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# MONTHLY MAINSTORMING

JUNE  
2022

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



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## MONTHLY MAINSTORMING

**JUNE 2022**

**G.S PAPER I**

### **1. SOCIETY**

***The homophobic attitude of society goes against the constitutional tenet of fraternity. Comment.***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- Kerala High Court set a trailblazing precedent recently by sanctioning a lesbian couple.
- The court simply asked the couple if they wished to live together, to which they replied yes. The joy of the couple spilled over into social media.
- The Indian Psychiatric Society authentically stated that homosexuality was not a mental disorder; but that sentiment has not convinced most Indian homes.
- The social and psychological abhorrence prevailing in India against the LGBTQ+ community nullifies the constitutional fraternity that is to be lived out in public and private life of the nation.
- Fraternity too is not a pure western ideal. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar elucidated the Indian roots of the ideal of fraternity during an All India Radio interview in 1954: “My social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality and fraternity.
- Dr. Ambedkar championed the ideal of fraternity to uphold the cause of the oppressed castes, Dalits. The same principle is felicitous to the gender Dalits of present-day India — the LGBTQ+ community.
- The society should not deprive the LGBTQ+ community of affection and regards thanks only to their sexual orientation.

### **2. POLITY**

***Democracy cannot happen without developing democratic local self governance with a sense of urgency. Do you agree with this view? Comment***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- Twenty-five years have gone by since India passed the 73rd/74th Constitutional Amendments (CAs) heralding decentralised governance, and 23 years since all the States passed the conformity legislations ushering in the third tier of government in Indian federal polity.
- The central tendency of local democracy in India tells a story of indifference if not neglect. After a quarter century of decentralisation, local expenditure as a percentage of GDP is only 2 per cent compared with the OECD (14 per cent), China (11 per cent), and Brazil (7 per cent).

- For example, as the CAs do not provide a separate list for local governments, the Eleventh Schedule that lists 29 subjects for PRIs, and the Twelfth Schedule with 18 subjects for urban local governments, carry no operational meaning because almost all local functions are State-Concurrent.
- The MPLAD and MLALAD (local area development) continue to bypass local governments. The mission-based administration of schemes by some States (Gujarat, Kerala) dampen the smooth growth of democratic decentralisation.
- Democracy, which is a government of people, by the people, for the people, must ultimately win for it is not only an intrinsic value but is instrumental to ushering in an inclusive and just society. This cannot happen without developing democratic local governance with a sense of urgency.

### 3. GEOGRAPHY

***Do you think that the two time zones help in boosting economic growth rate of the country? Comment***

#### KEY POINTS

- India is geographically the second largest country without multiple time zones.
- Not just in long-distance railway timetables but also in the way business is conducted. A single shared experience, no matter where you are in India, unites the country.
- India has long debated the feasibility of two time zones. In fact, tea gardens in Assam have long set their clocks one hour ahead of the IST, creating their own informal time zone.
- According to a study by the National Institute of Advanced Studies, two time zones will help India save 2.7 billion units of electricity a year.
- The International Energy Agency estimates that nearly 24 million Indians do not have access to electricity. According to CSIR-NPL, India might save Rs1,000 crore per year if it can conserve electricity by implementing two time zones.
- By taking advantage of these opportunities and converting the time zone differences, India can see some economic benefits.
- A significant portion of our population was illiterate at the time, and two time zones would have led to a lot of complications. But with the impressive strides made in improving in literacy rates, this is no longer the case.

## G.S PAPER - II

## 4. JUDICIARY

***Do you think that the Supreme Court's recent decision on copyright infringement will pave the way for the police to impinge on civil liberties? Comment***

### KEY POINTS

- The Supreme Court of India has passed a far-reaching judgment resolving the question of whether copyright infringement, which is punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend up to three years under the Copyright Act of 1957, is a cognisable offence under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973.
- In simple English, this means that the police can begin investigations into allegations of copyright infringement on receiving a complaint.
- Rather, a copyright is created the moment a piece of art or music or literature is fixed on a medium, provided it is original.
- India's international law obligations under the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) do not require India to criminalise all kinds of copyright infringement.
- So, for example, a person indulging in the mass reproduction of copyrighted books without the authorisation of the copyright owner would be guilty of copyright piracy.
- At best, the Indian Copyright Act makes a distinction between commercial and non-commercial infringement by allowing the courts to impose a sentence of less than six months or a fine of less than Rs 50,000.
- Unless the law is amended to not only differentiate between the different acts of copyright infringement but also require prior judicial cognisance as a precondition of criminal investigation by the police.

## 5. HEALTH

***World Health Organization's report on assistive technology for physically challenged persons provides a roadmap for India. Explain***

### KEY POINTS

- Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic in the last two and a half years, it is an incredible achievement that the World Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) jointly launched the first Global Report on Assistive Technology (GReAT).
- The GReAT report draws upon surveys conducted in 20 countries. These indicate that the proportion of the population currently using at least one assistive product ranges from less than 3 per cent to about 70 per cent.
- People: This is related to the age, gender, type of functional difficulty, location and socioeconomic status of those in need of AT.
- Products: The range, quality, affordability and supply of assistive products continue to pose considerable challenges. Quality and standard issues such as safety, performance and durability are key concerns.
- Provision: The information and referral systems remain complex and services are not available across all geographies and populations.

- Personnel: The workforce gaps are not just about numbers but also about adequate training and education too.
- Policy: A survey of more than 60 countries reported that they have at least one government ministry or authority responsible for access to AT.
- Until AT solutions are integrated with the existing primary healthcare packages the current top-down approach is of limited benefit. The GREAT Report provides that roadmap.

## 6. GOVERNANCE

***Quality training for civil servants at all levels is a must for inclusive development in the country. Discuss***

### KEY POINTS

- As democracies mature, elected representatives will play a more proactive role in policy making. It is imperative that representatives are able to understand the nuances of policy making.
- Capacity building must aim at building professionals in all domains, from technical experts to generalists.
- Union Department of Personnel and Training, one of us witnessed a three-day programme organised for safai karamcharis of the Satara Municipal Corporation.
- In scenic Panchgani, nearly 600 sanitation workers participated in the workshop, which included complimentary health checks, interactive problem-solving exercises, and other customised edutainment programmes.
- The participants left the session feeling respected, with a promise to put their newly acquired learnings to use.
- The good news is that India already has everything it needs to scale up capacity building.
- The existing institutions and educational centres, as well as the available expertise and knowledge base, can appropriately support trainings for various grades of civil servants.
- However, at the heart of such a massive capacity-building exercise is logistics if existing institutions are used to their full capacity, there won't be a need to invest in more brick-and-mortar establishments.
- Investments in high-quality learning material and using a pedagogy that is appropriate to the group, rather than standard classroom lectures, will be a better use of funds.

## 7. GOVERNMENT POLICIES

***The recent global recognition for India's Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) should be used as an opportunity to tackle the challenges in the programme. Elaborate***

## KEY POINTS

### KEY POINTS

- India's one million Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) volunteers have received arguably the biggest international recognition in form of the World Health Organization's Global Health Leaders Awards 2022.
- It is important to note that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, ASHAs have made extraordinary contributions towards enabling increased access to primary health-care services.
- India launched the ASHA programme in 2005-06 as part of the National Rural Health Mission. Initially rolled out in rural areas, with the launch of the National Urban Health Mission in 2013, it was extended to urban settings as well.
- The core of the ASHA programme has been an intention to build the capacity of community members in taking care of their own health and being partners in health services.
- Considering the extensive shortage of staff in the workforce at all levels, and more so in the primary health-care system in India, and an ongoing need for functions being undertaken by ASHAs, it is a policy option that is worth serious consideration.
- Alongside, there is a need to acknowledge that the specific functions at the village level, which ASHAs play, may not be ideally suited for a permanent position. However, finding a middle path would not be very difficult either.

### ***A functioning land market is imperative as India is becoming less of an agrarian economy due to the phenomenon of urbanization. Discuss***

### KEY POINTS

- The government must address its unfinished reform agenda to free up the land market if its \$1.4-trillion infrastructure-led push for growth is to bear fruition.
- IIM-Ahmedabad's new agri-land price index (ALPI) developed in collaboration with digital agri-land market place Sfarm India must therefore be welcomed as a beginning of a process to free up the land market by removing uncertainty in agricultural land valuation.
- The index would act as a reliable source for benchmarking land prices and help in potential conversion of agricultural land into real estate or for industrial use.
- This process of development has been highly conflict-prone as land acquisition is being contested by villagers, and tribals, who believe their land is being acquired for a song.
- Land acquisition was an important factor behind a FDI steel project in Odisha getting shelved seven years ago. The project to make the world's cheapest car also had to relocate to another state due to land conflict.
- The framework of restrictions on the transferability of land rights, depending on the type of land, proposed land use, and the occupational or residential role of the interested buyer also must be addressed.
- The Registration Act 1908 and state revenue laws, for instance, require the completion of two separate processes to effect a land transfer.

***The combined effect of Jal Jeevan and Swachh Bharat Missions are gradually improving people's well-being. Elaborate***

**KEY POINTS**

- At the Jal Shakti Ministry, we have tried to put this concept to the test. The best exhibition of this can be found in the ways in which the Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachh Bharat Mission work in tandem, one enabling the other.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission faces a challenge similar to that faced by the Swachh Bharat Mission managing grey water discharge. About 70 per cent of all household water turns into grey water, which if untreated leads to undesirable consequences. This is where the concept of convergence comes in.
- Another notable aspect of our approach has been the continuous pursuit of perfection, the will to cover loose ends, plug gaps in delivery and take the benefits to the last man in line.
- The Jal Jeevan mission intends to relieve women of the drudgery of travelling long distances to fetch water. The Swachh Bharat Mission too is centred around the dignity of women.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission is catalysing change at the grass roots level by reserving 50 per cent seats for women in village and water sanitation committees.
- In every village, at least five women have been entrusted with water quality surveillance and many of them have been trained as plumbers, mechanics and pump operators. These pioneering women are sure to influence others who could take over jobs generally monopolised by men.

***It is most important to ensure that there is no dip in the production of domestic coal during the monsoon period. Examine***

**KEY POINTS**

- In 2021, the Indian government gave instructions to generators to import coal while we were already in the midst of a power crisis.
- It directed the power stations in December 2021 itself to import coal to the extent of 4 per cent of their requirement and blend it with domestic coal.
- CIL functioning as the aggregator is a better idea and it may be able to import at a cheaper cost by accumulating demand as well as standardising the coal grade to be procured
- The government invoked Section 11 of the Electricity Act 2003 (Act) and directed imported coal-based plants to run at full capacity with the assurance that their enhanced cost of operation would be compensated.
- The government invoked the concept of tolling, which allowed states to transfer their allotted coal to private generators located near the mines instead of transporting it to far away state generators.
- When the government invoked Section 11 of the Act, the question being asked was whether it can really give a direction to private generators to import coal at a higher cost.
- What is most important, however, is that we ensure that there is no dip in the production of domestic coal during the monsoon season.

***The recently released National Air Sports Policy has the potential to turn India into a top destination for air sports by 2030. Analyse.***

## KEY POINTS

- Union Aviation Minister unveiled a national sports policy to promote sports like aerobatics, hot-air ballooning, and paragliding, with the aim of making India one of the top aerosports nations by 2030.
- As part of the policy, a four-tier structure will be established to govern aero sports, with the Air Sports Federation of India (ASFI) as the apex body. The ASFI will be an autonomous body under the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA).
- The economic multiplier benefits in terms of travel, tourism, support services and local infrastructure development will be over three times.
- The policy document defines air sports as sports activities involving the medium of air. Examples include air-racing, aerobatics, hang gliding, paragliding and skydiving
- The policy has also been framed to engage “migratory” air sports professionals who move away from prominent air sports locations during the winter season.
- Centre has said it will focus on promoting a culture of air sports in the country while adopting international best practices of safety
- Air sports can be exhilarating, but they involve great risk. To ensure safety, air sports associations will lay down the safety standards for equipment, infrastructure, personnel and training as per global best practices for the respective sport.

## ***Do you think that the Government of India should re-establish its role as a principle employment generator? Comment***

### KEY POINTS

With announcement that 10 lakh government jobs will be provided over the next 18 months on a “mission mode”, by Prime Minister

### Implications

- The creation of employment is indeed a problem and can no longer be hidden from the public discourse.
- The private sector, modern sectors such as the service and manufacturing sectors, which are dominated by multinational companies, have not created many jobs.

### Employment trends

- The 10 lakh jobs creation also needs to be seen in the context of the labour market and workforce participation rates have increased marginally, there is a decline in the quality of jobs.
- But an honest government would concede that the levels of several variables remained uncomfortably high even after three decades of economic reforms.

### Role of private sector

- The private sector creates jobs in response to market forces and while taking into consideration radically altering technological developments.

***Projects in the modern private sector consume a lot of capital to generate very few jobs. For instance, recently, there was a report that the Adani Group has invested Rs70,000 crore in Uttar Pradesh to create merely 30,000 jobs.***

The 5G spectrum auction of Government of India must ensure that the technology caters to the largest sections of the population. Discuss

#### KEY POINTS

- The Department of Telecommunications promptly issued a 'Notice Inviting Applications', detailing the specifics of the auction including the frequencies.
- The speed with which the Government has moved from the initial announcement in the Union Budget to the telecom regulator's recommendations, and finally notification of the auction has been commendable.
- The Government has underscored that its primary motivation is to boost digital connectivity, a laudable objective given that the rapid growth of wireless telephony has perceptibly helped improve the delivery of services such as mobile banking, online education and telemedicine.
- With 5G's adoption for the various possible end uses that leverage machine-to-machine communication such as IoT, smart agriculture, smart homes and others that bank on reliability, including smart grids and autonomous vehicles, still in its relative infancy even in advanced economies, the technology is yet some years away from scale-based economic viability.
- The Cabinet's decision to allow bids for starting Captive Non-Public Networks that would enable individual companies to run private networks within the isolated confines of the enterprise has also roiled the pitch.
- It is hard to imagine the urgency to open up 5G for this niche application, particularly as it further undermines the economics for traditional telcos.

***An independent agency for allocation of resources in states and monitoring the outcomes would be a right institutional arrangement. Explain***

#### KEY POINTS

- The government introduced a variety of initiatives to ensure flow of credit to priority sectors, besides introducing policies relating to infrastructure support to facilitate entrepreneurship and industrialisation of backward areas.
- The skewness of the institutional credit flow on per-capita basis is also validated by the coefficient variation of inter-State credit, which persisted at above 65 per cent throughout this period.
- Credit disbursed as per cent to GSDP for all States averaged 24.81 per cent in 1991-92, which gradually increased to 49.94 per cent in 2011-12, before moderating to 45.93 per cent in 2021-22.
- For all North-Eastern States, the credit/GSDP ratio remained lower than 25 per cent during 2021-22.
- Notwithstanding an improvement in credit/GSDP ratio over time, for most of the backward States, the ratio remained below the national average.
- There have been significant inter-State variations in credit-deposit ratio. While the average credit-deposit ratio in 1991-92 was 58.2 per cent, North-Eastern States in general and other poor States had a much lower ratio.

- The Twelfth Finance Commission had considered equalising delivery of services in health and education sectors across States. More sectors, particularly civic facilities, may be added for getting a minimum standard of access across the country.

***An overhaul of administrative mechanism is required the in drug approval system of the country. Elaborate***

**KEY POINTS**

- The Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) decision to arrest the Joint Drugs Controller on charges of receiving a bribe to waive the phase three clinical trial of an insulin injection again brings into focus the poor state of the Indian drug approval mechanism.
- Strong accusations have been made against a high-ranking regulatory official and a reputed company like Biocon Biologics, a subsidiary of Biocon.
- CBI claims it has got enough evidence for the arrests under IPC sections of criminal conspiracy and corruption for bypassing regulatory processes.
- The example of Ranbaxy is one of India's biggest drug manufacturers , Ranbaxy pleaded guilty to felony charges and paid a \$500 million fine.
- Citing a Parliamentary committee report on the functioning of the CDSCO, which highlighted serious lapses in India's drug approval standards, the petition highlighted how approvals had reached a slippery slope.
- High variety gives more flexibility to produce goods and services to match a customer's requirements. Variety and volume correlate the higher the variety, the lower the volume of products or services.
- The fact also is that India's drug regulatory bodies, both at the central and state level, are grossly understaffed and underfunded, and have faced charges of either corruption or lacking the expertise to oversee a sophisticated industry.

***Deregulating labour markets can potentially influence the overall growth and formal employment. Do you agree with this view? Comment***

**KEY POINTS**

- The hiring of 10 lakh people will not only help the government meet its stated targets but also strengthen the march towards a fully Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- In order to ease the administrative regulations and delays, single-window clearance, self-certification of compliance by enterprises, online filing for Registration and Returns, transparent inspection system, etc., have also been undertaken by some States.
- The *Economic Survey* (2018-19), which studied the impact of labour reforms undertaken by Rajasthan, showed that the post-reform period saw higher growth rate in the number of factories employing more than 100 employees.
- A study by the VV Giri National Labour Institute showed that deregulation of labour markets have had a positive impact on the overall growth and employment.
- As of 2017-18, over 50 per cent of the employment in the manufacturing sector in all the States was in plants with 300 or more employees.

- The industry says that the self-certification scheme has led to increased trust between the employers and labour administration/government machinery.
- The introduction of the Shram Suvidha portal of transparent inspection system, reducing the human biases/interference and the online filing of registration.
- Implementation of the labour codes and rules has the potential to accelerate India's journey to lead the world's strongest economies.

## 8. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

***It is a good move by the Government of India to leverage the diplomatic value in the global sugar trade scenario by restricting its supply. Do you agree with this view? Comment***

### KEY POINTS

- The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) notified the ban on export of sugar from June 1 beyond the quota limit.
- The key reasons cited are to ensure domestic availability and price stability under rising inflationary pressures. It is also aimed at orderly trade in the context of ever-increasing export shipments of sugar breaching the previous records of more than 7.2 mt.
- The government is also concerned over the threat of food crisis caused by supply-chain disruption(s); hence one dimension of export restriction is also aimed at supplying sugar to countries in economic distress, and friendly nations thus increasing India's diplomatic outreach along with taming speculative trading.
- The data of sugarcane sowing from all prime producing States Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Karnataka vindicates the satisfactory trends, supported by both manual feeding of sowing data and validated by Global Positioning System.
- The world economy is passing through a difficult phase with a series of economic disruptions, starting from the Covid-19 pandemic, container shortages, escalating freight charges, economic and trade sanctions, financial and commercial boycotts, and supply chain disruptions caused by the Russia-Ukraine war.
- Needless to reiterate, it is an export restriction not a ban, meaning India will continue to cater to genuine requests of supply of sugar up to the prescribed export limit of 10 mt.

***The dismal scenario of Myanmar should not impede our vision for the actualization of our ambitious Act east policy. Explain***

### KEY POINTS

- With the present dispensation in Myanmar, the Act East policy is going nowhere. This has not only stymied New Delhi's initiatives in terms of land outreach towards the vibrant economies of South East Asia, but has retarded development in the Northeast.
- While New Delhi may contemplate at leisure the innumerable faux pas it has committed, especially after the putsch, pragmatism demands that an ambitious policy that had fired the aspirations of the Northeast does not become a casualty to the inertia of policymakers.

- It is in this background that a fresh look needs to be taken at both the furtherance of the Act East policy, as well as the security matrix that governs the Northeast.
- Favorable bilateral relations with Bangladesh, under Sheikh Hasina, offer an opportunity for opening a new axis of land-sea connectivity for promoting trade and commerce with Southeast Asia.
- To enthuse dynamism and empower the Assam Rifles, there is a need to retain its current structure of being officered by the Indian Army, as it ensures systemic command and control.
- The Act East policy is intertwined with India's Northeast policy. Let not the dismal scenario of Myanmar impede our vision for the actualisation of our ambitious Act East to go East, as alternates exist.

### ***Should G-33 should push for permanent solution to public stockholding at upcoming World Trade Organization ministerial? Comment***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- The 'G-33' group that includes India, China, Indonesia and 30 other African and central American countries, has placed an important proposal before the WTO.
- The proposal yet again urges the developed nations to find a permanent solution to the issue of public stockholding, instead of repeatedly asking untenable questions of major food producers such as India, Indonesia and China on their 'trade-distorting' agri subsidies.
- In fact, the Centre has rightly decided to make a case for G2G food exports from public stocks at the upcoming WTO Ministerial in Geneva. The G-33 grouping should push back on efforts to influence food production and trade patterns.
- India has secured an indefinite peace clause on food procurement in November 2014 (a year after the Bali Ministerial) pending a permanent solution to food procurement.
- As the G-33 proposal points out, the external reference price should be a three-year average price, based on the preceding five-year period excluding the highest and lowest price, rather than one based on 1986-88 prices as the base.
- That said, India's agri support regime requires overhaul a shift away from input subsidy to income and extension support. While this could make its payouts WTO-compatible, it is a transition that India should make on its own terms.

### ***India's relations with the Gulf countries have been successful and are shaped by various factors. Elaborate***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- India has enjoyed centuries of good relations with countries like Iran, while smaller gas-rich nation Qatar is one of India's closest allies in the region. India shares good relations with most of the countries in the Gulf.
- The two most important reasons for the relationship are oil and gas, and trade. Two additional reasons are the huge number of Indians who work in the Gulf countries, and the remittance they send back home.

- UAE: The UAE was India's third largest trading partner in 2021-2022, and second largest for both exports (\$28 billion) and imports (\$45 billion) when these are counted individually.
- Saudi Arabia: While exports were low at \$8.76 billion (2.07% of India's total exports), imports from Saudi Arabia were the fourth largest at \$34.1 billion (7%), up 50% from the previous year. Most of it was crude oil.
- Qatar: The total trade was \$15 billion, accounting for just 1.4% of India's total trade, but the country is India's most important supplier of natural gas.
- In terms of remittances from abroad, India was the largest recipient in 2020 at \$83.15 billion, according to World Bank data. This was nearly twice the remittances to the next highest recipient, Mexico, at \$42.9 billion.

***Analysis of food crisis in the upcoming World trade organization ministerial conference is crucial for the food security of the country. Examine***

**KEY POINTS**

- Ukraine and Russia accounted for about 30 per cent of the global wheat export, which has stopped completely because of the war. India, a minor exporter of wheat since 2016, has also had a bad crop, compelling it to impose export restrictions.
- Currently, public stocks in India provide food to approximately 800 million people under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PM-GKAY) and other schemes.
- Public stocks have played a very important role during the Covid crisis in preventing starvation deaths and providing food to the needy.
- Price support backed PSH programmes have been frequently questioned at the WTO due to the inequitable and outdated rules of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) signed in 1994.
- If a developing country crosses its permissible limit, other WTO members can raise a dispute to remove or modify the measures like MSP through which the support is given.
- From the perspective of a majority of developing countries, any permanent solution should be broad in scope and coverage with less onerous transparency.
- Ignoring this long-standing demand from developing countries representing more than 60 per cent of the world population, especially in the context of a looming global food crisis.

***Russia - Ukraine crisis is not the only reason for the global wheat prices to increase rapidly. Justify this statement.***

**KEY POINTS**

- The war between two important grain producers Russia and Ukraine; and the impact on prices of inputs, including fertilisers, which acts as a disincentive for their use by farmers, and therefore can affect yields.
- In the case of US Hard Red winter wheat, the price increase was as much as 176 per cent over this same period.

- This rapid rise echoes the prices increases of 2007-08, the last global food crisis, when it subsequently emerged that financial speculation in the food markets was an important driver of the sharp increase and then decline after June 2008.
- Global trade in wheat is also projected to fall slightly in 2022, but it will still remain higher than in 2018-20.
- Total consumption (or utilisation) of wheat is actually projected to be lower than production, to the point that stocks are likely to increase in 2022. And global per capita food use will barely budge.
- Two factors are likely to be playing a significant role, and both stem from and now rely on the general public perception that the current food crisis is all about war-related supply shocks
- The almost exclusive emphasis on the fall-out of the war in Ukraine as the cause of the price spike points to the absence of such recognition.

***Discuss the various gains secured by the country at the 12<sup>th</sup> Ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation.***

**KEY POINTS**

- The WTO Ministerial Conference is the highest decision-making body in the WTO and it can change the existing rules/create new rules which are binding in perpetuity on its 164 members.
- The major demand in agriculture was to have a permanent solution to public stockholding (PSH) for food security purposes worked out. It may be mentioned that as an interim measure to a permanent solution, a peace clause had been negotiated at MC9 in Bali (2013), prohibiting legal challenges to PSH, subject to certain conditions.
- The demand for an expedited permanent solution along with waivers on the two issues does not figure in the MC12 outcome documents.
- The minor demand in agriculture related to exempting purchases by the World Food Programme (WFP) from any export restrictions.
- India was opposed to granting such a blanket exemption on the grounds that it may be required to meet domestic food shortages and price stability challenges.
- The MC12 decision stipulating no export restrictions on WFP purchases has a caveat allowing members to exercise their rights under the WTO to address domestic food security challenges.
- On balance, we can conclude that while India has not conceded ground on any of its core interests, many of its other demands have been given short shrift.

***India has indicated a more independent foreign policy with Iran. Justify this statement.***

**KEY POINTS**

- India's unbounded consideration for U. S. concerns has been a hallmark of its foreign policy over the decades, especially after the May 1998 nuclear tests.
- It is one thing to meet a minister from a "difficult" country, but it's quite another to say that Iran has promoted regional security.

- India would not abandon Iran at the IAEA, and eventually led to their withdrawal of support to his government over the India-U.S. nuclear deal.
- Today's India has its own compulsions, especially on the energy front given the global polarisation of positions around the Ukraine war.
- The government is also facing flak from the Gulf nations, including Iran, on the insulting remarks made by the ruling party's spokespersons against Prophet Mohammed.
- In today's uncertain world, India has the opportunity and the clout to pursue an independent foreign policy in the interest of its people. The departure from follow-the-leader default position on Ukraine and the vote on Iran are welcome, but there is a long distance to travel down this road.
- Energy security must be one of the guiding principles of this independent foreign policy as should food security.
- These goals are not negotiable and must not be sacrificed for the sake of any alignment with the West.

***BRICS countries have shown that they cooperate effectively on their common interest. Analyse with respect to 14<sup>th</sup> BRICS summit.***

#### KEY POINTS

- The 14th BRICS Summit revealed much about the grouping of five emerging nations.
- The bloc has been able to demonstrate some concrete, albeit modest, outcomes of cooperation, such as the emergence of the New Development Bank (NDB).
- NDB, which has since its launch in 2015 funded around \$30 billion worth of projects in emerging nations, still remains for the grouping an isolated example of their common interests translating into tangible outcomes.
- For instance, on two key issues for the grouping UN reforms and terrorism members India and China have found themselves on opposing sides of the debate. India and Brazil have made common cause on pushing for an expanded UN Security Council,
- On Ukraine, the bloc affirmed a commitment to respect sovereignty, despite Russia's actions, and stopped short of condemning NATO, as Russia and China have done, reflecting different views within BRICS.
- These differences certainly cast doubt on the bloc's loftier goals of reorienting the global order. They do not, however, suggest that the BRICS countries cannot cooperate on issues where interests align, whether in financing projects.

***Despite of Ukraine war, India cannot afford to alienate its relationship with Russia. Do you agree with this view? Explain***

#### KEY POINTS

- India's recent attitude toward the Russian attack on Ukraine and its concomitant behaviour in the United Nations Security Council (as a non-permanent member) contradict its support of democracy.
- By abstaining, rather than explicitly voting in favour of UN resolutions condemning Russian aggression at the beginning of the war, India angered several UN member-countries.

- At first glance, a “good” relationship with Russia seems to be more significant than the expectations of the world-community as represented in the UN.
- Although there was a marked reduction of Russian imports in past years, official data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reveal that between 1996 and 2015, the Russian proportion of Indian military imports was almost 70 per cent, and between 2016 and 20 it still hovered around 49 per cent.
- Russia is unlikely to be able to fulfil its contractual obligations towards India, and the lack of spare parts also has the potential to cripple India’s own military with regards to the Russian weapons equipment.
- For the Indian political establishment, Russian support, militarily or as a producer of cheap oil and gas, cannot be foregone.
- Going forward, India’s military will need to protect its national security and project Indian influence and power well beyond its borders.

***India’s participation in the G7 meeting as an observer serves to advance its foreign and security policy objectives. Elaborate***

**KEY POINTS**

- The meeting of G7 leaders that concluded in Bavaria in was an important one since it took place against the backdrop of a triple crisis.
- A standalone G7 Statement on Support for Ukraine was issued an unmistakable indication of what was foremost in the minds of the leaders of these countries.
- There was an unconditional commitment that the grouping will provide financial, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support and stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes.
- Further intensification of sanctions against Russia was contemplated, including tariffs on Russian products, targeting gold exports, capping oil prices and restricting access to technology.
- NATO’s Secretary-General minced no words when he termed Russia as the most immediate threat to NATO’s security and hinted that the alliance’s deployments will now be much closer to Russian borders.
- For India, G7 summits have always been an invaluable opportunity to exchange views not just in a plurilateral format but also in the bilateral meetings on the margins of the main meetings.
- The G7 is still a powerful grouping, with seven of its members in the top 10 economies of the world, three of them permanent members of the UNSC. India’s participation in this meeting as an observer serves to advance its foreign and security policy objectives.

**G.S PAPER - III**

**9. ECONOMY**

***Despite the efforts taken to ease the retail inflation, there is no room for complacency. Comment.***

**KEY POINTS**

- The latest retail inflation numbers point to a slight softening in the pace of price gains, and that should provide policymakers some solace that recent interventions appear to be working.
- Inflation in the transport and communication category of the CPI slowed by 137 basis points to 9.54% last month.
- This key category, with a weight of 8.59 that places it behind only cereals and housing, captures the pump prices of the main transportation fuels, making it a crucial indicator of price pressures in the economy.
- Food prices, the other driver of retail price gains, offered far less respite with the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) inflation slowing by only 34 basis points to 7.97%.
- City consumers experienced an acceleration in food price gains as urban CFPI inflation quickened 11 basis points to 8.2% last month.
- There is no room for complacency given that price gains in the vital cooking medium were still running at 13.3% amid persistent supply concerns in the wake of the Ukraine war .
- With the RBI's consumer confidence survey showing an appreciable deterioration in households' expectations of the one-year ahead price level, authorities must stay laser-focused on the battle to tame inflation.

***The PM's plan to create a million government jobs in mission mode over 18 months need to be carefully thought through and implemented. Discuss.***

#### KEY POINTS

- The central government has been going slow on recruitments to regular posts. Its representatives have instead pointed to employment generation through Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).
- The Indian Railways are the biggest government employer — with 12.52 lakh employees as of March 1, 2020, and estimated strengths of 12.03 lakh and 12.01 lakh as on March 1, 2021 and 2022 respectively.
- While recruitment rallies for General Duty in the Army have been on hold, the government on Tuesday announced the new 'Agnipath' scheme.
- The UPSC advertised 27,764 posts and recruited 24,836 people in the last five years, Singh told Lok Sabha on April 6 this year. In the same period, the SSC advertised 1,85,734 posts and recruited 1,74,744 people.
- The SSC, as per its Annual Report for 2020-21, conducted 12 All India Open Competitive Examinations, for which 1.08 crore candidates applied for different stages. The SSC also conducted the Combined Higher Secondary Level Examination, 2019 — its largest examination — for 41.68 lakh candidates across the country.
- Twenty one RRBs recruit mainly Group C personnel for Railways; and the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS) is engaged to recruit for nationalised and Regional Rural Banks. IBPS recruited 7,627 candidates to clerical posts and 4,398 officers in 2020-21.

***The U.S. Federal Reserve's interest rate hike has its spill over effect on India. Analyse.***

#### KEY POINTS

- The U.S. Federal Reserve implemented its steepest interest rate increase in more than 27 years as it fights to rein in runaway inflation.

- Fed recognised the 'hardship high inflation was causing' and had the resolve to restore price stability with singular focus.
- Even as it realises that it has very little control over supply side factors, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine and COVID-related lockdowns in China, the U.S. central bank said it was determined to continue raising interest rates till it saw 'compelling evidence' that inflation was slowing towards its 2% goal.
- It is also a scenario mirrored earlier this month in forecasts by almost 70% of academic economists, polled by the Financial Times and the University of Chicago, who foresee the U.S. economy shrinking in 2023.
- The Fed recognises that the tighter financial conditions have tempered demand, even as it posits that real GDP growth has rebounded on strong consumption spending.
- Central bankers now see the U.S. economy expanding by 1.7% both in 2022 and 2023, slower than the March forecasts of 2.8% and 2.2%, respectively.
- For India, the Fed's actions are likely to result in an acceleration in the recent exodus of foreign portfolio investments, spur more gains for the dollar against the rupee thus widening the trade deficit.

***Despite equity oriented transfers from the central government, there is a widening inter-state inequalities. Explain***

**KEY POINTS**

- State governments are largely responsible for the development of backward areas.
- It has one of the lowest CAGR of 9.9 per cent during the 30-year period. Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan continue to be at the bottom, indicating that the tag 'BIMARU' is yet to be shaken off by them.
- Institutional transfers by way of Finance Commission and by the erstwhile Planning Commission have been based on both equity and efficiency.
- The transfers from erstwhile Planning Commission based on the Gadgil-Mukherjee formulae had also allocated higher weightage to backwardness.
- Contrary to per capita GSDP, the skewness has shown a moderating trend as the coefficient of variation of transfers of resources from the Centre has declined from 418 per cent in 1991-92 to 230 per cent in 2021-22.
- The introduction of area as a distinct factor in inter-se allocation with a minimum weight of 2 per cent to each State benefiting smaller States with a smaller geographic area at the cost of bigger States.
- Moreover, horizontal distribution making these transfers equalising may also not be fair to the middle and high income States as they contribute far more to the Central taxes.

***An unsustainable level of debt in some of the large states would not only affect growth prospects, but also pose risks to macroeconomic stability. Discuss***

**KEY POINTS**

- The Covid-19 pandemic-related disruption has had a material impact on government finances all over the world.

- Before the onset of the pandemic, the average gross fiscal deficit (GFD) to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio was at 2.5 per cent, though some states ran fiscal deficits above 3.5 per cent.
- But the pandemic significantly affected government finances. The study has highlighted 10 vulnerable states based on their debt stock in 2020-21. Their GFD to GSDP ratios were also at 3 per cent or above.

### **Worrying state finances**

- While revenue collection has been an issue in general, some states are witnessing a decline in their own tax revenue.
- Revenue expenditure constitutes about 80-90 per cent of total expenditure in these states, which clearly affects their ability to spend on growth-enhancing asset creation.
- The guarantees extended to state-owned enterprises and the mounting debt of power distribution companies are another source of risks for states.
- According to estimates, the off-budget borrowings of state governments have increased to about 4.5 per cent of GDP.
- Projections suggest that most states would have a debt-GSDP ratio of over 30 per cent by 2026-27.
- Punjab is likely to be in the worst position with debt in excess of 45 per cent of GSDP.
- The end of the compensation regime under the goods and services tax would further weaken the fiscal position of the states.
- An unsustainable level of debt in some of the large states would not only affect growth prospects, but could also pose risks to macroeconomic stability.

### ***Digitalising MSMEs sector not only provide significant contribution to the economy but also enable a transition to cleaner forms of energy. Examine***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- As 70 per cent of the country's power consumption is met by coal, the segment's indirect contribution to global warming is significant. So addressing how to reduce MSMEs' energy consumption is vital for climate mitigation.
- Digitalisation could accelerate the MSME sector's clean energy transition, improve energy efficiency and reduce resource use and waste. Here's how digitalisation could do this:
- India's small businesses are being encouraged to adopt rooftop solar (RTS). Global Horizontal Irradiation (GHI) can be calculated using satellite data products. GHI is the total amount of shortwave radiation received from the Sun by a surface horizontal to the ground.
- Using high-resolution satellite images, the total footprint of MSME buildings, or, available real estate where RTS could be installed, can be mapped.
- Machine learning provides in-depth understanding of operations in a digestible format. A GIS enabled SCADA system can allow MSMEs to monitor dynamic processes with fixed geographical locations.

- Smart meters would provide past power consumption data, consumer behaviour and consumption patterns. This could then predict future demand. This will eventually allow businesses to optimise their production, reduce consumption, leading to greater revenue margins.
- The Centre and various States have extended support to the MSME sector. West Bengal has begun a geospatial survey of MSMEs aiming to provide technologically advanced infrastructure.

***Do you think that the online market place is hurting small business entrepreneurs and consumers? Comment***

**KEY POINTS**

- The online aggregator platforms have also damaged large segments of small and medium businesses through their dominant position and the malpractices this position allows them to indulge in.
- Be it e-marketplaces like Amazon and Flipkart or food service aggregators like Zomato or Swiggy or travel aggregators like MakeMyTrip and OYO, all have been accused of distorting the market.
- Zomato, like other food aggregators, is said to run cloud kitchens. Many of them run private-labelled products in categories where other sellers have been successful.
- Online travel aggregators are often accused of cartelisation. The Competition Commission of India's investigation in the OYO-MakeMyTrip collusion case resulted in MakeMyTrip being ordered to relist properties of Treebo and FabHotels.
- While using these platforms, citizens share their data voluntarily and involuntarily. The aggregators gather shopping habits, consumer preferences, and other personal data.
- They capitalise on this data and information about other brands to launch competing products on their marketplace. This information asymmetry is exploited by the aggregators to devour organisations they promise to support.
- Delayed payments, unreasonable charges, and hidden fees are common occurrences. The power of these platforms is at the cost of small hardworking businesses.
- The rules should allow for punitive penalties for unfair practices. Market dominance and subsequent invoking of fair competition rules should be triggered at the level of micro-markets and for product segments.

***An institutional framework to deal with the gig economy must be put in place to handle specific issues in a holistic way. Analyse***

**KEY POINTS**

- NITI Aayog has highlighted the exponential growth prospects of the gig and platform economy, while raising concerns about the need to create a social security umbrella for its workforce.
- The gig and platform economy's current workforce of about eight million is expected to rise to 23.5 million in a decade, forming 6.7 per cent of the non-agricultural workforce by then, against 2.6 per cent at present.

- The report points out that 2.7 million workers are employed in retail trade and sales and another 1.3 million in the transportation sector, with another 1.2 million spread across manufacturing, finance and insurance activities.
- The report observes that “currently more than 75 per cent of the companies have less than 10 per cent gig headcount, but this proportion is bound to rise.
- The Social Security Code (SSC) has spoken about providing certain benefits such as accident insurance for those registered under the Aadhaar-seeded e-shram portal in particular, but much remains to be done.
- The report falls short of addressing implementation issues how exactly the government will facilitate these workers’ access to PF and medical care while advocating the importance of the SSC.
- The Social Security Code may have been extended to the gig workers but the law needs to be precise for such definitions as ‘employee’, ‘employer’ and their relationship with each other for benefits such as PF to accrue to them.

## 10. AGRICULTURE

### ***Urban agriculture can help make cities sustainable, livable and enhance food security of the country. Analyse***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- The soaring temperatures adversely affect health, cause a dip in agricultural production, and also dry up rivers. Indeed, the repercussions of climate change are being felt more strongly than ever, especially in climate-vulnerable zones.
- The Centre’s 2015 AMRUT programme, for instance, included green spaces and parks as a thrust area. What, however, is often left out in urban planning is agriculture, still seen as a predominantly rural practice and source of livelihood.
- Urban areas already house at least 55 per cent of the world’s population and consume 80 per cent of the food produced globally, thus underlining UPA as key to achieving sustainable food systems. With a current urban population of 481 million, which is expected to double by 2050, this holds true for India as well.
- To further explore the actual practice of UPA vis-à-vis ULP, the project compared three municipal master plans of the Ghaziabad sub-district with actual land-use mapped using satellite imagery.
- Adequate political will for financial inputs and enforcement of regulations will be essential for often fund-starved urban administrations and for curbing violations of environmental norms.
- Urgent attention to UPA and its incorporation into ULP with enabling support will also go a long way in achieving urban food security and even a circular bioeconomy.

### ***The impact of climate-related food shortages could be more dangerous than that of the Covid-19 pandemic. Do you agree with this view? Comment***

#### **KEY POINTS**

- Wheat export from Ukraine has been affected, especially by the sea route but also by land and rail. Russia, the world’s leading wheat exporter, has been sanctioned.

- As India is the second-largest producer of wheat, this held out hope to countries in Asia and Middle East. However, the severe summer heat this year affected wheat production and also diminished grain size.
- Climate change, which is propelling global warming to higher temperatures each year, will affect agricultural production through heat stress and water stress.
- Rice and wheat will have reduced levels of zinc, protein and iron. It has been estimated, by scientists at the Columbia University, that India would have 49.6 million new zinc deficient persons by 2050 due to climate change.
- Wildfires, consuming forests and agricultural land, will also become more common with climate change. Water scarcity, with shrinking reservoirs, will lead to droughts. .
- We need to grow nutrient-rich crops, rather than killer crops like tobacco which consume large amounts of water, pesticides and fertile land.
- Quinoa, pearl millet, sorghum and chickpea are among the crops that are highly resilient to extreme weather conditions. They are good for nutrition too.

***The global community must plan to have a global buffer stock of food in order to ensure reasonable stability in food prices and supply. Explain***

#### **KEY POINTS**

The crisis can emerge in the form of food shortages, trade disruptions, a rise and spread in hunger and poverty levels, a depletion of foreign exchange reserves for net food importing countries,

#### **Implications for India**

- Export and import in the agriculture sector constituted 13% of gross value added in agriculture during 2020-21.
- The policy of having a buffer stock of food staples has also been very helpful in maintaining price stability especially in the wake of global food crises.

#### **Wheat export restrictions**

- The international market is looking for around 50 million tonnes of wheat to compensate for the disruption in wheat exports from Russia and Ukraine.
- India should continue with a policy of strategic liberalisation, as followed in the past, to balance the interests of producers and consumers.
- The policy of buffer stock has also been very helpful in maintaining price stability in the face of global price shocks.

#### **Global impact**

- The world requires new breakthroughs such as Green Revolution technology, for large-scale adoption in order to enable checks on food prices rising at a faster rate.
- Diversion of land under food crops and food output for biofuel should be carefully calibrated with implications for food availability. In most cases it requires serious rethink.

***For better cotton productivity, strategy involving multiple stakeholders and Central and State ministries is urgently drawn up. Elaborate***

**KEY POINTS**

- Cotton exports worth \$2 billion are under threat. India cultivates cotton on 12 million hectares but lags in productivity.
- The current productivity of 440 kg/ha of lint, down from its peak of 516 kg/ha five years ago, compares poorly with the global average of 775 kg/ha.
- Lack of upgradation of agronomic practices and mechanisation of operations including picking are creating inefficiencies in cotton production.

**High Density Planting System (HDPS)**

- Increase the plant population from the current 15,000-25,000 per hectare to 75,000- 1,00,000 with customised agronomic practices thereby increasing the yield by 30 per cent.

**High Ginning Out-Turn (GOT)**

- Seed companies need to be incentivised to invest in developing varieties with higher ginning out-turn.

**Technology deployment**

- The commercial approval of BtHt cotton is absolutely essential to meet farmers' urgent needs.
- It will also encourage R&D and accelerate research to tackle the pink bollworm, boll rot menace and cotton leaf curl virus.
- The Centre must streamline and operationalise the regulatory system, do away with burden of NOC from States, ensure regular functioning of GEAC and encourage the private sector to deploy advanced biotech traits.
- There is a need to revisit the highly successful Technology Mission on Cotton (TMC) 1.0 of 2002 and repeat the momentum by undertaking modern technology deployment through the value chain.

**11. ENERGY**

***Rapid solar power infrastructure development is the backbone of India's climate ambitions and energy security. Elaborate***

**KEY POINTS**

- The recent power crisis once again highlighted India's reliance on thermal power for generating electricity.
- The crisis stemmed from the convergence of multiple factors such as a shortage of coal stocks, post-Covid supply chain issues and record-high prices of coal in the international market.

- For instance, in 2021, solar module prices increased by up to 40 per cent due to raw material shortages and supply chain disruptions in China.
- Further, the R&D budget allocated to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) should be increased significantly from the current Rs 35 crore (\$5 million).
- To increase the role of the industry in technology development, MNRE should mandate manufacturers to allocate 3 per cent of their revenues to R&D.
- MNRE could create demand-pull for new technologies by mandating government tendering agencies to use modules developed under the technology roadmap for at least 5 per cent of awarded solar capacity.
- Indian solar manufacturers could face a demand ceiling and low utilisation rates if they rely on the domestic market alone.
- It is expected that 41,000 workers would be required if domestic solar manufacturers were to achieve their current capacity expansion plans.

## 12. INFRASTRUCTURE

***For safe foods there is a need to develop lab infrastructure in states. Justify this statement.***

### KEY POINTS

- Food safety and consumer empowerment are areas in need of constant attention in India, where enforcement is often lax.
- But in this, Tamil Nadu deserves credit for finishing at the top among 17 large States for food safety; it was ranked third in the previous edition of the State Food Safety Index.
- That Tamil Nadu, with 82 marks, is ahead of Gujarat by 4.5 marks and Maharashtra by 12 marks, highlights its creditable showing.
- Developed by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the Food Safety Index evaluates States and Union Territories on these parameters, apart from their size: human resources and institutional data; compliance; food testing infrastructure and surveillance; training and capacity building, and consumer empowerment.
- The State has performed marginally lower than what it did last year in 'consumer empowerment'.
- Liberal assistance should be provided to the States and Union Territories as far as laboratory infrastructure and improvement of manpower, both technical and non-technical, are concerned.
- What every player in the field of food safety should realise is that each one has a critical role to play, and there has to be collective and well-coordinated action.

***The road sector has important lessons for other infrastructure sectors and for Indian infrastructure in general to mobilize financial resources. Explain***

### KEY POINTS

- Global food prices are characterised by year-to-year volatility and periodic sharp spikes.

- The crisis can emerge in the form of food shortages, trade disruptions, a rise and spread in hunger and poverty levels, a depletion of foreign exchange reserves for net food importing countries.

### Implications for India

- Export and import in the agriculture sector constituted 13% of gross value added in agriculture during 2020-21.
- When international prices go too low, India has checks on cheap imports to protect the interests of producers.
- The policy of having a buffer stock of food staples has also been very helpful in maintaining price stability especially in the wake of global food crises.
- Ongoing trends in domestic demand and supply imply that India will be required to dispose of 15% of its domestic food output in the overseas market by 2030.

### Wheat export restrictions

- India was a very small exporter of wheat, with its share in global wheat trade ranging between 0.1% to 1% during 2015-16 to 2020-21.

### Global impact

- Biofuel protocols have contributed to the global food crisis for the second time in the last 15 years.
- The last three food price crises were primarily caused due to an increase in energy prices and disruptions in the movement of food across borders.
- Therefore, the global community must plan to have a global buffer stock of food in order to ensure reasonable stability in food prices and supply.

## 13. S & T

### *The story of India's digital transformation is a visionary leadership and commitment to bringing about inclusive growth and transformation using technology. Explain*

#### KEY POINTS

- After eight years of digital governance, there is concrete evidence to showcase this digital transformation. India today is home to more than 75 crore smartphones, 133 crore Aadhaar cards, more than 80 crore internet users, has 4G and is now accelerating towards 5G.
- Digital India solved some of the most difficult problems the country had been facing for decades. Ensuring delivery of government schemes to its beneficiaries without leakage or misuse remained a herculean task.
- These CSCs are offering banking, insurance, state and central government services, passport and PAN card services, digital literacy, rural eCommerce services and pre-litigation advice etc.
- India has emerged as the fastest-growing ecosystem for fintech innovations. India's digital payments revolution is being appreciated globally. This was made possible due to innovative digital payment products like UPI and Aadhaar-Enabled Payment Systems (AEPS).
- India is rapidly becoming atmanirbhar in electronics manufacturing. The value of electronics manufacturing in India has touched \$75 billion in 2020-21 from \$29 billion in 2014.

- Digital India's motto – "Power to Empower" – is truly living up to its goals and expectations. In the last eight years, the success of Digital India only confirms that it has a robust future in India's development.

***The cryptocurrencies have always been subject to extreme price swings and the crypto crash could be the end of the road for cryptocurrencies. Comment.***

**KEY POINTS**

- Ethereum, another cryptocurrency popular among investors, has lost almost 80% from its peak.
- The crash, which shows no signs of reversal yet, seems to have led to a drop in investor enthusiasm with trading volumes in Indian cryptocurrency exchanges dropping by 90% from their peak.
- As central banks withdraw liquidity from the market, there's less money chasing assets, which in turn causes the prices of assets to drop. Others believe that the crash could also mark the popping of the bubble that has driven the prices of cryptocurrencies to stratospheric levels.
- While countries such as China and Russia have opted to impose outright bans on cryptocurrencies, others such as India have tried to tax and regulate them heavily.
- In India, while the government has not imposed an outright ban on cryptocurrencies, the Reserve Bank of India has been quite vocal about the need to ban them completely.
- Crypto-enthusiasts, however, argue that while cryptocurrencies may not be widely accepted as a currency, they still represent an independent asset class like gold that can help investors protect their wealth from central banks.
- No cryptocurrency has such a record. The fact that precious metals are limited in supply definitely helped boost their value. But limited supply alone cannot make cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin a valuable asset like gold and silver.

***There is a need to create a statutory body for independent regulatory oversight of social media platforms. Do you agree with this view? Analyse***

**KEY POINTS**

- The Centre's proposal to set up an appellate committee with the power to review the content moderation decisions of social media platforms merits a cautious welcome.
- The Centre had notified The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 in February last year with the objective of making social media assume more responsibility for the content uploaded on their platforms.
- In the US, a Congressional committee had summoned the CEOs of Facebook, Twitter, and Google to testify about the misuse of private data after leaks to Cambridge Analytica came to light.

- Therefore, social media companies, left to themselves, can neither be trusted to uphold freedom of speech and user privacy nor to be impartial in content moderation.
- Oversight cannot be left to the governments either as they often are interested parties in social media posts. And thus comes in the idea of a statutory body for independent regulatory oversight of social media platforms.
- India's digital growth is at the nascent stage and it is important for all stakeholders to ensure that the laws governing the Internet are robust and clearly defined. It is important to strike a balance between promoting free speech and containing hate speech.

## 14. ENVIRONMENT

***Cooperatives have set the agenda to collectively provide solutions to the looming impact of climate change and environmental degradation. Examine***

### KEY POINTS

- The explicit adoption of eco-social agendas by cooperatives is contributing to co-op viability and vitality, providing a basis for positive differentiation and for stronger ties to important constituencies, stakeholders, and strategic allies.
- Dhundi village in Kheda district of Gujarat had formed the world's first solar irrigation cooperative as Dhundi Saur Urja Utpadak Sahakari Mandali (DSUUSM) in 2016.
- This has enabled them to reap a better harvest and they are connected to grid for additional income. Cooperatives like DSUUSM in India have meaningful action for attaining SDG 13 on climate change and renewable energy.
- Indian Farm Forestry Development Co-operative (India), the umbrella co-operative, is turning wasteland back into forest in three north-central States of India, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- Cooperatives have provided alternative sources of clean water for metropolitan communities and are helping to accomplish sustainable goals of energy access, energy efficiency, and reduced emissions.
- In many regions of the world, they are also leading the way in the use of new and renewable energies such as solar and wind power.
- The potential and value of cooperatives' contribution to the design and realisation of environmental sustainability appear to have been overlooked by policymakers at various levels due to their lack of visibility.

***In the context of Asiatic lion and Cheetah, analyse the idea of reintroduction of extinct species into the wild in the country.***

### KEY POINTS

- The Union Environment Ministry said that India is set to bring cheetahs from South Africa to Madhya Pradesh's Kuno-Palpur National Park.
- A 10 sq km enclosure has reportedly been readied in the national park and would soon house at least 6 cheetahs.
- The cheetah is the only large carnivore to have gone extinct in India, primarily due to hunting and habitat loss.

- In 1952, the Indian government officially declared the Cheetah extinct in the country.
- Under the British Raj, forests were extensively cleared, so as to develop settlements and to set up indigo, tea and coffee plantations. This further resulted in the loss of habitat for big cats, contributing to their decline.
- Cheetahs continued to be imported to independent India in small numbers, especially for exhibitions in zoos.
- The State Wildlife Board of Andhra Pradesh was the first to suggest the policy in 1955, on an experimental basis in two districts of the state.
- There are two sub-species of cheetahs recognized today, the Asiatic (*Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*) and the African (*Acinonyx jubatus jubatus*).
- If the re-introduction of cheetahs into the wild is successful, it would mark the culmination of a decades-long process.

***In order to treat water as an economic good, regulatory bodies play a key role in ensuring transparency in water pricing. Explain***

**KEY POINTS**

- A robust pricing strategy must be in place for individual State water regulator, thus ensuring uniform State-level water tariffs, subsidies, and other factors such as unaccounted for water, connection cost, and metering.
- The approach to tariff determination is normally based on the cost of service or the ability of various users to pay for the service or a combination of both.
- At the Central level, the National Water Policy (NWP) 2012 highlighted the need for regulatory bodies. The policy mandates a water framework law that will facilitate the establishment of regulatory authorities to plan, manage, and regulate water resources.
- The NWP defines the role of the water regulatory authorities, but does not elaborate much on their functions. Their role would also be advising the government and other agencies to regulate water usage, in addition to regulating water tariffs.
- For example, while most have the power to regulate equitable distribution and quality of water and establish a tariff system, some have the authority to regulate tariffs only in specific sectors (irrigation, industrial, domestic, or their combination), and have no adjudicatory powers for dispute resolution.
- Setting up independent water regulatory bodies with clearly defined roles to ensure efficiency and transparency in the water pricing process is a must.

***India needs to adopt a rigorous dashboard based approach towards environmental indicators in the country. Do you agree with this view? Comment***

**KEY POINTS**

- For a government acutely sensitive to global rankings, the latest Environmental Performance Index (EPI) placing India last among all 180 assessed countries has naturally touched a raw nerve.
- Unsurprisingly, the EPI ranking and scores have been rejected by the Union Government as based on “unfounded assumptions”, “surmises” and “unscientific methods.”

- Within the overall climate score, India does better in sub-metrics such as growth rates for black carbon, methane and fluorinated gases, and greenhouse gas emissions based on their intensity and per capita volumes.
- The Index rates the country low on projected green house gas (GHG) emissions for mid-century, a target for Net Zero emissions.
- This projection has met with strong protest from India, which has faulted the EPI for introducing a new metric on climate with increased weight in the calculation compared to the 2020 assessment.
- The country has protested that the new India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021 was not factored in as part of the biodiversity metric. Wetland loss prevention is among the best scores for India, at 62.
- The national policy of achieving Net Zero emissions by 2070 provides a longer timeline for a coal phaseout, but other areas can benefit from policies that prevent a carbon lock-in effect.

***In achieving goals of Net Zero strategy, India can be a role model for developing countries. Explain***

**KEY POINTS**

- The recent Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change made it clear that the world faces catastrophic consequences of rising temperatures.
- ‘Net Zero’ refers to offsetting new greenhouse gas emissions with other actions, to make net emissions zero.
- The case here is that advanced countries, which created the current situation with their past emissions, should rightfully do more to fix the problem. Given this situation, India’s adoption of a Net Zero target of 2070 is quite reasonable. The country has a feasible strategy for India to achieve this goal.
- India needs rapid electrification for development, and focusing on green electrification can make it possible to achieve Net Zero goals without sacrificing economic growth.
- To achieve Net Zero by 2070, electricity generation capacity will have to increase by about 6% a year.
- India will need additional annual investment in the energy sector of 2.7% to 4.5% of its current GDP.
- While a target of Net Zero by 2070 is well within India’s capability, accelerating that goal by a decade or two, or flattening the emissions curve without changing the Net Zero target date, may be more challenging.