

MONTHLY

RS/70

# EPIC!

*Supplementary reading material for MGP and Current Affairs classes  
of ForumIAS Academy*

AN EXCLUSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS MAGAZINE FOR

PRELIMS + MAINS

PREPARATION

NOVEMBER 2020

## **The seventh edition**

Dear Forumites,

The seventh edition of EPIC! Magazine, comes at cusp of the Civil Services Mains Examination of 2020. For the Mains examination EPIC! Magazine provides issue-based analysis of mains related topics.

Aggregating the various view points from our 9PM and 7PM initiatives, this edition contains interesting analysis of issues like urbanisation and pandemics, analysis of Mid Day Meal Scheme, the culmination of RCEP, the rise of radicalisation and many more.

EPIC! series of current affairs magazine provides a segregated yet complete monthly coverage of current affairs for civil services preparations.

You can contribute to the topics you would like us to cover or provide your feedback by writing to us at [feedback@forumias.academy](mailto:feedback@forumias.academy).

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**SHOWCASE ARTICLE****Labour Law Reforms: Future of Work**

**Syllabus:** GS III: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

**In News:** Parliament has passed the three Labour Code bills – the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020; the Industrial Relations Code, 2020; and the Code on Social Security, 2020.

**labour laws:** Labour laws are a body of laws, administrative rulings, and precedents which address the legal rights of, and restrictions on, working personnel and organizations.

**The significance of labour laws is fourfold:**

- Labour laws define legal rights and obligations of employee and employers.
- It regulates industrial relations and mitigates industrial disputes. Conducive industrial relations are important for economic growth and progress.
- Progressive labour laws are important for ease of doing business and attracting foreign investment.
- Labour laws regulate working conditions, payment of wages and social security of workers.

**Labor rights in Indian Constitution:**

- **Article 19(1) (c)** that gives the right to form unions or associations.
- **Article 23** prohibits forced labour.
- **Article 24** prohibits child labour in hazardous occupations.
- **Article 38(1)** promotes the welfare of people and **Article 38(2)** seeks to minimize income inequality.
- **Article 43(A)** secures participation of workers in the management of industries.

**Seventh Schedule:** Labour is mentioned as a subject in the concurrent list of the Seventh Schedule of the

**CHALLENGES: LABOUR MARKET IN INDIA**

The labour market in India is marred with a number of challenges. Some of them are outlined below:

- **Structure of Indian Labour Market**
  - Agriculture employs nearly 49 per cent of the total workforce while it contributes only 15 per cent of the Gross Value Added [GVA]. In contrast, China's 29% of the workforce is employed in agriculture.
  - Industry and services accounted for 13.7 and 37.5 per cent of employment while making up for 23 per cent and 62 per cent of GVA, respectively.
  - This calls for a shift of labour force from low productivity employment to high productivity sectors.
- **Casualization of Workforce**
  - According to the Fifth Employment-Unemployment Survey, 83% of the workers were in the informal sector (self-employed/casual/contract workers).

- In the organized sector, entrepreneurs have chosen to stay away from investing in labour-intensive industries due to rigid labour laws.
- **Low Productivity across sectors**
  - A large share of India's workforce is employed in low productivity activities with low levels of remuneration. It is due to lack of adequate training.
  - For example, over 90% of Indian labour forces are employed in unorganised sector. But the wages in the informal sector are one-twentieth of the wages in the formal sector.
- **Declining Female Labour Force Participation Rate**
  - The Indian economy is exhibiting a low and declining female labour force participation rate.
  - As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey(PLFS), the female labour force participation rate in India was 18.6 per cent in 2018-19 compared to 61 per cent in China and 56 per cent in the United States.
- **High cost of compliance with labour laws**
  - The multiplicity and complexity of laws makes compliance and enforcement difficult. For example, in 2016, there were 44 central labour laws and more than 100 state laws.
  - High cost of compliance is keeping investors away.
- **Lack of Social Security**
  - A large number of workers in the unorganized sector are not covered by any social security protection.
  - A large number regulations make compliance costly. This disincentivizes employers from formalizing the labour.
- **Unskilled labour**
  - According to the India Skills Report 2018, only 47 per cent of those coming out of higher educational institutions are employable.
  - This has created a mismatch between the needs of the industry and labour market.
  - It is also acting as a challenge to reap the demographic dividend.
- **Lack of credible labour market data**
  - India currently lacks timely and periodic estimates of the workforce.
  - The lack of data prevents us from rigorously monitoring the labour market and assessing the impact of various interventions to create jobs.



### Need of Labour law reforms

- **Inflexibility in Labour Laws:** In India, the labour laws are archaic and rigid which create several issues such as, firms (those employing more than 100 workers) dither from hiring new workers because firing them requires government approvals
- **Increased contractual employment-** As per Indian Council For Research On International Economic Relations, the share of contract workers in total employment increased sharply from 15.5 per cent in 2000-01 to 27.9 per cent in 2015-16
- **Constrains the growth of firms-** Inflexibility in labour laws has led to increase in dwarf firms-small firms (employing less than 100) that have been in existence for over 10 years
- **Decreases efficiency and stifles competition-** Rigid labour laws hinders ease of doing business and reduces competitiveness of industries. According to the World Economic Forum, India ranks 103 out of 141 countries on the competitiveness of its labour market in 2019.
- **Hinders formalization of economy:** Nearly 90% of the country's workforce is in the informal sector with no minimum wages or any kind of social security. A major factor for lack of formalization is inflexibility in labour laws for hiring and firing of workers and compliance hurdles which deter firms to provide formal contracts.
- **Multiplicity of Labour Laws:** As labour is in the concurrent list, both states and centre can enact labour laws. Multiplicity of labour laws has resulted in distinct compliances, increasing the compliance burden on firms. On the other hand, the labour enforcement machinery has been ineffective because of poor enforcement, inadequate penalties and rent-seeking behaviour of inspectors.
- **Competitive federalism:** The Economic Survey 2015-16 observed that several states, such as Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat have amended their labour laws with the goal of attracting large employers and high growth industries to their state. There is a rising concern that competitive federalism will ultimately induce a "race to the bottom" with states tweaking labour laws.
- **Substitution of capital for labour –** The high cost associated with the labour laws and their maintenance has made firms move towards capital-based production.
- **Demographic Dividend:** Since 2018, India's working-age population (people between 15 and 64 years of age) has grown larger than the dependant population (children aged 14 or below and people above 65 years of age). This demographic dividend will last till 2055. India's archaic labour laws are detrimental in reaping the benefits from this demographic dividend mainly

### REFORMING LABOUR LAWS

The 2nd National Commission of Labour had recommended to rationalise the 44 Central labour laws into four labour codes. Accordingly, the government has taken steps to merge the central labour laws into four labour codes:

1. Code on Wages
2. Code on Industrial Relations
3. Code on Social Security & Welfare and
4. Code on Occupation Safety, Health and Working Conditions.



**LABOUR CODE ON WAGES BILL, 2019**

- The Parliament has passed The Code on Wages Bill, 2019. The Code replaces the following four laws:
  - Payment of Wages Act, 1936,
  - Minimum Wages Act, 1948,
  - Payment of Bonus Act, 1965, and
  - Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.

**Salient Provisions:**

- **Definition of 'a worker':** The Act defines 'a Worker' as a person who is employed in any industry and does any kind of work (including manual, unskilled, skilled, or technical work).
- **Definition of 'an employee':** The Act defines 'an Employee' as a person who is employed on wages and does work including skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled, technical, managerial and administrative work.
- **Coverage:** The Code will apply to all employees (formal, informal, contractual workers, domestic help etc.)
- **Floor wage:** The Code mandates the central government to fix a floor wage based on the living standards of workers. The central government may set different floor wages for different geographical areas.
  - The minimum wages decided by the central or state governments must be higher than the floor wage. However, the central or state governments cannot reduce the minimum wages even if they are higher than the floor wage.
- **Fixing the minimum wage:** The Code prohibits employers from paying wages less than the minimum wages.
  - Minimum wages will be notified by the central or state governments based on the skills of the employee and place of employment. The minimum wages will be revised within every five years by the central or state governments.
- **Overtime:** The Code mandates the central or state government to fix the number of hours that for a normal working day. The employer is also entitled to pay overtime wages. It must be at least two times the wages of a normal working day.
- **Deductions:** The Code provides grounds on which an employee's wages may be deducted. It includes: absence from duty, accommodation given by the employee etc. However, it has that the deduction should not be more than 50% of the employee's total wage.
- **Bonus:** All employees whose wages do not exceed a specific monthly amount (as notified by the central or state government) will get an annual bonus. However, it has to be less than 20% of his annual wages.
- **Prohibits Gender discrimination:** The Code prohibits discrimination of employees on the basis of gender with respect to wages and recruitment for the same work/work of similar nature (work which has similar skill, effort, responsibility, experience).

- **Advisory boards:** The code mandates central and state governments to constitute advisory boards. The Boards will advise the governments on issues such as fixation of minimum wages, increasing employment opportunities for women etc.
- **Offences:** The Code specifies penalties for offences committed by an employer. It includes offences such as paying less than the due wages, contravening any provision of the Code etc. The extent of penalties will vary depending on the nature of offence.

#### Issues:

- **Unaddressed fundamental problems:** The critics have pointed out that the new bill merely brings together the existing multiple wage related laws into a single code. However, it does not address the fundamental problems like lack of jobs, inequality etc.
- **Exacerbate inequalities:** The Code prescribes that the minimum wages will be notified by the central or state governments based on the skills of the employee and place of employment. Critics have said that it would further create inequalities based on the level of skills.
- **Minimum wage:** The law mandates a universal minimum wage of ₹178 a day. However, it is less than the recommendation of a high-powered labour ministry panel, which prescribed ₹375 a day.
- **Difficulty in ensuring compliance:** The small and unorganized enterprises employ more than 90% of the workforce. Ensuring compliance of these small enterprises would be a challenging task. It may also lead to their harassment from labour officials.
- **Floor wages:** The Code says that the Centre 'may' take the advice of the states while fixing the floor wages. Thus, it places the discretion upon the Central government and reduces the role of states. It may lead to conflicts between the centre and states.

#### CODE ON INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, 2020

- It replaces the following laws:
  - Trade Unions Act 1926,
  - Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946,
  - Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.
- **Definition of worker:** It defines a 'worker' as any person who work for hire or reward.
  - It excludes persons employed in a managerial or administrative capacity, or in a supervisory capacity with wages exceeding Rs 18,000.
- **Standing Orders:** All industrial establishment with 300 workers or more must prepare standing orders on the matters relating to:
  - classification of workers,
  - manner of informing workers about work hours, holidays, paydays, and wage rates
  - termination of employment, and
  - grievance redressal mechanisms for workers.
- **Prior permission:** It is required for an establishment having at least 300 workers to seek prior permission of the government before closure, lay-off, or retrenchment. Only the central government can increase the threshold through notification.

- **Sole Negotiating Union:** If there are more than one registered trade union of workers functioning in an establishment, the trade union having more than 51% of the workers as members would be recognized as the sole negotiating union.
- **Negotiation Council:** In case no trade union is eligible as sole negotiating union, then a negotiating council will be formed consisting of representatives of unions that have at least 20% of the workers as members.
- **Fixed term employment:** Fixed term employment refers to workers employed for a fixed duration based on a contract signed between the worker and the employer.
- **Re-skilling fund:** A fund established to re skill those workers who are fired from their jobs.

#### Issues with Industrial Relations Code, 2020

- **Curtail right to form unions:** The Industrial Relations Code of 2019 has curtailed the right to form unions and accord them powers of representation.
- **Tremendous flexibility:** It will give tremendous amounts of flexibility to the employers in terms of hiring and firing, dismissal for alleged misconduct and retrenchment for economic reasons will be completely possible for all the industrial establishments employing less than 300 workers.
- **Violation of the principle of separation of executive and judiciary:** The code gives extensive power to government to modify or reject tribunal awards through executive action and raises a question of conflict of interest.
- **Provisions on fixed term employment:** Power to renew such contracts lies with the employer. This may result in job insecurity for the employee and may deter him from raising issues about unfair work practices, such as extended work hours, or denial of wages or leaves.

#### CODE ON SOCIAL SECURITY AND WELFARE, 2020

##### Key Features

- **Consolidation of multiple laws:** It will replace nine social security laws, including Maternity Benefit Act, Employees' Provident Fund Act, Employees' Pension Scheme, Employees' Compensation Act, among others.
- **Universalizes social security:** Social security has been extended to those working in the unorganised sector, such as migrant workers, gig workers, and platform workers.
- **Covers Agricultural workers:** For the first time, provisions of social security will also be extended to agricultural workers also.
- **National Social Security Board:** It proposes a National Social Security Board which shall recommend to the central government for formulating suitable schemes for different sections of unorganised workers, gig workers, and platform workers.
- **Social security organisations:** The Bill provides for the establishment of several bodies to administer the schemes. These include a Central Board to administer the provident fund schemes and national and state-level Social Security Boards to administer schemes for unorganised workers.
- **Social security fund:** The Bill proposes setting up a social security fund using a corpus available under corporate social responsibility.

- **Reducing employee PF contribution:** The bill provides for an option for reducing provident fund contribution (currently at 12% of basic salary) to increase workers' disposable income.
- **Gig Workers:** The bill states that the central or state government may notify specific schemes for gig workers, platform workers, and unorganised workers to provide various benefits, such as life and disability cover.
- **Exemption:** Under the bill, the central government is empowered to exempt selected establishments from all or any of the provisions of the code and makes Aadhaar mandatory for availing benefits under various social security schemes.

## ISSUES

- **No uniform definition:** It does not provide for a uniform definition of "social security".
- **No dedicated central fund:** There is no dedicated central fund. The proposed corpus will be split into numerous small funds creating a multiplicity of authorities and confusion
- **No Universal social security:** Benefits, such as pension and medical insurance, continue to be mandatory only for establishments with a minimum number of employees
- **Lack of clarity:** There is no clarity on how the proposed dismantling of the existing and functional structures, such as the Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO) with its corpus of ₹10 lakh crore will be handed over to a government.
- **Gig workers:** Though gig workers are covered under social security schemes none of these benefits are secure, which means, the Central government, from time to time, can formulate welfare schemes that cover these aspects of personal and work security, but they are not guaranteed. All these benefits will be dependent upon the will of the state government.
- For Example, in some states like Karnataka, where a platform-focused social security scheme was in the making last year will possibly offer some financial assistance by the Centre. these aspects of personal and work security, but they are not guaranteed. All these benefits will be dependent upon the will of the state government.
- **Role of stakeholders:** The Social Security Code states the provision of basic welfare measures is a joint responsibility of the Central government, platform aggregators, and workers. But doesn't mention which measures will be provided by which stakeholder.
- **Mandatory linking with Aadhaar may violate Supreme Court judgement:** The code mandates an employee or a worker (including an unorganised worker) to provide his Aadhaar number to receive social security benefits or to even avail services from a career centre. This may violate the Supreme Court's Puttuswamy judgement.

## CODE ON OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY, HEALTH AND WORKING CONDITIONS

- **Consolidation of laws:** It will amalgamate 13 labour laws including the Factories Act, 1948; the Mines Act, 1952; the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 etc.
- **Factory:** It defines a factory as any premises where manufacturing process is carried out and it employs more than: (i) 20 workers, if the process is carried out using power, or (ii) 40 workers, if it is carried out without using power.
- **Work hours and employment conditions:**
  - **Daily work hour limit:** fixes the maximum limit at eight hours per day.



- **Employment of women:** women will be entitled to be employed in all establishments for all types of work. In case they are required to work in hazardous or dangerous operations, the government may require the employer to provide adequate safeguards prior to their employment.
- **Exemption:** The code empowers the state government to exempt any new factory from the provisions of the Code in order to create more economic activity and employment.
- **Establishments engaged in hazardous activity:** It includes all establishments where any hazardous activity is carried out regardless of the number of workers.
- **Mandatory registration:** All establishments covered by the Code must be registered with registering officers.
- **Inter-state migrant workers**
  - Definition of inter-state migrant worker: any person who moves on his own to another state and obtains employment there and is earning a maximum of Rs 18,000 per month, or such higher amount which the central government may notify.
  - Benefits for inter-state migrant workers: option to avail the benefits of the public distribution system either in the native state or the state of employment, and insurance and provident fund benefits available to other workers in the same establishment.

### Issues

#### Unclear rationale:

- It contains general provisions which apply to all establishments. These include provisions on registration, filing of returns, and duties of employers. However, it also includes additional provisions that apply to specific type of workers such as those in factories and mines, or as audio-visual workers, journalists, sales promotion employees, contract labour and construction workers.
- While special provisions for hazard-prone establishments such as factories and mines and categories of vulnerable workers such as contract labour seems justified, the rationale for mandating special provisions for other workers is not clear.

#### Civil Court barred from hearing matters under the Code

- Under the existing 13 health and safety laws, claims which affect the rights of workers such as wages, work hours, and leave, are heard by labour courts and industrial tribunals.
- However, the code bars the jurisdiction of civil courts. The only recourse available would be to directly file a writ petition before the relevant High Court. It can be argued that the bar on civil courts may deny aggrieved persons an opportunity to challenge certain issues before a lower court.

### WAY FORWARD

- Stringent labor laws surely need to be amended. But during COVID distress, labour reform will work if labour is seen as key stakeholder.
- Legitimate attempts to reform labour laws need to be encouraged by the centre. However, any haste to promote economic benefit which has the potential to jeopardize

welfare of workers need to be stalled as holistic reforms are the only way forward for all the stakeholders.

## GENERAL STUDIES 1

### Urbanisation of Pandemics

**Syllabus:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors

**In News:** The COVID-19 pandemic has been urban-centric affecting the megacities and large cities.

#### State of Urbanization of Pandemics

- **Global level:** Globally, highly urbanized countries such as Spain, Italy, France, UK (United Kingdom), Germany, Iran, and US have suffered the highest number of COVID-19 cases, according to Worldometer. Worldometer is a reference website that provides counters and real-time statistics for diverse topics.
- **National level:** Nationally, the more urbanized states are among the top ten states impacted by corona.
  - These include Maharashtra (45% urbanization), Gujarat (43%), Delhi (98%), Tamil Nadu (48%) etc.
  - The ten cities of India had over half the coronavirus cases comprised of Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Indore, Pune, Jaipur, Hyderabad, Chennai, Surat, and Agra.
- **Spread of pandemic:** The top 10 cities affected worldwide accounted for 15% of the total cases, and data for populous Indian cities later showed large spikes that radiated into smaller towns.
- **Reason for the spread:** Rapid transmission in Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Pune and Chennai was the unavoidable outcome of densification and an inability to practice distancing norms.

#### Reasons for Urbanization of pandemics

- **Emergence of diseases:** Urban centres are networks of interfaces across which pathogens can be transmitted.
  - Current levels of human-ecosystem interaction, driven by increased environmental encroachment and land-use change (exploitation of natural resources and agricultural practices), and environmental effects such as climate change result in habitat alteration and changes in species assemblage and contact rates that promote the emergence of zoonotic disease.
- **Animal-human interface:** The key drivers that could promote interaction between humans and animals are:
  - Livestock-keeping practices, production systems and movements of livestock and animal products in urban areas.

- Direct effects of urbanization on the physical environment and ecosystems where urban centres are developed.
- **Population density:** There has been a large shift of population to urban areas coinciding with a sizable percentage of economies shifting towards urban centres. In India, the more urbanised states are among the top ten states impacted by corona. These are Maharashtra (45 percent urbanisation), Gujarat (43 percent), Delhi (98 percent), Rajasthan (25 percent), Madhya Pradesh (28 percent), Tamil Nadu (48 percent), Uttar Pradesh (22 percent), Andhra Pradesh (29 percent), Telengana (39 percent) and West Bengal (32 percent).
  - There are larger human densities within cities.
  - Urban activities of agglomeration require people to come together. This goes against the mandate of social distancing.
- **Slums and informal settlements:**
  - Since these settlements are overcrowded, poorly ventilated, and lack the infrastructure for adequate water and sanitation, they can put inhabitants at higher risk of infectious diseases.
  - In the case of COVID-19, the scarcity of clean water and personal living space made it impossible for many people to adhere to the preventative measures of frequent handwashing and physical distancing, as recommended by WHO (World Health Organization).
- **Scale of cities:** The size of cities poses challenges to effective infectious disease response.
  - The number of megacities in the world cities with populations of over ten million people is increasing. This number of people living in close quarters can create ideal conditions for the spread of infectious diseases.
  - Megacities such as Delhi, New York City and São Paulo have been heavily affected by COVID-19 with each city reporting most of the confirmed cases in their respective countries.
- **Dismal State of Public Health Infrastructure:** According to the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended doctor–patient ratio of 1: 1,000, India currently exhibits a ratio of 1: 10,189, thereby indicating a shortfall of about 6 lakh doctors.
- **Cultural heterogeneity:** Diverse cultures have different norms which may act as hindrance to controlling pandemics. Such as Western habit of handshake may have proved to be a contributing factor to COVID-19.
- **High connectivity**
  - There is a high connectivity between rural to urban and one country to another due to trade, travel etc. which resulted in increase in contacts.
  - Population movement: both on account of migration and travel across countries makes it faster and easier for viruses to spread around the cities of the world.
- **Centers of commerce**
  - The urban centres act as centres of commerce where products reach from one part of country or region to another which resulted in increase in interactions.



- **Urban health issues:** Diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, obesity and respiratory illnesses are considered diseases of the urban rich and middle class. These urban diseases make city populations more vulnerable, as one has seen being played out in cities. Fatalities have been much higher among the virus patients who exhibited symptoms of comorbidity.
- **The “Domino” effect:** In megacities even a minor and local failure is compounded into a catastrophe. The domino effect of Corona has led to shutdown of many small Industries and rise in NPAs etc. Indian industry is witnessing export opportunities in sectors like steel, textiles and agri products, but also faces the double whammy of supply chain disruption and weakening market sentiment.
- **Community spread:** Cities are also marked by large congregations for events in hotels and halls, movie shows in theatres, stadia for sports and celebrations and religious observances where the spread of the virus could happen.

### Challenges in managing the urbanization of pandemics

**Management:** The managing problems include:

- large population to manage, problems related to Demarcation and regulation of contamination zones.
- Ease of spread between humans in congested areas,
- Contact tracing problem due to high density of population,
- Large disparities resulting in poor housing environments which hinder outbreak prevention and control effects.

**Misinformation:**

- Fake news is travelling much faster than the coronavirus in India.
- During lockdown in India, a wave of misinformation was flooded with a lot of old videos and photographs of people falling ill, China killing people to contain the virus, how Dettol and weed can help kill the virus, or how certain races or religions are not getting affected.
- For example, Tablighi incident, a substantial portion of fake news was directed to target a particular minority group depicting them as the vector of the virus, thereby complicating the collective fight against a rapidly spreading global pandemic.
- Iran reported more than 700 deaths after being poisoned by bootleg alcohol.

**Problems in local governance:**

- Clashing interests within a finite local budget
- Scarce authority to prepare response measures quickly
- Scarce epidemic preparedness capacities
- Problems in accessing national capacities.

**Due to animal-human interface:**

- There are areas of poor sanitation with rodents and other animal vectors
- Live domestic and wild animal markets
- Industrial agricultural facilities near humans.

**Connectivity issues:**

- Due to greater connectivity there is substantial risk of rapid export of disease to other parts of the country or to other countries
- This anticipation might lead to restrictions on travel and trade.

Time period	Public health crisis	Urban reforms
14th century	The bubonic plague	It inspired radical improvements of the Renaissance in which cities expanded their borders, opened larger open spaces over suffocated public spaces and hired specialized professionals like architects and surveyors.
1720	The Great Plague of Marseilles	This is an example of medieval and industrial cities implementing urban planning practices to aid disease control and how management of water waste helped remake cities post pandemic.
1860s	Cholera and malaria outbreaks in New York city	They led to the establishment of the Metropolitan Board of Health. It comprises of building and zoning codes to control overcrowding, mandated better sanitary conditions and propelled infrastructure investments that have influenced city services
18 <sup>th</sup> and 19 <sup>th</sup> century	Yellow fever and cholera outbreaks	These outbreaks globally identified the need for modern sewerage and sanitation systems like citywide sewer systems
20th Century	Tuberculosis, typhoid, Spanish flu and polio	Originated urban planning reforms like waste management, slum clearance, single-use zoning etc.

**Steps to be taken**

- **Appropriate Schemes:** An opportunity to make schemes such as the centre's Affordable Rental Housing Complexes deliver at large scale and focus on new good houses built by the state.
- **Demand and supply:** The Ministry of Housing could work by digitally combining and transparently publishing data on demand and supply for each city.
- **Learning from the past:** Past menaces such as cholera, the plague, and the global flu pandemic led to change such as sewerage, waste handling, social housing and health care that reduced disease. Something on the same lines should be done about the pandemic.
- **The geography of urbanization-compact cities vs. sprawl:** Real expansion of the cities, both in population and geographical area, of rapidly growing cities is the root cause of urban problems.
  - Investing in planned compact cities that are more energy efficient as people from different economic strata mingle with each other, provide greater access to social services and employment.
- **Urbanizing rural areas:** To check the migration towards cities, there is a need for providing employment opportunities and proper amenities in rural areas.

- In this context, **Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission** is a step in the right direction. It is aimed at developing rural clusters by provisioning of economic, social, and physical infrastructure facilities.
- **Financial autonomy:** Urban centres should be made financial autonomous, so that they can take care of maintenance of basic civic amenities and cleanliness.
  - In this pursuit, the idea of municipal bonds should be realized in major urban centers.

#### Way Forward:

- Focus on epidemic preparedness in their designs and implementation.
- Transport networks can be used to rapidly move supplies to outbreak epicentres and harnessing advancement in technologies for more effective contact tracing.
- Amend Epidemic diseases act, 1897 to fully equip it to respond to the challenges posed by pandemic.
- The Community leaders can be mobilized for targeted approaches to preparedness and response and innovative solutions can be shared and adapted across cultures.
- The reliable information channels and social media can be used for risk communication. for example, The Safe Cities project In USA is enhancing community-based services for rehabilitation, health, and legal support for survivors. for example, Naaree portal In India and Twitter help centre.
- Businesses and corporations can be engaged in business continuity plans that also prevent further spread, as part of a whole of society approach.

## GENERAL STUDIES 2

### Judiciary's Constitution by the year

**Syllabus:** Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

**In News:** Tracing the evolution of constitution by Indian Judiciary.

#### The four phases of constitutional interpretation

##### The first phase of interpretation-Focus on text

- **A textualist approach:** In its early years, the Supreme Court adopted a textualist approach,
  - **K. Gopalan v. State of Madras (1950):** The Court was called upon to interpret the fundamental rights under Part III. In this case, the leader of the Communist Party of India claimed that preventive detention legislation under which he was detained was inconsistent with Articles 19 (the right to freedom), 21 (the right to life) and 22 (the protection against arbitrary arrest and detention).
  - **Fundamental rights are independent of each other:** The Supreme Court decided in A. K. Gopalan case that each of those **articles covered entirely different subject matter**, and were to be read as separate codes rather than being read together.

- **Unlimited Amendment Power of Parliament:** In its early years, the Court read the Constitution literally and concluded that there were no limitations on the Parliament's power to amend the Constitution.

#### The second phase of interpretation- 'basic structure' of constitution

- **Structure and coherence:** In this phase, Supreme Court began exploring other methods of interpretation and appeals to **the text** of the Constitution were gradually overtaken by appeals to the Constitution's **structure and coherence**.
  - **Limited Amendment Power-** In the landmark case of **Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)**, the Court concluded that Parliament's power to amend the Constitution **did not extend to altering its "basic structure"**.
  - When Parliament attempted to overturn this decision by amending the Constitution, the Court, relying on **structuralist justifications**, rejected that attempt.
  - **Fundamental rights as bill of rights:** In this phase, the Court also categorically rejected the Gopalan approach in favour of a structuralist one.
  - **Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978):** In this case, the Court conceived of the fundamental rights as a cohesive bill of rights rather than a miscellaneous grouping of constitutional guarantees.
  - **Interpretation of Right to Life:** The right to life interpreted to include a wide range of rights such as clean air, speedy trial, and free legal aid.
  - **Increase court's role in governance:** The incremental interpretation of Article 21 paved the way for the Supreme Court to play an unprecedented role in the governance of the nation.

#### What was common in the first two phases?

- Significant decisions involving the interpretation of the Constitution were entrusted to Constitution Benches (comprising five or more judges of court) and were carefully reasoned.
- There was **limited scope for precedential confusion**, since matters which had been decided by Constitution Benches and which demanded reconsideration were referred to larger Constitution Benches.

#### Third Phase -Eclecticism

- **Same issue, different opinions:** In the third phase the Supreme Court started to give different opinions on the same issues-i.e. eclecticism.
  - **Reduced reasoning:** The Court often surrendered its responsibility of engaging in a thorough rights reasoning.
  - **Two factors** led to this institutional failure.
    - **Change in the structure of the SC:** The changing structure of the Court, which at its inception began with eight judges, grew to a sanctioned strength of 31; it is currently 34. It began to sit in panels of two or three judges and effectively transformed into a "**polyvocal**" group of about a dozen sub-Supreme Courts.

- **Expansion of own role by the SC**-The Court began deciding cases based on a certain conception of its own role -whether as a sentinel of democracy or protector of the market economy.
- **The focus of the judgement rather than reason:** giving preference to arriving at outcomes that match the Court's perception.
- **Consequences of the eclecticism**
  - **Rise of doctrinal incoherence and inconsistency:** It contributed not only to methodological incoherence but also to serious doctrinal incoherence and inconsistency across the law.
  - **Conflicting interpretations:** This approach can be best described as Panchayati eclecticism, with different Benches adopting inconsistent interpretive approaches based on their conception of the Court's role, and arriving at conclusions that were often in different with one another.
  - **less importance to precedents and established methods:** taking decisions based on notions of fairness that are detached from precedent, doctrine and established interpretive methods.
- **Fourth phase- Purpose oriented**
  - **Purpose of enactment of the Constitution:** The Court has acknowledged as critical to its interpretive exercise the purpose for which the Constitution has been enacted.
  - **Realisation of revolutionary and transformative potential:** The Court is now beginning to interpret the Constitution in accordance with its revolutionary and transformative potential.
  - **Renaissance:** For example, Court's decisions **striking down Section 377** and the criminal offence of adultery and including the office of the **Chief Justice of India within the scope of the Right to Information Act.**

#### **Evolution of basic structure doctrine in India:**

- **Unlimited power:** The Supreme Court's initial position on constitutional amendments was that any part of the Constitution was amendable and that the Parliament might, by passing a Constitution Amendment Act in compliance with the requirements of article 368, amend any provision of the Constitution, including the Fundamental Rights and article 368.
- **Shankari Prasad case:** In the Shankari Prasad case (1951), the constitutional validity of the First Amendment Act (1951), which curtailed the right to property, was challenged.
  - The Supreme Court ruled that the power of the Parliament to amend the Constitution under Article 368 also includes the power to amend Fundamental Rights.
- **Sajjan Singh v. State of Rajasthan:** The Constitution's "basic features" was first theorized in 1964, by Justice J.R. Mudholkar in the case of *Sajjan Singh v. State of Rajasthan*.
  - He questioned whether the ambit of Article 368 included the power to alter a basic feature or rewrite a part of the Constitution.



- **Golaknath vs. State of Punjab:** In Golaknath vs. State of Punjab, Supreme Court held that Fundamental Rights of the Constitution are given a transcendental position and are beyond the reach of Parliament.
  - It also declared any amendment that takes away or abridges a Fundamental Right conferred by Part III as unconstitutional.
- **Kesavananda Bharati case:** The concept of basic structure was finally introduced by Supreme Court in the Kesavananda Bharati case 1973.
  - In this landmark ruling, the Court adjudicated that while Parliament has wide powers, it did not have the power to destroy or emasculate the basic elements or fundamental features of the constitution.
- **Indira Gandhi case:** In Indira Gandhi vs. Raj Narain, 1975, the Supreme Court reaffirmed its concept of basic structure.
- **Minerva Mills Case:** Under Minerva Mills Case (1980), the Supreme Court ruled that Judicial Review is included in Basic features of the Constitution.
- **Waman Rao Case:** In Waman Rao Case (1981), it was held that the doctrine will be applied to Constitutional Amendments after the Kesavananda Bharati Case Judgement.
- **Kihoto hollohan case:** In Kihoto hollohan vs. Zachillhu, 1992, 'Free and fair elections' was added to the basic features.
- **Indira Sawhney case:** Indira Sawhney vs. Union of India, 1992, 'Rule of law, was added to the basic features.
  - **Bommai case:** In S.R Bommai vs Union of India, 1994, Federal structure, unity and integrity of India, secularism, socialism, social justice and judicial review were reiterated as basic features.

#### Activism phase of Judiciary (Judicial Activism):

##### Evolution of Judicial activism:

- It is a “judicial philosophy which motivates judges to depart from the traditional precedents in favour of progressive and new social policies”.
- Judicial activism enjoins judges to use their powers to correct injustices, especially when the other branches of government do not act to do so.
- Article 142 provides that “the Supreme Court in the exercise of its jurisdiction may pass such decree or make such order as is necessary for doing complete justice in any cause or matter pending before it...”

##### Activism can be either conservative or liberal:

- **Conservative activism** tends to narrow the scope of interpretation to restrict government or individual rights.
- **Liberal activism** tends to broaden the scope of interpretation to expand individual rights in keeping with progressive social norms.
- **Judicial overreach:** When judiciary assumes the roles and functions of the legislature and executive, thus diluting the concept of separation of powers, it becomes judicial overreach. Unrestrained activism on the part of judiciary often leads to its overreach.

- **Kharak Singh Case 1962:** It was the first case of judicial activism on the right to liberty. SC held that 'personal liberty' was not only limited to bodily restraint or confinement to person only but something more than mere animal existence. It extends to all those limits and faculties by which life is enjoyed.
- A series of judgements, most notably **S.P. Gupta vs President of India and others (1981)**, gave rise to a new legal instrument called **public interest litigation**, which diluted the **rule of 'locus standi'**

#### **Judicial Activism to Administrative Judiciary:**

- **Evolution phase:** Judiciary's role got further evolved and it started turning into administrative judiciary while assuming the administrative functions of the executive i.e. 'constitutional court turning into Supreme 'Administrative' Court.
- **Indian Council for Enviro-Legal Action Case 1999:** SC adopted the 'polluter pays principle' for environment conservation by mandating that financial costs of preventing or remedying damage caused by pollution should lie with the undertakings which cause the pollution.
- **BCCI Case and Lodha report:** SC removed office-bearers of BCCI and appointed Committee of Administrators to oversee and implement recommendations given by Lodha panel.
- **Liquor shops on highways:** SC not only asked removal of all liquor shops along highways but went on to demarcate the precise distance in meters within which the law had to be implemented. The verdict and its details lacked evidence and rendered many jobless.
- **National Anthem Case:** SC mandated all cinema halls to play National Anthem before the feature film starts, during which all people should stand and the doors should be closed prior to starting of the anthem.

#### **Administrative Judiciary to Executive Judiciary:**

- When judges or their judgments depict inclination to partisan politics of the executive and they start toeing in the line of executive by compromising their moral and philosophical independence, the institution becomes 'executive judiciary'. The evolution of 'executive judiciary' is reflected in:
- **Meghalaya High Court Case 2018:** Recently Justice S. R. Sen of Meghalaya HC raised doubts about secular basis of Indian polity while stating that "anybody opposing... Indian laws and the Constitution cannot be considered... citizens of the country."
- **Master of Roster Issue:** The Chief Justice of India assigns cases to different benches and judges and has sole discretion in this regard, but his/her decisions have often been charged with bias. Example, 4 senior most judges earlier this year raised concerns that cases of "far reaching consequences for the nation" are "assigned selectively" to "benches of preference."
- Though the judiciary has not completely turned into 'executive judiciary' but the damaging trend ought to be contained in its early phases.

The basic structure doctrine has been used by the Supreme Court in subsequent judgments to preserve the sanctity and basic character of the Constitution. The doctrine has evolved through



SC judgments and is still expanding. It forces constitutional amendments to conform to certain standards or values that maintain the sanctity and spirit of the Constitution.

### Transgender Rights: A Call for Equality

**Syllabus:** *Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.*

**In News:** Recently, three couples filed petitions, two in the Delhi High Court, and one in the Kerala High Court, arguing that the state's refusal to recognise their marriages violates their constitutional rights.

#### More on news:

- Same-sex marriages are neither a part of “our culture” nor a part of the law, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the Delhi High Court, opposing a petition demanding marriage rights for the gay community under the Hindu Marriage Act 1955.
- The decriminalisation of Section 377 of the IPC in 2018 was a landmark judgment (Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India), favouring the Indian LGBTQIA community, but it's been two years since and the law still doesn't permit same-sex couples to marry.

#### The history of same sex marriage in India

Same-sex marriages are not a new phenomenon in India.

- Hindu scriptures define marriage as the union of ‘two souls’ and the same scriptures also define that a soul has no gender. It is only the human bodies that possess a gender.
- These scriptures are a major source of Hindu Law including the Act. The Act merely codifies the Hindu law and doesn't try to erode the values imbibed within the Holy Scriptures.
- The 11th-century Sanskrit text, the Kathasaritsagara, provides the same explanation for cross-class and cross-caste couples who want to marry.
- “Every individual soul is potentially divine”- Swami Vivekananda.

#### Basis of legalization:

- **Supreme Court** in past few decades while recognizing various fundamental rights like **Equality (Art 14)**, **Freedom (Art 19)**, and **Personal Liberty (Art 21)** has always kept individual as main focus. It's a rights and dignity of individual citizen which culminates as collective dignity of the society.
- The recent recommendation of the **Central Government to recruit transgender** in **CAPFs Forces** is a step forward to bridge the gap after passing of the landmark judgment by the Supreme Court on transgender rights in 2014 in **NLSA Vs Union of India**.
- In its 2014 decision Supreme Court also applied the standards of *Yogyakarta Principles* which is also recognized by United Nations and other various international forums. *Yogyakarta Principles* broadly address the standards of international human

rights law to address the abuse of human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and intersex people.

- **International Convention:** Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, Article 7 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 3 of European Convention of Human Rights.

#### Transgender Persons:

- **Umbrella term:** According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 'transgender' is an umbrella term that includes persons whose sense of gender does not match the gender assigned to them at birth.
  - For example, a person born as a man may identify with the opposite gender, as a woman.
- **Data on the 'other' category:** According to the 2011 Census, the number of persons who do not identify as 'male' or 'female' but as 'other' stands at 4,87,803 (0.04% of the total population).
  - This 'other' category applied to persons who did not identify as either male or female, and included transgender persons.
- **In 2014, the Supreme Court in NALSA vs UOI case:** it recognised a transgender person's right to self-identification as male, female or the third gender.
  - Further, the Court directed central and state governments to grant legal recognition to transgender persons, address issues of social stigma and discrimination, and provide social welfare schemes for them.
- **'Transgender' as separate category in job application forms:** Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions had issued a memorandum which directed all ministries to Includee "Third Gender/any Other Category" based on the provision of The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

#### Key features of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019:

- **Definition of a transgender person in the bill:** The bill defines a transgender person as one whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth. It includes trans-men and trans-women, persons with intersex variations, gender-queers, and persons with socio-cultural identities, such as *kinnar* and *hijra*.
  - Intersex variations is defined to mean a person who at birth shows variation in his or her primary sexual characteristics, external genitalia, chromosomes, or hormones from the normative standard of male or female body.
- **Certificate of identity for a transgender person:**
  - A person recognised as transgender person under the Bill shall have a right to self-perceived gender identity.
  - A transgender person has to obtain a Certificate of Identity which will confer rights and be proof of recognition of identity as a transgender person.
  - An application for obtaining such a Certificate should be made to the District Magistrate (DM), in the form and manner, as may be prescribed.

- A revised certificate may be obtained only if the individual undergoes surgery to change their gender either as a male or a female.
  - An individual may apply for a revised certificate from the DM if he undergoes surgery to change their gender either as a male or a female.
- **Prohibition against discrimination:** The Bill prohibits the discrimination against a transgender person, including denial of service or unfair treatment in relation to:
  - Education.
  - Employment.
  - Healthcare.
  - Access to or enjoyment of goods, facilities, opportunities available to the public.
  - Right to movement.
  - Right to reside, rent, or otherwise occupy property.
  - Opportunity to hold public or private office.
  - Access to a government or private establishment in whose care or custody a transgender person is.
- **Right of residence:** Every transgender person shall have a right to reside and be included in his household. If the immediate family is unable to care for the transgender person, the person may be placed in a rehabilitation centre, on the orders of a competent court.
- **Employment:** No government or private entity can discriminate against a transgender person in employment matters, including recruitment, and promotion. Every establishment is required to designate a person to be a complaint officer to deal with complaints in relation to the Act.
- **Education:** Educational institutions funded or recognised by the relevant government shall provide inclusive education, sports and recreational facilities for transgender persons, without discrimination.
- **Health care:** The government must take steps to provide health facilities to transgender persons including separate HIV surveillance centres, and sex reassignment surgeries. The government shall review the medical curriculum to address health issues of transgender persons, and provide comprehensive medical insurance schemes for them.
- **Offences and penalties:** The Bill recognize the following offences against transgender persons:
  - Forced or bonded labour (excluding compulsory government service for public purposes).
  - Denial of use of public places.
  - Removal from household and village.
  - Physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or economic abuse.
  - Penalties for these offences vary between six months and two years, and a fine.
- **National Council for Transgender persons (NCT):** The Council will advise the central government as well as monitor the impact of policies, legislation and projects with respect to transgender persons. It will also redress the grievances of transgender persons. The NCT will consist of:
  - Union Minister for Social Justice (Chairperson).

- Minister of State for Social Justice (Vice- Chairperson).
- Secretary of the Ministry of Social Justice.
- One representative from ministries including Health, Home Affairs, and Human Resources Development.
- Other members include representatives of the NITI Aayog, and the National Human Rights Commission. State governments will also be represented.
- The Council will also consist of five members from the transgender community and five experts from non-governmental organisations.

**Overview of the draft 'Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020':**

- **Establishing committees:** All educational institutions are to have a committee which transgender persons can approach in case of any harassment or discrimination.
- **Action by government:** The “appropriate government” is also required to take suitable steps to “prohibit discrimination in any government or private organisation or establishment.”
- **Timely prosecution:** States will be responsible for “timely prosecution of individuals” charged under Section 18 of the Act which proscribes offences against the transgender community and penalties therein.
- **The punishment:** The offences would be punishable with imprisonment for six months up to two years, with a fine.
- **Protection cell:** State governments will have to set up a Transgender Protection Cell under the District Magistrate and DGP to monitor cases of offences against transgender persons and implement Section 18.

**Concerns related to the bill:**

- **Self-determination of identity vs. verification of eligibility for entitlements:**
  - The Supreme Court has held that the self determination of one's gender is part of the fundamental right to dignity, freedom and personal autonomy guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.
  - Further, the Court upheld the right of transgender persons to determine their self-identified gender as a man, woman or as third gender. This would protect their right to live with dignity and respect.
  - However, the Bill states that a person will be recognised as 'transgender' on the basis of a Certificate of Identity issued by a District Magistrate.
  - Such a Certificate will be proof of identity as 'transgender' and confer rights under the Bill. This is direct violation of the SC judgement in NALSA case.
- **No mechanism for appeal or review for Certificate of Identity:** Despite including identities such as “gender queer” and “persons with intersex variations” in the definition of “transgender”, the Bill has failed to incorporate the rights of such persons.
  - This puts them in danger of being excluded by a system which certifies people based on medical examination.



- It is to be noted that if a transgender person is denied a Certificate of Identity, the Bill does not provide a mechanism for appeal or review of such decision of the District Magistrate.
- **Undefined sexual offences:** While the Bill makes “sexual abuse” punishable, it does not define the acts that constitute sexual offences, making it complicated for transgender persons to report such crimes.
  - It also fails to extend protection to transgender persons who might face sexual abuse as the Indian Penal Code recognises rape in strict terms of men and women as perpetrator and victim, respectively.
- **Access to schemes:** The bill is also silent on whether a trans-person who holds a male or female gender certificate will have access to government welfare schemes and programs meant for transgender people.
- **No action on medical conversion:** The bill fails to address and penalize surgeries on infants born with intersex variations with the intention of “correcting” their bodies to fit the binary gender.
  - Since many parents subject their children to medical “conversion” therapies or “correction” procedures, including shock therapy, to make them “normal”.
- **Threat to safety:** The Bill states, “No child shall be separated from parents or immediate family on the ground of being a transgender, except on an order of a competent court.”
  - This poses a potential threat to the safety and well-being of the child as it could give the family the scope to harass the child and exclude them from their property.
- **No reservations:** The bill is silent on the reservation in education and employment for transgender persons, going against the mandate in NALSA.
- **No mention of fundamental rights:** The Bill does not tackle the question of realisation of civil rights such as marriage, civil partnership, adoption and property rights.
  - Thereby continuing to deprive transgender persons of their fundamental rights and the constitutional guarantee provided by the Supreme Court in NALSA.

#### Difficulties faced by LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] community

1. **Legal recognition-** Same-sex marriages are not legally recognized in India.
  - a. **For example-** Recently, a PIL was filed in the High Court of Delhi seeking declaration to the marriage rights of the gay community under the **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955**.
  - b. The petitioner avers that the Act allows marriages between “two Hindus” without any discrimination between heterosexual and homosexual couples. But still, gay couples can’t get married and register the same under the Act.
2. **Deprived in Rights -** The rights enjoyed by opposite-sex couples are not enjoyed by same-sex couples. They are prohibited from those rights. For example-
  - a. The lack of a legal structure around their relationship became increasingly stark when they tried to bring each other on as nominees in insurance and financial plans, just as a married couples did.

- b. Most male-female married couples take for granted that the day after they marry, they can open a joint account, make health and funeral-related decisions for each other, and inherit each other's property.
  - c. Families violently separated the same sex couples, often driving them to suicide.
3. **Racial Discrimination**- Additionally, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people suffer from social and economic inequalities due to continuous discrimination.

#### Way forward:

- **Renaming the bill:** The bill should be renamed as the Rights of Transgender and Intersex Persons Bill since the mention of intersex persons in the Indian bill is an important inclusion. It must include explicit protections for intersex people in line with India's international human rights obligations.
- **Revision:** The bill should be revised to emphasize training teachers to help them adopt inclusive teaching methods to ensure that children are not harassed or discriminated against by staff or other children.
- **Compilation of existing cases:** The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment should also compile the existing experiences /interventions taken by many States like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Sikkim, and Delhi etc.
- **Reducing the stigma:** The government should implement stigma and discrimination reduction measures through a variety of ways like mass media awareness for the general public to focused training and sensitization for police and health care providers.
- **Reservation:** The government should consider reservation for transgender in education and employment to mainstream one of the most vulnerable groups in the society.

**Some initiatives:** In India, Tamil Nadu was the first state to introduced Transgender welfare policy. According to this policy, Transgender people can access free Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) in all Government Hospital, free housing program, various citizenship documents, admission in government colleges with a full scholarship for higher studies etc. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a major initiative of the 11th Five Year Plan period which brought employment opportunities for transgender people.

#### The Use of Discretion

**Syllabus:** *Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary Ministries and Departments of the Government*

**In News:** Supreme Court expressed unhappiness over the pendency of a plea by A G Perarivalan with the Governor of Tamil Nadu Banwarilal Purohit for over two years.

#### Background

- The discretionary powers of the Governor are once again at the centre of a fresh controversy to decide on the remission of seven convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.

- A Supreme Court Bench led by Justice Ranjan Gogoi, while disposing a writ petition, recorded that the petitioner had filed an application before the TN Governor.
- Following this, the TN Cabinet adopted a resolution recommending that the Governor release the seven convicts under Article 161 of the Constitution.

#### **The Supreme Court's verdict regarding the plea for pardon**

- Multi-Disciplinary Monitoring Agency (MDMA) investigation into the “larger conspiracy” behind Rajiv Gandhi assassination need not deter the Tamil Nadu Governor from deciding the plea for pardon of convicts like A.G. Perarivalan.
- The court made it clear that it was reluctant to exercise its jurisdiction when the Governor was already seized of Perarivalan's plea for pardon under Article 161 of the Constitution.
- **Background-** Perarivalan had applied to the Governor for pardon on December 30, 2015. Almost three years later, on September 2018, the Supreme Court asked the Governor to decide the pardon plea as he “deemed fit”.

#### **Pardoning powers of the Governor**

**Article 161** deals with the Pardoning Power of the Governor.

- The Governor can grant pardons, reprieves, respites and remissions of punishments or suspend, remit and commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the state extends.
- The Governor cannot Pardon a Death Sentence. (The President has the power of Pardon a death Sentence).

#### **The pardoning powers defined in the Constitution are-**

- **Pardon:** means completely absolving the person of the crime and letting him go free. The pardoned criminal will be like a normal citizen.
- **Commutation:** means changing the type of punishment given to the guilty into a less harsh one, for example, a death penalty commuted to a life sentence.
- **Reprieve:** means a delay allowed in the execution of a sentence, usually a death sentence, for a guilty person to allow him some time to apply for Presidential Pardon or some other legal remedy to prove his innocence or successful rehabilitation.
- **Respite:** means reducing the quantum or degree of the punishment to a criminal in view of some special circumstances, like pregnancy, mental condition etc.
- **Remission:** means changing the quantum of the punishment without changing its nature, for example reducing twenty-year rigorous imprisonment to ten years.



**JURISPRUDENCE OF GRANTING PARDON:-**

- **The philosophy underlying the pardon power:** “every civilized country recognizes and has, therefore provided for the pardoning power to be exercised as an act of grace and humanity in proper cases, without such a power of clemency to be exercised by some department or functionary of government, a country would be most imperfect and deficient in its political morality and in that attribute of deity whose judgments are always tampered with mercy.”
- **Definition:** In common parlance, to pardon means to forgive a person of his offence. The term 'pardon' has been defined as an act of grace, proceeding from the power entrusted with the execution of the law, which exempts the individual on whom it is bestowed upon, from the punishment the law inflicts for a crime he has committed. It affects both the punishment prescribed for the offence and the guilt of the offender.
- **Pardoning power in India:** Under Indian law, the President of India and the Governors of States have been given the power to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence. The law governing grant of pardon is contained in Articles 72 and 161 of the Constitution.

**Past judicial stands**

1. **The advice of the appropriate Government binds the Head of the state.**
  - **Maru Ram v Union of India case (1980)** –Even though the President and Governor are the executive heads, but they cannot exercise their discretion with regard to their powers under Articles 72 and 161. Both the executive heads are required to act on the advice of the appropriate government–Central and State Government.
    - The court followed Maru Ram’s case wherein it was held that the state government can advise the governor who is bound to take it.
2. **Undue delay in execution of mercy petition–**
  - **Shatrugan Chouhan v. Union of India (2014)**– Undue delay would entitle the death convict to seek relief under Article 32 r/w Article 21 get his death sentence commuted.
    - Inordinate delay caused due to circumstances beyond the control of the death convict and which is caused by the authorities for no reasonable ground”, the court should itself commute the sentence rather than “remanding matter for reconsideration of mercy petition”.
3. **Constitutional functionaries are not exempt from judicial scrutiny–**
  - **Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. Hon’ble Speaker (2020)** – Supreme Court was asked to examine the Speaker’s inaction with regard to disqualification proceedings.
  - **Kehar Singh v Union of India (1988)** : Supreme Court once again in Kehar Singh v Union of India reiterated its earlier stand and held that the grant of pardon by the President is an act of grace and, therefore, cannot be claimed as a matter of right. The power exercisable by the President being exclusively of administrative nature, is not justiciable.
    - **Swaran Singh v State of U.P(1998)** : the Governor of U.P. had granted remission of life sentence awarded to the Minister of the State Legislature of Assembly convicted for the offence of murder.

- The Supreme Court interdicted the Governor's order and said that it is true that it has no power to touch the order passed by the Governor under Article 161, but if such power has been exercised arbitrarily, mala fide or in absolute disregard of the "finer cannons of constitutionalism", such order cannot get approval of law and in such cases, "the judicial hand must be stretched to it."
- The Court held the order of Governor arbitrary and, hence, needed to be interdicted.

#### **Difference Between Pardoning Powers of President and Governor:**

- The scope of the pardoning power of the **President** under Article 72 is **wider** than the pardoning power of the Governor under **Article 161** in the **following two ways**:
  - The power of the President to grant pardon extends in cases where the punishment or sentence is by a **Court Martial** but Article 161 does not provide any such power to the Governor.
  - The President can grant pardon in all cases where the sentence given is the sentence of death but the pardoning power of the **Governor does not extend to death sentence cases**.

#### **Way forward-**

- Undue, inordinate and unreasonable delay in execution of death sentence has dehumanizing effects.
- The mercy petitions under Article 72/161 should be disposed of at a much faster pace than what is adopted now, if the due procedure prescribed by law is followed in verbatim.
- The pardoning power of Executive is very significant as it corrects the errors of judiciary. It eliminates the effect of conviction without addressing the defendant's guilt or innocence. The process of granting pardon is simpler but because of the lethargy of the government and political considerations, disposal of mercy petitions is delayed. Therefore, there is an urgent need to make amendment in law of pardoning to make sure that clemency petitions are disposed quickly.

#### **Addressing Tribal Vulnerability**

**Syllabus:** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

**News:** Survival International has called for urgent action following reports that at least five members of the Great Andamanese tribe have tested positive for Covid-19.

#### **The Great Andamanese tribe**

- **Great Andamanese:** They are an indigenous people of the Great Andaman archipelago in the Andaman Islands. They are classified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).
- **Language:** They speak Jeru dialect among themselves.
- **Population:** 74.
- **PVTGs in Andaman:** The five PVTGS residing in Andamans are Great Andamanese, Jarawas, Onges, Shompens and North Sentinelese.

**CONCEPTS: PVTGs and STs****The Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)**

- The PVTGs are the marginalized section of the Scheduled tribes of India.
- They are a section of people who are relatively isolated, educationally and socio-economically backward, living in a habitat far away from amenities.
- PVTGs are not constitutionally defined.
- It is classified by the Government of India for enabling improvement in the conditions of certain communities with particularly low development.

**Scheduled Tribes**

- Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India refers to Scheduled Tribes as those communities, who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution.
- In accordance to the provisions conferred in the **Clause (1) of Article 342** of the Constitution of India, the notification of STs is state specific and their identification is done on the basis of the following characteristics-
  - Primitive traits;
  - Distinctive culture;
  - Shyness of contact with the community at large;
  - Geographical isolation; and
  - Social and economic backwardness.

**Background of PVTGs:**

- In 1975, based on the Dhebar Commission report, the government created **Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs)** as a separate category and identified 52 such groups.
- In 1993, 23 more groups were added making it 75 PTGs
- In 2006, the Government of India renamed the PTGs as **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)**.

**Criteria for determining PVTGs**

1. A pre-agriculture level of technology;
2. A stagnant or declining population;
3. Extremely low literacy; and
4. A subsistence level of economy

**Statistical Overview of PVTGs in India:**

- Among the 75 listed PVTG's the highest number are found in Odisha (13), followed by Andhra Pradesh (12), Bihar including Jharkhand (9) Madhya Pradesh including Chhattisgarh (7) Tamil Nadu (6) Kerala and Gujarat having five groups each.
- The remaining PVTGs live in West Bengal (3) Maharashtra (3), two each in Karnataka and Uttarakhand and one each in Rajasthan, Tripura and Manipur.
- All the four tribal groups in Andaman, and one in Nicobar Islands, are recognised as PVTGs
- The Saharia people of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are the largest among the PVTGs with population more than 4 lakhs.
- Smallest population size among the PVTGs are the Sentinelese (as per the last contact effort on March 9, 2005, groups of 32 and 13 persons were sighted at different places).

**Legislation associated with PVTGs**

- **The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA):** It has a special section regarding the 75 PVTGs and the Act recognises forest and habitat rights of PVTGs.
- **The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA):** It extends Scheduled Areas of India under the purview of national framework of Panchayat. However, this act is not applicable to Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram and certain other areas including scheduled and tribal areas.
- The Sentinelese and other aboriginal tribes of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands are protected under **The Andaman and Nicobar (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956.**
- **Under the Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963:** The Andaman & Nicobar Islands are a “Restricted Area” in which foreigners with a restricted area permit (RAP) can stay.
- **Protection of Aboriginal Tribes:** The habitats of the PVTGs of Andaman and Nicobar Island are protected **Tribal Reserve** under the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Regulation, 1956.

**Restricted Area Permit System**

- RAP regime was notified under the Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963.
- Under it, foreign nationals are not normally allowed to visit protected or restricted area unless Government is satisfied that there are extra-ordinary reasons to justify their visit.
- Every foreigner, except citizen of Bhutan, who desires to enter and stay in protected or restricted area, is required to obtain special permit from competent authority having power to issue such permits to foreigner, seeking it.
- Citizens of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan and foreign nationals of Pakistani origin are exception and are not allowed to enter such areas.

**In News:**

- In August 2018, in a bid to promote tourism and encourage investment, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) decided to exclude 30 islands from Andaman and Nicobar from the RAP or Restricted Area Permit regime notified under the Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963. North Sentinelese island was among the 30 islands.
- According to critics, the removal of RAP from North Sentinel Island sent an extremely dangerous message that the island was now open for visitors.
- Further, it has also put un-contacted Sentinelese tribe at the risk of contracting diseases

**International Conventions:**

- **Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957, of the International Labour Organisation (ILO):** It advocated integrationist approach for development of tribal communities. India ratified the convention.
- **Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957, of International Labour Organisation (ILO):** The convention advocated non-intervention approach for protection and conservation of tribal communities. India has not ratified the convention. The



Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 of International Labour Organization Convention, also known as ILO-convention 169, or C169.

#### Government Measures for development of PVTGs

- **Survival International:** It is a human rights organisation formed in 1969 that campaigns for the rights of indigenous and/or tribal peoples and un-contacted peoples.
- **5-year plans:** For example, Community Development Program, Multipurpose Tribal Blocks, Tribal Development Block, Development Agencies, Integrated Tribal Development Projects, Modified Area Development Approach, Tribal sub-Pan (TSP) etc.
- **SCHEME OF DEVELOPMENT OF PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TRIBAL GROUPS (PVTGs):** The scheme was first started in 1998-199 for exclusive development of PVTGs and later revised in 2015. The key features of the scheme are:
  - **Aim:** The scheme aims at planning their socio-economic development in a comprehensive manner while retaining the culture and heritage of the community by adopting habitat development approach
  - **Strategic approach:** The scheme follows the strategic approach of Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojna, which is need-based and strives to optimise utilisation of resources available under various programs and aims at specific outcomes.
  - **CCD plan:** The scheme mandates all the 18 State Governments and the Union Territory of A&N Island shall prepare a long term “Conservation-cum-Development (CCD) Plan” for each PVTG of their State based on baseline survey.
  - **Activities supported under the scheme:** It includes housing, land distribution, land development, agricultural development, cattle development, construction of link roads, installation of non- conventional sources of energy, social security, etc.
  - **Nehru’s Tribal Panchsheel:** Panchsheel is five fundamental principles for tribal development in India laid down by Jawaharlal Nehru.
    - **The Five Principles are as follows:**
      1. The Tribal should **develop along the lines of their own genius**; there should be no imposition or compulsion from outside.
      2. **Tribal rights in land and forests** should be respected and no outsider should be able to take possession of tribal lands.
      3. It was necessary to encourage the **tribal languages which ‘must be given all possible support’** and the conditions in which they can flourish must be safeguarded’.
      4. Fourth, for **administration**, reliance should be placed on the tribal people themselves, and administrators should be recruited from amongst them and trained.
      5. Fifth, there should be no over-administration of the tribal areas. The effort should be to administer and develop the tribal through their own social and cultural institutions.

**Governance Challenges of PVTG areas:**

- **Incoherency in identification:** The spirit of the direction made by MoTA was loosely considered as a result there has been no uniform principle adopted in identifying the PVTGs.
- **Out-dated List:** The Anthropological Survey of India observes that the list of PVTG is overlapping and repetitive. For example, the list contains synonyms of the same group such as the Mankidia and the Birhor in Odisha, both of which refer to the same group.
- **Lack of baseline surveys:** Lack of baseline surveys hinder effective implementation of welfare schemes
- **Unequal Benefits from welfare schemes:** For example, the Lanjia Saora are recognized as a PVTG across Odisha but the micro-projects are established only in two blocks. The rest of the Lanjia Saora are treated among the Scheduled Tribes (STs) and do not receive benefit from these projects.
- **Impact of developmental projects:** In 2002, a Standing Committee formed by the MoTA to review the 'Development of Primitive Tribal Groups,' shared that the tribal people, especially PVTGs, are worst affected by developmental projects like dams, industries and mines.
- **Denial of land rights:**
  - PVTGs have faced systematic alienation from their resources due to conservation purposes-declaration of Reserved Forests and Protected Forests. For example: In 2009, 245 Baiga families were forced out from the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve, when it was notified so under the Project Tiger
  - Despite Forest Rights Act (2006) in place, habitat rights of PVTGs are still being forfeited in many instances. For Example: Mankidia community of Odisha are denied habitat rights in Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) by state's forest department
- **Livelihood issues:** Due to shrinking forests, environmental changes and forest conservation policies, their Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) collection is affected. They lack awareness about market value of NTFP and are exploited by middle men.
- **Health Issues:**
  - PVTGs suffer from many health problems like anaemia, malaria; gastro-intestinal disorders; micro nutrient deficiency and skin diseases due to poverty, lack of safe drinking water, bad sanitation, lack of health services, superstition and deforestation
  - Un-contacted tribal group such as the Sentinelese tribe of Andaman are also at the very high risk of contracting diseases in case of contact with outsiders
- **Illiteracy:** Though literacy rate among many PVTGs have increased over the past years, it still remains low at 30-40%. Further, poor female literacy is a major concern
- **Vulnerabilities of tribes in Andaman and Nicobar:** The fragile tribal communities have been facing expropriation of their ecosystem by outsiders. The outside influences are impacting their land use patterns, use of the sea, overall biodiversity leading to material and non-material changes.

**Way Forward:**

- Along with the Census, a proper survey should be conducted to comprehensively capture the data on PVTGs- population enumeration, health status, nutritional level, education, vulnerabilities etc. This would help implement welfare measures better
- Of the 75 PVTGs, those groups whose population is declining should be clearly identified and survival strategy should be devised
- PVTGs threatened with relocation of wildlife areas or development projects should be identified and actionable strategies should be devised to prevent the same
- It is important to recognise the innate connection between PVTGs and their lands and habitats. Therefore, a rights-based approach for development of PVTGs should be adopted
- Effective, preventive and curative health systems should be developed to address the health issues plaguing PVTGs
- The government needs to revamp its priorities towards protecting the indigenous tribes of A&N islands from outside influence. India needs to sign the 1989 convention of the ILO, and implement its various policies to protect the rights of the indigenous population.

**The Nutrition Fallout**

**Syllabus:** Issues relating to poverty and hunger.

**In News:** Malnutrition amongst the poorest in India remains high despite economic growth and government interventions.

**State of Malnutrition in India**

- **Undernourishment:** As a proportion of India's own population, around 14 per cent were undernourished during 2017-19.
  - According to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017 report, India is home to 190.7 million undernourished people- a 14.5% prevalence of hunger vis-à-vis the country's total population.
- **Hunger:** The Global Hunger Index (2020) ranks India at 94th position among 107 countries, much behind Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal.
- **Children:** India accounted for 28 percent of the world's stunted children (low height-for-age) less than five years of age, and 43 per cent of the world's wasted children (low weight-for-height) in 2019.
  - As per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS, 2015-16), the proportion of underweight and stunted children was as high as 35.8 per cent and 38.4 per cent respectively.

**Malnutrition in adults:**

- **Anaemia** is prevalent in 53% women and 23% men in the 15-49 age groups.
- 21% of women and 19% of men in the same age group are either overweight or obese.
- The dramatic increase in the prevalence of obesity has a consequent impact on the burden of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.



**Note:** Stunting- low height for age, wasting- low weight compared to height, Underweight- low weight for age. Malnutrition includes both under and over nutrition.

### Causes of malnutrition in India

- **Lack of education-** Women's education has a multiplier effect on the child's feeding practice and the sanitation facilities. Access and utilization of prenatal and postnatal health care services also play a significant role in curbing under nutrition among children.
- **Mother's health-**
  - More than half the women of childbearing age are anaemic and 33 per cent are undernourished, according to NFHS 2006. A malnourished mother is more likely to give birth to malnourished children.
  - Further, poor malnourished girls are married at an early age and they have malnourished children.
- **Monoculture agriculture practice-**
  - Food-based safety nets in India focused on increasing food production, particularly staples (rice and wheat). This led to lower production and consumption of indigenous traditional crops, impacting food and nutrition security in the process.
  - Farmers are not encouraged and incentivized for agricultural diversification leading to the lack of availability of nutrition dense crops like pulses.
- **Economic inequality-** One of the major causes for malnutrition in India is economic inequality. Due to the low social status of population, their diet often lacks in both quality and quantity.
- **Lax implementation-**
  - Providing nutritious food to the country's children is more a matter of political will and effective policy implementation at the grassroots level.
  - Gaps at policy level- There is a lack of real-time data that brings all these factors together to show the extent of India's malnutrition.
- **Sanitation-**
  - Most children in rural areas and urban slums still lack sanitation. This makes them vulnerable to the kinds of chronic intestinal diseases that prevent bodies from making good use of nutrients in food, and they become malnourished.
  - Lack of sanitation and clean drinking water are the reasons high levels of malnutrition persists in India despite improvement in food availability.

### Solutions to tackle malnutrition problem

- **WASH (Water, sanitation and hygiene) in schools** - State governments need to promote sanitation in schooling via the provision of separate sanitation facilities for girls in schools.
- **Reducing drop-out rates** - Initiatives like the distribution of bicycles to girls in secondary and high schools could help reduce the dropout rates among girls.

- **Upskilling Anganwadi workers** - Anganwadi workers can play a major role in community participation through awareness programmes.
- **Diversified food basket** - Government need to provide a more diversified food basket, including coarse grains, millets, pulses and bio-fortified staples to improve the nutritional status of pre-school children and women of reproductive age.
- **More research and innovation** - The Harvest-Plus programme can work with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) to grow new varieties of nutrient-rich staple food crops.

### Major Policy and Programme Interventions:

#### Box 1: Government Policy Interventions and Programmes to Combat Malnutrition

Direct Policy Measures	Plans, Programmes and Missions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand the safety net through ICDS to cover all vulnerable groups (children, adolescent girls, mothers, expectant women)</li> <li>• Fortify essential foods with appropriate nutrients (eg., salt with iodine and/or iron)</li> <li>• Popularise low cost nutritious food</li> <li>• Control micro-nutrient deficiencies amongst vulnerable groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid-day Meal Programme, 1962-63</li> <li>• Goitre Control Programme, 1962 (now known as National Iodine Deficiency Disorders Control Programme)</li> <li>• Special Nutrition Programme, 1970-71</li> <li>• Balwadi Nutrition Programme, 1970-71</li> <li>• Nutritional Anaemia Prophylaxis Programme, 1970</li> <li>• Prophylaxis Programme against Blindness due to Vitamin A Deficiency, 1970</li> <li>• Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), 1975</li> <li>• National Diarrhoeal Diseases Control Programme, 1981</li> <li>• Wheat-based Supplementary Nutrition Programme, 1986</li> <li>• National Plan of Action on Nutrition, 1995</li> <li>• Public Distribution System, 1997</li> <li>• National Nutrition Mission, 2003</li> <li>• National Health Mission, 2013 (subsumes former Rural &amp; Urban Health Missions)</li> <li>• National Iron+ Initiative, 2013</li> <li>• Promotion of Infant &amp; Young Child Feeding Practices Guidelines, 2013</li> <li>• Weekly Iron &amp; Folic Acid Supplementation, 2015</li> <li>• National Deworming Day, 2015</li> <li>• Establishment of: Nutritional Rehabilitation Centres; Village Health Sanitation &amp; Nutrition Committee</li> <li>• Bi-annual Vitamin-A Supplementation</li> <li>• Village Health &amp; Nutrition Days (at Anganwadi centers)</li> </ul>
Indirect Policy Measures	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure food security through increased production of food grains</li> <li>• Improve dietary pattern by promoting production and increasing per capita availability of nutritionally rich food</li> <li>• Effecting income transfers (improve purchasing power of landless, rural and urban poor; expand and improve public distribution system)</li> <li>• Other: Implement land reforms (tenure, ceiling laws) to reduce vulnerability of poor; increase health and immunisation facilities, and nutrition knowledge; prevent food adulteration; monitor nutrition programmes and strengthen nutrition surveillance; community participation</li> </ul>	

Source: National Nutrition Policy, 1993; Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Annual Report 2015-16. Chapter 3 – Maternal and Adolescent Healthcare

- **Constitutional Provision: Article 47** of the Constitution of India states that it is the duty of the State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living and to improve public health.
- **Integrated child development scheme (ICDS):** It offers non formal preschool education, growth monitoring, supplementary nutrition, health and nutrition education for care givers.
- **Mid-day meal scheme:** It provides meal to school children with an aim to enhance enrolment, attendance and improve nutritional status.

- **National food security act, 2013:** 75 per cent of rural and 50 per cent of the urban population is entitled to 5kg of food grains and 600 calories of take-home ration for pregnant and lactating women.
- **Zero hunger programme, 2017:**
  - Organized farming systems for nutrition;
  - set up genetic gardens for bio-fortified plants/ crops;
  - Initiate zero hunger training.
- **National Nutrition Mission (NNM):** National Nutrition Mission (NNM) aims to reduce stunting, under-nutrition, and anaemia among young children, women and adolescent girls, besides reducing low birth weight.
- **Implemented by-** Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- **Aim-** To reduce stunting, underweight and low birth weight each by 2% per year and anemia among young children, adolescents and women each by 3% per year until 2022.
- **National nutrition strategy – NITI Aayog:** It focuses on governance reforms, convergence of state/ district implementation programmes, counselling and community-based monitoring to significantly reduce undernourishment. Aimed at launching national nutrition mission.
- **The Poshan Maah campaign: Poshan Maah-** It includes a month-long activity focused on antenatal care, optimal breastfeeding, anaemia, growth monitoring, girl's education, diet, right age of marriage, hygiene and sanitation and eating healthy (food fortification).

#### Major Components of NNM:

- **Convergence:** Convergence between different Ministries for successful implementation of the programme.
- **ICDS-CAS:** It comprises a mobile application which is made available to the field functionaries preloaded on mobile phones and a six-tier monitoring dashboard for desktops. It is aimed to improve service delivery and also enable the Mission to effectively plan and make fact-based decisions.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** The NNM envisages 'incremental learning approach (ILA)'. According to this approach, the programme functionaries will be trained by breaking down the total learning agenda into small portions of doable actions.
- **Behavioral Change:** The Mission seeks to bring behavioral change among people through community-based events, use of mass media and Jan Andolan.
- **Innovation:** activities to be implemented at a project scale for improving the service delivery system, capacity building of functionaries and community engagement.
- **Incentives:**
  - To annually incentivize the States/UTs, NITI Aayog has decided to rank states/UTs on nutrition parameters.
  - Cash incentives to be given to field functionaries for achieving targets.
- **Grievance redressal** through call centres.

**Issues and Challenges in reducing malnutrition in India:**

- **Challenges with data:**
  - Lack of credible data on a year-year basis. For example, there has been a 10-year gap between NFHS 3 and NFHS 4.
  - There is confusion and inability to cope with measurement procedures among poorly trained Anganwadi workers and thus data on malnutrition may not be accurate.
- **Lack of adequate access to food:** Due to ineffective functioning (corruption and leakages) of the public distribution system (PDS), access to food is a major problem. Loss of food grains in warehouses (due to rotting and theft) further aggravates the problem.
- **Issues with ICDS:**
  - Major issues with ICDS are the supply of quality food and its uniform distribution.
  - Anganwadi workers are unable to play an effective role in attending to the problem of malnutrition because of low wages and inadequate training.
- **Cereal-based Diet:**
  - A major reason for micronutrient deficiency in India is because of a cereal-based diet. However, even the National Food Security Act does not address the issue of nutritional deficiency adequately.
- **Social-economic and Cultural challenges:**
  - Major challenges in implementing nutritional programmes are socio-cultural factors such as caste.
  - For example, Hausla Poshan Yojana, a plan to provide nutritious food to pregnant women and malnourished children in Uttar Pradesh failed to even start because some women beneficiaries allegedly refused to consume the food prepared by Anganwadi workers belonging to the SC community.
- **Lack of nutritional and health awareness:** Lack of awareness, ignorance of healthy diets, unhealthy feeding and caring practices, poor breastfeeding practice are major challenges in reducing malnutrition.
- **Sanitation and hygiene:** Lack of sanitation is also an important challenge in reducing malnutrition. Poor sanitary conditions caused by open-defecation and other issues lead to the incidence of diarrhoeal diseases which make children susceptible to stunting.
- **Financial Constraints:** Budgetary allocations of many schemes have decreased over time. Also, the money allocated has remained unspent in many states.
- **Implementation of Nutritional Programmes:** Unmonitored, improper implementation of nutritional programmes and lack of accountability remains a major challenge in achieving food security.
- **Environmental Degradation:** Agricultural production is under stress from environmental degradation, desertification, climate change, and an increasing conversion of land for non-agricultural activities. Climate change induced fluctuating weather patterns will reduce production for most crops including maize and rice.



### Way forward

- **Early life cycle interventions:** To address the problem of child under-nutrition, and disease there should be early life-cycle interventions targeting the first 1,000 days of a child's life.
- **Public-private partnerships:** ICDS, Mid-day Meal and PDS should be re-worked upon for greater effectiveness. Public-Private partnership in this domain should be encouraged. This would ensure that leakages, space and other constraints of lack of hygiene, delay in supply of food etc do not hinder delivering nutritious food.
- **Extend food fortification:** It is important to extend the food fortification and crop diversification. Public-private partnerships can help leverage the appropriate technology for scaling up food fortification interventions.
- **Target multiple contributing factors:** For example, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The focus should not only be on building toilets but bringing about a behavioural change among people.
- **Incentives:** Agricultural policy should be aligned with nutrition policy with incentives provided for encouraging the production of nutrient-rich and local crops for self-consumption.
- **Updated data:** It is important to have sufficient information and reliable, updated data for effective interventions.
- **Multi-dimensional determinants:** For POSHAN Maah to contribute towards the holistic nourishment of children and a malnutrition free India by 2030, the government needs to address the multi-dimensional determinants of malnutrition on an urgent basis.

### Giving Teeth to A Bulwark

**Syllabus:** Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

**In News:** As per Election Commission of India, over 1,100 candidates with criminal antecedents contested Bihar Assembly polls.

#### Election Commission of India

- **Article 324 of the Constitution** provides that the power of superintendence, direction and control of elections to parliament, state legislatures, the office of president of India and the office of vice-president of India shall be vested in the Election commission.



**Articles related to Elections in Indian constitution**

- 325: No person to be ineligible for inclusion in, or to claim to be included in a special, electoral roll on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex
- 326: Elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States to be on the basis of adult suffrage.
- 327: Power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to Legislatures.
- 328: Power of Legislature of a State to make provision with respect to elections to such Legislature.
- 329: Bar to interference by courts in electoral matters.

**Issues faced by Election commission:**

- **Qualification of members of ECI:** The Constitution has not prescribed the qualifications (legal, educational, administrative or judicial) of the members of the Election Commission.
- **Appointment:** The appointment of CEC and other ECs according to the Article 324, shall be done as per the law made by the Parliament in this regard.
  - However, no such law has yet been made which leaves a “gap” and leaves the appointment of such a crucial post solely to the executives.
- **Security of tenure:** Article 324(5) of the Constitution protects only CEC from removal, except if the manner and grounds of removal are the same as a judge of the Supreme Court.
- However, ECs can be removed by the government on the recommendation of the Chief Election Commissioner.
- **Reappointment of members:** The Constitution has not debarred the retiring election commissioners from any further appointment by the government, leaving a scope for the politicisation of commission.
- **Allegation of partisan role:** The opposition alleged that the ECI was favouring the ruling government in giving clean chits to the model code violations made by the Prime Minister.
- **Lack of control over political parties:** ECI is not adequately equipped to regulate the political parties.
  - For instance, Despite being the registering authority for political parties under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, it has no power to de-register them even for the gravest of violations of political parties.

**Successes of Election Commission of India (ECI):**

- **Electronic Voting Machine:** Since there were clear evidences of booth capturing and problems in counting of votes, the Election Commission of India introduced Electronic Voting Machines.
- **VVPAT:** Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines were introduced to cross-check EVM results through a paper audit.

- It added an extra layer of accountability.
- The EC has already operationalised the voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) with an attached printer that provides a paper trail for those who have cast their votes.
- **Model Code of Conduct:** The ECI formulates code of conduct when the election dates are announced, co-ordinates with administrative machinery to strictly enforce the do's and don'ts in elections to ensure a transparent voting.
- **None of the Above (NOTA):** NOTA has been mentioned in electoral voting machine to not choose any candidate mentioned in the machine, thereby giving citizen right to reject.
- **Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS):** It provides an alternative for service voters to for quick despatch of ballot paper electronically (earlier delivered by post). The voters can download the postal ballot and votes so cast would be received by the returning officer through post.
- **Voter Education:** ECI's voter education programme SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation) resulted in the highest ever voter turnout in a general election in 2019.

**Reforms proposed by Election Commission of India over the years:**

- **De-criminalization of politics:** For preventing persons with criminal background from becoming legislators, the Commission has made a proposal for disqualifying (from contesting election) a person against whom charges have been framed by a Court for an offence punishable by imprisonment of 5 years or more.
- **Political parties' reforms:** The Commission has suggested that legal provisions be made to regulate the functioning of political parties and the Commission should be empowered to **regulate registration as well as de-registration of political parties**.
- **Amendment of law to make 'paid-news' an electoral offence:** The Commission has proposed amendment in the Representation of People Act, 1951, to provide therein that publishing and abetting the publishing of 'paid news' for furthering the prospect of election of any candidate or for prejudicially affecting the prospect of election of any candidate be made an electoral offence.
- **Government sponsored advertisements:** For six months prior to the date of expiry of the term of the House, there should be a ban on advertisements on achievements of the Government. Advertisements/dissemination of information on poverty alleviation and health related schemes could be exempted from the ban.
- **Prohibition of Campaign during the Last 48 Hours:** Section 126 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, prohibits electioneering activities by way of public meetings, public performance, processions, advertisements through cinematograph, television or similar apparatus during the period of 48 hours before the time fixed for conclusion of poll.
  - However, this Section does not include print media.
  - The Commission has proposed that Section 126 should apply equally to the print media also.

- The Commission has further proposed that house to house visits by candidates/supporters should also be specifically prohibited during the period of 48 hours.
- **Amendment of law to provide for filing of election petition even against defeated candidates on the ground of corrupt practice:** As per the existing law, election petition (EP) can be filed only for challenging an election of the returned candidate (winner).
  - If a defeated candidate has indulged in corrupt practice, there is no provision for election petition against such candidate.
  - The Commission has recommended that the law should be amended to provide for filing of EP in cases of commission of corrupt practice by a losing candidate as well.
- **Ban on transfer of election officers on the eve of election:** In the case of general election, there should be a ban against transferring any election related officer without the concurrence of the Commission for a period of six months prior to the expiry of the term of the House.
- **Totalizer for counting of votes:** Using totalizer, it would be possible to take out the results of votes polled in a group of 14 EVMs together as against the present practice of counting votes polling station wise.
  - In such a system of counting, the trend of voting in individual polling station areas would not be known. This will prevent intimidation and post-election victimization of electors.

### Perspective: Star campaigner status and ECI's powers

#### Background of the issue

- Former Madhya Pradesh chief minister, Kamal Nath, while campaigning for a by-election to the Madhya Pradesh Assembly recently used the derogatory word “item” for a BJP woman candidate.
- Following this, the ECI revoked the star campaigner status for Kamal Nath.
- The Supreme Court has recently stayed the order issued by the Election Commission of India (ECI) revoking Kamal Nath's status as the star campaigner of the Congress party.

#### What is star campaigner status?

- It is a privilege given to few candidates. The **expenditure** incurred on the campaign by those from the list of star campaigners is not included in the expenditure of the candidate concerned.
- It ensures that some leaders can **charter helicopters** and **travel extensively** to cover more territory and constituencies without breaching any individual candidate's spending limit.

#### What were the arguments made by ECI?

- The ECI has cited the **clause in the MCC (non-statutory)** that bars candidates from resorting to “criticism of all aspects of the private life, not connected with the public activities” of other leaders and party workers.
- Also, the ECI has made **reference to the Supreme Court's observation** that when laws are absent, the ECI can invoke its residuary power to meet an infinite variety of situations that cannot be foreseen by lawmakers.

**Why the court stayed ECI's order?**

- **Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951**, which relates to a candidate's election expenditure, empowers the political party to decide itself who its "leaders" are and list of 'star campaigners' to the election authorities.
- Also, ECI's order is **against the right to campaign** without incurring electoral expenditure on the candidates' account.
- Hence, the **SC Stated that the EC has no power to withdraw the status of star campaigner** submitted by political parties and stayed the Election Commission's order

**Way forward:**

- The ECI needs to be empowered to **revoke the status of a campaigner**, if there is an apparent breach of campaign norms or the Model Code of Conduct.
- Commission needs to establish its trust amongst people by installing ( **Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail System ) VVPATS** in more and more constituencies.
- **2nd ARC report** recommended that **collegium** headed by the Prime Minister with the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, the Law Minister and the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha as members should make recommendations for the consideration of the President for appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioners.
- Simultaneous polls will reduce enormous costs involved in separate elections.
- The Election Commission of India should explore the idea of further **digitising the electoral infrastructure of the country using blockchain**.

**Building Partnership**

**Syllabus:** *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.*

**In News:** The 15th Finance Commission has suggested a greater role for public private partnerships to ramp up health infrastructure.

**More In news:**

- Niti Aayog and Union health ministry have put forward a public-private partnership (PPP) model for the management of non-communicable diseases in tier 2 and 3 cities across the country, with World Bank will be serving as a technical partner.
- There is shortage of infrastructure and human resources, 72% of the rural population and 79% of those living in urban areas have sought access to healthcare in the private sector.

**Present problems: Health Sector**

- **Lower expenditure on health:** The combined expenditure of center and states on health is around 1.5% of India's GDP. It is much below the target of 2.5% as set under the



National Health Policy, 2017. Also, India spends only 6.7% of Its healthcare expenditure on preventive health care.

- **Higher out-of-pocket expenditure on health:** The out-of-pocket expenditure as percentage of total healthcare expenditure is as high as 60%. This is considered to be one of the important reasons for pushing the families to below the poverty line.
- **Lack of Accessibility:** Most of the secondary and tertiary care hospitals are located in Tier-1 and Tier-2 Cities.
- **Lack of Affordability:** The contribution of private sector in healthcare expenditure in India is around 80 percent while the rest 20 percent is contributed by public sector. The private sector also provides for 58 percent of the hospitals and 81 percent of the doctors in India. The private sector hospitals do not address the needs of the poor patients.
- **Corruption in MCI:** Shortage of medical doctors due to the emigration of physicians and the fact that the current MCI rules and guidelines prohibit qualified MBBS doctors without a PG degree from performing procedures such as ultrasound and interpreting chest X-rays.
- **Lack of compliance:** There is no single authority responsible for public health that is legally empowered to enforce compliance from other public authorities and citizens.
- **Unequally distributed skilled human resources:** There aren't enough skilled healthcare professionals in India despite recent increases in MBBS programmes and nursing courses.
  - Shortage is compounded by inequitable distribution of these resources.
  - India does not have an overarching national policy for human resources for health.
- **Large unregulated private sector:** The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) numbers show a decrease in the use of public hospitals over the past two decades.
  - Significant portion of these private practitioners may not be qualified or are under-qualified.
  - Many new institutions set up in the past decade encouraged by commercial incentives, have often fuelled corrupt practices and failed to offer quality education.
- **Low public spending on health:** Economically weaker states are particularly susceptible to low public health investments.
  - Many state governments also fail to use allocated funds.
- **Fragmented health information systems:** Getting quality, clean, up-to-date data is difficult in the health sector. Data is incomplete (in many cases it excludes the private sector) and many a time, it's duplicated.
- **Irrational use and spiralling cost of drugs:** Costs of medical treatment have increased so much that they are one of the primary reasons driving people into poverty.
  - Jan Aushadhi campaign to provide generic drugs at affordable prices, but their implementation has been patchy and varied in different states.
  - Corruption also increases irrational use of drugs and technology.



- Kickbacks from referrals to other doctors or from pharmaceutical companies lead to unnecessary procedures such as CT scans, stent insertions and caesarean sections.
- **Weak governance and accountability:** Poor coordination between state and central governments as the main constraints why universal healthcare is not assured in India.
  - Unwillingness on the part of the state to prioritize health as a fundamental public good, central to India's developmental aspirations, on par with education.

#### **NITI Aayog's Proposed Model contract**

- **Sharing back end services:** The district hospitals will need to share their back-end services such as blood banks and ambulance services with the private players. The state government could also provide part of the funds needed by these private players.
  - The district health administration will ensure referrals for treatment from primary health centres to these private hospitals.
- **Secondary and tertiary medical treatment:** These private hospitals will provide secondary and tertiary medical treatment for cancer, heart diseases and respiratory tract ailments at prices that are not higher than those prescribed under government health insurance schemes.
  - For non-communicable diseases, the hospitals will need to have out-patient departments, in-patient beds, beds for intensive care, operation theatres, centre for angioplasty and angiography, laboratories and radiology services.
- **Insurance schemes:** Beneficiaries of the government insurance schemes will be able to get treatment at these hospitals but there will be no reserved beds or quota of beds for free services. General patients will also be allowed to seek treatment.
  - Patients not covered by the state insurance and health schemes would be required to pay the full cost.
- **Referring patients:** The private hospitals operating from these public hospital campuses will be able to refer complicated cases either to other government hospitals or other empanelled private hospitals.

#### **Advantages of private hospitals:**

- **Private hospital:** A private hospital is one which is owned and governed by a person or many people who are managing the whole finances on their own. A public hospital, on the other hand, is completely and entirely run by the government's funding and money.
  - **Less waiting time:** In public hospitals, the services are mostly free, waiting time is longer.
  - **Latest equipment:** Public hospitals have good equipment, but due to the extreme use they can get damaged more often than those in a private hospital.
  - **More attention given:** Number of patients per doctor is higher in public hospitals. It is not good as the attention is too much divided.

- **Disadvantages of private hospitals:**

- **Corporatisation of hospitals:** The fees of a private hospital are higher than that of public hospital. Most of the time public hospitals offer their services free of charge or for reduced rates.
- **Profit motive:** Private hospitals are a kind of a business they earn a profit like any other business. However, public hospitals run for the health of their patients, and not to earn.

**India's national health policy:**

- The national health policy seeks to provide “free, comprehensive primary healthcare services for all aspects of reproductive, maternal, child and adolescent health and for the most prevalent communicable, non-communicable and occupational disease in the population”.
- The policy recommends “strategic purchase of secondary and tertiary care services as short-term measures”, but not the services people would pay for.
- It supports government schemes which provide preferential care to government employees in the present and future.
- National Health Policy, 2017 approved by the government focus on Preventive and promotive Health Care and Universal access to good quality health care services.
- The policy seeks to reach everyone in a comprehensive integrated manner to move towards wellness.
- The objective of policy is to deliver quality health care services to all at an affordable cost.
- The policy looks at problems and solutions in a comprehensive way with private sector as strategic partners.
- It seeks to promote quality of care; focus is on emerging disease and investment in promotive and preventive healthcare.
- The policy is patient centric and quality driven. It addresses health security and make in India for drugs and devices.
- The Policy proposes free drugs, free diagnostics and free emergency care services in all public hospitals.

**Steps to be taken for better Health Outcomes**

- **Improving the Efficiency of Hospital management:** Government could hand over the management of an existing public hospital to a well-established private partner under a partnership agreement with the responsibility of investing in the hospital for its-up gradation/expansion and management.
- **Enhancing Investment in Healthcare Facilities:** Government could invest in land and building of a new hospital and private partners could bring in the equipment and staff. The Private sector may be given the exclusive management role with government participating in the governing board.
  - The maximum fee in such hospitals could be fixed by Government.

- Decrease in Government's burden, leveraging the private sector's expertise in terms of human resources and equipment and protection of interests of poor and weaker sections.
- **Addressing the shortage of Medical Personnel:** The shortage of doctors within India can also be addressed through PPP Mode. For example, in the Union Budget 2020-21, the Finance Minister has announced that new medical Colleges would be set up in PPP Mode. The Government would provide Viability Gap Funding (VGF) for setting up of medical colleges.
- **Reducing out-of-pocket Expenditure:** The Government can act as healthcare financier wherein the identified poor can get treatment in the private hospitals and their treatment cost would be paid by the Government leading to decrease in out-of-pocket expenditure. For example, PM Jan Arogya Abhiyan.
- **Addressing Accessibility and Affordability:** Some of the states such as Odisha have contracted out the management of the Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs) at the village level to the private sector entities in order to improve the accessibility and efficiency of healthcare services.
- **Ensuring Safe, Effective and Affordable Medicines:** The Government is presently implementing the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) in order to provide cheaper generic medicines through the network of Janaushadhi Kendras.
  - It involves procurement of bulk generic medicines from the Private sector.
  - It enables the non-governmental entities such as NGOs, Private Sector hospitals etc. to set up Janaushadhi Kendras.
- **Investment in IT Infrastructure:** The Srinath Reddy Committee (2011) on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) had recommended for creation of robust IT infrastructure which could capture various aspects related to healthcare infrastructure such as mortality rates, hospital admission rates, disease profiles, hospital bed occupancy ratios etc.
  - It will also help in evidence-based policy making in the field of health.
- **Improving Preventive Care:** The Civil society organisations (CSOs) can contribute effectively to community mobilisation, information dissemination, community-based monitoring of health services and capacity building of community-based organisations and workers.
  - Hence, the CSOs can be leveraged under PPP mode to improve the health outcomes of the Government schemes such as National Health Mission (NHM).

**Conclusion:**

- Countries that have done well in providing quality care have one system for all. Therefore, there is need to boost spending on healthcare in India. The National Health Policy, 2017 advocates a positive and proactive engagement with the private sector for critical gap filling towards achieving national goals.

## Fighting AMR

**Syllabus:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

**In News:** 'One Health' is the optimum approach to counter the impact of antimicrobial resistance.

**More on news:**

- **India is an important locus for the generation of resistance genes:** The multi-drug resistance determinant, New Delhi Metallo-beta-lactamase-1 (NDM-1), emerged from this region and spread globally.
- **The containment of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in India:** It is central to the global effort to address this threat.
  - In India, over 56,000 new-born deaths each year occur due to sepsis, caused by organisms that are resistant to first line antibiotics.

### How are antibiotics categorised?

- **Categories:** WHO has categorised antibiotics into:
  - "Access" which should be widely available.
  - "Watch" to be limited to specific indications.
  - "Reserve", to be used as a last-resort.
  - In 2015, India had the highest consumption rate worldwide for oxazolidinones, which have been defined by WHO as "Reserve" antibiotics.

### About antimicrobial resistance.

- **Antimicrobial resistance (AMR):** It is the resistance acquired by any microorganism (bacteria, viruses, fungi, parasite, etc.) against antimicrobial drugs such as antibiotics that are used to treat infections.
- **Reasons for AMR:**
  - The ingenuity and survival instinct of germs.
  - The misuse and overuse of antibiotics in humans and animals.
- **WHO's top threats:** WHO has declared that AMR is one of the top 10 global public health threats facing humanity.
- **Study findings:** The study 'Understanding drivers of antibiotic resistance genes' by Environment International journal shows that a total of 131 Antibiotic-Resistant Genes (ARGs) material were detected.
  - The blaNDM-1 gene, first found in surface water in India in 2008, has spread to the Arctic in just 11 years. This reflects that antibiotic resistance is a new epidemic threat of 21st century.
- **The long-term impact of AMR:** AMR is estimated to cause 10 million deaths annually by 2050, unless concerted actions are initiated now. It will result in 7.5 % reduction in livestock production and negatively impact the global GDP by 3.5%.

**Elaborate on how the one health approach supports focussed actions on the human-animal-environment interface.**

- **The 'One Health' approach:** The rational use of antibiotics in humans, animals, and agriculture warrants coordinated action in all sectors. These multi-sectoral, multidisciplinary and multi-institutional actions constitute the 'One Health' approach.
  - It is reinforced by the fact that all the epidemics in the current millennium (SARS, MERS, bird flu and COVID-19) have originated from animals because of unwanted excursion of humans into animal domains.
  - The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the urgency of implementing One Health.
- **One platform for experts:** This effort utilises existing expertise and infrastructure in various sectors with a focus on inter-sectoral coordination, collaboration, and communication.
- **Human-animal-environment interface:** The approach supports focussed actions on the human-animal-environment interface for the prevention, detection and response to the public health events that influence global health and food security.

### Reasons for prevalence of AMR in India

**Prevalence of AMR is grouped in three types -**

#### 1. Antimicrobial Resistance in Humans:

- **Carbapenem resistance:** The carbapenem class of antibiotics is one of the last-resort antibiotics to treat serious bacterial infections in humans
- **Colistin resistance:** Colistin is considered to be the last resort antibiotic in human medicine. With increasing use of colistin for treatment of carbapenem-resistant gram-negative bacterial infections, colistin resistance among gram-negative bacteria has emerged in India.

#### 2. Antibiotic Resistance in Food Animals:

- **Antibiotic-resistant bacteria in Poultry:** The use of antibiotics in food animals plays a major role in human health, as antibiotic-resistant bacteria can be transmitted between humans and animals through contact, in food products, and from the environment. Several studies reported isolation of extended-spectrum beta-lactamase (ESBL) producing E. coli strains from faecal samples of chickens
- **Antibiotic-resistant bacteria in Aquaculture:** Vibrio species associated with food poisoning were identified among shrimp, shellfish, and clams obtained from retail markets in Kerala

#### 3. Antibiotic Resistance in the Environment.:

- **Antibiotic-resistant bacteria and genes in Sewage and Hospital wastewater:** A study examining wastewater samples from three different sewage treatment plants (STPs) found that hospital wastewater inflow significantly increased the prevalence of third-generation cephalosporin-resistant E. coli.
- **Antibiotic-resistant bacteria and genes in Rivers:** In a study involving River Cauvery in Karnataka, 100% of E. coli isolates were found to be resistant to third-generation cephalosporins.



**Other major reasons:**

- **Lack of formal training:** Many medical practitioners lack formal training in India and 70 per cent of primary healthcare is delivered by such individuals. Sales companies target both doctors as well as those acting in a medical capacity without required qualifications.
- **Biased information:** Pharmaceutical sales representatives are a key source of updates and information for prescribers, but the information they provide may be biased and motivated by commercial considerations to promote antibiotic sales.
- **Illegal sale:** The sale of antibiotics without a prescription is prohibited under Schedule H1, which has been supported by the red line campaign but it is not widely enforced.
- **The lack of access:** The lack of access, due to geographical distance or affordability, to medical professionals and prescribers, in rural areas of India, leads 50 per cent of people to buy antibiotics directly from the pharmacy as a first choice.
- **Falsified, substandard or counterfeit antimicrobials:** It can worsen AMR in several ways. They can leave patients under-dosed and bacteria that are only partially suppressed may be more likely to evolve resistance.
- **Injudicious use of antimicrobials and inadequate treatment of waste waters:** these are important drivers of AMR in India. Use of sludge in agriculture, improper discard of livestock animals and aquaculture industry are considered AMR contributors in other countries but Indian data regarding these are lacking.
- **Contamination:** Effluents from multinational pharmaceutical companies contain active antibiotics, resistant bacteria and resistant genes. Contaminated water due to industrial waste such as Pharmaceutical, industry waste, Hospital effluent etc are important source of AMR.
- **Biological and social reasons:**
  - **Microbial behaviour:** As soon as scientists introduce a new antimicrobial drug, there is a good chance that it will become ineffective at some point in time. This is due primarily to changes occurring within the microbes.
  - **People's behaviour:** Not following recommendations for the use of some drugs can increase the risk of antimicrobial resistance. The way in which people use antimicrobial drugs is a significant contributing factor. Some individualistic reasons are:
    - **Wrong diagnosis:** Doctors sometimes prescribe antimicrobials “just in case,” or they prescribe broad-spectrum antimicrobials when a specific drug would be more suitable. Using these medications in this way increases the risk of AMR.
    - **Inappropriate use:** If a person does not complete a course of antimicrobial drugs, some microbes may survive and develop resistance to the drug. Also, antibiotics recommended by quacks or pharmacist contribute to magnify the issue.

**Rising challenge of Antimicrobial Resistance:**

1. This is no more a local problem and has to be looked as a global health concern. Annually, 700,000 deaths occur worldwide due to the AR bacteria, says a report titled “anti-microbial resistance benchmark”.
2. Bacteria are carried in the gut of animals and people, and were likely spread through the faecal matter of these animals, humans as well as migratory birds.
3. India has witnessed an increase in antibiotic consumption- about 65 per cent in 2015 compared to 2000, while the rate of consumption increased from 3.2 to 6.5 billion daily defined doses (DDDs) in the same period.

**Steps taken****At National level:**

- **National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance, 2017-21:** The objectives of the NAP include improving awareness, enhancing surveillance measures, strengthening infection prevention and control, research and development, promoting investments, and collaborative activities to control AMR.
- **Red Line Campaign on antibiotics:** the objective of the campaign is to decrease the use of Red line antibiotics without prescription and create awareness of danger of taking antibiotics.

**At global level:**

- **Global action plan on antimicrobial resistance sets out five strategic objectives:**
  - To improve awareness and understanding of antimicrobial resistance;
  - To strengthen knowledge through surveillance and research;
  - To reduce the incidence of infection;
  - To optimize the use of antimicrobial agents; and
  - Develop the economic case for sustainable investment that takes account of the needs of all countries, and increase investment in new medicines, diagnostic tools, vaccines and other interventions.
- The World Health Organization is also coordinating a global campaign “**Handle with care**” to raise awareness and encourage best practices for antibiotic use.
- **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** has identified antimicrobial resistance as one of six emerging issues of environmental concern in its 2017 Frontiers Report.

**Steps to be taken**

- **Access to basic antibiotics:** An estimated 170,000 deaths from pneumonia in children under five can be prevented with timely access to effective antibiotics.
- **Restrict excessive and inappropriate use:** It is a key driver of antibiotic resistance, while ensuring life-saving medicines are available to those who need them.
- **Adequate sanitation:** Half of the south Asian population lacked access to basic sanitation in 2018. The Swachh Bharat Mission in India has improved access to toilets in many areas.

- **Improvement in infrastructure:** adequate sanitation and quality hygiene in India could result in a reduction of 590 million diarrheal cases by 2020 that would have been treated with antibiotics.
- **Vaccination coverage:** Vaccination has been shown to reduce the transmission of AMR infections and the volume of antibiotics consumed due to both, appropriate treatment of bacterial infections and inappropriate treatment of viral infections.
  - **Mission Indradhanush** to address low vaccination coverage strengthened micro-planning and additional mechanisms to improve monitoring and accountability.
- **Solutions to combat the AMR threat:**
  - Discovery of new drugs, before the emergence of resistance in germs.
  - Prudent use of available antibiotics.

#### **Prevention and control measures: Stakeholder Approach**

- **Individuals:** To prevent and control the spread of antibiotic resistance, individuals should:
  - Only use antibiotics when prescribed by a certified health professional.
  - Never demand antibiotics if your health worker says you don't need them.
  - Always follow your health worker's advice when using antibiotics.
  - Never share or use leftover antibiotics.
  - Prevent infections by regularly washing hands, preparing food hygienically, avoiding close contact with sick people, practising safer sex, and keeping vaccinations up to date.
- **Policy makers:** To prevent and control the spread of antibiotic resistance, policy makers should:
  - Ensure a robust national action plan to tackle antibiotic resistance is in place.
  - Improve surveillance of antibiotic-resistant infections.
  - Strengthen policies, programmes, and implementation of infection prevention and control measures.
  - Regulate and promote the appropriate use and disposal of quality medicines.
  - Make information available on the impact of antibiotic resistance.
- **Health professionals:** To prevent and control the spread of antibiotic resistance, health professionals should:
  - Prevent infections by ensuring that their hands, instruments, and environment are clean.
  - Only prescribe antibiotics when they are needed, according to current guidelines.
  - Report antibiotic-resistant infections to surveillance teams.
  - Talk to their patients about how to take antibiotics correctly, antibiotic resistance and the dangers of misuse.
- **Agriculture sector:** To prevent and control the spread of antibiotic resistance, the agriculture sector should:
  - Only give antibiotics to animals under veterinary supervision.

- Not use antibiotics for growth promotion or to prevent diseases in healthy animals.
- Vaccinate animals to reduce the need for antibiotics and use alternatives to antibiotics when available.
- Promote and apply good practices at all steps of production and processing of foods from animal and plant sources.
- Improve biosecurity on farms and prevent infections through improved hygiene and animal welfare.

**Way forward:**

- Develop standards as per National action plan so that access to effective antibiotics is maintained, sustainable antibiotic production methods need to be developed and adopted by manufacturers.
- Ayushman Bharat will be important for access to be balanced with excessive and inappropriate use.
- There is a need to optimally utilise emerging technologies to improve human health and development. One Health has been acknowledged as the optimum approach to counter the impact of AMR and future pandemics and must be adopted expeditiously.

**Mid-Day Meal Scheme: Ensuring a healthy and educated generation**

**Syllabus:** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.

**In News:** The COVID-19 crisis has affected the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Scheme, threatening the food security of children from underprivileged communities.

**About Mid-day meal scheme**

- **Objectives:** To enhance the enrollment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improve nutritional levels among school going children.
- **Intended beneficiaries:**
  - School children studying in Classes I to VIII of Government, Local body and Government - aided schools, Special Training centres (STC) and Madrasas and Maktabas supported under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.
  - The Centres run under Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS)/Alternative & Innovative Education (AIE) and National Children Labour Project (NCLP) schools of all areas across the country are also included under the MDM.
- **Features:**
  - It was launched in the year 1995 as the **National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education**. In 2004, the scheme was relaunched as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme.
  - It is a Centrally-Sponsored Scheme and the cost of the MDMS is shared between the central and state governments.
  - The Midday Meal Scheme is covered by the National Food Security Act, 2013.

- It also involves providing nutritional support to children of elementary stage in drought-affected area during summer vacation.
- **Cost-sharing:** The central government provides free food grains to the states.
- The cost of cooking, infrastructure development, transportation of food grains and payment of honorarium to cooks and helpers is shared by the centre with the state governments.

### Performance Analysis

The performance of Mid-day meal scheme can be analyzed in terms of achievements and challenges in the implementation of the scheme.

### Achievements

- **Addressing hunger:** MDM scheme helps in alleviating hunger and improving nutritional status in children, especially of low-income families.
  - The contribution of mid-day meals to food security is particularly crucial in tribal areas, where hunger is endemic and hence parental appreciation of mid-day meals was highest among tribal communities.
  - **Nutrition for children:** Joint Review Mission of MDMS, 2015-16 noted that many children reach school on an empty stomach, making the school's mid-day meal a major source of nutrition for children, particularly those from vulnerable communities. It helps in universalising elementary education, increasing retention and attendance and thus helps in reducing dropout rate.
  - **Increased Enrollment:** The MDM scheme has led to "increased enrollment in schools, increased attendance in schools, improved performance of students in class in terms of better attention span and academic progress.
  - **Increasing social value:** Mid-day meals have an important social value and foster equality. As children learn to sit together and share a common meal, one can expect some erosion of caste prejudices and class inequality. for example, it helps to promote personal hygiene - hand washing etc - thus improves health.
  - **Reduce gender inequality:** Cultural traditions and social structures often mean that girls are much more affected by hunger than boys.
    - Thus, the mid-day meal programme has helped reduce the gender gap in education, since it enhances female school attendance.
- **Better classroom learning by improving nutrition status:** A total of 72 per cent children who availed mid-day meals in government schools said they could concentrate better on studies after meals.
  - This was revealed by an evaluation by the Hyderabad- based National Institute of Nutrition across 70 districts in 20 states and Union territories in 2017-18, commissioned by the Union HRD Ministry.



### Challenges

- **Administrative problems:** A number of layers of government involved in the scheme has resulted in poor information, coordination and monitoring of the scheme.
  - In 2013, 23 children from the Indian state of Bihar died as a result of unsafe food preparation.
- **Infrastructural Issues:** poor water supply, kitchen sheds, storage facilities and inadequate staffs etc. for example, a video showed children in a school in Mirzapur being served chapati and salt and there were reports from Sonbhadra that one litre of milk was allegedly diluted with a bucket of water and fed to 81 children.
- **Lack of proper audit:** There are provisions for regular social audit, field visits and inspections but these are seldom carried out. Field visit reports are not available after FY14 and monitoring institutions' reports.
- **Persistence of child hunger:** As per Global Hunger Index 2020,
  - India has been ranked at 94 among 107 countries in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2020. The country's score of 27.2 is the worst among BRICS countries, and inferior to Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal.
  - India's child wasting rate was extremely high at 20.8% – the highest.
  - The child stunting rate in India was 37.4 %,
  - The child wasting was at 17.3 %.
  - The undernourishment rate of India was at 14% and child mortality at 3.7 %.
  - India already far out in terms of achieving the 'Zero Hunger' goal.
- **Identification of disadvantaged children:** One of the objectives of MDM Scheme is to encourage poor children, belonging to disadvantaged sections, to attend school more regularly.
  - Most states however, as per the CAG audit report have not formulated any criteria to identify poor children belonging to disadvantaged sections.
  - Neither did these states have conducted any survey to identify such children. As a result, this important objective has remained on paper only.
  - **Doesn't affect the quality of education:**
    - There is a growing section of population which prioritizes quality of education over free meals even at an expense.
    - It shows that a free MDM, by itself, is not a sufficient condition to retain children in school.
    - There is a popular perception that private schools provide a better learning environment.
- **Financial indiscipline:** Cases of financial indiscipline such as furnishing of incorrect utilisation Certificates, misappropriation of funds, fudging of data to claim higher cost of foodgrains are widespread.
- **Inadequate medical check-ups:** Adequate numbers of health check-ups of children were not conducted, in the absence of which the impact of MDM Scheme on the nutritional status and required micronutrient supplements of the children could not be ascertained.

- **Poor quality meals:** Cases of cooking of poor-quality meals in unhygienic conditions, inadequate and poor quality of infrastructure in terms of kitchen sheds and utensils are rampant across all states exposing children to health hazards.
  - Absence of proper kitchen sheds led to cooking being undertaken in class rooms and corridors of schools seriously compromising the quality of education imparted to the children.
- **Provisions for vacations:** Government of India announced that the usual hot-cooked mid-day meal or an equivalent food security allowance/dry ration would be provided to all eligible school-going children even during vacation, to ensure that their immunity and nutrition is not compromised.
- Nearly three months into this decision, States were still struggling to implement this.

### ***What are the impacts of pandemic on food security of child?***

Food security concerns due to pandemic-

- **Loosing school meals-** A real-time monitoring tool estimated that as of April 2020, the peak of school closures, 369 million children globally were losing out on school meals, majority were in India. For children from vulnerable households, their only proper meal is the one they get at school.
- **Inefficiency in policy implementation-** The Government of India announced hot-cooked mid-day meal or dry ration for eligible school-going children even during pandemic. However, States were still struggling to implement this.
  - Dry ration distributions in lieu of school meals were irregular and started only in late May.
  - The offtake of grains under MDMS from FCI during April and May, 2020 was 22%, lower than the corresponding offtake during April and May, 2019.
- Children engaging in labor activity to supplement the fall in family incomes in vulnerable households. There is a risk that some children may not even return to schools when they reopen.

### ***Way Forward***

- **Providing Diverse diet-** Nourishment through a diverse diet that includes fat, protein and micronutrients. For example, recently NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant advocated introducing millets in midday meals to increase the nutritional value.
- Providing fortification of food to address micronutrient malnutrition.
- Increased involvement of private players and self-help groups (SHG). For example, In Mathura, for example, the MDM food contract has been outsourced to an NGO that prepares food for 1.67 lakh children at one place and supplies to 2,077 schools.
- **Local livelihood model** - Linking local smallholder farmers with the mid-day meal system for the supply of cereals, vegetables, and eggs. This will help in -
  - meeting protein and hidden hunger needs,
  - diversifying production and farming systems
  - Transforming rural livelihoods and the local economy.

- Fulfilling the 'Atmanirbhar Poshan'.
- **New Initiatives under MDMS-** School Nutrition (Kitchen) Garden under MDMS to provide fresh vegetables for mid-day meals.
- The Ministry of Human Resource Development has recently released set of guidelines mandating schools to set up a School Nutrition (Kitchen) Garden.
- **Awareness program-** The adequate awareness about of the availability of the scheme related to MDMS is needed for its proper implications.
- The missed mid-day meal entitlement for April-May should be provided to children as **dry ration with retrospective effect**.

### The RCEP Backout

**Syllabus:** *Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.*

**In News:** India's opting out of RCEP appears more debatable in terms of its economic rationale.

#### About RCEP:

It created world's largest trade bloc of 15 countries including the 10 ASEAN members, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

In 2019, India decided to distance itself from the RCEP negotiations.

- **Aim of RCEP:** The pact aims to cover the trade in goods and services, as well as investment, intellectual property and dispute resolution.
- **Purpose:** The purpose of the deal is to create an "integrated market" spanning all 16 countries. This means that it would be easier for the products and services of each of these countries to be available across the entire region.

#### The significance of RCEP:

- **Population:** RCEP members now account for about 30% of the global GDP and a third of the world's population.
- **Timing and development:** The timing of the accord presents a unique opportunity to support economic recovery, inclusive development and job creation. It will help in strengthening regional supply chains.
- **Reducing potential negative impact on economy:** Joining the RCEP is important for India since it is not a part of the other proposed large trade agreements like the trans-pacific partnership (TPP) and transatlantic trade and investment partnership (TTIP).
  - It would enable India to strengthen its trade ties with Australia, China, Japan and South Korea and thus reduce the potential negative impacts of TPP and TTIP on the Indian economy.
- **Market access:** The rise in protectionism, non- tariff barriers, regulatory measures and the deadlock in WTO negotiations are also important reasons for India to join the RCEP agreement as it can increase market access.
  - RCEP will facilitate Indian companies to access new markets. Further, it will give a boost to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

- **Economic status:** RCEP also has the potential to influence India's strategic and economic status in the Asia-Pacific region and help in fulfilment of India's Act East Policy.
- **Removing technical barriers:** RCEP will particularly boost textiles and pharma industries. It will also facilitate India in removing technical barriers to trade like sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures of these products.
- **Low tariff rate-** RCEP countries have agreed to progressively abolish 90% of all tariffs on goods between participating members.
  - The agreement focused on diversifying trading partners, solidifying supply chains, and achieving economic and job growth through a pan-regional trade agreement.

**India's reasons for opting out of RCEP:**

- **Trade Deficit:** In financial year 2019, India registered trade deficit with 11 out of the 16 RCEP countries.
  - India's trade deficit with these countries has almost doubled in the last five-six years i.e. from \$54 billion in 2013-14 to \$105 billion in 2018-19.
  - India's trade deficit with RCEP countries stood at \$105 billion, out of which China alone accounted for \$52 billion.
- **Imports more than exports:** India ships 20 per cent of all its exports to the RCEP countries and receives 35 per cent of all imports from them.
- **Inadequate protection against dumping:** There is concern about the dumping of cheaper goods such as dairy and farm products, and electronic items, especially from China.
- **Demand of market access:** India has also not received any credible assurances on its demand for more market access and its concerns over non-tariff barriers. RCEP participants like China are known to have used non-tariff barriers in the past to prevent India from growing its exports to the country.
- **Country of Origin:** Its concerns on a "possible escape" of rules of origin (the criteria used to determine the national source of a product) were also not addressed.
  - Current provisions in the deal reportedly do not prevent countries from routing, through other countries, products on which India would maintain higher tariffs. This is anticipated to allow countries like China to pump in more products.
- **Concerns of using base year before 2014:** India had sought to safeguard the interests of its domestic industry through measures like seeking a 2014 base year for tariff reductions instead of 2013, when negotiations on RCEP began. As it has raised import duties on several products between 2014 and 2019.
- **Past Experience:** The Niti Aayog, in 2017, had published a report that pointed out that free trade agreements have not worked well for India.
  - It analysed multiple free trade agreements that India signed in the past decade. Among those were FTA with Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Korea.
  - The Niti Aayog found that FTA utilisation by India has been terribly low between 5 and 25 per cent.



- **Concerns in Agricultural Sector:** RCEP will permanently bring down import duties on most agricultural commodities to zero which will lead to countries looking to dump their agricultural produce in India which would lead to a drastic drop in prices.
- **Plantation products like rubber:** Vietnam and Indonesia have very cheap rubber to export.
- **Dairy Sector:** New Zealand is the second largest exporter of milk and milk products. New Zealand's milk producers are more efficient than India's small producers. Both Australia and New Zealand are waiting for a free access to India for their dairy products.
- **Services trade:** India has "long pushed for other countries to allow greater movement of labour and services" in return for opening up its own market. Any agreement on trade in goods without simultaneous agreement on services trade and investment will only harm India's interests.
- **Geopolitical considerations:** India wanted RCEP to exclude most-favored nation (MFN) obligations from the investment chapter, as it did not want to hand out, especially to countries with which it has border disputes (China), the benefits it was giving to strategic allies or for geopolitical reasons.
- **Security considerations:** Closer economic ties under RCEP have the potential to make the countries of the region even more vulnerable to China's economic and political coercion. This could impact India's security interests in Southeast Asia.
- **Impact on Manufacturing:**
  - According to civil society representatives, reduction of import duties to promote global value chain will lead to mass layoffs, low wages and exploitation of labour.
  - Further, Japan and South Korea has asked India to eliminate export restrictions on minerals and raw materials. This may threaten domestic raw material availability for industrialisation and encourage over-mining. Indian experts opine that this would lead to a new form of neo-colonialism.
- **Issues related to Intellectual Property Rights and Health Sector:**
  - There are allegations that Japan and South Korea have been advocating for 'TRIPS Plus' IP protection regimes in the RCEP.
  - The provisions include patent term extensions, seizure of suspected IP-infringing medicines in trans-shipment and damages for patent infringement determined according to the value assessed by the patent owner.
  - A strong IPR regime based on patent term regime and data exclusivity would have hindered India's cheap supply of drugs, specially related to HIV/AIDS to developing countries, especially in Africa.



### The implications of India's decision of opting out

- **Benefits China:** RCEP is a China-backed trade deal, signing it without India will further strengthen China's economic power.
- It will affect India's neighborhood as China already tries to influence the region through its deep pockets.
- **Out of institutionalized orbit:** India remains outside the institutionalized orbit where future discussions, amendments, additions and revisions to RCEP could occur.
- Such discussions and potential rules will facilitate trade not just between the ASEAN and the other five.
- **Losing out on Large Market:** The move could potentially leave India with less scope to tap the large market that RCEP presents.
- **Adaptation is tough:** Positive institutional effects of RCEP must not be underestimated as trade patterns evolve in this region. Indian firms will find it tough to adapt to a regional market.

### The way forward

- **Leave behind the geopolitical differences:** Bury the geopolitical differences with China and prioritise what is collectively seen as a mutually beneficial trading compact.
- For example, among the ASEAN signatories Vietnam and the Philippines, which not only continue to have their share of disputes with Beijing but also suffer significant trade imbalances with Asia's largest economy.
- **Reconsidering the stance:** Acknowledging India's value as a market the RCEP members have left the door open. India should reconsider its stance as RCEP members have also waived a key 18-month cooling period for interested applicants.
- **Embrace openness:** India needs to dispassionately review its position and embrace openness rather than protectionism.
- **Review existing FTAs:** Before signing a trade agreement like RCEP, India should review and assess its existing FTAs in terms of benefits to various stakeholders like agriculture, industry and consumers and also examine changing trade patterns.
- **Mutually reciprocal terms:** RCEP should be signed keeping in mind that the terms are mutually reciprocal and the focus should be on products and services which have the maximum export potential.

### The Island Neighbourhood

**Syllabus:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

**In News:** Recently Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla visited Maldives.

### Significance of India-Maldives bilateral relationships

- **India's Neighborhood First Policy:** India announced a financial assistance package of \$1.4 billion for the Maldives in the form of budgetary support, currency swap agreements and concessional lines of credit to fulfil socio-economic development programmes.

- **Connectivity:** The two nations emphasized connectivity through the establishment of enabling infrastructure that would promote the exchange of goods and services, information, ideas, culture and people.
- **Direct Cargo Ferry Service–** It will be run between India and Maldives.
- **Bilateral relations–** Maldivian students attend educational institutions in India and patients come to India for healthcare, aided by a liberal visa-free regime extended by India.
- **Air Travel Bubble between India and Maldives–** Tourism is the mainstay of Maldivian economy.
  - The travel bubble will facilitate movement of people for employment, tourism and medical emergencies.
  - Maldives is the first neighbouring country of India with which an air bubble is being operationalized.
- **Quotas for Supply of Essential Commodities –** Given the geographical limitations imposed on the Maldives, India has exempted the nation from export curbs on essential commodities.
- **Financial Aid –** At the peak of the continuing COVID-19 disruption, a financial aid of 250 million USD will be provided to Maldives by India.
- **Operation Cactus–** In 1988, in response to a request from the Maldives, India activated Operation Cactus to deploy its military and ensure regime continuity in Male.
- **Disaster management–** The Government of India has provided large-scale assistance to the Maldives in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and during the 2014 Male water crisis.
- **Greater Malé Connectivity Project (GMCP)**
  - A financial package consisting of a grant of 100 million USD and new line of credit of 400 million USD.
  - This will be the **largest civilian infrastructure project in Maldives**, connecting Malé (the capital) with three neighbouring islands – Villingili, Gulhifalhu (**where a port is being built under Indian line of credit**) and Thilafushi (new industrial zone) – by construction of a bridge-and-causeway link.
  - This will boost economic activity, generate employment and promote holistic urban development in the Malé region.

#### Concerns for India–

- **Protests within MDP:** India should be concerned about the protests as well as the occasional rumblings within the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). It may pose serious challenge, especially after Mr. Nasheed sought the removal of certain Ministers-accusing them of corruption.
- **Change in the form of government:** Nasheed has also been pushing for a parliamentary system. There is concern within the government that his move might undermine the President, who is trying to work with the coalition partners.

- **Land grab by China:** There has growing trend of Chinese companies and individuals acquiring land in Maldives. The land grab is seen in excess of what East India Company had acquired during the colonial period in Maldives.
  - This land grab has raised concern of Maldives being increasingly falling into an economic neo-colonial influence of China.
- **Enhanced commercial Chinese presence:** The Maldives has maintained a close relationship with China, especially in financial terms, under its previous government.
  - Maldives signed its first country-specific FTA with China in 2017 and thereby becoming China's 2<sup>nd</sup> FTA in South Asia after Pakistan. It raised concerns that it will deepen the debt trap to China, wherein more than 70% of Maldives' foreign debt is owed to China.
- **Growing radicalization:** There is a growing presence of ISIS/Daesh in Maldives and has been seen with growing influence of Saudi philosophy of Wahhabis.
  - Moreover, due to the continuous defeat of Daesh, these fighters have been returning to Maldives and pose a threat to security of India, Sri Lanka and Maldives.
- **'India Out' campaign:** Main-ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP)'s Parliamentary Group leader has launched an **'India Out' campaign** instigated against India-Maldives relations.
  - It aims to create unrest in the country to divert attention from the many corruption allegations raised against the higher ups of the opposition.

### Indian Ocean Islands Diplomacy

#### Strategic Significance of Indian Ocean

- **Resources:** The region contains 1/3 of the world's population, 25% of its landmass, 40% of the world's oil and gas reserves.
  - Roughly 55 per cent of known oil reserves and 40 per cent of gas reserves are in the Indian Ocean region.
  - The Gulf and Arab states produce around 21 per cent of the world's oil, with daily crude exports of up to 17,262 million barrels representing about 43 per cent of international exports.
- **Net Security provider in the region:** The Indian Ocean lies at the core of India's maritime strategy.
  - India's maritime strategy 2015, titled "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy" reflected New Delhi's willingness to play a larger role in the region and India's intentions to be the net security provider in the region.
- **Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs):** The sea lanes in the Indian Ocean are considered among the most strategically important in the world.
  - More than 80 % of the world's seaborne trade in oil transits through Indian Ocean choke points, with 40 % passing through the Strait of Hormuz, 35 % through the Strait of Malacca and 8 % through the Bab el Mandab Strait.

- **Area of conflict:** The Indian Ocean is an area of conflict.
  - Some conflicts are internal and remain localised, but other local and regional conflicts are of global significance and are prone to foreign political and military interference.
  - Some notable conflict areas are Israel and Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.
- **Evolving strategic developments:** The region is home to continually evolving strategic developments including:
  - The competing rises of China and India,
  - Potential nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan,
  - Islamist terrorism,
  - Growing incidence of piracy in and around the Horn of Africa, and
  - Management of diminishing fishery resources
- **Choke points:** The Indian Ocean has some of the world's most important choke points, notably the Straits of Hormuz, Malacca, and the Bab el Mandeb.
  - As these choke points are strategically important for global trade and energy flow, a number of extra-regional states maintain a naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

#### **Challenges to India in the Indian Ocean Region**

- **Territorial boundary issues:** Pending territorial disputes with China and Pakistan has resulted in hampering India's prospects as a net security provider in the region.
- **The Chinese presence:** China's BRI(Belt and Road Initiative), String of pearls (acquiring ports in Indian ocean) and its debt trap diplomacy has increased India's anxiety about China's growing profile in Indian Ocean.
- **Indigenous defence capabilities:** Capacity of Indian defence industry marred by inefficient production rates hinder the export potential of Indian military equipment. Hence, even while other nations approach India for military hardware, India has limited ability to deliver.
- **Naval Nationalism of China:** China has increased its military activities in the Indian Ocean Region, expanding the range of its navy westward.
  - It has invested in port facilities in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Burma (String of Pearls).
- **Strategic ambivalence:** While its logistics agreements with France and the United States potentially give it access to important ports like Djibouti near the horn of Africa, Reunion Islands near Madagascar, and Diego Garcia in southern Indian Ocean, India continues to practice strategic ambivalence in the Indian Ocean.
  - For instance, India projects its strategy in the IOR as 'inclusive'. But it doesn't define the inclusivity of such a strategy (if it includes China or not).
- **India's ambition-spending gap:** India spends only 15 percent of its total military expenditure on its navy, far lower than its peers in the Quad. China spends nearly three times as much as India on its military overall.



**Steps taken by India**

- **The Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation (IOR-ARC):** IOR-ARC was established in Mauritius in March 1997 and a Charter was adopted.
  - The aim of IOR-ARC is to open the region based on four major components: trade liberalisation, trade and investment facilitation, economic and technical cooperation, and trade and investment dialogue.
  - It does not address defence and security cooperation directly as the aim of 'open and free trade' implies maritime security.
- **SAGAR:** SAGAR enunciated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015.
  - Its objective is to seek a climate of trust and transparency, respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries, sensitivity to each other's interests, peaceful resolution of maritime issues and increase in maritime cooperation.
- **Mission Sagar-II:** Mission Sagar-II, follows the first 'Mission Sagar' undertaken in May-June 2020, wherein India reached out to Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros, and provided food aid and medicines.
  - As part of Mission Sagar-II, Indian Naval Ship Airavat will deliver food aid to Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti and Eritrea.
  - This mission is in line with the Prime Minister's vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region 'SAGAR' and highlights the importance accorded by India to relations with her maritime neighbours.
- **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium:** The 'Indian Ocean Naval Symposium' (IONS) is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues.
- **Maritime diplomacy:** Deployment of **four warships for relief operations** when Mozambique was hit by Cyclone Idai. Indian naval teams played a stellar role in search and rescue operations and even set up medical camps.
- **Logistics Agreement with France and USA:** India got access to important ports like Djibouti near the horn of Africa, Reunion Islands near Madagascar, and Diego Garcia in the southern Indian Ocean.
- **Vanilla Islands:** Recently the Ministry has included the Vanilla islands as part of the IOR (Indian Ocean Region) desk along with Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles.
  - Incorporation of the Vanilla islands reflected the growing strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Islands within the framework of Indo-Pacific(entire neighborhood from the coast of Africa to the U.S. west coast).
- **Securing SLOCs:**
  - **The Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)** has started functioning as an information-sharing hub of maritime data and “curing incident responses” to maritime security situations through a collaborative approach.
  - **Maritime Capability Perspective Plan:** It is a grand regional plan to bolster India's operational capabilities by inducting new warships, submarines, and



aircraft besides enhancing New Delhi's influence in the strategic maritime zones. It aims at a comprehensive enhancement of naval capabilities.

#### Way forward-

- India's increasing geostrategic concerns in the shared seas, taking forward the multifaceted cooperation to the next stage quickly could also be at the focus of Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla's visit.
- The island nations are badly hit due to covid-19, where India shall act as a friend in need:
  - Be the first responder to their calls.
  - Provide security and support to the countries in order to have their support in future.

#### New President New Opportunities

**Syllabus:** *Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.*

**In News:** Impact of Joe Biden's win on ties with India.

#### US-India relations under different administration:

Relations between India and the US have improved substantially over the last 15 years, having been fraught with mistrust and tension during the Cold War.

- **Clinton administration-**
  - The Clinton years witnessed dip in India and the US bilateral relations.
  - India was pressurized to "freeze, rollback and eliminate" its nuclear programme and to settle Kashmir dispute with Pakistan.
- **Bush administration-**
  - George W Bush ensured the success of the nuclear deal between India and the United States. The agreement mainstreamed India's nuclear programme.
  - Bush administration depended on Pakistani cooperation for its war in Afghanistan, and India's importance was mostly as a lever to pressure Pakistan.
  - **Progresses in trade** – USA-India trade was close to \$40 billion.
- **Singh-Obama administration-**
  - **Surge in Trade**– Between 2009 and 2014, U.S.-India trade nearly doubled.
  - **Supported India**– For permanent membership of the UN Security Council and the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
  - **Military ties**– strengthened military to military ties in the Indo-Pacific region.
  - Promoted Indian engagement in Afghanistan and opening to Central Asia, encouraged the European Union to engage more closely with India.
  - **Flexible tie-ups**- The foreign policy initiatives of US such as the Trans Pacific pact (mainly with East Asian and Pacific countries), Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA, a nuclear deal between Iran and Permanent Member States of the United Nations), the US supported Agreement on Climate Change (Paris Convention) gave India enough scope for flexible strategic tie-ups, trade, improved relations with

friendly states like Iran, while building linkages on non-traditional security issues such as climate change.

- **Trump-Modi administration-**

- **Trade:** Trade grew at the slowest rate than in the preceding five years. Moreover, Trump administration terminated India's designation as a preferential trade status under the Generalized System of Preference (GSP) trade programme.
  - However, The Trump Administration has elevated the US relationship with India and solidified partnership in ways not seen in any other US administration.
  - **Indo-Pacific strategy:** Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy prioritises closer cooperation between the United States and India to secure a free, open, inclusive, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.
- **Military ties:** The United States has become the second-largest arms supplier to India, growing from virtually no arms sales a decade ago to more than \$20 billion.
  - The president has enabled India to become the first non-treaty ally to be offered an armed MQ-9 Unmanned Aerial System.
  - The state visit to India by Trump in February 2020 was symbolic of this enhanced bilateral relationship and the importance of defence cooperation within it.
  - **Pandemic days:** As global leaders with vibrant democracies, the United States and India have cooperated to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - US and Indian pharmaceutical companies have collaborated to expand global supplies of critical medicines and are cooperating on vaccine development.

#### **Present challenges to India under Biden's presidency**

- **Environmental:** India's environmental policies will be closely monitored and discussed world over.
  - For example, the restrictions removed in mining of forests or on land use in the natural forests of Kashmir may attract criticism.
- **Minority rights:** Biden presidency is very sensitive to minority rights as constitutionally proclaimed.
  - For example, Vice President-elect Kamala Harris has already commented on Kashmir issue.
- **Global trade:** Biden presidency will pursue the objective of strengthening multilateral accords and WTO rules with more diplomatic pressure.
  - For example, our government had already given up the food security and livelihood clauses as preconditions for discussing "other issues", basically tariff reduction.
- **On Civil rights and democracy:** This is a major concern for the Indian government, which has got support from the Trump administration on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir. Also, Biden co-associates have been particularly vocal in several issues against Indian administration.

- For example, Jammu-Kashmir issue, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, communal and caste-based violence, actions against non-governmental organizations and media freedoms.
- **India not high on Biden-Harris priority list**– Biden-Harris list of priorities includes:
  - Dealing with COVID-19.
  - Healing domestic divides.
- **Indian government's support to Trump's campaign:** Prime Minister voiced his support for US President Donald Trump at the mega event of 'Howdy, Modi' in Houston. It can affect India's position globally.

#### **Opportunities in Biden win**

- **Economic Relations:** Under Biden administration, India's trade with the US could recover from the dip since 2017-18.
- **Trade Surplus:** A recent analysis by experts of CARE Ratings (a credit rating agency) shows that over the past 20 years, India has always had a trade surplus (exports exceeding imports) with the US.
  - The trade surplus has widened from USD 5.2 billion in 2001-02 to USD 17.3 billion in 2019-20. Trade surplus had peaked at USD 21.2 billion in 2017-18 and has moderated to some extent.
  - In 2019-20, India exported goods worth USD 53 billion to the US - that's roughly 17% of all Indian exports that year and imported goods worth USD 35.7 billion in return - that's roughly 7.5% of all Indian imports.
- **Trade in Services:** India accounts for nearly 5% of USA's services imports from the World.
- **Increase in Investment:** The US is the fifth-biggest source for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI - investment in the physical assets inside India) into India.
  - Only Mauritius, Singapore, Netherlands, and Japan have invested more FDI since 2000.
  - The US also accounts for one-third of all Foreign Portfolio Investments (that is, investment in financial assets) into India.
- **H1-B Visa Issue:** How a US President looks at the H1-B visa issue, affects the prospects of Indian youth far more than the youth of any other country.
- **Less protectionism:** Under President Trump, who severely curtailed the visa regime, owing to his policy of "America First", India had suffered the most.
- H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows American companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.
- **Role of India diaspora:** In order to connect with Indian populace in the US, the Democratic Party's candidate Joe Biden's campaign team announced the launch of its massive outreach programme in 14 languages, acknowledging the linguistic diversity of the ethnic community.
- **US' Generalized System of Preference:** India's exclusion from the US' Generalized System of Preference (GSP) could come up for reconsideration under Biden.

- In 2019, President Donald Trump had terminated India's designation as a beneficiary developing nation under the GSP trade programme after determining that it has not assured the US that it will provide "equitable and reasonable access" to its markets.
- India was the largest beneficiary of the programme in 2017 with USD 5.7 billion in imports to the US given duty-free status.
- GSP is designed to promote economic development by allowing duty-free entry for thousands of products from designated beneficiary countries.
- **Data localisation:** The tricky issue of data localisation or capping prices of medicines and medical devices - have a chance of getting towards a resolution.
- **USA-Iran relations:** under the Trump administration, the US sanctions on Iran severely limited India's sourcing of cheap crude oil.
- **Countering china:** On China, it is more likely that a Biden administration will help India against China, instead of clubbing the two together.
- **Paris Climate Accord:** Biden has promised to rejoin the Paris Climate Accord, and this may help countries such as India in dealing with the massive challenges - both technical and financial - on this front.

#### **Foreign policy changes expected:**

##### **On Afghan policy:**

- In September 2009, Joseph Biden who was the then vice president of Obama's administration was tasked with building an alternative plan to Afghanistan, to present to U.S. Generals who were pushing for influx of up to 400,000 troops to win the war in Afghanistan.
- Biden suggested that, the U.S. need not send more troops, instead it needed to pull out, and focus on a five-point agenda for what he called "Counter-terrorism Plus".

##### **On Relation with Pakistan:**

- Biden will favour a policy of engagement with Pakistan in order to deal with the Taliban.
- Also, Biden Pakistan relation is expected to be in good will as Pakistan has accorded him with one of its highest civilian honours, the Hilal-e-Pakistan.

##### **On U.S. policy with India:**

- Biden and Mr. Trump foreign policy may not differ as much. For example, both favoured exiting troops from the Afghan base. For India, this would mean the continuity over the U.S. policy with India, during Biden's tenure.
- It is also likely that Mr. Biden will build on the military foundational agreements with India, strengthen military cooperation and push the sale of U.S. military hardware

##### **On Indo Pacific:**

- Though Mr. Trump owned the Indo-Pacific policy, the policy owes its origins to the Obama-Biden administration that first focused on "Asia-Pacific" through "**Pivot to Asia**" in order to build a coalition to counter Chinese inroads in the region. Also, Biden's presidency could also start a new chapter for the QUAD.

**How India needs to recalibrate its strategy?**

- **Environment:** Need to emphasise for a progressive stand at the Paris negotiations.
  - Need for more sensitive implementation of environmental laws by resisting pressure from corporate interests.
  - The rights of Adivasis habitation, livelihood, spiritual affiliation with trees and the jungle will need greater attention.
- **Minority rights:** Strict adherence to the rule of law and more reforms for the development of inclusive society
- **Trade:** Need to push for reconsidering GSP preference and India should resist diplomatic pressure by sticking to its common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR) principle
- **Diaspora:** The Indian diaspora in the US is one of the most successful expatriate communities and there is need of a closer bonding between their janmabhoomi or pitrabhoomi and their karmabhoomi.

**Way Forward**

- A Biden presidency may see a renewed push towards a **rules-based trading system** across the world instead of outright ad-hocism as was the case under Trump.
- India is not in a position to balance China on its own, and balancing (soft and hard: economic, diplomatic and military) would demand building a coalition with the US and other “like-minded” states.

**GENERAL STUDIES 3****Distributed Development**

**Syllabus:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

**In News:** Impact of Andhra Pradesh decentralization and inclusive development of all regions bill, 2020.

**Distributed development:** The essence of the ‘distributed development’ concept is to make deliberate efforts to spatially deconcentrate executive power, driven by region-specific economic activities.

**The Andhra Pradesh Decentralization and Inclusive Development of All Regions Bill, 2020**

- **Objective:** It is an act of Andhra Pradesh Legislature containing provisions relating to the decentralization of governance in the state of Andhra Pradesh so that establishments for additional two capitals can be made at any place outside Amaravati.
- **This law paves the way for three capitals for the state:**
  - Amaravati– legislative capital.
  - Visakhapatnam– executive capital.
  - Kurnool– judicial capital.



**Is it new for India?**

- In Rajasthan, the high court is located in Jodhpur, and not in the capital city of Jaipur.
- Maharashtra has summer (Mumbai) and winter capitals (Nagpur).
- Himachal Pradesh has capitals at Shimla and Dharamashala, while the former state of Jammu and Kashmir had Srinagar and Jammu as capitals.
- Uttarakhand has Gairsain and Dehradun as capitals and judicial seat at Nainital.

**At global level:**

- Bolivia: It has Sucre and La Paz as capitals.
- Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya.

**Why three capitals - To have a decentralised growth Origin of Three Capital Concept?**

1. **K.C. Sivaramakrishnan (KCS) Committee:** It was constituted as a result of Andhra Pradesh's split which in turn was caused by claims of regional imbalance in development. It said the state should see decentralised development, and that one mega capital city was not desirable.
2. **The Justice B N Srikrishna Committee:** It was set up to look into the demand for a Telangana state, said Rayalaseema and North Coastal Andhra were economically the most backward, and the "concentration of development efforts in Hyderabad is the key reason for demand of separate states".

**Arguments in favour of the law**

- **Equitable development:** Three capitals would ensure equitable development of different regions of the state.
  - Secretariat in Vizag can help in the development of regions like Vizianagaram and Srikakulam, which consists most of the tribal and rural areas and are the most backward regions of the state.
  - This may bring health and educational access to the region and may prevent Uddanam like incidents, where several people are suffering from chronic kidney disease.
  - Kurnool having a high court as it is the most backward region when compared with coastal Andhra and Telangana with Hyderabad.
- **Promote Decentralisation:** Decentralisation has been the central theme in recommendations of all major committees that were set up to suggest a suitable location for the capital of Andhra Pradesh.
- **Prevailing practice:** The multiple capital idea is not new and it has been a prevailing practice in countries like South Africa, Brazil, Australia and Bolivia and even in some states in India.
- **Increase Urbanisation:** it would be a boost to urbanisation and then economic development as three new cities will be developed. In India, cities contribute anywhere between 59% and 70% of the GDP.

**Arguments against the law:**

- **Separation of executive and legislative capital:** In the Parliamentary system of government, which has been adopted in India, functions of the executive and the legislature are closely connected.

- For example, a policy or a bill is made by the cabinet in Secretariat in Vizag and the bill has to be passed in the legislature in Amaravati and if any conflict arises it has to be given judgment in the high court situated in Kurnool.
- It will result in the traveling cost not only for the public authorities but also for a common person.
- For example, a person in Kurnool has to travel about 700 km to get work done in Secretariat in Vizag.
- **Logistics issues:** The development of a region can be done through policy interventions like industrial policy. However, separating the capitals can be against the convenience of the administration as well as the people.
  - It will be logistically difficult to implement coordination between seats of legislature and executive in separate cities.
  - It will lead to an unnecessary drain of resources for the state given that the ministers who perform both executive and legislative functions will need to constantly move between the two capitals at the expense of the state resources.
- **Strengthening the local bodies:** If the government's goal is to decentralize development, the best way possible is the financial strengthening of the local bodies by granting them more money to execute their functions in the eleventh and twelfth schedule of the Indian constitution.
  - This not only results in the development of even remote areas but also improve governance, as it increases the participation of common people in the development process.
- **Issue of Land acquisition:** People mostly farmers of 29 villages, gave their farmland in previously selected Amaravati region, to the previous government in land pooling. Now they feel cheated after backing out of the previously proposed single capital.
  - This may result in people from other regions being sceptical of the government's promises in the future, making it very difficult in the land attainment or pooling for any development process.
- **Spike in real estate prices:** Its immediate effect would mostly be an artificial spike in real estate prices in the two new proposed capital regions, and land sharks would move people from their land before the state turns up with offers.
- **Hamper administrative efficiency** - Executive capital Visakhapatnam is 700 km from judicial capital Kurnool, and 400 km from legislative capital Amaravati. The Amaravati-Kurnool distance is 370 km.
- **Infrastructure requirements:** It will need constructing new buildings in the new capitals.
- **Environmental impact:** Unrestrained real estate interests can co-opt local State institutions and sabotage environmental interests.



**Steps to be taken**

- **Focus on well-developed infrastructural network linking the growth centres:** Andhra Pradesh can learn from Maharashtra's experience of running winter sessions in Nagpur, aimed essentially at calming regional sentiments.
- **Infrastructural network:** Success of distributed development depends on a well-developed infrastructural network linking the growth centres.
  - Andhra Pradesh lacks these linkages now, and sooner the State focuses on these preconditions the better for it. Eg Chennai-Visakhapatnam Industrial Corridor needs to be developed.
- **Focus on infrastructure development within cities:** The proposed growth centres will experience much stress.
  - The basis for selection of capitals cannot be just the availability of land and built-up area, but also the ability to cope with an intense development also need to be taken into account.
- **Weak institutions cannot regulate growth:** The KCS committee warns about the environmental impact of such intensification and densification in cities, with a special reference to Visakhapatnam.
  - The ongoing processes of preparing the Master Plan and Strategic Plan for the Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region is an opportunity to address these challenges.
- **People should question the expenditure:** People should be empowered to question the government if the later takes the decision to implement huge capital expenditure which might not be financially prudent.
  - People should have the right to question the expenditure of the tax payer's money.
- **Empowering the local governments:** Decentralization in the State should take place by empowering the local governments i.e. the Panchayats and Municipal Corporations which were constituted after the enactment of the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act.
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**Parliament VS State: Who has the power to decide?**

- Article 2 and Article 3 of the Constitution of India confer exclusive powers upon Parliament to form or establish or completely alter and destroy the identity of the existing state.
- It is within the exclusive domain of Parliament to form any state, set boundaries, and name a state in the Union as defined in Article 1 of the Constitution.
- The power to establish a state's capital is inherent to, and inseparable from, the power conferred upon Parliament under Articles, 2, 3 and 4 of the Constitution of India.
- The matter of establishing the capital of a new state formed by Parliament by law is not covered by any Entry in List-II of the Schedule-VII of the Constitution.
- It is specifically because the capital of a state shall foster the needs of all sections of the society of the state without any political discrimination as to the development of a particular region of such a state.
- Therefore, only the Indian Parliament can, by law, establish the capital of a newly reconstituted state, which after reconstitution and reorganization by enacting a law, under Article 3(a)(c)(d) of the Constitution.
- The current proposal of three capitals in the state has not received the consent of the central government.

- **Development through policy interventions:** The development of the region can be brought by
  - Making an investment in the manufacturing and service sectors;
  - Bringing different policies benefiting the farmers and ease of doing business;
  - Development of the infrastructure;
  - Development of the social-cultural institutions such as universities, hospitals, etc.

**Way forward**

- The success of distributed development depends on a well-developed infrastructural network linking the growth centers.
- The ongoing processes of preparing the Master Plan and Strategic Plan for the Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region are an opportunity to address environmental challenges.
- The bill is thin in details but offers hope in its broad contours of pursuing inclusive development through Zonal Planning and Development Boards.

**Debunking the Present FTAs**

**Syllabus:** Effects of liberalization on the economy.

**Why in News?**

Recently, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was finally signed with participation of 15 members including 10 ASEAN member countries and Australia, China, Korea, Japan and New Zealand, after over a decade of negotiations.

**Free Trade Agreements**

- **Definition:** FTAs are arrangements between two or more countries or trading blocs that primarily agree to reduce or eliminate customs tariff and non-tariff barriers on substantial trade between them.
- **Increasing FTAs:** The last two decades have witnessed a spurt in Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) around the world. India has been no exception to this trend.
- **Significance for India:**
  - As of 2019, India had 16 such agreements in force. Various studies have convincingly illustrated that from a market access perspective, India has not gained from its FTAs.
  - Although India's overall trade in goods has grown with FTA partner countries, the increase in imports has outweighed that in exports, causing the bilateral trade balance to deteriorate with FTA partners.

#### Types of FTAs:

- **Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA):** In a PTA, two or more partners agree to reduce tariffs on agreed number of tariff lines. The list of products on which the partners agree to reduce duty is called positive list. India MERCOSUR PTA is such an example. However, in general, PTAs do not cover all trade.
- **Free Trade Agreement (FTA):** A free trade agreement is a pact between two or more nations to reduce barriers to imports and exports among them. Under a free trade policy, goods and services can be bought and sold across international borders with little or no government tariffs, quotas, subsidies, or prohibitions to inhibit their exchange.
- **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) and Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):** These terms describe agreements which consist of an integrated package on goods, services and investment along with other areas including IPR, competition etc. The India Korea CEPA is one such example and it covers a broad range of other areas like trade facilitation and customs cooperation, investment, competition, IPR etc.
- **Custom Union:** In a Customs union, partner countries may decide to trade at zero duty among themselves, however they maintain common tariffs against rest of the world. An example is Southern African Customs Union (SACU) amongst South Africa, Lesotho, Namibia, Botswana and Swaziland. European Union is also an outstanding example.
- **Common Market:** Integration provided by a Common market is one step deeper than that by a Customs Union. A common market is a Customs Union with provisions to facilitate free movements of labour and capital, harmonize technical standards across members etc. European Common Market is an example.
- **Economic Union:** Economic Union is a Common Market extended through further harmonization of fiscal/monetary policies and shared executive, judicial & legislative institutions. European Union (EU) is an example.



**Benefits of Free Trade Agreement (FTA):**

- **Market Access:** By eliminating tariffs and some non-tariff barriers FTA partners get easier market access into one another's markets.
- **Preferential treatment for exports:** Exporters prefer FTAs to multilateral trade liberalization because they get preferential treatment over non-FTA member country competitors.
  - For example, ASEAN has an FTA with India but not with Canada. ASEAN's custom duty on leather shoes is 20% but under the FTA with India it reduced duties to zero. Now assuming other costs being equal, an Indian exporter, because of this duty preference, will be more competitive than a Canadian exporter of shoes.
  - Secondly, FTAs may also protect local exporters from losing out to foreign companies that might receive preferential treatment under other FTAs.
- **Increased Investment:** Possibility of increased foreign investment from outside the FTA partners.
- **Growth of manufacturing sector:** The Economic Survey for 2019-20 has pointed out that generally FTAs have been beneficial for India.
  - Between 1993 and 2018, India's exports of manufactured products grew at an annual average of 13.4% to partners with which it has trade agreements and such imports grew 12.7%, it says.
  - In comparison, its overall goods exports grew at an average of 10.9% and imports 8.6% during this period.

**Assessment of India's FTA with ASEAN, Japan, Korea, Sri Lanka**

- Bilateral trade increased post signing of all the above FTAs
- Imports from these FTA partners into India increased more than India's exports to partner countries post signing of FTAs
- As imports from Korea, Japan and ASEAN have shot up after the respective agreements came into force, India's trade deficit with these countries has increased since then. Only exports to Sri Lanka have increased much more than imports into India from Sri Lanka.
- Overall trade deficit with ASEAN, Korea and Japan doubled from FY11 to FY17.
- Quality of trade has also deteriorated under India ASEAN FTA.
- The analysis shows that trade balance has worsened (deficit increased or surplus reduced) for 13 out of 21 sectors. Sectors where trade deficit has worsened account for approximately 75% of India's exports to ASEAN.

**Free Trade Agreements: not a guarantee of economic growth**

- **Limited market access gains:** India's market share has remained relatively low and stagnant and has even declined in some cases, suggesting that these FTAs have been of limited use. These FTAs are not sufficient in themselves to deliver market access gains.
- **Design and implementation of the agreements:** Utilisation rates for India's FTAs are low, due to the following reasons:
  - A failure to disseminate information especially to MSMEs,

- Low preference margins for high export potential goods,
- Placement of export potential items under the sensitive list, and
- Shortcoming in the architecture of India's FTAs is the avenue of discretionary power of officials in judging tariff concession claims which add to transaction costs.
- High compliance costs, all of which undermine the value of the FTAs.
- **Supply side constraints:** The more important reason is India's own supply side constraints and bottlenecks, i.e., it's difficult regulatory environment, poor logistics quality, inadequate and inefficient trade infrastructure, and high transactions costs, among others, all of which hurt export competitiveness.
  - To become a significant partner in global value chain system, it is required to have efficient ports, customs, shipping, roads and a regulatory compliance infrastructure.
  - It also requires harmonization of product and quality standards. For example, despite FTAs with ASEAN, Japan and South Korea, India has a weak presence in the electronics, machinery or apparels value chains.
- **Low exports to FTA countries:** India's exports to FTA countries have not outperformed overall export growth or exports to rest of the world. for example, in 2005, 98% of Sri Lankan exports availed the FTA route. This has declined to about 50% in recent years. On the other hand, only 13% of India's exports are routed through FTA.
  - FTAs have had a bigger impact on metals on the importing side and textiles on the exporting side.
  - Utilisation rate of FTAs by exporters in India is very low (between 5 and 25%).

**Impact on Exports:** India has FTAs with ASEAN, Japan and South Korea. India also has a small PTA with China. Three-fourth of the bilateral trade of India already happen zero duty.

- Mere signing of an FTA doesn't guarantee an increase in exports. If import duty in a partner country is high, there is likelihood of an increase in exports by 10% when this duty becomes zero. But if the import duty is already low at 1-3%, the chances are very low. In this regard, signing the FTA with Singapore and Hong Kong is of no use.
- India's exports to FTA countries has not outperformed overall export growth or exports to rest of the world.
- FTAs have led to increased imports and exports, although the former has been greater • India's trade deficit with ASEAN, Korea and Japan has widened post-FTAs
- A 10% percent reduction in FTA tariffs for metals increases imports by 1.4 %.
- India's exports are much more responsive to income changes as compared to price changes and thus a tariff reduction/elimination does not boost exports significantly.
- Regional trade agreements (RTAs) have become increasingly prevalent since the early 1990s. RTAs cover more than half of international trade and operate alongside global multilateral agreements under the World Trade Organization (WTO). However, utilisation rate of RTAs by exporters in India is very low (between 5 and 25%).
- As per NITI ayog, Since 2006 (India has signed most of its RTAs after 2006), India's exports to RTA partners increased by 13% y-o-y. The trend to non-partner countries was no different with exports increasing at the same pace.

- **Existence of non-tariff barriers:** Japan reduced duty from 10% to zero for Indian apparels through an FTA in 2011. But even after the FTA, India's apparel export to Japan reduced from \$255 million in 2010 to \$152 million in 2018. This is primarily because of non-tariff barriers. Some of the non-tariff measures are:
  - Custom procedures
  - Import licencing procedures
  - Trade documentation
  - Pre-shipment inspections
  - special sourcing requirements

### Way Forward

- **Negotiations:** India need to negotiate new FTAs and renegotiate existing FTAs with a focus on extending preference margins and securing market access in tariff lines with high export potential, on opening up markets for high value-added manufacturing, lowering compliance burden, and increasing regulatory cooperation with its partners.
- **Review:** Review and assess existing FTAs in terms of benefits to various stakeholders and changing trade patterns, before signing new ones.
- **Trade policy reforms:** It must complement its FTAs with trade policy reforms and measures which help diversify its export basket, reduce transactions costs, improve logistics and develop its export capacity and quality.
- **Reduce compliance:** It is important to reduce compliance cost and administrative delays is extremely critical to increase utilisation rate of FTAs.
- **Maintain standards:** Proper safety and quality standards should be set to avoid dumping of lower quality hazardous goods into the Indian market. Circumvention of rules of origin should be strictly dealt with by the authorities.
- **Firm-level competitiveness:** FTAs can ensure market access to only the **right quality products** made at competitive prices. Improvement in firm-level competitiveness is a must. The government can help by ensuring lower duties on raw materials and intermediates than on the concerned finished products.
- An FTA's possible impact on the economy or exports is subject to many caveats. India ranks higher than the US, Japan and China in the trade openness ratio. The ratio is the sum of all the imports and exports as % of GDP. India ranks 43 is more open than US (27), Japan (35) and China (38).

### A Digital Way of Life

**Syllabus:** *Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.*

**In News:** "Digital India is now a way of life. Technology First is our governance model." - Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

### State of digital infrastructure in India

- **Internet Usage:** According to the Internet Trends 2017 report, 27 per cent of India's population (355 million users) uses the internet. While this represents exponential growth compared to the 4 per cent penetration in 2009, there is scope for improvement.

- **Tele-density:** Tele-density, or the number of telephone connections for every 100 individuals is 83. In rural areas, the tele-density is one-third that of urban areas.

### Government Initiatives

National Informatics Centre, an attached office of Ministry of Electronics & IT, has been closely working with government in provisioning state of the art infrastructure. There have been various initiatives taken by government to give a boost to Digital India:

- **National Digital Communication Policy, 2018**
  - Broadband for all
  - Creating 4 million additional jobs in Digital Communications sector
  - Enhancing contribution of the digital communication sector to 8% of India's GDP from 6% in 2017.
  - Propelling India to Top 50 Nations in the ICT Development Index of ITU from 134 in 2017.
  - Establish a comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals and facilitates India's effective participation in the global digital economy.
  - Enhancing India's contribution to Global Value Chains
  - Ensuring Digital Sovereignty
- **National Broadband Mission:** Universal and equitable access to broadband services across the country, especially in rural and remote areas.
- **BharatNet:** Providing high-speed broadband to all the panchayats in the country.
- **Public Internet Access Programme:** Make 2,50,000 common service centres (CSCs) operational at the gram panchayat level to deliver government services online
- **NICNET** - The pan India communication network for exclusive use of government has continuously evolved since 1980s.
  - Today it connects government offices across the length and breadth of India.
  - NICNET is at the base of all government communications right from Government to Government, Government to Citizen as well as Government to Business communication.
- **National Knowledge Network (NKN):** is another important initiative which provides multigigabit nationwide network connected through 10G backbone.
  - It also extends high-speed connectivity to leading research and academic institutions of the country.
  - NKN is steadily evolving as the national education research network (NREN) of India.
- **Data centres:** National Informatics Centre (NIC) has established large data centres at Delhi, Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar and Pune.
  - Mini data centres are also operational in all NIC state centres to cater to the state level.
  - Hosting support is being provided from Data Centers and National Cloud for approximately 10,000 various critical e-governance projects, viz. E-procurement,



Public Financial Monitoring System (CPSMS), e-Lekha, e-panchayat, Aadhaar Enabled Biometric Attendance System (AEBAS), etc.

- **Command and Control Centre:** There was a need to setup a specialized centre to provide nationwide view for ICT infrastructure for effective monitoring and management and also to ensure availability of all critical services.
  - Command and Control Centre have been set up at NIC Headquarters which has increased the agility of NIC's ICT infrastructure.
- **Public Finance Management System (PFMS)** electronically interfaces with all banks and gives a holistic view of the overall flow of funds in the Government. It eliminates delay and increases transparency.
- **Citizen centric measures:** Some of the key initiatives are:
  - Direct Benefit Transfer:
    - Enables transfer of government benefits directly to the bank account of beneficiaries.
  - DIGI Locker:
    - Enables paperless governance by providing private space on public cloud to citizens for storing their public and private documents.
  - UMANG app:
    - Provides one mobile app for availing government services through backend integration with several government applications
- **National Cloud (MeghRaj):** Govt of India initiated a Government Cloud initiative titled "MeghRaj" in 2014.
  - Setting up a secured cloud infrastructure has reduced considerable amount of time in provisioning of digital infrastructure.

#### **Advantages:**

- **Enhancing digital infrastructure:** Soft and hard digital infrastructure such as network and cloud computing, fibre optic cables, mobile network penetration and regulatory framework including digital standards, are critical for enhancing connectivity and, more generally, promoting economic development.
- **Digital empowerment:** In the long term, digital connectivity will be important in empowering citizens by enhancing engagement, knowledge sharing, collaboration and providing opportunities for participative governance.
- **Economic potential:** Digital connectivity facilitates the communication and commerce that drives economic growth.
  - Individuals cannot transfer payments digitally, use e-governance portals to connect with the government, access information or make online purchases without continuous and reliable Internet or telephone access.
- **Increase efficiency:** Digital provision of services for individuals and firms will help reduce transaction costs. Electronic databases and online applications for government departments will increase efficiency, automation and transparency.
- **Development of WiFi networks:** Wi-Fi networks often offer a more affordable and flexible option than mobile Internet or broadband services for scaling up Internet access.



- From the perspective of an Internet Service Provider (ISP), Wi-Fi technology uses unlicensed spectrums, requires relatively cheap and readily available equipment, allows the offloading of mobile traffic and involves lower maintenance and operational costs.
- The lower production costs imply lower costs for the end-consumer.
- **Increase in digitization:** The Digital India scheme launched in 2015 brought the topic of digitization to the forefront of public discourse.
  - Areas including construction of broadband highways, public internet access, e-governance and development of basic information technology skills, etc., have achieved considerable progress under this programme.

### Challenges

With the increasing role of technology in our daily lives and the growing significance of Industry 4.0, India can only unlock its true potential once digital connectivity, the basic building block for most technological solutions, reaches the last mile. The constraints that need to be addressed to unleash the full benefits of digital connectivity in India fall under the following areas:

- **Broadband connectivity:** The current definition of broadband of 512 kbps speed is inadequate and not in line with the expected rise in demand in the future.
- **Issues in present network:** Existing networks have been strained by limited spectrum availability and usage, quality and reliability, outages, call drops and weak signals.
- **Availability of e-services:** A large number of e-services are not available on the digital platform and there is wide variation across states in the availability of citizen e-services.
- **No end-to-end solutions:** E-services often do not provide end-to-end solutions. Despite forms being available online, customers may still need to submit printed documents as hard copies or in-person.
- **Lack of last mile connectivity:** Currently, citizens have to physically visit government offices to access most government-to-citizen (G2C) services, as municipalities and other government bodies have been slow to digitize their processes.
- **Low vernacular content:** Interfaces may not be available in vernacular languages. The absence of websites and portals in local and vernacular languages limits adoption.
- **Limited scale of technology:** Technologies are limited in scale in terms of infrastructure and adoption by public authorities.
  - Approximately one million digital lockers, which provide shareable private spaces to store and access documents in the public cloud, exist presently.
  - Further, a relatively small number of public authorities are issuing documents in these lockers.
  - The number of eSign users and providers also remain limited.
- **Digital access and literacy:** A significant portion of our population does not have access to devices such as laptops, computers, smartphones, etc.
  - As per NITI Aayog strategy document, digital literacy in India is estimated to be less than 10 per cent of the population.

### Way Forward

- **Digital literacy:** Digital literacy needs special focus at the school/college levels.

- The **National Digital Literacy Mission** should focus on introducing digital literacy at the primary school level in all government schools for basic content and in higher classes and colleges for advanced content.
- The multiplier effects of this mission will be realized when these students in turn educate their family members.
- Higher digital literacy will also increase the adoption of computer hardware across the country.
- **Healthy competition:** Keeping regulatory barriers to the minimum necessary would lead to healthy competition in the mobile sector driving down the costs of devices and data plans.
- **Last mile connectivity:** An enabling digital infrastructure, such as reliable and continuous access to electricity, increase mobile network penetration and improved access to mobile devices and data plans by lowering costs would ensure last mile connectivity.
- **Innovation in Digital Sector**
  - Attracting investments of \$100 billion in the Digital Communications Sector
  - Creation of Innovation led Start-ups in Digital Communications Sector
  - Accelerate transition to Industry 4.0.
- **Cybersecurity:** MeitY will need to evolve a comprehensive cyber security framework for data security, safe digital transactions and complaint redressal.
  - The National e-governance Division of MeitY should periodically audit compliance of e-services offered by state governments.
  - It should bring out a performance report of e-services with a view to improve service delivery.
- **Vernacular content:** State governments should pay special attention to creating content, particularly those relating to government e-services, in Indian regional languages.
  - To fulfil the vision of making all government's online services available in all 22 official languages, there needs to be focused collaboration between the Centre, States and researchers to promote Natural Language Processing (NLP) in Indian languages.
- **Boost Electronics Manufacturing:** To reduce the import of electronic Goods and ensure digital sovereignty.
- **Quality of service:** Adequate spectrum availability is critical to ensure service quality.
  - Efficient spectrum allocation in large contiguous blocks should be explored.
  - Migration to new technologies would resolve some of the bandwidth challenges.

If self-reliance is the stated goal of India then India must focus on a clear road map and policy Implementation to indigenize technology as it did successfully in space and nuclear science.

### Telecom Sector: An Overview

**Syllabus: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.**

**In News:** Recently, the Supreme Court allowed the Centre's plea to recover Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) of about Rs 92,000 crores from the telecom service providers.

**More on news:**

- A three-judge bench has upheld the definition of AGR formulated by the Department of Telecommunications.
- The bench made it clear that there would be no further litigation on the issue and it would fix a time frame for calculation and payment of dues by the telecom companies.
- In July, the Centre had told the apex court that leading private telecom firms like Bharti Airtel, Vodafone and state-owned MTNL and BSNL have pending licence fee outstanding of over Rs 92,000 crores till date.

**Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR)**

- It is the usage and licensing fee that telecom operators are charged by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT).
- It is divided into spectrum usage charges and licensing fees, pegged between 3-5 percent and 8 percent respectively.
- As per DoT, the charges are calculated based on all revenues earned by a telco – including non-telecom related sources such as deposit interests and asset sales.
- Telcos, on their part, insist that AGR should comprise only the revenues generated from telecom services.

**What's the issue now?**

- In 2005, Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) challenged the government's definition for AGR calculation.
- In 2015, the TDSAT (Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal) stayed the case in favour of telecom companies and held that AGR includes all receipts except capital receipts and revenue from non-core sources such as rent, profit on the sale of fixed assets, dividend, interest and miscellaneous income.
- However, setting aside TDSAT's order, the Supreme Court in 2019 upheld the definition of AGR as stipulated by the DoT.

**State of Telecom sector in India:**

- The telecom market can be split into three segments – **wireless, wireline and internet services**.
- The wireless market comprises 98.1% of the total subscriber base. India's telephone subscriber base has expanded at a CAGR of 19.6%,
- India is the **world's second-largest telecommunications** market, with around 1.2 billion subscribers as of September 2018.
- **Tele density:** In rural areas, the tele density is far lower (56.9%) than that in urban India (171.1%).
- **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** cap in the telecom sector has been increased to 100% from 74%.

- **Investment needed:** Recently, Jio has stopped investing in capital expenditure (CapEx) but India still needs investment of at least Rs 7 lakh crores more for better 4G accessibility.

#### **Cellular Operators Association of India**

- It was constituted in 1995 as a registered, non-governmental society.
- It is dedicated to the advancement of modern communication through the establishment of world-class mobile infrastructure, products and services and to deliver the benefits of innovative and affordable mobile communication services to the people of India.
- Bharti Airtel Ltd., Vodafone India Ltd., Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd. are few of the core members.

#### **TRAI:**

- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) is a statutory body set up by the Government of India under section 3 of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act, 1997.
- It is the regulator of the telecommunications sector in India.
- It consists of a Chairperson and not more than two full-time members and not more than two part-time members.
- The TRAI Act was amended by an ordinance in 2000, establishing a Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) to take over the adjudicatory and disputes functions from TRAI.
- TRAI's mission is to create and nurture conditions for growth of telecommunications in India to enable the country to have a leading role in the emerging global information society.
- One of its main objectives is to provide a fair and transparent environment that promotes a level playing field and facilitates fair competition in the market. TRAI regularly issues orders and directions on various subjects such as tariffs, interconnections, quality of service, Direct To Home (DTH) services and mobile number portability.

#### **Challenges:**

- **Unfair Competition:** To attract more consumers the telecom companies have been offering lower tariffs, in competition with each other, which do not generate much revenue. This might lead to either no competition situation or monopoly by a single company.
- **Infrastructure:** Telecom sector has to get 5G spectrum, invest in infrastructure, expansion, technology upgradation etc so this additional burden is a major setback for the industry.
- **Current System of Tariffs:** Major telecom operators are reporting losses and financial stress. This shows that the current tariff system is not financially viable for telecoms.

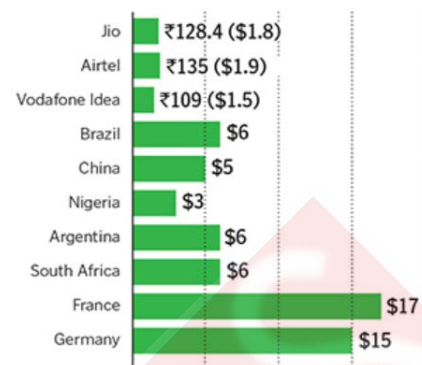


- **Financial Health of the Sector:** Gross revenue has dropped by 15% to 20% for the year 2017-18 over the preceding year for the incumbents and overall sector revenue has dropped. Also, there is drop in voice and data revenue per user.

- Globally, **Average Revenue Per User (ARPU)** fluctuates around 8-9 US dollars whereas in India it is around 1.2 US dollars.

### Global Tariff Comparison

Average Revenue Per User



SOURCE: Q3 Investor presentations for Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea; Statista.com

- **Limited Spectrum Availability:** Available spectrum is less than 40% as compared to European nations and 50% as compared to China. Hence, it is imperative that spectrum auctioning at sustainable prices is the need of the hour.
  - Also, government auction spectrum at an exorbitant cost which makes it difficult for mobile operators to provide services at reasonable speeds.
- **High competition:** The entry of new private players such as Reliance Jio has undoubtedly benefitted the consumers in terms of reduced call and data charges.
  - However, the stiff competition has led to price wars among telecom operators.
  - This had an overall negative impact on the telecommunication sector in the form of reduced revenues and higher debt (almost 8 lakh crores).
- **Lack of Telecom Infrastructure in Semi-rural and Rural areas:** Service providers have to incur huge initial fixed cost to enter semi-rural and rural areas.
  - Key reasons behind these costs are lack of basic infrastructure like power and roads, resulting in delays in rolling out the infrastructure.
- **Lack of trained personnel** to operate and maintain the cellular infrastructure.
- **Delays in Roll Out of Innovative Products and Services:** Substantial delays in roll out of data-based products and services are hampering the progress of telecom sectors.
  - This is primarily due to the non-conducive environment resulting out of government policies and regulations.
- **Low Broad Band Penetration:** Low broadband penetration in the country is a matter of concern and the government needs to do a lot more work in the field to go up in the global ladder.
- **Over the top services:** Over the Top (OTT) applications such as WhatsApp, OLA, Viber and so on do not need permission or a pact with a telecommunications company. This hampers the revenue of telecommunication service provider.
- **License fee:** The license fee of eight per cent of the Adjusted Gross Revenue including five per cent as Universal Service Levy (USL) is one of the highest in the world.

### Solutions

#### For Telecom Industry:

- **Practical tariff rates:** The telecom industry has to keep the tariff rates sustainably high instead of trying to make them the cheapest in the world.



- **Fair Competition:** It should be ensured that there is no cartelisation and no undercutting. Fair competition among the companies should be encouraged.
- **Outcome oriented Investment:** All the money which comes in after the government order should be invested in the telecom sector only so that consumers do not need to pay more and the revenues will be stabilized.
- **Technology:** India should invest in technology rather than products.
  - India is importing \$40 billion worth of telecom products mainly mobile phones every year which is not a feasible option for the future because of very limited foreign exchange.
- **Service oriented investment policies:** Telecom industry has to bring a shift from service-oriented investment policies to manufacturing oriented policies.
- **Value addition:** Telecom sector needs to do value addition by tying up with the service providers from education, medicine and entertainment sectors apart from increasing the tariff charges.

#### **For Government:**

- **Deadlines:** The deadlines should consider current challenges faced by the telecom industry.
- **Mergers:** In order to revive BSNL and MTNL, government has decided to merge them and then provide funds to the merged entity. Same approach should be applied to other private service providers also.
- **Longer interest tenure:** The interest collection by government should be done over a longer period of time giving ample time to the telecom industry to come over the financial stress.
- **Innovative capital investment:** Government should put the penalty and interest money into capital investment for the telecom industry, to provide availability of equipment and technologies on an equal access basis.
- **Alternative source of revenue:** Government should look for more avenues of revenue generation and should be equally responsible towards making this whole sector viable.
- **Indigenous manufacturing:** Government should incorporate Make in India in the telecom industry to boost the manufacturing.

#### **Learn from foreign models:**

- Telecom sector is tied up with various other commodities like the handset company apart from the operators only.
- Data has been very rationally planned in the international market and there are various plans suitable for various and specific needs of the people.
- Moving Wi-Fi zones or public Wi-Fi zones in India should not be completely free of cost instead India can learn from the Emirates, Singapore which charges its customers for data after exhausting the limits set by the airlines.

#### **Steps taken by government**

- **Infrastructure status:** The National Digital Communications Policy (NDCP) 2018 accorded telecom the status of critical and essential infrastructure. This would help operators in reducing capex and operational expenditure.

- **Ease in Merger & Acquisition (M & A) guidelines:** Ease in M & A helps the sector to consolidate. Today there is consolidation in the sector leading to 4-5 operators in each of the service area, similar to the global average. There is also spectrum consolidation with each operator holding reasonable quantities of spectrum.
- **Revival of the National Optic Fibre Network:** This enhances broadband connectivity. With the rising subscriber base, thrust on data services has enabled a smartphone revolution.
- **Payment bank initiative:** Operators have received in-principal approval from the RBI for Payments Bank license, which is expected to aide in customer retention and enables them to build on their M-Payment services.
- **Mobile virtual network operators:** Introduction of the concept of mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs) by the regulator are expected to open up new opportunities for operators such as wholesale revenue stream.
- **New national telecom policy:** The Telecom Commission, the highest decision-making body of the telecom ministry, has given its nod to the new telecom policy.
  - The policy proposes to invite sustainable investment over a period of time and promote fair competition.
- The National Digital Communications Policy 2018 has envisaged attracting investments worth US\$ 100 billion in the telecommunications sector by 2022.
- **Smart cities initiative:** The Indian Government is planning to develop 100 smart city projects, where IoT would play a vital role in development of those cities.

#### Way Forward

- **Infrastructure Sharing:** Since telecom business is heavy on capex and as much as 40%-60% of the Capex is utilized for setting up and managing the Telecom infrastructure. By sharing infrastructure, operators can optimize their capex, and focus on providing new and innovative services to their subscribers.
- **Availability of Affordable Smart Phones and Lower Tariff Rates:** This would increase tele penetration in rural areas.
- **Curb on predatory pricing:** government should fix a minimum price to save the industry from price war
- **Lower License fee:** The license fee of eight per cent of the Adjusted Gross Revenue including five per cent as Universal Service Levy (USL) is one of the highest in the world.
- **Reduce reserve price for spectrum auction:** In the past, some of the operators participated recklessly in these auctions leading to exaggerated prices – much above their true valuations. Reasonable reserve prices for the market mechanisms induce “truthful bidding”, and not leading to “winners’ curse” as witnessed in some of the previous auctions.

The telecom sector was one of the key sectors representing the success of the 1991 reforms in India. Preventing it from failing is important to maintain investor confidence in India and to maintain the market dynamics.

## Adhering to Technology

**Syllabus: Science and Technology-** developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

**In News:** India needs a holistic policy framework with the rapid pace of technology which are blurring boundaries.

### Introduction:

- As technology has evolved in the latter part of the 20th century and the early part of the 21st century, the traditional boundaries between goods and services have blurred.
- These information-based technologies have been widely adopted across a broad range of industries and products that traditionally have not been perceived as electronic or software based.
- Information is the new currency powering economies. The expansion of computing power has driven the pace of information gathering and analysis.
- The new currency drives processes and decision-making across a wide array of products and services, making them more efficient and value accretive for consumers.

### Data a new currency

- **Paradigm shift in traditional industries:** The amount of “value add” from intangible technology services as opposed to physical objects, even in traditional goods, is being transformed by information.
  - A modern automobile has 40% of its component value from electronic-based products and a modern electric vehicle has close to 100 million lines of code, which is more than that used by a Boeing 787 or the Chrome browser.
  - This is a paradigm shift as the amount of “value add” from intangible technology services as opposed to physical objects, even in traditional goods, is being transformed by information.
- **Revolution:** This revolution is taking place across products, as information availability drives efficiency and creates value for customers by providing greater control over the product and its surrounding environment.
  - And, this is what impels customers to value products that have utilised these evolving technologies.

### There is a need of a new policy framework!

- **To address the needs of various stakeholders:** governments have tended to build specialised departments and designed policies that govern those areas.
  - Over time, as each of these departments grew, they have tended to operate in silos. This has for most of the 20th century been reasonably successful in driving economic development in countries.
- **Increasing digitisation across the spectrum:** There is increasing digitisation and electrification of industrial activities, products and services, influencing the evolving skill sets in industry.

- For instance, a conventional “metal-based” industrial product, information and electronics are becoming all-pervasive, ensuring that we set boundaries to control quality or the uptime of the equipment.
- **Capital formation:** Technology is driving an increasing share of the value add coming from digitisation and data analytics in products and services across industry segments, there needs to be a way of encouraging capital formation by way of intangibles in traditionally tangible industries.
- **Issue of a shift of value between manufacturing and services as technology changes:** The policy, promotes and gives incentives for manufacturing, whereas the share of intangibles, even in traditional manufacturing companies, whether it be software, research and development or even servicing of products, are not adequately covered in industrial policies.
- **Inter-departmental cooperation:** There is increasingly a need for inter-departmental cooperation and synergy not only in policy framework but also in deployment.
  - Increasing electronification and digitisation of the automobile are not covered by industrial policies that govern the Electronics and Information Technology Ministry.
  - Drones that could serve different sectors, including agriculture, and would require a lot of inter-departmental clearances outside of the Department of Agriculture.
- **Holistic view:** There is a need to have a holistic view of policies for economic development as technology is becoming a significant enabler in most industries.
- **A sufficiently empowered policy clearing cell:** It could ensure a holistic view on policy across departments of government, at the State and the Centre.
- **Ecosphere:** A nourishing ecosystem for industry, including the hard infrastructure and softer areas such as education, skilling, technical institutions, laboratories, testing centres, etc., has to be cultivated.
  - The creation of clusters of companies in adjacent but complementary areas could constitute such an ecosystem that encourages multi and cross-disciplinary learning and spur innovation and economic development.

**Working in silos by centre, states and Ministries:**

As governments have focused on improving the lives of people, they have looked at economic development and industry as catalysts to progress. To address the needs of various stakeholders, governments have tended to build specialized departments and designed policies that govern those areas. However, over time, as each of these departments grew, they have tended to operate in silos. This has for most of the 20th century been reasonably successful in driving economic development in countries.

The recent developments in technology have, however, blurred standard boundaries that dictate policy framework in most governments. If you take India, industrial promotion policies look at encouraging capital formation from a manufacturing perspective.

As technology is driving an increasing share of the value add coming from digitisation and data analytics in products and services across industry segments, there needs to be a way of encouraging capital formation by way of intangibles in traditionally tangible industries.

**Examples**

- **Automobile industry:** If you look at the automobile industry, policies are governed by the Heavy Industries and the Surface Transport Ministries, respectively. However, increasing electronification and digitization of the automobile are not covered by industrial policies that govern the Electronics and Information Technology Ministry.
- **Drones:** Another example involves drones that could serve different sectors, including agriculture, and would require a lot of inter-departmental clearances outside of the Department of Agriculture. There is increasingly a need for inter-departmental cooperation and synergy not only in policy framework but also in deployment.

**Steps to be taken for modernisation of legal framework for IT:**

- Traditional legal-regulatory constructs, based on licences and controls, are rule-based legal framework that allows for easier enforcement but is rigid and prevents innovation.
- The present times call for new legal framework that has the agility and leeway to accommodate the pace of technological change in the digital economy. Thus, there we need a new regulatory construct to deal with digital market.
- One such regulatory regime is Value-based Legal framework that is more resilient to changes in technology and business models but requires thoughtful calibration and state capacity for enforcement.
- Such a policy design will provide legal certainty and also supports innovation.
- India's position on network neutrality (that has been repealed in USA) is an example of values- based regulatory framework.
- Future principles could include constructs such as "platform neutrality" to ensure that large platforms do not become gatekeepers in digital markets, combined with the wider use of "fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory" terms to govern business conduct.



**Taking an aggregate view: Multi and Cross-disciplinary learning:**

- The policy, by and large, promotes and gives incentives for manufacturing, whereas the share of intangibles, even in traditional manufacturing companies, whether it be software, research and development or even servicing of products, are not adequately covered in industrial policies.
- This departmentalisation of policies is facing a challenge from technology that very often blurs the boundaries served by different policies.
- There is a need to have a holistic view of policies for economic development as technology is becoming a significant enabler in most industries.
- A change in policy framework regarding economic development that enables various ministries to work together is essential.
- A sufficiently empowered policy clearing cell could ensure a holistic view on policy across departments of government, at the State and the Centre.
- In terms of attracting investments, policies have always been driven by subsidies and incentives but increasingly, in a competitive scenario, these are becoming hygiene factors.
- There is also the larger issue of a shift of value between manufacturing and services as Technological changes.
- It is important to include these to encourage innovation and technological development.

**Way forward**

- In this evolving policy framework, it is important that there is close cooperation and alignment between the Centre and State to ensure effective implementation on the ground. Some of these thoughts could help us navigate through an ecosystem that is changing with technology.
- In this evolving policy framework, it is important that there is close cooperation and alignment between the Centre and State to ensure effective implementation on the ground.
- More significantly, a nourishing ecosystem for industry, including the hard infrastructure and softer areas such as education, skilling, technical institutions, laboratories, testing centres, etc., has to be cultivated.
- The creation of clusters of companies in adjacent but complementary areas could constitute such an ecosystem that encourages multi and cross-disciplinary learning and spur innovation and economic development.
- Moreover, this type of ecosystem could also attract investment and capital formation. Some of these thoughts could help us navigate through an ecosystem that is changing with technology.

**Will Air India Take Off?**

**Syllabus:** Effects of liberalization on the economy.

**In News:** Recently, the Government of India announced few changes to facilitate the sale of Air India.

**Background:**

- As part of the strategic disinvestment, the government initiated the complete disinvestment process of debt burdened Air India.
- Before the start of the current financial year, Air India had more than Rs 60,000 crore as debt and with the coming of the pandemic, debt burden is getting accumulated.
- Due to increasing debt burden, the Government has been pushing for the strategic sale of Air India.
- Following the failure to receive a single bid in the first attempt the government has initiated the disinvestment process of Air India for the second time.
- In the late 1990s, the government recognised the gradual decline in the airline's service standards. The government referred it to the **Disinvestment Commission of India (DCI)**, which recommended dilution of government ownership to 40%.
- In 2017, **NITI Aayog recommended disinvestment**. But the government decided to retain 24% equity and also wanted the acquirer to absorb a major chunk of the non-aircraft related debt.

**Recent changes:**

- Earlier, the government had mandated a fixed level of debt i.e., Rs 23,286.50 crore to be taken by buyers along with the sale.
- The government, through its recent announcement will now allow the prospective bidders the flexibility to decide the level of debt they wish to take on while buying the airline.
- The winning bidder will have to deposit at least 15 per cent of the bid amount in cash with the government ahead of the share transfer.
- The government has extended the deadline from October 30 to December 14 to allow potential bidders to carefully evaluate the new terms and conditions.
- A Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), Air India Asset Holding Ltd, will be created to take over the remaining liabilities worth Rs 56334 crore and certain assets.

**Limitations of the previous deal:**

- Only 76% of Govt's stake was up for sale.
- No transfer of Management Control to the buyer.
- The heavy debt burden of Rs 60000 crore was to be borne by the prospective buyers (the Govt was willing to hive off debt worth Rs 29000 crore only).

**Whether the latest changes would be enough to attract the buyers?****Apprehensions**

- **Lack of buyers:** Most of the best bidders who are affected by the pandemic are now struggling to survive themselves.
- **Unattractive Aviation sector:** Estimates suggest that most airlines will struggle to be financially unviable even in 2021 fearing the second wave of COVID infections.

**Benefits:**

- The buyer will get a fleet of **146 aircraft**, 56 % of which are owned by Air India while the rest are on lease.

- They will also benefit from as much as 50 % of the International market share held by Indian airlines and also by **4400 airport slots** that the airline holds in the domestic aviation market and 3300 slots in the international market.
- The **networking capital is zero**, which means that the Maharaja's current assets are equal to its current liabilities. This means the buyer will effectively inherit zero liabilities.
- The buyer will also get the **expertise** of its staff including pilots and cabin crew with deep technical and operational knowledge, along with the airline's brand as well as the famous "Maharaja" and "Flying swan" logos.
- The transfer of Air India into private hands may translate into better efficiency and sound management. The ensuing market forces may provide **cheaper travel for the passengers**.

#### Disinvestment:

- **Disinvestment** means sale or liquidation of assets by the government, usually Central and state public sector enterprises, projects, or other fixed assets.
- The **government undertakes disinvestment** to reduce the fiscal burden on the exchequer, or to raise money for meeting specific needs, such as to bridge the revenue shortfall from other regular sources.
- **Strategic disinvestment** is the transfer of the ownership and control of a public sector entity to some other entity (mostly to a private sector entity).
- The disinvestment commission defines strategic sale as **the sale of a substantial portion of the Government shareholding** of a central public sector enterprises (CPSE) of upto 50%, or such higher percentage as the competent authority may determine, along with transfer of management control.
- **National Investment Fund (NIF)** was constituted in November, 2005, into which the proceeds from disinvestment of Central Public Sector Enterprises were to be channelized.

#### Evolution of disinvestment policy:

- **Industrial statement of 1991:** stated that the government would divest part of its holdings in selected PSEs.
- **Rangarajan committee on disinvestment (1993):** committee stated that the percentage of equity to be divested could be up to 49% for industries explicitly reserved for the public sector.
- **1999:** the government classified PSEs into strategic and non-strategic areas for the purpose of disinvestment.
- **Disinvestment policy since November, 2009:**
  - Offer for sale for listed profitable CPSEs.
  - Follow-on public orders in respect of profitable CPSEs having 10% or higher public ownership.
  - Disinvestment is to be considered on merits and on a case-by-case basis.

#### Need of disinvestment

In the present economic scenario, demand for expenditure is increasing, at the same time the supply of resources is not promising.

- **Fall in Goods and Service Tax (GST) collections:** As per the interim budget, the government revised the GST target from Rs. 7.44 lakh crore to Rs. 6.44 lakh crore due to short fall in collections. So, the standard collections from GST will take time.
- **Reduced Direct tax collection:** By March 2019, Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) stated that the tax collection figures have been reviewed and it is seen that as against the budget collection target of Rs. 12 lakh crores, only 85.1% of the target at Rs. 10,21,251 crores.
- **Borrowings:** The net borrowings of government already stand at Rs. 4.7 trillion in Fiscal Year 2019-20, further borrowings will increase the interest rates on government yields, which will have impact on debt market.
- **Rising expenditure:** Rising defence expenditure (more than Rs. 3 lakh crore in 2019-20) and increasing health expenditure (Ayushman Bharat Scheme) from Rs. 52,800 crore in 2018-19 to Rs. 61,398 crores in 2019-20.

#### **Performance of disinvestment in recent scenario:**

- According to department of investment and public asset management, between 2004-05 to 2013-14, disinvestment raised Rs. 1.07 lakh crore, on an average yearly collection of Rs. 10,700 crores.
- However, from 2014-15 to 2017-18, the collection went up to Rs. 2.12 lakh crore, i.e., yearly collection of Rs. 53,000 crores.
- The government has exceeded the target of Rs. 1 lakh crore in 2017-18 and Rs. 80,000 crores in 2018-19.
- Success of **BHARAT-22 Exchange Traded Funds (ETF)** takes government closer to disinvestment target. The ETF is benchmark to an index named BHARAT22 consisting of 22 companies (19 PSEs and 3 private).

#### **Benefits of disinvestment policy:**

- **Significance for the government:**
  - It will help in reducing government's debt.
  - It will save resources by spending less on PSUs which can be used by government for welfare purposes.
  - It will help in reducing fiscal deficit.
  - It enables government to raise funds that can be used to strengthen physical and social infrastructure.
- **Social welfare:**
  - It will ensure resources in the hands of public.
  - Consumers will get better services.
  - Companies will expand that will lead to more jobs.
- **Increase the role of market:**
  - Bring more competition into various sectors thus improving the quality of services.
  - It will increase market profitability and hence companies' profits.
- **Reforms in PSUs:**
  - It will ensure modernisation of PSUs with changing times.

- It distributes loss and failure risks of PSUs to the private sector.

#### **Challenges of disinvestment policy:**

- Sale of profit-making and dividend paying PSUs would result in the **loss of regular income to the Government**
- It has been just a resource raising exercise by the government than reforming PSU.
- The valuation of shares is affected by the decision not to reduce government holdings to less than 51 per cent.
- With the continuing majority ownership of the government the disinvested public enterprises would continue to operate within the constraints of the public sector.
- Loss making units don't attract investment so easily.
- Mere change of ownership from public to private **does not ensure higher efficiency** and productivity.
- It may lead to **loss of jobs** of many workers. Private sector governed by profit motive has a tendency to use capital intensive techniques which will worsen unemployment problem in India.
- Strategic Disinvestment of Oil PSUs is seen by some experts as a threat to **National Security** since oil is a strategic natural resource and possible ownership in the foreign hand is not consistent with our strategic goals. For example, disinvesting Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL).
- Complete Privatisation may result in public monopolies becoming **private monopolies**, which would then exploit their position to increase costs of various services and earn higher profits
- A majority stake sale done to another CPSE results in no real change in ownership, and is thus just hogwash.
- Using funds from disinvestment to bridge the fiscal deficit is an unhealthy and a short-term practice. It is said that it is the equivalent of selling '**family silver**' to meet short term monetary requirements.

#### **Future disinvestment potential:**

- Recently cabinet had approved an **institutional framework for monetisation of non-core assets of CPSEs** under strategic disinvestment. The government should expedite this initiative and realise the disinvestment potential locked in this sector.
- There are vast tracts of **land in big cities held by government wings** such as armed forces (Example, Secunderabad Cantonment area), railways, and in metro-Politan areas. Government should monetise these land assets and use for commercial purpose, which will be an evergreen income resource for government.
- With the success of **BHARAT22 ETF**, government should promote further disinvestment of PSEs and bring more of them under BHARAT22.

#### **Way Forward:**

- Disinvestment in present context can provide solution to the raising of funds, but in the long run, government should focus on raising the resources from tax receipts-direct and



indirect taxes and keep a balance between tax resource and disinvestment proceedings to fund the public expenditure.

- Divestment should not be seen as a short-term fiscal measure; instead, it should be part of a long-term plan to improve the production of goods and services in India. The government should strengthen the regulatory framework that ensures efficient market conditions.

### **Bioterrorism: Evolving Threat**

**Syllabus:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

**In News:** Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health has given a report, with the title “The Outbreak of Pandemic COVID-19 and its Management”, to the Rajya Sabha Chairman.

#### **More In news:**

- As per Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health there is need to formulate effective laws to counter bio-terrorism and it is one of the important lessons to be learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The report also said low testing and shoddy contact tracing were responsible for the spike in cases.

**Bioterrorism** - It is the intentional release of viruses, bacteria, or other germs that can sicken or kill people, livestock or crops. Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is the nodal ministry for Bioterrorism and partners with Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in its management.

**Biological Weapons** - WHO defines biological weapons as microorganisms like virus, bacteria, fungi, or other toxins that are produced and released deliberately to cause disease and death in humans, animals or plants.

- These agents can be deployed with a delivery system, such as a missile or airborne dispersion over a major population region.
- **Pathogens or pests** can be used as anti-crop agents to hamper the food security. It is a substantial threat because small amounts of biotic agents can be effortlessly hidden, transported and discharged into vulnerable populations.
- Biological agents, like anthrax, botulinum toxin and plague can pose a difficult public health challenge causing large numbers of deaths in a short amount of time while being difficult to contain.
  - **Bacillus anthracis**, the bacteria that causes anthrax, is one of the most likely agents to be used in a biological attack.

#### **Historic use of Biological Weapons:**

##### **COVID-19:**

- The scientific understanding of the outbreak of COVID-19 suggests that it might have originated in bats.

- However, some countries are raising suspicion that the pandemic might have begun from the Wuhan lab in China after the researchers were probably able to figure out how bat coronaviruses could mutate to attack humans.
- Biological warfare was used in the past as a legitimate source of national power. However, mode of warfare was stopped after 1975 Biological Weapons convention (BWC).

**Efforts for tackling Biological warfare:**

- **The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) or Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) 1972:**
  - It was the first multilateral disarmament treaty banning the production of an entire category of weapons. It effectively prohibits the development, production, acquisition, transfer, stockpiling and use of biological and toxin weapons. It is a key element in the international community's efforts to address the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
  - India has ratified the BWC.
- **Australia Group:**
  - It was established in 1985 after the use of chemical weapons by Iraq in 1984.
  - It is an informal arrangement which aims to allow exporting or transshipping countries to minimise the risk of assisting chemical and biological weapon (CBW) proliferation.
  - India joined the Group on 19 January 2018.
- **For India:**
  - **Specialized body:** National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) is a specialized force constituted under MHA to deal with chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) attacks.
  - **NDMA has issued guidelines on Management of Biological Disasters.**
  - **Legislative Framework:** The policies, programmes and action plans need to be supported by appropriate legal instruments for effective management of biological disasters.
  - **Prevention of Biological Disasters:** Prevention and preparedness shall focus on the assessment of biothreats, medical and public health consequences, medical countermeasures and long-term strategies for mitigation.
  - The important components of prevention and preparedness would include an epidemiological intelligence gathering mechanism to deter a BW/BT attack:
    - A robust surveillance system that can detect early warning signs.
    - Decipher the epidemiological clues to determine whether it is an intentional attack.
    - Capacity building for surveillance, laboratories, and hospital systems that can support outbreak detection, investigation and management.
    - A multi-sectoral approach to be adopted involving different ministries.
- **Preparedness and Capacity Development:** An important aspect of medical preparedness in Biological Disaster Management includes the integration of both government and private sectors.

- **Problems in International Conventions:**
  - **Weak Verification and compliance issues:** The Biological Weapons Convention bans the use of biological weapons. However, due to a weak verification and compliance procedure, there is no credible way to trace the development of biological weapons in any country.

### Highlights of the report

- Formulating effective laws to counter bio-terrorism is one of the important lessons to be learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Due to “poor contact tracing and slow testing” there was alarming rise of positive cases in the initial months.
- Deaths due to Covid-19 may have occurred due to a lack of a sustainable pricing model.
- Lack of specific guidelines in treating Covid-19 patients and inadequate amount of hospital beds led to private hospitals charging high fees.
- Strengthening disease surveillance, including at animal-human interface, training and capacity building for management of public health emergencies arising from use of bio-weapons and strengthening research and surveillance activities related to development of diagnostics, vaccines and drugs.
- Health Ministry should engage with agencies and actively participate in ongoing international treaties.

### Steps to be taken

#### 1. Strengthening the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

- The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) of 1972 prohibits signatory nations to develop, produce, stockpile or otherwise, acquire or retain:
- Microbial or other biological agents or toxins whatever their origin or method of production, of types and in quantities that have no justification for prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes.
- Weapons, equipment or means of delivery designed to use such agents or toxins for hostile purposes or in armed conflict.
- However, there is no exact authentication method that can ensure obedience with the BTWC. Therefore, efforts must be made to strengthen the BTWC so that it helps to uncover and successfully prevent biological weapons programs.
- India consented and pledged to abide by its obligations in 2015.

#### 2. Intelligence Sharing & Rapid Detection

- Rapid detection and surveillance are important for an efficient response to a bioterror strike. So, global intelligence agencies should operate together and share credible intelligence.

#### 3. Biodefense Systems

- Upgrading and installing biodefense systems in major urban conglomerates to protect against deadly disease outbreaks initiated by bioterrorism.
- Coaching first responders on how to deal with a biological weapons attack.
- Refining diagnostic laboratory capability and epidemiological capabilities.

- Developing and stockpiling vaccines and antimicrobial medicines that can be used to defend the people against infections triggered by biological weapons.

#### **Summary of Action Points of NDMA on Biological Disaster**

- **Capacity development:** Facilities and amenities must be developed to cover all issues of environmental management like water supply, personal hygiene, and vector control, burial/disposal of the dead and the risk of occurrence of zoonotic disorders.
- **Pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions and biosafety measures:** Tools must be developed to monitor the status of available pharmaceutical interventions including antibiotics, chemotherapeutics and anti-viral, and listing of essential drugs that may be required to manage biological emergencies.
- **Establishment of command, control and coordination functions:** A well-orchestrated medical response to biological disasters will only be possible by having a command-and-control function at the district level with the district collector as commander.
- **Capacity development:** capacity building of human resource, training and education, community, standardised documentation procedures and R&D. The roles of various health and non-health professionals at various levels in the management of a biological crisis must be defined. Control rooms to support the field responders should be set up. These professionals must be trained through refresher courses to fill the prevailing gaps.
- **Development of critical infrastructure for management of biological emergencies:** The development of a laboratory network including national/state level referral laboratories, and district level diagnostic laboratories with medical colleges to confirm diagnosis under a single integrated framework. On a similar basis, a chain of public health laboratories must also be developed and networked. The critical infrastructure must also be supported by biomonitoring techniques based on advanced molecular and biochemical techniques.
- **Action plan for the management of avian flu:** A properly functioning epidemiological mechanism must be used to prepare an action plan for the management of avian flu, and similar incidences to effectively combat the inherent risks.
- **Preparation for biological containment of microbial agents:** SOPs for biosafety and biosecurity must be developed by the respective laboratories in accordance with the National Code of Practice for Biosecurity and Biosafety.
- **Classification of microorganisms and biologics:** The scheme for risk-based classification of microorganisms is intended to provide a method for defining the minimal safety conditions that are necessary when using these agents.
- **Risk and vulnerability assessment of livestock:** The various risks posed to livestock during natural disasters, i.e., spread of infectious diseases, fodder poisoning, TADs, various types of wars including conventional wars, BW or BT must be analysed to develop a comprehensive mitigation strategy.
- **Capacity development: management of livestock:** This includes the development of infrastructure for disposal of carcasses, containment of epidemics; temporary shelters,



organised rehabilitation package for livestock livelihood, awareness programmes and preparedness for emergency field and laboratory veterinary services.

- **Establishment of legislative and regulatory framework** and early detection facilities based on risk management practices.
- **Preparation for management of agro-terrorism activities:** The measures include provisions for emergency control and treatment, development of national standards on phyto-sanitary measures and other related activities.
- **Development of an 'all hazard' implementation strategy:** Measures to implement and coordinate various activities at the national level, and institutional framework and coordination at the state/district levels. Suitable strategy must be evolved to develop linkages and state support systems. Necessary financial arrangements must be made for implementation of all the plans developed at the district/state/national levels.

#### Way Forward:

- There is a need of strict verification to trace the transfer of biological weapons in any country.
- Various international best practices must be tested and incorporated in the DM plans by the nodal and line ministries to prevent the spread of biological disasters across international boundaries.
- **Better coordination between countries:** Countries should work together and share credible intelligence. The early detection and preventive measures could save lot of lives.

### The Rumble of Radicalisation

**Syllabus: Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.**

**In News:** The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has, for the first time, approved a research study on "status of radicalisation in India."

#### More on news:

- The study would attempt to legally define "radicalisation" and suggest amendments to the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).
- The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), the police think tank of the MHA, had invited research proposals from academicians and legal experts in the year 2018.
- Study will be conducted by **G.S. Bajpai**, Director of the Centre for Criminology and Victimology, National Law University, Delhi.
- The study will attempt to legally define '**radicalisation**' and suggest amendments to the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967**.
- **Reasons for the study:**
  - Radicalisation is yet to be defined legally; this **leads to misuse by the police**.
  - The United Nations' 26<sup>th</sup> report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team concerning the IS (Islamic State), al-Qaeda and associated



individuals and entities had pointed out “significant numbers” of the IS and al-Qaeda members in Kerala and Karnataka.

**Radicalisation:**

- The word “**radical**” refers to change in the fundamental nature of something.
- Thus, radicalism is set of beliefs or actions of people who advocate thorough or complete political or social reform.
- Radicalisation is a process in which an individual or group adopts extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations. It rejects or undermines the status quo or contemporary ideas and expressions of the nation.
- The outcomes of radicalization are shaped by the ideas of the society at large; for example, radicalism can originate from a broad social consensus against progressive changes in society or from a broad desire for change in society.
- Radicalization can be both violent and nonviolent, and often radicalization turns into violent extremism (RVE).

**Types of Radicalisation:****Right-Wing Extremism:**

- It is characterized by the violent defence of a racial, ethnic or pseudo-national identity.
- It is also associated with radical hostility towards state authorities, minorities, immigrants and/or left-wing political groups.
- **Right-Wing Radicalism** is a form of radicalization associated with fascism, racialism/racism, supremacism and ultra-nationalism.

**Politico-Religious Extremism:**

- It results from political interpretation of religion and the defence, by violent means, of a religious identity perceived to be under attack (via international conflicts, foreign policy, social debates, etc.). Any religion may spawn this type of violent radicalization.

**Left-Wing Extremism:**

- It focuses primarily on anti-capitalist demands and calls for the transformation of political systems considered responsible for producing social inequalities, and that may ultimately employ violent means to further its cause.
- **Left Wing Radicalism** is a form of radicalization which focuses primarily on anti-capitalist demands and calls for the transformation of political systems considered responsible for producing social inequalities. It may employ violent means to further its cause.
- It includes anarchist, Maoist, Trotskyist and Marxist–Leninist groups that use violence to advocate for their cause.

**Radicalisation in India:**

- **Radicalisation:** It is associated with political interpretation of religion and the defence, by violent means, of a religious identity perceived to be under attack.
- **Radicalisation of youth by ISIS:** In early 2020 the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) published an India-centric propaganda material called Voice of Hind.

- **Left-Wing Extremism (LWE):** instances of internet-facilitated indoctrination, active radicalisation in multiple states and Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) have grown despite the continued government intervention.
- **Right wing extremism:** increased incidents of mob lynching, cow vigilantism and the string of assassinations of rationalists such as Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and Gauri Lankesh point towards rising extremism in the right-wing cadres.

**Reasons for growing Radicalisation in society:**

- **Socio-Economic Factors:** Socio-economic factors like poverty, social exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination, limited education and employment etc. is a cause of growing radicalisation.
  - The poor and illiterate provides a fertile ground for radical agencies for recruitment.
- **Political Factors:** Various political factors including weak and non-participatory political systems lacking good governance and regard for civil society are leading to people turning towards radicalisation.
  - Apathy of government, authoritarian tendencies lead to shattering of hopes and sense of anger against the government and established regime.
  - For example, Naxalism was fuelled by the sense of apathy of local politicians against the local people.
- **Social media:** Social media provides virtual participation and a platform for like-minded extremist views, accelerating the process of radicalisation.
  - Internet is used by terrorists as an effective tool for radicalisation and terror financing.
  - Terror groups use the internet to advocate the use of violence to further a religious, ideological or political cause.
  - For example, modus operandi of ISIS is spreading terror through local proxies and social media messaging.
- **Displacement:** Often development is accompanied with displacement. People are displaced due to land acquisition but often are not adequately compensated.
  - This led to the development of feelings of injustice and anger against the state, often leading to tilt towards radicalisation. for example, Naxalism.
- **Religious intolerance:** Rising religious intolerance, hate crimes, mob lynching are further leading to radicalisation. Minorities are feeling unsafe. With rising hatred and intolerance, minorities are turning towards radicalisation.
- **Illegal migration:** Porous borders especially towards West Bengal and North Eastern States have led to influx of thousands of Bangladeshi migrants which has increased tensions among ethnic communities. e.g., Kokrajhar riots of Assam, Dimapur lynching of a rape accused.
- **Feed on vulnerabilities:** for example, threat of radicalisation during peoples protest such as anti CAA, farmers protest .

**Consequences of radicalisation:**

- **Economic costs:** A sense of fear reduces economic investment and hinders economic progress of a country. Loss of trade and access to markets have a negative impact on people's livelihoods.
  - E.g., youth in Kashmir being radicalised leading to low economic development of the area.
- **Social costs:** Using resources for conflict-related purposes means that public expenditures on social services decrease. This impact spending on social causes like education, health etc.
- **Impact on children:** Children face particular vulnerabilities as a result of armed violence such as orphanhood, psychological damage.
  - They also face a threat of recruitment as young soldiers.
  - These factors often lead to a disruption to education, and thereby the reduction of a child's capacity to recover from poverty.
- **Impact on women:** Women are affected in many ways in the event of violence. Sexual violence, recruitment as combatants and an expanded economic/household role, which is often transferred onto young girls. for example, Yazidi women suffered under ISIS.

**Maharashtra Model:**

- The Maharashtra Government has rolled out a **Deradicalisation Programme** for the minority community to counter both **home-grown extremism** and the global Islamic State (IS) threat
- The plan has been chalked out by the State Home Department that includes a **50-point socio-economic strategy**.
- Deradicalisation is a process in which people reject the ideology they once embraced. This is a step further than disengagement, characterised by a change in behaviour (leaving the radical group, stopping violence) without giving up.
- Candidates are chosen after the ATS monitored their Internet activity or, as in many cases, from a tip-off from the community or family that their son or daughter was "behaving strangely."
- **"friend-officers"** track "candidates" for five years to meeting at cafes and restaurants, from professional psychologists to preparing a two-volume compendium of writings on Islam, jihad and terrorism and all translated into Marathi.
- **Two assurances:** no criminal case will be registered against a "candidate" selected for the deradicalisation programme and complete confidentiality.

**Steps to tackle radicalisation:**

- **Strengthening Institutions:** Educational and political institutions should be strengthened at ground level so that people of state feel empowered.
  - Also, intelligence agencies, law enforcement agencies and Judicial Courts need to act in unison on this matter.
  - A consistent **counter radical strategy** is required to tackle radicalism.
- **Employment:** Enough number of job opportunities should be provided to people to decrease their chances of joining any radical organization.

- It would help in providing livelihoods and directing youth energy towards productivity.
- **De-radicalisation:** It is necessary to de-radicalise people. There is a need to ensure that people who have been de-radicalised feel safe and secure in the country.
- **Social development:** The cornerstone for radicalisation is poverty, deprivation and isolation and standard education opportunities.
  - These needs to be addressed by the government and policies to be formulated for inclusive participation and facilitation of all means for their development.
- **Regulation of internet:** There is a need to draw guidelines to regulate the internet.
  - This must be done without damaging the privacy of an individual.
  - An effort is needed to place an effective mechanism to trace the activity of radical groups.
- **Regulation of social media:** Social media to be regulated to draw a legalized guide lines to regulate without contradicting the privacy of an individual.
- **Mobilisation:** Right thinking people in the community will have to be mobilised. As per the secretary of the Committee on Criminal Reforms, radicalisation is not merely a policing issue. Aggressive policing measures could be counter-productive as the youth who were radicalised were “misguided” and not the culprits.
- **Coordination:** There should be sufficient evidence behind banning any organization. This is necessary to avoid court cases.
  - Also, Intelligence Agencies, Law Enforcement Agencies and Judicial Courts need to act in unison on this matter.
  - Once government identifies any radicalism organization, it needs to take hold of their physical and financial resources.
- **Countering:** Countering activities of radicalism. If hate can be taught, then love and social responsibilities toward people and the nation can also be taught. This is necessary to de-radicalize people.
- **Segregation:** Need to start looking at where the radicalisation is taking place. Who are the people involved in radicalising the people.
- **Schemes:** Initiatives like UDAAN and NAI MANZIL must be inclusive in nature and drag youth from all sections.
- **Nehru Yuva Kendras** to be given impetus in such areas to **involve youth in all capacity, cultural and sports activities** so there are less chances for them to get influenced from such ideological goals.
- **Community model:** The success of Kerala and Maharashtra programmes of deradicalization indicates how community-based programmes may work in vulnerable states.
  - The disaffected youth with no real job prospects and limited futures are vulnerable.

### Conclusion

Radicalization offers critical challenges at the national, regional and global levels, rendering inadequate many of the traditional tools of violence prevention, peace building and democratic

governance. Hence, it requires policy makers and practitioners to appreciate the unique nature of these ideologies, many of them seeking the wholesale destruction of civic order as opposed to its reform or even restructuring. The war on terror is to be countered more in the human mind, and requires different skills and tactics. There are links between extremism, social exclusion and radicalisation. Sociological interventions to prevent or counter extremist behaviours are needed.



## POLITY

**Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020**

**News:** President of India has promulgated the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 to further amend Arbitration and Conciliation Act.

**Facts:**

- **Aim:** To ensure that all the stakeholders get an opportunity to seek unconditional stay of enforcement of arbitral awards where the underlying arbitration agreement or contract is induced by fraud or corruption.

**Key amendments:**

- **Amendment to Section 36:** If the arbitration award is being given on the basis of an agreement based on fraud or corruption, then the court will not impose a condition to stay the award and grant an unconditional stay during the pendency of the appeal.
  - Till now, an arbitration award was enforceable even if an appeal was filed against it in the court, however the court could grant a stay on the award on conditions as it deemed fit.
- **Omission of Eighth Schedule:** The ordinance has also deleted Eighth Schedule of the Arbitration & Conciliation Act 1996 which enables foreign practitioners to act as arbitrators in India.

**Additional Facts:**

- **Arbitration:** It is a procedure in which the dispute is submitted to an arbitral tribunal which makes a decision on the dispute that is binding on the parties.
- **Conciliation:** It is a non-binding procedure in which an impartial third party, the conciliator assists the parties to a dispute in reaching a mutually satisfactory agreed settlement of the dispute.

**All insults not offence under SC/ST Act: Supreme Court**

**News:** Supreme Court has ruled that all insults or intimidations to persons belonging to Dalit or tribal communities will not be an offence under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

**Facts:**

- **What was the case?** The court was hearing an appeal filed by an accused booked under the SC/ST Act for allegedly abusing a Dalit woman in her house.
- **What was the judgement?** The court has said that an offence will be considered under the SC/ST Act only if the insults or intimidations were intended to humiliate a member of the community, targeting their caste or tribe or if it is done in a place "within public view".

**Additional Facts:**

- **Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989:** It is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted to prevent atrocities against scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.
- **SC/ST Amendment Act, 2018:** The act was amended in 2018 to insert the following provisions to the original Act:
  - Preliminary enquiry shall not be required for registration of a First Information Report against any person.
  - The arrest of a person accused of having committed an offence under the Act would not require any approval.
  - The provisions of Section 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure which deals with anticipatory bail shall not apply to a case under this Act, notwithstanding any judgment or order of any Court.

**Election Commission revokes Congress Leader's Star Campaigner Status**

**News:** Election Commission of India has revoked the Status of Congress leader Kamal Nath as a star campaigner for the party for repeated violation of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and for completely disregarding the advisory issued to EC.

**Facts:**

- **Star Campaigner:** It can be described as persons who are nominated by parties to campaign in a given set of Constituencies. However, there are no specific definitions according to law or the Election Commission of India.
- **Benefits:** The expenditure incurred on campaigning by such campaigners is exempt from being added to the election expenditure of a candidate. However, this only applies when a star campaigner limits herself to a general campaign for the political party he or she represents.
- **Revised Norms:** Election Commission has revised norms for star campaigners for polls during the Covid-19 pandemic. As per revised norms, a recognised political party can now have only 30-star campaigners (Earlier 40) and an unrecognised (but registered) political party can have 15 (Earlier 20).

**Additional Facts:**

- **Model Code of Conduct (MCC):** These are the guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India for the conduct of political parties and candidates during elections. It comes into force immediately on the announcement of the election schedule by the commission and remains in force till the end of the electoral process.

**Pointly for Polity**

- **PRAGATI:** It stands for Pro-Active Governance And Timely Implementation. It was launched in 2015 and has been designed by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to address the common man's grievances and simultaneously monitor and review important programmes and projects of the Government of India as well as projects flagged by State Governments.

- **Global Bribery Risk Matrix:** It has been released by TRACE, an anti-bribery standard setting organisation that measures business bribery risk in 194 countries, territories and autonomous and semi-autonomous regions. Denmark has topped the list. India has been ranked at 77th in the 2020 index.
- **Sarna Code:** Jharkhand government has convened a special session and passed a resolution for the provision of a separate 'Sarna Code' for tribals. The resolution seeks a special column for followers of the 'Sarna' religion in the Census 2021.
- **Right to Recall:** Haryana Assembly has passed the bill to provide for the right to recall members of Panchayati Raj institutions to those who elected them. Right to Recall is a process through which the electorate has the power to remove the elected officials before the expiry of their usual terms.
- **Local Reservation:** Haryana Government has passed the Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Bill, 2020. The bill says that every employer shall be required to employ 75% local candidates for the posts where the gross monthly salary or wages are not more than Rs. 50,000 or as notified by the government from time to time.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### 15th G20 Summit

**News:** Prime Minister has virtually participated in the 15th G20 Summit.

**Facts:**

- The summit was convened under the presidency of Saudi Arabia.
- **Theme:** "Realizing the Opportunities of 21st Century for All"

**Key Takeaways from the Summit:**

- India has called for a new Global Index for the Post-Corona World that comprises four key elements:
  - Creation of a vast Talent Pool
  - Ensuring that Technology reaches all segments of the society
  - Transparency in systems of governance and
  - Dealing with Mother Earth with a spirit of Trusteeship.
- Indian PM also suggested creation of a G20 Virtual Secretariat as a follow up and documentation repository.
- The G20 leaders have also announced that India will be hosting the G20 summit in 2023 – a year later than what was decided earlier.

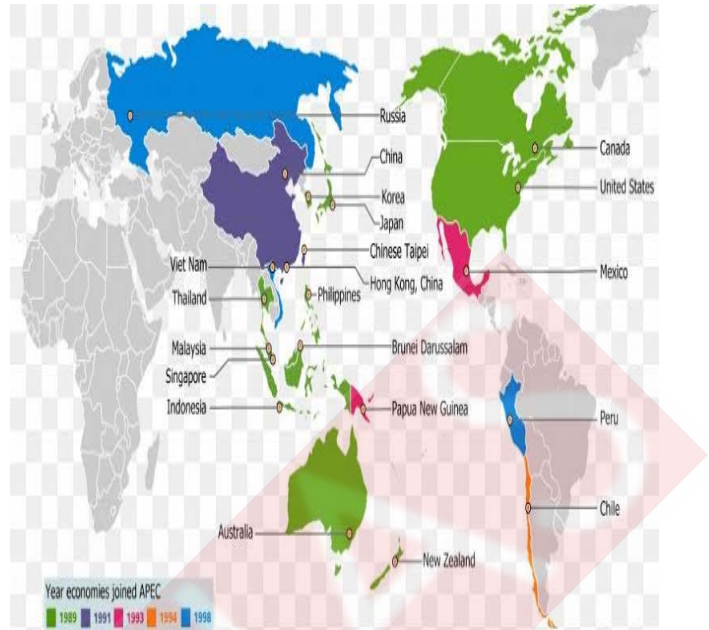
### APEC virtual summit

**News:** The 2020 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation(APEC) Virtual Summit was hosted by the Malaysian Prime Minister.

**Facts:**

- **Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation(APEC):** It is a regional economic forum established in 1989 to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific.

- **Aim:** To create greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and secure growth and by accelerating regional economic integration.
- **Members:** 21 members
- **Headquarters:** Singapore
- **India** is not a member of APEC.
- **Bogor Goals:** These are a set of goals agreed by APEC members in 1994 in Bogor, Indonesia with the aim of free and open trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific by the year 2020.



### 12th BRICS summit

**News:** The Prime Minister of India has virtually attended the 12th BRICS Summit.

**Facts:**

- **Host:** The summit has been chaired by Russia.
- **Theme:** "Global Stability, Shared Security and Innovative Growth"

**Key Takeaways:**

- **BRICS counter-terrorism Strategy:** The strategy is based on the following principles:
  - full respect for the sovereignty of the participating countries and noninterference in their internal affairs;
  - commitment to the principles of international law and recognition of the central and coordinating role of the United Nations on the issues of peace and security;
  - recognition of the role of regional organizations in countering the threat of terrorism;
  - need for all States to refrain from organizing, facilitating, financing, encouraging or tolerating terrorist activities.
  - due consideration of national interests and priorities
  - adoption of a comprehensive approach to combating terrorism.





**Additional Facts:**

- **BRICS:** It is the acronym coined for an association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- **Origin:** The acronym “BRIC” was initially formulated in 2001 by economist Jim O’Neill, of Goldman Sachs. In 2010, South Africa was invited to join BRIC after which the group adopted the acronym BRICS.
- **Chairmanship:** The Chairmanship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S.
- **Significance:** Brics brings together five major emerging economies comprising 41% of the world's population, having 24% of the global GDP and around 17% of the share in world trade.

**East Asia Summit 2020**

**News:** India’s External Affairs Minister has represented India at the 15th East Asia Summit (EAS).

**Facts:**

- The summit was chaired by the Prime Minister of Vietnam.
- During the summit, countries adopted the **Ha Noi Declaration** and discussed ways to strengthen the EAS platform and make it more responsive to emerging challenges.

**Additional Facts:**

- **East Asia Summit:** It was established in 2005. It is a premier forum in the Asia-Pacific region dealing with issues relating to security and defence.
- **Members:** It comprises the ten member states of the ASEAN countries along with 8 members Australia, China, Japan, India, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States. India is a founding member of the East Asia Summit.
- **Priority Areas:** There are six priority areas of regional cooperation within the framework of the EAS which are a) Environment and Energy b) Education c) Finance d) Global Health Issues and Pandemic Diseases e) Natural Disaster Management and f) ASEAN Connectivity.
- **Significance:** The members of the EAS together represent 54% of the world population and account for 58% of the global GDP.

**East Asia Summit**

Leaders' summit in Naypyidaw, Myanmar on November 12-13

**20th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit**

**News:** The 20th Summit of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council of Heads of State was held under the chairmanship of Russia.



**Facts:**

- **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):** It is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation founded in 2001 by Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- **Members:** China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. India and Pakistan were admitted to the SCO as permanent members in 2017.
- **Observed States:** Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia.
- **Secretariat:** Beijing, China.
- **Goals:**
  - strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states;
  - promoting effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology, culture, education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection,
  - making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region;
  - Moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.
- **Heads of State Council (HSC):** It is the supreme decision-making body in the SCO. It meets once a year and adopts decisions and guidelines on all important matters of the organisation.
- **SCO Heads of Government Council (HGC):** It meets once a year to discuss the organisation's multilateral cooperation strategy and priority areas, to resolve current important economic and other cooperation issues. It also approves the organisation's annual budget.
- **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS):** It is a permanent organ of the SCO which serves to promote cooperation of member states against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism. Headquarters: Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

**4th High-Level Meeting of the OPEC-India Dialogue**

**News:** The OPEC Secretariat hosted the 4th High-Level Meeting of the OPEC-India Dialogue via video conference.

**Facts:**

- **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC):** It is a permanent, intergovernmental Organization created at the Baghdad Conference in 1960 by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.
- **Aim:** To manage the supply of oil in an effort to set the price of oil on the world market and to avoid fluctuations that might affect the economies of both producing and purchasing countries.
- **Members:** Algeria, Angola, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Venezuela
- **Headquarters:** Vienna, Austria.

**Additional Facts:**

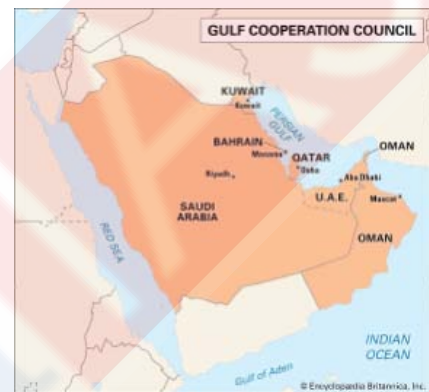
- **OPEC Fund for International Development:** It is a multilateral development finance institution established in 1976. Its 12 Member Countries are: Algeria, Ecuador, Gabon, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Venezuela.

**India - Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dialogue**

**News:** India had a virtual meeting with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). During the meeting, India has asked the members of the GCC to facilitate the return of Indians who want to resume work with the relaxing of Covid-19-related restrictions.

**Facts:**

- **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC):** It is a regional intergovernmental political and economic union established in 1981.
- **Members:** Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE
- **Objective:** To have coordination, integration and inter-connection between Member States in all fields, strengthening ties between their peoples, formulating similar regulations in various fields and encouraging cooperation of the private sector.
- **Headquarters:** Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

**Interpol creates cybercrime-related communication services**

**News:** INTERPOL has created two secure and flexible services to facilitate cybercrime-related communication among police and other stakeholders.

**Facts:**

- **Cybercrime Knowledge Exchange workspace:** It is open to law enforcement, governments, international organizations and cybersecurity industry experts to exchange non-police operational information on cybercrime.
- **Cybercrime Collaborative Platform:** It is a centralized information hub for the coordination of global law enforcement operations against cybercrime.

**Additional Facts:**

- **International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL):** It is an intergovernmental organization established in 1923 with the aim to facilitate worldwide police cooperation and crime control in around 194 countries. **Headquarters:** Lyon, France.
- **INTERPOL National Central Bureau (NCB):** Each of the member countries hosts an INTERPOL NCB. It connects their national law enforcement with other countries and with the General Secretariat of Interpol.
  - The Central Bureau of Investigation(CBI) is designated as the National Central Bureau of India

### UN adopts India sponsored resolutions on nuclear disarmament

**News:** The First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly has adopted two resolutions sponsored by India on nuclear disarmament titled

‘Reducing Nuclear Danger’ and ‘Convention on Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons’.

#### Facts:

- **Convention on Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons:** The resolution was tabled by India since 1982. It requests the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva to commence negotiations on an international convention prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances.
  - The aim behind it is that the legally and universally binding agreement will generate the necessary political will globally that will lead to the total elimination of nuclear weapons.
- **Reducing Nuclear Danger:** The resolution was tabled by India since 1998. It draws global attention to the risks of unintentional or accidental use of nuclear weapons and underscores the need for a review of nuclear doctrines. It calls for concrete steps to reduce such risks including through de-alerting and de-targeting of nuclear weapons.

#### Additional Facts:

- **United Nations General Assembly First Committee** (also known as the Disarmament and International Security Committee) is one of six main committees at the General Assembly of the United Nations. It deals with disarmament and international security matters.
- **Conference on Disarmament (CD):** It is a multilateral disarmament forum established in 1979 by the international community to negotiate arms control and disarmament agreements. It meets annually in three separate sessions in Geneva, Switzerland.

### Pointly for International Relations

- **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU):** It was established in 1889 as a global organization of national parliaments to promote parliamentary dialogue world-wide and work for peace and cooperation among the people. **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland.
- **South Asian University:** It is an International University established in 2010 by the governments of the SAARC countries to create a Centre of Excellence in the form of a University that would provide world-class facilities and professional faculty to students and researchers drawn from every country of the SAARC region. It is located in New Delhi, India.
- **Shahtoot Dam:** It is a proposed dam to be constructed by India in Afghanistan. The dam will provide drinking, irrigation and Environmental water for Kabul province.
- **Pangda Village:** It is a new border village built by China. The village is located on territory disputed by China and Bhutan. The area is east of India Bhutan China trijunction on the Doklam plateau, the site of a 72- day stand- off in 2017.
- **Nagorno-karabakh:** It is a landlocked region in the South Caucasus within the mountainous range of Karabakh. It is located between western Asia and Eastern Europe. It is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, but most of the region is controlled by Armenian separatists.

- **Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions:** It is a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly. There are 16 members of the committee appointed by the UN General Assembly for a period of three years on the basis of a broad geographical representation. The members serve in a personal capacity and not as representatives of Member States.
- **Gilgit Baltistan:** It is a region administered by Pakistan as an administrative territory. It borders Azad Kashmir to the south, Afghanistan to the north, China to the east and India to the southeast. Pakistan has announced to convert the disputed territory of Gilgit Baltistan (GB) into a full-fledged province.

## POLICY

### SDG Investor Map for India

**News:** SDG Finance Facility platform at UNDP in partnership with Invest India, has launched SDG Investor Map for India.

#### Facts:

- **SDG Investor Map:** It aims to help public and private sector stake-holders direct capital towards Investment Opportunity Areas (IOAs) that can contribute to the nationally determined sustainable development needs of India.
- **Priority Sectors:** The map has identified 18 IOAs across 6 Priority Sectors including Education, Healthcare, Agriculture and Allied Services, Financial Services, Renewable Energy and Alternatives, and Sustainable Environment.

#### Additional Facts:

- **Invest India:** It was set up in 2009 as a non-profit venture under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry. It is the National Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency of India and acts as the first point of reference for investors in India.
- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** These were launched at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. It consists of 17 goals and 169 specific targets that are to be achieved by 2030. However, they are not legally binding.

### Innovative Technology infusion for better implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission

**News:** A multi-disciplinary Technical Committee in the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti has recommended five technologies specifically three technologies for drinking water and two technologies for sanitation.

#### Facts:

**The five technologies that have been recommended are:**

- **Grundfos AQPure:** It is a solar energy based water treatment plant based on ultra filtration.

- **Janajal Water on Wheel:** It is an Internet of Things(IoT) based electric vehicle based on GPS location to enable delivery of safe water to the doorstep of households
- **Presto Online Chlorinator:** It is a non-electricity dependent online chlorinator for disinfection of water for removal of bacterial contamination.
- **Johkasou technology:** It is an inbuilt packaged black (sewage) and grey water (Kitchen and bath water) treatment system having advanced anaerobic-aerobic configuration that can be installed underground
- **FBTec®:** It is a site assembled decentralised sewage treatment system using fixed filter media.

#### Additional Facts:

- **Jal Jeevan Mission:** It was launched in 2019 with an aim to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India.
  - The mission will be based on a community approach to water and will include extensive Information, Education and communication as a key component of the mission.

#### What OTT platforms coming under IB ministry means?

**News:** Government has brought video streaming over-the-top(OTT) platforms under the ambit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. These platforms were so far under the purview of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

#### Facts:

- **What are OTT platforms?** It is a streaming media service offered directly to viewers via the Internet. Examples include Netflix, Amazon's Prime Video, Hotstar and others.
- **What are the laws regulating OTT platforms?** Currently, there is no law or autonomous body governing digital content.
- **What about other platforms?** At present, the Press Council of India regulates the print media, the News Broadcasters Association (NBA) represents the news channels, the Advertising Standards Council of India regulates advertising while the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) monitors films.
- **What happens now to the OTT platforms?** The central government's move to bring the OTT platforms under the I&B Ministry will give the government control over the OTT platforms which were unregulated till now.

#### Cabinet approves PLI Scheme to 10 key Sectors

**News:** The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister has given its approval to introduce the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for 10 key sectors.

#### Facts:

- **Aim:** To help encourage domestic manufacturing, reduce imports and generate employment.
- **Features:** Under the Scheme, companies will get incentives on incremental sales from products manufactured in domestic units.



- **Implementation:** The scheme will be implemented by the concerned ministries/departments.
- **10 Key Sectors (and Implementing Ministry/Department):**
  - Advance Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery: NITI Aayog and Department of Heavy Industries.
  - Electronic/Technology Products: Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology
  - Automobiles & Auto Components: Department of Heavy Industries.
  - Pharmaceuticals drugs: Department of Pharmaceuticals
  - Telecom & Networking Products: Department of Telecom
  - Textile Products (MMF segment and technical textiles): Ministry of Textiles
  - Food Products: Ministry of Food Processing Industries.
  - High Efficiency Solar PV Modules: Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.
  - White Goods (ACs & LED): Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.
  - Speciality Steel: Ministry of Steel.
  - **Note:** The above sectors will be in addition to the already notified PLI schemes in the following sectors:
    - Mobile Manufacturing and Specified Electronic Components: Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY).
    - Critical Drug Intermediaries, Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients and Manufacturing of Medical Devices: Department of Pharmaceuticals.

### Pilot Scheme on Fortification of Rice

**News:** Union Minister for Food & Consumer Affairs has said that Fifteen States have been identified for implementing Pilot Scheme on Fortification of Rice & its distribution through Public Distribution System (PDS).

#### Facts:

- **Pilot Scheme on Fortification of Rice:** It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme which aims to address anaemia and micronutrients' deficiency amongst beneficiaries consuming rice supplied under PDS.
- **Duration of Scheme:** The Scheme has been approved for a period of three years beginning 2019-2020.
- **Implementation:** 15 State Governments have identified their respective districts (1 district per state) for implementing the Scheme.
  - Already 5 states of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh have started the distribution of fortified rice in their respective identified districts.

**Additional Facts:**

- **Food Fortification:** It is the deliberate addition of one or more micronutrients to food so as to correct or prevent a deficiency and provide a health benefit.
- **Biofortification:** It is the process by which the nutritional quality of food crops is improved through agronomic practices, conventional plant breeding or modern biotechnology.
- **Difference between Biofortification and Food Fortification:** Biofortification differs from conventional fortification as biofortification aims to increase nutrient levels in crops during plant growth rather than through manual means during processing of the crops.

**Pointly for Policy**

- **State of Food and Agriculture Report:** It has been released by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The report aims to present new estimates on the pervasiveness of water scarcity in irrigated agriculture and of water shortages in rainfed agriculture, as well as on the number of people affected.
- **Mission Covid Suraksha:** It is Department of Biotechnology initiative for research and development (R&D) of the Indian Covid vaccine. Under this, the Government has allocated Rs 900 crore. The fund would only cater to R&D activity and would not cover the cost of vaccine or logistics required for its development.
- **Global Innovation and Technology Alliance (GITA):** It is a Public Private Partnership (PPP) company promoted jointly by the Technology Development Board (TDB), Department of Science & Technology (DST) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). It aims to strengthen India's innovation ecosystem through supporting and enabling technology and innovation driven enterprises.
- **National Portal for Transgender Persons:** The portal aims to help the transgender persons in applying for certificate and ID cards digitally without having to visit any government office. Through the portal, they can also monitor the status of their application that ensures transparency in the process.
- **Garima Greh:** It is a shelter home for transgender persons that will be run in association with Lakshya Trust, a Community based organisation entirely run by the Transgenders. The purpose of the Shelter Home is to provide shelter to Transgender persons with basic amenities like food, medical care, recreational facilities and skill building among others.
- **POSHAN Abhiyaan's Integrated Child Development Services Common Application Software (ICDS-CAS) Portal:** It is an innovative web and mobile-phone based application developed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) to facilitate anganwadi workers (AWWs) in their daily tasks, helps supervisors to assess and provide feedback to the workers and helps other programme officials to track service delivery and take informed decisions.
- **Sahakar Pragya:** It has been launched by Union Agriculture Minister to impart training to primary cooperative societies in rural areas of the country through National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC).
- **Sanitation and Hygiene Fund:** It has been launched by the United Nations to provide accelerated funding to countries with the heaviest burden of diseases stemming from lack of sanitation services and have the least ability to respond to them.

- **UMANG App:** It is developed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and National e-Governance Division (NeGD) to drive Mobile Governance in India. It provides a single platform for all Indian Citizens to access pan India e-Gov services ranging from Central to Local Government bodies and other citizen centric services.
- **Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge:** It was launched by Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs in 243 cities across the country to ensure that no life of any sewer or septic tank cleaner is ever lost again owing to the issue of 'hazardous cleaning and to promote mechanized cleaning. Under this challenge, cities will be awarded in three sub-categories – with a population of more than 10 lakhs, 3-10 lakhs and upto 3 lakhs based on ground assessment in May, 2021.
- **Food Coalition:** It is a voluntary multi-stakeholder and multi-sector alliance launched by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to support innovative initiatives to ensure global food access, increase the resilience of agri-food systems and put them on a more sustainable course
- **AIM-Sirius programme:** It is the first Indo-Russian bilateral youth innovation initiative that seeks to develop technological solutions (both web- and mobile-based) for the two countries through a 14-day virtual programme for Indian and Russian schoolchildren.
- **Nurturing Neighborhoods Challenge:** It is a 3-year initiative launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to support cities to develop, pilot and scale solutions that enhance the quality of life of young children, their caregivers and families in the public realm. The initiative is open to all Smart Cities, other cities with more than five lakh population, and capitals of States and UTs.
- **Data Maturity Assessment Framework (DMAF):** It is designed to help cities undergo a process of self-evaluation and embrace a data culture. The second cycle aims to assess the data readiness of 100 Smart Cities on the Systemic Pillar across 5nComponents- Policy, People, Process, Technology and Outcomes.
- **World's Cities Report 2020:** It has been released by the UN-Habitat. The report aims to show the intrinsic value of sustainable urbanization and how it should be harnessed for the wellbeing of all.
- **Strategic Policy & Facilitation Bureau (SPFB):** It has been setup as a collaboration between Ministry of AYUSH and Invest India to facilitate planned, systematic growth and investment in the AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) sector.

## ECONOMY

### What are Negative Bond Yields?

**News:** The demand for negative yield bonds is on rise in the global market.

**Facts:**

**Negative-yield bonds:** These are debt instruments that offer to pay the investor a maturity amount lower than the purchase price of the bond. These are generally issued by central banks or governments and investors pay interest to the borrower to keep their money with them.

- **Why do investors buy Negative Yield Bonds?**

- **Pledge asset:** Bonds are often used to pledge as collateral for financing and as a result need to be held regardless of their price or yield.
- **Currency Gain:** Some investors believe they can still make money even with negative yields. For example, foreign investors might believe the currency's exchange rate will rise, which would offset the negative bond yield.
- **Deflation Risk:** Domestically, investors might expect a period of deflation, or lower prices in the economy, which would allow them to make money by using their savings to buy more goods and services.
- **Safe Haven Assets:** Investors might also be interested in negative bond yields if the loss is less than it would be with another investment.

### What is a Technical Recession?

**News:** In its latest monthly bulletin, the Reserve Bank of India has said that India has entered a “technical recession” in the first half of 2020-21— for the first time in its history.

**Facts:**

- **What is the Technical recession?** It is a term used to describe two consecutive quarters of decline in output. In the case of a nation's economy, the term usually refers to back-to-back contractions in real GDP.

#### CONTRACTION IN INDIA. ELSEWHERE

	Quarterly Real GDP growth rate (in %)			
	October to December 2019	January to March 2020	April to June 2020	July to September 2020
India	4.1	3.1	-23.9	-8.6*
US	2.3	0.3	-9	-2.9
UK	1	-2.1	-21.5	-9.6
China	6	-6.8	3.2	4.9
Brazil	1.7	-0.3	-11.4	NA
Indonesia	5	3	-5.3	-3.5
South Africa	-0.5	0.1	-17.1	NA

- **When does Technical Recession occur?** It is most often caused by a one-off event (in this case, the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns imposed to combat it) and is generally shorter in duration.
- **Difference between Technical Recession and Recession:** The technical recession is mainly used to capture the trend in GDP but the Recession encompasses an appreciably more broad-based decline in economic activity that covers several economic variables including employment, household and corporate incomes and sales at businesses.

### Centre rolls out ₹1.19 lakh-crore stimulus package

**News:** The Finance Minister has announced a fresh set of relief and stimulus measures for the economy worth ₹1.19 lakh crore as a part of Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan 3.0.

**Facts:**

- **Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme:** The emergency credit line guarantee scheme (ECLGS) for MSMEs, businesses, MUDRA borrowers and individuals (loans for business purposes) has been extended till March 31, 2021.



- **ECLGS 2.0** was also launched for the health care sector and 26 sectors stressed due to COVID-19 pandemic. The entities of the 26 stressed sectors are identified by Kamath Committee.
- **Production-Linked Incentive Scheme:** The PLI scheme worth ₹ 1.46 lakh crore is being offered to 10 champion sectors which will help boost the efficiency and competitiveness of domestic manufacturing.
- **Pradhan Mantri Awaaz Yojana Urban:** An additional outlay of ₹ 18,000 crore over budget estimate towards PM Awaaz Yojana Urban has been announced which will help ground 12 lakh houses and complete 18 lakh houses. This will create additional 78 lakh jobs and improve the production and sale of cement and steel.
- **Income Tax Relief for Developers and Home Buyers:** The finance ministry has announced tax relief for developers and home buyers for houses up to ₹ 2 crore.
- **Investment in NIIF:** Government will make ₹6,000 Crore equity investment in debt platform of National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) which will help NIIF provide a debt of ₹ 1.1 Lakh Crore for infrastructure projects by 2025.
- **PM Garib Kalyan Rozgar Yojana:** Additional outlay of ₹10,000 Crore is being provided for PM Garib Kalyan Rozgar Yojana to provide rural employment. This will help accelerate the rural economy.
- **IDEAS Scheme:** Around ₹3,000 Crore boost is being provided to EXIM Bank for promoting project exports under Indian Development and Economic Assistance Scheme (IDEAS Scheme).
- **R&D grant for COVID Vaccine:** ₹900 Crore is being provided to Department of Biotechnology for Research and Development of Indian COVID Vaccine.

### Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana

**News:** Finance minister has announced the Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana scheme.

**Facts:**

- **Aim:** To incentivise the creation of new employment opportunities during the Covid-19 economic recovery phase.
- **Beneficiaries (new employees) under Scheme:**
  - Any new employee joining employment in EPF registered establishments on monthly wages less than Rs 15,000.
  - EPF members drawing a monthly wage of less than Rs 15,000 who made exit from employment during covid-19 pandemic from March 1, 2020, to September 30, 2020 and are employed on or after October 1, 2020.
- **Government Contribution:** Central Government will provide subsidy for two years in respect of new eligible employees engaged on or after 01.10.2020 at following scale:
  - **Establishments employing up to 1000 employees:** Employee's contributions (12% of Wages) & Employer's contributions (12% of wages) totalling 24% of wages
  - **Establishments employing more than 1000 employees:** Only Employee's EPF contributions (12% of EPF wages)
- **Duration of the Scheme:** The scheme will be operational till June 30, 2021.



**RBI announces co-lending scheme for banks, NBFCs for priority sector**

**News:** Reserve Bank of India has announced the Co-Lending Model (CLM) scheme which is an improvement over the co-origination of loan scheme announced by the RBI in 2018 which seeks to provide greater flexibility to the lending institutions.

**Facts:**

- **CLM Scheme:** It aims to improve the flow of credit to the unserved and underserved sector of the economy.
- Features of the scheme:
  - Under CLM, banks will be able to co-lend with all registered NBFCs (including HFCs) to the priority sector borrowers based on a prior agreement.
  - However, Banks cannot enter into a co-lending arrangement with an NBFC belonging to the promoter group.
  - NBFCs shall also be required to retain a minimum of 20% share of the individual loans on their books.

**Additional Facts:**

- **Priority Sector lending (PSL):** It means those sectors which the Government and RBI consider as important for the development of the basic needs of the country and are to be given priority over other sectors. The banks are mandated to encourage the growth of such sectors with adequate and timely credit.
- Under this, Commercial banks including foreign banks are required to mandatorily earmark 40% of the adjusted net bank credit for priority sector lending. Regional rural banks and small finance banks will have to allocate 75% of adjusted net bank credit to PSL.
- **Categories:** a) Agriculture b) Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises c) Export Credit d) Education e) Housing f) Social Infrastructure g) Renewable Energy h) Startups among others.

**Pointly for Economy**

- **FDI in Digital Media:** Central Government has announced new guidelines for digital news platforms. It has put emphasis on compliance to the 26% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) cap under the government approval route in digital media. FDI in print media is capped at 26% and that in TV news is 49%.
- **Virtual Global Investor Roundtable (VGIR):** It was organized by the Ministry of Finance and National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF). It is an exclusive dialogue between leading global institutional investors, Indian business leaders and the highest decision makers from the Government of India and Financial Market Regulators.

## ENVIRONMENT

**What are deemed forests?**

**News:** Karnataka Forest Minister has announced that the state government would soon declassify 6.64 lakh hectares of the 9.94 lakh hectares of deemed forests in the state (nearly 67%) and hand it over to Revenue authorities.

**Facts:**

- **Deemed Forest:** The concept of deemed forests has not been clearly defined in any law including the Forest Conservation Act of 1980.
- However, the Supreme Court in the case of T N Godavarman Thirumulpad (1996) had broadened the definition of forest to include not just land classified as forest under forest or revenue departments but also those that are forests according to the definition of a forest.
- It had also asked states to form committees to identify forests, irrespective of the nature of land ownership or whether they are notified, recognized or classified in a time-bound manner.
- Hence, an expert committee constituted by the Karnataka government after the Supreme Court order identified 'deemed forests' as "land having the characteristic of forests irrespective of the ownership".

**What is the Atlantic Ocean's largest protected marine reserve?**

**News:** Tristan da Cunha has been declared as the largest Marine Protection Zone of the Atlantic Ocean.

**Facts:**

- **Tristan da Cunha:** It is an isolated UK Overseas Territory located 6,000 miles from London in the South Atlantic Ocean.
- The island is inhabited by less than 300 humans and the water around the islands is considered to be the richest in the world. It is also home to the World Heritage Site of Gough and Inaccessible Islands, which is one of the most important seabird islands in the world.

**Four more biodiversity heritage sites for Karnataka**

**News:** Karnataka Biodiversity Board has decided to declare four more areas in the State as biodiversity heritage sites.

**Facts:**

- **What are the four areas?** The four areas declared as biodiversity heritage sites are:
  - Antargange Betta in Kolar

- Aadi Narayana Swamy Betta in Chickballapur
- Mahima Ranga Betta in Nelamangala, Bengaluru and
- Urumbi area on the Kumaradhara river basin in Dakshina Kannada.

#### Additional Facts:

- **Biodiversity heritage sites (BHS):** These are considered as unique and fragile ecosystems that can be marine ecosystems, coastal and inland waters, or terrestrial areas.
- **Criteria:**
- Richness of wild as well as domesticated species or intra-specific categories.
- High endemism.
  - Presence of rare and threatened species, keystone species, species of evolutionary significance.
  - Wild ancestors of domestic/cultivated species or their varieties.
  - Past pre-eminence of biological components represented by fossil beds and having significant cultural, ethical or aesthetic values are important for the maintenance of cultural diversity with or without a long history of human association with them.

#### Project Lion: Proposal identifies 6 relocation sites apart from Kuno-Palpur

**News:** Wildlife Institute of India along with the Gujarat Forest Department has identified six new relocation sites apart from the Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary under Project Lion.

#### Facts:

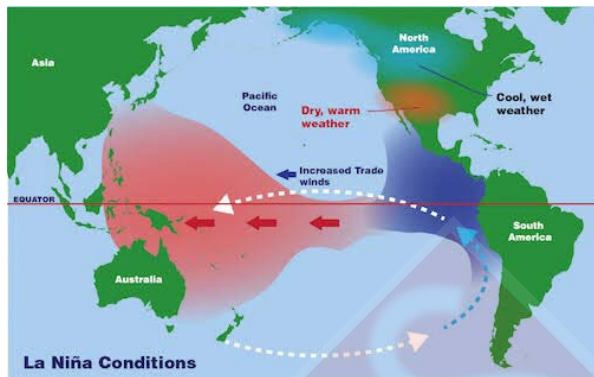
- **Project Lion:** The programme has been launched by Government of India for conservation of the Asiatic Lion. It aims to focus on habitat development, engaging technologies in lion management, addressing the issues of disease in lions and will also be addressing the Human-Wildlife conflict.
- **Why relocation of Lion?** The motive behind finding a relocation site for the Asiatic Lion species is because the population in Gir has low genetic diversity making it vulnerable to threats from epidemics.
- **What are the six new sites identified for relocation?**
  - Madhav National Park, Madhya Pradesh.
  - Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan.
  - Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve, Rajasthan.
  - Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh.
  - Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan.
  - Jessore-Balaram Ambaji WLS and adjoining landscape, Gujarat.

#### La Nina is back; what does that mean for Africa, Asia

**News:** According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the La Niña weather phenomenon is back in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean after nearly a decade's absence.

**Facts:**

- **La Niña:** It means the large-scale cooling of ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean together with changes in the tropical atmospheric circulation namely winds, pressure and rainfall.
- It has the opposite impacts on weather and climate as El Niño which is the warm phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO).

**Weather Changes in Asia and Africa due to La-Nina:**

- In India, La Niña means the country will receive more rainfall than normal leading to floods.
- The Horn of Africa and central Asia will see below average rainfall due to La Niña.
- East Africa is forecast to see drier-than-usual conditions which together with the existing impacts of the desert locust invasion may add to regional food insecurity.
- La Niña could also lead to increased rainfall in southern Africa.
- La Niña could also affect the South West Indian Ocean Tropical Cyclone season reducing the intensity.
- Southeast Asia, Pacific Islands and the northern region of South America are expected to receive above-average rainfall.

**Pointly for Environment**

- **Climate Change Knowledge Portal:** It was launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. It is a single point Information resource which provides information on the different climate initiatives taken by various line Ministries enabling users to access updated status on these initiatives.
- **India's first green energy convergence project:** Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL) and Goa government has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to implement India's first convergence project in Goa. The project aims to connect seemingly independent sectors like Solar Energy, Energy Storage and LED lights to generate green energy for rural and agriculture consumption and also to enable decarbonization.
- **Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (PTR):** It is situated in Uttar Pradesh forming part of the Terai Arc Landscape in the upper Gangetic Plain Biogeographic Province. It was declared as a tiger reserve in 2008. The northern edge of the reserve lies along the Indo-Nepal border while the southern boundary is marked by the river Sharada and Khakra.
- **Willow Warbler:** It is one of the longest migrating small birds which breeds throughout northern and temperate Europe and the Palearctic. It is a bird of open woodlands with trees and ground cover for nesting, including most importantly birch, alder and willow habitats.  
**IUCN Status:** Least Concern.
- **Climate Transparency report, 2020 (previously known as Brown to Green Report):** It has been released by Climate Transparency. The report aims to provide the most comprehensive



annual review of G20 countries climate action and their transition to a net-zero emissions economy.

- **Lonar Lake:** It is a notified National Geo Heritage Monument located at Lonar, Maharashtra. The lake is believed to have been formed when a meteorite crashed into Earth around 50,000 years ago. The lake is mentioned in ancient scripts like the Skanda Purana, the Padma Purana and the Ain-i-Akbari. It was declared as a Wetland of International importance under Ramsar Convention.
- **Soor Sarovar Lake:** It is also known as Keetham lake and is situated alongside river Yamuna in Agra, Uttar Pradesh. The lake is situated within the Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary which was declared as a bird sanctuary in the year 1991. It also has a Bear Rescue centre for rescued dancing bears. It was declared as a Wetland of International importance under Ramsar Convention.
- **Mink:** They are dark-colored, semiaquatic carnivorous mammals of the family Mustelidae which also includes weasels, otters and ferrets. There are two extant species referred to as "mink": the American mink and the European mink. The European mink is listed by the IUCN as Critically Endangered due to an ongoing reduction in numbers.
- **Paris agreement:** It was adopted at the UNFCCC COP21 held in Paris in 2015. It aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change and specifies long-term goals regarding global average temperatures, adaptation to climate change and finance flows. **Recently, United States has formally exited the Paris Climate Agreement.**
- **Typhoon Goni:** It is a tropical cyclone that recently made landfall as an extremely powerful Category 5-equivalent super typhoon in the Philippines.
- **Panna Biosphere Reserve:** It is located in the state of Madhya Pradesh. It is characterized by forests and marshy vegetation, with an abundance of rare medicinal plants as well as other non-timber forestry products such as Kattha, gum and resins. It has been included as a part of UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves.
- **Mansar Lake Rejuvenation Plan:** It is a comprehensive plan that aims to holistically develop the sacred Lake of Mansar as the second biggest tourist destination in Jammu region and also to preserve the lake, its ecology and heritage.

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### ISRO's Shukrayaan Mission

**News:** Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has short-listed 20 space-based experiment proposals for its proposed Shukrayaan Mission.

**Facts:**

- **Shukrayaan Mission:** It is a mission to study Venus for more than four years.
- **Launch Year:** The satellite is planned to be launched in either 2024 or 2026 onboard GSLV Mk II rocket.
- **Significance of studying Venus?**
  - Venus is often described as the twin sister of the Earth because of the similarities in size, mass, density, bulk composition and gravity.



- It is believed that both planets share a common origin, forming at the same time out of a condensing nebulosity around 4.5 billion years ago.
- Venus is around 30 per cent closer to the Sun as compared to Earth resulting in much higher solar flux.

### India's IRNSS is now part of World Wide Radio Navigation System

**News:** Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) has been accepted as a component of the World Wide Radio Navigation System (WWRNS) for operation in the Indian Ocean Region by the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

**Facts:**

- **How will it help India?** This will enable merchant vessels to use IRNSS for obtaining position information similar to GPS and GLONASS to assist in the navigation of ships in ocean waters approximately up to 1500 km from Indian boundary.

**Additional Facts:**

- **IRNSS (NavIC):** It is an independent regional navigation satellite system developed by India. It is designed to provide accurate position information service to users in India as well as the region extending up to 1500 km from its boundary.
  - **Types of Service:** IRNSS will provide two types of services, namely, Standard Positioning Service (SPS) which is provided to all the users and Restricted Service (RS) which is an encrypted service provided only to the authorised users.
  - **Applications of IRNSS:** Terrestrial, Aerial and Marine Navigation, Disaster Management, Vehicle tracking and fleet management, Integration with mobile phones, Mapping. Terrestrial navigation among others.

### What are Microwave Weapons?

**News:** Indian Army has rejected a fake report which had claimed that the Chinese army had used “microwave weapons” to drive Indian soldiers away from their positions in eastern Ladakh.

**Facts:**

- **Microwave weapons:** These are supposed to be a type of direct energy weapons, which aim highly focused energy in the form of sonic, laser, or microwaves at a target.
- **How does it target?** It works much the same as regular microwaves. It uses beams of high-frequency electromagnetic radiation to heat the water in a human target's skin causing pain and discomfort.
- **Which countries have these ‘microwave weapons’?**
  - China had first put on display its “microwave weapon”, called Poly WB-1 at an air show in 2014.
  - The United States has also developed a prototype microwave-style weapon which it calls the “Active Denial System”.

### The Guillain Barre Syndrome some Covid-19 patients develop

**News:** In a rare complication, some patients infected with Covid-19 have been found suffering from Guillain Barre Syndrome (GBS).

**Facts:**

- **Guillain Barre Syndrome (GBS):** It is a rare neurological disorder in which the body's immune system mistakenly attacks part of its peripheral nervous system—the network of nerves located outside of the brain and spinal cord.
- **Symptoms:** Tingling or itching sensation in the skin, followed by muscle weakness, pain and numbness. A person then starts experiencing reflex loss and paralysis which may be temporary but can last for 6-12 months or longer.
- **Treatment:** Intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) and sometimes plasma therapy helps recovery in patients with GBS. Some patients may develop severe complications and require intensive care treatment or ventilator support.

**What is Chapare virus?**

**News:** United States' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has announced that the 'Chapare virus' that causes Ebola-like illness can spread through human-to-human transmission.

**Facts:**

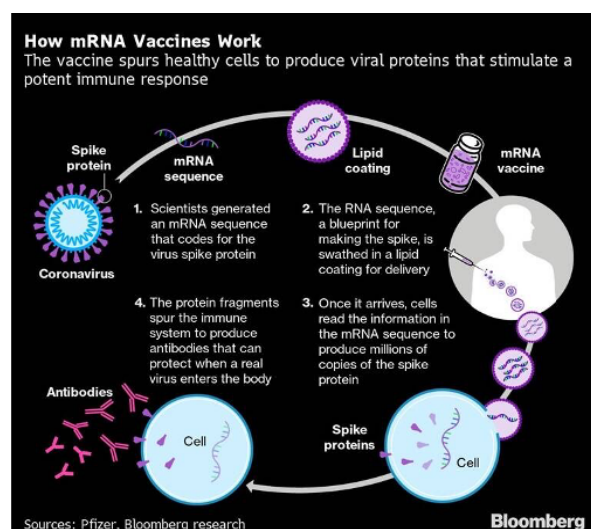
- **Chapare Virus:** It is caused by the same arenavirus family that is responsible for illnesses such as the Ebola virus disease (EVD).
- **Origin:** It was first discovered in 2004 in Bolivian province of Chapare, from where it gets its name. Though it disappeared in 2004, an outbreak last year infected at least five people.
- **Hosts:** Chapare virus are generally carried by rats and can be transmitted through direct contact with the infected rodent, its urine and droppings or through contact with an infected person.
- **Symptoms:** Some symptoms of Chapare are fever, abdominal pain, vomiting, bleeding gums, skin rash and pain.
- **Treatment:** Since there are no specific drugs to treat the disease, patients generally receive supportive care such as intravenous fluids.

**What is mRNA vaccine?**

**News:** Moderna and Pfizer have announced the results of the COVID vaccines. These vaccines use the same technology, based on messenger RNA or mRNA.

**Facts:**

- **How mRNA or messenger RNA Vaccine works?** It works by giving the body instructions to produce a spike protein which is present on the surface of the coronavirus.
- In turn, this is expected to prompt the immune cells to create antibodies to fight it. These antibodies will remain in



the blood and fight the real virus if and when it infects the human body.

#### Additional Facts:

#### Other Technologies to develop vaccine:

IMMUNOGEN	HOW IT WORKS	ADVANTAGE	DISADVANTAGE	EXAMPLE of vaccines
<b>Attenuated live virus</b>	Live virus but doesn't cause disease	Induces same response as natural infection	Not recommended for pregnant women and immunocompromised persons	Measles, rubella, mumps, yellow fever, smallpox (vaccinia)
<b>Whole inactivated virus</b>	Inactivated dead virus	Induces strong antibody response	Requires large quantities of virus	Influenza, rabies hepatitis A
<b>Protein subunit</b>	A protein derived from a pathogen	May have fewer side effects than whole virus (redness, swelling at injection site)	May be poorly immunogenic; complex process	Influenza
<b>Recombinant</b>	Host cell is used to express an antigen	No need to produce the whole virus	May be poorly immunogenic; High cost	Hepatitis B
<b>Peptides</b>	Synthetic produced fragment of an antigen	Rapid development	Poorly immunogenic; High cost	COVID-19 vaccines in development
<b>Replicating or non-replicating viral vector</b>	Viral pathogen expressed on a safe virus that doesn't cause disease	Rapid development	Prior exposure to vector virus (eg. adenovirus) may reduce immunogenicity	Ebola
<b>Nucleic acid</b>	DNA or RNA coding for a viral protein	Strong cellular immunity; rapid development	Relatively low antibody response	COVID-19 vaccines in development

#### Tata Group unveils first CRISPR Cas-9 based diagnostic tool for COVID-19

**News:** Tata Medical and Diagnostics Ltd has announced the commercial launch of CHECK, a novel diagnostic testing for COVID-19.

#### Facts:

- **CHECK:** It is powered by FELUDA, a CRISPR Cas-9 technology that was developed in India by CSIR- IGIB for COVID testing. It is the world's first CRISPR Cas-9 based diagnostic tool to be launched globally.

#### Additional Facts:

- **FELUDA:** It is the acronym for FNCAS9 Editor Linked Uniform Detection Assay. It is a low cost paper strip test which can detect the presence of coronavirus within an hour. It uses indigenously developed CRISPR gene-editing technology to identify and target the genetic material of SARS-CoV2.
- **CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats):** It is a gene editing technology. It can detect specific sequences of DNA within a gene and uses an enzyme functioning as molecular scissors to snip it.

#### Fast radio bursts detected in the Milky Way for the first time

**News:** Intense pulses of radio waves known as fast radio bursts (FRB) have been found in the Milky Way for the first time.

#### Facts:

- **What are Fast Radio Bursts (FRB):** These are bright bursts of radio waves (radio waves can be produced by astronomical objects with changing magnetic fields) whose durations lie in the millisecond-scale, because of which it is difficult to detect them and determine their position in the sky.

- **Who discovered it?** It was detected by several satellites including NASA's Wind mission and Canadian Hydrogen Intensity Mapping Experiment (CHIME), a radio telescope located in British Columbia.
- **Source of FRBs:** The study has suggested that magnetars could be the source of some fast radio bursts (FRBs).
- **Significance:** The FRB was the closest signal ever recorded near the Earth. It was also 3,000 times brighter than any other magnetar radio signal detected till now.

**Additional Facts:**

- **Magnetar:** It is a type of neutron star. The magnetic field of such a star is very powerful, which can be over 10 trillion times stronger than a refrigerator magnet and up to a thousand times stronger than a typical neutron star's.
- **Neutron:** Neutron stars are formed when the core of a massive star undergoes gravitational collapse when it reaches the end of its life.

**Brown carbon 'tarballs' found in Himalayan atmosphere**

**News:** Study has found that nearly 28% of particles collected from the air samples from a research station in the Himalaya-Tibetan Plateau were tarballs.

**Facts:**

- **Tarballs:** They are small light-absorbing, carbonaceous particles formed from Brown Carbon due to burning of biomass or fossil fuels that deposit on snow and ice.
- **Where did Tarballs come from?** The study has indicated that the tarballs were emitted from biomass burning in the Indo-Gangetic Plain.
- **Concerns:** The percentage of the tarballs increased on days of higher levels of pollution and could contribute to hastening of glacial melt and global warming.

**Additional Facts:**

- **Brown Carbon:** It is the brown smoke released by the combustion of organic matter. It coexists with black carbon when released in the atmosphere.
- **Black carbon:** It is formed through the incomplete combustion of fossil fuels, biofuel and biomass.

**What is 16 Psyche, the asteroid believed to be worth \$10,000 quadrillion?**

**News:** A study has found that asteroid 16 Psyche could be made entirely of metal and is worth an estimated \$10,000 quadrillion – more than the entire economy of Earth.

**Facts:**

- **16 Psyche:** It is an asteroid which orbits between Mars and Jupiter.
- **Where is it located?** It is located around 370 million kilometres away from Earth in the asteroid belt.
- **When was it discovered?** It was first discovered in 1853 and was named after the ancient Greek goddess of the soul, Psyche.



- **What is it made of?** Unlike most asteroids that are made up of rocks or ice, scientists believe that Psyche is a dense and largely metallic object thought to be the core of an earlier planet that failed in formation.

### Pointly for Science and Techonology

- **Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT):** It is an array of radio telescopes operated by the National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA), a part of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai. It investigates a variety of radio astrophysical problems ranging from our nearby Solar system to the edge of the observable Universe. **Location:** Pune, Maharashtra.
- **4th Global Conference on Criminal Finances and Cryptocurrencies:** It is an initiative of the Working Group on Cryptocurrencies and Money Laundering established in 2016 by Interpol, Europol and the Basel Institute on Governance. It aims to strengthen knowledge, expertise and best practices for investigations into financial crimes and intelligence on virtual assets and cryptocurrencies.
- **Param Siddhi:** It is a high performance computing-artificial intelligence (HPC-AI) supercomputer. It is jointly built by the Department of Science and Technology and Ministry of Electronics and IT under the National Supercomputing Mission. It has been ranked the 63rd most powerful supercomputer in the world.
- **Mihir:** It is a 2.8 Petaflop supercomputer which has been operational at the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecast (NCMRWF), Noida. It has been ranked the 146th most powerful supercomputer in the world.
- **Yarkovsky effect:** It is an effect during which the sun can heat an asteroid in a non-uniform way causing the space rock to radiate heat energy asymmetrically. This can cause a thrust or a tiny push in a certain direction sometimes changing the path of the asteroid.
- **World Antimicrobial Awareness Week:** It has been announced by World Health Organization (WHO) to increase awareness of global antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Antimicrobial resistance occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites resist the effects of medications making common infections harder to treat and increasing the risk of disease spread, severe illness and death.
- **nOPV2 vaccine:** It has been produced by Indonesia's Bio Farma PT. It is aimed at containing vaccine-derived polio viruses in several African and East Mediterranean countries. It is the first vaccine to be listed under Emergency Use Listing (EUL).
- **Atmospheric Remote-sensing Infrared Exoplanet Large-survey (ARIEL) Mission:** It is a space telescope planned for launch in 2029 by the European Space Agency. It aims to observe at least 1,000 known exoplanets using the transit method, studying and characterising the planets' chemical composition and thermal structures.
- **EOS-01:** It is an earth observation satellite launched by ISRO from Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C49). Its applications are Agriculture, forestry and disaster management support.
- **Data Scraping:** It is the process of extracting data from a website. Scraper bots are designed to derive information from these websites. A user designing a bot to extract data is called a scraper. Teams or individuals resort to data scraping from various companies to source marketing information related content and product price.



## SOCIAL

**What is Period Poverty?**

**News:** Scottish parliament has passed the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill with the aim to eliminate **Period Poverty** by making period products such as sanitary pads and tampons free of cost to those people who need them.

**Facts:**

- **Period Poverty:** It can be defined as no or inadequate access to menstrual products acting as an equity barrier which in turn forces women to drop out of work or education.
- **What's happening in India related to period poverty?**
  - According to the report of the Ministry of Health, only 12% of menstruators in India have exposure to proper period products. The rest 88% are largely dependent on unsafe materials like rags, cloth, hay, sand and ash as their only alternatives.
  - This exposes them to infectious urogenital diseases such as urinary tract infection(UTI), bacterial vaginosis with skin irritation, vaginal itching, white and green discharge and others.
- **Initiatives:** Janaushadhi Suvidha scheme was launched by the Indian Government with an aim to provide women with oxo-biodegradable sanitary napkins at a meagre cost of Rs 2.50/pad across 3,600 Janaushadhi Kendras in the country.

**How kala-azar was eliminated from a highly endemic district in Bihar**

**News:** Integrated control strategy in Vaishali district of Bihar has helped reduce the cases of Kala Azar from 664 in 2014 to 163 in 2016 (Eliminate means when the annual incidence of cases is reduced to less than 1 case per 10,000 people at the sub-district or block level).

**Facts:**

- **Kala-azar or visceral leishmaniasis(VL):** It is a tropical disease characterized by irregular fever, weight loss, anemia and swelling of the spleen and liver.
- **Caused by:** It is caused by a protozoan Leishmania parasite and is transmitted to humans by the bite of infected female sandflies.
- **Cases Worldwide:** According to the World Health Organization (WHO), globally, about 7 to 10 lakh new cases occur annually.
- **Cases in India:** India accounts for about two-thirds of the total global cases and the disease is endemic to Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.
- **WHO Initiative:** An initiative was launched by WHO to eliminate Kala Azar as a public health problem from the South East Asia region by 2020. The deadline has now been extended to 2023.
- **Initiatives:** An integrated control strategy which included mapping of the case distribution, early case detection, chemical-based vector control, community awareness campaigns and strong supervision and monitoring system has helped reduce the cases of Kala Azar from 664 in 2014 to 163 in 2016 in Vaishali district of Bihar.

### Global Prevention Coalition (GPC) for HIV Prevention

**News:** Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare has addressed the Ministerial meeting of the Global Prevention Coalition(GPC) for HIV Prevention.

**Facts:**

- **Global Prevention Coalition (GPC) for HIV Prevention:** It was established in 2017 as a global coalition of United Nations Member States, donors, civil society organizations to support global efforts to accelerate HIV prevention.
- **Objective:** To strengthen and sustain political commitment for primary prevention by setting a common agenda among key policy-makers, funders and programme implementers.
- **Membership:** It includes the 25 highest HIV burden countries, UNAIDS Cosponsors, donors, civil society and private sector organizations.

**Additional Facts:**

- **HIV:** It is the human immunodeficiency virus which targets the immune system and weakens people's defense systems. AIDS is the acquired immune deficiency syndrome, the most advanced stage of HIV infection.
- **Global Fund to Fight AIDS Tuberculosis and Malaria(GFATM):** It was created in 2002 as a partnership between governments, civil society, the private sector and people affected by the diseases.
  - **Aim:** To raise, manage and invest the world's money to end epidemics of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.
  - **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland.

### Arunachal records best sex ratio, Manipur the worst

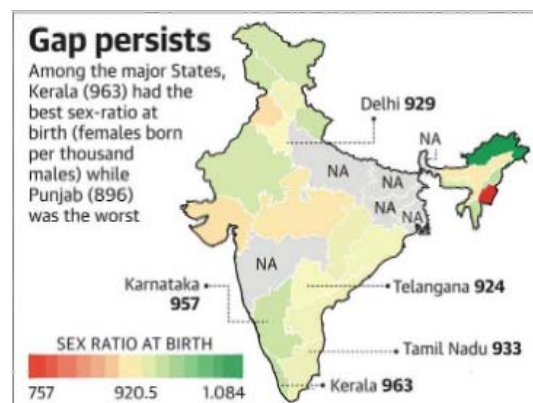
**News:** Registrar General of India has released a report titled "vital statistics of India based on the Civil Registration System".

**Facts:**

- **Civil Registration System(CRS):** It is the unified process of continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the vital events (births, deaths, stillbirths) and characteristics thereof.

**Key Takeaways:**

- **Best Sex Ratio:** Arunachal Pradesh recorded 1,084 females born per thousand males followed by Nagaland (965) Mizoram (964), Kerala (963) and Karnataka (957).
- **Worst Sex Ratio:** The worst sex ratio was reported in Manipur (757), Lakshadweep (839) and Daman & Diu (877), Punjab (896) and Gujarat (896).
- **Registered Births:** The number of



registered births has increased to 2.33 crore in 2018 from 2.21 crore registered births in 2017.

### The Miyas of Assam, and their char-chapori culture

**News:** A proposed “Miya museum” reflecting the culture and heritage of the people living in char-chapouris has stirred up a controversy in Assam.

#### Facts:

- **Who are the Miyas?** The ‘Miya’ community comprises descendants of Muslim migrants from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) to Assam. They came to be referred to as ‘Miyas’, often in a derogatory manner.
- **What is Char-chapouris?** A char is a floating island while chaporis are low-lying flood-prone riverbanks. It is located in the Brahmaputra River and is primarily inhabited by Miya community.
- **Culture of Miya Community:**
  - They perform an ancient martial art called the Lathiba.
  - The community has a variety of songs such as bhatiali Geet related to the river, magan geet or harvest songs, noi khel or geet or boat songs among others.

#### Pointly for Social

- **Interstate Migrant Policy Index (IMPEX):** It has been developed by Mumbai based research non-profit India Migration Now (IMN). It ranks and compares all the states of India on a total value of 100 based on their migrant integration policies. Kerala has topped the index followed by Goa and Rajasthan.
- **India Inequality Report 2020:** It was released by Oxfam. The report is based on data and responses collected from urban and rural women in New Delhi and Rajasthan in the past year.
- **Avadhānam:** It is a literary performance popular from the very ancient days in India. It originated as a Sanskrit literary process and is revived by poets in Telugu and Kannada in modern times. It involves solving tricky literary posers, improvising poems and tests a person's capability of performing such multiple tasks simultaneously.

## INTERNAL SECURITY

### India test-fires land-attack version of BrahMos supersonic cruise missile

**News:** India has successfully test-fired a land-attack version of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

#### Facts:

- **Brahmos Missile:** It is a supersonic cruise Missile designed, developed and produced by BrahMos Aerospace, a joint venture company set up by the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) and Mashinostroyeniya of Russia.
- **Features:**
  - **Range:** It has been extended to 400 km from the original 290 km.

- **Speed:** It has been maintained at 2.8 Mach or almost three times the speed of sound.
- **Significance:** These tests are a display of India's tactical cruise missile triad, i.e. launch capability from land, sea and air platforms.

### Indian Navy launches fifth Scorpene Submarine "Vagir"

**News:** Indian Navy has launched the fifth scorpene class submarine 'Vagir'.

**Facts:**

- **Vagir:** It is a part of the six Kalvari-class submarines being built as part of Indian Navy's Project-75
- They are designed by French naval defence and energy company DCNS and manufactured by Mazgaon Dock Limited, an Indian shipyard in Mumbai.

**Additional Facts:**

- **Project 75:** It is a programme by the Indian Navy that entails building six Scorpene-Class attack submarines. The six submarines are a) INS Kalvari b) INS Khanderi c) INS Karanj d) INS Vela e) INS Vagir and f) INS Vagsheer.

### Pointly for Internal Security

- **Sea Guardian:** It is an unarmed drone inducted by the Indian Navy from the United States on lease. The drone has a maximum endurance of 40 hours and a maximum flying altitude of 40,000 feet.
- **SITMEX 2020:** It is a trilateral naval exercise involving India, Singapore and Thailand. It aims to further consolidate interoperability between the three navies and also enhance understanding, sharing best practices and procedures for multi-faceted maritime operations.
- **Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile system (QRSAM):** It is a short range surface-to-air missile (SAM) system, primarily designed and developed by DRDO. Its purpose is to provide a protective shield to moving armored columns of the Army from enemy aerial attacks. It has a range of around 25 to 30 km.
- **Pinaka Rocket System:** It is a multiple rocket launcher developed indigenously by the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) for the Indian Army. It is used for attacking the adversary targets prior to the close quarter battles which involve smaller range artillery, armored elements and the infantry. It is an advanced version of Pinaka Mk-1 and has a strike range of around 45-60km.
- **Mission Sagar:** It was launched by the Indian government to provide assistance to friendly foreign countries to overcome natural calamities and the coronavirus pandemic. As part of Mission Sagar-II, Indian Naval Ship Airavat will deliver food aid to Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti and Eritrea.

## MISCELLANEOUS

**India International Science Festival (IISF-2020)**

**News:** The 6th India International Science Festival is going to be held in a Virtual format.

**Facts:**

- **IISF 2020:** It was launched in 2015 to promote Science and Technology and demonstrate how science could lead India towards a developed nation within a short span of time.
- **Aim:** To engage the public with science and celebrate the joy of science and show the ways how science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) provide us with the solutions to improve our lives.
- **Organized by:** Ministry of Science and Technology and Ministry of Earth Sciences in association with Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA).
- **Theme:** “Science for Self-Reliant India and Global Welfare”

**Additional Facts:**

- **CuRED or CSIR Ushered Repurposed Drugs:** It is a website launched by CSIR to provide information about the drugs, diagnostics and devices including the current stage of the trials, partnering institutions and their role in the trials and other details.

**What is eVIN?**

**News:** Government is using eVIN in association with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to identify primary beneficiaries and distribution networks for its Covid-19 vaccination programme in India.

**Facts:**

- **Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN):** It is an indigenously developed technology that digitizes vaccine stocks and monitors the temperature of the cold chain through a smartphone application.
- **When was it launched?** The innovative eVIN was first launched in 2015 to support better vaccine logistics management at cold chain points.
- **Implementation:** It is being implemented under National Health Mission (NHM) by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

**United Nations launches “Team Halo” to counter misinformation around COVID-19 vaccines**

**News:** United Nations (UN) has collaborated with The Vaccine Confidence Project at the University of London to launch the “**Team Halo**” initiative.

**Facts:**

- **Aim:** To counter the misinformation around Covid-19 vaccines.
- **Features:** Under this, scientists will build confidence among the public by busting myths and sharing information on the safety and effectiveness of vaccines via the social media.



### Union Minister of Education launches Lilavati Award-2020

**News:** Union Minister of Education has virtually launched the Lilavati Award-2020.

**Facts:**

- **Lilavati Award:** It is an initiative of the All India Council for Technical Education(AICTE) with the aim to recognize efforts by AICTE-approved institutions to treat women with 'equality and fairness'.
- **Objective:** To create awareness about issues like sanitation, hygiene, health, nutrition, literacy, employment, technology, credit, marketing, innovation, skill development, natural resources and rights among women.
- **Categories:** The award will be given in seven categories: women health, self defence, sanitation and hygiene, literacy, women entrepreneurship, and legal awareness.

### Prime Minister inaugurates Statue of Peace

**News:** The Prime Minister has unveiled the 'Statue of Peace' located at Pali, Rajasthan.

**Facts:**

- **Statue of Peace:** It was unveiled in the honor of the Vijay Vallabh Surishwer Ji Maharaj, a Jain Monk.
- **Features:** The statue has been made from Ashtadhatu i.e. 8 metals with Copper being the major constituent.

**Additional Facts:**

- **Shree Vijay Vallabh Surishwer:** He was a Jain saint who lived from 1870 to 1954.
- He actively supported the movement for Independence and had worked in the cause of the Swadeshi movement.

### Operation Thunder 2020

**News:** India Customs intercepted an 18-tonne shipment of red sandalwood destined for the United Arab Emirates, during "Operation Thunder 2020".

**Facts:**

- **Operation Thunder:** It is coordinated by the INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization (WCO) involving law enforcement agencies in 103 countries against environmental crime.

**Additional Facts:**

- **World Customs Organization (WCO):** It is an independent intergovernmental body established in 1952 to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations. **Headquarters:** Brussels, Belgium.
- **International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL):** It is an intergovernmental organization established in 1923 with the aim to facilitate worldwide police cooperation and crime control in around 194 countries. **Headquarters:** Lyon, France.

### NITI Aayog forms panel for reforms in urban planning education

**News:** NITI Aayog has formed a 14 member panel to look into introducing reforms in the urban planning education system.

**Facts:**

- **Composition of Panel:** The panel is headed by NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar. The secretaries of three ministries—Housing and Urban Affairs, Higher Education and Panchayati Raj are among the members of the committee.
- **Mandate:**
  - To review the urban planning education system in India and
  - To examine the availability, demand and supply of qualified urban planners in the country.

### Fourth India Mobile Congress (IMC) 2020

**News:** Minister for Electronics & Information Technology has announced the fourth edition of the India Mobile Congress (IMC) 2020.

**Facts:**

- **India Mobile Congress (IMC):** It is jointly organized by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI).
- **Aim:** To foster international regional cooperation, inspire Satat Bharat - Sanatan Bharat (digital inclusivity in connecting nearly 6 lakh villages with optical fiber), promote Samagra Bharat - Saksham Bharat (entrepreneurship and innovation), drive investments and facilitate supportive regulatory and policy frameworks.
- **Theme:** Inclusive Innovation - Smart I Secure I Sustainable.

### Gandhian Young Technological Awards(GYTI)

**News:** Union Minister for Science and Technology has given away the Gandhian Young

**Facts:**

- **Gandhian Young Technological Awards(GYTI):** It aims to celebrate the spirit of student innovation in all the fields of engineering, science, technology and design through extremely affordable solutions or the ones pushing the technological edge.
- **Categories:** The awards constitute two categories of awards namely:
  - SITARE-GYTI under Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) and
  - SRISTI-GYTI given by Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technological Innovations (SRISTI).

**Additional Facts:**

- **BIRAC:** It is a not-for-profit state owned enterprise under the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) to strategically empower emerging biotech companies.
- **SRISTI:** It is a developmental voluntary organization aiming to strengthen the creativity of/at/for grassroots communities, including individual innovators.

### 6 women led startups win COVID-19 Shri Shakti Challenge

**News:** Six women led startups have won COVID-19 Shri Shakti Challenge.

**Facts:**

- **COVID-19 Shri Shakti Challenge:** It was organized by MyGov in collaboration with UN Women.
- **Objective:** To encourage and involve women led startups to come up with innovative solutions that can help in the fight against COVID19 or solve problems that impact a large number of women.

**Additional Facts:**

- **MyGov:** It is an innovative platform launched in 2014 by Government of India to build a partnership between Citizens and Government with the help of technology for growth and development of India.
- **UN Women:** It was established in 2010. It is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

### Kerala launches Accelerator for Electronics startups

**News:** Kerala has launched a state-of-the-art Accelerator for Electronics Technologies (ACE) to boost startups.

**Facts:**

- **Launched by:** It is a joint initiative of Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM) and Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC).
- **Objective:** To develop itself as a leading accelerator in the country's electronics technologies. It also aims to nurture the development of high-tech startups in electronics and allied disciplines.

**Additional Facts:**

- **C-DAC:** It is an autonomous scientific society created in 1987 under the operational control Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. It primarily carries out Research and development (R&D) in IT, Electronics and associated areas.

### Pointly for Miscellaneous

- **80th All India Presiding Officers Conference:** It was organized by Lok Sabha to celebrate Constitution day. The conference discussed ways to ensure constitutional accountability of the legislature and the executive to the people. **Theme:** 'Harmonious coordination between Legislature, Executive and Judiciary – Key to a vibrant democracy'.
- **Project Kirana:** It was launched by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and MasterCard. It is a two-year project that will focus on increasing revenue streams, expanding financial inclusion and improving digital payments adoption of kirana shops that are owned or operated by women.
- **3rd Global Renewable Energy Investment Meeting and Expo (RE-INVEST 2020):** It has been organized by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), Government of India. It aims to accelerate the worldwide effort to scale up development and deployment of

renewable energy and connect the global investment community with Indian energy stakeholders. **Theme:** 'Innovations for Sustainable Energy Transition'.

- **Global Centre for Traditional Medicine:** It has been set up by the World Health Organization (WHO) in India to support WHO's traditional medicine strategy (2014-23) which aims to support nations in developing policies & action plans to strengthen the role of traditional medicine as part of their journey to universal health coverage.
- **Luhri Stage-1 Hydro Electric Project:** It is a 210 MW project being developed on the Satluj river in Shimla and Kullu districts of Himachal Pradesh. The project is being executed by the Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam Ltd.
- **Bandhu:** It is a self-help website launched by IIT Bombay to support the emotional well-being of its students and inspire them in dealing with various challenges positively.

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