1. Youth can be a Clear Advantage for India

Context:

- India's five decade-long demographic opportunity can be leveraged only with suitable policies and programmes.

Brief Background:

- India's population is among the youngest in an ageing world. By 2022, the median age in **India will be 28 years;** in comparison, it will be 37 in China and the United States, 45 in Western Europe, and 49 in Japan.

- India's working-age population has numerically outstripped its non-working age population. A demographic dividend, said to have commenced around 2004-05, is available for close to five decades.

What is Demographic Dividend?

- Demographic dividend, as defined by the United Nations Population Fund is, **"the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population is larger than the non-working-age share of the population".**

India's Demographic Advantage:

- India's population heterogeneity ensures that this window of demographic dividend becomes available at different times in different States.

- While Kerala's population is already ageing, in Bihar the working age cohort is predicted to continue increasing till 2051.

- By 2031, the overall size of our vast working age population would have declined in 11 of the 22 major States.

- Harnessing the demographic dividend will depend upon the employability of the working age population, their health, education, vocational training and skills, besides appropriate land and labour policies, as well as good governance.

- India will gain from its demographic opportunity only if policies and programmes are aligned to this demographic shift.

Need for Skills:

- Demographic dividend powered the Asian economies of Japan, China, and South Korea to spectacular growth.

- More significantly, in each case, the underlying pattern was fairly similar i.e. countries will benefit from the economic potential of their youth bulge when and where they succeed in providing good health, quality education, and decent employment to their entire population.

- The projected demographic dividend would turn into a demographic disaster if an unskilled, under-utilised, and frustrated young population undermines social harmony and economic growth.

- The Economic Survey 2019 calls for additional jobs to keep pace with the projected annual increases in working age population. We need a workforce that is well educated, and appropriately skilled.

- High quality education achieves gender parity and propels people forward into more productive lives.

- A coordinated incentive structure prompting States to adopt a broadly uniform public school system focusing on equity and quality will yield a knowledge society faster than privatising school education can accomplish.

Steps Needed to Taken:

- Modernise school curricula; systematically invest in teacher training so that they grow in their jobs to assume leadership roles, while moving beyond the tyranny of the syllabus.

- Most districts now have excellent broadband connectivity. Deploy **new technology** to accelerate the pace of building human capital by putting in place virtual classrooms together with **massive open online courses (MOOCS) to help prepare this huge work force for next-generation Jobs.**

- **Investing in open digital universities** would further help yield a higher educated workforce. Growing female literacy is not translating into relevant and marketable skills. A comprehensive approach is needed to improve their prospects against gainful employment. Flexible entry and exit policies for women into virtual classrooms, and into modules for open digital training, and vocational education would help them access contemporary vocations.

- Equal pay for women will make it worth their while to stay longer in the workforce

Conclusion:

- The elderly population in India is projected to double from 8.6% in 2011, to 16% in 2040.

- The policies that we adopt and their effective implementation will ensure that the demographic dividend, a time-limited opportunity, becomes a boon for India.