

Important Reports for RBI Grade B Exam July 2023

1. India's first-ever report on Critical Mineral

- **About the report:**

- Union Minister of Mines has unveiled India's first-ever report on Critical Minerals for India.**
- The report identifies **30 critical minerals essential for sectors including defense, agriculture, energy, pharmaceuticals, and telecom.**
- The list was identified considering resource and reserve position, production, import dependency, future technology, clean energy use, and agricultural requirements.
- This comprehensive list marks a milestone in India's pursuit of self-reliance and security in mineral resources, aligning with the vision of achieving 'Net Zero' targets.
- The list aims to guide policy formulation, strategic planning, and investment decisions in the mining sector.**
- The report, **prepared by an expert team constituted by the Ministry of Mines**, comes as a crucial step in India's journey towards self-reliance and security in the domain of mineral resources.
- The Ministry formed a **seven-member committee** to identify critical minerals for the country. The committee conducted a **three-stage assessment process to determine the list of critical minerals.**
 - In the first stage**, the committee studied the **critical minerals strategies of various countries** and **considered 69 elements/minerals** that were considered critical by major global economies.
 - The second stage involved an inter-ministerial consultation to identify minerals** critical to specific sectors. Feedback was received from representatives of various ministries and organizations.
 - The third stage aimed to derive an empirical formula for identifying critical minerals.**
- It is expected to play an important role in executing the required policies to ensure regulated extraction of these minerals essential for the growth of the renewables sector. The country, for now, continues to depend on imports of such raw materials to develop renewable technologies domestically.
- The committee consulted with the International Energy Agency (IEA) and adopted the EU methodology, considering economic importance and supply risk factors.**
- Minerals like lithium, graphite, cobalt, titanium, and rare earth elements are crucial for various sectors, including high-tech electronics, telecommunications, transport, defense, and the global transition to a low carbon emissions economy.
- India has been recently included as the newest partner in the Mineral Security Partnership (MSP) following Prime Minister Modi's recent visit to the United States.**
- Based on the three-stage assessment process mentioned above and considering important parameters such as resource/reserve position in the country, production, import dependency, use for future technology/clean energy, requirement of fertilizer minerals in an agrarian economy, the Committee has identified a set of 30 critical minerals.**

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- a. These are Antimony, Beryllium, Bismuth, Cobalt, Copper, Gallium, Germanium, Graphite, Hafnium, Indium, Lithium, Molybdenum, Niobium, Nickel, PGE, Phosphorous, Potash, REE, Rhenium, Silicon, Strontium, Tantalum, Tellurium, Tin, Titanium, Tungsten, Vanadium, Zirconium, Selenium and Cadmium.
- (m) The Committee also recommends the creation of a **Centre of Excellence for Critical Minerals (CECM)** in the Ministry of Mines.
- (n) The **Centre of Excellence will periodically update the list of critical minerals for India** and notify the critical mineral strategy from time to time and will execute a range of functions for the development of an effective value chain of critical minerals in the country.

2. 2023 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index

- **About the Global Multidimensional Poverty (MPI) index:**
 - (a) **The global MPI is a key international resource that measures acute multidimensional poverty across more than 100 developing countries.**
 - (b) **The Global MPI was first launched in the year 2010 and the latest update of the Global MPI is released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI).**
 - (c) The global MPI begins by constructing a deprivation profile for each household and person in it that tracks deprivations in **10 indicators spanning health, education and standard of living.**
 - (d) **All indicators are equally weighted within each dimension, so the health and education indicators are weighted 1/6 each, and the standard of living indicators are weighted 1/18 each.**
 - (e) A person's deprivation score is the sum of the weighted deprivations she or he experiences. The global MPI identifies people as multidimensionally poor if their deprivation score is 1/3 or higher.
 - (f) **The MPI ranges from 0 to 1, and higher values imply higher poverty.**
 - (g) Global MPI values decline when fewer people are poor or when poor people have fewer deprivations.
 - (h) By identifying who is poor, the nature of their poverty (their deprivation profile) and how poor they are (their deprivation score), **the global MPI complements the international \$2.15 a day poverty rate**, bringing into view interlinked nonmonetary deprivations.
 - (i) **UNDP has its headquarters in New York City.**
- **Key highlights of the report:**
 - (a) **Across 110 countries, 1.1 billion of 6.1 billion people are poor.**
 - (b) **Roughly five out of six poor people live in Sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia: 534 million (47.8 percent) in Sub-Saharan Africa and 389 million (34.9 percent) in South Asia.**
 - (c) **Some 65 percent of the remaining poor people live in just five countries: China (2014), Indonesia (2017), Myanmar (2015/16), Sudan (2014) and Yemen (2013).**

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- (d) Poverty disproportionately affects low-income countries. They are home to only **10 percent of the population covered by the global MPI but 34.7 percent (387 million) of poor people.**
- (e) **Some 65.3 percent of poor people (730 million) live in middle-income countries**, where the incidence of poverty ranges from 0.1 percent in Serbia (in 2019) to 66.8 percent in Benin (in 2017/2018) at the national level and from 0.0 percent in Jaweng, Botswana (in 2015/2016), to 89.5 percent in Alibori, Benin (in 2017/2018) at the subnational level.
- (f) **Over half (566 million) of the 1.1 billion poor people are children under the age of 18.**
 - a. Some **54.1 percent of poor children live in Sub-Saharan Africa**, making poverty reduction for these 306 million children a vital focus for the region.
 - b. **South Asia is home to 177 million poor children**, or 31 percent of poor children.
 - c. Across 110 countries **27.7 percent of children are poor**, compared with 13.4 percent of adults. This situation calls for unflinching engagement in reducing child poverty.
- (g) **Almost 84 percent of poor people live in rural areas**, and rural poverty dominates in every world region.
- (h) **25 countries halved their global MPI value well within 15 years, showing that progress towards SDG target 1.2 at scale is attainable.**
- (i) At least one country in every world region halved its global MPI value, including small countries.
- **Findings on India:**
 - (a) **415 million poor people moved out of poverty from 2005/2006 to 2019/2021.**
 - (b) Deprivation in all indicators declined.
 - (c) The poorest states and groups, including children and people in disadvantaged caste groups, had the fastest absolute progress.
 - (d) **India is among 25 countries, including Cambodia, China, Congo, Honduras, Indonesia, Morocco, Serbia, and Vietnam, that successfully halved their global MPI values within 15 years.**
 - (e) **India still has more than 230 million people who are poor.**
 - (f) The incidence of poverty in India declined significantly, **from 55.1 percent in 2005/2006 to 16.4 percent in 2019/2021.**

3. Farmers' Distress Index: By Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture (CRIDA)

- **About Farmers' Distress Index:**
 - (a) **In 2022, the Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture (CRIDA), an institution under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) started working on an early warning system called 'farmers distress index', a first of its kind for India.**
 - (b) **The main aim of the index is to minimise the agrarian distress in the form of crop loss / failure and income shock.**

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- (c) The index will try to anticipate this distress and prevent its spread from a few farmers to the village or block level by pre-warning different stakeholders, including central, state, local and also non-government agencies about the future occurrence of farmers distress in a particular block / district so that they can take timely preventive measures.
- **Methodology to track distress.**
 - (a) **The first step will be to scour through local newspapers, other news platforms and social media platforms for any report on incidence of farmers distress** like localised cases of issues with debt repayment, death by suicide, pest attacks, drought, floods, migration, among others.
 - (b) Following this, **contacts of marginal and small farmers or tenant farmers from the area will be collected to conduct telephonic interviews, which will have 21 standardised questions** to gauge early signs of distress.
 - (c) **The answers will be mapped against seven indicators:**
 - 1) Exposure to droughts, floods, crop failure due to pest attacks, livestock deaths.
 - 2) Debt.
 - 3) Adaptive capacity of farmer and local government through different schemes.
 - 4) Land holding and irrigation facilities.
 - 5) Sensitivity, mitigation and adaptation strategies like growing contingency crops if main crops fail.
 - 6) Triggers for immediate distress like health-related expenditure.
 - 7) Socio-psychological factors and impacts.
 - **Based on these 21 questions, the degree of distress will be identified.**
 - **The index will have values from 0-1. A value between 0-0.5 will indicate 'low distress', 0.5-0.7 will indicate 'moderate' distress and above 0.7 will indicate 'severe' distress.**
 - If the index is severe, it will identify which component, among the seven, is more severe and contributes maximum to farmers' distress. The index is currently being worked out in the form of a mobile or desktop application.
 - After completion of the ongoing work, **CRIDA will be handing over the index to the central government and it will be made available to different state governments, agriculture departments, rural development departments, agriculture universities**, which have databases of local farmers as well as non-profits and civil society organizations.

4. UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade 2023: Released by United Nation's Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific's (UNESCAP)

- **About the report:**
- (a) **The United Nations Regional Commissions have been conducting the Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation (formerly known as the UN Global Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade**

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- Implementation) since 2015 to review the progress of trade facilitation reforms in their respective Member States.
- (b) **The initiative, led and coordinated by ESCAP, supports the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement**, as well as emerging regional and global initiatives on paperless trade or e-trade, such as the recent Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA).
 - (c) The survey covers a **WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)+ set of nearly 60 trade facilitation measures categorized into eleven sub-groups, namely: Transparency; Formalities; Institutional arrangement and cooperation; Transit facilitation; Paperless trade; Cross-border paperless trade; Trade facilitation for SMEs; Agricultural trade facilitation; Women in trade facilitation; Trade finance for trade facilitation; and Trade facilitation in times of crisis.**
 - (d) The survey is fact-based rather than perception based. **A three-step approach to data collection and validation is generally followed, implemented over 6-month period every 2 years:**
 - a. Step (1) Open data collection from experts;
 - b. Step (2) Data verification by UN Regional Commission Secretariats; and
 - c. Step (3) Data validation by national governments.
 - (e) The survey evidence whether the trade facilitation measures being taken have the desired impact and helps draw comparison amongst countries. A higher score for a country also helps businesses in their investment decisions.
 - (f) The Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation is conducted every two years by UNESCAP. The 2023 Survey includes an assessment of 60 trade facilitation measures covered by the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement.
- **Key findings of the survey:**
 - (a) **The 2023 survey, covering more than 140 economies and evaluating 60 trade facilitation measures, has positioned India at the forefront of global trade facilitation efforts, with an impressive score of 93.55 percent in 2023 vis a vis 90.32 percent in 2021.**
 - (b) **India's exceptional performance was highlighted in various sub-indicators, with perfect scores of 100 percent achieved in key areas such as transparency, formalities, institutional arrangement and cooperation, and paperless trade.**
 - (c) This outstanding recognition reflects India's continuous efforts to streamline trade procedures and improve transparency through initiatives such as turant customs, single window interface for facilitation of trade (SWIFT), pre-arrival data processing, e-Sanchit, and coordinated border management.
 - (d) Furthermore, India demonstrated its dedication to gender inclusivity and empowerment by significantly increasing its score in the **"Women in Trade Facilitation" component from 66.7 percent in 2021 to an impressive 77.8 percent in 2023.**
 - (e) **India is now the best performing country amongst all the countries of South Asia region.** The overall score of India has been greater than many developed countries including **Canada, France, UK, Germany** etc.

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- (f) **The Survey notes that India is the best performing country when compared to South and Southwest Asia region (64.30 percent) and Asia Pacific region (66.76 percent).**
- (g) India's impressive performance in the Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation reinforces the effectiveness of trade facilitation measures implemented by Indian Customs, particularly the Turant Customs initiative, which integrates faceless, paperless, and contactless customs processes.
- (h) These measures have not only streamlined trade procedures but have also enhanced India's ease of doing business and fostered a trade-friendly environment.
- (i) **In paperless trade, the score has improved to 96.3 percent from 81.48 percent in 2019 and mild improvement in cross-border paperless trade to 66.67 percent from 55.56 percent in the same period.**

5. India to Surpass US and Become World's 2nd Largest Economy by 2075: Goldman Sachs

- **About the report:**

- (a) **India is poised to become the second-largest economy in the world by 2075, surpassing not only Japan and Germany but also the United States, according to a Goldman Sachs report.**
- (b) On top of a burgeoning population, driving the forecast is the country's progress in innovation and technology, higher capital investment, and rising worker productivity.
- (c) **The report projected India's GDP at \$52.5 trillion by 2075, behind China's \$57 trillion but ahead of the US' \$51.5 trillion.**
- (d) **Currently, India is the world's fifth-largest economy, behind Germany, Japan, China and the US.** (According to the Economic Survey tabled in Parliament in January this year, **the Indian economy was projected to reach the \$3.5 trillion mark by the end of March.**)
- (e) According to the report, for India, a key to realising the potential of that growing population is **boosting participation within its labour force**, as well as **providing training and skills** for its immense pool of talent.
- (f) India, according to UN projections, surpassed China as the world's most populous country earlier this year.
- (g) **The report further highlighted that over the next two decades, the dependency ratio of India will be one of the lowest among regional economies.** (The dependency ratio is a measure of the ratio of the number of dependents to the total working-age population in a country or region.)
- (h) **A low dependency ratio indicates that there are proportionally more working-age adults who are able to support the youth and elderly.**
- (i) The Goldman Sachs report said the government has placed a priority on infrastructure creation, especially roads and railways.
- (j) **The country's recent budget aims to continue the 50-year interest-free loan programs to state governments in order to spur investments in infrastructure.**
- (k) The Goldman report said among the downside risks to its projections is the labour force participation rate. The labour force participation rate in India has declined over the last 15 years.

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- (l) Driven by favourable demographics, India's savings rate is likely to increase with falling dependency ratios, rising incomes, and deeper financial sector development, which is likely to make the pool of capital available to drive further investment.
- (m) **In India, the demographic transition is happening more gradually and over a longer time period than the rest of Asia.** This is primarily due to a more gradual decline in death and birth rates in India compared with the rest of Asia.
- (n) Goldman Sachs said in the report that **this is an appropriate time for the private sector to scale up on creating capacity in manufacturing and services.** This will help in generating more jobs in the country and absorb a large labor force.
- (o) **A mere 20 percent of all working-age women in India are in employment.** The low figure could be due to women being primarily engaged in work not accounted for by the economic measures of formal employment.
- (p) Net exports have also been a drag on India's growth, because India runs a current account deficit, the report highlighted.
- (q) **India's economy is driven by domestic demand, unlike many more export-dependent economies in the region, with up to 60 percent of its growth mainly attributed to domestic consumption and investments, according to Goldman's report.**
- (r) Recently, **S&P Global and Morgan Stanley have also predicted that India is on course to become the third-largest economy by 2030.**
- (s) India's technology industry revenue is expected to increase by **\$245 billion by the end of 2023.**

6. Global Public Debt Hits Record \$92 Trillion - UN Report

- **About the report:**

- (a) **Global public debt surged to a record \$92 trillion in 2022 as governments borrowed to counter crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, with the burden being felt acutely by developing countries, a United Nations report said.**
- (b) **Domestic and external debt worldwide has increased more than five times in the last two decades, outstripping the rate of economic growth,** with gross domestic product only tripling since 2002, according to the report, released in the run up to a G20 finance ministers and central bank governors' meeting.
- (c) **Developing countries owe almost 30 percent of the global public debt, of which 70 percent is represented by China, India and Brazil.**
- (d) **Fifty-nine developing countries face a debt-to-GDP ratio above 60 percent - a threshold indicating high levels of debt.**
- (e) Debt has been translating into a substantial burden for developing countries due to limited access to financing, rising borrowing costs, currency devaluations and sluggish growth.

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- (f) According to the report, **about 3.3 billion people now live in countries where debt interest payments are greater than expenditure on health or education.**
- (g) **This five-fold surge in public debt levels since 2000 demands immediate action to tackle the escalating crisis affecting developing countries in particular.**
- (h) **On average, African countries pay four times more for borrowing than the United States and eight times more than the wealthiest European economies.**
- (i) **A total of 52 countries – almost 40 percent of the developing world – are in serious debt trouble.**
- (j) This disparity in interest rates highlights the inherent inequality in the international financial system, burdening developing countries disproportionately.
- (k) Today, **half of all developing nations spend a minimum of 7.4 percent of their export revenues on servicing external public debt.**
- (l) Of special concern is the rapid growth of interest payments, surpassing other public expenditures. It is alarming that some governments are compelled to spend more on servicing debt than on critical sectors like health and education.
- (m) **The report shows that at least 19 developing nations allocate more money to interest payments than education, and 45 allocate more to interest than health expenditure.**
- (n) The increasing reliance on private creditors, who offer more expensive debt and shorter maturities than official sources, has also complicated debt restructuring for developing countries.
- (o) Currently, **private creditors hold 62 percent of external public debt**, up from 47 percent a decade ago. There is, however, no mechanism to address how to restructure debt across different creditor classes.
- (p) Addressing the high cost of debt and the mounting risk of debt distress is of utmost importance.
- (q) Establishing a debt workout mechanism is crucial to expedite progress under the G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatment, which has faced challenges due to creditor coordination issues and the absence of automatic debt service suspension clauses.
- (r) **Developing countries, especially those with high debt burdens, require increased liquidity during times of crisis.** Otherwise, a liquidity crisis risks turning into a debt crisis. This can be achieved by expanding contingency finance.
- (s) The global safety net must work. **Measures such as enhancing the use of Special Drawing Rights, temporarily suspending IMF surcharges, and broadening access to emergency financing through increased quotas must be pursued.**

7. The Henley Passport Index 2023: Singapore replaces Japan as world's strongest passport

- **About the Henley Passport Index:**

- (a) The Henley Passport Index is the original, authoritative ranking of all the world's passports according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa.

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- (b) **The index is based on exclusive data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA)** – the largest, most accurate travel information database – and enhanced by Henley & Partners’ research team.
- (c) **The index includes 199 different passports and 227 different travel destinations.** Updated quarterly, the Henley Passport Index is considered the standard reference tool for global citizens and sovereign states when assessing where a passport ranks on the global mobility spectrum.
- (d) **The index assigns a score based on whether a visa is unnecessary, obtainable upon arrival, or through an electronic travel authority.**
 - **Key findings of the index:**
- (a) **Singapore has overtaken Japan to boast of the world’s most powerful passport, the Henley Passport Index showed.**
 - a. The Southeast Asian country's passport allows one to get visa-free entry into **192 countries out of 227 nations.**
 - b. **Japan has lost the top spot as it slipped to the joint third spot** with visa-free entry to 189 countries.
- (b) **Germany, Italy and Spain tied in second place**, with their citizens being able to visit 190 global destinations.
- (c) **Japan, which topped the list last year, slipped to third place** — its passport allowing visa-free access to 189 destinations, down from 193 in 2022.
 - a. **Other passports that tied with Japan to rank third place are Austria, Finland, France, Luxembourg, South Korea and Sweden.**
- (d) **The UK jumped up two places to come in fourth**, having turned the corner after a six-year decline.
 - a. The United Kingdom jumped two spots to joint fourth as its passport is valid for visa-free travel to **188 destinations.**
 - b. **The UK is tied with Denmark, Ireland, and the Netherlands.**
- (e) **Singapore’s passport was also in first place in 2021 with access to 194 destinations, but the city state dipped to second place last year.**
 - a. In the past 10 years, Singapore has increased its score by 25, pushing the country up by five places to take the top spot.
- (f) Conversely, out of the top 10 countries, **the U.S. saw the smallest increase in its index score over the last decade. The U.S. now ranks eighth place in the passport index.**
- (g) Global connectivity and access have become indispensable features of wealth creation and preservation, and its value will only grow as geopolitical volatility and regional instability increase.
- (h) **India has also jumped seven places in the index as it has improved from the 87th position in 2022 to the 80th position in 2023.**
 - a. With an Indian passport, **one can get access to 57 countries.**
 - b. **India has made progress, climbing to the 80th spot along with Senegal and Togo.**
- (i) **Taliban-ruled Afghanistan is the least powerful passport, as it is languishing at the last spot (103rd place).**
 - a. The country's passport is valid for visa-free entry into **27 countries.**

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- (j) **Pakistan is ranked poorly at 100th. Syria is 101st, while Iraq is a place above Afghanistan at 102nd place.**
- (k) For entrepreneurs and businesspeople, improving economic mobility through visa-free access to stable economies and key markets provides a pathway to lucrative jurisdictions, mitigates risks, enables valuable partnerships, and expands networks with industry leaders, innovators, and investors.

8. Export Preparedness Index 2022: Released by Niti Aayog

- **About the index:**

- (a) The Export Preparedness Index extends India's innate heterogeneity to its exports and serves as a tool to help states in developing strategies for their context-specific challenges.
- (b) **The Export Preparedness Index is prepared by NITI Aayog in association with the Institute for Competitiveness.**
- (c) **The third iteration of this report provides a comprehensive analysis of the country's export trends, district-level performance, and insights from the analysis of states and UTs.**
- (d) The framework consists of four main dimensions: **Policy, Business Ecosystem, Export Ecosystem and Export Performance.**
- (e) **The index uses 56 indicators** which holistically capture the export preparedness of States and UTs in terms of exports at both the state and district-level.
- (f) It highlights the achievements made in surpassing export targets despite challenging circumstances and acknowledges the collaborative efforts of the government and state governments in creating a resilient export ecosystem.
- (g) **The index is designed to cover all the States and Union Territories (UTs) in the country. India consists of 28 States and 9 Union territories at present. However, the index is not able to cover 4 UTs due to information unavailability from the states.**

- **Key findings of the report:**

- (a) The EPI 2022 Report observed that most 'Coastal States' have performed well, with the states of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat being the top-performers in the Export Preparedness Index across the country, in all categories of states.
- (b) **Tamil Nadu is followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal and Kerala in that order in the ranking of coastal states.**
 - a. **Tamil Nadu scored a combined 80.89** on the above four counts ahead of Maharashtra (78.2), Karnataka (73.22) and Haryana (63.65).
 - b. **Tamil Nadu's electronics exports posted a two-fold increase in electronic exports from \$1.86 billion in 2021-22 to \$5.37 billion in 2022-23.**
- (c) **Among hilly/Himalayan states, Uttarakhand has ranked at the top position.** It is followed by Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura, Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram in that order.

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- (d) **Haryana topped the chart among the landlocked regions.** It was followed by Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.
- (e) **In the category of union territories/small states, Goa was ranked first.** Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar and Ladakh were ranked second, third, fourth and fifth, respectively.
- (f) The report begins by analysing global and Indian export trends, examining trade patterns and sector-specific performance. It highlights the need to focus on districts as export hubs and describes the steps taken by the government to promote this approach. The report also identifies the top exporting districts of India's best-performing states, providing valuable insights for other states to develop tailored export promotion strategies.
- (g) **The framework for the third edition has incorporated new and revised indicators, with a focus on districts. It introduces new district-level parameters to capture the evolving export landscape.**
- (h) The index is divided into four dynamic pillars and sub-pillars, providing a detailed assessment of each state's export preparedness.
- (i) The performance analysis at the country, pillar, and sub-pillar levels identifies strengths and areas for improvement, serving as a valuable tool for states to identify areas to improve their export preparedness.
- (j) **The report aims to propel India towards achieving the target of merchandise exports valued over \$1 trillion by harnessing its diverse strengths, fostering regional competitiveness, and positioning itself as a key player in the global south export market.**

9. QS ranking on world's best cities for students 2024

- **Key highlights of the report:**
 - (a) **Quacquarelli Symonds, global higher education experts, released the QS Best Student Cities, 11th edition, which compares 160 premier educational destinations, including 26 new entries.**
 - (b) **The QS Best Student Cities 2024 ranks top study destinations around the world to reveal which cities are the most student-friendly according to several factors, including affordability and desirability.**
 - (c) **According to the report, four out of the world's top ten universities were in the UK and two of those in London-Imperial College London and University College London (UCL).**
 - (d) **The factors that are considered when determining the QS Best Student Cities ranking, and which are given an equal weightage of 16.67 percent, are:**
 - a. **QS World University Rankings** – A category aimed to reflect the collective performance of a city's universities in the QS World University Rankings.
 - b. **Student Mix** – Which assesses the student make-up of a city such as on-campus diversity, both overall and from an international perspective.
 - c. **Desirability** – With a broad spectrum of datasets, this is used to indicate how desirable a destination is as a whole, ranging from safety to pollution.

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- d. **Employer Activity** – In this indicator, two factors are considered that are derived from the QS Graduate Employability Rankings, examining which cities are the most highly sought-after employment grounds for graduates.
 - e. **Affordability** – From tuition fees to the cost of living, the affordability indicator measures how cost-effective a city is most likely to be for prospective students and their families.
 - f. **Student Voice** – Using findings from our yearly QS International Student Survey, we incorporate the views that students have on their experience studying abroad.
- (e) To be considered for inclusion, **each city must have a population of 250,000-plus and house at least two universities featured in the most recent QS World University Rankings.**
- (f) **London remains in the top spot for another year, accumulating the second highest score in ‘Student Voice’ (98.4) and ‘World University Rankings’ (94.9) respectively.**
- (g) **Melbourne, the highest ranked city in Australia, earned the second greatest score with 98.4 in ‘Student Voice’ and the third highest in ‘Student Mix’ with 98.6 points.**
- a. This comes as no surprise since it ranked as the most affordable city among the top 10, according to Mercer’s Cost of Living City Ranking 2023.
- (h) **Tokyo gained the world’s third highest score in QS World University Rankings indicator (90.1) and fourth in the world for ‘Employer Activity’ (95.9), climbing from seventh to second place in QS Best Student Cities rankings.**
- (i) **Mumbai has been ranked as the best Indian city for students in the QS Best Student Cities 2024 ranking.**
- a. Its global ranking dropped to **118**, indicating a decline from the previous year’s position.
- (j) **None of the major Indian cities made it to the top 100 global list in the QS Best Student Cities 2024 ranking.** Moreover, all the major Indian cities experienced a decline in their global rankings compared to the previous year’s standings. **Delhi received a global rank of 132.**
- (k) **70 percent of the 160 ranked cities decline for Affordability.**

10. Majority of women live in countries with large gender gaps: UN report

- **Key highlights of the report:**
- (a) **Only an abysmal 1 per cent of women across the world live in countries that have managed to achieve both high women empowerment and gender parity**, according to a new report by the United Nations.
- (b) Leadership roles and decision-making still mostly lie with men and are unavailable to women.
- (c) **The first-of-its-kind report that presents a comprehensive analysis of the progress made in human development of women and girls was jointly created by two UN agencies – UN Women and UN Development Programme.**
- (d) The bodies collated data from **114 countries and analysed them based on the twin indices of Women’s Empowerment Index (WEI) and the Global Gender Parity Index (GGPI).**

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- (e) These complementary indices together are the best tool to develop the most accurate understanding of the progress made towards women's empowerment and gender parity in a country.
- (f) The **WEI focuses solely on women, measuring their power and freedoms to make choices and seize opportunities in life.**
- (g) The **GGPI evaluates the status of women relative to men in core dimensions of human development and exposes gaps** in parity between women and men
- (h) They also factored in new data on the progress made by these countries towards achieving UN-mandated Sustainable Development Goals that deal with closing gender gaps.
- (i) WEI showed that, on an average, **women are empowered to achieve only 60 per cent of their full potential.** They also were found to achieve **28 per cent less than men across key human development dimensions**, as measured by the GGPI, the report noted.
- (j) **None of the 114 countries analysed achieved full women's empowerment or complete gender parity.**
- (k) **More than 90 per cent of the global population of women live in countries with low or middle women's empowerment and low or middle performance** in achieving gender parity.
- (l) Equality of women is of utmost importance and without it, empowerment of women will remain elusive, even in places with high human development, the study showed.
- (m) **Of the 114 countries analysed, 85 have low or middle women's empowerment and low or middle performance in achieving gender parity. More than half the countries in this group are in the high (21 countries) or very high human development group (26 countries).**
- (n) India can be cited as an example, based on the findings.
 - a. **In the country, women's empowerment and gender parity were both found to be 'low', although it was assessed to be in the 'medium' category in terms of human development.**
- (o) No country with a large gender gap has achieved high women's empowerment, the report added.
- (p) **8 per cent of women and girls live in countries with low or middle women's empowerment but high performance in achieving gender parity.**
- **The recommendations of the report in the areas where comprehensive policy action is needed are:**
 - **Health policies:** Support and promote long and healthy lives for all, with a focus on universal access to sexual and reproductive health.
 - **Equality in education:** Address gaps in skills and quality of education, especially in fields such as STEM, to empower women and girls in the digital age.
 - **Work-life balance and support for families:** Invest in policies and services that address work-life balance, including affordable quality childcare services, parental leave schemes, and flexible working arrangements.
 - **Women's equal participation:** Set targets and action plans for achieving gender parity in all spheres of public life and eliminate discriminatory laws and regulations that hold women back.

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- **Violence against women:** Implement comprehensive measures focused on prevention, changing social norms, and eliminating discriminatory laws and policies.
- (q) The indices serve as a catalyst for change, enabling comprehensive tracking and assessment of progress and gaps across countries.

11. Performance Grading Index 2.0 for States/UTs for the year 2021-22

- **About the index:**

- (a) **The Ministry of Education released the report on performance grading index (PGI) 2.0 for states and union territories for the year 2021-22.**
- (b) The Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, devised PGI for states and UTs that assesses the performance of the school education system at the state/UT level by creating an index for comprehensive analysis.
- (c) **The PGI for states/UTs was first released for the year 2017-18 and so far, it has been released up to the year 2020-21.**
- (d) Over the period, many of the indicators in PGI have become redundant. Therefore, to have a more updated base with quality indicators, to align with new initiatives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and to replace existing indicators that have achieved optimal targets, the PGI – State structure for 2021-22 has been revised and renamed as PGI 2.0.
- (e) **The new PGI structure covers 73 indicators, and it focuses more on qualitative assessment and even digital initiatives and teacher education.** Thus, the grades/level obtained by states/UTs in previous editions of the PGIs are not comparable with the grades/levels obtained by states/UTs in the 2022-22 edition.
- (f) **The PGI 2.0 structure comprises 1,000 points across 73 indicators grouped into two categories, namely outcomes, and governance management (GM).**
- (g) **These categories are further divided into six domains, namely learning outcomes (LO), access (A), infrastructure and facilities (IF), equity (E), governance process (GP), and teachers' education and training (TE&T).**
- (h) **The PGI 2.0 for 2021-22 classified states/UTs into ten grades, where the highest achievable grade is 'Daksh', which is for state/UT scoring more than 940 points out of a total of 1,000 points. The lowest grade is 'Akanshi-3', which is for a score up to 460.**
- (i) PGI 2.0 can help states/UTs to pinpoint the gaps and prioritise areas for intervention to ensure that the school education system is robust.

- **Key highlights of the report:**

- (a) **None of the states/UTs has attained the highest grade, Daksh.**
- (b) **The maximum and minimum scores obtained by the States/UTs in 2021-22 are 659.01 and 420.64 respectively.** The deviation between the maximum and minimum scores obtained by States/UTs is 238.37 or 23.8 percent of

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the maximum points, indicating that, States Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Mizoram has to put more effort to reach the top slot.

- a. **Only two states/UTs, namely Punjab and Chandigarh have attained Grade Prachesta -2 (score 641-700).**
 - b. **Six states/UTs joined Grade Prachesta - 3 (score 581-640).**
 - c. 13 states/UTs joined Grade Akanshi -1 (score 521-580).
 - d. 12 states/UTs attained Grade Akanshi - 2 (score 461-520).
 - e. **Three states got Grade Akanshi – 3 in PGI 2.0.**
- (c) One of the main purposes of PGI 2.0 is to make States and UTs aware of the areas where there is scope for improvement and strive to reach the maximum possible score.
- (d) The Performance of a State/UT is often perceived to be linked to the size (geographical area) of the State/UT as it has a bearing on several logistic, administrative, and other issues. **However, size does not appear to be a determining factor in the performance of States and UTs in the field of School Education as assessed by the PGI 2.0.**
- (e) Thus, **Punjab and Chandigarh which are in Prachesta - 2, are ranked 21st and 35th respectively in terms of their geographical size amongst States/UTs.**
- (f) Similarly, the States which are in Akanshi - 3 are ranked 15th (Arunachal Pradesh), 24th (Meghalaya), 26th (Mizoram) respectively in terms of geographical size.
- (g) **Below is a list of grades/scores of top 5 states:**
1. **Chandigarh received a score of 659.0** (Grade: PRACHESTA-2).
 2. **Punjab received a score of 647.4** (Grade: PRACHESTA-2).
 3. **Delhi received a score of 636.2** (Grade: PRACHESTA-3).
 4. Kerala received a score of 609.7 (Grade: PRACHESTA-3).
 5. Gujarat received a score of 599.0 (Grade: PRACHESTA-3).
- (h) Based on the scores obtained by the States/UTs and their Category/Domain wise performance, States/UTs need to take pro-active domain specific action to improve their score in future.

12. Global Peace Index 2023: Released by Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP)

- **About the index:**
- (a) **The 17th edition of the Global Peace Index (GPI) has been released recently by an international think-tank, the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP).**
 - (b) The GPI report presents the most comprehensive data-driven analysis to date on peace, its economic value, trends, and how to develop peaceful societies.
 - (c) **The report covers 99.7 percent of the world's population and uses 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators from highly respected sources to compile the Index.**
 - (d) These indicators are grouped into three key domains: **Ongoing Conflict, Safety and Security, and Militarization.**

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- **About the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP):**
 - IEP is an international and independent think tank dedicated to shifting the world's focus to peace as a positive, achievable and tangible measure of human well-being and progress. **It is a global think tank headquartered in Sydney, Australia** with branches in New York, Mexico City, and Oxford.
- **Key findings of GPI 2023:**
 - (a) Overall, the index found that the world is a little less safe than last year, due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic — which is unchanged from the 2022 survey results.
 - (b) **Iceland has remained the most peaceful country in the world since the study was first released in 2008.**
 - a. It also ranks as the **third happiest country in the world**, after Finland and Denmark.
 - b. More than 60 percent of the country's population lives in the **capital city of Reykjavik**.
 - c. In Iceland, school is free for all Icelanders through college, and every student is taught to speak Danish and English.
 - (c) **The second country on the list is Denmark.** Denmark's capital, Copenhagen, is home to institutions such as the Copenhagen Stock Exchange and serves as a hub connecting Northern Europe with the rest of the world.
 - (d) **This year, India fared well in the list and ranked at 126th position – climbed nine ranks up from last year's report.**
 - (e) **However, it is running far behind its neighbouring countries such as Bhutan (17), Maldives (23), Nepal (79), China (80), Bangladesh (88), Sri Lanka (107). Pakistan and Myanmar are two countries trailing behind India with 146th and 139th positions, respectively.**
 - (f) **Deaths from global conflict increased by 96 percent to 238,000.**
 - (g) New data shows higher number of conflict deaths in Ethiopia than Ukraine, eclipsing the previous global peak during the Syrian war.
 - (h) **79 countries witnessed increased levels of conflict including Ethiopia, Myanmar, Ukraine, Israel, and South Africa.**
 - (i) **The global economic impact of violence increased by 17 percent or \$1 trillion, to \$17.5 trillion in 2022, equivalent to 13 percent of global GDP.**
 - (j) **A Chinese blockade of Taiwan would cause a drop in global economic output of \$2.7 trillion**, almost double the loss that occurred due to the 2008 global financial crisis.
 - (k) Despite the conflict in Ukraine, **92 countries improved on military expenditure and 110 decreased their military personnel.**
 - (l) Conflicts are becoming more internationalised with 91 countries now involved in some form of external conflict, up from 58 in 2008.
 - (m) The 17th edition of the annual Global Peace Index (GPI), the world's leading measure of peacefulness, reveals the average level of global peacefulness deteriorated for the ninth consecutive year, **with 84 countries recording an improvement and 79 a deterioration.**

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- (n) **Iceland remains the most peaceful country, a position it has held since 2008, followed by Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand and Austria.**
- (o) For the sixth consecutive year, **Afghanistan is the least peaceful country, followed by Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.** Highlighting the shifting dynamics of conflict, both Afghanistan and Syria recorded improvements in peacefulness.
- (p) **Ten of the 23 GPI indicators improved, 11 deteriorated, and two had no change.** The largest deteriorations were in External Conflicts Fought and Deaths from Internal Conflict. Other notable deteriorations included Neighbouring Country Relations and Political Instability, where 59 countries deteriorated.
- **Impact of the War in Ukraine on Peacefulness.**
 - **Ukraine recorded the largest deterioration, falling 14 places to 157th.**
 - The economic impact of violence has increased by **479 percent or \$449 billion**, equivalent to 64 percent of Ukraine's GDP.
 - Despite the conflict, Russia's incarceration rate, violent demonstrations, terrorism impact and homicide rates have improved over the past year, with the homicide rate at its lowest since 2008.

13. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) World Investment Report (WIR) 2023

- **About the report:**
 - (a) **The World Investment Report focuses on trends in foreign direct investment (FDI) worldwide, at the regional and country levels and emerging measures to improve its contribution to development.**
 - (b) The Report further reviews recent policy developments, including trends in national investment policy measures and international investment agreements. It presents an overview of investment policy measures aimed at supporting the energy transition.
 - (c) The Report also documents sustainability trends in global capital markets, including sustainability-linked financial products, sustainable stock exchanges, institutional investor commitments and financial regulations – all with a special focus on the mobilization of funds for the energy transition.
 - (d) **The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that deals with issues related to international trade, investment, development and cooperation.**
 - (e) **It was established in 1964** by the UN General Assembly as a permanent forum for discussing and addressing development challenges, especially those related to international trade.
 - (f) **UNCTAD has 195 member countries and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.**
- **Key highlights of the report:**
 - (a) **UNCTAD's World Investment Report 2023 reveals a widening annual investment deficit that developing countries face as they work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.**
 - a. **The gap is now about \$4 trillion per year – up from \$2.5 trillion in 2015 when the SDGs were adopted.**

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- b. **Developing countries' energy investment needs, estimated at \$2.2 per year – make up more than half the gap.** This refers to investment in energy generation, energy efficiency and low-carbon transition technologies and sources. Large gaps also exist for water and transport infrastructure.
 - c. The widening SDG investment gap in developing countries stands in contrast to positive trends observed in sustainability investment in global capital markets. **The sustainable finance market grew 10 percent to \$5.8 trillion in 2022.**
- (b) **The report shows that global foreign direct investment (FDI) fell 12 percent in 2022 and analyses how investment policy and capital market trends impact investment in the SDGs, particularly in clean energy.**
- a. After a strong rebound in 2021, global FDI fell by 12 percent in 2022 to **\$1.3 trillion**, due mainly to overlapping global crises – the war in Ukraine, high food and energy prices, and soaring public debt.
 - b. The decline was felt mostly in developed economies, where FDI fell by 37 percent to \$378 billion.
 - c. On a positive note, greenfield investment project announcements were up 15 percent in 2022, growing in most regions and sectors.
- (c) **It highlights that developing countries need renewable energy investments of about \$1.7 trillion each year but attracted only \$544 billion in clean energy FDI in 2022.**
- (d) Although investments in renewables have nearly tripled since 2015, most of the money has gone to developed countries.
- (e) **The report shows that more than 30 developing countries still haven't registered a large international investment project in renewables.**
- (f) And in most of the 10 developing countries with the highest levels of international investment in renewable energy, investment in renewables represents between one tenth and one third of total FDI.
- (g) The report highlights that institutional investors, pension funds and sovereign wealth funds are ideally placed to help finance clean energy in developing countries.
- (h) **In 2022, FDI in developing countries in Asia reached a total of \$662 billion, representing no change compared to the previous year.**
- a. **India and ASEAN were the most buoyant recipients of the Foreign direct investment (FDI)**, with increases of 10 and 5 percent, respectively.
 - b. **FDI flows to India increased by 10 percent to reach \$49.3 billion, positioning India as the third-largest host country for greenfield project announcements and the second largest for international project finance deals in South Asia.**
- (i) China, the world's second largest FDI host country, registered a 5 percent rise in FDI.
- (j) **FDI inflows to developing Asia were highly concentrated, with five economies accounting for nearly 80 percent of the total investment.** These economies are India, China, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the United Arab Emirates.

14.Panchayat Development Index Report (PDI)

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- **About the report:**

- Recently, the Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj released the Report on Panchayat Development Index (PDI) at the National Workshop on Panchayat Development Index.
- The PDI is a composite index that measures the performance of panchayats in achieving the Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**
- It provides a holistic and evidence-based assessment of the development status of panchayats, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses.
- The PDI aims to promote the Localization of SDGs by creating awareness among panchayats and stakeholders about their importance.**
- It encourages panchayats to adopt best practices and innovations to improve their performance in achieving SDGs.
- The PDI provides rankings for panchayats at different levels, including district, block, and village, based on their overall scores.**
- Panchayats are categorized into four grades: D (scores under 40 percent), C (40-60 percent), B (60-75 percent), A (75-90 percent), and A+ (above 90 percent).**
- Ministry of Panchayati Raj has initiated thematic approach through aggregating 17 SDG goals into 9 broad themes for Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) at the grassroots level through empowering Panchayats and other relevant stakeholders in Rural Areas.**
- Panchayat Development Index (PDI) will play a pivotal role in the process of quantified evaluation and mechanism for computation of the composite score on 9 themes of LSDGs and will pave the way for outcome-oriented development goals at Panchayats.
- Panchayat Development Index Report has come with 144 local targets, 577 local indicators and 688 data points on 9 themes of LSDGs.**
- The PDI considers nine themes, including poverty-free and enhanced livelihood, healthy village, child-friendly village, water-sufficient village, clean and green village, self-sufficient infrastructure, socially just and secured villages, good governance, and women-friendly village.**
- Some of the significant indicators at 9 themes that are expected to be monitored through PDI are the percentage of households living in kucha houses, the percentage of eligible persons covered under the social security pension scheme, the under-five mortality rate (per 1000 live birth), percentage of birth attended by skilled health personnel or institutional delivery (period one year), percentage of children (0-3 years) with disabilities receiving Early Childhood Intervention, dropout rate (primary).**
- In addition, the percentage of functional household water tap connections with a per capita availability of 55 liters, the percentage availability of child-friendly toilets in Anganwadi and the percentage of households covered by a health scheme, the number of unemployed persons in the age group 15-24 who are neither in employment/ training/ education and percentage of a pregnant and lactating mother who are anemic.**

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- (n) PDI will act as a baseline for Panchayat for setting local targets & local action points with measurable indicators in preparation of thematic Gram Panchayat Development Plan.
- (o) PDI also helps to reflect the status of the Panchayats to take concerted actions to achieve development goals through building institutional mechanisms.
- (p) The pilot project was carried out in four districts of Maharashtra, namely Pune, Sangli, Satara, and Solapur.
- (q) **The Ministry of Panchayati Raj had constituted a committee for preparation of the Panchayat Development Index which included members from different ministries and departments of Union and state governments.**
- (r) **The ministry has also approved the revamped Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan for implementation from 2022-23 to 2025-26 with the focus on capacity building and training of elected representatives and functionaries to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions.**

15. National Multidimensional Poverty Index- A Progress Review 2023

- **About the index:**
 - (a) **Based on the latest National Family Health Survey [NFHS-5 (2019-21)], this second edition of the National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) represents India's progress in reducing multidimensional poverty between the two surveys, NFHS-4 (2015-16) and NFHS-5 (2019-21).**
 - (b) It builds on the Baseline Report of India's **National MPI launched in November 2021.**
 - (c) **The National MPI is India's equivalent of the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index developed by the NITI Aayog.** It uses the robust procedures followed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and the UNDP to determine the multidimensionality of poverty among the Indian masses.
 - (d) **The National MPI measures simultaneous deprivations across the three equally weighted dimensions of health, education, and standard of living that are represented by 12 SDG-aligned indicators.**
 - (e) **These include nutrition, child and adolescent mortality, maternal health, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, assets, and bank accounts.**
- **Key highlights of the report:**
 - (a) According to the Report, **India has registered a significant decline of 9.89 percentage points in number of India's multidimensionally poor from 24.85 percent in 2015-16 to 14.96 percent in 2019-2021.**
 - a. **Around 13.5 crore people moved out of multidimensional poverty during this period.**
 - (b) The **rural areas** witnessed the fastest decline in poverty from **32.59 percent to 19.28 percent.**
 - (c) During the same period, the **urban areas** saw a reduction in poverty from **8.65 percent to 5.27 percent.**
 - (d) **Uttar Pradesh registered the largest decline in the number of poor with 3.43 crore people escaping multidimensional poverty.**
 - (e) Providing multidimensional poverty estimates for the 36 States and Union Territories and 707 Administrative Districts, the Report states that the fastest reduction in the proportion of multidimensional poor was observed in the States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Rajasthan.

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- (f) **Between 2015-16 and 2019-21, the MPI value has nearly halved from 0.117 to 0.066 and the intensity of poverty has reduced from 47 percent to 44 percent**, thereby setting India on the path of achieving the SDG Target 1.2 (of reducing multidimensional poverty by at least half) much ahead of the stipulated timeline of 2030.
- (g) It demonstrates the Government's strategic focus on ensuring sustainable and equitable development and eradicating poverty by 2030, thereby adhering to its commitment towards the SDGs.
- (h) **The Government's dedicated focus on improving access to sanitation, nutrition, cooking fuel, financial inclusion, drinking water, and electricity has led to significant advancements in these areas.**
- (i) **All 12 parameters of the MPI have shown marked improvements.**
- (j) **Bihar saw the fastest reduction in MPI value in absolute terms with the proportion of multidimensional poor reducing from 51.89 percent to 33.76 percent in 2019-21** followed by Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.
- (k) **Flagship programmes like the Poshan Abhiyan and Anaemia Mukta Bharat have contributed to reduced deprivations in health.**
- (l) Initiatives such as **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)** and **Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)** have improved sanitation across the country. The impact of these efforts is evident in the swift 21.8 percentage points improvement in sanitation deprivations.
- (m) The provision of subsidized cooking fuel through the **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)** has positively transformed lives, with a 14.6 percentage points improvement in cooking fuel deprivations. Initiatives like **Saubhagya, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), and Samagra Shiksha** have also played a major role in significantly reducing multidimensional poverty in the country.
- (n) The remarkable progress achieved through extremely low deprivation rates especially for electricity, access to bank accounts and drinking water, reflects the Government's unwavering commitment to improving citizens' lives and creating a brighter future for all.
- (o) Consistent implementation across a diverse set of programmes and initiatives that have strong interlinkages has led to significant reduction in deprivations across multiple indicators.