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ASEAN-India Economic Ministers' Consultations

Why in News

Recently, the 17th **ASEAN-India** Economic Ministers Consultations was held virtually, co-chaired by India and Vietnam.

The meeting was attended by the Trade Ministers of all the 10 **ASEAN** (**Association of Southeast Asian Nations**) countries viz. Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.



Key Points

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- **Related to Covid-19:** The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to take **collective actions in mitigating the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.**

They also resolved to **ensure macroeconomic and financial stability** and **resilient supply chain connectivity**, particularly the unimpeded flow of essential goods and medicines in the region, in compliance with the WTO rules.

- **AIBC's Report:** The report of the **ASEAN India Business Council (AIBC)** was placed.
 - It has recommended that the **ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) be reviewed** for mutual benefit.
 - The review will make the Agreement **modern with contemporary trade facilitative practices**, and **streamline customs and regulatory procedures.**
 - **ASEAN India-Business Council (AIBC)** was set up in March 2003 as a forum to bring key **private sector players from India and the ASEAN countries on a single platform** for business networking and sharing of ideas.
- **AITIGA:** Discussions on review of the **ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)** took place.
 - The AITIGA is a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** among the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India which came into force in January, 2010.
 - India emphasized on review on AITIGA at the earliest and the need to **strengthen the Rules of Origin** provisions, work towards **removal of non-tariff barriers** and provide **better market access.**
 - The Rules of Origins provisions of AITIGA specify that the preferential treatment under the agreement will be applicable **only to goods which have wholly or partially originated** in the exporting country.
 - **India** wants strict **rules of origin to prevent Chinese goods from flooding the country through ASEAN member countries** that may have lower or no duty levels.
 - A **nontariff barrier** is a way to restrict **trade** using **trade barriers** in a form other than a **tariff. Nontariff barriers** include quotas, embargoes, sanctions, and levies.
 - India has concerns regarding the FTA, given that its FTA with ASEAN is **leading to increased trade deficits** with several ASEAN partners.
India's trade deficit with the ASEAN rose from around 5 billion USD in 2011 to 21.8 USD billion in 2019.

- **Background:**

- In 2003, India and ASEAN signed a **Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation** to establish an ASEAN-India Regional Trade and Investment Area, which would provide a basis for subsequent FTAs covering goods, services and investment.
- India dropped out of the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** in November 2019 at ASEAN+3 summit, because of increasing trade deficits with partner nations and increasing China-India tensions.
- Recently, India participated in the 6th roundtable meeting of the ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks (AINTT).
India **highlighted the difficulties** that were hindering strong response to deal with the **Covid-19 pandemic**.

Way Forward

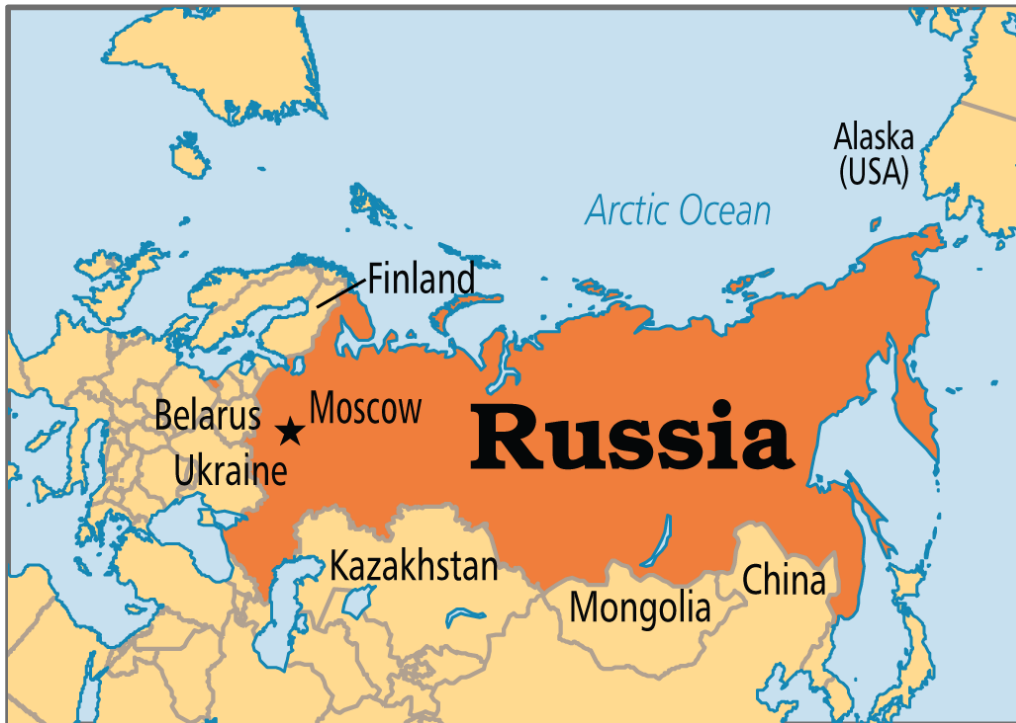
- An immediate review of the agreement and the effective utilisation of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement will contribute to the realisation of the **2020 trade target of 200 billion USD set by India and ASEAN**.
- Over dependence of India and other countries on China can be decreased by developing a common forum/platform with ASEAN countries. Moreover, better collaboration and partnership with ASEAN is in line with India's Act East Policy.

Source: PIB

India Pulls Out of Kavkaz 2020

Why in News

Recently, India has withdrawn its participation from **Kavkaz 2020**, a multinational tri-services exercise in Russia, citing **Covid-19** as the official reason.



Key Points

- **Other Possible Reasons for Withdrawal:**

- Participation of Chinese, Turkish and Pakistani troops.
 - The **standoff** at **Line of Actual Control** (LAC) with China has been ongoing since May 2020 and several rounds of talks for disengagement have failed to end the impasse.

However, in June 2020, Indian and Chinese military contingents marched at the **Victory Day Parade** at Red Square in Moscow to mark the 75th anniversary of **World War II**.
 - Turkey has been critical of India's policies on Kashmir.
- Participation of Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the exercise which have **been recognised only by Russia and few other countries**.

India **does not recognize** these breakaway regions.

- **Kavkaz-2020 Exercise:**

- It is a strategic **command-post exercise**, and also known as **Caucasus-2020**.
- The **tri-service exercise** is part of a **four-year exercise cycle** of the Russian army. Previous editions of the exercise were held in 2012 and 2016.

In 2020 it will be conducted in the Astrakhan province of Southern Russia.
- Member countries of **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** and **Central Asian countries** would be participating.

- **India-Russia Military Diplomacy:**

- India's military diplomacy with Russia started in 2003 with the first edition of **Ex Indra**, a bilateral Naval exercise. India also participated in **Exercise TSENTR 2019**.
 - Exercise **TSENTR 2019** is a **part of the Russian Armed Forces' annual training cycle**.
 - It aims at evolving drills of the participating armies and practising them in the fight against the scourge of international terrorism thereby ensuring military security in the strategic Central Asian region.
- India's withdrawal from Kavkaz assumes significance because the Kavkaz was essentially a Russian military exercise and not a Chinese one.
 - India has always viewed its relations with Russia independent of China-Russia ties.
 - Russia has also responded in a similar fashion. It maintained its commitment of supplying arms to India even during the standoff.

Way Forward

- India needs to **deepen its ties with Russia** because Russia is an important balancer for India vis-à-vis China.
- Also, India should seek to reset its relationship with Russia, especially as the defence element is starting to fade as India has started diversifying its defence procurements. Energy and strategic minerals can be other areas of cooperation.
- **Promoting mutually beneficial trilateral cooperation between Russia, China and India** could contribute towards the reduction of mistrust and suspicion between India and China. In this context, the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation** and **RIC trilateral forum** must be leveraged.

Source: TH

Proposal of Supply Chain Resilience Initiative

Why in News

With **Covid-19** and **trade tensions between China and the United States** are threatening supply chains, Japan has mooted the **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)** as a **trilateral approach** to trade, with India and Australia as the key-partners.

Key Points

- **Supply Chain Resilience:**
 - In the context of international trade, supply chain resilience is an approach that helps a country to ensure that it has **diversified its supply risk across a clutch of supplying nations instead of being dependent on just one** or a few.
 - **Importance:** In unanticipated events -whether natural, such as volcanic eruptions, **tsunamis, earthquakes** or even a pandemic; or manmade, such as an armed conflict in a region — that disrupt supplies from a particular country or even intentional halts to trade, could adversely impact economic activity in the destination country.
- **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI):**
 - The initiative aims to **reduce the dependency on a single nation (at present China)**.

SCRI is a direct response to individual companies and economies concerned about Chinese political behaviour and the disruption that could lead to the supply chain.
 - The initiative, first proposed by **Japan** with India and Australia as partners, potentially see other Asian and Pacific Rim nations later.
- **Objective:**
 - To attract foreign direct investment to turn the Indo-Pacific into an “economic powerhouse”.
 - To build a mutually complementary relationship among partner countries.
 - To work out a plan to build on the existential supply chain network. Japan and India, for example, have an India-Japan competitiveness partnership dealing with locating the Japanese companies in India.
- **Reasons for the Initiative:**
 - **Covid-19 Realization:** With spread of Covid-19 globally, it has been realized that dependence over a single nation is not good for both global economy and national economies:
 - Assembly lines are heavily dependent on supplies from one country.
 - The impact on importing nations could be crippling if the source stops production for involuntary reasons, or even as a conscious measure of economic coercion.
 - **USA-China Trade Tensions:** The tensions began when the United States and China both applied tariff sanctions on each other.
 - **India as an Emerging Supply Hub:** The businesses have started seeing **India as a “hub for supply chains”**.

- **Chinese Import to India:**

- As per the Confederation of Indian Industry, China's share of imports into India in 2018 (considering the top 20 items supplied by China) stood at **14.5%**.
- Chinese supplies dominate segments of the Indian economy. Sectors that have been impacted by supply chain issues arising out of the pandemic include **pharmaceuticals, automotive parts, electronics, shipping, chemicals and textiles**.
 - In areas such as **Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients** for medicines such as paracetamol, India is fully dependent on China.
 - **In electronics**, China accounts for 45% of India's imports.

- **Indo-Japan Trade Relationship:**

- **Japan is the fourth-largest investor in India** with cumulative foreign direct investments touching **USD 33.5 billion** in the 2000-2020 period accounting for 7.2% of inflows in that period, according to quasi government agency India Invest.
- **Imports** from Japan into India more than **doubled** over 12 years to **USD 12.8 billion** in FY19.
- **Exports** from India to Japan stood at **USD 4.9 billion for FY19**.
- Also, India is carrying forward the sentiments of self-reliance focussing on less dependence on China which is one of the reasons behind SCRI.
- Japan has included India under the SCRI initiative despite India having pulled out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.
- Further, India and Japan are a part of **QUAD** (also includes the USA and Australia) and **malabar** (naval) exercise (also includes the USA).

Suggestions for India

India needs to enhance **self-reliance against China**, so that it could build resilience into the economy's supply networks. **Economic measures** are of real value in this regard.

- **Ease of Doing Business:** While India appears an attractive option for potential investors both as a market and as a manufacturing base, it needs to accelerate progress in ease of doing business and in skill building.
- **Tax incentives:** These will help in attracting investments from China and other attractive locations like Vietnam and the Philippines.
- **Boost Domestic Manufacturing:** India's strategy should be to boost manufacturing competitiveness and increase its share in world trade.
 - **Infrastructure Boost:** In this pursuit, there is a need to create an infrastructure that raises the competitiveness of India's exports.
 - **Removing Structural Bottlenecks:** There is a need to push through long-pending legislation that aims to address the structural bottlenecks (in **4Ls: Land, Labour, Law, Liquidity**) that continue to plague and hinder domestic competitiveness.
- **Leveraging Service Sector:** In spite of banning Chinese imports, India should tackle trade by trade.

India can lobby for a more liberalized service sector (India's comparative advantage) in China.

Source TH

UN Principles for People with Disabilities

Why in News

The **United Nations (UN)** has released its **first-ever guidelines** on **access to social justice for People with Disabilities (PwD)** to make it easier for them to access justice systems around the world.

The guidelines outline a set of 10 principles and detail the steps for implementation.

Key Points

- **10 Principles:**
 - **Principle 1:** PwD shall not be denied access to justice on the basis of disability.
 - **Principle 2:** Facilities and services must be **universally accessible** without discrimination of PwD.
 - **Principle 3:** PwD, including children with disabilities, have the **right to appropriate procedural accommodations.**
 - **Principle 4:** PwD have the **right to access legal notices and information in a timely and accessible manner** on an equal basis with others.
 - **Principle 5:** PwD are **entitled to all substantive and procedural safeguards recognized in international law** on an equal basis with others, and **States must provide** the necessary accommodations to guarantee due process.
 - **Principle 6:** PwD have the **right to free or affordable legal assistance.**
 - **Principle 7:** PwD have the **right to participate in the administration of justice** on an equal basis with others.
 - **Principle 8:** PwD have the **right to report complaints and initiate legal proceedings** concerning human rights violations and crimes.
 - **Principle 9: Effective and robust monitoring mechanisms** play a critical role in supporting access to justice for PwD.
 - **Principle 10:** All those working in the justice system must be provided with **awareness-raising and training programmes** addressing the rights of PwD.
- **UN Definition of Person with Disability:**
 - The **UN Convention on the Rights of PwD**, which was adopted **in 2006**, defines persons with disabilities as those “who have **long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments** which in interaction with various barriers may **hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis** with others”.
 - India ratified the Convention in October 2007.
 - The Parliament enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 with a view to fulfilling the obligations under the UNCRPD.
- **Statistics:**

As per statistics maintained by the UN:

 - Around 15% of the world’s population, or estimated 1 billion people, live with disabilities. They are the world’s largest minority.
 - **In India**
 - 2.4 % of males are disabled and
 - 2% of females from all age groups are disabled.

Indian Efforts for Persons with Disability

- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - **Article 41** of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) states that the State shall make effective provision for securing right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, within the limits of its economic capacity and development.
 - The **subject** of 'relief of the disabled and unemployable' is specified in the state list of the **Seventh Schedule** of the constitution.
- **Legislation for Disabled - Right of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016:**
 - The **Right of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** replaces the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995.
 - "Person with disability" means a person with **long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others.**
 - "**Person with benchmark disability**" means a person with not less than 40% of a specified disability where specified disability has not been defined in measurable terms and includes a person with a disability where specified disability has been defined in measurable terms, as certified by the certifying authority.
 - The **types of disabilities** have been **increased from 7 to 21**. The Act added mental illness, autism, spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, chronic neurological conditions, speech and language disability, **thalassemia, hemophilia, sickle cell disease, multiple disabilities including deaf blindness**, acid attack victims and **Parkinson's disease** which were largely ignored in earlier Act. In addition, the Government has been authorized to notify any other category of specified disability.
 - It increases the quantum of reservation for people suffering from disabilities from **3% to 4%** in **government jobs** and from **3% to 5%** in **higher education institutes**.
 - **Every child** with benchmark disability between the age group of **6 and 18 years** shall have the **right to free education**.
- **Accessible India Campaign (Creation of Accessible Environment for PwDs):**
 - A nation-wide **flagship campaign** for achieving **universal accessibility** that will enable persons with disabilities to gain access for equal opportunity and live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life in an inclusive society.
 - The campaign targets at enhancing the accessibility of the built **environment, transport system and Information & communication ecosystem**.

Scholarship Schemes in India

Why in News

Recently, a multi-crore scam has been reported in the **post-matric scholarship scheme for Scheduled Castes (SC)** in Punjab.

The Central government is planning to bring a **single national scholarship scheme** by merging all the current scholarship schemes.

Key Points

- **Post Matric Scholarship for SCs:**
 - It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** launched in 2006. It is **implemented** through State government and Union Territory administration.
 - The Scheme provides **financial assistance to the Scheduled Caste (SC) students** studying at post matriculation or post-secondary stage to enable them to complete their education.
 - The scholarship is **available for studies in India only** and is paid to the students whose guardians' income is below Rs. 2,50,000 per annum .

- **Single National Scholarship Scheme:**
 - The Central government is **contemplating** setting up a **single national scholarship scheme** called **PM Young Achievers Scholarship Award Scheme for Vibrant India (PM-YASASVI)** for meritorious students which will absorb all the existing scholarship schemes.
 - **Beneficiary:** Students in the Other Backward Class (OBC), SC, Denotified, Nomadic and semi-Nomadic Tribe (DNT) and Economically Backward Caste (EBC) categories will be able to avail the national scholarship.
 - **Implementing Agency:** The **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** has been tasked to implement the Scheme **by conducting a merit test.**
 - **Benefits of Single National Scholarship Scheme:**
 - It will **increase the reach of information** about the govt scholarships.
 - **Boost** the importance of maintaining a **basic curriculum and teaching standards** across the country.
 - Help improve the **quality and implementation of scholarships.**
 - **Issues Involved:**
 - In case a student misses the deadline of scholarship, he will **not get a second chance** to apply for other scholarships.
 - The national-level scholarship exam would become an **added burden on students.**

Having a separate exam for identifying merit is redundant as already students are appearing for board examinations and entrance examinations.
 - If the existing pre-matric and post-matric scholarship schemes are done away with, it could end up **hampering the education of students.**

Way Forward

- The single national scholarship scheme under PM-YASASVI can be beneficial only if it is implemented properly. Without correct implementation, it can become a hindrance rather than a help for students in India.
- The government should leverage the experience of scholarship provider platforms while developing this new scholarship scheme as they have a first-hand experience of supporting students.

Source: IE

A Single Voters' List

Why in News

The Prime Minister's Office held a meeting with representatives of the Election Commission and the Law Ministry to discuss the possibility of having a **common electoral roll for elections to the panchayat, municipality, state assembly and the Lok Sabha.**

Key Points

- **Types of Electoral Rolls in India:**

Each State Election Commissions (SEC) is governed by a separate state Act.

- Some state laws allow the SEC to borrow and use the Election Commission of India's voter's rolls for the local body elections.
- In others, the state commission uses the EC's voters list as the basis for the preparation and revision of rolls for municipality and panchayat elections.
- Few states have their own electoral rolls and do not adopt EC's roll for local body polls like those of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Odisha, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The distinction stems from the fact that the supervision and conduct of elections in our country are entrusted with **two constitutional authorities** – the **Election Commission (EC) of India** and the **State Election Commissions (SECs)**.
 - **Election Commission (EC) of India:** It was set up in 1950, the EC is charged with the responsibility of conducting polls to:
 - the offices of the **President and Vice-President of India,**
 - to **Parliament, the state assemblies and the legislative councils.**
 - **State Election Commissions (SECs):** The SECs, on the other hand, **supervise municipal and panchayat elections.** They are free to prepare their own electoral rolls for local body elections, and this exercise does not have to be coordinated with the EC.

- **Reason for Demand for Common Electoral Roll:**
 - A **common electoral roll and simultaneous elections** as a way to save an enormous amount of effort and expenditure.

It is argued that the preparation of a separate voters list causes duplication of the effort and the expenditure.
 - **Earlier Recommendations:**
 - The **Law Commission** recommended it in its **255th report in 2015 for a single electoral roll.**
 - The EC too adopted a similar stance in 1999 and 2004.

The EC pointed out that it **adds to the confusion among voters**, since they may find their names present in one roll, but absent in another.
- **Implementation Process:**
 - A **Constitutional Amendment** to Articles 243K and 243ZA is required.
 - **Articles 243K and 243ZA** deal with elections to panchayats and municipalities in the states. These give the power of superintendence, direction and control of preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of these elections to the **State Election Commission (SEC).**
 - The SECs are free to prepare their own electoral rolls for local body elections, and this exercise does not have to be coordinated with the EC.
 - The amendment would **make it mandatory to have a single electoral roll** for all elections in the country.
 - **Persuading the state governments** to tweak their respective laws and adopt the Election Commission's (EC) voters list for municipal and panchayat polls.
 - **Challenges in implementation:**
 - The boundaries of the EC's polling station may not necessarily match that of the wards.
 - The change would require a massive consensus-building exercise.

Way Forward

- Mature approach calls for the option of states adopting EC's voter list. This can be the guiding light. The change would require a massive consensus-building exercise between the states and the centre.
- So the EC's voters list has to be made in a way to fit the SEC's wards which is a tedious task but can be done by the use of technology.

Source IE

Poshan Maah

Why in News

Under ***Poshan Abhiyaan***, the month of **September** is observed as Poshan Maah i.e. **Nutrition month** every year, since 2018.

‘**Agricultural Fund of India**’ is being created to have complete information about the crops that are grown in each district and their related nutritional value.

Key Points

- **Poshan Maah:**
 - It includes **a month-long activities** focussed on antenatal care, optimal breastfeeding, **anaemia**, growth monitoring, girls education, diet, **right age of marriage**, hygiene and sanitation and eating healthy (**food fortification**).
 - The activities focus on **Social and Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC)** and are based on **Jan Andolan Guidelines**.
 - SBCC is the strategic use of communication approaches to promote changes in knowledge, attitudes, norms, beliefs and behaviours.
 - Jan Andolan is one of the strategies under the Poshan Abhiyaan.
 - A food and nutrition quiz as well as meme competition will be organized on the **My Gov portal**.
 - A unique kind of **nutrition park** has been created at **Statue of Unity (Gujarat)**, where one can witness nutrition related education along with fun and frolic.
- **Poshan Abhiyan:** Also called as the National Nutrition Mission, it is Government of India’s flagship programme to improve nutritional outcomes for children, pregnant women and lactating mothers. Poshan implies ‘Prime Minister’s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition’.
 - **Launch:** It was launched by the Prime Minister on the occasion of the **International Women’s Day on 8th March, 2018** from Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan.
 - **Implemented By:** Ministry of Women and Child Development
 - **Targets:**
 - To reduce **stunting, underweight, and low birth weight**, each by 2% per year; and anaemia among young children, adolescents and women each by 3% per year until 2022.
 - The minimum target to **reduce stunting is 2% every year**, but the mission will strive to bring it down from 38.4% in 2016 to 25% by 2022.

Source: PIB

Shetrunji and Bhadar Dams of Gujarat

Why in News

Due to heavy rains, Shetrunji and Bhadar dams, the **two largest reservoirs** in the Saurashtra **region (Gujarat)**, have overflowed simultaneously.

This monsoon, rain is centred over south Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch regions while north and central Gujarat regions are highly rain-deficient.

Key Points

- **Saurashtra region** has received **more than 100% of its average rainfall** this year.
 - However, in this peninsular region, almost **every fourth monsoon remains a deficient monsoon.**
 - Even within 11 districts of Saurashtra, **spatial distribution of rainfall remains skewed**, as evidenced by 12 different years in which either only Bhadar or Shetrunji dam overflowed.
- **Shetrunji and Bhadar Dam:**
 - **Shetrunji** is located in **Bhavnagar** district and has a designed gross storage capacity of 308.68 million cubic metre (mcm), the **largest** in Saurashtra region.
 - **Bhadar** is located in **Rajkot district** and has a gross storage capacity of 188.14 mcm, the **second largest** in the Saurashtra region.
 - The **two dams are across Shetrunji and Bhadar rivers.** These rivers flow in opposite directions and the two dams have different catchment areas. Geographical location of these dams in Saurashtra makes them a good indicator of rainfall distribution in the region.
 - **Sardar Sarovar Dam**, also called Narmada Dam, is the largest reservoir in Gujarat.
- **Shetrunji River:**
 - It originates from the **Amreli district.** It is an **east flowing river** and outfalls into the Gulf of Khambhat.
 - **Tributaries:** Safara, Shel, Khari, Talaji, Stali, Thebu, Gagadia, Rajwal and Kharo.
- **Bhadar River:**
 - It originates from **Jasdan taluka of Rajkot.**
 - **Tributaries:** Gondali, Chapparwadi, Phopal, Utawali, Moj, Venu, Vasavadi, Surwa and Galolia.



Source: IE

BIPOC

Why in News

The term BIPOC became popular on the internet during the **Black Lives Matter** movement. It stands for “Black, Indigenous and People of Color.”

Key Points

- The BIPOC movement urges to **acknowledge the diversity in skin color, race, and hair** and advocates for **in clusivity and representation** across all areas of life, from politics to skin care.
- It speaks against the **invisible discrimination** that exists in various industries.
 - For eg. In cosmetic industries, most of the **products cater to only fair skin** colours, excluding indigenous people of color and black people.
 - Standardization of beauty standards have **adverse effects on the mental well-being** of people who don't meet the conventional standards.
- It is been seen as a **substitute to degrading and offensive terms** like negro, african-american and minority.

The term **People of Colour (POC)** came into use during the 1960s to replace the words blacks, browns or coloured people.

- The **civil rights challenges, systemic oppression and racism** faced by people under BIPOC are similar and thus, the term is used to **reinforce the collective experience** between Black and Indigenous people and to **unite** them.
 - **Criticism:** However, some people criticize the use of the term as it puts the separate problems of different groups of people in one basket thus **erasing the chances of specialized solutions for each.**
 - It is also being said that all groups in BIPOC do not face equal levels of injustice.
 - Also, it is said to be a **colonial tendency to homogenize** different sets of people.
-