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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

WTO and Subsidies

Context:- The finance minister of India has urged the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to look at the issue of farm subsidies with an open mind as it impacts the food security needs of emerging economies in the backdrop of COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.

- The FM said this while Speaking at the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Governor’s seminar on ‘Policies to support Asia’s rebound.

Agreement on Agriculture:

- WTO’s agreement on agriculture was concluded in 1994, and was aimed to remove trade barriers and to promote transparent market access and integration of global markets.
- Subsidies regime included in the AoA has three forms of subsidies, ranging from those that were considered “non-distorting” or “minimally distorting” (the “Green Box” and “Blue Box” subsidies), to those that seriously “distorted” markets (the “Amber Box” subsidies).
- The World Trade Organization (WTO) compares the “boxes” it uses for classifying trade subsidies to traffic lights. When it comes to agricultural trade and commodity subsidies, however, it’s not that simple.

Green box

Green Box is domestic support measures that don’t cause trade distortion or at most cause minimal distortion.

The Green box subsidies are government funded without any price support to crops.

They also include environmental protection and regional development programmes.

“Green box” subsidies are therefore allowed without limits (except in certain circumstances).

Amber Box:

Amber box subsidies are those that can distort international trade by making a country's products cheaper in comparison to those of other countries.

Examples: Subsidies for inputs such as fertilisers, seeds, electricity, irrigation, and Minimum Support Price (MSP).

WTO members without these commitments are required to maintain their amber box supports to within five to 10 percent of their value of production.

Blue box:

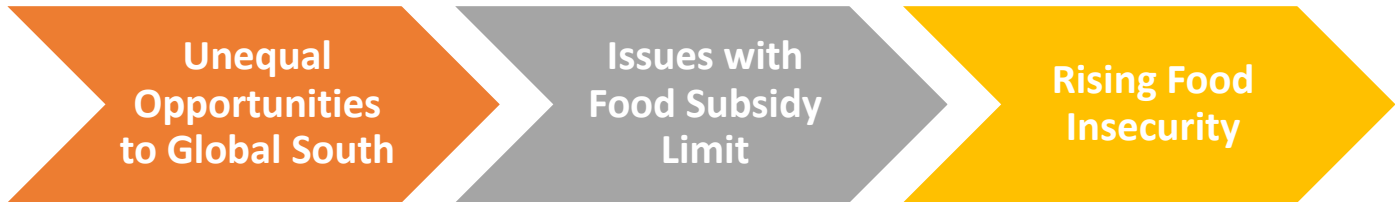
It is the “amber box with conditions” — conditions, designed to reduce distortion.

Any support that would normally be in the amber box is placed in the blue box if it requires farmers to limit production.

These subsidies aim to limit production by imposing production quotas or requiring farmers to set aside part of their land.

At present there are no limits on spending on blue box subsidies.

Need to Relook into Subsidy Norms



World Trade Organisation (WTO)

- The World Trade Organization (WTO) is an intergovernmental organization that regulates and facilitates international trade between nations.
- It officially commenced operations on 1 January 1995, pursuant to the 1994 Marrakesh Agreement, thus replacing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that had been established in 1948
- The WTO is the world's largest international economic organization, with 164 member states representing over 98% of global trade and global GDP
- Also, WTO is the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations

Why WTO replaced GATT?

- There were certain limitations of GATT, like
- It lacked institutional structure. GATT by itself was only the set of rules and multilateral agreements.
- It didn't cover trade in services, Intellectual Property Rights etc. Its main focus was on Textiles and agriculture sector.
- A strong Dispute Resolution Mechanism was absent.
- By developing countries it was seen as a body meant for promoting interests of west. This was because Geneva Treaty of 1946, where GATT was signed had no representation from newly independent states and socialist states.
- Under GATT countries failed to curb quantitative restrictions on trade. (Non-Tariff barriers)

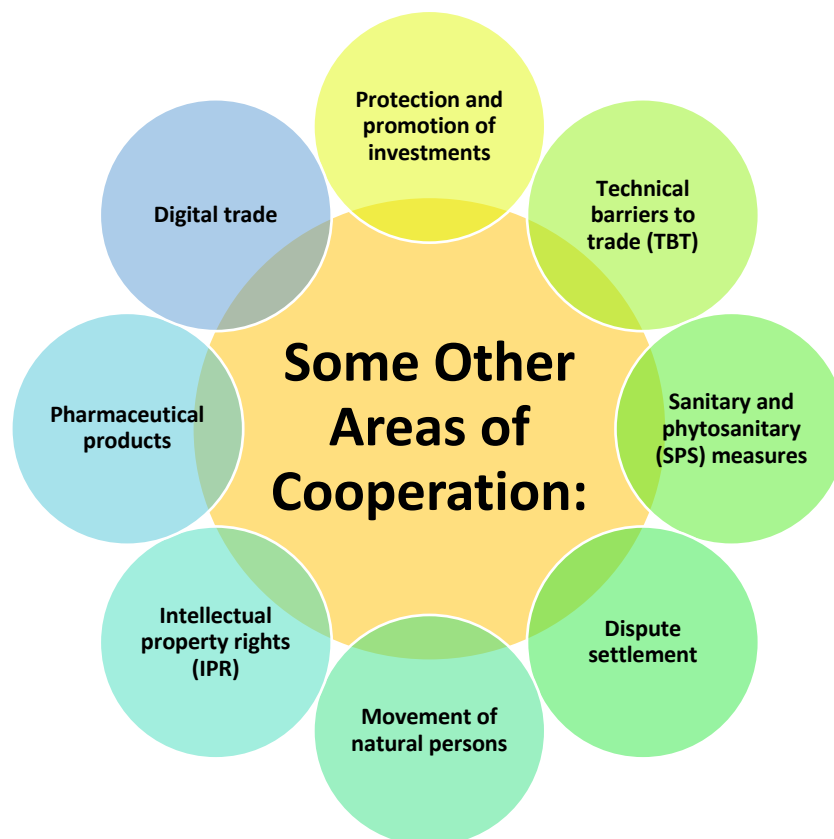
One Year of India- UAE CEPA

Context:- Recently, the **India-UAE** Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) completed one year of implementation.

Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CEPA)

- CEPA is a comprehensive agreement between India and the United Arab Emirates that seeks to enhance the economic and commercial ties between the two countries.
- The agreement aims to increase trade and investment, improve market access, and promote economic growth between India and the UAE.
- CEPA was signed in 2020 and is seen as a significant milestone in the economic relationship between India and the UAE.

- Under CEPA, the two countries have committed to reducing barriers to trade and investment, which will make it easier for businesses from both countries to engage in trade and investment activities.
- The agreement includes provisions for reducing tariffs on goods, services, and investment, as well as for promoting the movement of people, goods, and services between India and the UAE.
- CEPA is expected to provide a major boost to the economic relationship between India and the UAE, as it will increase trade and investment, improve market access, and provide a more favourable environment for businesses to operate in.
- The agreement is expected to benefit a range of sectors, including but not limited to information technology, engineering, pharmaceuticals, and services sectors.
- CEPA is expected to promote the development of economic and commercial ties between India and the UAE, and to provide a foundation for further cooperation between the two countries in the future.
- It is projected to reach US\$100 billion in goods trade and over US\$1.5 billion in trade in services in the next five years. Built on three pillars of trust, transparency, and talent.



Importance of UAE

- Trade and Investment: UAE is one of India's largest trading partners, with bilateral trade reaching nearly \$60 billion in 2019-20. UAE is also a significant source of foreign investment for India.
- Energy Security: UAE is a major supplier of oil to India, making it an important partner in India's energy security.

- Strategic Location: UAE's location makes it a gateway for India to access the wider Gulf region and Africa.
- People-to-People Ties: There is a large Indian diaspora in the UAE, estimated to be around 3 million people, making it a significant cultural and economic bridge between the two countries.
- Political and Defence Cooperation: India and UAE have a strong political and defence relationship, with regular high-level exchanges and cooperation on regional and global issues.

Sectors that Witnessed Significant Export Growth:

- Mineral Fuels
- Electrical Machinery (particularly telephone equipment)
- Chemical Products
- Coffee/Tea/Spices
- Cereals (Rice)
- Other Machinery
- Essential Oils/Perfumes/Cosmetics (Beauty/Skin care products)
- Automobiles (Transport vehicles segment)
- Gems & Jewellery

Other Major Types of Trade Agreements



India-Israel Relations

Context:- Recently, India's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and Israel's Defence Research and Development (DDR&D) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Industrial Research and Development Cooperation.

Key Highlights of the MoU?

- It aims to work together on research and development projects in various fields such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Quantum and semiconductors, synthetic biology, Sustainable Energy, Healthcare, and Agriculture. They will focus on implementing specific projects in mutually agreeable areas.
- The collaboration will include important industrial sectors such as aerospace, chemicals, and infrastructure.
- The MoU will be monitored by a Joint Steering Committee led by the heads of the CSIR and DDR&D for taking forward mutually benefiting Industrial and technology cooperation.

India-Israel Relations

Diplomatic Relations:

- India officially recognised Israel in 1950. Soon after, Israel established an immigration office in Bombay which was later converted into a Trade Office and subsequently a Consulate.
- However full diplomatic relations were established only in 1992 and Embassies were opened.

Economic and Commercial Relations:

- The bilateral merchandise trade grew from USD 200 million in 1992 to USD 6.35 billion (excluding defence) during the period 2021-2022, with the balance of trade being in India's favour.
- India is Israel's third-largest trade partner in Asia and seventh largest globally.
- In recent years, bilateral trade has diversified into several sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture, IT and telecom, and homeland security.
- Israeli companies have been instrumental in transferring technology to India in areas like renewable energy, telecom, water technologies. Many of them have also set up R&D centers in India.
- The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two countries is also on cards.

Defence Cooperation:

- India imports critical defence technologies from Israel. There are regular exchanges between the armed forces.
- There is cooperation on security issues, including a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.
- Indian armed forces use Israeli Phalcon AWACS (Airborne Warning And Control Systems), Heron drones to Barak anti-missile defence systems.

Cooperation in Agriculture:

- A three year joint work program has been signed between the two countries in 2021 for development in agriculture cooperation.
- It is aimed at establishing Centres of Excellence, intensifying value chains and encouraging private investment.
- India has benefited from Israeli expertise and technologies in horticulture mechanization, orchard and canopy management, micro-irrigation and post-harvest management.
- Israeli drip irrigation technologies and products are now widely used in India. Some Israeli companies and experts are providing expertise to manage and improve dairy farming in India through their expertise in high milk yield.

Science & Technology:

- The two countries have established a Joint Committee on S&T, established under the S&T Cooperation Agreement signed in 1993.
- India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F) has been set up to secure cooperation between the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, and the Israel Innovation Authority, Government of Israel to promote, facilitate and support joint industrial R&D projects.
- It will address the challenges in the agreed 'Focus Sectors'.

Energy:

- Tamar and Leviathan gas fields off the coast of Israel were explored recently and India has been one of the first countries to bid for an exploration license in order to extract and import natural gas from the fields.
- India's ONGC Videsh, Bharat Petro Resources, Indian Oil and Oil India were awarded an exploration license by the Israeli government, a clear sign of the ongoing diversification in ties between the two countries.

POLITY

SC Allows Divorce on Irretrievable Breakdown

Context:- A constitution bench of the Supreme Court of India recently held that it can exercise its powers under Article 142 of the Constitution to directly grant divorce to consenting parties, in cases of irretrievable breakdown of marriage.

SC's Ruling

- In the case of **Shilpa Sailesh vs. Varun Sreenivasan (2023)**, the SC has ruled that it has the power to dissolve a marriage if it is irretrievably broken down.
- The court can waive the mandatory six-month waiting period for divorce under the **Hindu Marriage Act (HMA), 1955**, and allow the dissolution of the marriage on grounds of an irretrievable breakdown even if one of the parties was not willing.

Current procedure for divorce under the HMA, 1955

- **Section 13B** of the HMA provides for “divorce by mutual consent” where both parties must together file a petition to the district court on the ground that they have been living separately for a period of one year or more.
- **Under Section 13B(2)** of the Act, the parties must move a second motion before the court “not earlier than six months after the first petition and not later than 18 months”.
- Thereafter, the court shall hear the parties and after being convinced that the averments in the petition are true, pass a decree of divorce declaring the marriage to be dissolved.
- Usually a petition for divorce by mutual consent can be moved only after a year of the marriage. However, Section 14 of the HMA allows a divorce petition sooner in case of “exceptional hardship to the petitioner or of exceptional depravity on the part of the respondent”.
- In the 2021 ruling, the SC said that if there was a chance of reconciliation, a cooling period of 6 months was to be enforced. However, if there seems no possibility of reconciliation, it would be meaningless to prolong the agony of the parties to the marriage.

Article 142 of Indian Constitution

Powers of SC under this article

- The Art. 142 confers on the Supreme Court plenary power to pass such decree or make such order as is necessary for doing complete justice.
- The SC can do so in any cause or matter pending before it.

Noticeable Use of Art. 142

- 142 remained unnoticed till the SC gave its decision in The Bhopal Gas Disaster Case.
- It quashed all criminal proceedings arising out of the disaster. SC invoked the power given to it under Art 142 to pass the judgement.

Limitations on Art 142

- SC recognised that the power under Art 142 has certain limitations and fetters.
- It held that while exercising power under this article:
 - the court should not ignore the substantive rights of a litigant under the existing law.
 - The power could not be used to supplant substantive law applicable to a case.
 - Express statutory provisions cannot be ignored.
 - It cannot exercise the jurisdiction in violation of the statute.
 - It clarified that no court has competence to issue a direction contrary to the law. The courts are meant to enforce the rule of law and not to pass orders contrary to law.

Mercy Petition

Context:- In a recent ruling, the Supreme Court (SC) has declined to direct the government to commute the death penalty of Balwant Singh Rajoana, instead, it has allowed the government to decide on the Mercy Petition when necessary.

- Balwant Singh Rajoana was convicted for the assassination of former Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh in 1995.
- The petitioner argued that since the state and the Union of India have not been able to decide on the mercy petition, which is pending for more than 10 years, the death penalty should be commuted to life imprisonment.

About Mercy Petition:

- As per the Constitutional framework in India, mercy petition to the President is the last constitutional resort a convict can take when he is sentenced by the court of law.
- A convict can present a mercy petition to the President of India under Article 72 of the Constitution of India.
- Similarly, the power to grant pardon is conferred upon the Governors of States under Article 161 of the Constitution of India.
- Previously, the governor cannot pardon the death sentence, which only the Indian President can do. But recently on 3rd August 2021, the Supreme Court held that the Governor of a State can pardon

prisoners, including death row ones, even before they have served a minimum of 14 years of a prison sentence.

- The recent judgement regarding the Governor's power to pardon overrides a provision in the Code of Criminal Procedure (Section 433A) which mandates that a prisoner's sentence can be remitted only after 14 years of jail.

Court's Observation

- The court cited the Home Ministry's conclusion that a decision on the mercy petition now would compromise national security.
- The court has observed that it is not up to the court to "delve" to the Ministry's decision to defer a decision on the clemency plea.
- The court said that the Ministry's call to postpone its decision on the mercy petition actually amounted to declining the plea for the time being.

Important Judgments Related to Mercy Petition

Maru Ram v. Union of India (1981):

- **The SC held that the power to grant pardon under Article 72 is to be exercised on the advice of the Council of ministers.**

Dhananjay Chatterjee State of West Bengal (1994):

- **The SC said that "The power under Articles 72 and 161 of the Constitution can be exercised by the Central and State Governments, not by the President or Governor on their own.**

Kehar Singh v. Union of India (1989):

- **The SC had examined the scope of the President's pardoning power under Article 72 in detail.**

INTERNAL SECURITY

Command Cyber Operations and Support Wings (CCOSWs)

Context: The Indian Army has decided to create Command Cyber Operations and Support Wings (CCOSWs) to assist its formations in dealing with cyberspace security challenges posed by adversaries.

What are CCOSWs

- The CCOSWs are a specialized unit of the Indian Army that will assist the formations in undertaking mandated cyber security functions.
- The unit will be responsible for safeguarding the networks and enhancing the cybersecurity posture of the Indian Army.
- They will also facilitate better utilization of modern communication systems and networks within the Indian Army.

Purpose

- To assist Army formations in taking up cyberspace security challenges and safeguard networks
- Increase preparedness levels in the cyberspace domain

Function

- Help Army formations in addressing cyberspace security challenges posed by adversaries. The Lead Directorates and Test Bed formations will facilitate the absorption of niche technologies and improve the exploitation of futuristic technologies across the army.



GOVERNANCE

National Medical Device Policy 2023

Context: Indian Union Cabinet has approved the National Medical Devices Policy, 2023

Background on Medical Device Sector:

- The medical devices sector in India is an essential and integral constituent of the Indian healthcare sector, particularly for the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and management of medical conditions, diseases, illnesses, and disabilities.
- The medical device is a multi-product sector, with the following broad classifications:



- The medical devices sector in India is a sunrise sector which is growing at a fast pace.
- The current market size of the medical devices sector in India is estimated to be \$11 bn and its share in the global medical device market is estimated to be 1.5%.

Key Features of NMD Policy 2023

- **Regulatory Streamlining:** To make it easier to do research and business while balancing patient safety and product innovation, a "Single Window Clearance System" for licensing medical devices will be created.
- **Enabling Infrastructure:** Large medical device parks with world-class infrastructure facilities will be established, near economic zones.
- **Facilitating R&D and Innovation:** The policy aims to promote Research & Development in India, complementing the proposed National Policy on R&D and Innovation in the Pharma-MedTech sector.

PCPNDT Act

Context: In a significant judgment, the Supreme Court has upheld provisions in the anti-pre-natal sex determination law which 'criminalises' non-maintenance of medical records by obstetricians and gynaecologists and suspend their medical licence indefinitely.

The court held that these provisions in the Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act of 1994 were necessary to prevent female foeticide in the country.

What is PC & PNDT Act?

- The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994 is an Act of the Parliament of India that was enacted to stop female foeticides and arrest the declining sex ratio in India. The act banned prenatal sex determination.
- The main objective of enacting the act is to ban the use of sex selection techniques before or after conception and prevent the misuse of prenatal diagnostic techniques for sex-selective abortion.

Main provisions in the act are:

- The Act provides for the prohibition of sex selection, before or after conception.
- It regulates the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques, like ultrasound and amniocentesis by allowing them their use only to detect few cases.
- No laboratory or centre or clinic will conduct any test including ultrasonography for the purpose of determining the sex of the foetus.
- No person, including the one who is conducting the procedure as per the law, will communicate the sex of the foetus to the pregnant woman or her relatives by words, signs or any other method.
- Any person who puts an advertisement for pre-natal and pre-conception sex determination facilities in the form of a notice, circular, label, wrapper or any document, or advertises through interior or other media in electronic or print form or engages in any visible representation made by means of hoarding, wall painting, signal, light, sound, smoke or gas, can be imprisoned for up to three years and fined Rs. 10,000.
- The Act mandates compulsory registration of all diagnostic laboratories, all genetic counselling centres, genetic laboratories, genetic clinics and ultrasound clinics.
- Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 (PNDT), was amended in 2003 to The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition Of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT Act) to improve the regulation of the technology used in sex selection. The Act was amended to bring the technique of pre conception sex selection and ultrasound technique within the ambit of the act. The amendment also empowered the central supervisory board and state level supervisory board was constituted.
- In 1988, the State of Maharashtra became the first in the country to ban pre-natal sex determination through enacting the Maharashtra Regulation of Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act.

National Health Accounts Estimates

Context:-(NHA) Estimates for India (2019-20), which was produced by the National Health Systems Resource Centre.

- The NHA estimates are prepared by using an accounting framework based on the internationally accepted System of Health Accounts 2011, provided by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Major Highlights

- Share of **Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE)** in Total Health Expenditure declines from 62.6% in 2014-15 to 47.1% in 2019-20
- Government Health Expenditure's share in country's total GDP increases from 1.13% (2014-15) to 1.35% (2019-20)
- Additionally, in **General Government Expenditure (GGE)**, the share of health sector spending has steadily increased from 3.94% to 5.02% between 2014-15 and 2019-20.
- Private health insurance share is also going up which is a sign of maturity for a country in terms of the insurance arena. It complements the government system of primary, secondary and tertiary care.
- The share of primary healthcare in **Current Government Health Expenditure (CGHE)** has increased from 51.3% in 2014-15 to 55.9% in 2019-20.

- The share of **Social Security Expenditure (SSE)** on health, which includes government-funded health insurance, medical reimbursement to government employees, and social health insurance programs, in THE (Total Health Expenditure) has increased from 5.7% in 2014-15 to 9.3% in 2019-20.
- In per capita terms, Government health expenditure has doubled from Rs. 1,108 to Rs. 2,014 between 2014-15 to 2019-20

Initiatives Related to Healthcare



About National Health Account (NHA) estimates

The **National Health Account (NHA)** estimates for India 2019-20 is the seventh consecutive NHA estimates report prepared by NHSRC, designated as **National Health Accounts Technical Secretariat (NHATS)** in 2014 by the Union Health Ministry.

Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE) in health:

- Out-of-pocket expenditure is the money paid directly by households, at the point of receiving health care.
- This occurs when services are neither provided free of cost through a government health facility, nor is the individual covered under any public or private insurance or social protection scheme

General Government Expenditure (GGE):

- GGE involves all types of expenditure, current and capital. It includes all types of revenue. GGE includes funds that are provided by donors, and channelled through the government.
- It is not the same as the General Government Final Consumption, which comprises only current spending.

Sedition Law in India

Context:-Recently, the government in the Supreme Court (SC) has said it has initiated the "Process of Re-examination" of Section 124A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and consultations are in its "final stage".

- In May 2022, the court, in an interim order, had suspended the use of Section 124A, stalling pending criminal trials and court proceedings under Section 124A across the country.

About Sedition Law

- The sedition law, enshrined in Section 124A of IPC, was introduced by the British government in 1870 to tackle dissent against colonial rule.

- The original draft of the IPC, which was enacted in 1860, did not consist of this law and the Section was drafted by Thomas Babington Macaulay in 1970.

Section 124A states:

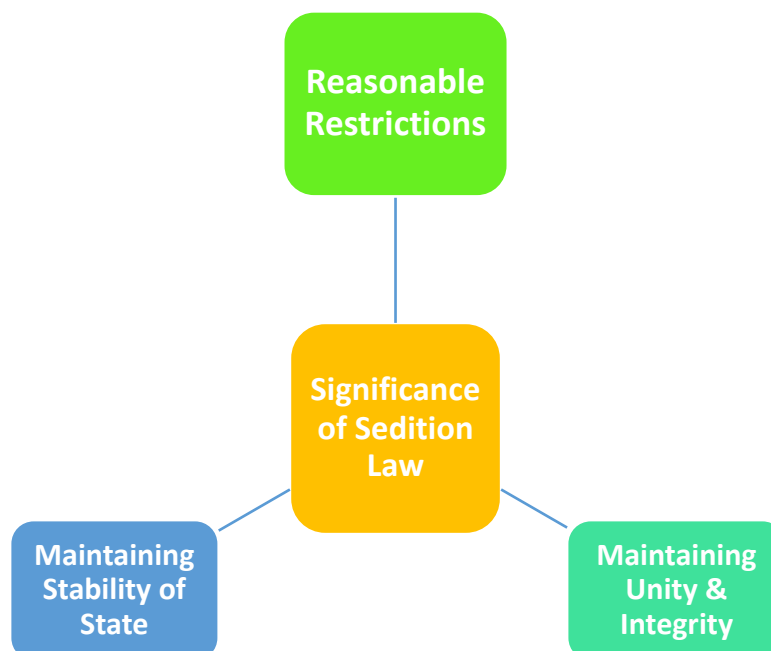
- "Whoever, words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the Government established by law in India shall be punished with imprisonment for life, to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

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the law was used primarily to suppress the writings and speeches of prominent Indian nationalists and freedom fighters.

- The first known instance of the application of the law was the trial of newspaper editor Jogendra Chandra Bose in 1891.
- Other major examples of the application of the law include the trials of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.

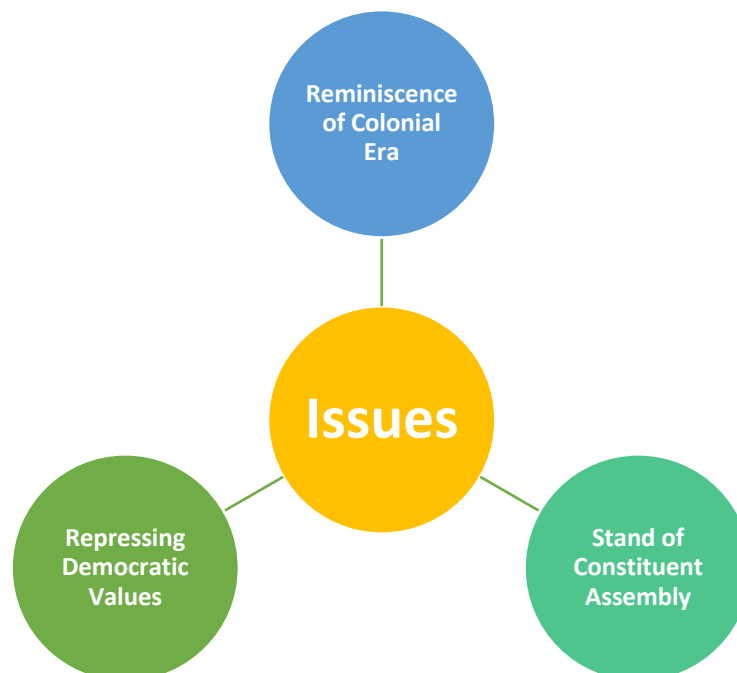
Trials of Tilak and Gandhi

- In 1922, Gandhi was arrested on charges of sedition in Bombay for taking part in protests against the colonial government and was sentenced to six years in prison. However, he was released after two years because of medical reasons.
- Tilak faced three trials in cases related to sedition and was imprisoned twice. In 1897, he was charged with sedition for writing an article in his weekly publication called Kesari and was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment. In 1908, he was tried again for his writings and was represented by Mohammad Ali Jinnah.



Latest Ruling of Supreme Court

- A three-judge Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud flagged indiscriminate use of the sedition law against critics, journalists, social media users, activists and citizens for airing their grievances about the governments Covid-19 management, or even for seeking help to gain medical access, equipment, drugs and oxygen cylinders, especially during the second wave of the pandemic.
- The ambit and parameters of the provisions of Sections 124A, 153A and 505 of the IPC 1860 would require interpretation, particularly in the context of the right of the electronic and print media to communicate news, information and the rights, even those that may be critical of the prevailing regime in any part of the nation
 - Section 153 A: Punishes acts promoting enmity between different groups on ground of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc, and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony.
 - Section 505: Makes the publication and circulation of content which may cause ill-will or hatred between different groups an offence.
- The court acknowledged the argument that the media was well within its rights to air critical programmes about a prevailing regime without attracting sedition.



ST Status of Meitei Community

Context:-Recently, the All-Tribal Students' Union of Manipur (ATSUM) has carried out a solidarity march in order to oppose the demand of Meitei Community be included in the List of State's Scheduled Tribes (ST).

- The march broke into violent clashes after an order from the Manipur High Court, directing the State to pursue a 10-year-old recommendation to grant ST status to the non-tribal Meitei community.

Major tribes of Manipur

- **Naga and Kuki:** Manipur's two major tribal communities – **Naga and Kuki** – live in the hill districts, which account for about 90% of the state's area.
 - But these 10 districts send only 20 legislators to the 60-member legislative assembly since they are more sparsely populated than the Valley.
- **Meiteis:** The Meiteis, who account for 60% of the state's population, are largely concentrated in the Imphal Valley.

Points made by Meitei Community

- The community, through the Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee, Manipur, has been demanding ST status for decades now.
- They argue that they had been listed as one of the tribes of Manipur before it merged with India in 1949 but that they lost this tag when the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 was drafted.
- Claiming that they had thus been left out of the ST list, they had persisted with their demands.

Why does the Meitei Community want ST Status?

- The Meitei community, led by the Scheduled Tribes Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM), has been demanding ST status since 2012, asking to provide them with constitutional safeguards to preserve their culture, language, and identity.
- The Meiteis argue that they were recognised as a tribe before the merger of Manipur with India in 1949 but lost their identity after the merger in India.
- As a result of being left out of the ST list, the Meitei community feels marginalized and victimized without any constitutional protections.
 - The STDCM has stated that the Meitein/Meetei have been gradually marginalised in their ancestral land.
 - Their population, which was 59% of the total population of Manipur in 1951, has now been reduced to 44% as per 2011 Census data.
- They believe that granting ST status would help preserve their ancestral land, tradition, culture, and language, and safeguard them against outsiders.

ECONOMY

Report on Currency and Finance 2022-23

Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released a report on currency and finance for the financial year (FY) 2022-23. The theme of the report is 'Towards a Greener Cleaner India'.

Report on Currency and Finance

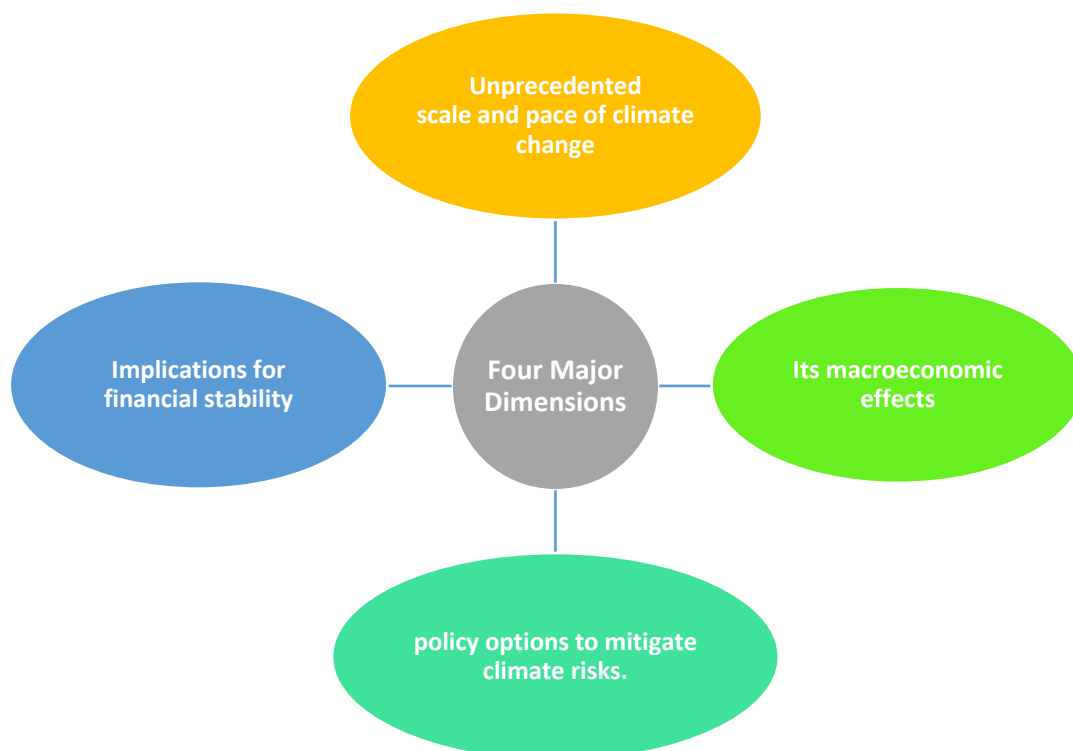
- It is an annual publication of the RBI.
- The report covers various aspects of the Indian economy and financial system.

Theme: 'Towards a Greener Cleaner India'.

- It focuses on the challenges and opportunities of climate change for India and the role of the financial sector in achieving a low-carbon and climate-resilient development path.

Aim: It aims to provide analytical insights into the macroeconomic and financial developments in India and their policy implications.

- The report covers four major dimensions of climate change to assess future challenges to sustainable high growth in India



Key Highlights of the Report

- **Net zero target:** India aims to achieve the net zero target by 2070. But this would require an accelerated reduction in the energy intensity of GDP by around 5% annually and a significant improvement in its energy mix in favour of renewables to around 80% by 2070-71.
 - The cumulative total expenditure for adapting to this climate change in India is estimated to be Rs 85.6 lakh crore (at 2011-12 prices) by the year 2030.
- **Implications for Financial Stability:** The financial sector faces the dual challenge of recalibrating its operations and business strategies to support the green transition process while also strengthening resilience to rising vulnerability to adverse climate events so as to safeguard financial stability.
 - On the first challenge, estimates suggest that the green financing requirement in India could be at least 2.5% of GDP annually to address the infrastructure gap caused by climate events.
 - On the second challenge, the results of a climate stress-test reveal that public sector banks may be more vulnerable than private sector banks in India.

Suggestions given by the report

- Introduce an Emissions Trading System (ETS) linked to green taxonomy, covering all sectors of the economy which can partly balance subsidies (fewer polluting industries getting carbon credits for trading) and tax (more polluting industries that should have to buy carbon certificates).
- Ramp up domestic capacity to mine rare earth elements or procure them through long-term contracts and outward FDI;
- Complementing green building standards with IoT-based monitoring and AI and ML to manage and reduce energy demand;
- Boost climate-resilient agriculture;
- Production of green hydrogen using renewable energy; and
- Investment in carbon capture and storage technologies.

BizAmp-Amplifying Businesses of Northeast Region

Context:-Recently, an outreach program named BizAmp was organized by the Ministry of MSME in association with NSIC Venture Capital Fund Limited (NVCFL) under its Self-Reliant India (SRI) Fund at Dimapur Nagaland.

What is BizAmp?

- BizAmp is the first outreach program in the Northeast Region of the country which focused on maximizing capital benefits through NVCFL's SRI Fund
- The program aims to empower micro, small, and medium enterprises(MSMEs) from the North-eastern States and amplify their businesses utilizing benefits under the SRI Fund.
- The event included dedicated a platform for beneficiary MSMEs to present their stories and inspire aspiring MSMEs.

What is SRI Fund?

- Self-Reliant India (SRI) Fund is Rs.10,000 crore fund launched by the Indian Government.
- It is a SEBI-registered category-II Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) that was launched by the Indian Government to provide growth capital to MSME Sector.
- It operates via the mother-fund and daughter-fund (Fund of Funds) structure. The mother fund is the SEBI fund that invests up to 20 per cent of the overall corpus. The daughter fund (mostly venture capital and private equity funds) raises the rest 80 per cent of the capital from the outside sources.
- The investment by this fund will get leveraged fivefold, making the total value of the investment capital to MSMEs to Rs.50,000 crore.
- The TATA Capital Healthcare Fund, Aavishkaar India Fund, SVL-SME Fund, Gaja Capital India Fund, Avaana Sustainability Fund, ICICI Ventures's India Advantage Fund S5 I, Omnivore Agritech and Climate Sustainability Fund 3, Fireside Ventures Investment Fund III, Nab Ventures Fund 1, Maharashtra Defence and Aerospace Venture Fund etc., are the daughter funds empanelled with the SRI fund.

BIODIVERSITY & ENVIRONMENT

Ludhiana Gas Leak Tragedy

Context:- The **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** has formed an eight-member fact-finding committee to look into the death of 11 people due to a recent gas leak in Ludhiana district of Punjab.

- The NGT took **Suo moto** cognisance of the matter based on media reports.
- According to the air quality sensors used by the **National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)** team, high levels of **Hydrogen Sulphide** gas, a kind of **neurotoxin**, have been detected and it is being ascertained how this gas might have led to the incident.

National Green Tribunal

- It is a statutory body set up under the National Green Tribunal (NGT) Act, 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.
- With NGT, India became the 3rd country in the world to set up a specialised environmental tribunal, only after Australia and New Zealand, and the first developing country to do so.
- NGT is mandated to make disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing of the same.
- The NGT has five places of sitting, New Delhi is the principal place of sitting and Bhopal, Pune, Kolkata and Chennai are the other four.

Powers:

- The Tribunal has jurisdiction over all civil cases involving substantial questions relating to the environment (including enforcement of any legal right relating to environment).
- It can take Suo Motu cognizance of the environmental cases.
- Apart from original jurisdiction side on filing of an application, NGT also has appellate jurisdiction to hear appeal as a Court (Tribunal).
- NGT is not bound by the procedure laid down under the CPC 1908 but shall be guided by principles of 'natural justice'.
- An order/decision/award of Tribunal is executable as a decree of a civil court.

What are Neurotoxins?

- Neurotoxins are poisonous substances which can directly affect the nervous system.
- Neurotoxicity occurs when exposure to natural or man-made toxic substances alters the normal activity of the nervous system.
- These substances can eventually disrupt or even kill neurons or nerve cells, which are important for transmitting and processing signals in the brain and other parts of the nervous system.

What are neurotoxic gases?

- Methane, hydrogen sulphide, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide are common neurotoxic gases.
- While methane and carbon monoxide are odourless gases, hydrogen sulphide has a pungent odour and in higher concentration it can be fatal for humans.
- To remove gases such as hydrogen sulphide from wastewater, chemical oxidation is done where oxidants such as hydrogen peroxide are added to the wastewater.

Similar leaks

In 2020, hydrogen sulfide leaked from the reactor of an industrial unit of Sainor Life Sciences in Vishakapatnam causing the death of two employees.

A leak of styrene gas from the chemical plant of LG Polymers in Vishakapatnam killed eight people and hospitalized thousands in 2020.

In 2015, five deaths occurred due to the leak of ammonia gas from a tanker in Ludhiana.

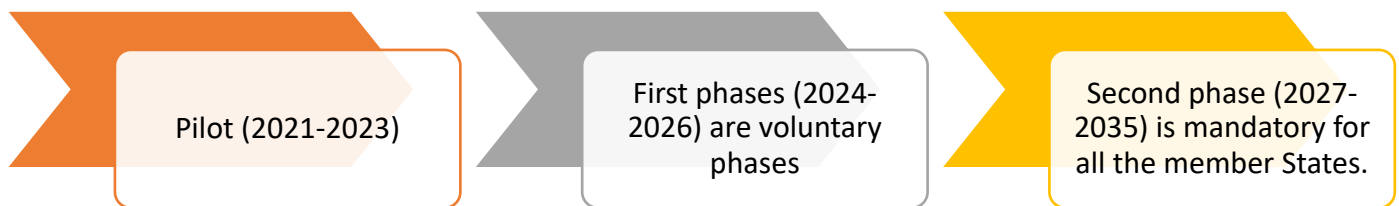
Hydrogen sulphide

- Hydrogen sulphide, also known as sewer gas, is a neurotoxin with the distinctive odour of rotten eggs.
- It is generally produced as a result of the microbial breakdown of organic matter in the absence of oxygen. This process is also known as anaerobic digestion and occurs in swamps and sewers.
- Hydrogen sulphide is also found in volcanoes, well water, and natural gas and is also produced by the human body in small amounts.

India to Join International Climate Action in Civil Aviation

Context:-The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) has announced that India will start participating in the International Civil Aviation Organisation's (ICAO) Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) and the Long-Term Aspirational Goals (LTAG) from 2027.

Implementation of CORSIA:



ICAO's Focus on Reducing Carbon Emissions:

- ICAO has been tasked with reducing carbon emissions from international civil aviation. To achieve this goal, the global body has adopted several key aspirational goals, including a two per cent annual fuel efficiency improvement through 2050, carbon neutral growth, and net zero by 2050. These goals are clubbed under CORSIA and LTAG.

What are CORSIA and LTA

- The ICAO has been tasked to reduce carbon emissions from international civil aviation as one of its focus areas.
- In order to mitigate carbon emissions from aviation and its impact on climate change, the global body has adopted several key aspirational goals. Among them are:
 - **2% annual fuel efficiency improvement through 2050**
 - **carbon neutral growth**
 - **net zero by 2050**

CORSIA:

- It is a global scheme established by the ICAO to address the growth in CO₂ emissions from international aviation.
- CORSIA aims to stabilize net CO₂ emissions at 2020 levels through a combination of measures, including carbon offsetting, carbon credits, and sustainable aviation fuel.

- It offers a harmonized way to reduce emissions from international aviation, minimizing market distortion, while respecting the special circumstances and respective capabilities of ICAO Member States.
- CORSIA complements the other measures by offsetting the amount of CO₂ emissions that cannot be reduced through technological improvements, operational improvements, and sustainable aviation fuels with emissions units from the carbon market.
- CORSIA is applicable only to flights originating from one country to another.

LTAG:

- 41st ICAO Assembly adopted LTAG for international aviation of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 in support of the UNFCCC Paris Agreement's temperature goal.
- The LTAG does not attribute specific obligations or commitments in the form of emissions reduction goals to individual States. Instead, it recognizes each State's special circumstances and respective capabilities e.g., the level of development, maturity of aviation markets.

What is ICAO?

- It is a specialized agency of the United Nations that was created in 1944 to promote safe, secure, and efficient air transportation around the world.
- ICAO develops international standards and recommended practices for aviation, including regulations for air navigation, communication, and airport operations.
- It also works to address global aviation issues, such as air traffic management, aviation security, and environmental protection.
- It is headquartered in Montreal, Canada.

Black Tigers

Context:-Recently, the death of a Rare Black Tiger was reported in the **Similipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha**.

- Similipal has the world's highest rate of black tiger sightings in the world.

Key Points Related to Black Tigers

- Black Tigers are a rare colour variant of the Bengal tiger and are not a distinct species or geographic subspecies.
- The coat colouration and patterning that make the wild cats appear dark boil down to a single mutation in the Transmembrane Aminopeptidase Q (Taqpep) gene.

Similipal Tiger Reserve

- It was formally designated a tiger reserve in 1956 and brought under Project Tiger in the year 1973. It was declared a biosphere reserve by the Government of India in June, 1994.
- It has been part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserve since 2009.
- It is part of the Similipal-Kuldiha-Hadagarh Elephant Reserve popularly known as Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve, which includes 3 protected areas i.e., Similipal Tiger Reserve, Hadagarh Wildlife sanctuary and Kuldiha wildlife sanctuary.

- It is situated in the northern part of Odisha's Mayurbhanj district. Geographically, it lies in the eastern end of the eastern ghat.

Other Major Protected Areas in Odisha:



Debt-for-climate swaps

Context: -In the past decade, Debt-for-climate swaps have grown relatively popular among low- and middle-income countries.

- Multilateral development banks and multilateral organizations such as the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** have been advocating this instrument as a debt-relief measure.

What is Debt-for-climate Swap?

- The debt-for-climate swap was introduced as a debt restructuring device that aims to combat climate change by ensuring that debt-ridden countries do not incur additional debt while addressing climate change locally.
- In these cases, a new agreement would be worked out with a multilateral or bilateral partner to replace the terms of the initial loan agreement which would direct the remaining debt on mutually agreed terms towards “green or blue” domestic investments—while green investments focus on projects or areas committed to preserving the environment, blue investments focus on sustainable use of ocean resources.

Objective: It possesses dual objectives:

- I. to promote specific investment and policy action on the one hand and
- II. some debt relief on the other.

Historical Background: Debt-for-climate swaps are a variation of debt-for-nature swaps, which were first proposed in the 1980s as a way to conserve biodiversity and protect tropical forests in exchange for debt relief.

- Debt-for-nature swap first appears to have been used in the 1980s in Latin America, where the countries aimed to reduce unsustainable external debts and address worsening environmental conditions.
- Debt-for-climate swaps emerged in the 2000s as a broader concept that encompasses not only nature conservation but also climate mitigation and adaptation.

What are the advantages of Debt-for-climate Swaps?

- **Debtors:** Debt swaps can help the world's low-income countries avoid default and enable them to redeploy part of their debt repayments to invest in measures to tackle climate change or nature protection.

- **For creditors:** Debt swaps can reduce their risk through additional guarantees and ensure that at least part of a loan is eventually repaid.
 - It will also enhance their development cooperation and climate finance objectives and strengthen their diplomatic relations with debtor countries.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)

Context:- Recently, the Indian Institute of Petroleum (IIP), a laboratory of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), has tied up with Boeing, Indigo, SpiceJet and the three Tata Airlines - Air India, Vistara and AirAsia India to support the production of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF).

Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)

- Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), also referred to as bio-jet fuel, is created using domestically developed methods using cooking oil and oil-rich seeds from plants.
- The SAF samples produced by the institutes are undergoing strict testing at the US Federal Aviation Administration Clearinghouse to meet the standards required for the ASTM D4054 certification from ASTM International.

Sources of Production:

- The CSIR-IIP has created fuel using different materials, such as non-edible and edible oils, as well as used cooking oil.
- They used various sources, including palm stearin, sapium oil, palm fatty acid distillates, algae oil, karanja, and jatropa.

Benefits of SAF Scaling in India:

- Scaling up the production and use of SAF in India can bring several benefits, including reducing GHG emissions, improving air quality, enhancing energy security, creating jobs in the renewable energy sector, and promoting sustainable development.
- It can also help the aviation industry meet its environmental targets and contribute to global efforts to combat climate change.
- Biofuel for aviation can be mixed with regular jet fuel and used together. Compared to traditional fuel, it has lower sulphur content, which can decrease air pollution and support India's goal of achieving Net Zero emissions.

Challenges Associated with SAF

- **High Cost:** The cost of producing SAF is currently higher than traditional jet fuel, making it less economically viable for airlines to invest in SAF production and use.

- **Resource Availability:** There is limited infrastructure for the production, storage, and distribution of SAF, making it difficult to scale up production and supply of SAF.
- **Feedstock Availability:** The availability of feedstock for SAF production is limited, and there is competition for resources between other industries, such as the food and agriculture sectors.
- **Certification:** The certification process for SAF is complex and time-consuming, and there is a lack of globally recognized standards for SAF production.
- **Public Awareness:** There is a need to raise public awareness and understanding of the benefits of SAF and to encourage greater support from policymakers and investors.

Way Forward



Tea Fortification

Context- A recent study conducted in Maharashtra on 43 women to assess the impact of fortifying tea with folate and vitamin B12 has found a significant increase in Folate and Vitamin B12 levels. It also highlighted a significant increase in haemoglobin levels.

How could tea fortification alter the outcome?

- **Defending Against Anaemia and NTDs:** As per the new review, Sustaining tea with folate and vitamin B12 might assist with countering paleness and NTDs in Indian ladies as tea is the most well-known drink in India.
- The majority of Indian women consume insufficient quantities of folate and vitamin B12 through their diets, resulting in a chronic vitamin deficiency that contributes to anaemia and the high prevalence of folate-responsive neural tube defects (NTDs) in the country.
- Both folate and vitamin B12 are necessary for the body to produce red blood cells.
- Folate can only be properly absorbed and utilized by taking vitamin B12; folate inadequacy can cause extreme birth abandons (NTDs).

Problems with Fortifying Tea

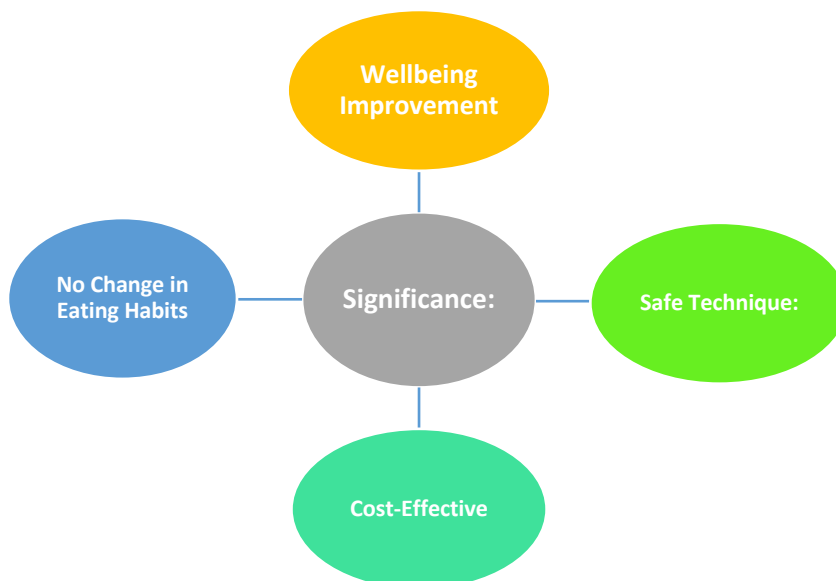
- **Limited Agriculture:** Tea is generally developed and handled in the good countries of just 4 states: Kerala, Assam, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu
- **Insufficient infrastructure:** Numerous tea-developing regions need sufficient foundation for handling and bundling strengthened tea.
- This incorporates offices for mixing and bundling tea, as well as transportation and capacity foundation.
- **Limitations on Diet:** Cement grain is typically grown, milled, and purchased locally by approximately 70% of the population in rural villages. Additionally, cultural, religious, and ethnic differences in beliefs significantly influence diets.

What is Food Fortification?

- The process of adding essential vitamins and minerals like iron, iodine, zinc, and vitamins A and D to common foods like rice, milk, and salt to boost their nutritional value is known as fortification. Before being processed, the food may or may not have contained these nutrients.

Status of Food Fortification in India:

- **Rice:** Division of Food and Public Conveyance (DFPD) has been running a “Midway Supported Pilot Plan on Stronghold of Rice and its dispersion through Open Dissemination Framework”.
- **Wheat:** Under India’s flagship Poshan Abhiyaan, the decision to fortify wheat was made public in 2018 and is currently being implemented in 12 states to improve nutrition for children, adolescents, pregnant women, and lactating mothers.
- **Eating Oil:** In 2018, the FSSAI mandated the fortification of edible oil across the country.
- **Milk:** In 2017, the Public Dairy Improvement Leading group of India (NDDDB) started the fortress of milk by empowering organizations to add vitamin D.



Challenges

- Only a select few foods are fortified in India (wheat, rice, and salt); numerous other food things are not strengthened, prompting insufficient supplement consumption.
- Natural foods’ protective substances, such as phytochemicals and polyunsaturated fat, may be adversely affected by the process of blending micronutrients.
- Utilization of overabundance iron by pregnant ladies can antagonistically influence fetal turn of events and birth results; kids might have an expanded hazard of contracting persistent sicknesses.
- Stronghold might give a reliable market to MNCs, which might actually hurt the vocations of private ventures across India.

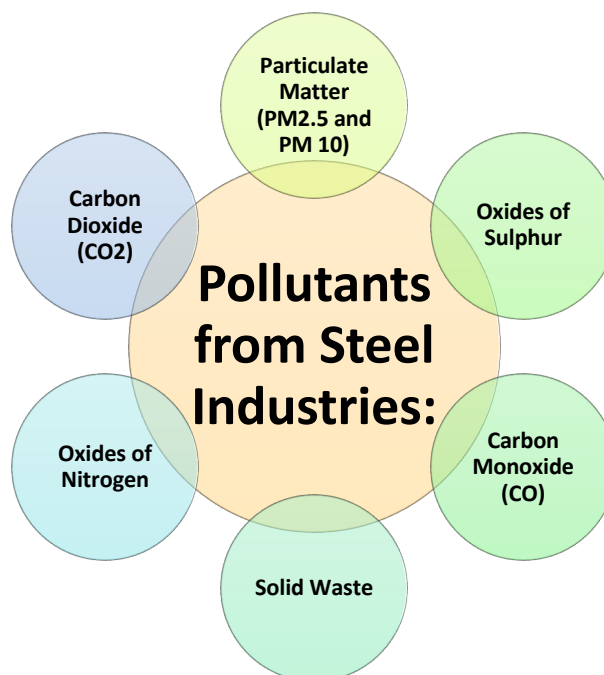
- The unstable nature of the added vitamins and minerals makes fortifying certain foods, like milk and oil, difficult from a technical standpoint.

Decarbonizing Steel Sector

Context: Decarbonisation of steel sector is an integral part of the India's ability to achieve its climate goal. A recent study has tried to minimize use of carbon in steel making

About:

- India is the world's second-largest steelmaker, making the sector's decarbonisation plans integral to India's climate commitments.
- In steelmaking industry, hydrogen can be used instead of carbon in an important chemical reaction that contributes to 5-7% of the global greenhouse-gas emissions and 11% of carbon dioxide emissions.
- Strong steel consists of a tiny amount – less than 1% – of carbon.
 - To achieve this mix, iron oxide is heated with coke (form of coal with high carbon content) at 1,700 degree C inside a blast furnace.
- In this reaction, carbon reacts with oxygen to release carbon dioxide.



About Decarbonizing India: Iron and Steel Sector report:

- The iron and steel sector is a hard-to-abate sector in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, but it is an equally critical contributor to the economic development of the country.
- India is the second-largest producer of crude steel in the world and plans to almost triple its production by 2030
- The report(Decarbonizing India: Iron and Steel Sector) was released by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

- According to it India’s iron and steel sector can produce fewer emissions and increase its output at the same time.
- The analysis shows that it is possible to bring down carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from our iron and steel sector drastically by 2030, while more than doubling India’s output of steel.
- emissions from crude steel production are estimated to grow to almost 2.5 times by 2030.
- This report provides a detailed insight into the GHG emissions of the iron and steel sector and its future emission scenarios for 2030 -the report provides, based on available information, unit and company-wise data on emissions, which will help design the road ahead.
- The report suggests a roadmap for the sector, highlighting the pathways for GHG emissions reduction. The assessment clearly finds there are huge opportunities to bend the carbon dioxide curve for this emission-intensive sector, but it will need planning, technology and adequate funds.

Challenges Associated with Using Hydrogen in Steel Production



Way Forward



REPORT

Who's Tipping the Scales Report

Context:- a report has been released by the **International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES)** titled **"Who's tipping the scales"**, highlights how corporate capture of global Food Governance is increasingly taking place in more visible ways and raising concerns over Bluewashing

Bluewashing

- Bluewashing is using misinformation to deceive consumers into thinking that a company is more digitally ethical and secure than it really is.
- It is just like greenwashing but focused more on social and economic responsibility rather than the environment.
- The term 'bluewashing' was first used to refer to companies who signed the United Nations Global Compact and its principles but did not make any actual policy reforms.

What are the Highlights of the Report?

- Corporate Takeover of Food Governance:
- There has been a growing presence of firms in governance and spaces, staking claims to be legitimate actors.
- Over recent decades, corporations have succeeded in convincing governments that they must be central in any discussion on the future of food systems.
- Corporate partnerships provided a key source of funding for global food governance institutions and corporations with greater influence over decision-making.

Normalization of Corporate Role in Food Governance:

- The role of private corporations in food governance and decision-making has been normalized by public-private partnerships and multi-stakeholder roundtables while public governance initiatives have become heavily dependent on private funding.
- The UN Food Systems Summit, 2021 was described as a watershed moment in highlighting the importance of corporate influence in public health governance.

Concerns Over Corporate Influence:

- Civil society organizations, food scholars, and social movements have expressed concern that the increased involvement of corporations in food governance could lead to a weakening of the public good and impact the rights of people and communities.

Visible and Invisible Corporate Influence:

- Corporations have influenced global food governance in visible and invisible ways.
- Corporate influence could be seen in global food systems platforms such as the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, the Food and Land Use Coalition, and the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement.

- Other less visible ways in which corporate influence was seen in food systems governance was how the private sector enterprises provided political and institutional donations, shaped trading & investment rules and research strategies, and other structural aspects of global food systems.

Causes of Increases Corporate Involvement:

- The Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Food Inflation, aggravated the issue of corporate involvement.
- Following these crises, governments and multilateral agencies have been facing fund crunches.

World Press Freedom Index 2023

Context:-On the World Press Freedom Day (WPDF) (3rd May), the World Press Freedom Index 2023 was published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

- India ranked 161st among the 180 countries with a score of 36.62. In 2022, India's rank was 150.

Key Highlights of the World Press Freedom Index 2023?

Ranking of Countries:

Top and Worst Performers:

- Norway, Ireland and Denmark occupied the top three positions.
- Vietnam, China and North Korea were at the bottom on the list.

India's Neighbours:

- Sri Lanka also made significant improvement on the index, ranking 135th this year as against 146th in 2022.
- Pakistan is ranked at 150th position.
- The situation has gone from 'problematic' to 'very bad' in three other countries: Tajikistan (down 1 at 153rd), India (down 11 at 161st) and Turkey (down 16 at 165th).

India's Performance Analysis:

- India's position has been consistently falling in the index since 2016 when it was ranked 133.
- The reasons behind the fall in ranking is the increased violence against journalists and a politically partisan media.
- The other phenomenon that dangerously restricts the free flow of information is the acquisition of media outlets by oligarchs who maintain close ties with political leaders.
- The organisation asserts that many journalists in India are forced to censor themselves due to extreme pressure.

About World Press Freedom Index

- It has been published every year since 2002 by Reporters Without Borders or Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF).

- RSF is an independent NGO based in Paris that has consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and the International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF).
- The report ranks 180 countries based on their level of press freedom, considering factors such as censorship, media independence, and the safety of journalists. However, it is not an indicator on the quality of journalism.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Each country or territory's score is evaluated using five contextual indicators:



USCIRF's 2023 Annual Report on Religious Freedom

Context:-The government of India rejected the recommendations of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) 2023 report, calling it biased and motivated.

About U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF):

- It is an independent, bipartisan federal government entity created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA).

Functions:

- Reviews the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally;
- Make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and the Congress;
- It uses international standards to monitor religious freedom violations globally.
- It is required to issue its own annual report setting forth its independent recommendations for U.S. policy

Composition: USCIRF has nine commissioners, appointed by either the President or Congressional leaders of each political party, supported by a non-partisan professional staff.

Concerns associated with the USCIRF's International Religious Freedom Report?

- The process the USCIRF follows is non-inclusive,
- The organisation does not study the state of religious freedoms inside the U.S. This suggests a double standard and
- Its recommendations hold no influence within India. Instead, the reports are meant only for the U.S. government to deliberate on, and accept or dismiss.
- India is a secular, inclusive and pluralistic democracy. The Centre may well consider an internal review of its conduct and the direction it hopes to lead India on issues such as religious freedoms and rights.