Fulfilling COP26 pledge

(Mains GS 2 & 3 : Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests & Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.)

Context:

World leaders converged in **Glasgow for the COP26** but Presidents of China and Russia, the world's second and fourth largest carbon emitters failed to make their presence. This leads all eyes on India, the world's third largest carbon emitter.

The announcements:

- There was cautious optimism when India finally announced its net zero target, even though India's pledged deadline is 2070 – two decades after than the desired deadline of the year 2050.
- After the net zero target, the United States and Europe led the next biggest climate goal, the Global Methane Pledge, to bring down global methane levels significantly by 2030; this was signed by as many as 104 countries.
- Despite being the third-largest methane emitter, India was not signatory. India also was not part of the pledge to deforestation despite hosting the world's largest contiguous mangrove forest: the Sundarbans.

Pursuing green energy:

- India has been a promoter of green energy to reduce carbon emission.
- Although the country is yet to significantly transit to renewable energy, accounting for only 22.5% of nationwide electricity production, India has been leading the global movement towards solar power.

- The country co-founded the International Solar Alliance (ISA) along with France – an alliance with more than 120 countries to promote solar energy.
- To strengthen India's stand for renewable energy like solar energy, India has signed to the Glasgow Breakthrough Agenda in this year's COP26 along with over 35 other nations to promote clean energy and make it more affordable.

Key struggles:

- Compared to China's 28.4%, the U.S. 19.8% and some North European country's 100% transition to renewable energy for power, there is much room for improvement in India.
- However, there are two key struggles that India has to deal with when transitioning to green energy: the consumption of the world's second largest population base and the lack of adequate available renewable energy options.

Affordable and attractive business:

- Countries such as Iceland and Norway have the privilege to depend almost entirely on hydroelectricity adequate enough for a small population such as theirs.
- Countries with a similar population scale to India such as China and the U.S. have been relying significantly on nuclear power to cut down on carbon emissions which India cannot facilitate due to not being a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
- India did commit to transiting to green energy for meeting at least half of nation-wide power consumptions.
- However, the country requires significant measures to do so, which includes bringing down the cost of renewable energy to make it more affordable and attractive to the general public and private businesses.

Promoting green energy:

- The Indian government has been promoting green energy to abide by its COP21 climate commitments.
- The Government plans to make wide use of hydrogen fuel as a better substitute of fossil fuels and is promoting renewable energy such as solar powered energy production by reducing tariffs and even providing for subsidising which are falling.
- The Indian renewable energy industry is up against an immense financial challenge with a recent report estimating the requirement of ₹2.61 trillion to install a balanced capacity to achieve its target of 175 gigawatts of renewable power by the year 2022.

Economic adversities:

- The country is still reeling from the impact of demonetisation in 2016 that left GDP growth rate falling ever since. Foreign investment in India has also been declining since 2018.

- The **COVID-19 pandemic** that hit in early 2020 further pushed down GDP growth, severely impacting several industries.
- The Government is desperately trying to aid its economy by subsidising various industries during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as vaccinating its population to prevent another wave as worse as the COVID-19 Delta variant wave that had hit India earlier.
- Thus, the country is going through a resource constraint, having to choose between priorities.

Financial commitment:

- Meeting climate goals with a population of 1.3 billion while combating the novel coronavirus pandemic has been a challenge for the world's largest democracy.
- India does not have privilege like its peers from the developed world to financially support all of its economy, people and the climate.
- It is no surprise that Mr. Modi had to ask the international community for a new financial commitment to achieve the climate goals.
- More so, since the annual $100 billion pledge by developed countries to the developing countries and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) back in COP16 is yet to be disbursed.

Taking a common responsibility:

- If powerful developing economies such as India are to play a constructive role in tackling **climate change** and achieving net zero target, the developed North needs to shore up its support.
- Developed countries should take common responsibility to help developing countries and LDCs to pursue climate goals as they already face the daunting tasks of fighting poverty, providing basic health-care services, and ensuring access to education.

Conclusion:

- The developed countries must develop the mechanism for climate finance which is trustworthy and provide mitigation and adaptation strategies beneficially for developing or least developed countries.
- It is now time that developed countries rose to the occasion and ensured climate justice by leading climate action responsibly.

People without food when they are hungry, medicine and doctors when they are ill, and schools for their children cannot be expected to either relate or appreciate the adversities of climate change being debated in a place and country which most of them have not even heard of and leaders they hardly know.