NEWS TODAY

COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS SUBMITS REPORT ON 'INDIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRST POLICY'

- Neighbourhood First Policy is **a dynamic policy** that was conceived **around 2008** to forge strong neighbourhood relations **based on a consultative, non-reciprocal and outcome-oriented approach.**
  - **Priority countries** are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
  - Under the policy, India **also engages with its neighbours under regional frameworks like SAARC, BIMSTEC,** Bangladesh Bhutan-India-Nepal **(BBIN)** etc.
- **Challenges identified to Neighbourhood First policy:**
  - Threats from **cross border terrorism, illegal migration, smuggling, drug and weapons trafficking** etc.
  - **Delays in implementation** of development projects.
  - **China's Belt and Road** vision and **America's Indo-Pacific vision.**
  - **Limited Parliamentary exchanges** with neighbours.
  - **Deficiency in border infrastructure,** especially in North-eastern region (NER).
- **Recommendations**
  - **Establish a cell to identify specific initiatives** that can be taken up **by various Ministries and Departments** with neighbouring countries.
  - Establish a **common platform to counter terrorism.**
  - **Execute development projects within a timeframe** by strengthening Joint Project Monitoring Committees and Oversight Mechanisms.
  - **Maintain synergy between Neighbourhood First policy and Act East Policy** for development of NER.

Various Initiatives taken under policy

- **Physical connectivity:** Chabahar port, Kaladan project, Agreement to use Chattogram and Mongla Port etc.
- **Energy Connectivity:** Grid interconnection to Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh; Maitree Super Thermal Power Project in Bangladesh, Mangdechhu Power Project in Bhutan etc..
- **Trade Connectivity** through special market access, financial assistance, border crossings such as Land Custom Stations with Bangladesh, Lines of Credit to Sri Lanka etc.
- **Humanitarian assistance** through Early Warning Systems (EWS), aid deployment etc such as Tsunami EWS, earthquake relief to Nepal, during COVID-19 etc.

MINISTRY OF COAL AND MINES INTRODUCED MINES AND MINERALS (DEVELOPMENT AND REGULATION AMENDMENT) BILL, 2023 IN LOK SABHA

- The Bill would amend the **MMDRA 1957 to incentivize private sector participation** in all spheres of **mineral exploration for critical and deep-seated minerals.**
  - Increasing **exploration and mining of such critical minerals** are essential for **economic development and national security.**
- **Key highlights**

Omits 6 of the 12 atomic minerals from Part-B of the First Schedule	**Omitted minerals are** Beryl and other beryllium-bearing minerals; Lithium-bearing minerals; Niobium-bearing minerals; Titanium bearing minerals and ores; Tantallium-bearing minerals and Zirconium-bearing minerals and ores. • This will facilitate **exploration and mining of these minerals by private sector as well.** • These minerals are critical for **space industry, electronics, achieving net-zero emission commitment, etc.**
Insertion of part D in First Schedule	• It contains **list of 24 Critical and Strategic Minerals such as Beryl, graphite.** • **Central Government** shall conduct **auction for grant of mining lease or composite licence.** • **State Government** shall grant **mineral concession** to the selected bidders.
Exploration licence for deep-seated and critical minerals	• Inserts Seventh Schedule having **list of 29 minerals** such as gold, silver, copper. • Licence for **reconnaissance and prospecting** shall be granted by **State Government.**
Time limits for various process	• **Exploration licence** shall be granted for **five years.** • **Specified timeline for submission of a geological report to the State** Government by exploration licensee and **Initiation of auction process.**
Compensation to exploration licensee	• By State Government in case the **preferred bidder is not selected** within the specified period.

JHARKHAND ISSUES PANCHAYATS (EXTENSION TO SCHEDULED AREAS) ACT (PESA ACT) DRAFT RULES FOR CONSULTATIONS

- PESA was enacted in 1996 to **extend the Provisions of the Panchayats, as given in Part IX** of the Constitution **to the Fifth Schedule Areas** with certain modifications and exemptions.
  - PESA **empowers the state legislatures** to frame laws in this regard.
- **Presently, 10 States** viz. Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and Telangana, **have Fifth Schedule Areas** in their respective States.
  - **Eight States** (except Jharkhand and Odisha) **have framed and notified their State PESA Rules** under their respective State Panchayati Raj Acts.
- **Key Features of PESA:**
  - It recognises **right of tribal communities to govern themselves** through their own systems of self-government, and also acknowledges their **traditional rights over natural resources.**
  - It **empowers Gram Sabhas** to play a key role in **approving development plans** and controlling all social sectors and local plans.
  - It provides certain **exclusive powers to Gram Sabhas** such as identify beneficiaries, mandatory consultation in land acquisition, managing minor water bodies and minor minerals.
  - Powers are endowed to Gram Sabhas for control over **minor forest resources,** managing **village markets,** preventing **land alienation** and **regulating intoxicants** among other things.

UNESCO RELEASED GLOBAL EDUCATION MONITORING REPORT (GMR) 2023, TITLED 'TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION: A TOOL ON WHOSE TERMS ?'

- The mandate of GMR is to be **"the mechanism for monitoring and reporting on SDG 4** (quality education) and on education in the other SDGs."
- **Key highlights**
  - **Technology in Education** opened up opportunities for **learners with disabilities and** hard-to-reach populations.
    - 45% of students in India's National Open University are **from rural areas**
      Helped in **access to education during COVID-19 school closures.**
  - **Digital literacy and critical thinking are increasingly important,** particularly with the growth of generative AI.
  - **54% countries** have **outlined skills they want to develop** for the future, but only 11 out of 51 governments surveyed have curricula for AI.
- **Concerns:**
  - **It would cost USD 1 billion per day** to maintain connectivity for education in poor countries.
  - **Only 40% of primary schools** worldwide currently have Internet access.
  - During the pandemic, **half a billion students worldwide were left out due to online-only tuition.**
  - **Less than half of countries have teacher training programmes** covering cybersecurity.
- **Recommendations:**
  - Focus on **learning outcomes,** not on digital inputs.
  - All countries to set **benchmarks for connecting schools to the Internet** between now and **2030.**
  - Endorses **banning smartphones** from schools as it **improves academic performance.**

🏛 unesco	**UNESCO**	🏢 HQ **Paris**

- **Genesis:** Established in 1945
- **About:** UNESCO is a **specialized agency of the UN**
- **Mission:** To contribute to the building of a **culture of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development** and intercultural dialogue through education, sciences, culture, etc,
- **Membership:** 194 Members and 12 Associate Member 🇮🇳 **MEMBER**

INDIA'S RICE EXPORT CURBS COULD SPUR FOOD PRICE INFLATION: INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (IMF)

- India imposed **restrictions on non-basmati white rice exports** to ensure **adequate domestic availability** at reasonable prices.
  - Export ban is also **expected to support the ethanol-blending programme** that saves costly oil imports and **animal husbandry and poultry sectors by reducing cost of animal feed.**
- India has emerged as **world's largest rice exporter,** accounting for **almost 40% of global rice exports in 2022/23.**
  - **Non-Basmati White Rice** constitutes **about 25% of total rice exported** from the country.
- **Possible impact of India's export ban**
  - As per IMF, **global grain prices could rise** 10-15% this year.
  - **Threatens already vulnerable global rice markets as** strengthening **El Niño could reduce** South and Southeast Asian **rice production.**
  - **India is a major supplier** to rice to several important markets **in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa,** making their **populations vulnerable** to rice market disruptions.
  - **Other major rice exporters** like Thailand, Vietnam etc **can also impose similar restrictions.**
- **Rice cultivation in India:**
  - **India is world's second largest rice producer,** after China.
  - It is a **kharif crop.**
  - Needs **high temperature** (above 25º C), **high humidity and rainfall** (above 100cm).

60 PERCENT HOUSES SANCTIONED UNDER PMAY-U COMPLETED: MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND URBAN AFFAIRS (MOHUA)

- According to the MoHUA, **only Goa, Delhi and Chandigarh have completed the targeted construction of houses under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban (PMAY-U)**
  - **118.90 lakh houses** involving Central assistance of around ₹2 lakh crore sanctioned.
  - Bihar and Andhra Pradesh **failed to construct even 40% of the sanctioned houses.**
- PMAY was launched in **2015 under the MOHUA** to achieve the target of **Housing for all by 2024 (initial target 2022).**
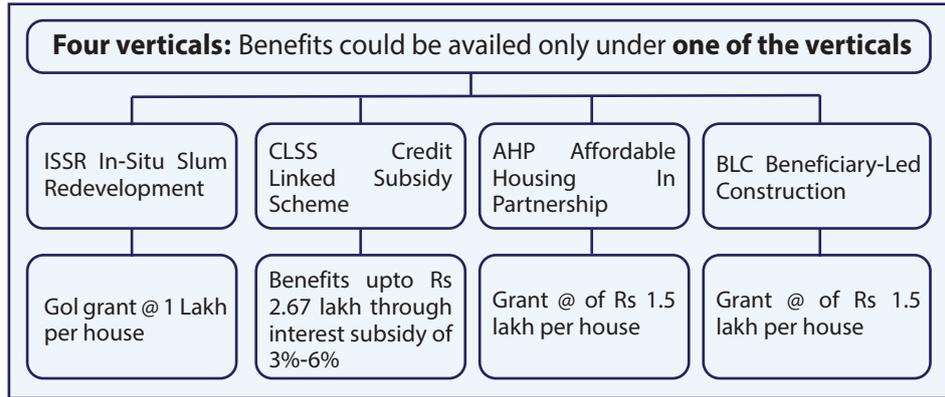
Four verticals: Benefits could be availed only under **one of the verticals**

ISSR In-Situ Slum Redevelopment	CLSS Credit Linked Scheme	AHP Affordable Housing In Partnership	BLC Beneficiary-Led Construction
GoI grant @ 1 Lakh per house	Benefits upto Rs 2.67 lakh through interest subsidy of 3%-6%	Grant @ of Rs 1.5 lakh per house	Grant @ of Rs 1.5 lakh per house

- It provides **central assistance to implementing agencies** for providing all weather pucca houses to all eligible families/ beneficiaries
  - **The scheme** has four verticals and promotes **women empowerment** (ownership of houses in name of female member/joint name).
- **Challenges**
  - **Stressed fiscal situation** of States/UTs and beneficiaries due to pandemic.
  - Potential BLC beneficiaries face challenges with **land ownership documentation.**
  - **EWS beneficiaries** from informal income-earning groups still **struggle to access formal housing finance.**
  - Improper execution of **centrally sponsored components.**
  - **Project delays, information asymmetry** between the state and private developers.
- **Way Forward:**
  - Robust finance mechanisms like **risk guarantees, long-term low-interest rates, etc. for borrowers with informal income sources.**
  - Assess result in **terms of outcome** i.e the number of houses actually occupied by beneficiaries.

ALSO IN NEWS

Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2023

- The Bill amends **Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969**
- **Need:** To keep pace with the **societal change and technological advancements** and to make **it more citizen friendly.**
- **Key highlights**
  - Provides for appointment of a **Registrar-General, India** for issuing general directions for registration of births and deaths.
  - Provisions for **digital registration and electronic delivery of certificate of births and deaths.**
  - Create a **National and State level database of registered births and deaths** which would help in updating other databases.
  - Facilitates registration process of **adopted, orphan, abandoned, surrendered, surrogate child and child to a single parent or unwed mother.**
  - **Enhance the penalties.**

National Coal Index (NCI)

- The **NCI has declined** 238.3 points in May 2022 to **157.7 in May 2023.**
- The decline indicates a **strong supply of coal in the market,** with **sufficient availability to meet the growing demands.**
- **About NCI**
  - Released by the **Ministry of Coal every month.**
  - **Combines coal prices from all sales channels,** including notified prices, auction prices and import prices.
  - **Base year is FY 2017-18**
  - It serves as a **reliable indicator of market dynamics,** providing **valuable insights into coal price fluctuations.**

Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System (CFCFRMS)	• According to Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), **Rs 570 crore have been saved using CFCFRMS.** • CFCFRMS was **operationalised in 2022 as a national helpline** to report all sorts of **financial frauds and immediately prevent stealing** of funds by cheats. • It has been made **operational by Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre** (I4C), under MHA, **to integrate Law Enforcement Agencies and Banks and Financial Intermediaries.** • It **leverage new-age technologies** for sharing online fraud related information and **taking action in almost real time.**
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)	• **Jim Skea (UK) was elected** as the **new chair of IPCC.** **ipcc** **INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE** **HQ: Geneva, Switzerland** ℹ️ **Genesis:** An **intergovernmental organization** created in 1988 by **the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).** **Objective:** To **provide governments at all levels with scientific information** that they can use to develop climate policies. ○ IPCC is the **UN body for assessing the science related to climate change.** **Membership:** 195 members 🇮🇳 **MEMBER** **Other Key Information:** ○ Prepares **Assessment Reports, special reports, and methodology reports** assessing the state of knowledge of climate change. ○ However, it **does not itself engage in scientific research.** ○ In 2007, the **IPCC was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.**
INDIAai (The National AI Portal of India)	• **India AI and Meta, India** have signed an **MoU for collaboration in AI & Emerging Technologies** including to make Meta's open-source AI models available for use by Indian AI ecosystem. • INDIAai, a **joint venture** by **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), National e-Governance Division (NeGD) and NASSCOM,** has been set up to prepare the nation for an AI future. • It **is knowledge portal, research organisation** and an ecosystem building initiative.
Anubhav Mantapa	• **International Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre (IECC)** at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi **has been named, 'Bharat Mandapam'.** • Bharat Mandapam – **derives its root from Lord Basaveshwara's (12th century) idea of Anubhav Mantapa.** • Anubhava Mantapa was **one of the earliest Parliament** in history of mankind, where **Sharanas** (poets and socio-spiritual reformers) **deliberated for reforms** in various spheres. ➤ **Prabhudeva,** a great Yogi, **was the President** and **Lord Basaveshwara acted as PM.** ➤ **Members were not elected by people** but were picked up or **nominated by higher authorities** of Mantapa.
UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage conservation	• **Restored heritage Byculla Railway station of Mumbai** received the award. ➤ 169 year old railway station is **Asia's oldest railway station.** ➤ Apart from Byculla station, **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya Museum (Mumbai), Stepwells of Golconda (Hyderabad) and Domakonda Fort (Telangana) were also winners** of this award (under different categories) in 2022. • Since 2000, awards have been **recognizing the achievement of private sector and public-private initiatives** in conserving or **restoring heritage in the region.**