

## Current Affairs of the Day

### Survey details 'catastrophic' impact of school closure

The prolonged closure of primary and upper primary schools since the onset of the pandemic has led to "catastrophic consequences" for school students, particularly in rural India, says an emergency report.

#### Catastrophic learning loss

1. Based on the School Children's Online and Offline Learning (SCHOOL) survey conducted by researchers, who worked in coordination with eminent economist Jean Dreze, the 'Emergency Report on School Education' says that only 8% of school students in rural India have been able to access online education, while at least 37% have stopped studying altogether.
2. The SCHOOL survey makes it clear that the reach of online education is very limited: the proportion of schoolchildren who were studying online "regularly" was just 24% and 8% in urban and rural areas respectively. One reason for this is that many sample households (about half in rural areas) have no smartphones.
3. The survey also found that the Dalit and Adivasi children were at a greater disadvantage as a mere 5% of the children from these groups had access to online classes.

### Survey details 'catastrophic' impact of school closure

'37% of rural children have stopped studying altogether'

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NEW DELHI

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The report covered 1,362 sample households spread across 15 States, including Assam, Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

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**Baby steps:** After being closed for 17 months, schools in many States have opened for classes again. - P. SANKARANARAYANAN

According to the findings, access to online education among students in those houses with smartphones is also handicapped by the fact that the smartphones are mainly used by the working adults who are not always able to share the gadgets with the children at home.

#### No access to teachers

Another casualty of the prolonged closure of schools has been the relation between the teachers and students in both urban and rural sectors, with 51% of the respondents in the urban areas and 58% in rural India saying that they had not met teachers during the month preceding the survey. Researchers also found that there have been many teachers who went out of their comfort zones to help students during the 17-month-long closure of schools.

In addition to education, the closure affected the level of nutrition among the children in rural schools where the midday meals have been stopped.

"Midday meals have been discontinued in all the sam-

ple States with the closure of schools. Among parents with a child enrolled in a government school, about 50% reported receiving some food (mainly rice or wheat) during the preceding 3 months as a substitute for their child's midday meals," stated the report.

Most parents surveyed have supported reopening of the schools at the earliest. Ten percent of the parents in urban areas had some hesitation in sending their children to school but, overall, 97% of parents supported reopening of schools.

The report said the prolonged school lockdown, one of the longest in the world, has led to a "colossal disaster".

"It will take years of patient work to repair this damage. Reopening schools is just the first step, still being debated. In fact, even preparations for that first step (such as repairing school buildings, issuing safety guidelines, training teachers, enrolment drives) are virtually invisible in many States," said the researchers.



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## PM urges the private sector to help improve quality in govt. schools

1. The private sector must come forward and contribute to increasing the quality of education in government schools, Prime Minister said while launching a portal to coordinate private contributions for school development.
2. He rolled out five initiatives as part of the implementation of the National Education Policy, including a 10,000-word dictionary for Indian Sign Language and a talking books project for visually challenged students.
3. A teacher training programme for early childhood education, a standards-setting authority for the Central Board of Secondary Education and the Vidyanjali 2.0 portal to facilitate private donors, corporate social responsibility contributions and volunteering activities are part of the initiatives.
4. The Prime Minister emphasised that the transformation of the education sector is “not just policy-based but also participation-based”, and noted that the NEP had involved consultations with academics, teachers and other stakeholders at every level.

## ‘Govt. mulls allowing local sales by SEZ units sans import tag’

1. The government is considering a proposal to allow producers in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to sell their output to the domestic market without treating them as imports. It is also reviewing the exclusion of export-oriented units (EOUs) and SEZs from the recently notified tax refund scheme for exports.





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- Freight rates and input costs had risen, but SEZ and EOU units had not been given benefits under the Remission of Taxes and Duties on Export Products (RoDTEP) scheme.
- SEZs are governed by an Act of Parliament, not a scheme, and most benefits that were offered to units in these zones had expired, including the erstwhile export incentive schemes for merchandise and services (MEIS and SEIS), the experts has urged the Centre to bring them under the RoDTEP.

## Mapping distress

Labour Force Survey data underlines continuing strain in the labour market, lack of job creation in non-Agri sectors. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (2019-20) points towards the steady build-up of distress in the labour market in India. As the survey pertains to July 2019 to June 2020 period, it captures both the economic slowdown prior to Covid, and the period after the national lockdown was imposed to restrict the spread of the pandemic.



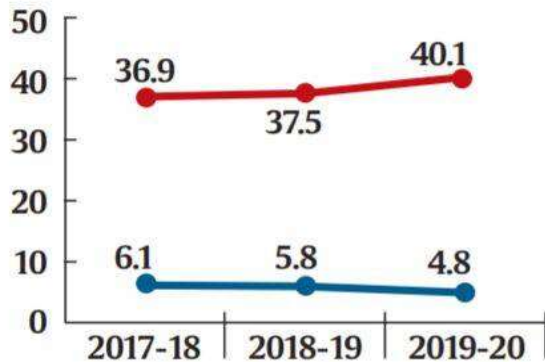
### Employer of last resort:

- The survey data shows an increase in the labour force participation in agriculture during this period. This, as some have argued, implies that during this period of stress, agriculture emerged as an “employer of last resort”.
- Equally significant is that much of the increase in the women’s labour force participation recorded by the survey during this period was in the category of unpaid family workers, and not in more productive forms of employment. These are worrying developments.
- The PLFS data shows that the share of the labour force engaged in agriculture rose to 45.6 per cent in 2019-20, up from 42.5 per cent in 2018-19 — an abrupt reversal of the decades-long decline in the labour force participation in agriculture.
- This suggests that the movement of labour out of agriculture, which had gathered pace post-2004-05, seems to have been stymied by the economic slowdown.



## CHART-1

### RISING LFPR, FALLING UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



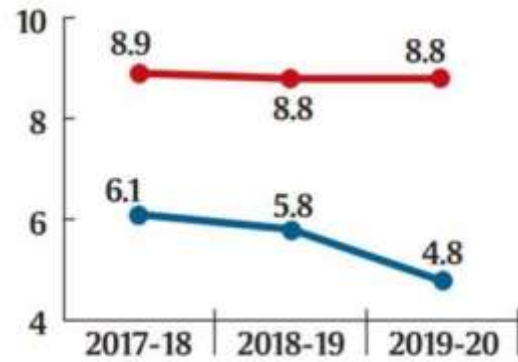
■ LFPR\* (%)

■ Unemployment rate\*\* (%)

\*Labour Force Participation Rate \*\*Usual Status

## CHART-2

### UNEMPLOYMENT RATE DIFFERS DRAMATICALLY BETWEEN METHODS



■ Unemployment rate (CWS)\* (%)

■ Unemployment rate (US)\*\* (%)

\* Current Weekly Status

\*\*Usual Status

The LFPR is the proportion of Indians who seek to participate in the economy. In the recent past, India's LFPR has been less than 40% — far below the global norm (around 60%) or even the norm in most Asian counterparts such as China (76%) and Indonesia (69%). In other words, of every 100, only 40 come forward to seek work in India, while the comparable number elsewhere is around 60.

The UER is the percentage of people in the labour force who do not get employment. Again, in the last few years, India's UER has hovered around 6% (or higher) — far more than the global or regional norm. In other words, of those 40 who chose to participate in the economy, at least 6% did not get any job.

### Two types of unemployment data

**The Usual Status (US):** In this approach, the survey ascertains whether a person had been employed for enough days in the 365 days preceding the survey.

The second approach is called the Current Weekly Status (CWS). In this, the survey tries to figure out whether a person was adequately employed in the 7 days preceding the survey.





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## Unpaid work sign of underemployment:

1. The rise in female labour force participation is also problematic. Under normal circumstances, considering the low rates of female labour force participation in India — for women aged 15 and above it stood at 24.5 per cent in 2018-19 — a rise in participation would be a positive development.
2. However, much of the increase observed in 2019-20 was in the form of unpaid family work. In fact, according to the survey, the employment rate for unpaid workers in household enterprises in rural and urban areas increased to 15.9 per cent in 2019-20, from 13.3 per cent in 2018-19.
3. In the case of female workers, it increased from 30.9 per cent to 35 per cent over the period. This, as some economists have said, is indicative of rising underemployment.

## In COVID situation:

1. In the months thereafter, as Covid infections ebbed and flowed, and as restrictions on economic activities have been tightened and loosened in response, the employment situation changed accordingly.
2. However, data on work demanded by households under MGNREGA indicates that the stress in the labour market remains higher than in pre-Covid times.
3. What these numbers also reflect is the failure of the economy is not being able to create enough non-agricultural jobs (even in pre-Covid times) to absorb both those shifting out of agriculture and the millions entering the labour force each year. Worryingly, even the jobs that are being created tend to be largely informal in nature.

## India establishes the largest network of Ramsar Sites in South Asia

- Designating 46 wetlands spanning 1.08 million hectares, India has created the largest network of Ramsar Sites in South Asia.
- The Ramsar Sites have an international status because of their importance for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life.
- Ramsar Site designation is a stepping stone towards wetland's wise use.

## Four new Sites



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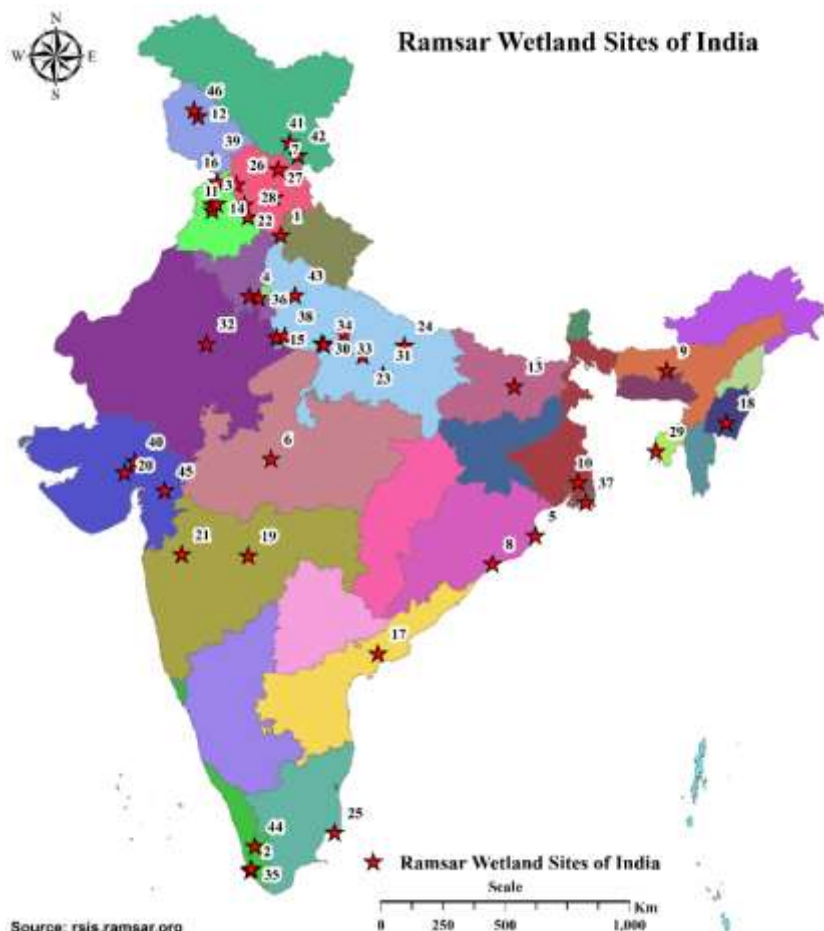


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1. In August 2021, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) designated four wetlands to the list of Ramsar Sites – two each from Haryana and Gujarat. Sultanpur, located 15 km from Gurugram (Haryana) is a shallow depression receiving runoff from agricultural fields and canals. The wetland is famed for the sighting of spectacular flocks of bar-headed and grey-lag goose.
2. Bhindawas, a human-made wetland constructed to store excess water from the Jawaharlal Nehru Canal, is a resting and roosting haunt of over 250 bird species.
3. In Thol, an irrigation reservoir, on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, the presence of over half of the bird species of Gujarat has been recorded. In Wadhvana, an irrigation reservoir created by the former Baroda state in a semi-arid agricultural landscape, up to 50,000 birds have been counted.

### Ramsar Sites

1. The number of Ramsar Sites in India is now an incredible 46. India ratified the Ramsar Convention in 1982 at the behest of the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, who is also credited to have heralded several key environment legislations in the country.
2. Keoladeo National Park and Chilika were the first two sites to be placed on the Ramsar List by the Government of India initially.
3. The network of Indian Ramsar Sites



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*covering over 8% of the known wetlands' extent of the country and is the largest in South Asia.*





S.No	Site Name	Designation Date	Area (Sq. Km)
1	Asan Conservation Reserve	21-07-2020	440.33
2	Ashtamudi Wetland	19-08-2002	374.87
3	Beas Conservation Reserve	26-09-2019	437.34
4	Bhindawas Wildlife Sanctuary	25-05-2021	443.41
5	Bhitarkanika Mangroves	19-08-2002	374.87
6	Bhoj Wetland	19-08-2002	374.87
7	Chandertal Wetland	08-11-2005	386.64
8	Chilika Lake	01-10-1981	298.6
9	Deepor Beel	19-08-2002	374.87
10	East Calcutta Wetlands	19-08-2002	374.87
11	Harike Lake	23-03-1990	329.55
12	Hokera Wetland	08-11-2005	386.64
13	Kabartal Wetland	21-07-2020	440.33
14	Kanjli	22-01-2002	372.78
15	Keoladeo National Park	01-10-1981	298.6
16	Keshopur-Miani Community Reserve	26-09-2019	437.34
17	Kolleru Lake	19-08-2002	374.87
18	Loktak Lake	23-03-1990	329.55
19	Lonar Lake	22-07-2020	440.34
20	Nalsarovar	24-09-2012	411.76
21	Nandur Madhameshwar	21-06-2019	436.37
22	Nangal Wildlife Sanctuary	26-09-2019	437.34
23	Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary	19-09-2019	437.27
24	Parvati Arga Bird Sanctuary	02-12-2019	438.01
25	Point Calimere Wildlife and Bird Sanctuary	19-08-2002	374.87
26	Pong Dam Lake	19-08-2002	374.87
27	Renuka Wetland	08-11-2005	386.64
28	Ropar	22-01-2002	372.78
29	Rudrasagar Lake	08-11-2005	386.64
30	Saman Bird Sanctuary	02-12-2019	438.01





31	Samaspur Bird Sanctuary	03-10-2019	437.41
32	Sambhar Lake	23-03-1990	329.55
33	Sandi Bird Sanctuary	26-09-2019	437.34
34	Sarsai Nawar Jheel	19-09-2019	437.27
35	Sasthamkotta Lake	19-08-2002	374.87
36	Sultanpur National Park	25-05-2021	443.41
37	Sundarban Wetland	30-01-2019	434.95
38	Sur Sarovar	21-08-2020	440.64
39	Surinsar-Mansar Lakes	08-11-2005	386.64
40	Thol Lake Wildlife Sanctuary	05-04-2021	442.91
41	Tso Kar Wetland Complex	17-11-2020	441.52
42	Tsomoriri	19-08-2002	374.87
43	Upper Ganga River	08-11-2005	386.64
44	Vembanad-Kol Wetland	19-08-2002	374.87
45	Wadhvana Wetland	05-04-2021	442.91
46	Wular Lake	23-03-1990	329.55

### Diversity of Ramsar Sites:

The Ramsar sites in India are highly diverse. While the smallest Ramsar Site is just 49 ha in the area (Chandertal), the largest, the Sunderbans spans 0.42 million ha.

Ramsar site types	Examples
Himalayan high-altitude wetlands	Tso-Moriri, Tso kar complex and Chandertal
Lakes and marshes	Wular, Hokera, Renuka, Keoladeo, Kabartal, Nawabganj, Loktak, Deepor, Rudrasagar, Sandi, Saman, Keshopur-Miani, Sultanpur, Nalsarovar, and Sasthamkotta



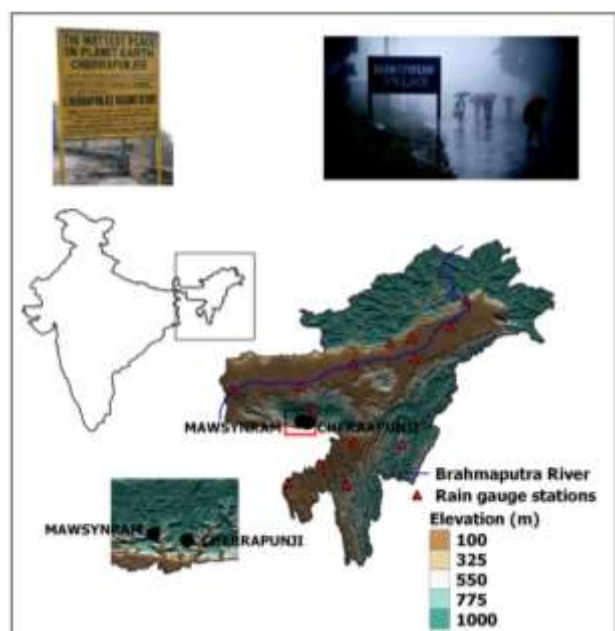
River stretches	Upper Ganga River stretch, Beas Conservation Reserve and Kanjili
Crater lake	Lonar lake
Salinas	Sambhar
Mangrove swamps	Sunderbans, Bhitarkanika, and Point Calimere
Lagoons and estuaries	Chilika, Ashtamudi and Vembanad-Kol
Water storage areas	Pong, Harike, Bhoj, Surinsar-Mansar, Bhindawas, Sur Sarovar, Asan, Wadhvana, and Thol
Assemblages of sewage-fed fish farms	East Kolkata Wetlands

## Climate crisis in North East India

Climate change behind increasing variability and unpredictability of rainfall in the region, say experts.

**The climate of North East India is changing:**

1. Rainfall patterns over the region in the last century have considerably changed, resulting in its overall drying up. The India Meteorological Department September forecast stated that normal to below-normal rainfall was most likely to continue over many areas of northwest and northeast India.







2. An aspect of warming that influences rainfall is the drying of the land, which increases the frequency and intensity of dry periods and droughts. An increase in moisture and the drying up together change the rainfall patterns in unpredictable ways.
3. Other climatic factors such as the increased snowfall in the Eurasian region also impact monsoon rainfall in North East India. Excessive snowfall in Eurasia causes cooling of the atmosphere of the region, which triggers events eventually leading to a weak summer monsoon season there.

### Impact of Changing rainfall patterns

1. This changing rainfall pattern, especially during the monsoon season, affects the flow of rivers, extent of snow cover and health of mountain springs, which in turn have an impact on livelihoods, especially agriculture and fishing, forest flora growth, animal and bird habitat (and behaviour) and other ecosystem aspects.
2. There is some evidence of the changing course of rivers from several districts in Assam such as Lakhimpur and Dhemaji, where the Subansiri, Dibang (tributaries of Brahmaputra) and Brahmaputra rivers are changing courses in unexpected ways.

#### Practice MCQs

Which of the following rivers is/are tributaries of Brahmaputra?

1. Subansiri
2. Manas
3. Lohit

Which among the following statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

#### Mains Practice

Account for changing rainfall patterns in northeast India. Suggest Way forward to address the climate crisis in northeast India.



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## How India is positioned to achieve the UN's sustainable consumption and production goal

The population of China and India together constitutes 36% of the global population but generates only 27 per cent of the global municipal waste.

### The United Nations-mandated Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12



1. It deals with resource usage. India, the fourth-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, is committed to reducing its emissions by a fourth and has prepared numerous sustainable consumption and production plans that are put in the mainstream priority. India's progress in regard to the SDG is fair enough but not satisfactory.
2. The average lifestyle material footprint of India according to 2015 statistics is around 8,400 kilograms per capita per year, which when compared to the sustainable material footprint of 8,000 kg per capita per year is quite acceptable.
3. The SDG 12.3 focuses on reducing per capita global food waste by 2030. About 50 kg of food is wasted per person per year in India, UNEP highlighted in its 2021 report. It seems rather impossible to achieve the goal to halve food waste, with only nine years left, without significantly increasing investment.
4. Food wastage reduction can have a significant effect on greenhouse gas emissions, hunger, pollution and money-saving during recessions. India, among South Asian countries, has a lower level of food wastage compared to its neighbouring countries.
5. Curbing food loss and wastage can serve to fulfil multiple SDGs at once as well as help bridge the food gap by 2050.

### Comparison:

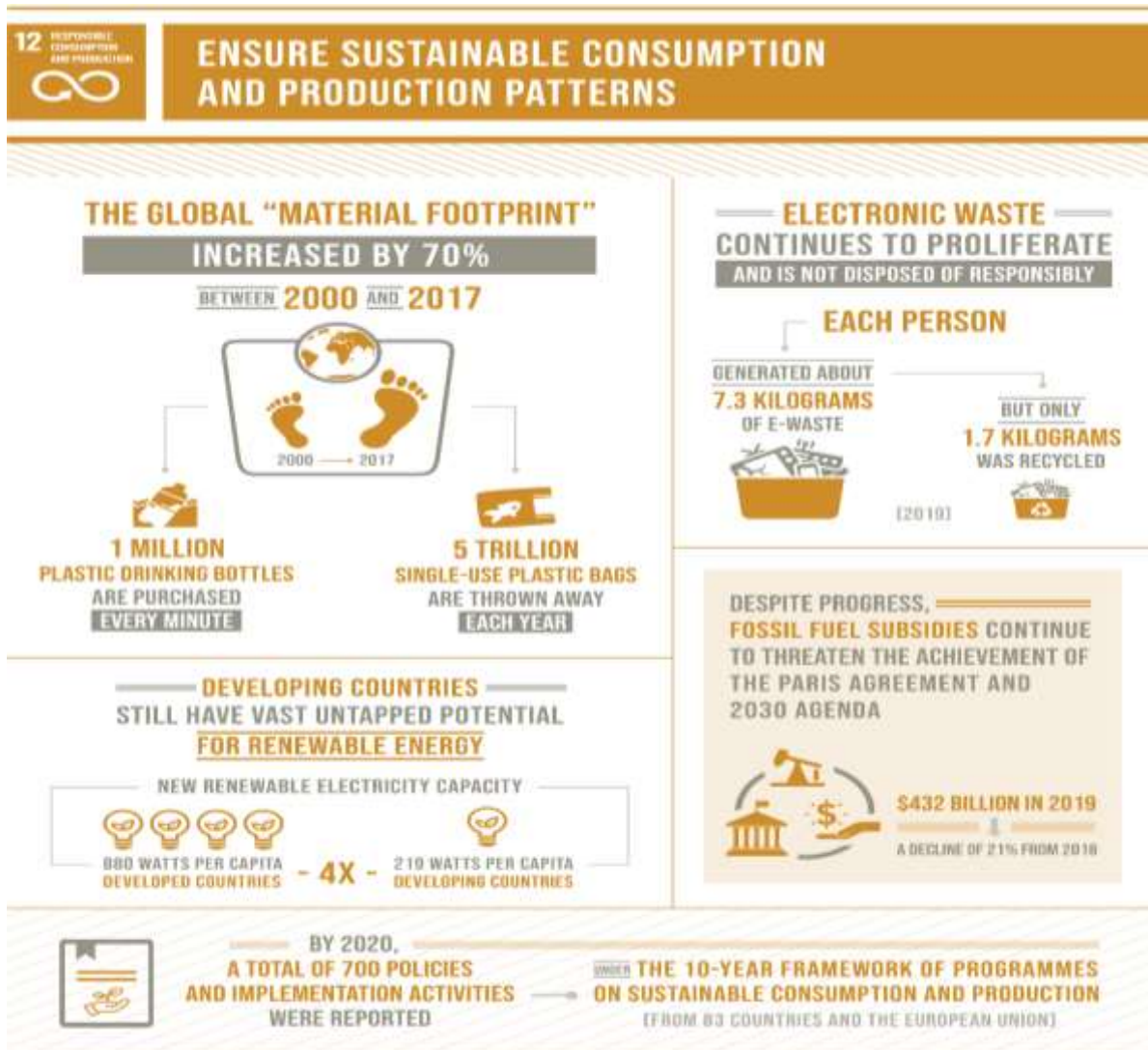
1. The population of China and India together constitutes 36 per cent of the global population but generates only 27 per cent of the global municipal waste. Whereas, the United States constitutes only four per cent of the global population that produces 12 per cent of the waste. The





- The US falls short compared to other developed countries in the process of recycling wastes, despite its high income and consumption.
- China, India and Pakistan use the method of 'phytoremediation', a concept that stems from bioremediation through the usage of plants. This involves tree plantation to restore the environment as well as degraded soil restoration.

## Infographic showing unsustainable consumption and production



THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS REPORT 2021: UNSTATS.UN.ORG/SDGS/REPORT/2021/



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## Important SDG 12 Targets

	<p>Implement the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns</p>
	<p>By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.</p>
	<p>By 2030, halve per capita global food waste</p>
	<p>PROMOTE UNIVERSAL UNDERSTANDING OF SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES</p>
	<p>By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.</p>