

Forest (Conservation) Act and SC Judgement**Why in News?**

- The Supreme Court told States and Union Territories to act as per the definition of 'forest' laid down in its 1996 judgment for identifying and preserving forest land.
- It asked States/UTs to refrain from using the 2023 amendment to the Forest (Conservation) Act.
 - The amendment act allegedly removed 1.97 lakh square km of land from forest area.

Definition of forest in India

- No clear definition
 - At present, in India, there is no clear nationally-accepted definition of 'forest'.
 - In September 2019, the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) observed that there cannot be any uniform criteria to define forest which can be applicable to all forest types in all states and union territories.
- Responsibility of States
 - States are responsible for determining their definition of forests.
 - In November 2019, the environment ministry emphasised that the states, having well-established forest departments.
 - They are in a better position, rather than the MoEFCC, to understand their own forests and needs, and should frame criteria for their forests.
 - The prerogative of the states to define forests stems from a 1996 Supreme Court order called the T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad Vs the UoI
- Godavarman Thirumulpad judgment
 - In 1995, T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad filed a writ petition with the Supreme Court to protect the Nilgiris forest land from deforestation by illegal timber operations.
 - One of the aspects of the judgement is related to the meaning of the word forest.
 - In the judgement, the Supreme Court interpreted that the word forest must be understood according to its dictionary meaning.
 - This description covers all statutorily recognised forests, whether designated as reserved, protected or otherwise.
 - The ruling instructed state governments to form a panel of experts to recognize, declare, and outline areas as forests.
 - It also offered additional instructions on managing forest areas, including transferring forest land for non-forest purposes, as per the Forest Conservation Act, 1980.

Forest Conservation Act

- The Forest Conservation Act 1980
 - It was enacted to -
 - protect India's forests and
 - empower the Central government to regulate the extraction of forest resources (from timber and bamboo to coal and minerals) by industries as well as forest-dwelling communities.
- Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act 2023
 - Inserted a 'preamble' that underlines -
 - India's commitment to preserving forests, their biodiversity and tackling challenges from climate change and
 - Amending the name of the Act to Van (SanrakshanEvamSamvardhan) Adhiniyam (translated as Forest Conservation and Augmentation) from the existing Forest (Conservation) Act.
 - The Act would only apply to: Lands notified in any government record as 'forest' on or after 1980.
 - Exemptions: The Act would not apply -
 - If notified forest land was legally diverted between 1980 and 1996, for non-forest use.
 - To forest land situated 100 km away from international borders and to be used for "strategic projects of national importance" or
 - To land ranging from 5-10 hectares for security and defence projects.
 - The Act specifies some activities that can be carried out in forests, such as establishing check posts, fencing, and bridges.
 - The Bill also allows running zoos, safaris and eco-tourism facilities.
 - The state government requires prior approval of the central government to assign any forest land to a private entity.
 - The Bill extends this to all entities, and allows the assignment to be made on terms and conditions specified by the central government.

Background

- Petitions filed in SC against
 - Petitions were filed challenging the amendments introduced in 2023 to the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.
 - The petitions had argued that Section 1A introduced through the amended Act had substantially diluted the definition of forest to two categories:
 - declared forests and
 - lands recorded as forests in ‘government records’ after 1980.
- Stand of Centre
 - The government rejected claims of reducing forest coverage.
 - It highlighted an amendment to Section 1A, broadening the definition of government records to include lands recognized as forest by state or union territory authorities, local bodies, councils, or recognized communities.

News Summary: Forest (Conservation) Act and SC Judgement


- The Supreme Court issued a temporary order instructing States and Union Territories to follow the 1996 definition of forest from the T.N. Godavarman Thirumalpad case.

Key highlights of the judgement

- Forest will continue to have a broad and all-encompassing meaning
 - SC directed that the expression ‘forest’ will continue to have a “broad and all-encompassing” as per the 1996 judgement.
 - This means it includes 1.97 lakh square km of undeclared forest lands.
 - The Bench emphasized that the broad dictionary meaning of "forest" upheld by the Supreme Court over 25 years ago will still apply.
 - This will continue until the States and union territories compile a comprehensive record of all lands marked as 'forest' in government records, including forest-like areas, unclassified, and community forest lands.
- Directions to states
 - SC also directed states to file, by the end of March, reports on forest land identified as per its ruling in the T N Godavarman case.
- Establishment of zoos or safaris
 - The Bench also mandated that no government or authority should proceed with the establishment of "zoos or safaris" without the final approval of the apex court.

Verdict on woods

Some of the observations made by the SC over the pleas challenging the 2023 amendments to the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980



- The “all-encompassing” dictionary meaning will continue to hold field until the States and Union Territories prepare a consolidated record of forest lands
- Environment Ministry should issue a circular in this regard to the States and Union Territories
 - Establishment of “zoos or safaris” must have the final approval of the top court

INDIAN GEOGRAPHY

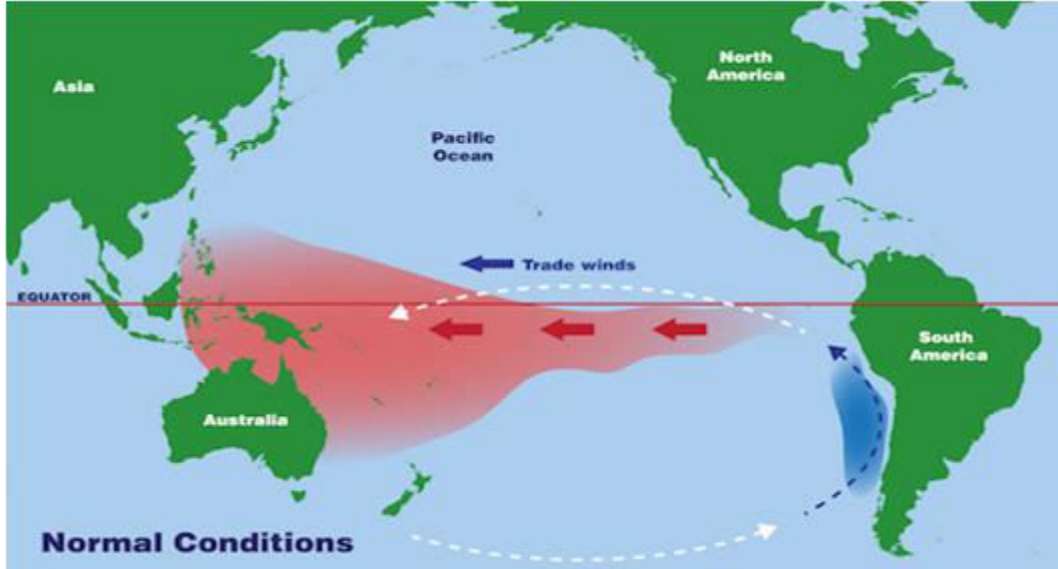
Impact of La Nina on Air Quality in India

Why in News?

- According to a new study, an unprecedented La-Nina event, extended by climate change, triggered a peculiar trend in the 2022-23 winter season in India.
- During the 3 consecutive years of La Niña (2020-23) - a rare “triple-dip” phenomenon - air quality improved in north India while peninsular India recorded an increase in pollution levels in the 2022-23 winter season.

What are the Normal Climatic Conditions?

- In the Pacific Ocean, near the equator, the Sun makes the water especially warm on the surface.
- Normally, a surface low pressure system forms in northern Australia and Indonesia and a high-pressure system develops off the coast of Peru.
- As a result, the trade winds blow strongly from east to west over the Pacific Ocean, transporting warm surface waters westward.
- This leads to convective storms (thunderstorms) to Indonesia and coastal Australia.



What is El Nino and La Nina?

EL NINO AND LA NINA		
Forecasters say EL Nino weather pattern may develop later this year		
<p>EL NINO (the boy)</p> <p>An irregular event of warming of Pacific waters. Occurs at intervals of two to seven years</p>		<p>Effects on climate</p> <p>The warm currents flowing towards the east displace the cooler currents to Oceania. Rainfall occurs over Central and eastern Pacific, and drought in Indonesia and Australia</p>
<p>LA NINA (the girl)</p> <p>A cold episode that usually follows the warm equatorial ridge cools between the coasts of South America and Oceania</p>		<p>Currents contribute to form a warm pool in Oceania, increase rainfall in Asia and Australia, lower the temperature on the American coasts and increase aridity</p>

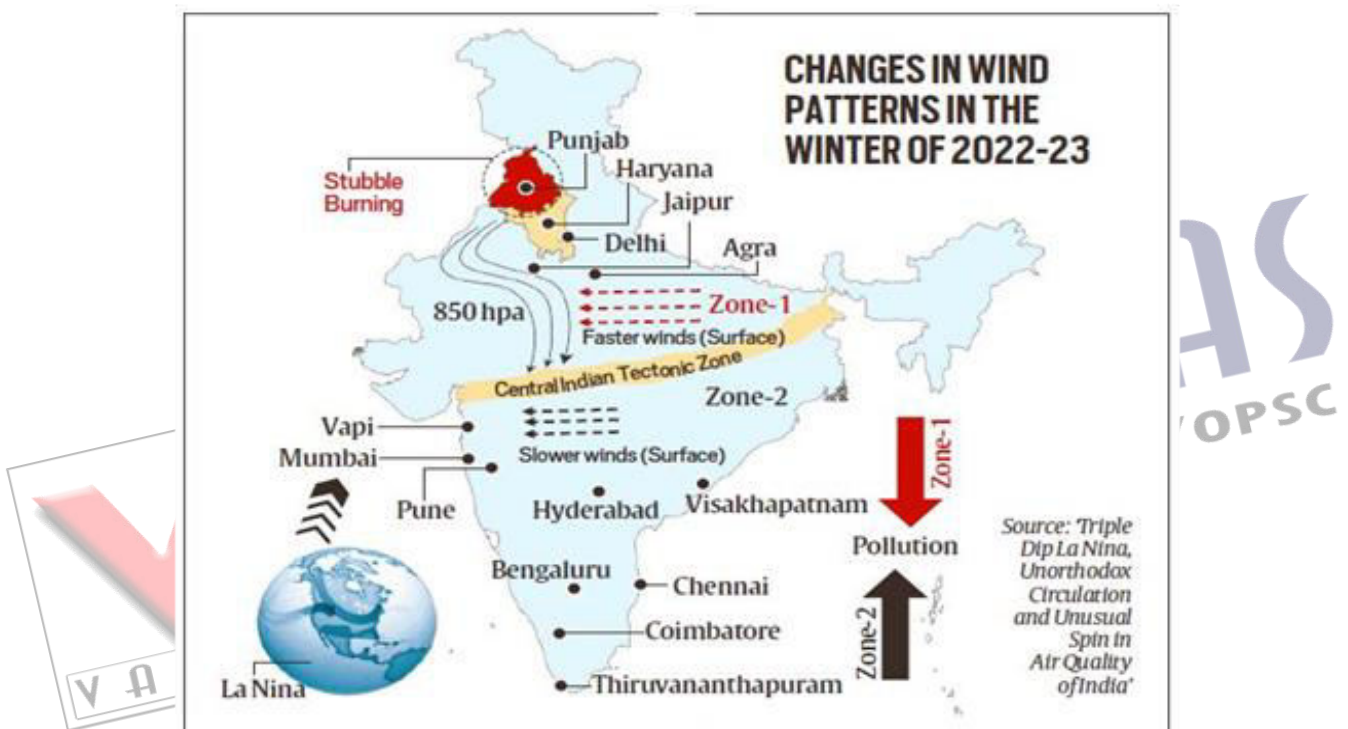
- El Nino and La Nina are two opposing climate trends that deviate from the normal conditions and normally run nine to twelve months, but can often extend.
- These events occur every two to seven years on average (El Nino is more frequent than La Nina), but not on a regular basis and together are referred to as the El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle by scientists.
- El Nino is typically known as the warm phase (a band of warmer water spreading from west to east in the equatorial Pacific Ocean) and La Nina is identified as the cold phase (a band of cooler water spreads east-west) of ENSO.
- Both El Nino and La Nina can have global effects on weather, wildfires, ecosystems and economics.

Findings of the New Study - Impact of La Nina on Air Quality in India

- The study is conducted by researchers at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (Bengaluru) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (Pune).
- Monsoon rainfall over India is known to be strongly influenced by El Nino and La Nina events, the alternating warming and cooling of the eastern Pacific Ocean that impacts weather across the world.
- According to the study, this is the first time that air quality in Indian cities has been linked to a La Nina event - and indirectly to climate change, which is making El Nino and La Nina more severe.

- Normally, northern Indian cities (particularly Delhi) experience very high concentrations of PM2.5 during October to January.
- However, the winter of 2022 showed a significant deviation from this normal.
 - Northern Indian cities (including Delhi) were cleaner than usual, while cities in the west and the south, like Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai, experienced worse-than-usual air quality.
 - The study said PM2.5 concentrations in Delhi saw a reduction of about 10%. Simultaneously, the concentrations in Mumbai rose by 30%, while Bengaluru registered a 20% rise.
- The researchers had set out to investigate this unusual behaviour when they discovered the potential effects of La Nina.
 - Not all La Nina events might produce noticeable changes in wind circulation over India, but this one was a particularly strong event.
 - The impact on air circulation became evident only in the third year of La Nina. So, there may be an accumulative effect.
- It was not yet entirely clear whether El Nino would produce an opposite effect for air quality over India.

How La Nina Impacted Air Quality in India?



- By changing wind direction:
 - During this time, wind usually blows in the north-westerly direction: for example, from Punjab towards Delhi and further into the Gangetic plains.
 - This is one of the main reasons why agricultural waste pollutants in Punjab and Haryana flow into Delhi.
 - However, the wind circulation was in the north-south direction in the winter of 2022. The pollutants from Punjab and Haryana bypassed Delhi and flew over Rajasthan and Gujarat to southern regions.
- By changing the local circulation of wind near Mumbai:
 - Wind currents alternate between blowing from the land to the sea every few days.
 - When blowing from the land towards the sea, the winds carry pollutants out of the city.
 - However, instead of changing direction every four to five days, the winds persisted in one direction for more than a week or 10 days, leading to greater accumulation of pollutants in Mumbai in 2022.

PRELIM FACTS

1. SOFIA (Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy)

- Scientists recently detected water molecules on the surface of two asteroids for the first time ever, using the data from NASA's now-retired SOFIA airborne observatory.

About SOFIA (Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy):

- SOFIA was a telescope mounted on a Boeing 747 SP aircraft that studied infrared light, essentially heat, emitted by objects in the universe.

- SOFIA is operated jointly by NASA and the German space agency.
- It is the world's largest airborne astronomical observatory, complementing NASA's space telescopes as well as major Earth-based telescopes.
- The observatory, fitted with a 8.9-foot-wide (2.7 meter) telescope with a nearly 20-ton mirror, used a door in the side of the aircraft to peer at the sky.
- Flying into the stratosphere at 38,000-45,000 feet put SOFIA above 99 percent of Earth's infrared-blocking atmosphere, allowing astronomers to study the solar system and beyond in ways that are not possible with ground-based telescopes.
- SOFIA could observe the universe in the widest range of infrared light.
- The airplane is capable of ten-hour flights, with flight paths chosen to keep ahead of the sunrise and maximize the amount of darkness.
- The observatory's mobility allowed researchers to observe from almost anywhere in the world, and enabled studies of transient events that often take place over oceans, where there are no telescopes.
- For example, astronomers on SOFIA studied eclipse-like events of Pluto, Saturn's moon Titan, and Kuiper Belt Object MU69, the next flyby target for NASA's New Horizons spacecraft, to study the objects' atmospheres and surroundings.
- The SOFIA project was prematurely ended in 2022 after operating for 12 years.

2. Anti-Dumping Duty

- India has initiated an anti-dumping probe into imports of certain solar glass from China and Vietnam, following a complaint by domestic players.

About Anti-Dumping Duty:

- Anti-dumping duty is a tariff imposed on imports manufactured in foreign countries that are priced below the fair market value of similar goods in the domestic market.
- The government imposes anti-dumping duty on foreign imports when it believes that the goods are being "dumped" – through the low pricing – in the domestic market.
- Anti-dumping duty is imposed to protect local businesses and markets from unfair competition by foreign imports.
- Thus, the purpose of anti-dumping duty is to rectify the trade distortive effect of dumping and re-establish fair trade.
- The use of anti-dumping measure as an instrument of fair competition is permitted by the World Trade Organization (WTO).
 - The WTO allows the government of the affected country to take legal action against the dumping country as long as there is evidence of genuine material injury to industries in the domestic market.
 - The government must show that dumping took place, the extent of the dumping in terms of costs, and the injury or threat to cause injury to the domestic market.
- While the intention of anti-dumping duties is to protect local businesses and markets, these tariffs can also lead to higher prices for domestic consumers.

What is Countervailing duty (CVD)?

- It is a specific form of duty that the government imposes to protect domestic producers by countering the negative impact of import subsidies.
- CVD is thus an import tax by the importing country on imported products.
- Why is CVD imposed?
 - Foreign governments sometimes provide subsidies to their producers to make their products cheaper and boost their demand in other countries.
 - To avoid flooding the market in the importing country with these goods, the government of the importing country imposes CVD, charging a specific amount on the import of such goods.
- The duty nullifies and eliminates the price advantage enjoyed by an imported product.
- The WTO permits the imposition of CVD by its member countries.

Countervailing duty v/s Anti-dumping duty:

- Anti-dumping duty is imposed to prevent low-priced foreign goods from damaging the local market. On the other hand, CVD will apply to foreign products that have enjoyed government subsidies, which eventually leads to very low prices.
- While the Anti-dumping duty amount depends on the margin of dumping, the CVD amount will completely depend on the subsidy value of the foreign goods.

3. Kosi River

- At least 100 people living in miserable conditions within Kosi River embankments walked 250 kilometres in 12 days to reach Patna to press for their long-standing demand for rehabilitation.

About Kosi River:

- It is a transboundary river which flows through China, Nepal, and India.
- It is a prominent tributary of the Ganges.
- Origin: The river Kosi is formed by the confluence of three streams, namely the Sun Kosi, the Arun Kosi, and the Tamur Kosi, all of which have their origin in the Himalayan region of Nepal and Tibet.
- Course:
 - About 30 miles (48 km) north of the Indian-Nepalese frontier, the Kosi is joined by several major tributaries and breaks southward through the Siwalik Hills at the narrow Chatra Gorge.
 - The river then emerges on the great plain of northern India in Bihar state on its way to the Ganges River, which it enters south of Patna after a course of about 450 miles (724 km).
- The Kosi drains an area of 74,500 sq.km, of which only 11,070 sq.km lie within Indian Territory.
- The Kosi River valley is bounded by steep margins that disconnect it from the Yarlung Zangbo River to the north, the Mahananda River to the east, the Gandaki to the west, and the Ganga to the south.
- It is well known for its tendency to change course generally in westward direction. During the last 200 years, the river has shifted westwards for a distance of about 112 km and has laid waste large tracks of agricultural land.
- Kosi is known as the "sorrow of Bihar", as it has caused widespread human suffering in the past due to flooding and very frequent changes in course, when it flows from Nepal to Bihar.
- Tributaries: It has seven major tributaries: Sun Koshi, Tama Koshi or Tamba Koshi, Dudh Koshi, Indravati, Likhu, Arun, and Tamore or Tamar.

4. Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR)

- The State Bank of India (SBI) has requested the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for a lower cash reserve ratio (CRR) on green deposits raised from customers.

About Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR):

- Under CRR, commercial banks have to hold a certain minimum amount of deposit as reserves with the RBI.
- The percentage of cash required to be kept in reserves as against the bank's total deposits is called the CRR.
- The RBI decides the amount, and is kept with them for financial security.
- The bank cannot use this amount for lending and investment purposes and does not get any interest from the RBI.
- The CRR applies to scheduled commercial banks, while regional rural banks and NBFCs are excluded.
- Following are the critical objectives of the CRR:
 - CRR helps control inflation. In a high inflation environment, the RBI can increase CRR to prevent banks from lending more.
 - CRR also ensures banks have a minimum amount of funds readily available to customers, even during huge demand.
 - CRR serves as the reference rate for loans. Also known as the base rate for loans, banks cannot offer loans below this rate.
 - Since CRR regulates the money supply, it boosts the economy whenever required by lowering the CRR.
- How is the CRR Calculated?
 - There is no CRR formula. In technical terms, CRR is calculated as a percentage of Net Demand and Time Liabilities (NDTL).
 - NDTL for banking refers to the aggregate savings account, current account, and fixed deposit balances held by a bank.
 - In case a bank fails to maintain its CRR, it will have to pay fines to the RBI because of that default. The fine is charged for the shortfall.

5. Interpol's Red Corner Notice

- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) recently said it has brought back an absconding life convict, against whom there was a Red Corner Notice (RCN) in a murder case.

About Interpol's Red Corner Notice:

- Criminals or suspects often flee a country to evade facing justice.
- A Red Corner Notice also called a Red Notice (RN), is a request to law enforcements worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest such fugitives.
- It alerts the police forces across the world about these fugitives who are wanted internationally.
- A RN contains information that helps identify the wanted person, including name, date of birth, nationality, physical attributes like colour of hair, eyes, etc., along with pictures and biometric information.
- It also includes information about the crimes that they are wanted for.
- Interpol issues a RN at the request of a member country.
- The country which issues the request need not be the home country of the fugitive.

- Interpol acts at the request of the country where the alleged crime is committed.
- A RN request can also be raised by International Criminal courts and Tribunals.
- It is not an international arrest warrant. It is a request to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition, surrender, or similar legal action.
- Interpol cannot compel the law enforcements authorities in any of the countries to arrest someone who has a RN issued. Each member country determines on the legal value it gives to a RN.

Key Facts about Interpol:

- The International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO), commonly known as Interpol, is an inter-governmental organization that facilitates international police cooperation to control crime.
- It has 195 member countries, with its headquarters in Lyon, France.
- Each of the member countries has an Interpol National Central Bureau (NCB).
 - They facilitate the respective country's national law enforcement with other countries and with the General Secretariat, which is Interpol's body that coordinates its policing and administrative activities.
 - CBI represents Interpol in India as the country's NCB.'
- Interpol helps coordinate police networks & experts in different crime areas to control crime.
- All the member countries are connected through Interpol's communication system, called I-24/7.
 - This secure network is used by member countries to contact each other and allows them to access Interpol's databases.
- Interpol manages 19 databases, which include information on varied crimes and criminals and are available real-time to countries.
- It offers investigative support, including forensic analysis, locating fugitives across the world, etc.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. Examine the role of Minimum Support Price (MSP) in ensuring the farmers' income and food security in India. Suggest the reforms that are needed to make MSP more effective and equitable for farmers.

Answer: Minimum Support Price (MSP) is a form of market intervention by the Government of India to insure agricultural producers against any sharp fall in farm prices. The minimum support prices are announced by the Government at the beginning of the sowing season for 23 notified crops on the basis of the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).

Role of Minimum Support Price (MSP) In Ensuring the Farmers Income in India:

- Protect farmers from price fluctuations: MSP helps in rescuing farmers from low-income trap by providing fixed income by addressing the vagaries of price instability in the market.
- Diversification of crops: Announcement of MSP before each cropping encourages the farmers to grow these diverse notified crops to maximize their income.
- Prevents Distress-Sale: It prevents farmers from selling their produce at throw-away prices as MSPs ensure that farmers receive a certain "minimum" remuneration so that their costs of cultivation (and some profit) can be recovered.
- Helps informed decision making: Advance information about MSP helps the farmer to make an informed decision about which crop to sow for maximum economic benefit.
- Acts as a benchmark for private buyers: MSPs create the benchmark for farm prices not just in those commodities for which they are announced, but also in crops that are substitutes.

Role of Minimum Support Price (MSP) In Ensuring the Food Security in India:

- Encourage Production: In the era of the Green Revolution, MSPs incentivized adequate production of staple food grains to eliminate shortages.
- Address supply shortage: MSPs aim to boost crops in short supply, such as pulses, crucial for Indian nutrition.
- Risk Mitigation: The MSP acts as a risk mitigation tool by assuring farmers of a minimum price even in unfavourable circumstances thus ensuring the production of notified crops.
- Public food programs: MSP helped the Public Distribution System (PDS) evolve as a system of management of scarcity through the distribution of food-grains at affordable prices.

Following reforms are needed to make MSP more effective and equitable:

- Providing Legal status: Minimum support prices (MSP) should be made legal by providing statutory backing to make them available across India.
- Making it inclusive: The MSP policy benefits farmers only in a handful of states. For example, Punjab and Haryana farmers have benefited the most from MSP due to the Green Revolution's legacy.
- Increasing its Coverage: For example, the percentage of farmers benefiting from MSP in India is just 5.6% and the value of agri-produce benefiting from MSP a only 2.2%
- Notifying More Crops under MSP: Including other crops under the ambit of MSP would check the serious imbalances of water and land resources and boost crop diversification thus reducing costly imports.

- Rationalization of MSP: By implementing the Swaminathan Commission recommendation of C2+50% (C2 or comprehensive cost of production).

Conclusion

Ineffective implementation of MSP and ‘non-procurement’ of all the crops at the MSP are the main concerns of farmers. The Government should provide a fair return to farmers while keeping the interest of consumers in a way that prices of food and other agricultural commodities are kept at a reasonable level.

MCQs

- Consider the following Technological elements:
 - Artificial Intelligence
 - Remote Sensing
 - Geographic Information Systems
 Precision Farming uses how many of the above-mentioned elements?
 - Only one
 - Only two
 - All three**
 - None
- Consider the following statements regarding Spotted Deer:
 - It is native to the Indian subcontinent.
 - Both its males and females have antlers.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - 1 only**
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- With reference to Guru Ravidas, consider the following statements:
 - He is known for his contributions to the Bhakti movement.
 - His teachings were based on social justice and equality.
 - His devotional songs and poems are included in the Guru Granth Sahib.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
 - Only one
 - Only two
 - All three**
 - None of the above
- Consider the following:
 - Finland
 - Sweden
 - Norway
 - Croatia
 How many of the above countries are member of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation?
 - Only one
 - Only two
 - Only three**
 - All four
- Consider the following statements regarding the Virtual Private Network:
 - It creates a point-to-point tunnel that encrypts personal data.
 - It involves physical cables in the connection network process.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - 1 only**
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Consider the following statements regarding the sub-national climate resilient green fund:
 - It aims to develop mid-size climate resilient infrastructure & nature-based solutions.
 - The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is responsible for its Technical Assistance component.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2**
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Which one of the following best describes the concept of ‘Grey zone warfare’?
 - Traditional military engagement above the conventional threshold.
 - Use of coercive actions that intentionally remain below the threshold for a conventional military response.**
 - Peaceful negotiations between conflicting states.
 - Exclusive reliance on diplomacy for maintaining peace between countries.
- Consider the following statement:
 - The Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan is a series of high-level meetings involving National Security Advisers (NSA) from countries in the region, including Afghanistan, Pakistan and China only.
 - Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan follows the objective of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2593.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - 1 only
 - 2 only**
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- With reference to the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha Mandir, recently inaugurated at Abhu Dhabi, consider the following statements:
 - It is built in traditional Vesara style of architecture.
 - Temple is surrounded by ‘Dome of Harmony’ and ‘Dome of Peace.’
 - The temple has been built using cement.
 - The temple houses seven shrines.
 Which of the statements given above are correct?
 - 1 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 2 and 4 only**
- Which one of the following statements is NOT correct regarding “Bor Tiger Reserve”?
 - It is located in Maharashtra.
 - It has Dry Deciduous Forest.
 - It is the largest tiger reserve in India by area.**
 - The Bor River flows through the Reserve.