

## UAE trumps G7

(GS Paper 2, International Organisation)

### Why in news?

- India Prime Minister is attending two summits; he is a 'special invitee' at the **48th G7 Summit** at Schloss Elmau in Germany.
- After that, he has a **bilateral summit in Abu Dhabi with the UAE President**.



### Why UAE is more important to India?

- If the U.S. is exempted, **no G7 country comes close to the UAE as India's trading partner**, exports market, Indian diaspora base and their inward remittances.
- **The UAE invested more in India in 2021 than Germany and France combined.**
- Unlike the UAE, none of the G7 countries has yet signed a bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with India.

### India-UAE synergy:

- The current India-UAE synergy is largely due to Prime Minister Modi's effort. This would be his **fourth visit to Abu Dhabi and sixth summit** with Sheikh Mohammed over the past seven years.
- These have re-energised this historic, but long-dormant, relationship. The visits have plenty to show from **Emirati investments in Jammu and Kashmir to a CEPA.**

### Relevance of current Abu Dhabi summit:

- As Sheikh Mohammed has been the **de facto President** since Sheikh Khalifa suffered a stroke in 2014, the change at the helms means little in the practical term.
- However, this being the only second transition at the top since the formation of the UAE in 1971, it is significant.
- It symbolises political stability and continuity in a turbulence-prone region.
- Indian PM would probably be the **first non-Arab leader to be received in Abu Dhabi after the 40-day State mourning ended on June 22.**
- Thus, the Abu Dhabi summit would be a useful opportunity to recalibrate the bilateral ties and open new vistas following the operationalisation of the bilateral CEPA from May 1.

### Changes since the pandemic:

- Significant changes in the bilateral, regional and global context have taken place since the two leaders last met in August 2019.
- Their **bilateral trade grew by 68% in 2021-22 to \$72.9 billion**, a new record. While both exports and imports grew, the **trade deficit reached \$16.8 billion**, also a new record.
- Due to the CEPA, the robust economic revival, higher oil prices and larger Indian imports, trade is likely to grow even higher in 2022-23.

### Opportunities:

- As the UAE collects petrodollars, India, the world's fastest-growing major economy, could be a lucrative market for investments in areas such as petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, renewables, infrastructure, manufacturing, logistics, start-ups, etc.
- A lot has already been done to streamline the manpower sector, including skilling the young Indian labour force to suit the Emirati requirements, but more can be done.
- The two sides can collaborate for the eventual **reconstruction of the war-ravaged regional countries** such as Yemen, Syria, Somalia, Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan.
- In the bilateral political domain, the two sides have cooperated efficiently on security and anti-terrorism, but they need to do more to fight **money laundering and the flow of illicit narcotics**.

### Changing UAE:

#### Israel:

- The South West Asian region is a complex and evolving area. The UAE has disrupted the longstanding Arab Israeli stalemate by **normalising relations with Israel in 2020**. The two sides have recently signed a bilateral CEPA.

### Regional hotspots:

- After pursuing a muscular regional foreign policy against political Islam and in regional hotspots such as Syria, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, and Somalia, Abu Dhabi seems to have decided to stage a **phased withdrawal and improve ties with Syria, Qatar and Turkey**.
- The ties with Saudi Arabia remain somewhat edgy, due to policy divergences and economic competition.

### Russia & China:

- Similarly, Abu Dhabi has developed some ruction with the Biden presidency in the U.S. and is diversifying its strategic options with Russia and China.
- It has conspicuously ignored the plea by the U.S. and other Western countries to raise its oil production.

### Way Forward:

- India, the UAE's second-largest trading partner, and largest source of tourists and manpower, can be a useful ally.
- Against this ongoing regional and global flux, the India-UAE summit is both topical and opportune and can have an impact beyond the bilateral context.

## **NITI Aayog Report on India's Gig and Platform Economy**

**(GS Paper 3, Economy)**

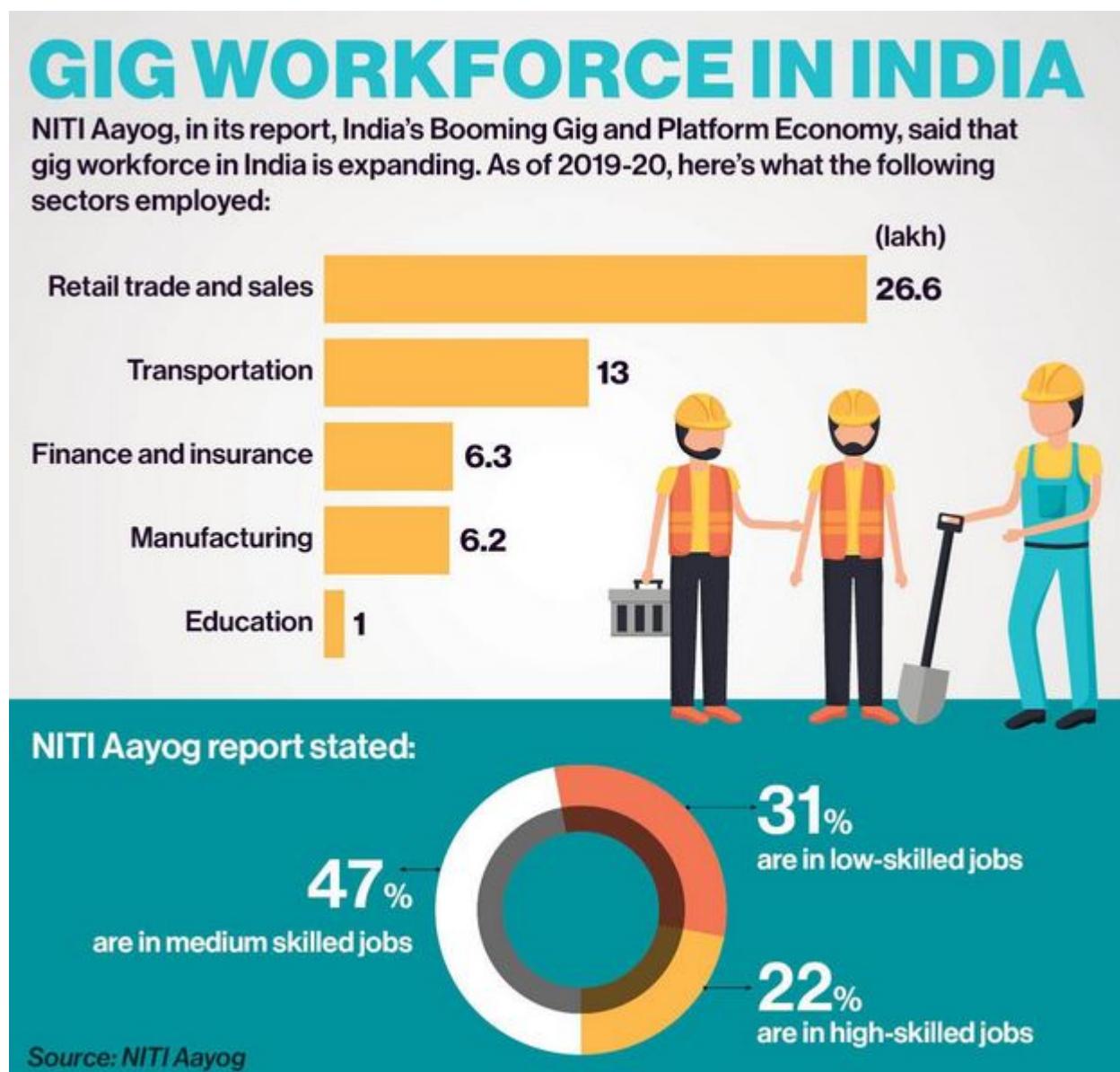
### Why in news?

- Recently, NITI Aayog launched a report titled '**India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy**'.

### Significance:

- The report provides a **scientific methodological approach to estimate the current size and job-generation potential of the sector**.

- It highlights the **opportunities and challenges of this emerging sector** and presents global best practices on initiatives for social security and delineates strategies for skill development and job creation for different categories of workers in the sector.



### Gig workers in India:

- The report estimates that in 2020–21, 77 lakh (7.7 million) workers were engaged in the gig economy. They constituted **2.6% of the non-agricultural workforce** or **1.5% of the total workforce in India**.
- The gig workforce is expected to expand to 2.35 crore (23.5 million) workers by 2029–30.
- Gig workers are expected to form 6.7% of the non-agricultural workforce or 4.1% of the total livelihood in India by 2029–30.
- At present, about 47% of the gig work is in medium skilled jobs, about 22% in high skilled, and about 31% in low skilled jobs.
- Trend shows the concentration of workers in medium skills is gradually declining and that of the low skilled and high skilled is increasing.

### Classification of gig workers:

- The report broadly classifies gig workers, those engaged in livelihoods outside the traditional employer-employee arrangement into **platform and non-platform-based workers**.

- While platform workers are those whose work is **based on online software apps or digital platforms**, non-platform gig workers are generally casual wage workers and own-account workers in the conventional sectors, working part-time or full time.

#### **Recommendations:**

- It has also recommended introducing a **‘Platform India initiative’, on the lines of the ‘Startup India initiative’**, built on the pillars of accelerating platformisation by simplification and handholding, funding support and incentives, skill development, and social financial inclusion.
- It has suggested that self-employed individuals engaged in the business of selling regional and rural cuisine, street food, etc., may also be linked to platforms so that they can sell their produce to wider markets in towns and cities.
- The report puts forth suggestions for **platform-led transformational and outcome-based skilling**, enhancing social inclusion through gender sensitization and accessibility awareness programmes for workers and their families and extending social security measures in partnership mode as envisaged in the Code on Social Security 2020.
- Other recommendations include **undertaking a separate enumeration exercise to estimate the size** of the gig and platform workforce and collecting information during official enumerations ( Periodic Labour Force Survey) to identify gig workers.

#### **Way Forward:**

- This report will become a valuable knowledge resource in understanding the potential of the sector and drive further research and analysis on gig and platform work.”

## **Performance Grading Index for Districts (PGI-D) for the year 2018-19 and 2019-20**

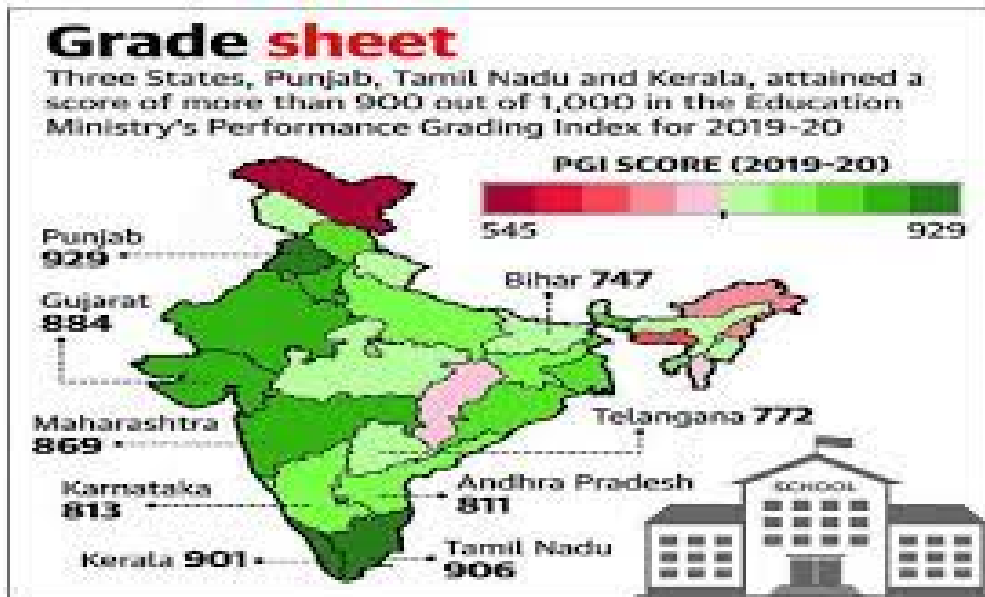
**(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)**

#### **Why in news?**

- Recently, the **Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSE&L)**, Ministry of Education released the Performance Grading Index for Districts (PGI-D) for 2018-19 and 2019-20.
- It assesses the performance of school education system at the District level by creating an index for comprehensive analysis.

#### **Significance:**

- Based on the success of State PGI, **83-indicator based PGI for District (PGI-D) has been designed** to grade the performance of all districts in school education.
- The data is filled by districts through online portal. The PGI-D is expected to help the state education departments to identify gaps at the district level and improve their performance in a decentralized manner.
- The indicator-wise PGI score shows the areas where a district needs to improve.



### Structure of Performance Grading Index for Districts (PGI-D):

- The PGI-D structure comprises of **total weight age of 600 points across 83 indicators**, which are **grouped under 6 categories** viz., Outcomes, Effective Classroom Transaction, Infrastructure Facilities & Student's Entitlements, School Safety & Child Protection, Digital Learning and Governance Process.
- These categories are **further divided into 12 domains**, viz., Learning Outcomes and Quality (LO), Access Outcomes (AO), Teacher Availability and Professional Development Outcomes (TAPDO), Learning Management (LM), Learning Enrichment Activities (LEA), Infrastructure, Facilities, Student Entitlements (IF&SE), School Safety and Child Protection (SS&CP), Digital Learning (DL), Funds convergence and utilization (FCV), Enhancing CRCs Performance (CRCP), Attendance Monitoring Systems (AMS) and School Leadership Development (SLD).
- **PGI-D grades the districts into ten grades** viz., Highest achievable Grade is Daksh, which is for Districts scoring more than 90% of the total points in that category or overall.
- The **lowest grade in PGI-D is called Akanshi-3** which is for scores upto 10% of the total points.

### Way Forward:

- The Indian Education System is one of the largest in the world with about 15 lakh schools, 97 lakh teachers, and nearly 26 crore students from varied socio-economic backgrounds.
- Ultimate objective of PGI-D is to help the districts to priorities areas for intervention in school education and thus improve to reach the highest grade.

## From higher to hire education (GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

### Context:

- Higher education policy planners and regulators are busy giving shape to the digital university, which was announced in the 2022-23 Union Budget.
- Though still on the drawing board, the digital university is expected to offer any number, kind, and type of course without limits on intake, in a hybrid or 'physical plus digital' mode.
- It proclaims to provide equitable access to quality higher education and employability-enhancing skill development programmes to all.

### Private open universities:

- In the interim, the **University Grants Commission has relaxed the norms and standards for setting up open universities**.
- In particular, land requirement has been reduced from 40 acres to just five acres. This is likely to open the floodgates for private open universities.

- Simultaneously, more universities are being enabled to offer courses in the distance, open and online mode, mostly in collaboration with EdTech startups and unicorns.
- In the process, **higher education is now getting delivered by for-profit entities**, in contravention of the long-held belief that education at all levels must be provided on a not-for-profit basis.

#### Remote learning with technological advancement:

- Information Communication and Entertainment technologies, augmented and virtual realities, artificial intelligence and machine learning are being touted as technologies with immense possibilities for transforming the delivery of education.
- The higher education horizon appears densely dotted with EdTech startups and tech companies as higher education aggregators.
- Technology-enabled and mediated digital learning is projected as the future of higher education. Such learning is supposed to **end face-to-face formal education**.
- Two years of COVID-19-compelled online education seems to have convinced them that in future, education, particularly higher education, will transform into a virtual space.

#### Digital divide:

- Evidence of massive learning losses due to the digital divide, but primarily due to the inherent limitations of technology, are being regarded as mere teething troubles.
- Sold to the idea, policy planners and regulators are aggressively pushing the distance, open, virtual, and online modes of education.
- Going by the evidence, **employers across the world** are generally negatively disposed towards this. Most recruiters **prefer to hire those who have graduated in face-to-face mode**.



#### Regulations for online & virtual education:

- Even the strongest proponents of online and virtual education feel that such programmes be **subjected to stricter oversight, tighter regulations, and rigorous processes** to ensure high standards and robust quality control.

- Given the fact that the **quality of higher education is inversely proportional to the intensity of regulation**, designing and developing an efficient and effective regulatory mechanism often proves more challenging than imagined.
- The open and distance mode of learning, including the latest model based on digital and virtual delivery, often finds favour with the government due to cost considerations. It is, however, wrong to assume that these are economical and cost-effective.
- To be effective, they not only require massive capital investment in infrastructure, but also demand a significantly **higher recurring expenses on content development** and their continuous updating and upgradation.

**No substitute for teachers:**

- Digital delivery and technology integration in education may undoubtedly serve a useful purpose. Higher education must indeed embrace and keep pace with the advancements in technology. Technology can be effectively leveraged as a quality-enhancement tool.
- It would, however, be a **blunder to regard technology-mediated teaching-learning as an alternative to face-to-face education**. Technology can supplement and not substitute teachers.

**Way Forward:**

- No world-class universities, including those with a high degree of technology integration in their teaching and learning processes, are planning to cut down their faculty cost or their number any time soon. On the contrary, they envision hiring more of them to attain greater excellence.
- India cannot be an exception to this. Higher education is a lot more than borrowing content and delivering them online or outsourcing content. This would render India a consumer of knowledge.