in resources and household income. Planting trees is deeply linked to the 'wholistic' well-being of all individuals, the community, and the planet.
- The span 2021-2030 is the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, emphasising efforts to restore degraded terrestrial ecosystems including forests.

- India joined the Bonn Challenge in 2015, pledging to restore 26 million hectares of degraded and deforested land by 2030. An additional carbon sink of 2.5 billion-3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent through forest and tree cover is to be created by 2030.
- However, forest restoration in India faces hurdles in terms of the identification of areas for restoration, a lack of importance accorded to research and scientific strategies in tree planting, stakeholders' conflicts of interest, and financing.

***Increasing the use of clean fuel will be a win-win situation for the environment as well as for women and families. Explain***

**KEY POINTS**

- The World Health Organization estimates that 4 million people die each year from pneumonia and other diseases caused by household air pollution.
- Burning wood and other biomass fuels indoors increases the concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> particles.
- According to the latest National Family Health Survey (2019-21) report, 56 per cent of the rural households still use solid wood, and 11 per cent use grass, crop residue, or dung cake for cooking.
- Poor ventilation, cooking inside the living areas, asbestos roofing, and gaseous pollutants like formaldehyde, volatile organic compounds released from paints, etc., compound the challenge.
- The provision of free LPG connection to BPL households under the scheme boosted the access to clean fuel among these households as evident from the NFHS data.
- Usage of clean cooking fuel among rural households has increased from 24 per cent during NFHS 4 to 43 per cent during NFHS 5.
- As India takes over the presidency of the G-20, it would be an ideal opportunity to bring developing world sensibility to the climate commitments.
- At present, much of the discourse on reducing carbon footprint emphasises vehicle emissions and fossil fuel use in the production of electricity, but much less attention is paid to the use of clean cooking fuel.

***Swachh Sagar, Surakshit Sagar campaign to clean up the coasts and beaches speaks of India's seriousness towards restoring marine health. Explain***

**KEY POINTS**

- Prime Minister of India committed to protecting at least 30 per cent of "our" lands, waters and oceans, and thus adhere to its commitment of 30X30 by 2030 in a mission mode.
- Goal 14 calls for the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas, and marine resources.
- A 75-day-long awareness campaign, "Swachh Sagar, Surakshit Sagar" has been launched on July 5.
- It will be the first-of-its-kind and possibly the world's longest-running coastal cleanup campaign with the most number of people participating in it.
- Moreover, urban beaches have higher accumulation rates than rural beaches. Samples from coastal water, sediment, beach, and biota were analysed for micro/meso/macro plastics pollution.
- The stations closer to the river mouth in particular had higher numbers of microplastic concentrations.

- These domestic measures are part of international obligations as India, as a signatory of the UN “Coastal Clean Seas” campaign, has adopted and undertaken activities that have direct relevance to the “Swachh Bharat” vision to prevent pollution from both land-based and offshore activities, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 14.
- A mobile app, “Eco Mitram”, has been launched to spread awareness about the campaign and facilitate the registration of volunteers.

***A holistic approach to dealing with plastic waste in all forms is underway, but it needs citizen participation. Explain***

**KEY POINTS**

- To protect human health and the environment, the Ministry of Environment and Forests had notified the Bio-Medical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 1998 under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 (29 of 1986) and later notified Bio-medical Waste Management Rules, 2016.
- The guidelines have also been prepared to enable each hospital to create conditions for waste management in terms of segregation, collection, transportation, treatment and disposal of hospital waste.
- The broader context here is that India generates 9.46 million tonnes of plastic waste annually out of which 40 per cent plastic waste goes uncollected.
- India generates around three million tonnes of medical waste every year and the amount is expected to grow at 8 per cent annually.
- It can also be dangerous to human beings and environment. Similarly, hospitals and other health care facilities generate lots of waste which can transmit infections.
- It has constituted an advisory committee for the respective States to review implementation of bio-medical waste management.
- Capacity building workshops are being organised for MSME units to provide them technical assistance for manufacturing of alternatives to banned single use plastic items.
- For effective enforcement of ban on identified single use plastic items from this month, national and State level control rooms will be set up and special enforcement teams will be formed for checking illegal manufacture.

***In the context of performance in the Environmental Performance Index, India must hold of the fact that there are other factors critical to the survival of Tiger. Explain***

**KEY POINTS**

- India is now reporting increased tiger numbers, and a recent International Union for Conservation of Nature assessment suggests that tiger numbers have increased by 40% since 2005.
- A closer look at the distribution of tigers across their range shows that most tiger ‘populations’ are smaller than 100.
- On the flip side, sets of tiger reserves that share less genetic variation must have barriers or landscapes that impede movement and connectivity.

- Most land-use types were not too bad for tiger connectivity, including agricultural fields. However, the presence of built-up areas and high traffic roads greatly impeded tiger movement.
- Genome sequences of a litter of zoo tigers that included pseudo-melanistic cubs revealed that a single spelling mistake (or mutation) in a specific gene causes these tigers to look this way.
- In Rajasthan, genome sequences from wild tigers reveal that individuals in the Ranthambore tiger reserve show inbreeding.
- While we celebrate the recovery of tiger populations only by looking at numbers, we must not lose sight of other factors that are critical to their continued survival, such as connectivity.
- The future of tigers will require a 'dialogue' between such data and management strategies in order to ensure their survival. India is lucky to have so many wild tigers and we must work together to save them.

SHANKAR IAS ACADEMY