JUNE 2020

IASBABA'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Post-COVID World
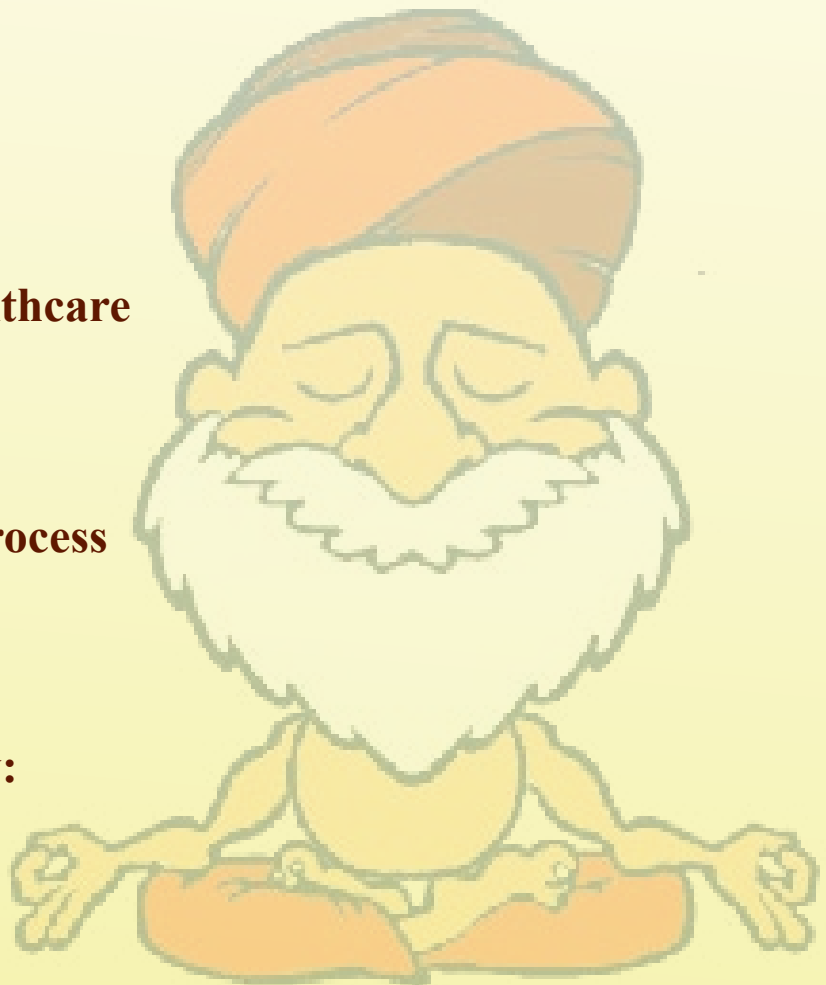
Atmanirbhar Bharat

Need for Universalisation of Healthcare

Dire need for Police Reforms

India and China De-escalation Process

G7 and its expansion

Post-COVID Economic Recovery: Challenges and Way forward

IASBABA

UPSC PRELIMS
TEST SERIES-2021

ENGLISH & हिन्दी (VIDEO
DISCUSSION)

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PREFACE

With the present shift in examination pattern of UPSC Civil Services Examination, 'General Studies – II and General Studies III' can safely be replaced with 'Current Affairs'. Moreover, following the recent trend of UPSC, almost all the questions are issue-based rather than news-based. Therefore, the right approach to preparation is to prepare issues, rather than just reading news.

Taking this into account, our website www.iasbaba.com will cover current affairs focusing more on 'issues' on a daily basis. This will help you pick up relevant news items of the day from various national dailies such as The Hindu, Indian Express, Business Standard, LiveMint, Business Line and other important Online sources. Over time, some of these news items will become important issues.

UPSC has the knack of picking such issues and asking general opinion based questions. Answering such questions will require general awareness and an overall understanding of the issue. Therefore, we intend to create the right understanding among aspirants – **'How to cover these issues?'**

This is the **61st edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **JUNE 2020** which can be accessed from - https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/

VALUE ADDITIONS FROM IASBABA

- **Integrated Value Addition Content** - covers both Static and Dynamic aspects.
- **Think** and **Connecting the dots** - facilitates your thinking to connect and ponder over various aspects of an issue.
- Prelims and Mains focused snippets - Crisp and Precise Pointers.
- **Test Your Knowledge** (Prelims MCQs based on daily current affairs) - For better Revision.
- "**Do You Know?**" section - Satisfies your curiosity for extra knowledge.

This will make sure that, you don't miss out on any important news/editorials from various newspapers on daily basis.

Under each news article, 'Connecting the dots' facilitates your thinking to connect and ponder over various aspects of an issue. Basically, it helps you in understanding an issue from multi-dimensional view-point. You will understand its importance while giving Mains or Interview.

Must Read Articles: We have not included them in the magazine. Those following DNA on daily basis may follow it- https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/

"Tell my mistakes to me not to others, because these are to be corrected by me, not by them."

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ART AND CULTURE/HISTORY

Raja Parba Festival
Culture and Festivals

Key Prelims Pointers:
• It is a three-day unique festival celebrated in Odisha
• Celebrates the onset of monsoon and the earth's womanhood
• It is believed that during this time the Mother Earth or Bhudevi undergoes menstruation
• As a mark of respect towards the earth, all agricultural works are suspended for the three days

Veer Savarkar
Freedom fighter/Personality; Modern History

Key Prelims Pointers:
• May 28, 2020 marked 137th birth anniversary
• He was an Indian independence activist, politician, lawyer and writer
• Also known as Swatantryaveer Savarkar
• Founder of Abhinav Bharat Society
• He was also involved in the formation of Hindu Mahasabha
• He was the president of the Mahasabha from 1937 to 1943

Savarkar's works
• He wrote - The History of the War of Indian Independence (Book)
• Hindutva: who is Hindu? (Book)

ART AND CULTURE/HISTORY

Ambubachi Mela
Culture and Festivals

Key Prelims Pointers:
• It is a four-day fair to mark the annual menstruation of the goddess
• Kamakhya temple, Assam
• One of 51 shaktipeeths or seat of Shakti followers
• The temple's sanctum sanctorum houses the yoni — female genital — symbolised by a rock
• Attainment of womanhood of girls is celebrated with a ritual called 'Tuloni Biya', meaning small wedding

Kamakhya temple, Assam

Mains Focus
• Taboo associated with menstruation is less in Assam
• Ritualistic fair celebrates the goddess' period

Aguada Fenix
Architecture and Culture

Key Prelims Pointers:
• 3,000-years-old Mayan temple site
• Discovered in Mexico using laser mapping technique (Lidar)
• It is 4,600 feet long and up to 50 feet high
• It the ancient civilisation's oldest and largest monument
• It was built between 800 BC and 1,000 BC
• It exceeds ancient Egypt's Great Pyramid of Giza build 1,500 years earlier (in total volume)

Mains Focus:
• Application of Lidar (Aerial Remote Sensing Method)
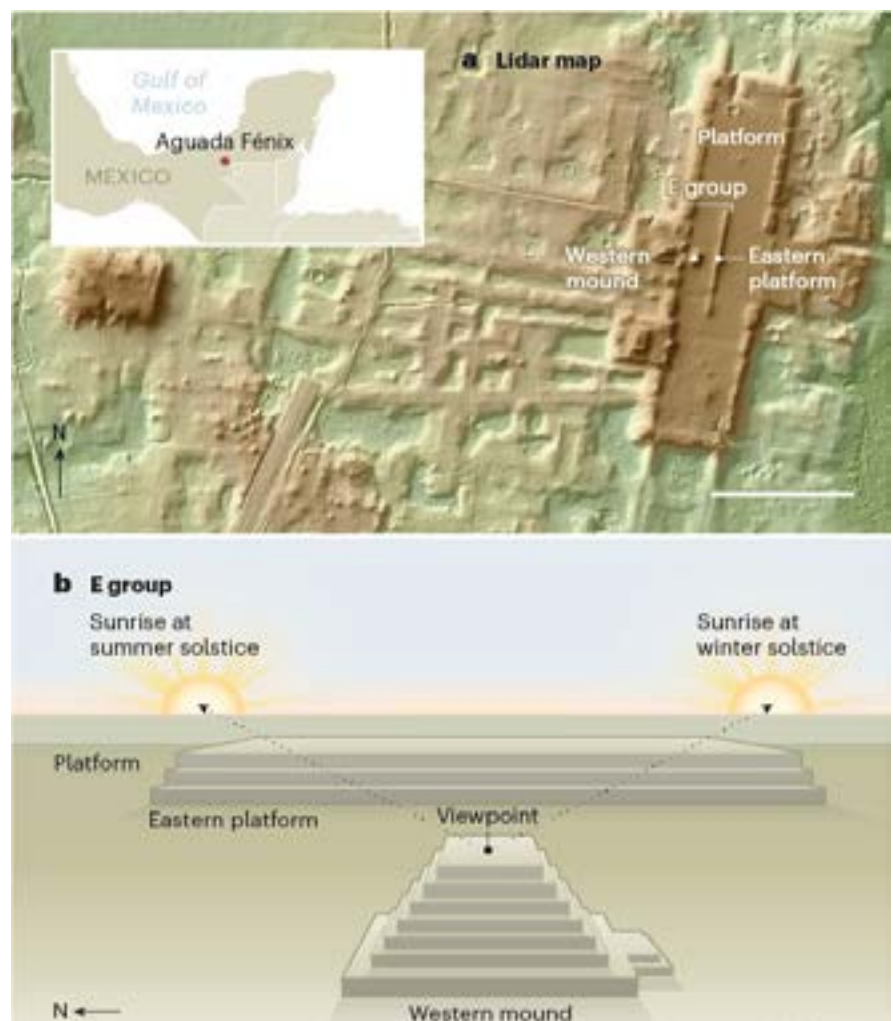
GEOGRAPHY/MAP BASED

Cyclone Nisarga
Natural hazards; Climate

Key Prelims Pointers:
• Western coast - north Maharashtra and south Gujarat
• Much weaker than Cyclone Amphan that struck recently West Bengal and Bangladesh

Do you know?
• Cyclones formed in the Bay of Bengal side more frequent and stronger than those on the Arabian Sea side
• The relatively cold waters of the Arabian Sea are main cause of less cyclones in the sea

Cristobal
Natural hazards; Climate

Key Prelims Pointers:
• Tropical Storm Cristobal had formed recently in the southern Gulf of Mexico.

Do you know?
• Hurricanes, typhoons and cyclones - all are tropical storms
• In the North Atlantic Ocean and Northeast Pacific, they are called hurricanes.
• But if the same type of disturbance takes place in the Northwest Pacific Ocean, it is known as a typhoon.
• And in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean, cyclone is the correct term.

Map activity:
• Locate Gulf of Mexico
• Gautemala

Lonar Lake
Lakes and Rivers; Conservation

Key Prelims Pointers
• It is in Maharashtra
• 56,000-year-old Lonar crater sanctuary lake has turned red/pink
• Pink colour due to salinity and presence of algae or bacteria in the water body
• Lonar lake was created by a meteor impact during the Pleistocene Epoch
• It is the only known hyper velocity meteorite crater in basaltic rock anywhere on Earth
• It was notified as a National Geo-heritage Monument in 1979 by Geological Survey of India (GSI)

Do you know?
• Two other similar ones are in Dhala and Ramgarh in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan respectively but both are relatively unknown

Lonar Lake

GEOGRAPHY/MAP BASED

DSDBO Road
Map based; Strategic Road

Key Prelims Pointers
• Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road in Ladakh
• 255-km long all-weather road built by India's Border Roads Organisation (BRO)
• It runs almost parallel to the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at Aksai Chin

Do you know?
• In October 2019, Defence Minister inaugurated a 500-m-long Bailey Bridge on the road
• The bridge is named after Colonel Chewang Rinchen, an Indian Army hero from Ladakh
• DSDBO connects Leh to Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO)
• DBO has the world's highest airstrip

Challenger Deep
Map based; Location

Key Prelims Pointers:
• Kathy Sullivan became the first woman and the fifth person in history to descend to the Challenger Deep
• She is now the only human who has walked in space and reached the deepest point in the ocean
• The Challenger Deep is the deepest known point in the Earth's oceans with a depth of 10,929 metres
• It is located in the Western Pacific Ocean, at the southern end of the Mariana Trench near the Mariana Islands group.
• This location is in the ocean territory of the Federated States of Micronesia.

Coral Triangle Day
Map based; Conservation

Key Prelims Pointers
• It is held every June 9
• It is an annual, open-sourced event
• Focus - ocean conservation; ways to protect and conserve the Coral Triangle
• Coral Triangle is the world's epicentre of marine biodiversity
• It is one of the 3 mega ecological complexes on our planet
• The region contains 76% of all known coral species and 53% of the world's coral reefs

Do you know?
3 mega ecological complexes
1. Congo Basin
2. Amazon Rainforest
3. Coral Triangle

Coral Triangle encompasses the seas of 6 countries in the Asia-Pacific region
(CT6 countries)
1. Indonesia
2. Malaysia
3. Papua New Guinea
4. Philippines
5. Solomon Islands
6. Timor Leste

Map activity:
• Locate CT6 countries in your Atlas

- **NOTES**

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Delimitation Commission
Statutory Bodies

Why in news?
• 15 MPs were nominated to the Delimitation Commission by the Lok Sabha Speaker
• They will assist the Delimitation Commission in redrawing the Lok Sabha and the Assembly constituencies of the northeastern States and the Union Territory of J&K

Key Prelims Pointers:

About Delimitation Commission
• It is appointed by the President of India
• Usually composed of the retired Supreme Court judge, Chief Election Commissioner and Respective State Election Commissioners
• It works in collaboration with the Election Commission
• Main task is to fix limits or boundaries of territorial constituencies in a country to represent changes in population
• Delimitation Commission Act was enacted in 1952

Objectives
• To provide equal representation to equal segments of a population
• Fair division of geographical areas so that one political party doesn't have an advantage over others

Functions
• To determine the number and boundaries of constituencies
• To make the population of all constituencies nearly equal
• To identify the seats reserved for SCs/STs

Do you know?
• Delimitation Commission orders have the force of law. Its orders cannot be called in question before any court
• 84th Amendment Act of 2001 extended the ban on readjustment of constituencies (till 2026)
• 87th Amendment Act of 2003 - provided for delimitation of constituencies on the basis of the 2001 census and not 1991 census

Reservation not a FR: SC
Rights; Role of Judiciary

Key Prelims Pointers:
According to SC
• Right to reservation is not a fundamental right
• Not giving the quota benefits cannot be construed as a violation of any constitutional right

Do you know?
• In February 2020, SC ruled that there is no fundamental right to claim reservation in public jobs
• No court can order a state government to provide for reservation to SC/STs

NHRC on migrants' plight
Statutory bodies; Social/Welfare issue

Context:
• National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) took suo motu (on its own) cognisance and issued notices to Home Ministry, Railway Board and some state governments
• Notices were in connection with the reported deaths of some migrant workers on Shramik Special trains, due to lack of food and water on these trains.

Key Prelims Pointers:
• NHRC is a statutory body
• It was established in 1993, under Protection of Human Rights Act (PHRA), 1993
• Act also provides for the creation of the State Human Rights Commission
• NHRC is a multi-member body consisting of a chairman and five members
• Chairperson of NHRC is a retired chief justice of India or a judge of the Supreme Court
• They are appointed by the President on the recommendations of a six-member committee (include PM, Speaker of LS, Dy. Chairman of RS, Leaders of Opposition in both the House, Home Minsiter)
• They hold office for a term of three years or until they attain the age of 70 years, whichever is earlier
• The President can remove them from the office under specific circumstances

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Hindi Language in Courts
Governance

Context:
• Haryana government notified an amendment to its Official Language Act, to mandate the use of Hindi in subordinate courts and tribunals across the state
• English has been the preferred choice in many courts and districts

Objective of the amendment
• To ensure that people get justice in their own language
• To make the judicial system more litigant friendly

Mains Focus:

Language in Courts (History)
• **Colonial History** - India's legal system is an institutional inheritance ofw the British Raj (hence, English language is an integral part of its foundation)
• **Continuance of English in Post-Independent India** - Constituent Assembly retained it as the Official Language of the Union (in addition to Hindi)
• **Article 348** - stipulate that proceedings in the high courts and the Supreme Court would be conducted in English
• Article 348 also says that the authoritative text of all acts, orders, rules etc would be in English and subject to Parliament enacting a law otherwise
• **Absence of sustained effort** to develop and enrich Hindi

Challenges
• Building infrastructure and training staff requires adequate time
• State Judicial Examinations are conducted in English, with Hindi only being a separate paper
• English is the default medium of instruction for all law course
• Major laws, judicial precedents, commentaries and other legal resources are all primarily available in English only
• Similar amendment by Punjab in 2008 - progress on the ground has been meagre

Conlusion

There should be gradual creation of an atmosphere for all stakeholders to move towards adopting the language of their choice

It would indeed be ideal for our justice delivery system to function in the common tongue

"Unless 2 generations of lawyers were trained in Hindi, such a move would not be feasible" - Justice B N Srikrishna

Connecting the dots:
• Eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution
• Do you think Hindi or other regional languages should be used in courts?

CAT for J&K and Ladakh
Statutory bodies

Context:
• Bench of Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) for the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh was unaugurated recently
• CAT Bench of Jammu shall deal exclusively with service matters of government employees
• It would reduce the burden of various Courts
• Jammu (UT of J&K) and Srinagar (UT of Ladakh) shall be seats of these tribunals

Key Prelims Pointers:
• CAT is established under Article 323 - A of the Constitution
• Its mandate is to adjudicate disputes and complaints with respect to recruitment and conditions of service of persons appointed to public services and posts
• It deals with affairs of both the Union or other authorities under the control of the Government
• Administrative Tribunal Act, 1985 provides CAT the power to exercise the same jurisdiction and authority in respect of contempt of itself as a High Court
• It is guided by the principles of natural justice in deciding cases (not bound by Civil Procedure Code)
• Salaries, allowances and conditions of service are specified by the Central Government

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Law enforcement post-COVID-19
Governance

Context:
• COVID-19 has impacted the Policing and has given new challenges in short term

Law Enforcement during Pandemic times
• **Essential:** In pandemic times, strict maintenance of public order is most essential. Police ensured strict observance of guidelines, including physical distancing norms which reduced the disease spread
• **Criticality:** Law enforcement was considered next only to healthcare in its critical function of preventing disease spread
• **Public cooperation** during the pandemic helped the police to overcome the challenges of manpower and mobility
• **Use of Social Media**: Police skilfully used social media to disseminate all relevant information to a majority of the population
• **Overall drop in crime**: Fall in heinous crimes (murders and rapes), traffic accidents & fatalities etc.
• **Uptick in domestic violence**: The Tamil Nadu Police, for instance, reportedly received 2,963 calls on domestic violence in April 2020 alone

Challenges for Police in Post-COVID time
• **New dangers of Organised Crime:** Due to restrictions across borders, crime gangs innovate to adapt to changing nature of illicit market. They may infiltrate health services and make profits through the sale of tightly regulated drugs
• **Rise in Cyber Crime:** Various fake portals have been launched to get people to donate money for the cause of combating COVID-19
• **Low quality Products:** Police will also have the responsibility to curb large-scale manufacture of ineffective masks and hand sanitizers
• **Issue of Prisoners:** One of the major challenge will be keeping prisons free of the virus given the scenario of overcrowded prisons in India

Measures needed - comprehensive Standard Operating Procedure, Police Reforms and police-public relations

Dire need for Police Reforms
Governance

Context:
• Police brutality has necessitated the need to reform police system

Issues faced by Police
• **Overburdened:** Police work under incomprehensible pressure as they are understaffed (India had 131 police officers per 1,00,000 people in 2017, as against UN recommended number 222)
• **Slow filling of vacancies** further aggravates the understaffed situation (more than 5 lakh vacancies exist in police forces as of Jan 2020)
• They are **poorly paid** when compared to their counterparts in developed countries
• **Poor Living Conditions**: Police infrastructure is perennially underfunded and there are few efforts to improve them
• **Political Control:** They are usually beholden to corrupt and venal superiors
• **Prejudiced**: Many policemen carry prejudices—hidden and not-so-hidden—which make their performance uneven and unfair
• **Police Abuse**: There are complaints against the police including unwarranted arrests, unlawful searches, torture and custodial rapes and deaths
• **Not Citizen friendly**: Interactions with the police are generally considered frustrating, time-consuming and costly
• **Weak Investigations**: Well over 50% of cases filed by the police (nearly 80% in rape cases) end up in acquittals
• **Structural issues**: 86% of the police force are constables, who have no growth path other than a single promotion (to Head Constable) before they retire. This pushes them to adopt corrupt pathways thus reducing the credibility of Police
• **Low Public Trust:** A study by Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) found that less than 25% of Indians trust the police highly (54% for the army).
• **Lack of Uniformity across India**: Policing in India is a state subject which means there is significant variation across states.

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

- **Resource Crunch**: Between fiscal 2011 and 2015, states spent 4.4% of their budgeted expenditure on policing on average but this has reduced to 4% over the 2015-19
- **Frequent Transfer** often leads to dilution of accountability of Police actions and inability to implement long-term reforms

Way Forward- Reform of Police System
- Effective implementation of **Model Police Act of 2006**
- There is a need to **separate law and order from investigation**
- A separate **independent complaints authority** to inquire into complaints of police misconduct
- Increase the **funding of Police** and better their infrastructure
- **Sensitization of Police** especially during sensitive issue
- **Modernisation of Police Forces** in the light of growing cyber crimes
- **Decriminalization of Politics**

India's Long History of Police Reforms

National Police Commission (NPC)	1977-81	Established after the Emergency, the NPC produced 8 reports suggesting major reforms across a range of police issues.
Ribeiro Committee	1998	Established by the Supreme Court to review the lack of action taken to implement NPC recommendations and to re-frame a new police act
Padmanabhaiah Committee	2000	Dealt with the issues of politicization and criminalization of the police and police accountability
Malimath Committee	2002-03	Suggested changes to the Indian Penal Code and outlined ways of improving judicial proceedings
Police Act Drafting Committee 1	2005	Drafted a new model Police Act to replace the 1861 Police Act.
Supreme Court Directives (Prakash Singh Case)	2006	SC issued seven directives to state police forces including setting up State Security Commissions, Police Establishment Boards and a Police Complaints Authority
Second Administrative Reforms	2007	Noted that police-public relations were unsatisfactory and suggested a range of reforms to change this
Justice Thomas Committee	2010	Highlighted the total indifference of state governments to police reforms
Supreme Court Directives (On Centre's plea to modify 2006 verdict)	2018	New directives on police reforms and reviewed states progress in the implementation of the 2006 directives

George Floyd incident
Example of Police Brutality; Racism

Mains Focus:
- George Floyd, African-American, was killed by police during an arrest in USA
- This led to widespread protest in US against Police brutality and systemic racism
- Racial discrimination in US has shown that economic development not necessarily removes forms of discrimination in the society
- There is need for fresh thinking to bring social equality in India as well along with efforts of economic equality
- Like US, India has also many fault lines like religious discrimination, caste system, regionalism and linguistic issues; which often erupt into protests in India

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Open Ballot System
Free and Fair Election

In this article, we will know about 'open ballot' and issue of cross-voting.

Mains Focus:

What is 'crossing the floor' or 'Cross Voting'?
• In politics, a politician is said to cross the floor if they change their party allegiance
• Crossing the floor may mean changing to a second party after being elected as a member of a first party, or voting against the approved party lines
• For instance, during the election to Rajya Sabha, when an MLA from x party cast his vote in favour of y party candidate then it is termed as cross voting

Concept of 'open ballot' system during the election to Rajya Sabha
• Rule 39AA of the Conduct of Election Rules of 1961 provides for open ballot system
• A voter may show his/her marked ballot paper to the authorised representative of his/her political party before dropping it into the ballot box
• Rule 39AA provides that marked votes of MLAs are to be shown only to the authorised representative of their political party before being dropped into the ballot box, and any transgression will amount to their votes being declared invalid.
• In case of independent MLAs, they do not have to show their votes to "anyone at all".
• However, Rule 39AA is silent on who would be the authorised representative for a rebel MLA.
• 'Open ballot' system was adopted to prevent corruption.

SC on 'Open' ballot process
• 'Open' ballot process was challenged in SC by Kuldip Nayar alleging that it stifled free speech and expression of a voter, which is at the core of democracy.
• In 2006, a five-judge bench led by then CJI Y K Sabharwal unanimously upheld the constitutional validity of the 'open ballot' system and said: "if secrecy becomes a source for corruption, then sunlight and transparency have the capacity to remove it."

SC on 'Open' ballot process
• SC bench also said "Voting in elections to Council of States cannot be compared with a general election. In a general election, the elector have to vote in a secret manner without fear that their votes would be disclosed to anyone or would result in victimization. There is no party affiliation and hence the choice is entirely with voter. This is not the case when elections are held to the Council of States as the electors are elected members of the legislative assemblies who in turn have affiliations."

Do you know?
• To deal with money and muscle power, engineering splits in political parties and defections, parliament had enacted anti-defection law to combat this political evil.
• This provided for disqualification of an MP or MLA if s/he "votes or abstains from voting" contrary to the directions of her/his party.
• However, the anti-defection law is not applicable to RS elections.
• According to Election Commission, political parties cannot issue any whip, like they do in the Legislative Assembly, asking their MLAs to vote for a particular candidate. They can issue instructions but it is left to political organisations to take action as they deem fit if an MLA defies the party's order.

Secrecy of ballot
Free and Fair Election

Supreme Court held that -
• Secrecy of ballot is the cornerstone of free and fair elections
• The principle of secrecy of ballots is an important postulate of constitutional democracy

Do you know?
• 'Secret Ballot' refers to the process of casting of a vote by a voter in such a way that no one comes to know in whose name the voted is casted except by the voter
• Section 94 of the Representation of the People Act upholds the privilege of the voter to maintain confidentiality about her choice of vote

THINK! How is secrecy of ballot related to free and fair election? Discuss.

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Review petitions on adultery
Role of Judiciary

Context:
• Supreme Court refused to review its 2018 judgment which decriminalised adultery
• SC had scrapped the 19th century law on adultery calling it arbitrary and offensive to a woman's dignity

Mains Focus:
• IPC Section 497 deals with Adultery

SC bench in its 2018 Judgment–
• Jail term for adultery does not make sense
• Adultery does not even qualify as a criminal offence and is a civil wrong
• Adultery has a civil remedy: divorce
• Section 497 cannot "command" married couples to remain loyal to each other for the fear of penal punishment
• Section 497 was also seen to deprive a woman of her dignity, sexual autonomy as the law treated her to be a property of her husband
• The court also observed that there was no data whatsoever to support claims that abolition of adultery as a crime would result in "chaos in sexual morality" or an increase of divorce

Do you know?
• In many countries adultery has ceased to be a crime - New Zealand, Brazil, Japan, China, Japan, Australia, the Netherlands, Denmark, France, Germany etc., yet it continues to be a crime in many countries in the Middle East and Africa

Nagaland law and order issue
Governance; Internal Security

In news
• Nagaland Governor wrote letter to CM regarding the poor law and order situation in the state
• The Governor's letter said the constitutionally established State government was being challenged on a day-to-day basis by armed gangs
• His letter questioned the integrity and sovereignty of the nation, while the instruments of law and order remain totally unresponsive

Prelims Focus:
Do you know?
• Nagaland Governor hints at his special responsibility with respect to law and order in the State of Nagaland, enshrined in the Constitution under Article 371A (1) (b).

Important value additions
• Article 371A deals with the special provisions with respect to the State of Nagaland.
• Article 371A (1) (b) - the Governor of Nagaland has special responsibility with respect to law and order in the state so long as internal disturbances caused by the hostile Nagas continue.
• For instance, under Article 371A (1) (b) of the Constitution, important functions like "transfer and posting of officials" entrusted with the maintenance of law and order of and above the district level will be with the approval of the Governor.

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

State's borrowing conditions altered
Centre-State Relations; Federalism; Governance

Context:
• Centre increased the borrowing limit of states to 5% of gross state domestic product (GSDP) in 2020-21 from 3%
• However, Centre insisted that the States should follow certain conditions to avail the increased borrowing limit beyond 3.5% of GSDP

Mains Focus:

Conditions insisted by Centre
• Borrowing limit of states was increased from 3% to 5%
• Of the additional borrowing, the first 0.5% will be unconditional
• The next 1% will be in four equal tranches based on the reforms taken by the states
• The remaining 0.5% will be given if milestones are achieved in at least three out of four reform areas

4 Reforms
1. Universalisation of **'One Nation, One Ration card'(ONOR) Scheme**
2. Improvements in **Ease of doing business**
3. **Power distribution reforms** - Bring down aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses and increase revenues
4. **Urban Local Bodies** – Empowering them with more resources

How will above 4 reforms help?
1. ONOR scheme to help Migrants
2. EoDB to attract investment
3. Currently state electricity boards (SEBs/discoms) owe power-generating firms about Rs 90,000 crore
4. To improve local governance and revenue

How does the enhanced borrowing limit help States?
• Availability of Additional Capital
• Addresses Revenue Shortfall
• Avoid Cut in Capital Expenditure
• Helps plug the shortfall in Centre's Devolution

Criticism of the measure
• States allege that it is unfair for the Centre to set conditions on them in these difficult times
• Central government levy 'cesses' instead of straightforward taxes in many areas, which means less has to be shared with the states under the finance commission formula. This has also partly led to inadequate resources with States
• Centre should reduce its focus on cesses

Connecting the dots:
• Devolution of powers (legislative, executive, financial)
• Sarkaria Commission and Punchhi Commission

Empower Local Govts
Governance

Mains Focus:
• Local and decentralized bodies playing critical role in pandemic times.

Issues faced by local bodies
• **Health Delivery:** The new normal demands a paradigm shifts in the delivery of health care at the local body level.
• **Multiple oversight bodies** have distorted the functions-fund flow matrix at the lower level of governance.
• **Administrative challenges:** no clarity in the assignment of functions, functionaries and financial responsibilities
• **Lack of politico-administrative will:** critical role of local governments will have to be recognised by all

How resources can be mobilized for Local bodies?
• Local finance - share revenue
• Compulsory property tax (cover land)
• Corona containment bond
• MP fund scheme
• Grants from Fifteenth Finance Commission
• Special COVID-19 containment grant

- **NOTES**

SOCIAL/WELFARE ISSUES

Accessibility in the Post-COVID world
Social/Welfare issues; Disabled/Vulnerable Scetion

Context:
- Disabled persons faced acute difficulties during the lockdown.
- As the world continues to re-imagine a new normal for its physical and social spaces, there is a window of opportunity to improve accessibility.

Impact of the crisis on persons with disabilities
- Problems of financial stability
- Difficulty to access to essential items
- Inadequate accommodation
- Social isolation
- Lack of availability of healthcare
- Lack access to critical care takers and domestic help, who play crucial roles in caring for person with disability
- Triple burden on working women: Along with household chores and work from home women also faced added responsibilities due to absence of caregivers
- Decreased access to basic services and rights: Persons with disabilities were already struggling for equitable access to education, healthcare, transportation, and economic opportunities which was exacerbated during this pandemic

How were the above challenges tackled during lockdown period?
- Families & Organisations joined forces with caregivers to collaborate on common challenges to develop innovative solutions for persons with disabilities.
- For Ex: Parent or families delivered interventions and therapies for their disabled member, with telephone support from therapists or other support workers.

Filling the gaps
- Accessibility should be considered in COVID-19 recovery plans to catalyse the vision of an inclusive world
- Governments and Civil Society must engage people to promote education and awareness on including persons with disabilities.
- Implementing accessibility laws and regulations
- Improving physical accessibility and universal design
- Reducing stigma
- Developing the tools for individuals and communities to engage meaningfully with persons with disabilities.
- Including and involving persons with disabilities in decision and policymaking, for COVID-19 recovery and beyond.

A Disabled Person's Perspective On The Coronavirus

HOW THE CORONAVIRUS IS AFFECTING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Self Isolation Isn't New to Lots of People with Disabilities

During the winter, it is common for people with disabilities to go out as little as possible to avoid getting sick.

Working From Home IS Possible

In spite of what some people with disabilities were told was impossible, companies are now being forced to work remotely and are still functioning relatively smoothly.

Panicking Makes Things Worse

Panic-buying and hoarding necessities is only hurting those who are already at a higher risk and in greater need.

Be mindful of your wellness habits and stay up to date on what's going on with the Coronavirus, but don't let yourself panic. Your mental health impacts your physical health.

Conclusion
Using this crisis to implement universal accessibility should be central to the vision of the post-COVID era.

Connecting the dots
- Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

SOCIAL/WELFARE ISSUES

Pandemic, Population Explosion and Urbanisation

Urbanisation; Population; Sustainable development

Context:
• The pandemic has given us an opportunity to reconsider our habitation model

Mains Focus:

Reasons attributed to population explosion
• Concentrated production centres i.e. rise of Cities
• Improved medicine - increased the average lifespan of humans
• Technological progress
• Relative peace at global levels post WW-II due to emergence of International institutions like UN, WHO & WTO

Present-day Urbanisation
• **Concentrated** - population growth rate has been largely urban and metro-centred
• **Requires heavy investment** - to accommodate new urban dwellers (about $2.5 trillion of investment until 2030)
• **Energy intensive:** Today, cities consume two-thirds of the global energy consumption
• **Environmental degradation**: Cities account for more than 70% of greenhouse gas emissions.
• **Increased population densities.** For Ex: The Dharavi slum in Mumbai has a mind-boggling density of 3.75 lakh persons per sq km.
• **Productivity:** An average Mumbaikar daily spends 95 minutes commuting between office and home, wasting nearly 10% of his time.
• **Safety issues**: Eight people die every day in Mumbai in local train-related accidents, and in Delhi, five people lose their lives in road accidents.
• **The "Domino" effect**: In megacities even a minor and local failure is compounded into a catastrophe. In China in 2010, due to some broken cars and road repair work, a minor traffic problem expanded quickly into a massive jam of 120 kilometres
• **Prone to natural and man-made disasters**: Nearly every hot-spot of the COVID-19 outbreak is a congested urban centre.
• **Unequal in its effects**: Congested low-income urban spaces not only bear disproportionate disease burden, they also bear the brunt of air pollution, water contamination and crime infestation
• **Ever-dwindling space and choked infrastructure**: UN projected that by 2030, 28 per cent of the world population will live in dense, congested spaces

Despite the criticism why megacities are aspired?

The advantages claimed for megacities are:
• Economies of agglomeration
• Generation of jobs
• Generation of new ideas and innovations through multi-disciplinary interactions.

Alternative habitation philosophies

• Gandhiji's model of gram Swaraj
• APJ Abdul Kalam's vision of providing urban amenities in rural areas
• Nanaji Deshmukh's idea of self-reliant village development

The basis of all these three models is that agriculture, industry and service sectors move in sync for sustainable development, which is in harmony with nature.

Conclusion
New technology, the carbon constraint and diseconomies of congestion and density must force us to review our urbanisation landscape.

Connecting the dots
• Smart Cities mission
• Chennai Floods in 2016 - reasons

EDUCATION

India Rankings 2020
Education; Social Development

Context:
• Union Human Resource and Development Ministry recently released "India Rankings 2020" for Higher Educational Institutions

Prelims pointers:
• National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) was launched in 2015
• NIRF outlines a methodology to rank institutions across the country

It evaluates institutions on five parameters –
1. Teaching, Learning and Resources (TLR) – 30% Weightage
2. Research and Professional Practice (RP) – 40%
3. Graduation Outcomes (GO) – 5%
4. Outreach and Inclusivity (OI) – 15%
5. Perception (PR) – 10%

Key takeaways
• Dental institutions have been included for first time in "India Rankings"

Institutes which secured top rank in 'India Rankings 2020' -
• Overall: Indian Institute of Technology Madras
• University: Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru
• Engineering: Indian Institute of Technology Madras
• Management: Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad
• Pharmacy: Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi
• Medical: All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi
• Law: National Law School of India University, Bengaluru
• Dental: Maulana Azad Institute of Dental Sciences, Delhi

UNIVERSITY	INDIA RANKING			WORLD RANKING		
	2020	2019	Change	2020	2019	Change
IIT Bombay	1	1	—	152	162	▲
IIT Delhi	2	3	▲	182	172	▼
IISc Bangalore	3	2	▼	184	170	▼
IIT Madras	4	4	—	271	264	▼
IIT Kharagpur	5	6	▲	281	295	▲
IIT Kanpur	6	5	▼	291	283	▼
IIT Roorkee	7	7		383	381	▼
Univ of Delhi	8	9	▲	474	487	▲
IIT Guwahati	9	8	▼	491	472	▼

QS World University Rankings
Education; Social Development

Context:
• The Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings 2021 were released recently.

Key takeaways
• The top 10 universities of the world comprised mainly the top-notch Ivy League colleges from the US, the UK and even one from Switzerland.
• Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) of the United States secured Rank 1.

Status of Indian universities
• No Indian institute secured a position among the top 100 universities of the world.
• Like last year's QS rankings, IIT Bombay, IISc Bengaluru, and IIT Delhi featured in the top 200 list.
• All three saw a drop in their ranks this year.
• IIT Bombay dropped 20 spots -- from 152 to 172, IISC Bengaluru dropped one spot from 184 to 185, and IIT Delhi dropped 11 spots from 182 to 193.
• The total number of Indian institutions in the top 1,000 global list has also fallen from 24 to 21.

Important value additions
• It is published annually by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), a British company specialising in the analysis of higher education institutions around the world.

It measures the world's top 1,000 universities on 6 factors:
• Academic reputation (40%)
• Employer reputation (10%)
• Faculty/Student Ratio (20%)
• Citations per faculty (20%)
• International Faculty Ratio (5%
• International student ratio (5%)

EDUCATION

Online Education
Education; Social issues

Context:

• The COVID-19 lockdown has given impetus to online learning which is being seen as substitution of Classroom learning experience

University Grants Commission (UGC) scheme

• UGC issued a circular to universities encouraging them to adopt massive open online courses (MOOCs) offered on its **SWAYAM platform** for credit transfers in the coming semesters

• However, the SWAYAM platform has left out courses in engineering, medicine, dental, pharmacy, nursing, architecture, agriculture, and physiotherapy on the grounds that they involve laboratory and practical work

Education inequalities
Education; Social issues

Context:

According to **2020 Global Education Monitoring Report** released by UNESCO

• COVID-19 pandemic has increased inequalities in education systems across the world.

• About 40% of low- and lower-middle-income countries have not supported learners at risk of exclusion during this crisis.

• In April 2020, almost 91% of students around the world were out of school.

• Poor, linguistic minorities and learners with disabilities were affected more as resources for such persons may not be available outside schools.

• For poor students who depend on school for free meals or even free sanitary napkins, closures have been a major blow.

Criticism of UGC Scheme/ MOOC-based e-learning

• **Tool to increase GER:** MOOC-based e-learning platforms poses danger since it is being seen as an instrument to achieve the country's target Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education (envisioned to be 30% by 2021; it was 25.8% in 2017–18) and not quality.

• **Neglecting Physical Infrastructure**: Instead of expanding the network of higher educational institutions across the country and increasing seats, the government plans to make online degree programmes available for students

• **Reduction of Education:** The scheme views education as a combination of content and consumption, and this diluted meaning is being put to the service of achieving increased GER.

• **Uni-directional:** MOOC-based e-learning platforms tend to reinforce a top-down teacher-to-student directionality of learning whereby the teacher 'creates' and the student consumes

• **Role of Teacher Changed:** The teacher is traditionally considered as an intellectual midwife who facilitates in the birth of students' ideas and insights through engaging in critical dialogue. This interaction will be reduced to great extent in online learning

• **Overlooking Sacred Spaces**: Taking higher education online is much like taking up a sport such as cricket, football or boxing online. One has not actually learnt the sport unless one has engaged with it in one's gully, stadium, field, or ring.

• **Narrow view of Humanities:** Science stream being left out of SWAYAM portal is welcome. However, arts, social sciences, and humanities curricula are considered largely lecture- and theory-based, and, therefore, readily adaptable to the online platform, which is a misconception

• **Loss of inclusiveness:** Classroom and campus spaces offer the potential for solidarity in the face of discrimination, social anxiety, and stage fear, paving the way for a proliferation of voluntary associations

• This could also dilute norms of evaluation, whereby a good lecture might mean merely a lecture which "streams seamlessly, without buffering".

IASBABA

ILP PLUS - 2021

IN HINDI NOW

ILP Basic की सभी विशेषताएं। इसके अतिरिक्त, इसमें वीडियो क्लासेस शामिल हैं।

- वीडियो क्लासेस में (कुल 92 वीडियो डिस्कशन / क्लासेस) शामिल हैं

- 62 डिस्कशन वीडियो (52 **GS** और 10 **CSAT**) – **AIPTS**

- 30 क्लासेज – प्रत्येक विषय की रणनीति क्लासेज, प्रत्येक विषय के लिए दृष्टिकोण क्लासेज, प्रत्येक महीने की करंट अफेयर्स क्लासेज।

- 30 क्लासेज – प्रत्येक विषय की रणनीति क्लासेज, प्रत्येक विषय के लिए दृष्टिकोण क्लासेज, प्रत्येक महीने की करंट अफेयर्स क्लासेज।

  - राजव्यवस्था
  - भूगोल
  - इतिहास
  - अर्थशास्त्र
  - विज्ञान एवं प्रौद्योगिकी
  - पर्यावरण
  - प्रीलिम्स रणनीति क्लास – क्या करना है, क्या नहीं करना है, **Elimination** तकनीक
  - मुख्य परीक्षा संबंधी उत्तर-लेखन कला

- करंट अफेयर्स – 10 क्लासेज (जुलाई 2020 से अप्रैल 2021– प्रति माह 1)

HEALTH

Universal Health Care
Health

Context:
• While COVID-19 has exposed the fault lines of Indian Healthcare, it has strengthened the calls for Universal Health Coverage(UHC) as a long-term reform
• In this regard, there seems to be an emerging consensus around expanding the coverage through Ayushman Bharat initiative

About Ayushman Bharat
• Ayushman Bharat adopts a continuum of care approach, comprising of two inter-related components, which are:
1. Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs).
2. Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY).

• It aims to bring quality healthcare to around 50 crore poor and vulnerable Indians (based on the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) data)
• PM-JAY is world's largest health insurance fully financed by government which will provide free coverage of up to Rs 5 lakh per family per year at any government or even empanelled private hospitals all over India for secondary and tertiary medical care facilities.
• Centrally sponsored scheme with contribution from both Centre and State
• Cashless access to health care services for the beneficiary at the point of service.
• Wellness Centres: The 1.5 lakh sub-centres that are converted into wellness centres will cater to majority of services such as detection and treatment of cardiovascular diseases, screening for common cancers, mental health, care of the elderly, eye care, etc

Measures taken by Maharashtra
• Universalising its state health insurance scheme,
• Free Covid-19 testing/ treatment under AB–PMJAY
• Express empanelment to encourage private sector participation in AB–PMJAY
• Significance: These steps could be a prelude to universalisation of health insurance.

Learnings from COVID-19 pandemic
• Strong public sector comes in handy during times of crisis.
• States with higher per-capita public health spending have tackled Covid-19 better
• Private healthcare interests aren't particularly aligned with managing infectious diseases and emergencies.
• Private hospitals under health insurance often prefer high-paying, non-communicable disease-related interventions .
• The private sector's weak response to Covid-19 under AB–PMJAY till date could be evidence of above observation.

Advantages of Universalisation of healthcare(UHC)
• In ideal conditions, universal health coverage would extend to currently uninsured citizens and reduce financial barriers to care, both over a short period.
• Helps bring a large chunk of private healthcare under the public ambit
• Reduces informality in healthcare provision,
• Paves the way for better regulation and oversight,
• Allows monopsonistic power to the state to negotiate for better and affordable care.
• It may also contribute to reducing regional disparities in healthcare services
• It helps foster the adoption of cost-effective healthcare innovations

Challenges with expansion of PM-JAY
• While the lesson from the pandemic is to strengthen public healthcare, the insurance route to UHC could further weaken the public sector.
• Private providers would likely comprise an unduely large proportion of empanelled facilities under PM-JAY, and public providers, with their weak infrastructure, are bound to lose out.
• Expanding AB–PMJAY to the uncovered population through premium collections would be unpredictable given our huge informal sector
• Typically, under-regulated private-sector-led insurance models fail to address the problem of the out-of-pocket expenses on health, and do little to address issues of equity and access
• Insurance & Private sector led UHC also leads to large, unfruitful administrative expenses and pervasive malpractices.

HEALTH

Continued...

Way Ahead – Robust Public Health Sector

• While there is a need to carefully rethink the insurance route to UHC, the pandemic has indicated that strengthening public healthcare is unquestionably indispensable.

• Not only can a robust public sector enable mounting an effective response to future emergencies, but even if the insurance route is opted, it can provide a counterweight to the private sector through its efficient functioning.

Connecting the dots

• National Health System model of UK vs US Insurance Model

• Increasing burden of non-communicable diseases – Critical analysis

Pharmacopeia Commission for Indian Medicine & Homoeopathy
Health

In news:

• Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine & Homoeopathy (PCIM&H) recently received approval to be re-established as Subordinate Office under the **Ministry of AYUSH**.

Key takeaways

• Presently, PCIM&H is an autonomous body under AYUSH Ministry since 2010.

• Pharmacopoeia Laboratory for Indian Medicine (PLIM) and Homoeopathic Pharmacopoeia Laboratory (HPL) shall be merged under the Commission.

• The merger is aimed at optimising the use of resources for enhancing the standardisation outcomes of Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Homoeopathy drugs.

• Legal status shall be accorded to the merged structure by making amendments to Drugs & Cosmetics Rules, 1945.

First mobile COVID-testing lab
Health

In news:

• India has set up its first mobile testing laboratory in a bid to meet the growing demand to conduct coronavirus disease (COVID-19) tests.

Key takeaways

• The mobile laboratory, with on-site Elisa, RtPCR & Bio-chem analysers, was created within eight days by a team from Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone Limited.

• The laboratory can be deployed at remote and inaccessible areas in the country, where there is no such facility.

• The laboratory belongs to the biosafety level 2 (BSL-II) category.

Important value additions

Biosafety Levels

• BSLs are ranked from one to four.

• They are categorised on the basis of the organisms that the researchers are dealing with.

• The organisms include viruses, bacteria, fungi, parasites, etc.

• SARS-CoV-2, which causes Covid-19, belongs to the BSL-II category.

• BSL-I is considered to be the least hazardous, while BSL-IV poses the maximum safety risk.

• Each level builds on the previous category, adding more layers of constraints and barriers.

HEALTH

Mental Healthcare
Health issue; Social issue

Context: The suicide of the actor Sushant Singh Rajput has brought to the fore the significance of the mental health in contemporary times.

Did You Know?
- Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code had criminalized attempted suicide but this was removed through Mental health care Act 2017
- The Sustainable Development Goals target 3.4 and 3.5 talks about reducing mental illness within the population.

Issues related to Mental Health care in India

- **Neglected Area**: Mental health which forms the core of our personhood is often neglected which impeded the development of an individual to full potential.
- **Stigmatised**: Mental health illness is often considered as Taboo that leads to reluctance on part of family members to seek diagnosis & treatment for the patient
- **Burden of Demography**: According to WHO, the burden of mental disorders is maximal in young adults. India being a young country (nearly 50% of its population below the age of 25) will face increased burden of mental illness in short term
- **Disproportionate impact**: It is the poor, dispossessed and marginalised who bear the greatest burden of mental health problems, but historically their sufferings are dismissed as a natural extension of their social and economic conditions
- **Post-Treatment gap**: There is need for proper rehabilitation of the mentally ill persons post his/her treatment which is currently not present.
- **Lack of Specialists**: Low proportion of mental health workforce in India (per 100,000 population) include psychiatrists (0.3), nurses (0.12), psychologists (0.07) and social workers (0.07).
- **Dangers of increase in post-COVID order**: Mental health problems, tend to increase during economic distress leading to reduction in life-expectancy. This has been described by Nobel prize winning economist, Angus Deaton, as "Deaths of Despair"

Continued...

- **Prone to abuse:** Mentally ill patients are vulnerable to and usually suffer from drug abuse, wrongful confinement, even at homes and mental healthcare facilities which is a cause of concern and a gross human right violation.
- **Affordability issues:** Due to inadequate number of mental health caretakers, such service if often concentrated in Urban areas and are also expensive
- **Needs Unique approach:** There is no one-size-fits-all prescription for mental health issues as they are intimately intertwined with unique, personal life stories.

So, what's the solution?
- **Awareness:** People should be made aware of significance of mental health, as much as that of physical health.
- **Destigmatising the issue:** Sharing one's story about mental health (through media campaigns) is the most effective strategy to reduce stigma attached with mental illness
- **Community Approach:** There is need to deploy community health workers who, with appropriate training and supervision, effectively deliver psychosocial interventions for the needy
- **Increase Funding:** State governments need to scale up its psychosocial interventions through community health workers
- **Broadening the scope:** Mental health care must embrace the diversity of experiences and strategies which work, well beyond the narrow confines of traditional biomedicine with its emphasis on "doctors, diagnoses and drugs"
- **Digital initiatives:** To help improve rural India's mental health through telemedicine, initiatives like Schizophrenia Research India's (SCARF) mobile bus clinic is being run by an NGO. There is need for scaling up such initiatives through public-private collaboration to bridge the rural-urban divide

Connecting the dots
- Mental health care Act 2017

HEALTH

Drug abuse amidst pandemic
Health issue; Social issue

Context: In Punjab, there has been 23% rise in addict registrations since Covid outbreak

Did You Know?
• Around 269 million people used drugs in 2018, up 30% from 2009, with adolescents and young adults accounting for the largest share of users
• Development assistance dedicated to drug control fell by some 90% between 2000-2017.

Why India is vulnerable to trafficking of narcotics?

• India is sandwiched between the 'Golden Crescent' and the 'Golden Triangle', the major opium production regions in the world
• The Golden Crescent region of the South Asia comprises Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan.
• The Golden Triangle is the area where the borders of Thailand, Laos and Myanmar meet at the confluence of the Ruak and Mekong rivers.
• The bumper harvests of opium in Afghanistan for the last few years have given rise to increased supply of heroin in the subcontinent
• The combination of darknet and courier/postal deliveries have made the narco/psychotropic trafficking more anonymous in nature

Consequences of pandemic on Drugs usage

• **Increased Substance abuse:** The economic downturn caused by the global pandemic may drive more people to substance abuse
• **Anti-social activities:** Many people will be vulnerable to involvement in drug trafficking and related crime as their incomes became dry during lockdown period
• **Inattention and neglect:** Governments will reduce budgets to deal with drug-related problems in the wake of reduced government revenues post-COVID-19 pandemic
• **Dangers of increase in use of synthetic drugs:** In the global recession that followed the 2008 financial crisis, drug users sought out cheaper synthetic substances and patterns of use shifted towards injecting drugs.
• **Increase in drug use disorders:** Only one out of eight people who need drug-related treatment receive it, according to the World Drug Report 2020. Some 35.6 million people suffer from drug use disorders globally.
• **Prevents shift by farmers:** Assistance for alternative development — creating viable, legal forms of income to enable poor farmers to stop growing illicit opium poppy or coca — will remain low.
• **Increased transnational drug trafficking:** National governments efforts will be focused on reviving domestic economies and this may hamper multi-lateral cooperation on cracking drug trade
• **Disproportionate impact on weaker sections:**
-- One out of three drug users is a woman but women represent only one out of five people in treatment.
-- People in prison settings, minorities, immigrants and displaced people also face barriers to treatment due to discrimination and stigma.

Way Ahead
• Greater investment in evidence-based prevention, as well as treatment and other services for drug use disorders
• International cooperation to increase access to controlled drugs for medical purposes and to strengthen law enforcement action to dismantle the transnational organised crime networks.
• Health-centred, rights-based and gender-responsive approaches to drug use and related diseases deliver better public health outcomes.

HEALTH

'Nasha Mukt Bharat'
Health issue; Social issue

In news:
• 26th June - International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking
• Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched drug-free India campaign - 'Nasha Mukt Bharat'
• Annual anti-drug action plan (2020-21) would focus on 272 most affected districts and launch a three-pronged attack combining efforts of Narcotics Bureau, Outreach/Awareness by Social Justice and Treatment through the Health Dept.

Aim/Objectives:
• It will focus on institutional support and also on community outreach programmes in the districts identified by Narcotics Control Bureau.
• Change in the strategy against drugs - from institutional level to level of society.
• It will launch campaigns in schools and colleges to prevent drug abuse among youth.

Integrated Rehabilitation Centre for Addicts (IRCAs)

• It is funded by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
• It provides composite/ integrated services for the rehabilitation of the substance dependent person.
• IRCA is responsible for preventive education and awareness generation which target groups (vulnerable and at risk groups) in their neighborhood.
• IRCA envisages total recovery of the addicted person leading to his socio economic rehabilitation through an appropriate combination of individual counseling.

According to **2020 World Drug Report** released by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) -
• Economic hardship caused by the pandemic may push people into making drugs for a living.
• Adverse impact of pandemic could lead to an increase in the number of people resorting to illicit activities.

Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Sanitary Napkins
Health

In news:
• Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Sanitary Napkin shall be available at numerous Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushdhi Pariyojna (PMBJP) Kendras across the country at a minimum price of Rs.1/- per pad.
• Earlier the price was Rs. 2.50 per pad.

Important value additions

Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Sanitary Napkin

• The launch ofw "Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Oxo-Biodegradable Sanitary Napkin" for women of India was announced on the eve of World Environment Day in 2018.
• It is biodegradable.
• This means that upon discarding, it is totally biodegradable once it comes in contact with oxygen indicating that they are environmental friendly.

Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)

• It is a campaign launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Government of India, to provide quality medicines at affordable prices to the masses through special kendras known as Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra.
• PMBJP Kendra is set up to provide generic drugs, which are available at lesser prices but are equivalent in quality and efficacy as expensive branded drugs.
• BPPI (Bureau of Pharma Public Sector Undertakings of India) has been established under the Department of Pharmaceuticals for co-coordinating in procurement, supply and marketing of generic drugs.

IASBABA

One stop destination for UPSC/IAS preparation

ILP BASIC - 2021

IN HINDI NOW

- प्रारंभिक परीक्षा एवं मुख्य परीक्षा पाठ्यक्रम, साक्षात्कार को कवर करने हेतु व्यापक कार्यक्रम

- विस्तृत अध्ययन योजना (1.5 वर्षों के लिए) दैनिक लक्ष्यों / योजना के साथ

- **VALUE ADD NOTES (VAN)** - मुख्य परीक्षा + प्रारंभिक

- **BABAPEDIA** - करंट अफेयर्स की तैयारी के लिए वन-स्टॉप डेस्टिनेशन

  o **MAINSPEDIA** (MAINS DATAHUB) - (GS1, GS2, GS3, GS4 और निबंध)

  o **PRELIMSPEDIA** - करंट अफेयर्स

- आल इंडिया प्रीलिम्स टेस्ट सीरीज (**AIPTS**) – कुल 62 टेस्ट

  o **52 GS** (पेपर –1) प्रीलिम्स टेस्ट

  o **10 CSAT** (पेपर –2) प्रीलिम्स

- आल इंडिया रैंकिंग

- स्व–मूल्यांकन प्रणाली – प्रीलिम्स टेस्ट सीरीज में

- मुख्य परीक्षा और SYNOPSIS- कुल = 50 टेस्ट

  o 30 माइक्रो मुख्य परीक्षा टेस्ट और SYNOPSIS (प्रारंभिक परीक्षा पूर्व)

  o 20 फुल मोक् मुख्य परीक्षा टेस्ट और SYNOPSIS (प्रारंभिक परीक्षा पश्चात्)

- **GS** मुख्य परीक्षा के लिए **MIND MAPS**

- निबंध गाइड – मॉडल निबंध और **Mainspedia** सामग्री

- **ABHIYVAKTI** (ILP का सोशल मीडिया) - एक मंच, जहाँ आप USPC तैयारी के संबंध में अपने संदेह / प्रश्नों का समाधान पा सकते हैं। इसमें एक सहभागी–प्रणाली भी शामिल है, जिसमें समान वैकल्पिक विषय, कॉलेज या पृष्ठभूमि वाले छात्र ग्रुप बना सकते हैं तथा विचार–विमर्श कर सकते हैं! यह न केवल आपको एक अच्छा सहभागी–समूह / अध्ययन मंडली बनाने में सहायता करेगा, बल्कि एक–दूसरे को अपने लक्ष्यों को प्राप्त

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Atmanirbhar Bharat
Growth and Development

Significance of Atmanirbharat
• It is based on Swadeshi philosophy and Mahatma Gandhi's concept of a self-reliant India.
• It could serve as the pivot on which India can emerge as a hub for manufacturing and investments.

What should be the direction of government's policies to achieve it?
• **Focus on Raw materials:** Incentivising the establishment of production facilities in the country is critical, not just for assembly, but for raw materials, too
• **Country Specific Foreign Policy:** The government should consider moving away from broad-stroke international policies and shift to a country-to-country model
• **Bilateralism over multilateralism:** The focus should remain on bilateral trade agreements, which ensure a balance of payments as well as technology-sharing.
• **Partnership based on Complementarities:** The government should forge partnership/alliance models with other countries and companies, especially in areas where indigenous capabilities do not exist.
• **Promote Innovation:** India should also need to incentivise innovation, research and development to keep India at the cutting edge of the industry

Way Ahead
• **R& D development:** Global innovation centres needs to be set up in India. Also, NASA-ISRO like partnership should be enhanced across institutions and fields.
• **Governance Simplification:** Heavy investment on technology in government procedures and bureaucracy is needed to improve 'ease of doing business' climate.
• **Infrastructure Financing:** Building world-class infrastructure is extremely critical, and this requires huge investments. A strong framework for collaboration (e.g. contracting) and financing such investments needs to be established.
• **Collaborative Federalism:** While competitive federalism is required in the long term, ensuring a common playing field, with a more cohesive and consistent policy framework achieved through collaboration, is vital.
• **Change in Mindset:** A cultural shift is required in the public sector and bureaucracy to avoid the constant distrust—whether it is towards private organisations or the public at large
• **Act Faster:** If bold measures are not taken, in land, labour & law areas, over the next five to ten years, China might dominate as superpower and India's ability to achieve economic independence will get drastically impacted.

Conclusion
There has been a resurgence in protectionist policies in recent years. The success of the self-reliance vision will depend on how well India is able to negotiate terms with countries, especially the US and European nations

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan
Welfare scheme; Employment
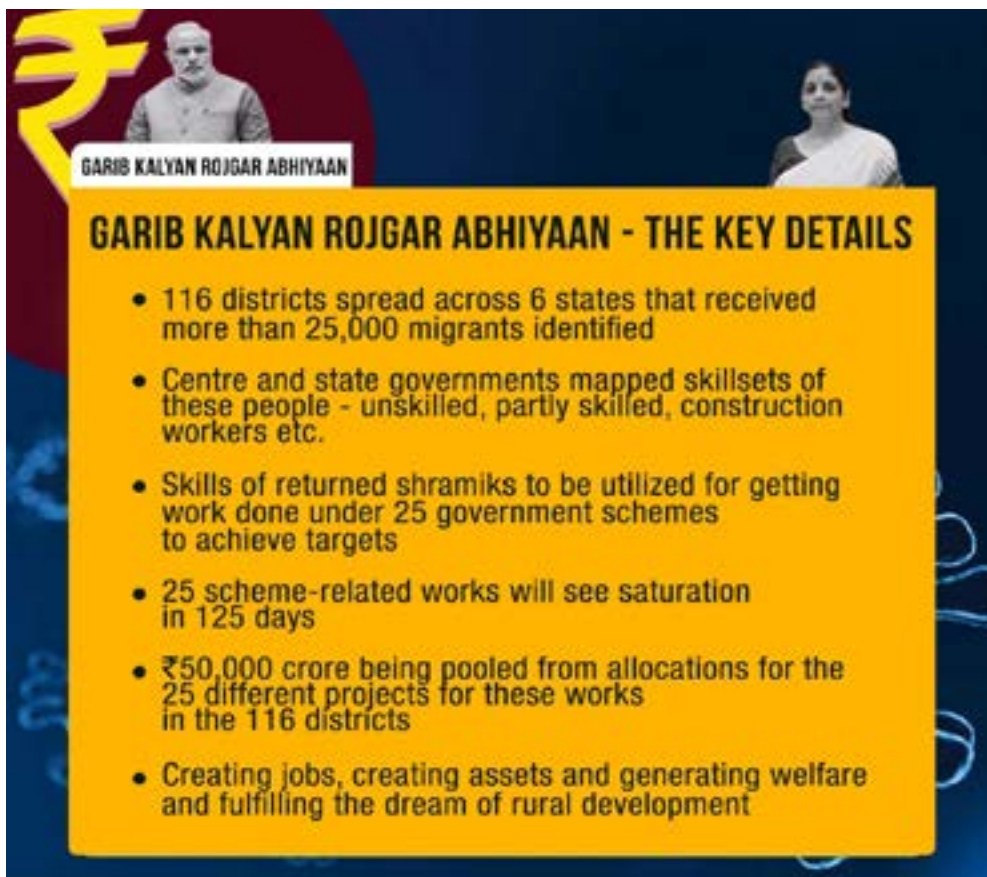
In news:
• Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan was launched on 20th June 2020 to boost employment and livelihood opportunities for migrant workers returning to villages, in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak.
• This campaign will work in mission mode for 125 days with an outlay of Rs. 50,000 crore.

The major objectives of the initiative include:

• Provide livelihood opportunity to returning migrants and similarly affected rural citizens
• Saturate villages with public infrastructure and create livelihood opportunities viz. Roads, Housing, Anganwadis, Panchayat Bhavans, various livelihood assets and Community Complexes among others
• The basket of a wide variety of works will ensure that each migrant worker is able to get an opportunity of employment according to his skill, in the coming 125 days. The Program will also prepare for expansion and development of livelihoods over a longer term.

Do you know?
• The Ministry of Rural Development is the nodal Ministry for this campaign and the campaign will be implemented in close coordination with the State Governments. Central Nodal Officers of the rank of Joint Secretary and above will be appointed to oversee the effective and timely implementation of various schemes in the identified districts.
• The Railways decided to generate 8 lakh man-days of employment in various infrastructure projects till October 2020 as part of "Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan".

GARIB KALYAN ROJGAR ABHIYAAN - THE KEY DETAILS

• 116 districts spread across 6 states that received more than 25,000 migrants identified

• Centre and state governments mapped skillsets of these people - unskilled, partly skilled, construction workers etc.

• Skills of returned shramiks to be utilized for getting work done under 25 government schemes to achieve targets

• 25 scheme-related works will see saturation in 125 days

• ₹50,000 crore being pooled from allocations for the 25 different projects for these works in the 116 districts

• Creating jobs, creating assets and generating welfare and fulfilling the dream of rural development

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana
Senior Citizens; Social Security schemes

About:
• Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana, or PMVVY, is a social security scheme for senior citizens.
• It is implemented through the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC).
• This gives an assured minimum pension.

Do you know?
• LIC invests the corpus in the market and generates market-related returns.
• If such returns are lower than the guaranteed return, the differential is subsidised by the Union government.
• The scheme also offers a death benefit in the form of return of purchase amount to the nominee.
• The minimum entry age for this scheme is 60 years, there is no maximum age limit.

SWADES initiative
Skill Development; Employment

About
• SWADES (Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support) initative was launched recently.
• The scheme will conduct a skill mapping exercise of the returning citizens under the Vande Bharat Mission.

Key takeaways
• This is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Civil Aviation Ministry and External Affairs Ministry.
• It aims to create a database of qualified citizens based on their skills and experience.
• The collected information will be shared with the companies for suitable placement opportunities in the country.
• The returning citizens are required to fill up an online SWADES Skills Card which will help the citizens with job prospects and bridge the demand-supply gap.

PM SVANidhi scheme portal
Welfare scheme; Credit/Investment

In news:
• Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry launched the portal for a loan scheme for street vendors.
• Name of the loan scheme for street vendors - Pradhan Mantri Street Vendors' AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) scheme.
• The portal — pmsvanidhi.mohua.gov.in — provides an "integrated end-to-end IT interface to users for availing benefits under the scheme.

About PM SVANidhi scheme
• Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs launched the scheme on June 1st.
• The vendors can avail a working capital loan of up to Rs. 10,000.
• It will be repayable in monthly instalments in the tenure of one year.
• On timely/early repayment of the loan, an interest subsidy at 7% per annum will be credited to the bank accounts of beneficiaries through Direct Benefit Transfer on six monthly basis.
• There will be no penalty on early repayment of loan.
• Over 50 lakh people, including vendors, hawkers, thelewalas, etc. are likely to benefit from this scheme.
• Street vendors from peri- urban/ rural areas have become beneficiaries of an urban livelihood programme for the first time.
• MFIs/ NBFCs/ SHG Banks have been allowed in a scheme for the urban poor due to their ground level presence for the first time.

Striving for AtmaNirbhar Bharat
Launch of
A SPECIAL MICRO-CREDIT FACILITY FOR STREET VENDORS

• Step towards AtmaNirbhar Bharat-Providing Special Micro-Credit Facility to 50 lakh Street Vendors
• Promoting Digital India by incentivising digital transactions
• Strengthening Street Vendors - Working capital (WC) loan to resume their livelihoods post COVID-19 lockdown
• Integrated IT Platform - Mobile App/web based loan application process

Panchayats to get Rs. 10 lakh crores
Local Bodies; Financial decentralisation

In news:
• Panchayati Raj Ministry has pitched for a fivefold increase in Finance Commission funding for rural local bodies.
• In a meeting with the 15th Finance Commission, the Ministry asked for Rs. 10 lakh crores to be allocated for the 2020-21 to 2025-26 period.

Do you know?
• Rs. 2 lakh crore was allocated under the 14th Finance Commission. (Allocations have tripled)
• Road construction and maintenance, as well as drinking water supply have been the major projects carried out by panchayats using FC grants.
• According to the 11th schedule of the Constitution, 2.63 lakh panchayats across the country have 29 functions under their ambit.
• The new Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyan will depend on panchayats to generate employment for newly returned migrant workers.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Essential Commodities Act
Govt Schemes; Policies and interventions

About:
• Union Cabinet has recently approved an ordinance to amend The Essential Commodities Act, 1955, to deregulate commodities such as cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes.
• The ordinance has introduced a new subsection (1A) in Section 3 of the Act.

Important value additions
• There is no specific definition of essential commodities in The EC Act.
• Section 2(A) of the act states that an "essential commodity" means a commodity specified in the "Schedule" of this Act.
• The Act gives powers to the central government to add or remove a commodity in the "Schedule."
• The Centre, if it is satisfied that it is necessary to do so in public interest, can notify an item as essential, in consultation with state governments.
• By declaring a commodity as essential, the government can control the production, supply, and distribution of that commodity, and impose a stock limit.

Sahakar Mitra
Skill development; Agriculture

About:
• Union Agriculture Minister launched Sahakar Mitra: Scheme on Internship Programme (SIP).
• Its objective is to help cooperative institutions access innovative ideas of young professionals while the interns will gain experience of working in the field to be self-reliant.
• The scheme is an initiative by National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), the cooperative sector development finance organization.
• Professional graduates in disciplines such as Agriculture and allied areas, IT etc. will be eligible for internship.
• Professionals who are pursuing or have completed their MBA degrees in Agri-business, Cooperation, Finance, International Trade, etc. will also be eligible.
• Each intern will get financial support over a 4 months internship period.

Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)
Basic services; Drinking Water; SDG

About:
• In August, 2019, Government of India launched Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).
• JJM aims at providing potable water at service level of 55 litre per capita per day (lpcd) to every rural household through Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) by 2024.
• The fund sharing pattern between the Centre and states is 90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States, 50:50 for other states, and 100% for Union Territories.

Why JJM is in news?
• There has been a 45% shortfall in financing the JJM by both the Centre and the States in its first year of 2019-20. Similarly, in 2020-21 as well, there has been a 32% shortfall at the Central level.
• Only 18% of households are currently covered.
• So, Jal Shakti Ministry is pitching for additional funding of Rs. 82,000 crore from the 15th Finance Commission for the project.
• Jal Shakti Ministry to release grants or funds to the panchayats, to ensure that they follow the JJM's five-year village action plans (VAP). (Criticism - It doesn't empower panchayati raj institutions and against the decentralisation process)

Do you know?
Every village will prepare a Village Action Plan (VAP) which will have three components:
• Water source and its maintenance
• Water supply and
• Grey-water (domestic wastewater management.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Khelo India State Centres of Excellence (KISCE)
Youth/Welfare scheme; Employment; Sports

In news:

• Sports Ministry is all set to establish Khelo India State Centres of Excellence (KISCE) under the ministry's flagship, Khelo India Scheme to enhance India's Olympic performance.

• One KISCE will be identified in each state and union territory, with an effort to create a robust sporting ecosystem in the entire country.

• 8 states identified by the Ministry will run the centres and build capacity to turn them into the world-class sporting facilities.

• They will be responsible for all aspects of management of the centre.

• Funds for expert coaches, supporting staff, equipments, infrastructure will be extended through the Khelo India Scheme.

State-owned sports facilities in eight states
1. Karnataka
2. Odisha
3. Kerala
4. Telangana
5. Arunachal Pradesh
6. Manipur
7. Mizoram
8. Nagaland

Important value additions
The Khelo India programme

• It has been introduced to revive the sports culture in India at the grass-root level by building a strong framework for all sports played in our country and establish India as a great sporting nation.

• Talented players identified in priority sports disciplines at various levels by the High-Powered Committee will be provided annual financial assistance of INR 5 lakh per annum for 8 years.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Fifth anniversary of the Smart Cities Mission

Urbanisation and related issues; Infrastructure

In news:

• Fifth anniversary of the Smart Cities Mission was held recently.

• Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry announced initiatives like - plan to promote cycling in cities ('Cycles4change Challenge') and a finance portal for urban local bodies.

About Smart Cities Mission

• It is an innovative initiative under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

• The Mission covers 100 cities for the duration of five years starting from the financial year (FY) 2015-16 to 2019-20.

• It aims to drive economic growth and improve the quality of life of people by enabling local development and harnessing technology as a means to create smart outcomes for citizens.

• **Objective:** To promote cities that provide core infrastructure and give a decent quality of life to its citizens, a clean and sustainable environment and application of Smart Solutions.

Do you know?

• Low-cost interventions such as pop-up cycle lanes and non-motorised zones and community-led cycle rental schemes would be explored.

• The finance portal will get financial statements of all cities on a single platform. This will enable sharing and learning of best practices and helps urban local bodies in accessing market funds.

Important achievements in the five years of Smart Cities Mission

• About 31% of projects identified under the Smart Cities Mission have been completed

• About 33% of urban housing sanctioned through the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) have been completed

• Under the Smart Cities Mission, 5,151 projects worth Rs. 2 lakh crore had been identified in 100 cities.

• So far around 4,700 projects worth Rs. 1.66 lakh crore or 81% of the total projects had been tendered and 1,638 projects worth Rs. 27,000 crore had been completed.

• Through the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), the government had provided 79 lakh household water tap connections and 45 lakh sewer connections.

Narayana Guru spiritual circuit plan

Tourism and Infrastructure

In news:

• Ministry of Tourism has considered the revival of the Sivagiri Sree Narayana Guru Ashram-Aruvipuram-Kunnumpara Sree Subrahmania-Chembazhanthi Sree Narayana Gurukulam spiritual circuit.

• Rs. 69.47-crore Sree Narayana Guru spiritual circuit would be retained under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme.

Important Value Additions:

• Swadesh Darshan Scheme

• It is a flagship scheme of Ministry of Tourism launched in 2014-15.

• It is for an integrated development of theme based tourist circuits in the country.

• The scheme would result in increased tourist inflow thereby creating employment opportunities for the local community.

The following thematic circuits have been identified, for development namely,

1. North-East India Circuit, Buddhist Circuit,
2. Himalayan Circuit, Coastal Circuit, Krishna Circuit,
3. Desert Circuit, Tirtankar circuit, Tribal Circuit,
4. Eco Circuit, Wildlife Circuit, Rural Circuit,
5. Spiritual Circuit, Sufi circuit, Ramayana Circuit and Heritage Circuit.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Narayana Guru spiritual circuit
Tourism and Infrastructure; Modern History

About Sree Narayana Guru
• He was a great saint, scholar, philosopher, poet and the forerunner of social renaissance in Kerala.
• He was born in 1856 in a peasant family of then untouchable Ezhava caste, in Thiruvananthapuram.
• He led a reform movement in Kerala, against the injustice in the caste-ridden society in order to promote social equality.
• He also gave the universal message, "One caste, one religion, one God."

Aravipuram Movement - was launched by Sri Narayana Guru on Shivaratri day of 1888. On that day, Sri Narayana Guru defied the religious restrictions traditionally placed on the Ezhava community, and consecrated an idol of Shiva at Aravipuram. This drew the famous poet Kumaran Asan as a disciple of Narayana Guru.
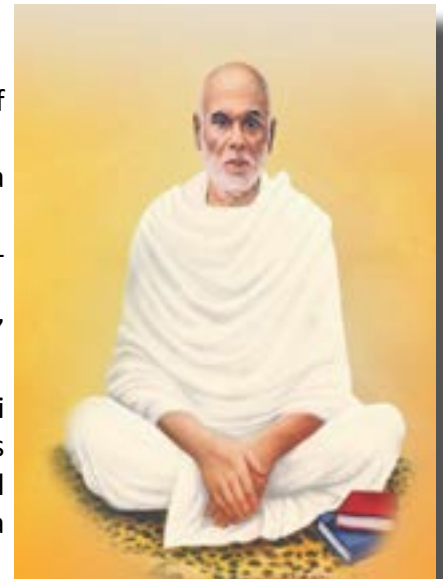
Country of Origin on Government e-Marketplace
Trade reforms

Context: The government on 23 June 2020 made it mandatory for sellers on the Government e-Market-place (GeM) portal to clarify the country of origin of their goods when registering new products.

What is GeM?
• GeM is a one-stop National Public Procurement Portal to facilitate online procurement of common use Goods & Services required by various Central and State Government Departments / Organizations / Public Sector Undertakings
• It was launched in 2016 to bring transparency and efficiency in the government buying process.
• It operates under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
• GeM is a completely paperless, cashless and system driven e-market place that enables procurement of common use goods and services with minimal human interface

What are the new guidelines?
• Sellers on the GeM portal will now have to disclose the origins of their products.
• The portal also has a 'Make in India' filter, and government offices will be able to know which products have a higher content of indigenously produced raw materials.
• This would help government agencies choose products that meet the 'minimum 50 per cent local content' criterion when selecting bidders for their tenders
• The GeM portal now allows buyers to reserve a bid for Class I local suppliers, or suppliers of those goods with more than 50 per cent local content.
• For bids below Rs 200 crore, only Class I and Class II (those with more than 20 per cent local content) are eligible.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Country of Origin
Trade reforms

Significance of the move
• The move is aimed at promoting India-made goods and in line with government's push for self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission)
• Products sold on the GeM portal range from stationery used by government officials to medical products that are used on patients — and this might provide an opportunity to Indian manufacturers across industries to push their products in government facilities.
• It may over time filter out imported goods from use in government offices and facilities
• Weaponisation of trade ties in the wake of recent border tensions with China -
---India wants to reduce its economic dependence on China so that China doesn't use its economic might as a leverage against India during crisis times
---At $ 70.32 billion in 2018-19 and $ 62.38 billion between April 2019 and February 2020, China accounts for the highest proportion of goods imported into India (around 14 per cent in 2019-2020 so far)

Critical Analysis of the move
• The GeM move on country of origin is at best symbolic.
• This may erode Indian industry's global competitiveness by placing a premium on 'Indianness' over quality or cost.
• A more direct impact may be seen if the proposal to mandate the country of origin for products on private platforms is implemented.
• Attaining genuine self-reliance is a long and capital intensive process that would require far greater investment in education, skill-building and infrastructure.
• This may further escalate tension with China transcending the boundary misunderstanding into trade war which may not be in India's interest. For Ex: India's drug makers depend on China for nearly 70% of requirements of bulk drugs and intermediates.

Conclusion
• Enhancing manufacturing capacities with improved efficiency and reduced cost would require an overhaul of bureaucratic processes rather than mere tweaking of government procurement rules

Connecting the dots
• Critical analysis of Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission and its financing

ILP 2021
(ENGLISH & HINDI)

INDIA AND THE WORLD

India-China and Africa
Bilateral Relations

Context: The COVID-19 effect are particularly devastating in Africa, where economic and public health conditions are extremely vulnerable.

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Africa

• **Ill-equipped** to cope with a public health emergency of such magnitude due to shortages of masks, ventilators, and even basic necessities such as soap and water.

• **Recession:** COVID-19 outbreak has sparked off the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region's first recession in 25 years.

• **Deepens Health Crisis:** With high rates of HIV, malaria, diabetes, hypertension and malnourishment prevalent in Africa, COVID-19 pandemic will further deepen the health crisis in the region.

• **Impacts economic model:** The steep decline in commodity prices has spelt disaster for the commodity dependent economies of Nigeria, Zambia and Angola.

• **Possibility of Increased Public debt:** According to the World Bank, the SSA region paid $35.8 billion in total debt service in 2018, 2.1% of regional GDP. This figure is set to increase due to falling revenues & precarious fiscal position of African nations

• **Africa's cycle of chronic external aid dependence continues:** Together, African countries have sought a $100 billion rescue package, including a $44 billion waiver of interest payment by the world's 20 largest economies.

Beijing's donation diplomacy
• China, being Africa's largest trading partner (annual trade ~ $208 billion), was quick to signal its intent to help Africa cope with the pandemic.
• China despatched medical protective equipment, testing kits, ventilators, and medical masks to several African countries.

The motives for such donations are:
• To raise Beijing's profile as a leading provider of humanitarian assistance and "public goods" in the global public health sector.
• To shift the focus away from talking about the origins of the virus in Wuhan
• To build goodwill overseas, and establish an image makeover.
• To further secure Africa's support in multilateral fora. In the past Beijing had used African support for securing a win for Chinese candidates as the head of FAO & WHO

New Delhi and Africa during the Pandemic

• **Increased Focus:** Africa has been the focus of India's development assistance and also diplomatic outreach.

• **Similar Conditions:** Both India and African countries share similar socioeconomic and developmental challenges.

• **Health Support:** India is sending consignments of essential medicines, including hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and paracetamol, to 25 African countries in addition to doctors and paramedics ($7.9 million)

• Capacity Building: e-ITEC COVID-19 management strategies training webinars during pandemic were exclusively aimed at training health-care professionals.

• Ayurveda: A few African countries such as Mauritius are pushing for health-care partnerships in traditional medicines and Ayurveda for boosting immunity.

• **Proactive Diaspora:** Country-specific chapters of gurdwaras and temples by Indians in Africa, have fed thousands of families by setting up community kitchens, helplines for seniors and distributing disinfectants and sanitisers.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

The Contrasts – India and China

The Chinese approach to Africa is threefold:

- Money, political influence and elite level wealth creation;
- Strong state-to-state relations as opposed to people-to-people ties; and
- Hard-infrastructure projects and resource extraction.

India's approach on the other hand is one that focuses on

- Building local capacities
- An equal partnership with Africans and not merely with African elites.
- Soft power with collaborative partnership is resource utilization

Conclusion

As India & China rise in Africa, their two distinct models will come under even greater scrutiny. Both powers might have to adapt their approached to the rising aspirations of the African continent.

Connecting the dots

- Regional Organisation: African Union, Indian Ocean Commission, SAARC
- Neo-colonialism

India-Bhutan: Kholongchhu project
India-Bhutan ties

In news:

- India and Bhutan signed pact for first joint hydel project - Kholongchhu project
- It is the first time an India-Bhutan hydropower project will be constructed as a 50:50 joint venture, not as a government-to-government agreement.

Do you know?

- India had committed in 2008 to help Bhutan create a total 10,000 MW of installed capacity by 2020.
- The Kholongchhu project is one of four additional projects agreed to in 2008.

1993 India-China Agreement
India-China dispute/concerns

In news:

- India accused the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of violating the 1993 agreement between India and China.
- Indian government called on China to restore "peace and tranquillity" by implementing the June 6 disengagement plan agreed to by military commanders, as peace at the border is the "basis" of the India-China bilateral relationship.

Note: Aspirants should be aware of 1993 Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the LAC.

Important value additions:

- 1993 Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas
- This agreement provides the framework for border security between the parties until final determination is made regarding border demarcation.
- The parties agree to reduce troop levels compatible with friendly and good relations between them.
- They also agree to undertake confidence building measures along the line of actual control including by providing notification of troop movements.
- They agree that the India-China boundary question shall be resolved through peaceful and friendly consultations. Neither side shall use or threaten to use force against the other by any means.

The first Joint Venture agreement signed for Kholongchhu project

INDIA AND THE WORLD

Galwan tragedy
India-China dispute/concerns

Context - The Indo-China border clash at Galwan Valley led to loss of twenty Indian Army personnel.

(For a brief background on the issue: click here *and* here)

Significance of the Galwan valley incident
• **Failure of Diplomacy:** Failure of Corps Commander-level talks
• **Watershed moment:** The incident marks the end of a 45-year chapter which saw no armed confrontation involving loss of lives on the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
• **Calculus of Bilateral relationship changed:** The business as usual approach with China after this incident will be under strain particularly the economic relationship
• **Bilateral relations in other areas will be under considerable strain:** In areas that impinge on national security, as in the cyber field, telecommunications & 5G, clampdowns can be expected in the treatment & entry of Chinese companies in India.

Similarity of situation during late 1950s
• The atmosphere between India-China were complicated by the revolt in Tibet and the granting of asylum by India to the Tibetan leader Dalai Lama in March 1959
• In October 1959, there was a face-off between Indian and Chinese troops at Kongka La(in Ladakh). Nine Indian soldiers were killed and three soldiers were detained then
• It was after Kongka La incident that the national mood turned against the Chinese in full measure which eventually broke down the diplomatic correspondence to resolve the boundary question leading to 1962 war
• The conflict in 1962 inflicted wounds on the national soul and prestige from which India took time to recover.
• Nearly three-decade long cold relationship between India & China began to recover after former PM Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in December 1988.

So, will there be a repeat of 1962 war?
• 2020 is not 1959. India and China are in a very different place in their history as nations today.
• They have grown immensely in strength and stature on the world stage and their relations have substance and a diversity of content in a manner absent in the 1950s
• To assume that India is towards a full-blown conflict with China may therefore be an oversimplification.

What India needs to do now?
• Cool-headed thinking is the need of the hour as India is facing multiple crisis now:
   • COVID-19 crisis demands the full attention of the government
   • The economy needs to recover from the stagnancy of the last few quarters
   • The tensions with Pakistan and the Kashmir issue persists
   • A dispute over territory with Nepal in the Lipulekh/Kalapani area has to be handled
• Therefore, battlefront with China cannot be blindly embraced, however much national pride and prestige are at stake.
• Strong political direction, mature deliberation and coherence are keys to handling the situation.
   • The Army can make tactical adjustments and manoeuvres to deter the Chinese
   • Also, a comprehensive China strategy must be evolved along with effective strategic communication from top level
   • Be proactive: India that should take the initiative to insist on a timely and early clarification of the LAC.
   • Temporary resolutions: Pockets of difference of alignment as perceived by each side have to be clearly identified and these areas demilitarised by both sides through joint agreement pending a settlement of the boundary
• Realignment of Foreign Policy
   • The events in Galwan Valley should be a wake-up call to many of India's Asian friends and partners about Chinese aggressiveness
   • This is also an opportunity for India to align its interests much more strongly and unequivocally with the U.S. as a principal strategic partner and infuse more energy into its relations with Japan, Australia, and the ASEAN

Conclusion
• Apart from insisting on a timely and early clarification of the LAC, India should take a long view of its South Asia policy

INDIA AND THE WORLD

Galwan Valley: In depth view
India-China border dispute

Context: The deterioration in India-China relationship in recent past because of violence in Galwan Valley

Where is Galwan Valley?
• The valley refers to the land that sits between steep mountains that buffet the Galwan River.
• The river has its source in Aksai Chin, on China's side of the LAC, and it flows from the east to Ladakh, where it meets the Shyok river on India's side of the LAC.
• The valley is strategically located between Ladakh in the west and Aksai Chin in the east (currently controlled by China)
• At its western end are the Shyok river and the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulet Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road.
• Its eastern mouth lies not far from China's vital Xinjiang Tibet road, now called the G219 highway.

What is the recent flare-up in this sector?
• The Line of Actual Control (LAC) lies east of the confluence of the Galwan and Shyok rivers in the valley, up to which both India and China have been patrolling in recent years.
• The LAC refers to territory under the effective control of each side, not to their entire territorial claim.
• For instance, India's territorial claims extend 38,000 sq km on the other side of the LAC across all of Aksai Chin, but the LAC India observes runs through the valley.
• However, Beijing is now saying the entire Galwan valley is on its side of the LAC, which pegs the LAC further west near the Shyok river.
• The DSDBO road has helped India plug the infrastructure gap near the LAC region. This is being viewed with suspicion by China which wants to maintain its upper hand in the region vis-à-vis military mobilization
• India has rejected the claim as "exaggerated and untenable".

Are China's claims new?
• In 1959, then Premier Zhou Enlai said a 1956 map portrayed the correct alignment. This showed the entire Galwan Valley as a part of India.
• However, in June 1960 China put out a map claiming sovereignty over the valley. A Chinese map from November 1962 also claims the entire valley, but subsequent maps have not shown the western tip of the river as a part of China.
• Therefore, most Chinese maps show most of Galwan river on China's side of the line, but short of the confluence.
• By now staking a claim to the entire Galwan Valley and up to the confluence of the rivers, China is, in India's view, unilaterally altering the LAC here.

Are there any initiatives to deal with this differing perception on LAC?
• According to the 1993 Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement (BPTA), India and China agreed to "strictly respect and observe the LAC between the two sides".
• This referred to the LAC at the time, rendering irrelevant the line of actual control in 1959 or 1962
• It also says that when necessary, the two sides shall jointly check and determine the segments of LAC where they have different views as to its alignment
• Clarifying the LAC has also been explicitly codified in the 1996 agreement on confidence-building measures and subsequent agreements.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

Why the problem in finding a resolution?
• China has refused to exchange maps in the western sector to take the resolution process forward.
• China appears to view an unsettled border as holding some leverage with India, one of the many pressure points it could use to keep India off-guard

Conclusion
• Apart from insisting on a timely and early clarification of the LAC, India should take a long view of realigning its South Asia policy (to counter-balance China)

Connecting the dots
• China's Belt & Road Initiative
• India's Act East Policy

China trade ban could be bad for India
India-China border dispute

Context:
• The Indian government has tried to respond to the border dispute with China by targeting the trade ties between the two countries.
• The idea resonating among the common public is that Indians should boycott Chinese goods to teach China a lesson.
• While one can understand the outrage that Indians feel when they hear about the brutal deaths of their soldiers, turning a border or defence dispute into a trade one is an ill-advised move.

Let us look at the reasons as to why such a move is not favorable to India?

Trade deficits are not necessarily bad
• One of the main reasons why banning trade has been the first reaction is the notion that having a trade deficit is somehow a "bad" thing.
• However this is not true. Trade deficits/surpluses are just accounting exercises and having a trade deficit against a country doesn't make the domestic economy weaker or worse off. For instance, India has a trade surplus with the US, the UK and the Netherlands.
• But the Indian economy is still not stronger or better off than any of these three. Similarly, it has a trade deficit with many other countries such as China, South Africa, UAE, Russia, South Korea, etc. Yet, a trade deficit doesn't necessarily mean that the Indian economy is worse off than South Africa's.
• A trade deficit with China only means that Indians buy more Chinese products than what Chinese from India.
• Essentially, it shows that Indian consumers and the Chinese producers, gained through trading. Both sides are better off than what they would have been without trade.
• At one level, no country is self-sufficient.
• It allows countries to specialise in what they can do most efficiently and export that good while importing whatever some other country does more efficiently.
• So while a persistent trade deficit pushes the domestic government to improve policies and create the infrastructure to raise competitiveness, it should not force people to move away from trade because doing so will undermine efficiency and will affect consumer's benefits.

Trade ban will hurt the Indian poor the most
• Most of the times, the poorest consumers are the worst-hit in a trade ban because they are the most price-sensitive.
• For instance, if Chinese ACs were replaced by either costlier Japanese ACs or less efficient Indian ones, richer Indians may still be able to buy the costlier option.
• But, a number of poor, who could have otherwise afforded an AC, would either not buy one because it is now too costly or suffer by buying a less efficient Indian one.
• Similarly, by banning sale or avoiding chinese products which are already in India, Indian retailers will be affected.
• This harm would be proportionately more on the poorest retailers because of their relative inability to cope with the unexpected losses.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

... Continued

It will punish Indian producers and exporters

• It is true that trading hurts only the less efficient Indian producers while helping the more efficient Indian producers and businesses.

• However, several Indian businesses import intermediate goods and raw materials which are used to create final goods — both for the domestic Indian market as well as the global market.

• An overwhelming proportion of Chinese imports are in the form of intermediate goods such as electrical machinery, nuclear reactors, optical and photographic measuring equipment, etc.

• Such imports are used to produce final goods which are then either sold in India or exported.

• A blanket ban on Chinese imports will hurt all these businesses at a time when they are already struggling to survive.

It will barely hurt China

• The trade ban will hurt India and Indians far more than it will hurt China.

• China accounts for 5% of India's exports and 14% of India's imports.

• China's exports to India are just 3% of its total exports.

• China's imports from India are less than 1% of its total imports.

• Due to the ban, India will lose 5% of its exports and 14% of its imports.

• On the whole, it is much easier for China to replace India than for India to replace China.

India will lose policy credibility

• It has also been suggested that India should pull out of existing contracts with China.

• Again, while in the short-term this may assuage hurt sentiments, it would be hugely detrimental for India which has been trying to attract foreign investment.

• One of the first things a foreign investor tracks is the policy credibility and certainty.

• If policies can be changed overnight, if taxes can be slapped with retrospective effect, or if the government itself pulls out of contracts, no investor will invest. Or, if they do, they will demand higher returns for the increased risk.

Raising tariffs is mutually assured destruction

• It has also been argued that India should just slap higher import duties on Chinese goods.

• Others have suggested that India can allow primary and intermediate goods from China at zero duty, but apply prohibitive tariffs on final goods.

• India would be violating the rules of the World Trade Organization.

• This is a poor strategy since others can and most likely will reciprocate in the same way.

• What will also go against India here is its relatively insignificant presence in global trade and value chains.

• In other words, it is relatively easy for the world to bypass India and carry on trading if India doesn't play by the rules.

Conclusion

• The first thing to understand is that turning a border dispute into a trade war is unlikely to solve the border dispute.

• Given India and China's position in both global trade as well as relative to each other, this trade war will hurt India far more than China.

• Banning all trade with China will be most poorly timed since the Indian economy is already at its weakest point ever facing a sharp GDP contraction.

• The ban will come at the cost of Indian domestic consumers.

Way forward

• India now has an insignificant share in world trade.

• India must try to aggressively acquire a higher share of global trade by raising its competitiveness.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

Remaining non-aligned is good advice
India-China border dispute

Context - The India-China stand-off and the both countries agreeing to step back marginally from positions adopted at the beginning of May.

What exactly happened?
• During May 2020, Chinese forces came in sizeable numbers and crossed the undemarcated LAC at quite a few points in the Ladakh and Sikkim sectors.
• These were in the vicinity of Pangong Tso (Lake), the Galwan Valley, the Hot Springs-Gogra area (all in Ladakh), and at Naku La in the Sikkim sector
• This led to physical engagement with Indian soldiers who opposed Chinese activities
• Chinese action is primarily to oppose India's efforts to bridge the infrastructural gap at the border areas i.e. at Line of Actual Control (LAC)
• China has sizeable military presence along the LAC, comprising armoured vehicles, artillery units and infantry combat vehicles in far larger numbers than that of India
• China also insists that India stop road construction in the border area on the ground that it is taking place in Chinese territory, which India contests, insisting that it is taking place within Indian territory.
• Due to diplomatic efforts, both sides agreed for partial disengagement and to handle the situation in line with the agreement that had been reached.

Reasons for China's actions
• To say that India's decision to strengthen its border infrastructure was the main trigger for the recent show of strength by China, would be simplistic.
• Leadership factor: Chinese President Xi Jinping disdains Deng Xiaoping's policy "to keep your head low and bide your time"
• Geopolitical Factors: India's increasing shift towards US and emergence of Quad (the U.S., Japan, Australia and India) has a definite anti-china stance. China thus views India as being in opposite camps in the wider geopolitical game
• Bilateral Relationship: Despite public bonhomie at the level of Mr. Xi and PM Modi, relations between the two countries have been steadily deteriorating. India opposes China's Belt & Road Initiative. China views India's assertions regarding Gilgit-Baltistan, as an implicit attack on the CPEC
• China's internal dynamics: Internal criticism of China's handling of COVID-19 pandemic, growing opposition within party ranks to some of Xi's policies and Chinese economic miracle losing steam has put pressure on Mr. Xi to deflect attention & showcase the strongman image (through border clashes with India)

Lesson from History
• There were similar circumstances that led to the India-China war of 1962
• Faced with the disaster of the Great Leap Forward (internal pressure), and increasing isolation globally (even from USSR), China under Mao chose to strike at India rather than confront Russia or the West.
• Therefore, a single misstep by India could lead to a wider conflagration, which both sides must avoid

Way Ahead
• This is not the time for India to be seen as the front end of a hostile coalition of forces seeking to put China in its place
• India has consistently followed a different policy in the past, and it is advisable that it remains truly non-aligned and not become part of any coalition that would not be in India's long-term interest.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

India-Bhutan sign MoUs

India-Bhutan ties; India and its neighbourhood relations

Context - Union Cabinet recently approved the signing of the MoU between India and Bhutan on Cooperation in the areas of Environment.

Key takeaways

The MoU will cover the following areas of environment:
- **Air**
- **WasteChemical Management**
- **Climate Change**
- **Any other areas jointly decided upon**

• This MoU shall enter into force on the date of signature and shall continue to remain in force for a period of ten years.
• It will facilitate exchange of best practices and technical knowhow through both public and private sectors.
• It shall contribute to sustainable development.
• It provides the possibility for joint projects in areas of mutual interest.
• However, no significant employment generation is envisaged.

Important value additions
Bhutan
• Bhutan is a landlocked country in South Asia, located in the Eastern Himalayas.
• It is bordered by the Tibet Autonomous Region of China in the north, the Chumbi Valley of Tibet, China and Sikkim and West Bengal in the west, and Assam, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh in the south and east.
• It is the region's second-least-populous nation after the Maldives. (in South Asia)
• In 2008, Bhutan transitioned from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy.
• In South Asia, Bhutan ranks first in economic freedom, ease of doing business and peace and is the least corrupt country in the region as of 2016.
• It continues to be a least developed country, but expects to graduate from this status by 2023.
• Bhutan pioneered the concept of Gross National Happiness.

India-Australia: Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

India-Australia ties

In News:
• India and Australia raised their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) after a 'virtual' summit held recently between Prime Ministers of the two countries.

Key takeaways
• 9 agreements were concluded though the summit.
• Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) was also concluded.
• A joint declaration was also issued on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
• MLSA will allow both militaries the reciprocal use of bases, humanitarian and disaster relief cooperation, port exercises, and passage exercises.

Other agreements included:
- A framework arrangement on cyber technology
- An MoU on mining and processing critical and strategic minerals including Australian rare earth metals used for electronics
- Governance
- Vocational training
- Water management.

• It was also decided to recommence the talks on India-Australia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) which has been suspended since 2015.

Important value additions
• India has signed CSPs with the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the United Arab Emirates.
• Australia has CSPs with China, Indonesia and Singapore.
• CSP would raise the level of trust required to improve the trade and investment flows between India and Australia.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

India and Australia Summit
India-Australia ties

wSignificance of the summit
- **Change from the past:** After decades of neglect, New Delhi and Canberra are finally coming to terms with each other's potential
- **Increased Momentum:** PMs of India and Australia have met four times over the last year and a half. Australia PM's visit to India in January 2020 could not take place because of bush fires in Australia and later due to Covid-19. Virtual summit is an important signal to ensure that momentum is not disrupted
- **Elevating Bilateral relationship** to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" with a focus on institutionalising their growing engagements
- **Strategic Collaboration:** The two sides decided to elevate the "2+2" engagement to the level of Foreign and Defence Ministers, where strategic discussions will be taking place at least every two year
- **Broadening area of Cooperation:** Several pacts were announced like framework arrangement on cyber technology, a MoU on cooperation in mining and processing of critical and strategic minerals, vocational training and water management.
- **Renewed focus on Trade:** The two nations have restarted talks over the India-Australia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) which were suspended in 2015
- **Growing defence synergy** with the signing of two pacts
  - **T**he **Australia-India Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement:** It will give the two militaries reciprocal access to each nation's respective military bases, thereby deepening the integration between the two militaries.
  - The **Defence Science and Technology Implementing Arrangement**

Focus Areas
- Maritime geography of the Indo-Pacific.
- Both countries "share a vision of a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region to support the freedom of navigation, over-flight and peaceful and cooperative use of the seas."
- Strong ties with Australia are "not only important for our two nations but also for the Indo-Pacific region and the whole world"

How has Australia's foreign policy vis-à-vis India changed?
- Moving beyond the 'Cricket, Curry and Commonwealth' banality, Canberra has imparted a renewed sense of purpose to its engagement with New Delhi
- After initial dilly-dallying from Australia on strong ties with India, it has recognised India now as a pre-eminent maritime power among Indian Ocean countries and a "front-rank partner of Australia."
- China's aggression and assertive foreign policy has played an important role in shaping this robust outreach
- China's growing interference in Australian domestic politics and its attempts to use trade for geopolitical purposes has led to Australia's realignment in foreign affairs
- Retaliation by China on Australia calling for an independent enquiry into the origins of the novel coronavirus.
- China not only suspended Australian beef imports from and imposed tariffs on barley but also issued an advisory to its citizens to avoid travelling to Australia

Way Ahead
- The Indo-Australian bilateral trade is around $21 billion in 2018-19 which remains below potential. Hence, early signing of CECA is necessary for robust relationship
- India's annual Malabar naval exercises with the US and Japan should be expanded to include Australia – The Quad grouping.
- The Quad will also become more potent if the four powers are ready to pool together their defence capabilities in the service of regional stability and economic prosperity.

Conclusion
As the two nations realise each other's significance in the emerging geopolitical and geo-economic dynamic, they can be more ambitious in charting out their future engagement.

Connecting the dots
- China's String of Pearl Theory
- USA's Pivot to Asia Policy

INDIA AND THE WORLD

India-Nepal border dispute
India-Nepal ties; India and its neighbourhood relations

Context - The Nepal government's decision to pass the constitutional amendment ratifying a change in its maps that include Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura, territories that India controls, marks a decidedly new phase in ties.

Treaty of Sugauli

• The Nepalese kingdom had stretched from the Sutlej river in the west to the Teesta river in the East.

• However, Nepal lost the Anglo-Nepalese War and the resulting Treaty of Sugauli, 1816 limited Nepal to its present territories.

• The Sugauli Treaty stated that Nepal ceded to British the whole of the lowlands between the Rivers Kali and Rapti.

• The Kali River is formed by the union of two headwaters: the Kalapani river that originates below the Lipulekh Pass and the Kuthi Yankit river that rises below the Limpiyadhura range. Both the streams have been termed 'Kali River' on different occasions.

• The valley of Kalapani, with the Lipulekh Pass at the top, forms the Indian route to Kailash–Manasarovar.

• The Kali River serves as the boundary between Uttarakhand (Kumaon region) and Nepal from Limpiyadhura.

• In addition to Mahakali/Sharda (West), Gandak/Narayani (South) and Mechi (East) are two other rivers which demarcate the border between India and Nepal.

• By 2007, the Nepal-India Technical Level Joint Boundary Working Group agreed on 182 strip maps covering almost 98% of the boundary, except the two disputed areas of Kalapani and Susta.

Issue of Kalapani area

• Over the decades, these rivers have changed courses several times, giving rise to disputes, claims and counterclaims on land.

• The Nepal government claims that by taking advantage of Nepal's negligence in guarding its borders, India has encroached on its borderland.

• The former director-general of the Department of Survey of Nepal, claims that maps from 1850 and 1856, prepared by the Survey of India with the participation of Nepali authorities, clearly state that the Mahakal River originates from Limpiyadhura, 16 km northwest of Kalapani, thereby proving that Kalapani belongs to Nepal.

• However, India has consistently refused to accept those maps as proof.

• Indian officials insist that a map drawn up by the British colonial government in 1875 should be considered instead.

• The 1875 map allegedly shows the origin of the Mahakali River to the east of Kalapani. Unlike the maps from 1850 and 1856, the 1875 map does not have Nepal's certification.

Controversy about Lipulekh pass

• The Lipulekh pass, as well as the Limpayadhura pass (or Limpiya pass), are on Nepal border with Tibet.

• The Lipulekh Pass links Uttarakhand with China's Tibetan Autonomous Region. The pass is near the trijunction of India, Nepal and China

• The Lipulekh Pass is situated at an altitude of 5,000 metres. Nepal claims that the Indian army has encroached 372 km2 towards Limpiyadhura from Kalapani since the 1962 Indo-China war. At that time, Nepal, as a friendly neighbour, granted permission to the Indian army to set up a camp in the region.

• Subsequently, despite several firm requests by Nepal's prime minister at the time, to evacuate the camp, Indian troops stayed put.

• Because of the asymmetric power relationship between the two countries, Nepal has not been able to force India to withdraw its troops from the area

INDIA AND THE WORLD

...Continued

India carried out four escalatory actions in a row –
• First, in May 2015 it signed an agreement with China to use the Lipu Lekh Pass for trade; Kathmandu immediately protested to both New Delhi and Beijing.
• Second, in November 2019 India published a new map that showed Kalapani within its territory.
• Third, India's defence minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated a road link to Lipu Lekh amid Covid-19 and an ongoing political crisis in Kathmandu.
• Fourth was the statement by Indian Army Chief General M.M. Naravane, implying China had instigated Nepal to lay claims on the area.

Concerns/Danger of crisis ahead
• At the base of the rift is the lack of diplomatic manoeuvring by India to de-escalate the issue.
• While New Delhi contends that it was willing to discuss matters at a mutually convenient date, Kathmandu says the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has rejected two dates suggested by the Nepal
• Nepal also alleges India has routinely dismissed requests from the Nepal Ambassador for a meet with the Foreign Secretary.
• Also, MEA said Kalapani talks could wait until both countries had dealt with the coronavirus pandemic first, which further enraged the Nepali government.
• This was in contrast with India's participation by videoconference in bilateral and multilateral meetings.
• Meanwhile, Mr. Oli's (Nepal PM) push towards the amendment at exactly the same time as the India-China border stand-off bolstered the belief that he is speaking with confidence borne from Beijing's backing.
• The Oli government, which seeks to build its legacy by overturning what it calls "unequal" agreements made by the monarchy, could also cause a security nightmare for India
• If Nepal opens up other parts of their long boundary, and reverses old commitments on open and unsecured border posts, the bilateral relationship will worsen benefitting China.

Conclusion
It is necessary the two nations resolve their issues through dialogue lest they face more serious consequences.

Russia-India-China Meet
Multilateral Relations/Agreements

In News:
• Virtual meeting of the foreign ministers of the Russia-India-China (RIC) grouping on 23rd June 2020

Do you know?
• Together, the RIC countries occupy over 19 percent of the global landmass and contribute to over 33 percent of global GDP.
• All three countries are nuclear powers and two, Russia and China, are permanent members of the UN Security Council, while India aspires to be one.

About RIC

• RIC is a strategic grouping that first took shape in the late 1990s under the leadership of Yevgeny Primakov, a Russian politician as "a counterbalance to the Western alliance."
• This idea of a 'strategic triangle' took a tangible form when former Foreign Ministers of Russia, China, and India met on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2002.
• The group was founded on the basis of ending Russia's subservient foreign policy guided by the USA and renewing old ties with India and fostering the newly discovered friendship with China.
• The grouping was formed in an aim to ensure that it is not left to the America-led West alone to shape the rules of global governance

Relevance of RIC for India
• Membership for India was always about containing China in Eurasia
• **Forum for Cooperation:** Even though India, China and Russia may disagree on a number of security issues in Eurasia, there are areas where their interests converge, like, for instance, on Afghanistan. RIC can ensure stable peace in Afghanistan and by extension, in Central Asia.
• **Governance over Arctic:** With the Northern Sea Route opening up due to climate change, the RIC has a common interest in ensuring that it is not left to the West and Russia alone and that India and China also have major say in rules governing the Arctic route

INDIA AND THE WORLD

Key Takeaways of the Virtual RIC meet

• The special meeting of RIC on 23rd June 2020 was held to mark 75 years of the victory over the Axis powers in World War-II

• The ministerial-level engagements took place in the backdrop of ongoing border tensions between India and China, which has resulted in the first army casualties in 45 years.

• However, bilateral matters (Indo-China) were not discussed

• India stressed upon respecting international law, recognising the legitimate interests of partners, supporting multilateralism and promoting common good are the only way of building a durable world order

• There was no joint statement due to differences over few paragraphs

Critical Analysis of RIC

• India's growing strategic partnership with the United States, Japan, and Australia conflicts with the RIC's goals and objectives of seeking to undermine Washington's role in the Indo-Pacific.

• There is growing Russia-China Axis which undermines the grouping relevance for India

• China is Russia's biggest trading partner and the largest Asian investor in Russia.

• China sees Russia as a powerhouse of raw material and a growing market for its consumer goods

• The West's approach towards Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and recent US-China trade war has brought Russia & China much closer

• There is also growing dependence of Russia on Chinese consumption.

• Also, over 70% of China's arms imports now come from Russia

So is Russia now a permanent ally of China?

• Not necessarily, western analysts see Russia-China as a "friendship of convenience" between two countries

• Russia has been extremely calibrated in its statements on issues on which Beijing is most sensitive to: Huawei's 5G rollout, Hong Kong and the Covid-19 pandemic

• China does not recognise Crimea as part of Russia, and Moscow, formally speaking, takes a neutral stance on Beijing's claims in the South China Sea.

• Russia maintains steady relationship with India. Nearly 60 to 70 % of India's defence supplies are from Russia

• India decided to reach out to RIC since it believes Russia has leverage and influence to shape and change Beijing's stance on certain issues

Conclusion

• Far from enjoying equal status, member countries in groups like the BRI, BRICS, RIC, SCO, RCEP are seconded to Chinese special interests.

• Therefore, India's policy makers must wriggle out of the China's embrace and seek friends in other places like the Quad and Japan-America-India (JAI) formulation

Connecting the dots

• Belt & Road Initiative, CPEC and String of Pearls Strategy

• India's Act East policy

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INTERNATIONAL

Hong Kong Issue
International Affairs

Context
• China's Parliament recently passed new legislation for Hong Kong.

• The law is called the **"NPC Decision on Establishing and Improving the Legal System and Enforcement Mechanisms for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to Safeguard National Security"**.

• It essentially empowers the Ruling party of China to draft new national security laws for Special Administrative Region (SAR) of Hong Kong for the first time.

The law is aimed at enabling measures to counter, lawfully prevent, stop and punish foreign and over-seas forces which are using Hong Kong to carry out separatist or destructive activities.

• The law has been criticised by pro-democracy parties and legal community in Hong Kong.

• It is being said that it undermines the **"one country, two systems"** model of Hong Kong.

Background:
• In 1898 British had taken the Hong Kong island on lease for 99 years from the then Qing dynasty of China (after defeat in Opium wars)

• Britain eventually agreed to transfer the island to China upon the expiration of that lease in 1997, after obtaining guarantees from China to preserve Hong Kong's systems, freedoms, and way of life for at least 50 years.

• China had promised to maintain a special status for Hong Kong under the 'one country, two systems' principle.

• China is now poised to impose a new national security law on Hong Kong, which increases China's control over Hong Kong .

• The passage of law by Ruling party of China means that China has effectively abrogated the treaty with the UK.

Taiwan
• Taiwan was where the defeated regime of Chiang Kai-Shek, China's last non-communist president, retired when the Communist Party captured Beijing.

• In the Chinese Constitution there is a pledge to regain Taiwan.

• President Xi Jinping has, without provocation, called for incorporation of Taiwan back into mainland China after 71 years

Tibet/India
• China takes the view that when it was weak in the last two centuries, Britain took advantage, seized Chinese (or Tibetan) territory and incorporated it in British India.

• China began to ask for it from independent India in Jawaharlal Nehru's days.

• Nehru took the view that territory of British India (Partition apart) was Indian territory.

US vs China:Uighur Muslims
Rights issue

In news:
• Recently, the USA House of Representatives approved legislation which called for sanctions on Chinese officials responsible for oppression of Uighur Muslims.

• The bill has been sent to the President to veto or sign into law.

Key takeaways
• It has been reported that several Chinese officials are responsible for repression of Uighurs and other Muslim groups in China's Xinjiang province.

• The United Nations estimates that more than a million Muslims have been detained in camps.

• The bill also calls on U.S. companies or individuals operating in the Xinjiang region to take steps to ensure their products do not include parts using forced labor.

• China has, however, maintained denial about mistreatment and has claimed that the camps provide vocational training.

INTERNATIONAL

Who are Uighurs Muslims?

• They are a predominantly Muslim minority Turkic ethnic group.
• Their origins can be traced to Central and East Asia.
• They are considered to be one of the 55 officially recognized ethnic minority communities in China.
• However, China recognises the community only as a regional minority and rejects that they are an indigenous group.
• The largest population of the Uighur ethnic community lives in Xinjiang region of China.
• They also live in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Inter-Parliamentary Alliance to counter China
International Affairs

In news:
• A group of senior lawmakers from eight countries including the US have launched the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China.

Eight countries include -
1. USA
2. Germany
3. UK
4. Japan
5. Australia
6. Canada
7. Sweden
8. Norway
9. Members of the European parliament

Do you know?
• It is a new cross-parliamentary alliance to help counter the threats posed by China's growing influence to global trade, security and human rights.
• The group aims to achieve the following on issues related to China :
----- to construct appropriate and coordinated responses
------ to create a proactive and strategic approach

G-7 Summit postponed
Multilateral/Global Groupings and Relations

In News:
• Recently, G-7 Summit was postponed by the US President citing the Covid-19 pandemic.
• He also expressed his desire to expand the Group to G10 or G11, where he wanted to include India, Russia, Australia and South Korea also.

Important value additions

The G-7 or 'Group of Seven'
• It is an intergovernmental organisation that was formed in 1975 by the top economies of the time as an informal forum to discuss pressing world issues.
• G-7 includes countries of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
• It is an annual summit that is presided over by leaders of member countries on a rotational basis.
• Wide range of global issues is discussed at the summit.
• Russia was expelled as a member in 2014 following the latter's annexation of the Crimea region of Ukraine.
• It does not have a permanent headquarter.
• The decisions taken by leaders during annual summits are non-binding

India and G-7
Multilateral/Global Groupings and Relations

Context: U.S. President Donald Trump announced that he would like to expand G-7 to a G-11, by adding India, Russia, South Korea and Australia.

US President followed up his announcement with invitations to these four country's leaders, to attend the 2020's G-7 summit in the U.S.

Do you know?
• In 2019, the 45th G-7 summit held at France was unable to issue a joint communiqué due to differences on various issues— a first in its history.
• The G20 was formed in 1999, so as to bring more countries on board to address global economic concerns. India is a member and is slated to host G20 summit in 2022.

INTERNATIONAL

Brief History of G7
- The G7 emerged as a restricted club of the rich democracies in the early 1970s.
- The quadrupling of oil prices just after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, when members of the OPEC imposed an embargo against Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, and the United States, shocked their economies.
- Although the French were spared the embargo, the fear of it made France to invite finance ministers of the US, Germany, Japan, Italy, and UK, for an informal discussion on global issues.
- This transformed into a G7 Summit of the heads of government with the inclusion of Canada in 1976.
- It does not have a permanent headquarter and the decisions taken by leaders during annual summits are non-binding.
- On the initiative of U.S. President Bill Clinton and British PM Tony Blair, the G7 became the G8, with the Russian Federation joining the club in 1998.
- However, in 2014, Russia was suspended from the group after the annexation of Crimea and tensions in Ukraine.

What has been the reaction of countries on G-11 plan?
- India has welcomed the decision and commended Trump for his "creative and far-sighted" decision to expand the format of the grouping to keep up with the new realities of the "post-COVID world".
- Australia and South Korea have also welcomed the invitation,
- Russia, that lost its membership of the grouping in 2014 over its annexation of Crimea, has stated it would attend "if treated as an equal"

Significance of G-11 plan for India
- The proposed G-11 grouping would recognise India's place amongst the world's richest nations. Membership will acknowledge India's global voice
- It will provide a platform for India to address its concerns like terrorism and ensure that world work towards it
- It helps increase the soft power of India
- Exclusion of China from G-11 means possible strengthening of India's alliance against China
- This is step in democratization of international institutions which are facing the criticism of being biased in favour of developed countries

Critical Analysis of G-11 Plan
- **Improves Effectiveness:** Expansion is needed to improve the groupings effectiveness as a multilateral forum to arrive at consensus on issues like climate change, security contributions, Iran, etc
- **Against G-8+ 5:** China, India, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa, were invited regularly to G-8 summits as an outreach by the developed world to the five emerging economies. The G-11 plan leaves out all these members except India
- **Potential fora for Cold War:** The summit appears aimed at fuelling a new Cold War between the U.S. and China.
- **Adds fire to US-China tensions:** US and China are fighting each other over trade, IPR, 5G Technology, Hong Kong, South China Sea, Climate issues and recently over origins of Coronavirus. This action by US will further widen their rift
- **Long Way:** As host, Mr. Trump can invite any country as a G-7 special invitee, but changing its composition will require the approval of the other members.
- **Opposition from within G-7:** There are some concerns by European countries over Russia joining the group, which could derail the entire G-11 plan
- **Short term Challenges:** It is unclear when the summit will actually be held, given the November polls in the U.S. This might derail the plan in initial stages itself

Conclusion
India deserves its place on the global stage, but on G-11 which excludes China, it must be clear about its aims given that the plan further polarise the world into two camps

Connecting the dots
- International Solar Alliance   G20 and its utility for India
- East Asia Summit   Criticism of UN and WHO

INTERNATIONAL

An unravelling of the Group of Seven
International organization; Multilateral/Global Groupings

Context:
- The 46th G7 summit, scheduled in US in mid-June 2020, has been postponed by the host, U.S. President.
- U.S. President Donald Trump announced that he would like to expand G-7 to a G-11, by adding India, Russia, South Korea and Australia. Donald Trump.

Brief History of G7
- The G7 emerged as a restricted club of the rich democracies in the early 1970s.
- The **quadrupling of oil prices just after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War**, when members of the OPEC imposed an embargo against Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, and the United States, shocked their economies.
- Although the French were spared the embargo, the fear of it made France to invite finance ministers of the US, Germany, Japan, Italy, and UK, for an informal discussion on global issues.
- This transformed into a G7 Summit of the heads of government with the inclusion of Canada in 1976.
- It does **not** have a **permanent headquarter** and the decisions taken by leaders during annual summits are **non-binding**.
- On the initiative of U.S. President Bill Clinton and British PM Tony Blair, the G7 became the G8, with the Russian Federation joining the club in 1998.
- However, **in 2014, Russia was suspended** from the group after the annexation of Crimea and tensions in Ukraine.

Criticisms of G7
- The G7 has not been successful with respect to contemporary issues, such as the

  —**COVID-19 pandemic:** They have failed to perform vigilance functions through WHO
  —**Climate change**: The G7 countries account for 59% of historic global CO2 emissions (from 1850 to 2010) but has not yet announced any plan of action to phase out all fossil fuels and subsidies
  —**The challenge of the ISIS**: Three of the G7 countries, France, Germany, and the U.K., were among the top 10 countries contributing volunteers to this terrorist organisation
  —The c**risis of state collapse in West Asia** due to external intervention (particularly by US) has led to largest refugee crisis in recent times

- The G7 failed to head off the economic downturn of 2007-08, which led to the rise of the G20.
- In the short span of its existence, the G20 has provided a degree of confidence, by promoting open markets, and stimulus, preventing a collapse of the global financial system

Economic Circumstances forces G7 expansion
- When constituted, the G7 countries accounted for close to two-thirds of global GDP, however, they now **account for less than a third of global GDP** on a purchasing power parity (PPP) basis, and less than half on market exchange rates (MER) basis.
- The seven largest emerging economies **(E7, or "Emerging 7")**, comprising Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia and Turkey, account for over a third of global GDP on PPP terms, and over a quarter on MER basis.
- By 2050, six of the seven of the world's best performing economies will be China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, and Russia.
- Hence, economic circumstances necessitate change in composition of G7, else it will lose its relevance

Way Ahead:
- **Relevance:** Any new international mechanism (G10 or G11) will have value only if it focuses on key global issues.
- **Rule of law:** There is a need to push for observing international law and preventing the retreat from liberal values.
- **Global public health and the revival of growth** and trade in a sustainable way (that also reduces the inequalities among and within nations) which is a huge challenge needs to be addressed effectively by the new international mechanism.
- **Prepare for future pandemic:** An immediate concern is to ensure effective implementation of the 1975 Biological Weapons Convention

INTERNATIONAL

WHO Foundation
Global Groupings

In News:
• The **WHO Foundation** was created recently as an **independent grant-making entity.**
• It will support the WHO's efforts to address the most pressing global health challenges.

Key takeaways
• The foundation will enable WHO to tap new non-traditional sources of funding, including the general public.
• It will support the global health ecosystem by funding **high-impact initiatives** and advancing strategies of innovation, effectiveness, and rapid response.
• Its Headquarter will be in Geneva.
• It will be legally independent from the WHO.
• It will provide funds to WHO and trusted implementing partners to deliver on the Organization's **triple billion goals**.

These goals aim to achieve the following by 2023:

> • Protect 1 billion people from health emergencies.
> • Extend universal health coverage to 1 billion people.
> • Assure healthy lives and wellbeing to 1 billion people.

Kohala Hydroelectric Power Project
Effect of Policies and Politics on Effect of Policies and Politics

In News:
• An agreement has been finalised between China and Pakistan to implement the Kohala hydroelectric power project under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Key takeaways
• The project will be set up in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).
• It will be built on the Jhelum River.
• Once completed, it will provide more than 5 billion units of clean and low-cost electricity for consumers in Pakistan.
• Earlier, India had protested Pakistan's plans to build a dam in Gilgit-Baltistan region.

Important value additions
China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)
• It is a collection of infrastructure projects that are under construction throughout Pakistan since 2013.
• It is intended to rapidly upgrade Pakistan's required infrastructure and strengthen its economy by the construction of modern transportation networks, numerous energy projects, and special economic zones.
• It is a 3,000-km-long corridor which is aimed at connecting China and Pakistan with rail, road, pipelines and optical cable fiber networks.
• It connects China's Xinjiang province with Pakistan Gwadar port, providing access to China to the Arabian Sea.
• The CPEC passes through PoK, over which India has conveyed its protests to China.

INTERNATIONAL

A chill in U.S.-China relations
International Relations

Context:
• Vijay Gokhale, a former Foreign Secretary of India and a former Ambassador to China, has given his views on the US-China relations.

American administration since the 1960s have been complicit in China's rise
• US have been complicit in China's rise in the unrealised hope that China will become a 'responsible stakeholder' under US Hegemony
• President Richard Nixon gave China the international acceptability it craved in return for being admitted to Mao's presence in 1972;
• President Jimmy Carter terminated diplomatic relations with Taiwan in order to normalise relations with China in 1978;
• President George H.W. Bush washed away the sins of Tiananmen in 1989 for geopolitical gain
• President Bill Clinton ushered the Chinese into the World Trade Organization at the expense of American business

What has been Chinese action in return for US support in these decades?
• **Rhetoric over action**: In return China have spoken anti-Soviet rhetoric during the Cold War and promoted the market principles
• **Suspicious view of USA**: Every Chinese leader from Chairman Mao to President Xi Jinping has been clear that the U.S. represents an existential threat to the continued supremacy of the communist regime.
• **Started creating Parallel Universe**: The collapse of the Soviet Union only reinforced China's suspicious view of US and strengthened China's resolve to resist by creating its own parallel universe.

> —Alternate trading system - the Belt and Road Initiative;
> —A multilateral banking system under its control - Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, New Development Bank;
> —China's own global positioning system –BeiDou
> —China's own digital payment platforms - WeChat Pay and Alipay
> —A world-class digital network -Huawei 5G
> —Development of a modern military force.

• **Professed Peaceful Rise:** General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Hu Jintao's assured about "peaceful rise" so as to allay the fears of other and also to utilise the financial and technological resources of the West.
• **Regional Hegemon:** China started building military installations in the South China Sea as its economic power increased

Recent announcements on China by U.S. President Donald Trump
• **Break from past:** President Trump is the first one to finally acknowledge the uneasy facts about the Chinese
• **Strategic Shift** It was Mr. Trump's 2017 National Security Strategy document that, perhaps for the first time, clubbed China along with Russia as a challenge to American power, influence and interests
• **Clashes on various front:** Trump has called China out on trade practices and on 5G
• **Decoupling of relationship:** U.S. is heavily dependent on supply chains in China, while the Chinese have been unable to break free of the dollar. Both Trump & Xi-Jinping wants to decouple their closely inter-linked economies.
• **Hongkong:** Trump administration has stated it would revoke Hong Kong's special trade status under U.S. law.

INTERNATIONAL

...Continued

• **Chinese Immigration:** US administration has passed an order limiting the entry of certain Chinese graduate students and researchers who may have ties to the People's Liberation Army.
• **Tighter Regulation:** U.S. President has also ordered financial regulators to closely examine Chinese firms listed in U.S. stock markets, and warned those that do not comply with U.S. laws could be delisted.

What does all these announcements indicate?
• It is a clear indication that the competition between the U.S. and China is likely to sharpen in the post-COVID world.
• The points of divergence, even dispute, between US-China have so far been in the material realm. With Hong Kong, the U.S.-China rivalry may be entering the ideological domain.

Conclusion
A binary choice between the U.S. and China is likely to test India's capacity to maintain strategic and decisional autonomy.

Connecting the dots
• Cold War and Nuclear arms race
• Impact of rising US-China tensions on rules-based international order

North and South Korea: Armistice Agreement
International Relations

In news:
• The **UN Command,** led by the United States, recently held both North and South Korea guilty of violating **armistice agreements** after a recent incident which involved gunfire along the **Demilitarised Zone (DMZ)** between the two countries.

About Korean Armistice Agreement
• The agreement brought about a complete cessation of hostilities of the Korean War.
• It was signed on 27 July 1953 by the United Nations Command (UNC), Korean People's Army (KPA of North Korea) and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army (PVA).
• It was designed to ensure a complete termination of hostilities and of all acts of armed force in Korea until a final peaceful settlement is achieved.
• A final peace settlement has never been achieved.
• It also established the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the de facto new border between the two nations which put into force a cease-fire, and finalized the return of prisoners of war.
• The DMZ runs close to the 38th parallel and has separated North and South Korea since the Agreement.

Source: Research Gate

• South Korea never signed the Agreement, due to its refusal to accept failure to unify Korea by force.
• The UN Command oversees affairs pertaining to the DMZ, to ensure the terms of the armistice are being agreed upon by both North Korea and South Korea

INTERNATIONAL

International Criminal Court
International organization

About
• It is an intergovernmental organization and international tribunal that sits in The Hague, Netherlands.
• It has jurisdiction to prosecute individuals for the international crimes of:

- genocide
- crimes against humanity
- war crimes
- crime of aggression

• It is intended to complement existing national judicial systems.
• It may exercise its jurisdiction only when national courts are unwilling or unable to prosecute criminals.
• It may only investigate and prosecute crimes committed within member states, crimes committed by nationals of member states, or crimes in situations referred to the Court by the United Nations Security Council.
• The ICC lacks universal territorial jurisdiction.

Japan to rename disputes islands
International Affairs

About:
• Japan approved plans to change the name of the area covering the Tokyo-controlled Senkaku Islands — known by Taiwan and China as the Diaoyus — from "Tonoshiro" to "Tonoshiro Senkaku".
• China said the move is illegal and a "serious provocation".

Key Prelims Pointers:
• The Senkaku Islands dispute, or Diaoyu Islands dispute, concerns a territorial dispute over a group of uninhabited islands located in East China Sea.
• They are currently controlled by Japan. But both China and Taiwan claim sovereignty over the islands.
• Oil and gas reserves had been identified under the seabed surrounding the islands and it makes the dispute tougher to resolve.

Kaesong Industrial Complex
International Affairs

About
• North Korea blew up the joint liaison office (communication channel) with South Korea in Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC).
• The demolition follows a recent deterioration in relations between North and South Korea.

Important value additions
Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC)
• It is located inside North Korea just across the demilitarised zone from South Korea.
• It was launched in 2004, largely financed by the South Korea to increase cooperation.
• The purpose of the KIC was to develop an industrial park where South Korean companies could manufacture their products using North Korean labour.
• It is a duty-free zone.
• There are no restrictions on the use of foreign currency or credit cards.
• No visa is required to enter the complex.
• It is argued that KIC would help North Korea start to reform its economy, which is in a dire state, and ease tensions between the two Koreas.
• It is one of the last remaining points of peaceful engagement between North and South Korea.

INTERNATIONAL

Pakistan to remain on FATF 'greylist'

International relations; Security

About

• Pakistan to remain on FATF 'greylist' till October 2020.
• Financial Action Task Force (FATF) plenary session paused due to COVID.

Do you know?

• Pakistan has faced criticism due to its failure to meet the finance watchdog's 27-point action plan on countering terror financing and anti-money laundering (CFT/AML) measures.
• Pakistan has also failed to act against groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Afghan Taliban and affiliated HQN.

According to US's 2019 report on terrorism,
• Pakistan allowed groups targeting Afghanistan as well as groups targeting India to operate from its territory
• Pakistan continues to "serve as a safe haven" for regional terrorist groups.

What happens when a country (Ex: Pakistan) is blacklisted?

• Unlike others, the FATF follows a principle of ostracism against members who don't comply with its strictures.
• Countries will face severe financial restrictions which means tightening all banking mechanisms in this inter-connected globalised world
• A downgrading by credit agencies meaning high interest rate while borrowing
• Most significantly, possible loan cuts by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

India and FATF

• India became an observer in the grouping in 2006, and was inducted as a full member in 2010.
• India has faced three rounds of mutual evaluations and cleared them, and faces the fourth round next year.
• India has been persistent with its efforts in bringing evidence it has on Pakistan's terror links to the world body.
• India is using FATF as a platform to pressurise Pakistan to curb its terror related activities

From Prelims Point of View

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

• Inter-governmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7.
• Secretariat is housed at the OECD headquarters in Paris.
• Generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in various areas
• to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures
• Combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
• The FATF is not a part of the UN system, but it functions out of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development headquarters in Paris

Mains Focus

Working of FATF

• As a policy-making body, the FATF works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in these areas.
• The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system
• The FATF runs differently from other multilateral agencies, as its primary focus is on reviewing all actions through a "technical" not a political prism, and frowns upon countries bringing bilateral issues to the forum.
• FATF depends on voluntary implementation of its reports by member countries.
• Also, meetings of the group are carried out behind closed doors, and deliberations are not publicised. In the past, the FATF has penalised countries that have disclosed the contents of its meetings.

INTERNATIONAL

Future Challenges w.r.t FATF

Politicisation of body
• Even though decisions are taken by consensus, the organisation is affected by geopolitical trends
• The U.S. and other countries have been able to ensure that Iran and North Korea remain on the FATF blacklist.
• while others are able to avoid the blacklist tag as they are able to enlist the political support of enough other countries like China, Russia and Turkey.

US-Taliban Deal
• With the U.S. striking a deal with the Taliban in 2020, and efforts to take Taliban off the UN listing, FATF may change the focus of its reviews in jurisdictions that have engaged with the Taliban in the past.

New-Age Challenges which includes
• Bitcoins and cyber currencies,
• Illegal trafficking of wildlife as a source of funding,
• Use of artificial intelligence in terror attacks and
• Biowarfare as part of the wider challenge of the coronavirus pandemic.

China to join UN arms trade treaty
International affairs

About: China to join a global pact (UN Arms Trade Treaty) to regulate arms sales, efforts to "enhance peace and stability" in the world.

About UN Arms Trade Treaty (2014)
• UN Arms Trade Treaty seeks to regulate the international trade in conventional arms (from small arms to battle tanks, combat aircraft and warships).
• It is designed to control the flow of weapons into conflict zones.
• It requires member countries to keep records of international transfers of weapons and to prohibit cross-border shipments that can be used in human rights violations or attacks on civilians.
• It establishes common standards for the international trade of conventional weapons and seeks to reduce the illicit arms trade.

Do you know?
• While 130 countries originally signed the treaty, only 101 have ratified and joined it. India has not signed the treaty.

USTR initiates investigations into Digital Service Taxes
International Relations; Trade; Intellectual Property

Context:
• Recently, the office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) has initiated investigations into taxes adopted or under consideration by 10 nations, including India.
• These nations had charged taxes on revenues of American digital service companies like Netflix, Airbnb, Spotify, etc. Such taxes are known as Digital Service Taxes.

Key takeaways
• The US is probing the 2% Digital Services Tax (DST) that India adopted from April 1, 2020.
• The tax applies only to non-resident companies with annual revenues over $267,000, and covers online sales of goods & services to persons in India.
• Further, equalisation levy at 6% has been in force since 2016 on payment exceeding Rs. 1 lakh a year to a non-resident service provider for online advertisements.
• This is applicable for e-commerce companies that are sourcing revenue from Indian customers without having significant presence in the particular country.
• It is argued that India's equalisation levy is complex and ambiguous which includes the possibility of double taxation.
• In India's case, the probe could potentially affect the outcome of a bilateral trade deal that India has been looking to forge with the US.
• Further, India continues to be on the 'Priority Watch List' of USTR for lack of adequate Intellectual Property (IP) rights protection and enforcement.

INTERNATIONAL

The Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR)

• It is responsible for developing and coordinating US international trade.
• The Section 301 gives the USTR broad authority to investigate and respond to a foreign country's actions which may be unfair or discriminatory and may negatively affect US commerce.
• Section 301 was adopted through the 1974 Trade Act.
• It allows the US President to impose tariffs or other curbs on foreign nations.
• However, the law mandates consultations with trading partners.

Digital Services Taxes (DSTs)

• These are the adopted taxes on revenues that certain companies generate from providing certain digital services.
• E.g. digital multinationals like Google, Amazon and Apple etc.
• The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is currently hosting negotiations with over 130 countries that aim to adapt the international tax system.
• One goal is to address the tax challenges of the digitalization of the economy.

India wins UNSC non-permanent seat
International relations

Context: India was elected to the U.N. Security Council as a non-permanent member.

Functions and Powers of UNSC

• To maintain international peace and security in accordance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations;
• To investigate any dispute or situation which might lead to international friction;
• To recommend methods of adjusting such disputes or the terms of settlement;
• To determine the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression and to recommend what action should be taken;
• To take military action against an aggressor;
• To call on Members to apply economic sanctions and other measures not involving the use of force to prevent or stop aggression;
• To recommend the admission of new Members;
• To exercise the trusteeship functions of the United Nations in "strategic areas";
• To recommend to the General Assembly the appointment of the Secretary-General and, together with the Assembly, to elect the Judges of the International Court of Justice.

What happened at the election that India won?

• India won 184 votes in the 193-strong UN General Assembly
• Ahead of the vote, India had launched a campaign brochure which highlighted -
    — Its demand for transparency in mandates for UN peacekeeping missions
    — Push for the India-led Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism
    — Demand for joint efforts for UN reform and expansion of the Security Council

• India begins its term in the beginning of 2021, and will hold the position until the end of 2022.

Do you know?
• In 2020, India was the only candidate for the vacancy from the Asia Pacific and was endorsed unanimously by the Asia Pacific group, which comprises 55 countries, including Pakistan and China.
• India has earlier been a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 1950-51, 1967-68, 1972-73, 1977-78, 1984-85, 1991-92 and 2011-12.

INTERNATIONAL

Significance of India's win

• **India's Growing Credibility:** Broad based support for India's candidature means world places faith on India's commitment to multilateralism and reforms.
• **Diplomacy with agenda:** A "new orientation for a reformed multilateral system" (NORMS), as laid out by India's Minister of External Affairs, would be India's overall objective during the two-year tenure
• **Voice of developing countries:** UN's agenda has often been hijacked by the interests of five permanent members. India win means that it has got a platform to voice the issues of emerging countries.

Challenges Ahead

• **Implementation hurdles:** Achieving the objective laid out in NORMS, would depend on how India will conduct diplomacy in the global body, build alliances and raise issues that go beyond the interests of the big five
• **Declining Multilateralism:** The COVID-19 pandemic has already shaken up the global order and sharpened the rivalry between the U.S. and China. This has opened up fresh debates on strengthening multilateralism and multilateral institutions.
• **Polarised world:** India should avoid the temptation of taking sides at a time when the Security Council is getting more and more polarised, especially in the wake of US-China tensions

India's 5-S approach:
• SAMMAN – Respect
• SAMVAD – Dialogue
• SAHYOG – Cooperation
• SHANTI – Peace
• SAMRIDDHI – Prosperity

Committed to:
• Multilateralism
• Rule of law
• A fair & equitable international system.

A world-view anchored in our ethos:
the world is one family

NORMS: NEW ORIENTATION FOR A REFORMED MULTILATERAL SYSTEM

INDIA: committed to promote **responsible & inclusive** solutions to international peace & security

Conclusion
To serve India's interests and push for its agenda of multilateralism and reforms, India should adopt value-based positions that are not transactional.

INTERNATIONAL

Anatomy of anti-black racism in USA
International Affairs

Context: George Floyd, an African-American, was killed by police during an arrest in Minneapolis, USA on May 25th 2020, which led to widespread protest in US against Police brutality and systemic racism.

What is racism?

• In a nutshell, it is this: one can tell everything important about a person, his group, its past and future, by noting the colour of his skin.

• Racism is a systematic ideology, a complex set of beliefs and practices that, on the presumed basis of biology, divides humanity into the 'higher' us and a lower 'them'.

Anatomy of Racism

• The classification of humans into different races is the starting point of all racism

• Racism depends on two additional, deeply troublesome features.

First is linking Biology with Behaviour

• A given set of biological characteristics is believed to be necessarily related to certain dispositions, traits of character and behaviour.

• Biological descent fixes a person's culture and ethics

• Racism thus naturalises a person's belief, character and culture.

• For example, being uneducated is seen not as socio-economic deprivation but a sign of inherited low IQ

• In USA, blacks are seen as predatory and savagery, which unless kept down by brute force from time to time, might explode and destroy civilisation.

Second, these racial cultures and ethical systems are hierarchically arranged

• Racism considers that those on top are intrinsically superior to those at the bottom.

• Racism not only sustains a permanent group hierarchy but deeply stigmatises those designated as inferior.

• This sense of hierarchy provides a motive for say, whites to treat blacks in cruel ways

• Inferior races are either considered not worthy to live with (Ex: Anti-semitism in Nazi Germany that led to Holocost) or fit only to be controlled, subordinated and enslaves (Ex: Anti-Black racism, Caste Sytem)

Idea of race

• Race is considered as a group with a common biological descent.

• This idea of race develops primarily due to following two reasons

— Specific bodily features (colour, shape of nose, eye, lips) are permanently clumped together and human beings are classified in terms of these distinct biological clusters

— Further, it is believed that these shared features are inter-generationally transmitted

• Each race is then believed to be fundamentally and permanently different from others- differences that are innate and indestructible

• Despite many attempts, particularly in the 1930s to demonstrate its scientific basis, race or racial classifications have virtually no scientific foundation.

How racism persists in USA despite several movements?

• Despite the civil war in US over slavery, and the civil rights movement for dignity and equality, systemic discrimination and violence against blacks persist

• Even though good education helps in dismantling racism but the fact remains that much of it lies hidden within the social structure, in habits, practices and institutions.

• Open discrimination of blacks has been replaced by another system of hidden & systemic discrimination.

• There now persists a racialized criminal system - one that awards unfair advantage and privilege to whites, while inflicting unmerited and unjust disadvantages on blacks

• For example, in a number of southern States in America, once declared a felon, a person is disqualified from voting

• In several States of USA, Blacks are 10 times more likely to go to prison than whites.

• In U.S., between 1976-2019, black defendants sentenced to death for killing whites numbered 291, while white defendants killing blacks were only 21

INTERNATIONAL

...Continued

Conclusion

Only a peaceful movement to end institutionalised racism, with both blacks and white participants, quite like the recent protests after Floyd's murder, can break the back of racism.

Connecting the dots
- Caste system in India – its features and criticism
- Impact of racism on Indian diaspora in US

Important value additions

Freedom of Religion in India
Freedom of religion in India is a fundamental right guaranteed by Article 25-28 of the Constitution of India.
- **Article 25** - Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion
- **Article 26 -** Freedom to manage religious affairs
- **Article 27** - Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion
- **Article 28** - Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions

Article 29 and 30 of the Constitution deal with the protection of interest of minorities.

US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)
- It is a U.S. federal government commission created by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998.
- USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President.
- Its principal responsibilities are:
--- Review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally
--- Make policy recommendations to the US President, the Secretary of State, and the Congress.
- It is authorized to travel on fact-finding missions to other countries and hold public hearings
- It issues an annual report that includes policy recommendations to the U.S. government based on the report's evaluation of the facts and circumstances of religious freedom violations worldwide

International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report 2019
International organisations; Effect of Policies on India's interests

About
- Recently, the US State Department has released its annual International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report 2019.
- IRF is a survey of the state of religious freedom across the world.

Key takeaways
- It published the country report for India to highlight the issue of religious freedom in India.
- Earlier, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF report) had downgraded India's religious freedom to the lowest grade of 'Country of Particular Concern (CPC)' category.
- The IRF report listed countries for positive developments in religious freedom and negative examples.
    Negative examples:
    - Nicaragua
    - Nigeria
    - China
- India is not included in either of the lists.

The Country Report for India

- It highlighted the developments that took place in 2019 - the status of Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).
- Mob lynchings, anti-conversion laws, cow vigilantism and related issues were also discussed.
- The need to ensure full protection to minorities was emphasized.

- The Indian government has rejected the report by asserting that a foreign government did not have right to comment on the state of its citizens' constitutionally protected rights.
- It also emphasised that the report did not talk about the religious freedom given to various communities in India.

SOCIOLOGY e-CLP
& ALL INDIA
SOCIOLOGY TEST SERIES

Dr. N.C. Vamshi Krishna

IASbaba's
e - Classroom Learning
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Baba's 8 fold path to success!!
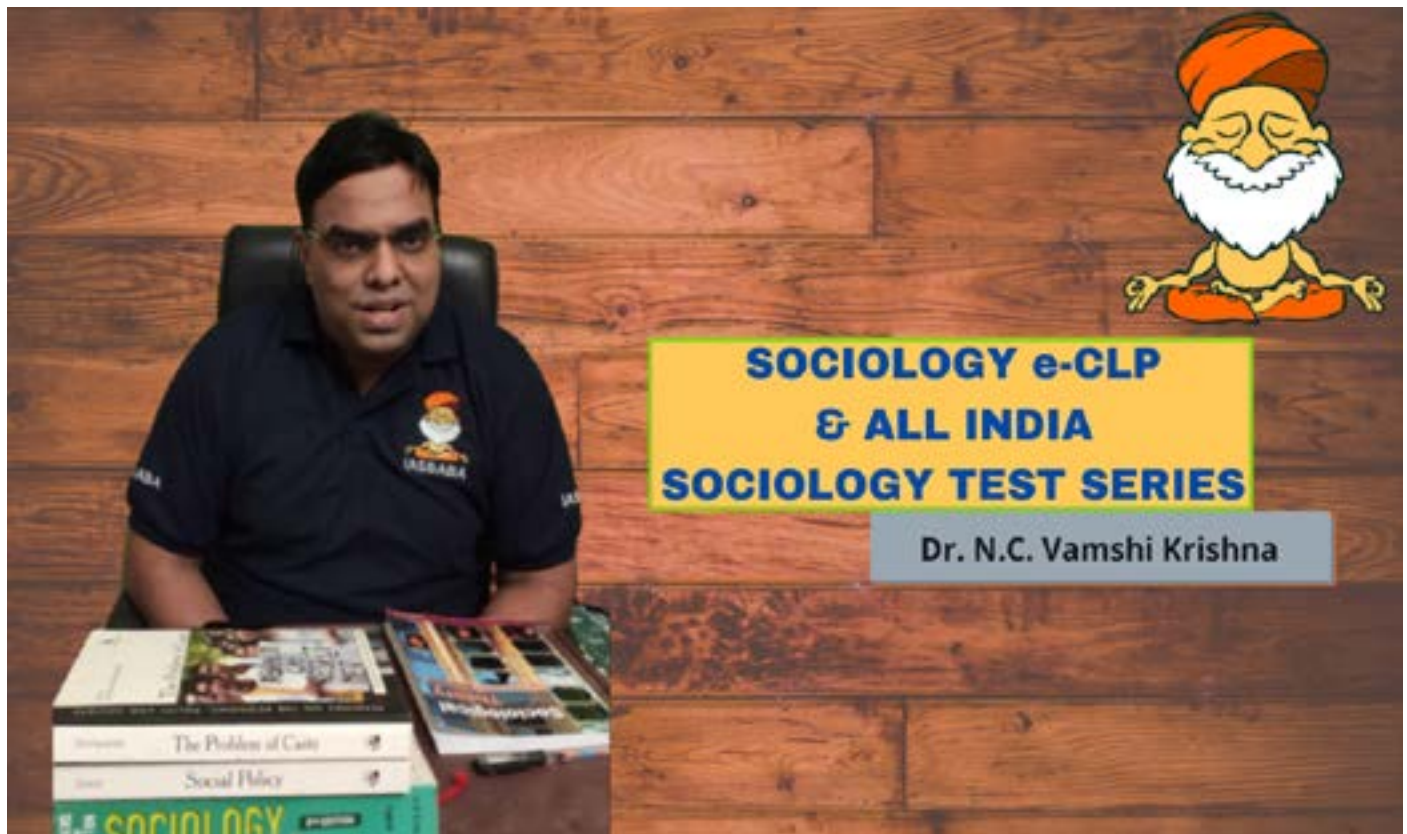
ECONOMY

Measures taken to boost MSMEs
Economy; Growth and Development

Context
Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are facing problems like **low liquidity or cash flow** and **lack of workforce** as the daily-wagers have gone to their villages due to COVID lockdown.

Measures taken:
1. RBI introduced **Long Term Repo Operations (LTRO)** worth Rs 1,00,000 crore to help banks increase lending at cheaper interest rates.
2. Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved ₹50,000 crore **equity infusion for MSMEs**.
3. The CCEA also approved the **new definition of MSMEs**.
4. RBI is likely to allow banks to assign **zero risk weight for loans** that will be extended to the MSMEs. Zero risk would mean that banks will not have to set aside additional capital for these loans.
5. National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC) to provide 100% guarantee coverage to eligible MSMEs, in the form of a **Guaranteed Emergency Credit Line (GECL) facility.**
6. **Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE)** was launched by the GoI to make available collateral-free credit to the MSMEs sector.

New definition of MSMEs

Micro enterprise : :
investment < 1 cr and turnover < 5 cr

Small enterprise : :
investment <10 cr and turnover < 50 cr

Medium enterprise : :
investment < 50 cr and turnover < 250 cr

Key facts:
• India currently has over 75 million MSMEs
• MSMEs provide employment to over 114 million people
• MSMEs contribute to more than 30% of the GDP

Prelims Exclusive Pointers (PEP)

Long Term Repo Operations (LTROs)

About
• It is a tool under which the RBI provides one-year to three-year money to banks at the prevailing repo rate, accepting government securities with matching or higher tenure as the collateral.
• RBI borrowed the concept from the European Central Bank.

How LTRO is different from LAF or MSF?
• While RBI's liquidity adjustment facility (LAF) and marginal standing facility (MSF) offer banks money for their immediate needs ranging from 1-28 days, the LTRO supplies them with liquidity for their 1- to 3-year needs.
• LTRO operations are intended to prevent short-term interest rates in the market from drifting a long way away from the policy rate, which is the repo rate.

Why LTRO was introduced?
• India is facing economic slowdown and especially after the IL&FS fiasco borrowing costs have increased. Therefore, RBI introduced LTROs to stimulate the economy through easy-money policies.
• RBI believes that offering banks durable longer-term liquidity at the repo rate, can help banks lower the rates they charge on retail and industrial loans, while maintaining their margins.

ECONOMY

Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE)

• The Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGS) was launched by the Government of India (GoI) to make available collateral-free credit to the micro and small enterprise sector.

• Both the existing and the new enterprises are eligible to be covered under the scheme.

• The Ministry of MSMEs and Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) established a Trust named Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) to implement the scheme.

PM SVANidhi launched
Welfare Schemes; Economy

Context

• The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs recently launched a Special Micro-Credit Facility Scheme for providing affordable loans to **street vendors.**

• The scheme is PM SVANidhi - **PM Street Vendor's Atma Nirbhar Nidhi.**

Key takeaways

• The vendors can avail a working capital loan of up to Rs. 10,000.

• It will be repayable in monthly instalments in the tenure of one year.

• On timely/early repayment of the loan, an interest subsidy at 7% per annum will be credited to the bank accounts of beneficiaries through Direct Benefit Transfer on six monthly basis.

• There will be no penalty on early repayment of loan.

• Over 50 lakh people, including vendors, hawkers, thelewalas, etc. are likely to benefit from this scheme.

• Street vendors from peri- urban/ rural areas have become beneficiaries of an urban livelihood programme for the first time.

• MFIs/ NBFCs/ SHG Banks have been allowed in a scheme for the urban poor due to their ground level presence for the first time.

Equity infusion into MSMEs

• Cabinet panel approved a ₹50,000 cr equity infusion into MSMEs through Fund of Funds, and an additional ₹20,000 cr fund for the MSMEs sector.

Banks Board Bureau (BBB)
Banking

• Banks Board Bureau was formed on the basis of the recommendations of **"The Committee to Review Governance of Boards of Banks in India"**. (P. J. Nayak committee)

• BBB is a body of eminent professionals and officials to **make recommendations for appointment** of whole-time directors and non-executive chairpersons of Public Sector Banks (PSBs) and state-owned financial institutions (including government-owned insurance companies).

• It is an **autonomous recommendatory body**.

• The **Ministry of Finance** takes the final decision in consultation with the Prime Minister's Office.

• It is a public authority as defined in the Right to Information Act, 2005.

ECONOMY

Mudra Shishu loan
Economy; Financial inclusion

Context
• The Central government has announced **'Mudra Shishu loan'** for small businesses and cottage industries so that **shopkeepers do not suffer** due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key takeaways
• A 1500 crore interest subvention has been announced.
• 2% interest rate subvention for a period of 12 months shall be offered by the Government.
• It shall benefit small borrowers under the Mudra Shishu loans up to ₹50,000.
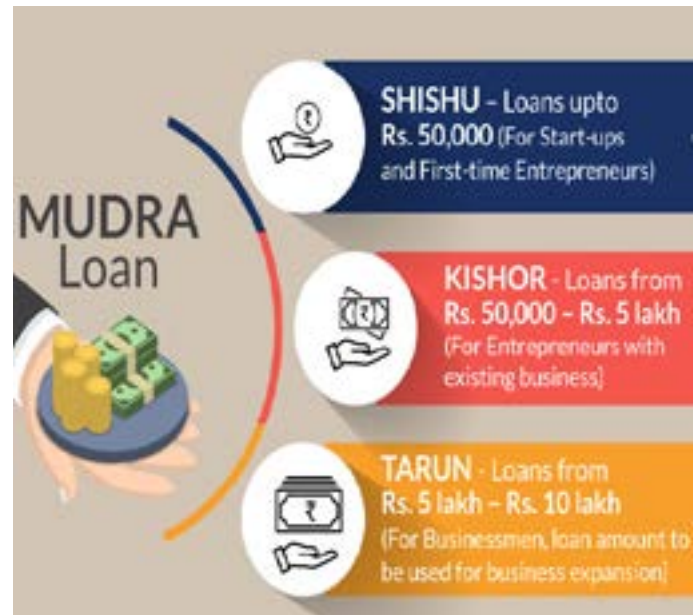
Important value additions

Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency (MUDRA)

• It is a Non-Banking Financial Company which supports development of micro enterprise sector in the country.
• It provides refinance support to Banks / MFIs for lending to micro units having loan requirement upto 10 lakh.
• It provides refinance to micro business under the Scheme of Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana.

MUDRA offers incentives through these interventions:
• Shishu : covering loans upto 50,000/-
• Kishor : covering loans above 50,000/- and upto 5 lakh
• Tarun : covering loans above 5 lakh and upto 10 lakh.

Generally, loans upto 10 lakh issued by banks under Micro Small Enterprises are given without collateral.
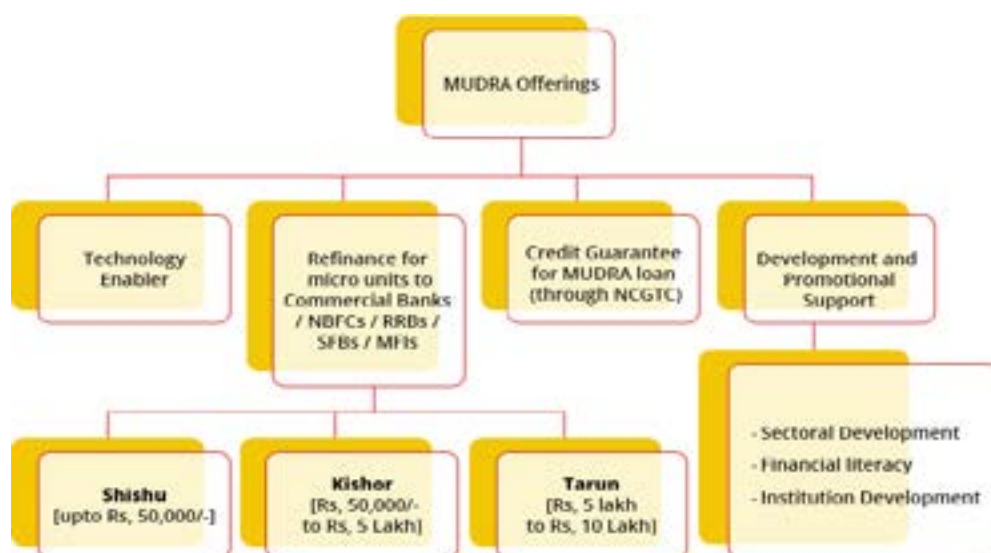
ECONOMY

FSDC meeting held
Welfare Schemes; Economy

Context
• Recently, the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) meeting was held through video conferencing.
• The meeting was chaired by the Indian Finance Minister.

Key takeaways
• It was noted that the COVID-19 pandemic poses a serious threat to the stability of the global financial system since its impact and timing of recovery was still uncertain.
• It highlighted the need for the government and regulators to remain vigilant on financial conditions that could expose systemic vulnerabilities.
• It also assured that the government and regulators would continue to provide liquidity and capital support to domestic financial institutions.
• Liquidity and solvency positions of non-banking financial companies, housing finance companies and micro-finance institutions were reviewed.

Payments Infrastructure Development Fund
Economy; E-Commerce

About:
• The RBI has announced the creation of a **Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF)** with an initial contribution of **₹250 crore**.
• It is created to encourage the adoption of **Points of Sale (PoS)** machines by businesses in tier-3 to Tier-6 centres and Northeastern States.
• The POS machines allow businesses to accept e-payments, thereby reducing the need to deal in cash.

Key takeaways
• The PIDF will be governed through an Advisory Council.
• It will be managed and administered by RBI.
• RBI will make an initial contribution of ₹250 crore which will cover half of the fund.

Important value additions

The Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)
• It is a **non-statutory apex council** under the Ministry of Finance.
• It was constituted by the Executive Order in 2010.
• Its constitution was proposed by the **Raghuram Rajan committee (2008)** on financial sector reforms.

It is **chaired by the Finance Minister** and its members include:
• The heads of all Financial Sector Regulators (RBI, SEBI, PFRDA & IRDA)
• Finance Secretary
• Secretary of Department of Economic Affairs (DEA)
• Secretary of Department of Financial Services (DFS)
• Chief Economic Adviser
• Minister of State for the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA)
• Secretary of Department of Electronics and Information Technology,
• Chairperson of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI)
• Revenue Secretary.
The Council can invite experts to its meeting if required.

Objectives:
• To strengthen and institutionalize the mechanism for maintaining financial stability
• Enhancing inter-regulatory coordination
• Promoting financial sector development
• Assess the functioning of the large financial conglomerates.

• The remaining contribution will be from card-issuing banks and card networks operating in the country.
• RBI will also contribute to yearly shortfalls, if necessary.
• It is being set up according to the recommendations of the report of the committee on deepening of digital payments, chaired by Nandan Nilekani.
• Most of the POS terminals in the country are concentrated in tier-1 and tier-2 cities and towns only.
• Other regions have been left out. Thus, there was need to create such a kind of fund for such cities.

ECONOMY

GDP growth falls to 11yr low
Economy; Growth and Development

Context
• According to data released by the National Statistical Office, economic growth slowed to an 11-year low of 4.2% in 2019-20.
• In the final quarter of the year (January-March, 2020) the growth rate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell to 3.1%.

Important value additions

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
• It is a measure of economic activity in a country.
• It is the total value of a country's annual output of goods and services.
• GDP = Private consumption + Gross investment + Government investment + Government spending + (exports-imports)

Nominal GDP
• It is GDP evaluated at current market prices taking into account current inflation or deflation.

Real GDP
• It is calculated in a way such that goods and services are evaluated at some constant set of prices.

Downward spiral
India's real GDP growth rate slowed to 3.1% for the fourth quarter of FY 2020. Nominal GDP growth rate, at 7.5%, saw a marginal improvement compared to the previous quarter
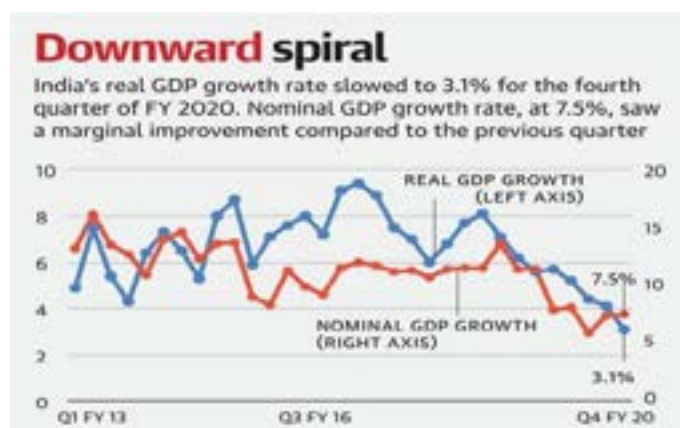
National Statistical Office (NSO)

• It is the **central statistical agency** of the Government mandated under the **Statistical Services Act, 1980**.
• It comes under the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation**.
• It provides statistical information services so that the Government can formulate better policies.
• The services include collecting, compiling and disseminating official statistical information.

India GDP to contract 4.5% on COVID-19: IMF
Economy; Growth and Development

In news:
According to the updated World Economic Outlook (released by IMF) -
• Worldwide business shutdowns destroyed hundreds of millions of jobs, and the prospects for recovery are steeped in "pervasive uncertainty".
• India's GDP will fall 4.5% this year.
• Mexico will see a double digit decline of 10.5% while Brazil just misses that mark with a drop of 9.1%. Argentina is projected to fall 9.9%.
• Meanwhile, South Africa's GDP is seen dropping 8%, while oil-producer Nigeria falls 5.4%.
• The U.S. economy is set to contract 8% in 2020, while China fares slightly better, posting growth of 1%

ECONOMY

7.75% savings (taxable) bonds discontinued
Economy

Context
• The Government of India has discontinued 7.75% savings (taxable) bonds, 2018 recently.

Key takeaways
• Recently, repo rate (by RBI) deposit rates (by banks) and small savings rate (by the government) were also decreased.
• Investors were looking for safer investment rather than high returns.
• This led to the high demand for such bonds due to which the government decided to discontinue this option.
• Only fresh issuance of such bonds is discontinued.

Important value additions

7.75% RBI Savings Bonds, 2018
• These were issued in 2018.
• These were available for subscription to resident citizens/Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) to invest in a taxable bond.
• These bonds were first introduced in 2003 as 8% GOI Savings (Taxable) Bonds.
• The interest rate was brought down to 7.75% in January 2018.
• One bond was of Rs 1,000 each.
• The bonds had no maximum limit for investment.
• The bonds had a 7-year lock-in period from the date of issue.
• Premature encashment was permitted to individuals who were 60 years and above.
• Interest on these bonds is taxable under the Income-tax Act, 1961.

Draft Frameworks for 'Sale of Loan Exposures' and 'Securitisation of Standard Assets' released by RBI
Economy; Banking

In news
• RBI has released draft Frameworks for **'Sale of Loan Exposures'** and **'Securitisation of Standard Assets'** recently.

Key takeaways

These draft guidelines are applicable to:
• Scheduled Commercial Banks (excluding Regional Rural Banks)
• All India Financial Institutions (NABARD, NHB, EXIM Bank, and SIDBI)
• All Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) including Housing Finance Companies (HFCs).

Salient features of draft guidelines:

• Only transactions that result in multiple tranches of securities being issued reflecting different credit risks will be treated as securitisation transactions.
• Two capital measurement approaches have been proposed: Securitisation External Ratings Based Approach (SEC-ERBA) and Securitisation Standardised Approach (SEC-SA).
• A special case of securitisation, called Simple, Transparent and Comparable (STC) securitisations, has also been prescribed.
• The definition of securitisation has been modified to allow single asset securitisations.
• Securitisation of exposures purchased from other lenders has been allowed.
• Standard Assets would be allowed to be sold by lenders through assignment or a loan participation contract.
• The Stressed Assets, however, would be allowed to be sold only through assignment or novation.

ECONOMY

Rise in India's Forex Reserves
Economy; Growth and Development

Context
• India's foreign exchange reserves are rising and will reach $500 billion mark soon.
• In the month of May, forex reserves jumped by $12.4 billion to an all-time high of $493.48 billion.

Key takeaways
• The major reason forex reserves are rising despite the slowdown in the economy is the rise in investment in foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) and foreign direct investments (FDIs).
• Besides, the fall in crude oil prices has brought down the oil import bill.

Important value additions

Foreign Exchange Reserves
• These are assets held on reserve by a central bank in foreign currencies, which can include bonds, treasury bills and other government securities.
• Most foreign exchange reserves are held in U.S. dollars.
• These assets are held to ensure that the central bank has backup funds if the national currency rapidly devalues or becomes altogether insolvent.
• It is an important component of the Balance of Payment and an essential element in the analysis of an economy's external position.

India's Forex Reserve

It includes
• Foreign Currency Assets(FCA)
• Gold reserves
• Special Drawing Rights
• Reserve position with the IMF

FCAs:
• Assets that are valued based on a currency other than the country's own currency.
• It is the largest component of the forex reserve.
• It is expressed in dollar terms.

Special drawing rights (SDR)
• It is an international reserve asset, created by the IMF in 1969 to supplement its member countries' official reserves.
• It is neither a currency nor a claim on the IMF.
• The value of the SDR is calculated from a weighted basket of major currencies, including the U.S. Dollar, the Euro, Japanese Yen, Chinese Yuan, and British Pound.

Reserve position with the IMF
• It implies a portion of the required quota of currency each member country must provide to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that can be utilized for its own purposes.
• It is basically an emergency account that IMF members can access at any time without agreeing to conditions or paying a service fee.

India's FOREX is governed by RBI under RBI Act,1934.

The level of foreign exchange reserves is largely the outcome of the RBI's intervention in the foreign exchange market.

P K Mohanty Committee constituted by RBI
Economy; Banking

In news: The RBI has constituted a five-member Internal Working Group to review present ownership guidelines and corporate structure for Indian Private Sector Banks.

Key takeaways:
• RBI Central Board Director P K Mohanty will head the committee.
• It will submit its report by 30th September, 2020.

Terms of Reference of the Committee are:
• To **review** the licensing guidelines and regulations relating to ownership and control in Indian private sector banks and suggest appropriate norms.
• To examine and review the eligibility criteria for individuals/ entities to apply for banking licenses.
• To **study** the current **regulations** on holding of financial subsidiaries through non-operative financial holding company and suggest the manner of migrating all banks to a uniform regulation in the matter.
• To **examine** the **norms for promoter shareholding** at the initial/licensing stage and subsequently, along with the **timelines** for dilution of the shareholding.

ECONOMY

Finance Commission must reset the balance
Economy

Context
• The COVID-19 has deepened the fault lines in Centre-state fiscal relations. Against this backdrop, the 15th Finance Commission is expected to submit its report by October 2020.

The Commission's report will be critical on two counts:
• First, it will determine how India's fiscal architecture is reshaped
• Second, how Centre-state relations are reset as the country attempts to recover from the COVID-19 shock

Challenges ahead for 15th FC
• **Dominance of Centre:** The present dispensation is at unease with extending greater fiscal autonomy to states. This was apparent in the framing of the terms of reference of the 15th FC. Centralisation of political power may well lead to demands for centralisation of resources.
• **Issue of tax devolution to states:** 42% of Central divisible pool of resources were allotted to States on recommendation of 14th FC. There is pressure by Centre to get back the fiscal space it ceded to the states and assert its dominance over the country's fiscal architecture
• **States Vs Centre:** Challenge for 15th FC to balance the contesting claims of Centre (reduced devolution and conditional funds) and the states (more untied funds)
• **Containing Debt-to-GDP ratio:** FRBM review committee had envisaged bringing down general government debt to 60% of GDP by 2022. However,the debt-to-GDP ratio may well be over 80% this year which 15FC has to factor in.
• **Sharing of debt reduction:** In the wake of increase in Debt-to-GDP ratio, 15th FC will have to lay out a new fiscal path to be followed by both Centre and states. There is challenge of ensuring the burden of debt reduction fall equally upon the Centre and states
• **Leeway for Centre:** The Commission may allow the Centre to have greater leeway when it comes to fiscal consolidation as the fiscal multiplier of central government capital spending is greater than that by the states
• **Issue of state borrowings:** Recently, the Centre increased the State's borrowing limits, linking it with reforms. There is challenge that FC, in line with its terms of reference, go along with the Centre's stance and recommend imposing conditions on additional borrowing of states and formalise this arrangement
• **Issue of the GST compensation cess:** The GST council is yet to give its views on the extension of the compensation cess to offset states losses beyond the five-year period. 15th FC has to consider this too. It may argue in favour of extending the compensation period, as states desire, but, perhaps, lowering the assured 14% growth in compensation and linking it to nominal GDP growth

Need to relook at the Centre's expenditure priorities
• Over the past decades, there has been increase in the Centre's spending on items on the state and concurrent list
• This shift has occurred even as grants by the Centre to states exceed the former's revenue deficit. This, as some have pointed out, effectively means that the Centre is borrowing to transfer to states.
• Additionally, any attempt to shift the uneasy balance in favour of the Centre will dilute the government's agenda of Cooperative Federalism and reinforces its centralising tendencies
• Thus, there is a need to review some of the Centre's own spending programme.

Way Ahead
• The fiscal stress at various levels of the government necessitates a realistic assessment of the country's macro-economic situation
• There is a need to prepare medium-term fiscal roadmap, as well as careful calibration of the framework that governs Centre-state relations.
• 15th FC could request for another year's extension to present its full five-year report citing the prevailing uncertainty.

ECONOMY

Governance in Commercial Banks
Economy; Banking

In news: The RBI released a Discussion Paper on 'Governance in Commercial Banks in India' for public comments.

Key takeaways
• The objective of the discussion paper is to align the current regulatory framework with global best practices while being mindful of the context of the domestic financial system.
• Based on the feedback, fresh guidelines will be issued.
• The new norms will come into effect within six months after being placed on the RBI's website or April 1, 2021, whichever is later.
• The norms will be applicable to private, foreign and public sector banks.

Some of the major highlights of the paper are as follows:
• Board members should not be a member of any other bank's board or the RBI.
• They should not be either a Member of Parliament or State Legislature or Municipality or other local bodies.
• Board of directors of a bank should not be less than six and not more than 15, with a majority being independent directors.
• The board shall meet at least six times a year and at least once every 60 days.
• A director on the board of an entity other than a bank may be considered for appointment as director on a bank's board, if the person is not an owner of an NBFC or a full-time employee and that the NBFC does not enjoy a financial accommodation from the bank.
• Appointment, re-appointment and termination of wholetime directors (WTDs) and chief executive officers (CEOs) should be with the previous approval of RBI.
• The upper age limit for CEO and WTDs of banks is suggested at 70 years.
• Banks will be free to set a lower age for such appointments.

SEBI eases Fund-raising norms for firms
Statutory Bodies; Economy

In news: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has further eased fund-raising norms for firms.

Key takeaways
• SEBI has allowed companies to make two qualified institutional placements (QIPs) with a gap of just two weeks between them.
• The earlier regulations mandated a minimum gap of six months between two such issuances.
• Promoters can also increase their stakes in their companies through preferential allotments by up to 10% without triggering an open offer.
• The cap was earlier set at 5%.
• SEBI has, however, allowed this relaxation only for the current financial year.
• The twin moves would help in enhancing liquidity in the market while promoters could also acquire shares at a time when valuations were quite low compared with the historic highs.

Important value additions
Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)
• It is the regulator of the securities and commodity market in India owned by the Government of India.
• It was established in 1988 and given statutory status through the SEBI Act, 1992.

SEBI is responsible to the needs of three groups:
1. Issuers of securities
2. Investors
3. Market intermediaries

Functions:
• Quasi-legislative – drafts regulations
• Quasi-judicial – passes rulings and orders
• Quasi-executive – conducts investigation and enforcement action

Powers:
• To approve by–laws of Securities exchanges.
• Inspect the books of accounts and call for periodical returns from recognised Securities exchanges.
• To require the Securities exchange to amend their by–laws. *(more in next article)*

ECONOMY

Listing of non-profit organisations on social stock exchanges
Economy; Statutory bodies

In news
• A working group constituted by the **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** on social stock exchanges (SSE) has recommended allowing non-profit organisations to directly list on such platforms along with certain tax incentives to encourage participation on the platform.

Key takeaways:
• The idea of a SSE for listing of **social enterprise** and **voluntary organisations** was mooted by the Indian Finance Minister during the Union Budget 2019-20.

Recommendations:
• Direct listing for non-profit organisations through issuance of bonds.
• A range of funding avenues, including some of the existing mechanisms such as Social Venture Funds (SVFs) under Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs).
• A new minimum reporting standard for organisations that raise funds on social stock exchanges.
• Allowing for-profit social enterprises to list on the platform but with enhanced reporting requirements.
• SSE can be housed within the existing Exchanges like the Bombay Stock Exchange and the National Stock Exchange.

Powers of SEBI
• To approve by–laws of Securities exchanges.
• To require the Securities exchange to amend their by–laws.
• Inspect the books of accounts and call for periodical returns from recognised Securities exchanges.
• Inspect the books of accounts of financial intermediaries.
• Compel certain companies to list their shares in one or more Securities exchanges.
• Registration of Brokers and sub-brokers

EGoS and PDCs to be set up for attracting investments
Economy (FDI); Investment

About:

"Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGoS) and Project Development Cells (PDCs) in Ministries/Departments of Government of India for attracting investments in India" recently received approval for its set up.

Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGoS)
&
Project Development Cells (PDCs)

Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGoS)

• Objective is to provide investment support to global investors by bringing synergies and to ensure timely clearances from different departments and Ministries.

Project Development Cell (PDC)

• The cell will be set up for the development of investible projects in coordination between the Central Government and State Governments.
• This will lead to increase in the number of investible projects in India and in turn increase FDI inflows.

ECONOMY

Economic recovery: Challenges and way forward
Economy; Growth and Development

Context: The COVID-19 pandemic has brought global economic activity to a virtual halt an induced recession.

Do you know?
• The IMF estimates the global economy to contract by -4.9 per cent in 2020
• With regards to Indian economy, growth has been decelerating for the past eight quarters, and indications by the RBI suggest that growth is contracting for the first time in four decades.

What has been the economic scenario of India in recent years?
• Consumption and investment demand in India have been subdued for the past few quarters, dragging down overall growth.
• These two components were perhaps casualties of a sharp deceleration in credit supply even after an impressive bank cleanup exercise by the government and RBI.
• The IL&FS debacle in September 2018 only made matters worse.
• The NBFC sector, which played an important role in fuelling India's consumption growth, suffered from funding crunches leading to a further squeeze in credit supply, thereby impacting consumption demand.
• This deceleration was exacerbated in the wake of pandemic & lockdown.

What Keynesian Theory says about demand recovery?
• Keynesian theory suggests that for aggregate demand to increase, at least one of the components of GDP needs to expand.

Growth in the Indian economy has been dominated by
• Consumption (PFCE)
• Investments (GFCF)
• Government expenditure (GFCE)
• Net exports (NEX)

Has government taken steps to tackle the economic crisis?

Yes, government has taken steps like
• Economic package – PMGKY – for addressing the short term needs of society particularly weaker sections of society
• RBI actions to provide much-needed near-term liquidity support
• Long-pending structural reforms (Ex: Agriculture, Coal, Textile) aiming towards medium-to-long-term stability

However, government needs to further aid a demand recovery.

Challenges with reviving economy

1. Challenges with increasing Investments:
• Uncertain economic prospects restrict bankers to lend further despite measures taken by government & RBI. A higher rate of investments is essential for sustainable economic growth.
• Increasing levels of debt during this deteriorating economic scenario along with rating downgrades for industries are likely to aggravate existing problems.

2. Challenges with increasing Consumption:
• Industry-wide job/pay-cuts with a growing sense of uncertainty over the future may limit spending to non-discretionary items and force people towards precautionary savings.
• Estimates suggest that PFCE will grow at its slowest pace in 15 years.

3. Challenges with increasing exports
• Disrupted global trade due to heightened trade tensions between the US and China, especially in the wake of pandemic.
• Global trade witnessed its steepest decline since 2009, falling by -4.3 per cent in March over the previous year, with only downside risks from hereon.
• India's limited share in global trade along with a battered domestic and global outlook provides little room for exports to contribute towards growth.

Solution to revive economy
• With the above challenges we can see that government expenditure is the only exogenously determined element in a Keynesian framework.
• Increased government expenditure to aid a demand recovery.

ECONOMY

...Continued

Solution to revive economy

• However, given the sparse resources that India has, government must deploy funds that yield a higher return.

• One key area that can provide the necessary support is infrastructure investment.

• Historically, countries have used infrastructure to provide counter-cyclical support to the economy - New Deal in the US, Germany's expansion post-WWII debt reduction (1953) and more recently with China in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis.

• Infrastructure has strong links to growth and with both supply and demand-side features that help generate employment and long-term assets.

• 1 per cent of GDP spend on infrastructure can boost real growth by 2 per cent while creating 1.3 million direct jobs.

• Front-loading key projects with greater visibility from the recently announced National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) could aid in a quicker recovery.

Way Forward

• India already has several institutions for infrastructure development purposes from the likes of IIFCL, IRFC to more recently NIIF

• However, over these years, their scale and functioning have remained inadequate. A relook, to restructure these into one large development institution could help reduce inefficiencies and allow for greater leverage

• Taking a cue from China, floating special infrastructure bonds through this organisation to accelerate the funding of the NIP could aid a speedier recovery.

• Development of state government and urban local body bond markets by leveraging the capabilities of this large development institution

Mass sowing of GM seeds
Agriculture; Biotechnology

Context:
• In the current kharif season, farmers would undertake mass sowing of Genetically modified (GM) seeds for maize, soyabean, mustard brinjal and herbicide tolerant (Ht) cotton.
• Cultivating GM seeds is not approved in India.

Important value additions
• Conventional plant breeding involves crossing species of the same genus to provide the offspring with the desired traits of both parents.
• Genetic engineering aims to go beyond conventional breeding by introducing an alien gene in the seeds to get the desired effects.
• The alien gene could be from a plant, an animal or even a soil bacterium.
• Bt cotton, the only GM crop that is allowed in India, has two alien genes from the soil bacterium Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt) that allows the crop to develop a protein toxic to the common pest pink bollworm.
• In Bt brinjal, a gene allows the plant to resist attacks of fruit and shoot borer.
• In DMH-11 mustard, genetic modification allows cross-pollination in a crop that self-pollinates in nature.

Legal position of GM crops in India
• In India, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) is the apex body that allows for commercial release of GM crops.
• In 2002, the GEAC had allowed the commercial release of Bt cotton.
• Use of the unapproved GM variant can attract a jail term of 5 years and fine of Rs 1 lakh under the Environmental Protection Act ,1989.

Kharif season
• The Kharif season varies by crop and region, starting at the earliest in May and ending at the latest in January.
• In India, the season is popularly considered to start in June and to end in October.
• Kharif crops are usually sown with the beginning of the first rains during the advent of the south-west monsoon season, and they are harvested at the end of monsoon season (October-November).

GM seeds: the debate, and a sowing agitation
Agriculture; Biotechnology

Context: In 2020 kharif season, farmers would undertake mass sowing of GM seeds for maize, soyabean, mustard, brinjal and herbicide tolerant (Ht) cotton, although these are not approved.
Farmers had carried out a similar movement in 2019 too.

What are genetically modified (GM) seeds?
• Conventional plant breeding involves crossing species of the same genus to provide the offspring with the desired traits of both parents.
• Genetic engineering aims to transcend the genus barrier by introducing an alien gene in the seeds to get the desired effects.
• The alien gene could be from a plant, an animal or even a soil bacterium.
• Bt cotton, the only GM crop that is allowed in India, has two alien genes from the soil bacterium Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt) that allows the crop to develop a protein toxic to the common pest pink bollworm.
• Ht Bt cotton is derived with the insertion of an additional gene, from another soil bacterium, which allows the plant to resist the common herbicide glyphosate
• In Bt brinjal, a gene allows the plant to resist attacks of fruit and shoot borer.
• In DMH-11 mustard, developed by Deepak Pental & University of Delhi, genetic modification allows cross-pollination in a crop that self-pollinates in nature.

Some benefits of GM Products:
• Increased crop yields.
• Reduced costs for food or drug production.
• Reduced need for pesticides.
• Enhanced nutrient composition.
• Resistance to pests and disease.
• Greater food security and medical benefits to the world's growing population.
• Increase the yield of animals for milk and meat production.
• Decrease susceptibility to disease in animals.
• Allowing plants to grow in conditions where they might not otherwise flourish.
• Increased shelf life and hence there is less fear of foods getting spoiled quickly.

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Concerns over the use of genetically modified (GM) products:

• **Ecological Balance:** The capability of the GMO to escape and potentially introduce the engineered genes into wild populations thus disturbing the fragile ecological balance

• The reduction in the spectrum of other plants including loss of biodiversity

• **Danger of Permanence:** The persistence of the gene after the GMO has been harvested

• The susceptibility of non-target organisms (e.g. insects which are not pests) to the gene product

• The stability of the gene is another cause of worry

• Increased use of chemicals in agriculture.

• **Health:** Genetic modification, experts say, brings about changes that can be harmful to humans in the long run.

• **Awareness and Labelling issues:** Manufacturers do not mention on the label that foods are developed by genetic manipulation because they think that this would affect their business, which is not a good practice.

• **Religious issues:** Many religious and cultural communities are against such foods because they see it as an unnatural way of producing foods.

• **International Trade:** With the increase of GM Products, developing countries would start depending more on industrial countries for GM technology

What is the legal position of genetically modified crops in India?

• In India, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) is the apex body that allows for commercial release of GM crops.

• In 2002, the GEAC had allowed the commercial release of Bt cotton. More than 95 per cent of the country's cotton area has since then come under Bt cotton.

• Use of the unapproved GM variant can attract a jail term of 5 years and fine of Rs 1 lakh under the Environmental Protection Act ,1989.

Why are farmers rooting for GM crops?

• In the case of cotton, farmers cite the high cost of weeding, which goes down considerably if they grow Ht Bt cotton and use glyphosate against weeds.

• Brinjal growers in Haryana have rooted for Bt brinjal as it reduces the cost of production by cutting down on the use of pesticides.

• This action of defying government regulations by growing unapproved Bt varieties will draw attention of authorities to the need for introduction of the latest technology in the fields

• The approval process of GM seeds is lengthy, opaque and often excludes farmers. This is opposed by farmers who want access to better technology

Conclusion

With growing agrarian distress and increasing population pressures, there is a need for innovation in agriculture that balances interests of humans and that of environment.

Efforts to enhance cultivation of Heeng and Saffron

Science and Technology; Agriculture

In news:

To increase the production of Heeng and Saffron in India, the Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (CSIR-IHBT) and the Department of Agriculture, Government of Himachal Pradesh (HP), have forged strategic and implementation partnership based on their mutual strengths.

Key takeaways

This partnership is expected to provide immense benefits to HP by way of:

• increased farm income
• livelihood promotion
• rural development

Introduction of these crops will reduce the import.

A number of steps will be undertaken:

• Transfer of innovations by means of capacity building
• Skill development
• Other extension activities

IHBT has developed the production technology for Saffron and introduced its cultivation in non-traditional areas of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

AGRICULTURE

CSIR-IHBT will:
• provide technical know-how to the farmers
• impart training to state agriculture department officers and farmers.
• set up corm and seed production centres of Saffron and heeng, respectively.

It has also developed tissue-culture protocol for the production of disease-free saffron.

It has introduced six accessions of heeng from Iran through the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR), New Delhi, and standardized its production protocols under Indian conditions.

Technical supervision of Saffron production areas shall also be undertaken.

Exposure visits of farmers will also be done.

A total of 750 acres of land will be covered under these crops in the state in the next five years.

A state-of-the-art tissue-culture lab will be established for large-scale production of quality planting material of these crops.

Important value additions
• Saffron and Heeng (asafoetida) are the most valuable spices of the world and widely used in Indian cuisine since time immemorial.
• In India, the annual demand for Saffron spice is 100 tons per year but its average production is about 6-7 tons per year.
• Hence, a large amount of Saffron is being imported.
• Similarly, there is no production of heeng in India and currently about 1200 tons of raw heeng worth Rs 600 crore is being imported from Afghanistan, Iran, and Uzbekistan.

> **Heeng**
> • It is a perennial plant and it produces oleo-gum resin from the roots after five years of plantation.
> • It can be grown in unutilized sloppy land of cold desert regions.

> **Saffron**
> • It is a spice derived from the flower of Crocus sativus, commonly known as the "saffron crocus".
> • The vivid crimson stigma and styles, called threads, are collected and dried for use mainly as a seasoning and colouring agent in food.
> • It has long been the world's most costly spice by weight.

Factory Farming and alternative protein

Context: The outbreak of COVID-19 has brought attention to the dietary habits of people, especially the dependence on meat for proteins.

What is factory farming?
• Large-scale, industrial animal agriculture for meat, eggs, and dairy is called factory farming
• It involves raising food animals that concentrates large numbers of animals into confined spaces.
• To prevent disease spreading and encourage growth, drug programs such as antibiotics, vitamins, hormones and other supplements are heavily administered to these animals
• It is also known as intensive animal farming or industrial livestock production

Hazards of factory farming
• **Energy Intensive:** Our need for animal protein uses vast tracts of land and quantities of water to raise those animals, to graze them, and to grow crops to feed them
• **Global Warming:** It contributes more to climate change than emissions from the entire transportation sector.
• **Environmental Degradation:** Factory farming leads to imbalance in ecology causing species loss, and habitat destruction.
• **Health risk:** It creates and increases planetary health risks at every scale. These animals are also the sources of viral outbreaks of swine flu and avian flu
• **Unethical:** Confining animals in closed spaces usually leads to their discomfort, pain, injuries and distress. This is against welfare of animals and is protested by civil society.
• **Antibiotic resistance: A**ntibiotic use in livestock may create antibiotic-resistant pathogens which then infiltrate into the entire food-chain.

Hazards of factory farming

• **Against small farmers:** Factory farming requires heavy investment on land and machineries so as to achieve economies of scale. Thus, it is biased in favour of corporate players and affects livelihood of small & marginal players

• **Prone to market shock:** These products are dependent on global forces of demand & supply. Hence, a policy change in developed country will impact this industry in developing countries as well.

Way Ahead

• Stimulating research and entrepreneurship in alternative proteins

• Alternative protein involves making upgraded versions of meat, eggs, and dairy from plant or crop ingredients, or directly from animal cells.

• These foods satisfy consumers and producers without taking away their choice, because they taste the same, are used in exactly the same way, but are vastly better for planetary health

• Countries like Singapore and Canada are already making alternative protein a central piece of their food security story, with an emphasis on research, entrepreneurship, and self-sufficiency.

Land Leasing – Much needed reform
Agriculture reforms

Context: While the slew of reforms announced by government empower the farmers economically, tenancy reform is arguably that 'last-mile' intervention that would complement these bold initiatives.

Agrarian distress in India is due to reasons like

• Increased frequency of natural calamities due to Climate Change

• Shocks in farm income triggered by crash in commodity prices

• Increasing input cost

• Inadequate access to formal credit

• Bad agronomic practices – preference to water intensive commercial crops

• Informality of land tenure affecting the tenant farmers

Do you know?

• As per NABARD All India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey (2016-17), All-India, 12% households leased-in agricultural lands. The incidence of tenancy is under-reported as tenancy in most states is not permissible legally.

• As per 70th round of NSSO Report (2013), the share of small and marginal farmers in the total leased-in land is 52%

Why tenancy reform is needed?

• **Inclusiveness:** Land tenure security is the cornerstone to achieve broader goals of inclusive agriculture growth.

• **Efficiency:** Many empirical studies validate the hypothesis that productivity of leased-in land can be comparable to that of owner-operated land if legal recognition is provided to tenancy.

• **Access to services:** Legal recognition and formalisation of land leasing would enable tenants to access credit, insurance and high-yielding input

• **It facilitates a paradigm shift in disbursement of fertiliser subsidy:** Formalisation of tenancy helps to switchover from product subsidy to delivery of fertiliser subsidy through DBT.

• **To increase the outreach of direct income support schemes:** Rs 18,253 crore has been disbursed to 9.13 crore farmers under PM-KISAN during the lockdown (till May 10). However, it excluded tenants in the absence of authentic and credible database of tenant cultivators

• **Migrants welfare in post-COVID times:** Migrant labourers who have returned to their villages during the lockdown may not go back to their host states in the near term. They may prefer to work as tenant farmer and legalisation of tenancy will prevent their livelihoods from disaster

AGRICULTURE

Way Ahead – Nudging the States

Even though land is a state subject, Centre can nudge States to undertake various reforms:

• **Unique Opportunity to push reforms:** In the 2020-21Budget, Finance minister proposed to encourage state governments to undertake implementation of model Central laws issued such as
--- Model Agricultural Land Leasing Act, 2016;
--- Model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2017;
--- Model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Contract Farming and Services (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2018.

• **Leveraging Technology:** Computerisation of land records and their updation in all states is needed to have data bank which helps in evidence based policy making
• **Change in Mindset:** Land leasing should be viewed as an 'economic necessity' and not merely as a feature of 'semi-feudal agrarian structure'
• **Much Needed:** Tenancy reform is arguably that 'last-mile' intervention that would complement these bold initiatives and enhance the equity and inclusivity of the resultant growth process.

Connecting the dots
• Contract Farming
• Green Revolution 2.0

Reorienting India's food basket
Agriculture; Cultivation

Context: Covid-19 – a zoonotic disease- has brought into sharp focus the need to reorient our food basket.

Advantages of Pulses Cultivation
• **Protein Source:** Pulses are a great source of protein for Indians, especially vegetarians
• **Helps achieve Sustainable Development Goals:** Pulses fits well with SDG-12 (responsible consumption and production) rather than meat based food
• **Water efficiency of the crop:** One-hectare millimetre of water can produce 12.5 kg of Bengal gram while it can produce only 7 kg of wheat and 2.5 kg of paddy.
• **Improves Soil Health** by fixing nitrogen in the soil.
• **Suitable for Post-COVID world:** Plant-based nutrition(pulses) will be seen as a more sustainable system of production and consumption from the environment and nutrition(protein) viewpoint especially in post-COVID world
• **Future Demand Potential:** Increasing population, improved incomes and enhanced awareness about nutrition has boosted demand for pulses in the last two decades

Pulse Cultivation in India
• Red gram and Bengal gram (chana) account for most of India's pulse production, followed by black gram and green gram.
• In 2016, pulse cultivation accounted for 30 mha and imports increased to 6.3 mt
• The MSP for pulses has increased every year. Similarly, tur dal support price increased from Rs 46.25/kg in 2015 to Rs 58/kg this year
• Although these support prices provided relief for the farmers, on many occasions, the market price was less than the support price, especially when large-scale imports took place
• By 2030, when our population crosses 150 crore, the estimated demand for pulses will be 33 mt

Way Ahead
• **Increased Acreage:** There is a need to convert some of the acreages under cereals to grow pulses. This will help bring greater balance to the crop portfolio, especially considering the changing food basket.

AGRICULTURE

Way Ahead

- **Improve Productivity:** If we have to meet the demand requirements of 2030 and avoid imports, our current yields of 835kg/ha have to go up by at least 30% in this decade.
- **Increase R&D:** There is a need to take up projects that increase yields, protein content and make our red gram varieties more tolerant to the dreaded pod borer, which causes 50% yield losses
- **Use of Bt Technology:** Farmers use heavy doses of pesticides to control the pod borer in red gram and the diseases in black gram and green gram. There is a strong case to use Bt technology, used in cotton to control the same insect
- **Smooth regulatory progress** to fast track projects that are in various stages of development of new seeds
- **Micro-irrigation tool** like Hose Reel technology-based irrigation system could be perfectly suited for these crops
- **Private investments** could be encouraged in genomics area through strong PPP projects to find useful genes that can help these crops to resist pests, diseases and water stress conditions.
- **Encouraging farmers** to grow pulses as mixed crops with sugar cane and to bring 1.2 mha of additional cultivation of pulses in rice fallow lands.
- **Market Reforms:** While the new e-NAM is expected to help, there is a need to make more efforts in setting up village-level primary processing and grading centres.
- **Long-term and predictable policy environment** for import and export of pulses is required as sudden decisions to import can land the farmers in distress.
- **Inclusion in Welfare schemes:** Pulses need to be included in PDS and in the mid-day meals to improve nutrition standards

Connecting the dots

- Green Revolution 2.0
- Tur Dal price hike in 2015 and measures taken by government

New agri-markets: A game-changer
Agriculture

Context: The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (promotion and facilitation) Ordinance 2020 was promulgated on June 5th 2020.

The virtual monopoly of Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs) is expected to end sooner rather than later.

Key Provisions of Ordinance

- **Trade of farmers' produce:** It seeks to provide for barrier-free trade (both intra-state & inter-state) of farmers' produce outside the markets notified under the various state agricultural produce market laws (state APMC Acts).
- The Ordinance will prevail over state APMC Acts.
- **Electronic trading:** The Ordinance permits the electronic trading of farmers' produce in the specified trade area. New electronic trading platforms are also allowed to be set up in these areas by private individuals, FPOs and co-ops.
- **Payment to farmers:** A person transacting with a farmer will be required to make payments to the farmer on the same day, or within three working days in certain conditions, for any transaction of scheduled farmers' produce.
- **No fees to be levied by states:** The Ordinance prohibits state governments from levying any market fee, cess or levy on farmers, traders, and electronic trading platforms for any trade under the Ordinance.
- **Dispute resolution mechanism:** The parties involved in a trade-related dispute may apply to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate for relief through conciliation. The Magistrate will appoint a Conciliation Board and refer the dispute to the Board.
- **Centralised System of Information dissemination:** Mandi prices are the biggest sources of localised price information for the farmer. The ordinance tries to address this by providing for a central government organisation, which will develop a price information and market intelligence system, and produce a framework for disseminating such information

AGRICULTURE

A brief history of Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs)

• The pre-APMCs days were dominated by misinformation and price arbitrage. Traders with better communications between themselves got a sense of prevailing prices and used this information to their advantage.

• APMCs were thought to be the answer to these problems.

• APMCs were institution created for price discovery through a competitive auction process, proper weighing, payment on time, quality grading, etc

• Institutional and physical infrastructure were set up to ensure that all farm produce was brought to the designated markets, traders with licences were allowed to participate in auctions of graded produce and timely payments were made.

• Market yards and market committees were set up at the district and sub-district levels to cater to farmers in every part of country.

• These changed the market dynamics (at least, partially) in favour of the farmers in the early day

What went wrong with APMCs?

• APMCs were democratic institutions managed by a board/committee of mostly elected members from among the farmers and traders.

• The state governments, obsessed with revenue collection, found it convenient to supersede these boards and appoint administrators for long periods of time

• Over time, they ceased to represent farmers' interests.

• APMC system somehow deteriorated into a cartelised operation (licensing becoming the tool); cess collection became an obsession, and price discovery and transparency were side stepped

• APMCs, undisputedly, created market infrastructure, and used the cess collections to improve agrarian infrastructure. However, now they had no interest in investing beyond their market yards.

Why reform of APMCs failed?

• Multiple efforts to reform APMCs failed, primarily due to opposition from state governments who felt their cess collections will go down, and also from powerful vested interests.

Merits of Ordinance

• **Wider Choice to Farmers:** The ordinance carves out a new space called 'trade area' which includes everything(like farm gates, silos, factory premises, etc) except the market yards operated by APMCs and private mandis. This gives the farmer three choices, APMC, private market yard or a trade area

• **Price Advantage:** No market fee or cess is leviable in the trade area which is huge benefit for both farmer and trader

• **Power with Centre:** The central government has retained with itself the power to give licences to traders who can operate in this new area, so as to protect the farmers.

• **Promotes Transparency:** As electronic trading platforms is encouraged, there is openness in the transactions

• **Promotes Private investment:** The new set up will encourage large companies, food processing firms, exporters, etc, to invest and source good-quality material from the origins, thereby, reducing the risk of mixing with lower grade produce

• **Encourages FPOs:** This ordinance does open up a new and profitable avenue for Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) which can take their rightful place as aggregators and 'reliable' suppliers

Challenges Ahead

• Enforcement of provisions by Central government could see the birth of a new set of inspectors.

• Despite the provision of dispute settlement mechanism farmer would like to settle rather than litigate due to economic reasons

• If the APMCs lose most of the business, there are doubts whether they will continue doing price discovery and reporting prices

• For the average farmer, who sells his crop at minimum support prices (MSP), mandis may remain the preferred option unless prices in the 'trade area' are above MSP which is unlikely to be the case. If it stays below, the purpose of ordinance is lost.

Conclusion

This is the last chance for APMCs to reform. But, the ordinance that creates the new agri-markets replaces a decentralised structure with a highly centralised one

Connecting the dots

• Doubling Farmers Income- Ashok Dalwai Committee

• e-NAM and its functioning over the years

IASbaba

ILP Toppers

Student of Integrated Learning Program, Regular follower of initiatives like Yojana/Kurukshetra Gist, Interview Mentorship Programme (IMP) and his favourite TLP Mains Answer Writing.

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I was an Integrated Learning Programme (ILP) student. VAN of History and Daily Current Affairs section was of much help.

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ILP Toppers

ILP really helped me a lot. Right from Babapedia, to the notes on various topics which were filled with diagrams and stories making them so much easier to learn to the regular prelims and Mains tests, it was all very succinct yet comprehensive.

I recommend that every serious aspirant must at least go through ILP and evaluate for themselves.

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ENVIRONMENT/CLIMATE CHANGE
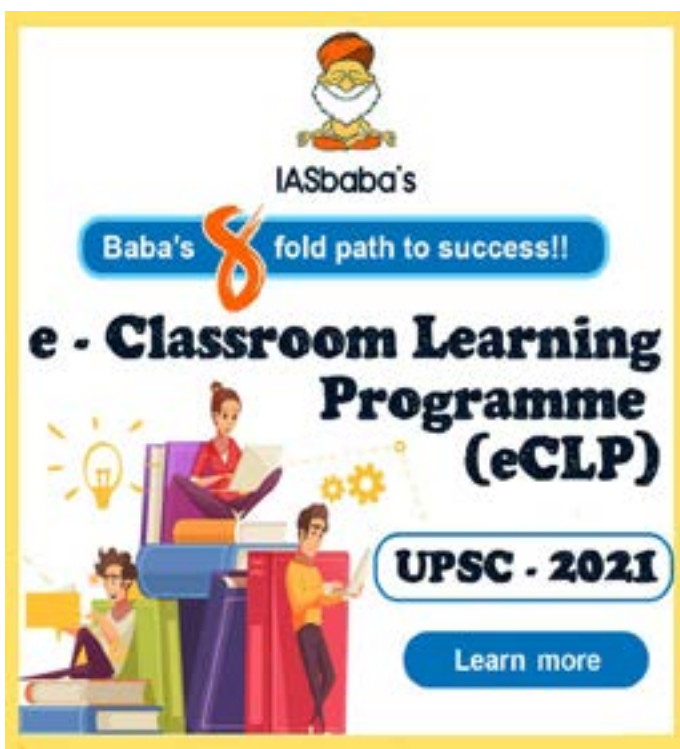
State of India's Environment report 2020

Environment issues; National report

About:
• State of India's Environment report, 2020 was released by Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)

Key takeaways
• 19 major extreme weather events claimed thousands of lives last year.

• **Internal displacement:**
--- More than 50 lakh internal displacements were reported in India in 2019 which is the highest in the world.
--- Floods, Cyclones - Fani, Vayu and Bulbul, droughts were major factors.

• **Migrants:**
--- The report also broke down 2011 census data on migrant populations.
--- There were over 45 crore migrants in the country at the time, with the vast majority migrating within their own State.
--- In 2011, new migrants had moved for employment purposes, mostly from rural to urban areas.

Merits of Ordinance
• **Wider Choice to Farmers:** The ordinance carves out a new space called 'trade area' which includes everything(like farm gates, silos, factory premises, etc) except the market yards operated by APMCs and private mandis. This gives the farmer three choices, APMC, private market yard or a trade area
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• **Power with Centre:** The central government has retained with itself the power to give licences to traders who can operate in this new area, so as to protect the farmers.
• **Promotes Transparency:** As electronic trading platforms is encouraged, there is openness in the transactions
• **Promotes Private investment:** The new set up will encourage large companies, food processing firms, exporters, etc, to invest and source good-quality material from the origins, thereby, reducing the risk of mixing with lower grade produce
• **Encourages FPOs:** This ordinance does open up a new and profitable avenue for Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) which can take their rightful place as aggregators and 'reliable' suppliers

Challenges Ahead
• Enforcement of provisions by Central government could see the birth of a new set of inspectors.
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• If the APMCs lose most of the business, there are doubts whether they will continue doing price discovery and reporting prices
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Connecting the dots
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• e-NAM and its functioning over the years

World Environment Day
Environment

About:
• Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs recently launched advisories on the occasion of World Environment Day.

Key takeaways
These advisories are:
--- Advisory on Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) for Municipal Solid Waste (MSW)
--- Advisory on Landfill Reclamation
--- Draft advisory on On-site and Off-site Sewage Management Practices.

• These advisories have been prepared by the Central Public Health and Environmental Engineering Organisation (CPHEEO) under Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban).
• These are part of an effort to find and facilitate sustainable solutions to some of the key problems which prevent holistic sanitation and solid waste management.
• A toolkit for a communication campaign on faecal sludge management titled 'Malasur- The Demon of Defeca' was also released.
• It aims at heightening the risk perception of faecal sludge.

About World Environment Day
• It is celebrated on 5th June every year.
• This year's theme is 'Biodiversity'.
• In India, Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change held virtual celebrations on this year's theme with focus on Nagar Van (Urban Forests).
• It relaunched a scheme (Nagar Van Scheme) for creating urban forest in 200 corporations and cities because all these cities have gardens but not forests.
• The forests shall come up either on existing forest land or on any other vacant land offered by urban local bodies.
• Wajre Urban forest in Pune, Maharashtra has been developed on a 40 acre degraded land area. It sets right model for Nagar Van scheme.
• The urban forests will help in reducing pollution in these cities.

Healthy and Energy Efficient Buildings initiative
Energy; Environment; Climate change

About:
• On occasion of World Environment Day, Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) MAITREE program, launched the "Healthy and Energy Efficient Buildings" initiative to make workplaces healthier and greener.
• It will address the challenges of retrofitting existing buildings and air conditioning systems so that they are both healthy and energy efficient.

Important value additions

Market Integration and Transformation Program for Energy Efficiency (MAITREE)
• It is a part of the US-India bilateral Partnership between the Ministry of Power and USAID.
• It is aimed at accelerating the adoption of cost-effective energy efficiency as a standard practice within buildings, and specifically focuses on cooling.

Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL)
• It is a joint venture of PSUs under the administration of Ministry of Power.
• It works towards mainstreaming energy efficiency and is implementing the world's largest energy efficiency portfolio in the country.

ENVIRONMENT/CLIMATE CHANGE

Flattening the climate curve
Environment issues

About:
Two interrelated curves began their upward trend two centuries ago with the advent of the industrial age.
• The first curve was the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide (or, more generally, all greenhouse gases, GHGs)
• The second was the average global temperature curve.

Brief history of CO2 Curve
• The CO2 curve began its upward march about 18,000 years ago when it was a little under 200 parts per million (ppm) and earth was much colder.
• By the time it reached 270 ppm about 11,500 years ago, the warmer conditions accompanying this curve made it possible for the emergence of agriculture.
• Over the past million years, CO2 levels never exceeded 280-300 ppm. They always went back to 200 ppm before rising again in a cyclical fashion
• From mid-19th century, CO2 began to rise again as humans burnt coal & oil and erased forests to expand agriculture and settlements.
• From a mere 0.2 billion tonnes of CO2 emissions in 1850, annual emissions increased to 36 billion tonnes by 2018.
• However, one-half of all CO2 emissions have been sanitised from the atmosphere, equally by growing vegetation on land and by absorption in the oceans
• Thus, the levels of CO2 in the atmosphere reached 407 ppm in 2018, a level last experienced by earth some three million years ago.

Brief history of global average temperature Curve
• From 1850 onwards, for over a century, the global temperature showed a slight warming trend. But there was nothing suggestive of anything serious
• From 1975 onwards, the temperature graph has shown a distinct, upward trend.
• By 2015, the globe had heated by a full degree Celsius relative to a hundred years previously.
• Under the current trends of emissions, the globe will heat up by 4˚C by the end of the century.
• Extremely hot days (days above 35˚C) to increase to 15 days by 2050 and to 42 days by 2100

Manifestation of these upward trend curves
• Globally there have been several extreme and frequent weather events such as hurricanes, heat waves, floods or droughts
• The 2003 European heat wave killed over 70,000 people.
• The years 2015-19 have globally been the warmest years on record.
• The Amazon fire of 2019 and the bush fires of 2019-20 in Australia were unprecedented in their scale and devastation.
• If global CO2 emissions if continues at the present rate, then average summer would rise by 4˚C

Paris Climate Deal and its challenges
The Paris Agreement's long-term temperature goal is to keep the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels; and to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 °C. However, some of challenges to achieve this goal are:

Dangers of post-COVID period: The most common excuse is that the world cannot afford to curb GHG emissions for fear of slowing the economy

Inadequate Spending: The wealthy nations are spending over $500 billion each year internally on projects aimed at reducing emissions.

IPCC, however, estimates that a sustained annual investment of $2.4 trillion in more efficient energy systems is needed until 2035 in order to keep warming below the more ambitious 1.5˚C relative to pre-industrial levels

Inadequate Aid to Developing Countries: At the UN Climate Conference in 2009, the richest nations had pledged to provide $100 billion in aid each year by 2020 to the poorer countries for climate change mitigation and adaptation. In 2017, only $71 billion had been provided towards this purpose

Change is mindset: The spectre of dangerous climate change impacting human civilizations has not yet evoked a response comparable to that seen in COVID-19 outbreak

Conclusion
This is a make-or-break moment for the climate trajectory which has to be flattened within a few years if we are to avoid dangerous climate change.

ENVIRONMENT/CLIMATE CHANGE

Oil leak at Norilsk
Climate change

About:
• The principal reason that led to the recent 20,000-tonne oil leak at Norilsk at an Arctic region power plant in Russia is the sinking of ground surface due to permafrost thaw.
• The plant is built entirely on permafrost, whose weakening over the years due to climate change caused the pillars supporting a fuel tank at the plant to sink.

Important value additions
Permafrost
• Permafrost is any ground that remains completely frozen — 32°F (0°C) or colder — for at least two years straight.
• It is defined solely based on temperature and duration.
• It covers large regions of the Earth.
• Almost a quarter of the land area in the Northern Hemisphere has permafrost underneath.
• It is made of a combination of soil, rocks and sand that are held together by ice.
• The soil and ice in permafrost stay frozen all year long.
• Near the surface, permafrost soils also contain large quantities of organic carbon due to the cold.
• Lower permafrost layers contain soils made mostly of minerals.
• A layer of soil on top of permafrost does not stay frozen all year. This layer, called the active layer, thaws during the warm summer months and freezes again in the fall.

Impact of Climate Change on Permafrost
• As Earth's climate warms, the permafrost is thawing. That means the ice inside the permafrost melts, leaving behind water and soil.
• Thawing permafrost can have dramatic impacts on our planet.
• Thawing permafrost can destroy houses, roads and other infrastructure.
• When permafrost is frozen, plant material in the soil (organic carbon) can't decompose.
• As permafrost thaws, microbes begin decomposing this material which releases greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Climate Change Assessment report
Reports; Environment; Climate change

About:
• The first Assessment of Climate Change over the Indian Region published by the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).
• Findings of the report deal exclusively with India and the sub-continent unlike the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change(IPCC), which is global in nature

Key findings
• Between 1900 and 2018, the average temperatures of India rose by 0.7°C. This rise in temperatures has been largely attributed to global warming due to GHG emissions and land use and land cover changes
• Overall rainfall during the monsoon season has decreased by 6% between 1950 and 2015.
• In a worst case scenario, average surface air temperatures over India could rise by up to 4.4oC by the end of the century as compared to the period between 1976 and 2005
• The rise in temperatures will be even more pronounced in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region where the average could reach 5.2°C
• By 2100, the frequency of warm days and warm nights might also increase by 55 per cent and 70 per cent respectively, as compared to the period 1976-2005
• The incidences of heat waves over the country could also increase by 3-4 times.
• Sea level could rise by 30cm by the end of this century as compared to the recent 2-3 decades.
• Monsoon rainfall could change by an average of 14% by 2100 that could go as high as 22.5%. The report does not mention if this change will be an increase or a decrease but still represents variability.

Key takeaways from the report
• Temperature rise in Himalayan region means glaciers and the snow that feeds some of India's most important perennial rivers receding drastically, with disastrous implications for the northern part of India in terms of floods.
• The frequency of extreme rainfall in central and southern India—the kind that Kerala has seen of late—is also likely to rise drastically.

ENVIRONMENT/CLIMATE CHANGE

....Continued

• The report seems to acknowledge that the 1.5oC (rise in global temperature over pre-industrial level) target may no longer be achievable, given how human activity so far has already set the planet on a warming pathway

• Against such a backdrop, the need for adapting to climate change effects becomes urgent, which is echoed by IPCC report as well

The report also suggests solutions to Climate Change, some of which are

• More R&D to understand regional variations in climate change effects
• Water-harvesting
• Shifting to sustainable farming
• Accelerated afforestation efforts
• Transition to renewables from fossil fuels
• Carbon taxation
• Focus on building the climate resilience of the most vulnerable sections of the population

Significance of the report

• This is the first ever climate change assessment report for India
• It gives a clear comprehensive view on the possible future climate change projections, that will be useful for policymakers and academia.
• This is the first important step where existing projections are put in the context of historical trends in land and ocean temperatures, monsoon rainfall, floods, droughts etc.
• However, the report doesn't say anything on the need to get climate action off the ground in developing countries through increased funding from developed nations (This was perhaps outside the scope of the report)

Conclusion

The future assessments will have to start documenting the impacts of changes that have already occurred and the impacts that will be caused by future changes if projections come true

Connecting the dots

• Paris Climate deal of 2015 and India's commitments towards it.

Railway stations to be classified on waste water output

Infrastructure; Environment; Climate change

About:

• Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) will classify railway stations under the red, orange and green categories based on the quantity of waste water generated and the disposal of untreated water into the municipal drain systems

Key takeaways

• Railway stations generating waste water equal to or more than 100 Kilo Litres per Day (KLD) would be categorised as Red.
• Railway stations generating waste water greater than 10 KLD but less than 100 KLD would come under the Orange category.
• Railway stations with less than 10 KLD waste water generation would be branded Green.

Advisory for import of exotic species issued

Biodiversity; Conservation

About:

• Environment Ministry has issued an advisory for import of exotic species to tackle illegal wildlife trade and zoonotic diseases.

Key takeaways

• The advisory defines 'Exotic Live Species' as animal or plant species moved from their original range (location) to a new one.
• 'Exotic live species' shall be interpreted to mean only "the animals named under the Appendices I, II and III of the CITES of Wild Fauna and Flora".
• Species covered by the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 cannot be traded.
• People importing such species will have to make a voluntary disclosure and all imports will be screened.
• For new 'Exotic Live Species', the importer should obtain a no-objection certificate from the Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW) of the State.
• Earlier, imports were being made through the Director General of Foreign Trade and State Forest departments were not kept in the loop.

ENVIRONMENT/CLIMATE CHANGE

Expansion of Amery Ice Shelf (AIS)
Climate change

About:
• The **National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR)** has predicted an increase in the expansion of **Amery Ice Shelf (AIS)** boundaries from its 2016 positions.
• The AIS is one of the **largest glacier drainage basins** in the world, located on the east coast of Antarctica.
• The AIS dynamics and mass balance help in understanding the changes in the global climate scenario.
• The prediction made by NCPOR is expected to help to understand the ongoing changes in the ocean and atmospheric forces better.

Key takeaways
• The predictions are based on a 16-year-long satellite-based observation that covered an area of 60,000 sq. km across the AIS.

• It has been predicted that there would be a 24% increase in the expansion of AIS boundaries by 2021 and another 24% expansion by 2026 from its 2016 positions
• The study has also observed a spatio-temporal (belonging to both space and time) change in the ice shelf as reflected by the extension of the Prydz, Mackenzie and the Sandefjord Bays which forms a part of the AIS.
• In the background of the global warming scenario, the study reveals about the advancement in the predicted ice shelf extent, the future dynamism of ocean heat fluctuation.
• The study has also observed that the critical cooling of the Sea Surface Temperature (SST) is resulting in an advancement of the ice shelf by 88% in the past 15 years.
• These changes would contribute in a major way to climate variability.

Important value additions

Ice Shelves

• The floating sheets of ice are called 'ice shelves'.
• It plays a major role in maintaining the stability of a glacier.
• Ice shelves connect a glacier to the landmass.

Important parameters for the balancing of a glacier:
• Ice sheet mass balance
• Sea stratification
• Bottom water formation

• The ice sheet mass balance - Net balance between the mass gained by snow deposition and the loss of mass by melting.

• Sea stratification - When water masses with different properties form layers that act as barriers to water mixing.

• The deep-ocean bottom water is formed by the cooling and sinking of surface water at high latitudes.

New rules to regulate exotic animal trade
Concerns related to Wildlife and Environment

About:
• Environment Ministry's wildlife division has introduced new rules to regulate the import and export of 'exotic wildlife species'.
• Under the new rules, owners and possessors of such animals and birds must register their stock with the Chief Wildlife Warden of their States.
• Wildlife Department officials have the right to inspect the facilities of such traders to check if these plants and animals are being housed in healthy conditions.

About CITES
• Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is part of a multilateral treaty that includes plant, animals and birds under varying categories of threat of extinction and which will be jointly protected by members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
• India is a signatory to CITES.

ENVIRONMENT/CLIMATE CHANGE

Draft EIA
Govt policies; Environment and Ecosystem

About:
• The draft of the proposed Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2020 which seeks to amend existing EIA 2006 is open to public comments.

• The existing EIA, 2006 prescribes the procedure for industries to assess the ecological and environmental impact of their proposed activity and the mechanism whereby these would be assessed by expert committees appointed by the Ministry.

Key Prelims pointers:

Environment Impact Assessment (EIA)
• It is a process of evaluating the likely environmental impacts of a proposed project

• It is statutorily backed by the Environment Protection Act, 1986.

• Environment Impact Assessment Notification of 2006 has decentralized the environmental clearance projects by categorizing the developmental projects in two categories – Category A (national level appraisal) and Category B (state level appraisal).

EIA categories
1. **Category A projects** – They require mandatory environmental clearance and thus they do not undergo the screening process.
2. **Category B Projects-** They undergo screening process and they are classified into two types:
3. **Category B1 projects** (Mandatorily require EIA).
4. **Category B2 projects** (Do not require EIA).

What is EIA?
• UNEP defines EIA as a tool used to identify the environmental, social and economic impacts of a project prior to decision-making.

It aims to --
• Predict environmental impacts at an early stage in project planning and design,
• Find ways and means to reduce adverse impacts,
• Shape projects to suit the local environment and
• Present the predictions and options to decision-makers.

Draft EIA Notification 2020: Criticisms

• It has inverted the logic of 'precautionary principle' which forms the bedrock of India's environmental outlook.

• The new draft allows for post-facto approval for projects. It means that the clearances for projects can be awarded even if they have started construction or have been running phase without securing environmental clearances.

• The new notification comes in the wake of recent attempts to dilute environmental safeguards and follows from a tradition to widen the escape route for violators or environmental regulations.

• Polluting industries like soda-ash, acids, petroleum and petrochemical products, dyes, biomedical waste, treatment plants, synthetics, paints, chemical fertilizers, pesticides and construction industries – all of which pose threats to human health – will be exempted from the public clearance process.

• The draft notification provides for a reduction of the time period from 30 days to 20 days for the public to submit their responses during a public hearing for any application seeking environmental clearance.

India endorses the 'polluter-pays-principle', it cannot afford to endorse the "pollute-and-pay" sham.

Do you know?
• By using EIA both environmental and economic benefits can be achieved, such as reduced cost and time of project implementation and design, avoided treatment/clean-up costs and impacts of laws and regulations.

• EIA in India is statutorily backed by the Environment Protection Act, 1986 which contains various provisions on EIA methodology and process

• The assessment is carried out by an Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), which consists of scientists and project management experts.

What is the philosophy behind EIA?
• The basis in global environmental law for the EIA is the "precautionary principle". Environmental harm is often irreparable — one cannot reverse an oil spill.

• It is cheaper to avoid damage to the environment than to remedy it.

• Also, we are legally bound to the precautionary principle under international treaties and obligations, as well as by Supreme Court judgments.

ENVIRONMENT/CLIMATE CHANGE

History of EIA in India

• The Indian experience with EIA began in 1976-77 when the Planning Commission asked the Department of Science and Technology to examine the river-valley projects from an environmental angle.

• Till 1994, environmental clearance from the Central Government was an administrative decision and lacked legislative support.

• In 1994, the Union Environment ministry under the Environmental (Protection) Act 1986, promulgated an EIA notification making Environmental Clearance (EC) mandatory for activity listed in Schedule 1 of the notification

• Since then there have been 12 amendments made in the EIA notification of 1994 the latest one being in 2006 which has put the onus of clearing projects on the state government depending on the size/capacity of the project.

• Additionally, donor agencies operating in India like the World Bank and the ADB have a different set of requirements for giving environmental clearance to projects that are funded by them.

The EIA process

It generally consists of eight steps with each step equally important in determining the overall performance of the project

1. **Screening:** First stage of EIA, which determines whether the proposed project, requires an EIA and if it does, then the level of assessment required.
2. **Scoping:** This stage identifies the key issues and impacts that should be further investigated. This stage also defines the boundary and time limit of the study.
3. **Impact analysis:** This stage of EIA identifies and predicts the likely environmental and social impact of the proposed project and evaluates the significance.
4. **Mitigation:** This step in EIA recommends the actions to reduce and avoid the potential adverse environmental consequences of development activities.
5. **Reporting:** This stage presents the result of EIA in a form of a report to the decision-making body and other interested parties.
6. **Review of EIA:** It examines the adequacy and effectiveness of the EIA report and provides the information necessary for decision-making.

Did You Know?

• In the Samarth Trust Case, the Delhi high court had considered EIAs- a part of participatory justice in which the voice is given to the voiceless and it is like a Jan Sunwai, where the community is the jury.

• The EIA process is an outcome of the 1992 Rio Declaration, which says that environmental issues are best handled through the participation of all concerned citizens and that states must provide an opportunity to citizens to participate in decision-making processes.

Shortcomings of EIA Process

1. **Exclusion:** There are several projects with significant environmental impacts that are exempted from the notification either because they are not listed in schedule I, or their investments are less than what is provided for in the notification
2. **Inadequate capabilities:** Lack of trained EIA professionals often leads to the preparation of inadequate and irrelevant EIA reports
3. **Public Consultation:** Public comments are not considered at an early stage, which often leads to conflict at a later stage of project clearance.
4. **Neglect of indigenous knowledge:** The data collectors do not pay respect to the indigenous knowledge of local people.
5. **Communication issues:** Most reports in English and not in the local language. Hence, local people do not understand the intricacies of the report
6. **Poor review or monitoring:** EIA review is not upto the marks. The review agency called Impact Assessment Agency (IAA) lacks inter-disciplinary capacity
7. **Corruption:** There are so many cases of fraudulent EIA studies where erroneous data has been used, same facts used for two totally different places etc.
8. **Distorted Focus:** The focus of EIA needs to shift from utilization and exploitation of natural resources to conservation of natural resources.
9. **Exempt Categories:** For defence and national security installations, the EMP (Environment Management Plan) are often kept confidential for political and administrative reasons.
10. **Considered as impediment to the ease of doing business:** Industries and business interests have long regarded EIA as a thorn in their side increasing their transaction cost and complicating the business process

ENVIRONMENT/CLIMATE CHANGE

Key provisions of 2020's Draft EIA

1. Creation of an ex-post-facto clearance route

• Clearances for projects can be awarded even if they have started construction or have been running phase without securing environmental clearances.

• Any environmental damage caused by the project is likely to be waived off as the violations get legitimised i.e. the project proponent can enter an assessment procedure, with some minor fines for the violations

• It is the violation of "precautionary principle"

2. Diluted Public Consultation Process

• It shortens the time period from 30 days to 20 days for the public to furnish responses on the project.

• For project-affected people, this will make it harder to put forth representations.

• Public hearings without informed citizenry would not be meaningful and hence the whole EIA process would lack credibility.

3. Monitoring requirements have been reduced.

• It halves the frequency of reporting requirements from every six months to once a year and extends the validity period for approvals in critical sectors such as mining.

• Certain irreversible environmental, social or health consequences of the project could go unnoticed because of the extended reporting time.

4. Scope of the EIA regime is set to shrink

• Through the draft notification, the central government gets the power to categorise projects as "strategic" and no information related to such projects shall be placed in the public domain.

• Violations can only be reported suo motu by the project proponent, or by aappraisal committee, or regulatory authority. This is against the principles of natural justice.

• Further,the new construction projects up to 1,50,000 square metres (instead of the existing 20,000 square metres) do not need "detailed scrutiny" by the Expert Committee, nor do they need EIA studies and public consultation.

• Industries that previously fell under the categories that required a full assessment have been downgraded. This means that projects could now be proposed in dangerously close proximities of boundary of protected and eco-sensitive zones.

5. Definition of terms: On a positive note, the 2020 draft notification has a clause dedicated to definitions to several terms related to EIA. It may be beneficial in the sense that it consolidates the EIA rules and has the potential of alleviating some ambiguity in the present law.

Consequences of diluting EIA process

• **Against democratic norms:** For affected communities, where shifts in the local environment can threaten livelihoods, flood a valley or destroy a forest, public consultation is a referendum on existential threats

• **Increases vulnerability to disasters:** A deadly gas leak at LG Polymers' Visakhapatnam plant in May 2020 killed 12 people and harmed hundreds. What came to light after the disaster was that the plant had been operating without a valid environmental clearance for decades.

Way Forward

• Instead of reducing the time for public consultation, government should focus on ensuring access to information as well as awareness about the whole EIA process.

• In order to improve ease of doing business, the government should solve the problems of bureaucratic delays, complex laws and lengthy dispute resolution.

• Along with the EIA, we also need Social impact assessment to achieve sustainable development in true sense.

Connecting the dots

• Polluter Pay principle
• Sustainable Development Goals

FATF report flags wildlife trade

Concerns related to Wildlife and Environment

About

• Financial Action Task Force (FATF) releases its first global report on the illegal wildlife trade.

• It described illegal wildlife trade as a "global threat", as it also has links with other organised crimes such as modern slavery, drug trafficking and arms trade.

According to FATF's **"Money Laundering and the Illegal Wildlife Trade"** report

• Illegal trade generates revenues of up to $23 billion a year.

• Financial investigation is key to dismantling the syndicates involved.

• Curbing illegal wildlife trade can in turn significantly impact the associated criminal activities.

• The study has highlighted the growing role of online marketplaces and mobile and social media-based payments to facilitate illegal movements.

Ozone pollution increased during the lockdown

Pollution; Science and Technology

According to an analysis by the **Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)** -

• While particulate matter and nitrous oxide levels fell during the lockdown, ozone increased.

• Ozone is a highly reactive gas and even short-term exposure of an hour is dangerous for those with respiratory conditions and asthma.

• Eight-hour average is considered for ozone instead of the 24-hour average for other pollutants

Do you know?

• Ozone is not directly emitted by any source but is formed by photochemical reactions between oxides of nitrogen (NOx) and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and gases in the air under the influence of sunlight and heat.

• It can be curtailed only if gases from all sources are controlled.

Distinct colour band made mandatory for BS-VI four-wheelers

Environment; Pollution

About:

• The Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways has issued an order under which distinct colour bands will be compulsory for number plate stickers for BS-VI four-wheel vehicles.

• A strip of green colour of 1 cm width on top of the existing sticker which carries details of registration for BS-VI vehicles of any fuel type will be mandatory.

Important value additions

• The BS-VI emission standards have been mandated with effect from 1st April, 2020.

• It provides for stricter and cleaner emission norms and are at par with the emission standards being followed across the world.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Band-tail scorpionfish

Why in news?
• The rare fish was found from Sethukarai coast in the Gulf of Mannar.
• The specimen has been deposited in the National Marine Biodiversity Museum of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI)
• This was the first time that the particular species was found alive in Indian waters.

About:
• Scientific name: Scorpaenospsis neglecta
• Band-tail scorpionfish has spines which contain neurotoxic venom.
• Eating the fish would lead to death.
• The fish is well-known for its ability to change colour and blend with its surrounding environment to escape from predators and while preying.

Great knots & Indian skimmers
Environment; Biodiversity; Conservation

About:
• Dredging activity halted at Kakinada coast due to possible threat to the species.
• The Forest Department has directed GMR Energy Limited to stop dredging activity in the Kumbabhishekham mudflat with immediate effect.
• It has also ordered the removal of the bund around the mangrove cover on the Kakinada coast, Andhra Pradesh.
• The decision was taken after taking into account the threats to the mudflat and the mangrove cover and destruction of the prime habitat of birds — endangered Great knots (Calidris tenuirostris) and vulnerable Indian skimmers (Rynchops albiocollis).

Great knots
• The great knot (Calidris tenuirostris) is a small wader.
• It is the largest of the calidrid species.
• These birds forage (search for food) on mudflats and beaches, probing or picking up food by sight.
• They mainly eat molluscs and insects.
• It is one of the species to which the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) applies.
• Their breeding habitat is tundra in northeast Siberia.
• They are strongly migratory wintering on coasts in southern Asia through to Australia.
• IUCN status: Endangered

Indian skimmers
• It (Rynchops albicollis) is one of the three species that belong to the skimmer genus Rynchops in the family Laridae.
• It is found in southern Asia, where it is patchily distributed and declining in numbers.
• They are mainly found in rivers or estuaries.
• They are very brightly marked in black, white and orange, making them difficult to miss.
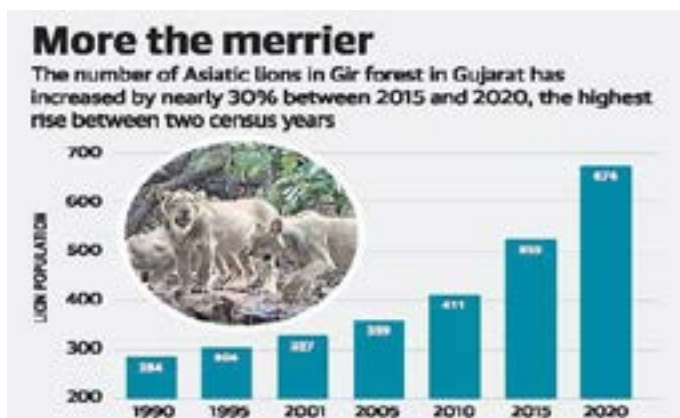• IUCN status: Vulnerable

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Rise in Asiatic Lions' population reported

About

• According to June 5, 2020 census, the number of Asiatic lions have now risen by 29% over five years to an estimated 674 in the Gir forest region and other areas of coastal Saurashtra, Gujarat.

• During 2015, their population was 523 lions.

• Geographically, distribution area has also increased by 36%.

More the merrier
The number of Asiatic lions in Gir forest in Gujarat has increased by nearly 30% between 2015 and 2020, the highest rise between two census years

Important value additions

Asiatic Lion

• It is a Panthera leo leo population in India.

• Its current range is restricted to the Gir National Park and environs in the Indian state of Gujarat.

• It is also known as the "Indian lion" and the "Persian lion".

• It is slightly smaller than African lions.

• The most striking morphological character is a longitudinal fold of skin running along belly of Asiatic Lions.

It is one of five pantherine cats inhabiting India. Others are:

1. Bengal tiger
2. Indian leopard
3. Snow leopard
4. Clouded leopard

Status:

• Listed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972
• Appendix I of CITES
• Endangered on IUCN Red List.

First population estimation of Indian Gaur

Environment; Biodiversity; Conservation

In news:

• The first population estimation exercise of the Indian gaur, carried out in the Nilgiris Forest Division over the last few years, has revealed that more than an estimated 2,000 Indian gaurs inhabit the entire division.

Indian Gaur

• Its Scientific name is Bos Gaurus.
• It is one of the largest existing bovines.
• It is also one of the largest species among the wild cattle.
• Gaurs are found on the forested hills and grassy areas of South to South-east Asia.
• They are found in India, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal.
• The Western Ghats in southern India constitute one of the most extensive extant strongholds of gaur, in particular in the Wayanad – Nagarhole – Mudumalai – Bandipur complex.
• It is also the State Animal of Goa and Bihar.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Man-Animal Conflict

Context

• A pregnant wild elephant in Kerala died on May 27 after she ate a pineapple filled with firecrackers. Scores of elephants are killed every year in India which indicates the rising instances of human-animal conflict

Do you know?

• Research in Karnataka showed that 60% of elephant distribution was encountered outside protected areas
• Madhav Gadgil Committee Report called for the entire Western Ghats to be classified as ecologically sensitive that restricted developmental activities. However, this report was adopted due to political opposition

The Indian elephant

• One of three extant recognised subspecies of the Asian elephant and native to mainland Asia
• Listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List
• The wild population has declined by at least 50% since the 1930s
• Threatened by loss, degradation and fragmentation of its habitat

About Project Elephant

• It is a flagship programme of Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF)
• Launched in 1992 it is a Centrally-sponsored scheme
• Primarily aimed at protecting elephant, their habitats and corridors
• It addresses issues of man-animal conflict and welfare of domesticated elephants.

India's Conservation culture

• Despite a billion people India still has most of our large wildlife species- India today has the largest population of the tiger, Asian elephant, leopard, sloth bear, gaur and many others
• Part of Culture: People have accepted coexistence of human & animals, and incorporated it in our culture. All our deities have animals associated with them; it shows the inclusion of these animals in our mind space.
• The Velip community in Goa worship the tigers and this practice is done even today.

Connecting the dots

• Kasturirangan Committee report on Western Ghats
• Project Tiger

Reasons for man-animal conflict:

• Lost ranges and blocked corridors for elephants have made lelephants look for soft landscapes adjoining forests such as coffee, tea and cardamom estates, and in the absence of these, wander into food-rich farms falling in their movement pathways.
• Expansion of human settlements into forests – expansion of cities, industrial areas, railway/road infrastructure, tourism etc.
• Commercial pressures eat into already diminished habitat.
• Allowing livestock to graze in forest areas
• Land use transformations such as change from protected forest patches to agricultural and horticultural lands and monoculture plantations are further destroying the habitats of wildlife.
• Unscientific structures and practices of forest management in the country
• Infestation of wildlife habitat by invasive exotic weeds leads to decreased availability of edible grasses for wild herbivores
• Decreased prey base caused by poaching of herbivores has also resulted in carnivores moving out of forests in search of prey and to indulge in cattle lifting.

Way Ahead:

• Inclusion of local community in forest wildlife management
• To ensure that money which comes in through tourism (of Tiger reserves) should be used for the development of the local villages as has been done in Tadoba tiger reserve, Maharashtra
• Ensuring that elephant corridors are not razed/ neglected due to overzealous developmental approach

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Inter-state tiger translocation project

About

• The Rs 19 crore ambitious tiger relocation exercise was conceived by the Union ministry of environment and forests, **National Tiger Conservation Authority** and **Wildlife Institute of India**.

• It was started in June 2018 under which six tigers (three pairs) from different reserves of Madhya Pradesh were to be sent to Odisha.

• NTCA had initially okayed the translocation of six tigers from MP to Odisha, but only two were shifted.

• The project which was shared between Centre and state governments has now been suspended following furious protests by Odisha villagers.

Tigress Sundari

• NTCA has been asked to intervene in the ongoing tension between Odisha and Madhya Pradesh forest departments with regard to tigress Sundari.

Background information:

• The Odisha forest department had asked Madhya Pradesh to take back the translocated tigress 'Sundari', after she killed two people in the Satkosia Tiger Reserve (STR).

• Sundari was shifted from MP's Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) to Satkosia Tiger Reserve (STR) in Odisha's Angul district in 2018.

• She had been moved to Odisha a week after translocation of MB2 - a male tiger from Kanha.

• This pair was part of the country's first Interstate tiger translocation project.

• MB2 was later killed by poachers in late 2018.

National Tiger Conservation Authority

• It was established in December 2005 following a recommendation of the Tiger Task Force which was constituted by the Prime Minister of India for reorganised management of Project Tiger and the many Tiger Reserves in India.

• The Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 was amended in 2006 to provide for its constitution.

• It is responsible for implementation of the Project Tiger to protect endangered tigers.

• It is set up under the Chairmanship of the Minister for Environment and Forests.

Composition:

• The Inspector General of Forest will be ex-officio Member Secretary

• 8 experts having qualifications and experience in wildlife conservation and welfare of people including tribals

• 3 Members of Parliament (2 from Lok sabha and 1 from Rajya Sabha)

Functions:

• Lay down normative standards, guidelines for tiger conservation in the Tiger Reserves, National Parks and Sanctuaries.

• Provide information on protection measures.

• Facilitate and support tiger reserve management in the States through eco-development and people's participation

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Schizothorax Sikusirumensis

About
• A new species of fish has been discovered in Arunachal Pradesh.
• The fish species is named as Schizothorax sikusirumensis.
• The fish species belongs to genus Schizothorax.
• It was named after the rivers - Siku and Sirum in East Siang District at the junction, from where it was found.
• The fish inhabits the water logged area of torrential river drainage.

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve
*Environment and Biodiversity; Protected Areas*

Why in news?
• Union government has proposed auctioning of Bander coal mine blocks near the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve.
• Over 1,200 hectare of rich forest land will have to be diverted if mining is allowed in the area.
• There are objections and oppositions as the coal block is likely to impact a few hundred acres of the forest and will destroy the wildlife corridor of Tadoba and Andhari.

Do you know?
• Such auctions were scrapped after evaluation twice before, once in 1999 and then around 2011.
• Tiger Reserves in Maharashtra - Melghat, Tadoba-Andhari, Pench, Sahyadri, Nawegaon-Nagzira and Bor.
• According to wildlife experts, Bander blocks falls in the route used by tigers to disperse from Tadoba to Bor Tiger Reserve in Wardha district and Melghat Tiger Reserve in Amravati district.
• Man-animal conflict is raging in Chandrapur district as the Tadoba landscape is teeming with tigers and other wildlife and clearing the area for mining will only increase the problem.

Key Prelims Pointers:

• Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve is located in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra state in India.
• It is Maharashtra's oldest and largest national park.
• Tadoba reserve is a predominantly southern tropical dry deciduous forest with dense woodlands comprising about eighty seven per cent of the protected area. Teak is the predominant tree species.
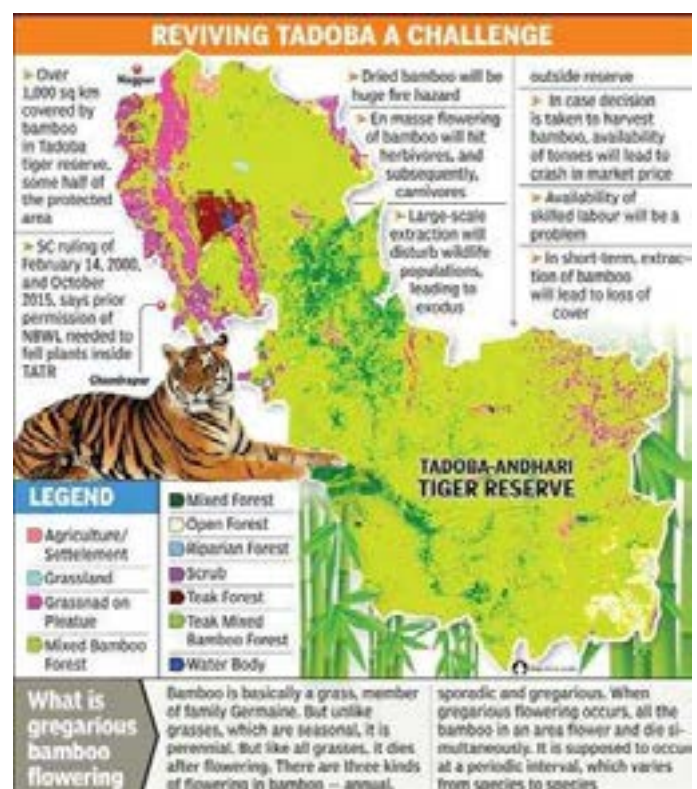
ENDANGERED SPECIES

Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Maguri-Motapung wetland

About
• The recent Baghjan oil blowout in Assam have affected the flora, fauna and wetlands which is close to the Maguri-Motapung wetland and the ecologically fragile Dibru-Saikhowa National Park.

Key Prelims Pointers:

• Dibru-Saikhowa is a National Park as well as a Biosphere Reserve situated in the south bank of the river Brahmaputra in the extreme east of Assam state.
• The park is bounded by the Brahmaputra and Lohit Rivers in the north and Dibru river in the south.
• The forest type of Dibru-Saikhowa comprises of semi-evergreen forests, deciduous forests, littoral and swamp forests and patches of wet evergreen forests.
• The Park is renowned for natural regeneration of Salix trees and a safe haven for many extremely rare and endangered species of Wildlife.

Do you know?

• National park is an area which is strictly reserved for the betterment of the wildlife & biodiversity, and where activities like developmental, forestry, poaching, hunting and grazing on cultivation are not permitted. Their boundaries are well marked and circumscribed.
• Total number of National Parks in Assam is Five (5). Kaziranga National Park, Manas National park, Orang National Park, Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Nameri National Park.
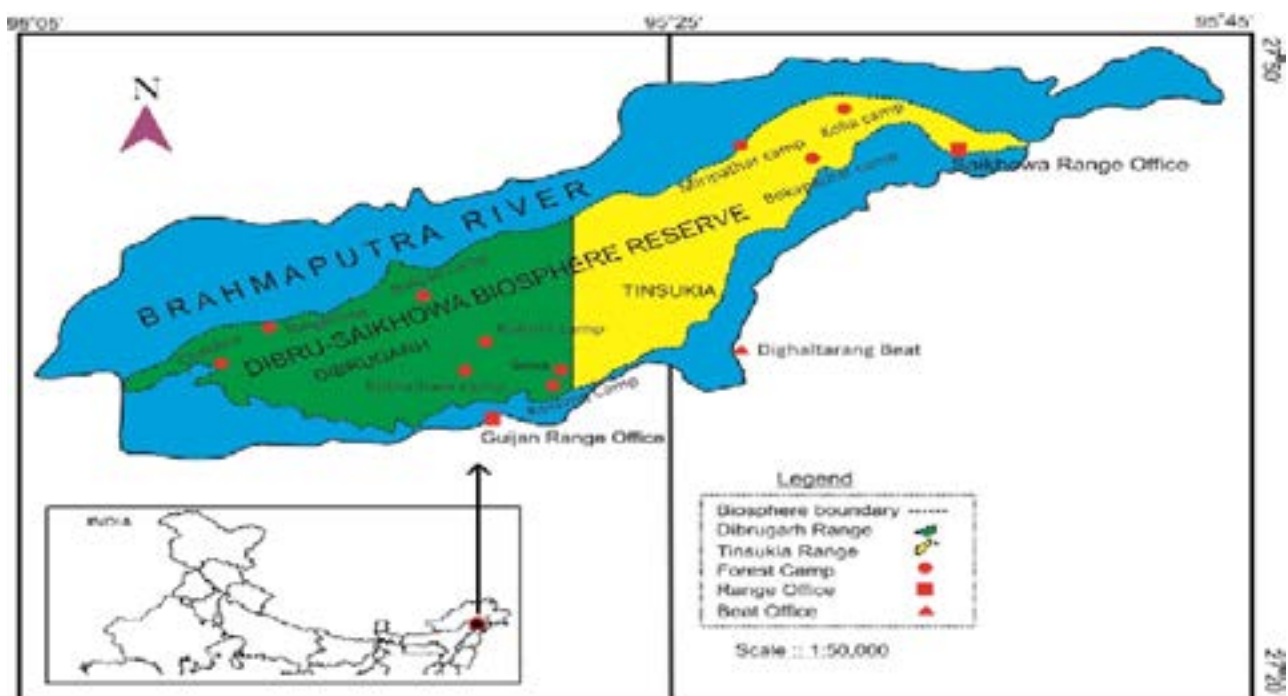

Fig. 1 Location map of Dibru-Saikhowa Biosphere Reserve, India

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

ADB and India signs $177 million loan for Maharashtra roads

Infrastructure (Roads); Global Groupings

Context
• The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Indian Government recently signed a $177 million loan to upgrade state highways and major district roads in the state of Maharashtra.

Key takeaways
• The project will improve connectivity between rural areas and urban centers in the state.
• It will enable rural communities to better access markets, employment opportunities and services.
• Mobility will improve.
• It will expand development and livelihood opportunities to second-tier cities and towns which will lead to reduction in income disparities.
• It will also strengthen road safety measures by developing a road safety audit framework that will protect vulnerable groups such as the elderly, women, and children.
• Another feature is to update road maintenance system by encouraging 5-year performance-based maintenance obligations to contractors.

One Sun One World One Grid initiative

Global Groupings; Energy

In News:
• OSOWOG initiative was recently proposed by India to set up a framework for facilitating global cooperation which aims at building a global ecosystem of interconnected renewable energy resources that can be easily shared.

Key takeaways
• Parent Body: The Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)
• Objective: To build global consensus about sharing solar resources among more than 140 countries of West Asia and South-East Asia.
• This grid shall be interconnected with the African power pools also at the later stage.
• Proposals are invited from consulting firms for making a long-term OSOWOG road map, and identify two or three cross-border projects that can be initiated within one or two years.

Asian Development Bank (ADB)
• It is a regional development bank.
• It was established on 19 December 1966.
• Headquarters: Mandaluyong, Philippines.
• It was established to promote social and economic development in Asia.
• Motto: ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient and sustainable Asia & the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.
• It offers hard loans (currency) on commercial terms primarily to middle income countries in Asia and
• It provides soft loans (loan with a below-market rate of interest) to poorer countries in the region.
• Both types of loans are sourced from the bank's ordinary capital resources (OCR).
• Five largest borrowing countries are China, India, Pakistan, Indonesia and Bangladesh.

International Solar Alliance (ISA)
• It is a treaty-based inter-governmental Organisation.
• It aims to deploy over 1,000 GW of solar generation capacity globally.
• It aims to mobilise investment of over $1 trillion by 2030.
• Headquartered: Gurgaon.
• It was established following the Paris Declaration as an alliance dedicated to the promotion of solar energy among its member countries.

Do you know?
• India, along with the other countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation had signed an agreement to enable cross-border electricity trade among the member states on a voluntary basis in 2014.
• Later in August 2018, India also signed a MoU for establishing grid interconnection between the members of the BIMSTEC.

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Reforms in Civil Aviation Industry

Context
• Due to the effects of the Covid contagion the world's second oldest airline (Avianca) has already filed for bankruptcy protection

Significance of aviation sector in India

• **Contributes to GDP:** The Aviation sector in India currently contributes $72 bn to GDP
• **Job creation:** Indian aviation sector to employ 4 million by 2035
• **Fast growing:** India is now the 3rd largest- and fastest growing- aviation market in terms of domestic tickets sold.
• **Potential for Investment:** Government agencies projects requirement of around 250 brownfield and green-field airports by 2020
• **Allied Sector Growth:** Before COVID-19, Maintenance, Repair & Overhaul (MRO) industry was forecasted to grow at an expected 5 year CAGR of close to 10% by 2023
• **Regional Connectivity:** It boosts connectivity to smaller cities and north-eastern states
• **Relaxed FDI policy:** Up to 100% FDI is permitted in Non-scheduled air transport services, MRO, flying training institutes, helicopter services and seaplane services under the automatic route.

Challenges of Indian Aviation Sector
• **Infrastructure deficit:** unavailability of land to expand airports at their current sites, particularly in major cities
• **High Fuel Costs:** Fuel cost as a percentage of operating charges amounts to 45% in India as compared to the global average of 30 per cent.
• **Procedural Complexities:** Taxes and approvals by both Central and States governments increases the transaction costs of the aviation sector
• **Inadequate Human Resource Capabilities:** Shortage and gaps in the availability of industry-recognised skills – from airline pilots and crew to maintenance and ground handling personnel – constrains the growth of different segments of the sector.
• **Weak MRO sector:** 90% of the Indian MRO work is outsourced to countries like Singapore, Dubai, UAE, Sri Lanka and others.

What are the reforms announced under Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan?
• **Efficient Airspace Management:** Route dispersal guidelines (RDG), mandates airlines to fly a certain percentage of flights in smaller, unprofitable air routes. The government announced that these restrictions on the utilisation of Indian airspace will be eased.
• *Development of MRO Sector:* The convergence between the Defence sector and the civil MROs will be established to bring down the maintenance cost of airlines.
• **Development of more airports** under the PPP model with a view to improve the aviation infrastructure without the government having to pump in additional funds
• **Overall Economic reform measures:** Beneficial measures like extending moratoriums, reducing interest rates, improving liquidity etc. will provide impetus to the economic recovery process, including for the aviation sector.

Challenges ahead:
• **Legacy issues:** Historically heavy operating costs that cannot be borne in the present situation
• **Social Distancing norms:** Stringent protocols to be put in place for air travel which means added costs for aviation industry
• **Outside GST:** Taxation and pricing structure of aviation turbine fuel (ATF) are not aligned to global benchmarks and is still outside the ambit of GST. This prevents the level playing field for the domestic airline industry
• **Inefficient usage of AAI resources:** Vacant real estate near Airports Authority of India (AAI) airports in all major centres can be monetised to increase non-aeronautical revenues.
• **Resolving Air India issues:** Government owned Air India is surviving on bailout packages and thus requires disinvestment

Connecting the dots
• UDAN scheme; National Civil Aviation Policy 2016 and National Civil Aviation programme 2018

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

New National Numbering Plan
Telecommunication; Statutory Bodies

Context
• The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recommended a new National Numbering Plan to be issued so that a uniquely identifiable number can be provided to every subscriber in India.

Key takeaways
TRAI has recommended:
• Switching to a 11-digit mobile number.
• Reallocation of mobile numbering resources surrendered by operators who have shut shops.
• Prefixing zero for all mobile calls made from fixed lines.
• Shifting of SIM-based M2M (machine to machine) connections to the 13-digit numbering series allocated by DoT at the earliest.
• The government should enlist all newly allocated numbering resources for fixed line as well as mobile services every year.
• Automated allocation of numbering resources using number management system software to speed up the process of allocation in an efficient and transparent manner.
• The mobile number should be changed from 10 to 11 digits only if all the efforts to continue with the 10-digit numbering are exhausted.

Presently, adequate availability of numbering resources is threatened because of an increase in the range of services and number of connections, especially in the mobile segment.

Adequate availability of resources is necessary for sustainable growth of the telecommunication services.

Challenges involved in migrating to 11 digits:
• Widespread modifications in the configuration of switches involving cost.
• Inconvenience to the customers in the form of dialing extra digits and updating phone memory.
• More dialing errors
• Unnecessary traffic
• Loss of revenue to service providers.
• Changes will be required in the databases of all services which require telephone numbers for identity like financial banking services, e-commerce, government welfare schemes, etc.

• The Department of Telecommunications administers the numbers for fixed and the mobile networks based on the International Telecommunication Union's Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU-T) Recommendations.
• The management of numbering resources is governed by the National Numbering Plan.

Important value additions

National Numbering Plan (NNP), 2003
• NNP (2003) provides a set of rules and guidelines for the use and assignment of numbers to telephone services delivered over the public networks.
• It also describes the assignment of numbers to international services, trunk service, emergency service, etc.
• The management of numbering resources is governed by the NNP.

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India
• It was established by Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act, 1997 to regulate telecom services, including fixation/revision of tariffs for telecom services.
• It provides a fair and transparent policy environment which promotes a level playing field and facilitates fair competition.
• The TRAI Act was amended to establish a Telecommunications Dispute Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) to take over the adjudicatory and disputes functions from TRAI.

International Telecommunication Union
• It is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies – ICTs.
• It is the oldest among all the 15 specialized agencies of UN.
• It is based in Geneva, Switzerland.
• It is an intergovernmental public-private partnership organization.

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Indian Railways runs First double-stack container train in OHE electrified territory

Infrastructure (Railways)

In news:

• The Indian Railways has created a world record by commissioning the first high rise Over Head Equipment (OHE) and successfully running double-stack containers in the electrified territory on the Western Railway.

• This achievement is a first of its kind in the entire world.

• It will also boost the Green India Mission.

• The operations successfully commenced on June 10 from Palanpur and Botad stations in Gujarat.

Delivery-based natural gas trading platform, Indian Gas Exchange (IGX), launched

Infrastructure (Energy)

In news:

• Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister launched the Indian Gas Exchange (IGX) recently.

Green India mission

• It is one of the missions that come under the umbrella of National Action Plan on Climate Change.

• It was launched in 2014.

• The primary aim is to protect, restore and enhance India's diminishing forest cover

• Ministry of Environment and Forests is the nodal Ministry for the mission.

Some of its objectives are:

• Growth in forest or tree cover to 5 million hectares (mha).

• Increase the quality of forest cover in another 5 million hectares of forest or non-forest lands.

• Increase the quality of degrading moderately dense forests.

• Ecologically restore open forests which are being degraded.

• Grasslands revival – 0.4 million hectares

Key takeaways

• It is the first nationwide online delivery-based natural gas trading platform.

• It is fully automated with a web-based interface.

• It has been incorporated as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Indian Energy Exchange, which is India's energy market platform.

• The trading platform will enable market participants to trade in standardised gas contracts.

• It is expected to facilitate transparent price discovery in natural gas.

• It shall also facilitate the growth of the share of natural gas in India's energy basket.

• It provides hassle-free trading experience to the customers.

• It will allow buyers and sellers of natural gas to trade both in the spot market (financial instruments, such as currencies are traded for immediate delivery) and in the forward market (an over-the-counter marketplace that sets the price of a financial instrument for future delivery).

• The trading of natural gas will be for imported natural gas across three hubs — Dahej and Hazira in Gujarat, and Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh.

• Imported Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) will be regassified and sold to buyers through the exchange.

• The need for buyers and sellers to find each other shall be removed.

• The price of domestically produced natural gas is decided by the government which will not be sold on the gas exchange.

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Pan-India real-time market of electricity launched
Infrastructure; Energy

In news:
• Recently, the government has launched a pan-India real-time market of electricity to enable the buyers and sellers to meet their energy requirement closer to real time of operation.

Key takeaways
• It is an organized market platform which will bring required flexibility to provide real time balance while ensuring optimal utilization of the available surplus capacity in the system.
• Shorter bidding time, faster scheduling, and defined processes will enable the participants to access resources throughout the all India grid, promoting competition.
• The market would open for 30 minutes in a day.
• Buyers and sellers would have the option of placing buy or sell bids for each 15-minute time block.
• It will also help manage diversity in the demand pattern in the country with a market at national level.
• It would help to mitigate challenges of grid management and help to integrate higher amounts of renewable energy (RE) resources into the grid.
• It would provide an alternate mechanism for Discoms to access larger markets at competitive prices.
• It would lead to cost optimization of power purchase and serving the consumers with reliable supply as any last minute requirement of power can easily be bought from the Real Time market.
• Earlier regime of managing the grid by load shedding due to last minute changes will be avoided.

In a nutshell:
• Generators shall have opportunity to sell their surpluses
• Better management of variability of RE generation
• Better utilization of transmission systems
• Opportunity for discoms to buy or sell power
• Consumers shall get reliable power supply

Integrated Flood Warning System (IFLOWS)
Disaster; Science and Technology

In News:
Integrated Flood Warning System - IFLOWS was inaugurated in Mumbai by Union Minister for Earth Sciences and Maharashtra Chief Minister.

Key takeaways
• It is developed by the Union Ministry for Earth Sciences on the request of Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM).
• It is a state-of-art system for Mumbai and is expected to enhance Mumbai's resilience by providing early warning for flooding specially during high rainfall events and cyclones.

It comprises seven modules: Data Assimilation; Flood; Inundation; Vulnerability; Risk; Dissemination Module; Decision Support System.

The system has provisions to capture the urban drainage within the city and predict the areas of flooding, which will be incorporated in the final system.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Bodoland University develops fungal powder to boost immunity
Biotechnology

In news:
• Bodoland University has said that it has developed a fungal powder to help people boost their immunity to disease.
• The powder is from a parasitic but rare "super mushroom" called Cordyceps militaris.
• A potent pinch of C. militaris was powdered through lyophilisation or freeze-drying at – 80°C.

Cordyceps
• The earth has more than 400 species of Cordyceps.
• It is a fungus parasitic on insects as well as other fungi.
• It is often referred to as a super mushroom.
• It is known for its anti-ageing, anti-viral, energy and immunity-boosting effect.
• Cordyceps militaris is spread throughout the northern hemisphere.

List of 8 therapies being used in Indian hospitals for fighting COVID:

Remdesivir	• Antiviral drug • Used in treating Ebola in 2014 • Inhibits viral replication in the body
Favipiravir	• Antiviral • Used as an anti-influenza drug.
Tocilizumab	Immunosuppressant commonly used to treat rheumatoid arthritis.
Itolizumab	Commonly used for the skin disorder psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, and autoimmune disorders.
Hydroxychloroquine	• Antimalarial drug • India is the largest producer
Doxycycline + ivermectin	• Doxycycline - Antibiotic used to fight infection in the urinary tract, eye, or respiratory tract. • Ivermectin - Anti-parasite drug for treatment of scabies, head lice, and filariasis. • Used to treat Covid patients with acute symptoms
Ritonavir + lopinavir	Antivirals commonly used to treat HIV patients.
Plasma therapy	Meant for critical patients with low oxygen saturation levels, or those suffering a cytokine storm.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Fusarium wilt TR4: Banana
Agriculture; Biotechnology

In news:
• Fusarium wilt TR4, a novel fungus strain, has devastated banana plantations across the globe.
• Its new hotspots have been found in India too which is threatening output.

Key takeaways
• The strain, Tropical Race 4 (TR4), was first identified in Taiwan.
• It cripples plantations by first attacking the leaves, which turn yellow from their trailing edges before wilting away.
• There is no effective remedy yet.
• According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), TR4 is one of the most destructive of all plant diseases.
• It has infected the most commonly sold variety: Grand Nain (musa acuminata), a curvy yellow fruit.
• Scientists recommend biosecurity measures such as plant quarantine, bio priming to slow its spread.
• In India, hotspots have been found in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.
• Inability to contain TR4 could jolt farm incomes and push up banana prices.
• It has already jeopardised the $26 billion global banana trade.
• The Indian Council of Agricultural Research has asked farmers to abandon farms whose plantations have been affected .
• They must grow rice for a year or two before returning to growing bananas. That way the chain gets broken.

Important value additions

Fusarium wilt
• It is a common vascular wilt fungal disease.
• It is caused by Fusarium oxysporum.
• Hosts: Tomato, tobacco, legumes, cucurbits, sweet potatoes and banana
• It is not new.
• It entirely wiped out Gros Michel, the dominant export variety of bananas in 1950s.
• It was in response to this that a new resistant variety, Grand Nain, came up.

Bio-priming
• It is a new technique of seed treatment that integrates biological (inoculation of seed with beneficial organism to protect seed) and physiological aspects (seed hydration) of disease control.
• It is used as an alternative method for controlling many seed-borne and soil-borne pathogens.

Bananas
• India is the world's largest producer of bananas.
• It is the world's most globally exported fruit, according to the FAO.
• It is a tropical crop.
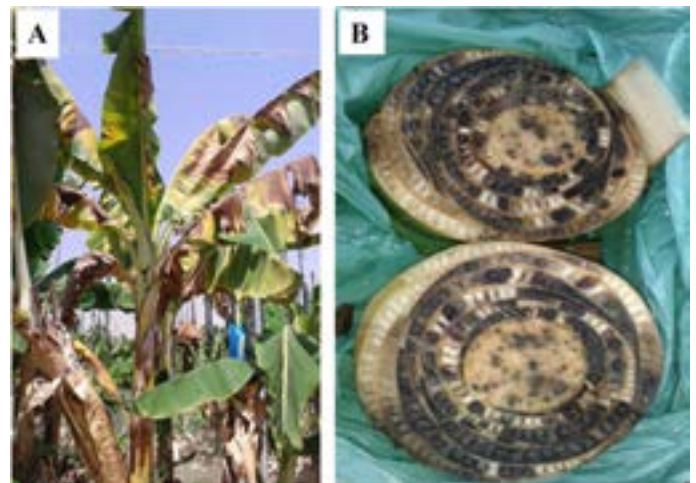
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Measures taken to facilitate research work in Recombinant DNA Technology
Biotechnology

In News:

• The Department of Biotechnology has taken several measures to streamline the biosafety regulation and to facilitate researchers and industries which are undertaking research and development in Recombinant DNA Technology and Hazardous Microorganisms.

Key takeaways

Operationalization of Indian Biosafety Knowledge Portal:

• Launched in May, 2019, it is now made fully operationalised.
• All new applications are being received through online portal only.
• The whole process has become transparent and time bound.

Notification of Revised Simplified Guidelines on Import, Export and Exchange of GE Organisms and Product Thereof for R&D Purpose:

• The Revised Guidelines were issued in January, 2020.
• Institutional Biosafety Committee have been given authority to take decisions on applications of import, export and exchange of GE organisms and products.

Facilitation of Research and Development on COVID-19:

• The Department has proactively taken several steps to facilitate researchers and industries involved in research on COVID19.
• Rapid Response Regulatory Framework for COVID-19 to deal with application for development of vaccines, diagnostics, prophylactics and therapeutics.
• Interim Guidance Document on Laboratory Biosafety to Handle COVID-19 Specimens has also been notified.
• Rapid response regulatory framework for development of recombinant DNA COVID 19 vaccine has also been issued.

Important value additions

Biosafety

• It refers to policies and procedures adopted to avoid risk to human health and safety and to the conservation of the environment as a result of the use of GMOs for research and trade.

Recombinant DNA Technology

• It is a technology used for producing artificial DNA through the combination of different genetic materials (DNA) from different sources.

Application

• Gene therapy: It is used as an attempt to correct the gene defects which give rise to hereditary diseases.
• Clinical diagnosis
• It is used in carrying out Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA) test. The test detects and measures antibodies in blood.
• It is used in the production of Insulin.
• It is used to produce genetically-modified organisms such as Flavr Savr tomatoes.
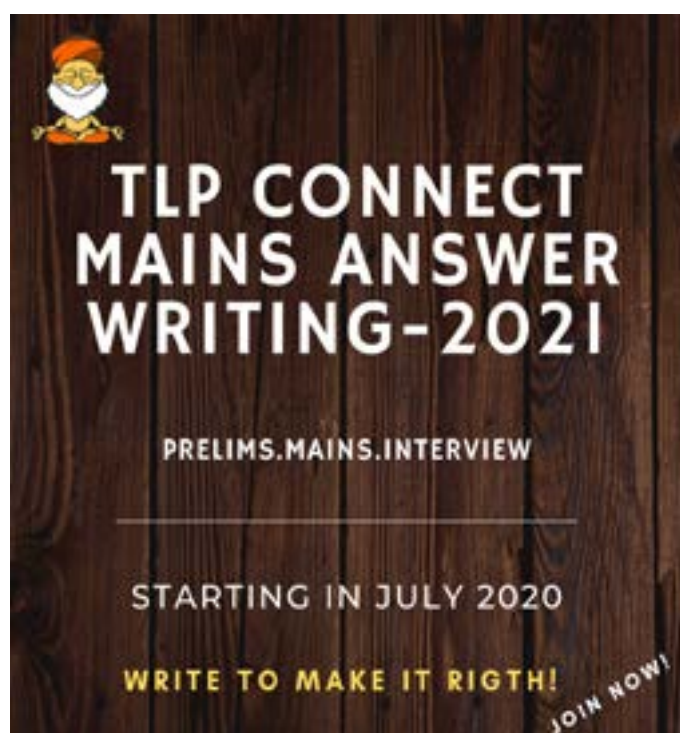
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

SpaceX-NASA Dragon
Space

About:
• Recently, NASA astronauts, Robert Behnken and Douglas Hurley, flew onboard a spaceship named Crew Dragon built by SpaceX, a private company.
• The rocket - Falcon 9, which carried the spaceship into the orbit, was also built by SpaceX.
• SpaceX became the first private company to launch people (human spaceflight) into orbit.
• So far, this feat was achieved only by the US, Russia & China.

Crew Dragon
• It is a part of the Dragon 2, a class of reusable spacecraft developed and manufactured by American aerospace manufacturer SpaceX.
• It is the fifth class of US spacecraft to take human beings into orbit, after the Mercury, Gemini, Apollo and Space Shuttle programs.
• It is done under the Demo-2 Mission of NASA and SpaceX.
• Contribution of such private companies is not much significant in India.

A brief Background
• NASA's Space Shuttle mission was decommissioned in 2011
• Since then NASA has relied on the Russian space agency Roscosmos for ferrying astronauts to ISS.
• NASA was no longer interested in performing routine jobs like ferrying people to orbit as it wanted to reserve budgets for increasing R& and space exploration.
• Also, NASA wanted Private players (like SpaceX) to take up this role but it took nearly 9 years to do this

Impact of Crew Dragon' success
• **Reduced Russian Dominance:** Over the last nine years, there have been some 40 successful launches of Russian Soyuz spacecraft with US astronauts on board. But, now the Moscow's monopoly on crew transport has ended.
• **Emboldened US:** President Donald Trump has pledged that US astronauts will return to the moon in 2024 to stay, and make a launch base for Mars.

Impact of Crew Dragon' success
• **Speeds up Mars Mission:** The US has also stated that it would put the first woman on the moon, and the first astronauts on Mars.
• **Fire up US- Russia Space Travel competition:** Trump's competitive America-first rhetoric is of Cold War vintage, when winning the space race was a matter of superpower prestige
• **Enhances Private Partnership:** An era of public-private partnerships in space is beginning, where the sector will also be driven by profits rather than mere National prestige.
• **Opens up Space Market:** Rapid mass commercial aviation at the edge of space would probably be the most lucrative segment in the future
• **National Cooperation:** The biggest achievement of the ISS program could be lost: the "invaluable experience of cooperation." A return to nations going it alone in outer space would be a step backward for international collaboration
• **Reduced Cost:** The entry of private sector has begun to drive down the cost-per-launch through innovations such as reusable rockets. For a trip to the ISS and back Roscosmos had increased its fees from $21 million to nearly $90 million in 2020

Conclusion

The Crew Dragon has broken a psychological barrier, but aversion to risk would probably keep private capital (especially in post-COVD world) to a secondary or supporting role in space.

Connecting the dots
• Gaganyan Mission of India
• India needs reforms in Space sector

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

# 'Responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Youth' program launched
Artificial Intelligence

In News:

• Recently, the Ministry of Electronics and IT has launched a National Program for the youth - Responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Youth.

• The government has also launched India's National Artificial Intelligence Portal.

Key takeaways

• It is designed to reach out to students from Government schools pan India and provide them with an opportunity to become part of the skilled workforce in an inclusive manner.

• It aims to help reduce the skill gap, while enabling youth to create meaningful social impact solutions.

• It also intends to provide a platform for relevant AI skill-sets and access to required AI tool-sets to make youth digitally ready for the future.

• It is open to students of class 8th to class 12th from Central and State government-run schools (including KVS, NVS, JNV) from across the country.

• It will be implemented in a phase-wise manner.

• In its first phase, each State will nominate 10 teachers as per the eligibility criteria.
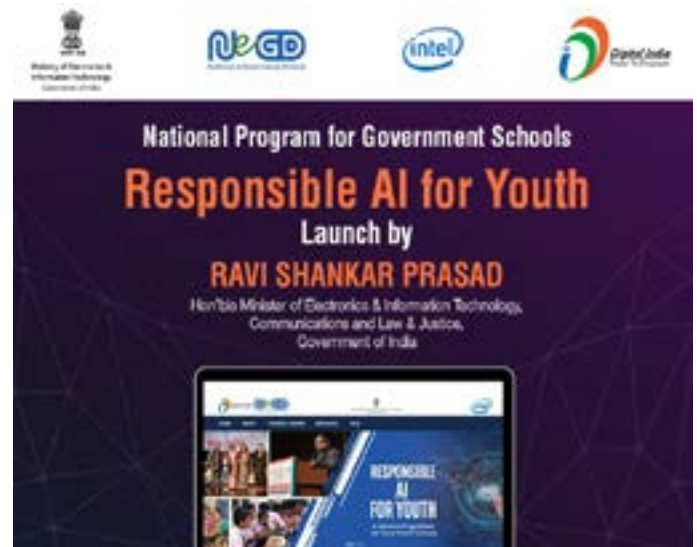
Important value additions

National Artificial Intelligence Portal

• It has been jointly developed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM).

• It will work as a one stop digital platform for sharing of resources such as articles, startups, investment funds in AI etc.

Prehistoric settlements discovered via LiDAR
Science and technology

In news:

• U.K.-based archaeologists have discovered Roman large embanked settlement enclosures in Tamar Valley, England by analysing images derived from Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data.

Two types of LiDAR are:

1. Topographic typically uses a near-infrared laser to map the land
2. Bathymetric uses water-penetrating green light to measure seafloor and riverbed elevations.

Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR)

• It is a remote sensing method that uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure ranges (variable distances) to the Earth.

• These light pulses, when combined with other data recorded by the airborne system, generate precise, 3-D information about the shape of the Earth and its surface characteristics.

• A LiDAR instrument principally consists of a laser, a scanner, and a specialized GPS receiver.

• Airplanes and helicopters are the most commonly used platforms for acquiring the data.

• It can be used to examine both natural and manmade environments with accuracy, precision, and flexibility.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Formulation of National Science Technology and Innovation Policy initiated
Innovation

About:
• Recently, the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser (Office of PSA) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST) have jointly initiated the formulation of a new national Science Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP 2020).

Key takeaways
• It will be the 5th STIP of India.
• It will integrate the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic including the building of an Atmanirbhar Bharat by taking advantage of India's strengths in research and development, science and technology, huge markets, demographic dividend and data.
• The STIP 2020 formulation process will be six-months long.

It has been organised into 4 highly interlinked tracks:
1. Track I: It involves an extensive public and expert consultation process through Science Policy Forum.
2. Track II: It comprises experts-driven consultations to formulate recommendations for the policy.
3. Track III: It involves extensive intra-state and intra-department consultation with Ministries and States.
4. Track IV: It constitutes an apex level multi-stakeholder consultation.

Important value additions

Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser
• It was set-up in November 1999 by the Cabinet Secretariat.

Objectives:
• To evolve policies, strategies and missions for the generation of innovations and support systems for multiple applications.
• To generate science and technology tasks in critical infrastructure, economic and social sectors.
• To function as the Secretariat to the Scientific Advisory Committee to the Cabinet.
• The Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) is an overarching council that facilitates the PSA's office.

CAPTAIN ARJUN
Artificial Intelligence; Indigenisation

In news:
• Railway Protection Force, Pune, under the Central Railways, has launched a Robotic 'CAPTAIN ARJUN' (Always be Responsible and Just Use to be Nice) to intensify the screening and surveillance.

Key takeaways
• This Robot is launched to screen passengers while they board trains and keep a watch on anti-social elements.
• It can be deployed for multiple uses and it is an effective element in station access control and will augment the station security plan.
• It is equipped with a motion sensor, one PTZ camera and one Dome Camera.
• The Cameras use Artificial Intelligence algorithms to track suspicious and antisocial activity.
• It does thermal screening and records the temperature in a digital display panel.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Tiny flashes of radio light emanating from the sun discovered
Space

In News:
• A group of scientists working at the Pune-based National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA) have recently discovered tiny flashes of radio light emanating from all over the sun.
• These flashes could help in explaining the long-pending coronal heating problem.

Important value additions

Coronal heating problem
• The solar corona is the outer layer of the Sun's atmosphere.
• It is composed of extremely high temperature gas, known as plasma
• Its temperature could reach upto millions of degrees Celsius.
• It is farthest from the core where the nuclear reactions powering the Sun occur.
• It would logically be expected to be the coolest part of the Sun.
• However, corona is 200 times hotter than the photosphere which is the layer beneath it.
• This contradiction is dubbed as the coronal heating problem.
• It has puzzled astrophysicists ever since the temperature of the corona was first measured over 70 years ago.

Lunar Polar Exploration (LPE) Mission
Space

In news:
• Japan and India will be launching a joint lunar mission called the Lunar Polar Exploration (LPE).

Key takeaways
• The mission aims to put a lander and rover on Moon's surface.
• The mission will be launched after 2023.
• Japanese space agency JAXA would be building the overall landing module and the rover, while ISRO would develop the lander system.
• It will be launched from Japan, and the designated launch vehicle is the H3 rocket.
• The mission intends to obtain data on the quantity and forms of water resources present, in order to determine the feasibility of utilizing such resources for sustainable space exploration activities in the future.

Joint Science Communication Forum

About:
• The Department of Science & Technology (DST) has constituted a joint Science Communication Forum to facilitate interaction and coordination amongst various public sector science communication institutions and agencies.

It is represented by senior officials from various central ministries and departments which include:

- Agriculture
- Health
- Culture
- Defense
- Space
- Atomic Energy
- Information & Broadcasting
- Science & Technology

The Forum would be served by a Secretariat at the National Council for Science & Technology Communication (NCSTC), Department of Science & Technology.

It brings together science communication efforts spread across various institutions and can help adoption of a common policy and best practices at a wider scale.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

NASA's Gateway Lunar Orbiting Outpost
Space

In News:
• NASA recently finalised the contract for the initial crew module of the agency's Gateway lunar orbiting outpost.
• NASA has issued this contract to design the habitation and logistics (HALO) support for the Gateway.

Important value additions

Gateway lunar orbiting outpost
• It is a part of NASA's Artemis program.
• The Gateway is a small spaceship that will orbit the Moon.
• It is meant for astronaut missions to the Moon and for expeditions to Mars.
• It will act as a temporary office for astronauts, distanced at about 250,000 miles from Earth.
• It will have living quarters, laboratories for science and research and docking ports for visiting spacecraft.
• Astronauts will use the Gateway at least once per year and not stay around the year like they do on the International Space Station (ISS).
• Compared to the ISS, the Gateway is much smaller,
• NASA has targeted the completion of the Gateway for 2026, while work on the spaceship is already underway.
• By 2022, NASA plans to ready the power and propulsion for the spaceship, which will be launched on a partner-provided commercial rocket.

Artemis program
• It is an on-going government-funded crewed spaceflight program of USA.
• It has the goal of landing the first woman and the next man on the Moon, specifically at the lunar South Pole region by 2024.
• The program is carried out by - NASA; ESA; JAXA; CSA; ASA
• It is expected to advance Artemis as the next step towards the long-term goal of establishing a sustainable presence on the Moon and eventually sending humans to Mars.

5th state of matter observed in space
Space

In news:
• The fifth state of matter has been observed by the scientists for the first time in space.
• A team of NASA Scientists recently unveiled the first results from Bose-Einstein condensates (BEC) experiments aboard the International Space Station (ISS).
• In space, the particles are free from manipulation from any of the Earthly constraints.
• This observation has offered unprecedented insight that can help in solving some of the quantum universe's most difficult questions.

Key takeaways

A breakthrough of 'Fifth State of Matter'
• Creating a fifth state of matter within the physical confines of a space station is no easy task.
• First bosons, the atoms that have an equal number of protons and electrons, are cooled to absolute zero with the use of lasers to clamp them in space.
• The slower the atoms move around, the cooler they become.
• As the atoms lose heat, the magnetic field is introduced to keep them from moving and each particle's waves expand.
• Cramming plenty of bosons into a microscopic 'trap' causes their waves to overlap into a single matter-wave; this property is known as quantum degeneracy.
• The magnetic trap is released for the scientists to study the condensate.
• However, the atoms begin to repel each other which cause the cloud to fly apart and BEC becomes dilute to detect.
• The microgravity aboard ISS has allowed them to create BECs from rubidium on a far shallower trap than on Earth.
• This gave the vastly increased time to study the condensate before diffusing.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Important value additions

Bose-Einstein Condensates (BEC)

• BEC are formed when the atoms of certain elements are cooled to near absolute zero (0 K or -273.15°C).

• At this point, atoms become a single entity with quantum property, whereas each particle also functions as a wave of matter.

• Scientists have believed that BECs contain vital clues to mysterious phenomena such as dark energy which is unknown energy thought to be behind the Universe's accelerating expansion.

• These are extremely fragile and the slightest interaction with the external world is enough to warm them past their condensation threshold.

• Because of this condition, it becomes nearly impossible for scientists to study BECs on Earth as gravity interferes with the magnetic field required to hold them in place for observation.

• BECs in terrestrial lab generally last a handful of milliseconds before dissipating while aboard ISS, those lasted more than a second.

Studying BECs in microgravity has opened up a host of opportunities.

• Applications range from:
• Studying gravitational waves
• Spacecraft navigation
• Searches for dark energy
• Tests of general relativity
• Prospecting for subsurface minerals on the moon and other planetary bodies

The existence of Bose-Einstein condensates (BEC) was predicted by an Indian mathematician Satyendra Nath Bose and Albert Einstein almost a century ago.

Rubidium

• It is a chemical element with the symbol Rb and atomic number 37.

• It is a very soft, silvery-white metal in the alkali metal group.

• It cannot be stored under atmospheric oxygen, as a highly exothermic reaction will ensue, sometimes even resulting in the metal catching fire.

• It is used in fireworks to give them a purple color.

• It has also been considered for use in a thermoelectric generator.

• Vaporized 87Rb is one of the most commonly used atomic species employed for laser cooling and Bose–Einstein condensation.

India joins GPAI
Artificial Intelligence

In news:

• India joined the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI or Gee-Pay) as a founding member to support the responsible and human-centric development and use of Artificial intelligence (AI).

Important value additions

Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence

• It is an international and multi-stakeholder initiative to guide the responsible development and use of AI taking into account human rights, inclusion, diversity, innovation, and economic growth.

• This is also a first initiative of its type which involves better understanding of the challenges and opportunities around AI using the experience and diversity of participating countries.

• It will be supported by a Secretariat.

• It will be hosted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris, as well as by two Centers of Expertise- one each in Montreal and Paris.

Other countries who are part of this initiative other than India are:
• USA
• UK
• EU
• Australia
• Canada
• France
• Germany
• Italy
• Japan
• Mexico
• New Zealand
• Republic of Korea
• Singapore

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

IN-SPACe
Space

In News:
• Union Cabinet approves the creation of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe)
• IN-SPACe will provide a level playing field for private companies to use Indian space infrastructure.
• IN-SPACe will also hand-hold, promote and guide the private industries in space activities through encouraging policies and a friendly regulatory environment.

Important value additions

About New Space India Ltd.
• It is the Department of Space's second commercial arm (after Antrix) that was announced in Budget 2019.
• Its objective is to use research and development carried out by ISRO over the years for commercial purposes through Indian industry partners.
• One of the mandates of NSIL aims to mass-produce and manufacture the SSLV and the more powerful PSLV in partnership with the private sector in India through technology transfers.
• NSIL will dal with capacity building of local industry for space manufacturing.

Do you know?
• Until now, ISRO dealt with regulation and promotion of building of routine satellites, rockets and commercial launch services.
• In future, IN-SPACe will deal with such activities. It will function autonomously and parallel to ISRO.
• IN-SPACe will have its own directorates for technical, legal, safety and security, monitoring and activities promotion.
• NSIL will also be strenghtened and empowered with a larger role to work with IN-SPACe and enable it to take on some of the activities of ISRO.
• This restructuring will allow ISRO to allocate more time and resources for R&D endeavours.

IN-SPACe: Growing private role
Space

Context
• The government has approved the creation of a new organisation called Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe), which is expected to be functional within six months

About IN-SPACe
• IN-SPACE will be a separate vertical within the Department of Space (DoS) that will make independent decisions for permitting and regulating activities of the private sector.
• It will have its own legal, technological, activity promotion and monitoring directorates and its Board will comprise members from the private industry, academia and government of India
• It will act as a national nodal agency for hand-holding and promoting private industry in the space sector and will even help private players build facilities within DoS premises

Why private participants?
• It is not that there is no private industry involvement in India's space sector. In fact, a large part of manufacturing and fabrication of rockets and satellites now happens in the private sector
• However, Indian industries' role has been mainly that of suppliers of components and sub-systems while there is huge scope for participation in satellite-based services, and ground-based systems.
• Indian industry had a barely 3% share in a rapidly growing global space economy ($360 billion). There were several Indian companies waiting for make use of these opportunities but the policy environment in India was supportive of private players
• Additionally, the demand for space-based applications and services is growing even within India, and ISRO is unable to cater to this.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Significance of the creation of IN-SPACe:

Facilitator and regulator: IN-SPACe will act as an interface between ISRO and private parties, and assess how best to utilise India's space resources and increase space-based activities.

Fair Competition: IN-SPACe will provide a level playing field for private companies to use Indian space infrastructure.

Better utilisation of space resources: Existing ISRO infrastructure, both ground- and space-based, scientific and technical resources, and even data are planned to be made accessible to interested parties to enable them to carry out their space-related activities.

Strategic benefits: ISRO, like NASA, is essentially a scientific organisation whose main objective is exploration of space and carrying out scientific missions. The private industry will also free up ISRO to concentrate on science, R&D, interplanetary exploration and strategic launches.

Widening the horizon of Private participation: IN-SPACe will promote private players in end-to-end space services, including building and launching rockets and satellites and providing space-based services commercially.

Reorients space activities: IN-SPACe will reorient space sector from a 'supply-driven' model to a 'demand-driven' one, thereby ensuring optimum utilization of the nation's space assets.

Leveraging the potential of Young Country: So far only ISRO was doing all space related activities. Opening up of the space sector means the potential of the entire country can be leveraged

Boost to Space Start-ups: This will not only result in an accelerated growth of the sector but also enable India to generate large scale employment in the technology sector.

Additional revenue: ISRO can earn some money by making its facilities and data available to private players

Way Ahead

Need for new navigation policies: India has the SatCom policy and Remote Sensing Data Policy (RSDP) but they need suitable modifications for the purpose of IN-SPACe to perform its duty in an effective manner

Changes needed in New Space India Limited (NSIL): It needs to be recalibrated to transform its approach of a supply-driven model to being a demand-driven model for space-based services

Enhancing ease of doing space business: Space activities are multi-layered projects which involve a lot of intricacies across domains, such as gaining access to frequencies, licensing of satellites for operation, ability to export products, imagery

Value Addition

• The SatCom policy dictates the use of Indian National Satellite (INSAT) system's capacity by non-governmental agencies, the establishment and operation of Indian Satellite Systems and the use of foreign satellites for SatCom Services
• India's Remote Sensing Data Policy (RSDP) is for the acquisition and distribution of remote sensing satellite data — from Indian and foreign satellites — for civilian users in India

Connecting the dots

• UN Outer Space Treaty
• Gaganyaan Mission of ISRO

INDIA'S TRYST WITH ITS MAN IN SPACE

April 2, 1984: Rakesh Sharma becomes the first and only Indian citizen to travel in space

2007 - First proposals for ISRO's manned space mission

2008 - India and Russia sign MoU for manned space mission; plan abandoned in 2010

Dec 2014 - Experimental flight of the manned mission launcher - GSLV Mk-III - tested

2016 - Then director of Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, K Sivan announced 'Pad abort' test for the mission capsule

2017 - Initial estimates of the successful manned space mission

July 2018 - Pad abort test conducted successfully in Sriharikota

2022 - PM Narendra Modi's new target for manned space mission

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Letter of Intent signed between CSIR and AIM
Innovation

In news:
• Recently, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) have signed a Letter of Intent (LOI) to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in various sectors.

Key takeaways

Major areas of mutual interest include:
• Supporting world class start-ups through CSIR Incubators under Atal Innovation mission initiatives.
• Working together on new models of innovation including setting up of CSIR Innovation Parks.
• Stimulating innovation and research in the MSME industry by CSIR in collaboration with ARISE initiative of AIM.
• Creating problem solving mind-set across schools in India through close cooperation between Atal Tinkering Labs and CSIRs ´JIGYASA' - a Student-Scientist connect program through which more than 3 lakhs students across the country have been exposed to science and technology.

Important value additions

Atal Innovation Mission
• It is Government of India's flagship initiative to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.

AIM's objectives are:
• To develop new programmes and policies for fostering innovation in different sectors of the economy.
• To provide platform and collaboration opportunities for different stakeholders.
• To create awareness.
• To create an umbrella structure to oversee innovation ecosystem of the country.

Five major initiatives:
• **Atal Tinkering Labs**-Creating problem solving mindset across schools in India.
• **Atal Incubation Centers-F**ostering world class startups and adding a new dimension to the incubator model.
• **Atal New India Challenges**-Fostering product innovations and aligning them to the needs of various sectors/ministeries.
• **Mentor India Campaign**- A national Mentor network in collaboration with public sector, corporates and institutions, to support all the intiatives of the mission.
• **Atal Community Innovation Center**- To stimulate community centric innovation and ideas in the unserved /underserved regions of the country including Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities.
• **ARISE**-To stimulate innovation and research in the MSME industry.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Locust Attack

What are locusts?
• The desert locust (Schistocerca gregaria) is a short-horned grasshopper.
• They differ from ordinary grasshoppers in their ability to change behaviour (gregarize) and form swarms that can migrate over large distances.
• They can rapidly reproduce and increase some 20-fold in three months.
• The normal locust season in India spans June-November and coincides with the kharif season.

Do you know?

• There were serious outbreaks in 1812, 1821, 1843-44, 1863-67, 1869-73, 1876-81, 1889-98, 1900-1907, 1912-1920
• The last major upsurge in India occurred in 1993

Climate factor
• A pattern of warming in the Indian Ocean (Indian Ocean Dipole) may be a trigger.
• Rainfall (especially torrential) in several parts of West Asia, Oman, Yemen and in the Horn of Africa — Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya — facilitates the formation of several locust swarms.
• Due to favourable winds, it helped swarms to fly and breed in traditional grounds in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.
• The unusually mild summer in 2020, which saw several bouts of rainfall over north and western India from March to May, also helped the insects breed.
• Strong Indian Ocean Dipoles are expected to become more frequent due to global warming of oceans which means regular locust attacks.

How to deal with locust invasions?
• By spraying pest control and plant protection chemicals.
• Going forward, there has to be increased focus on natural disasters such as cyclones as well as locust attacks.
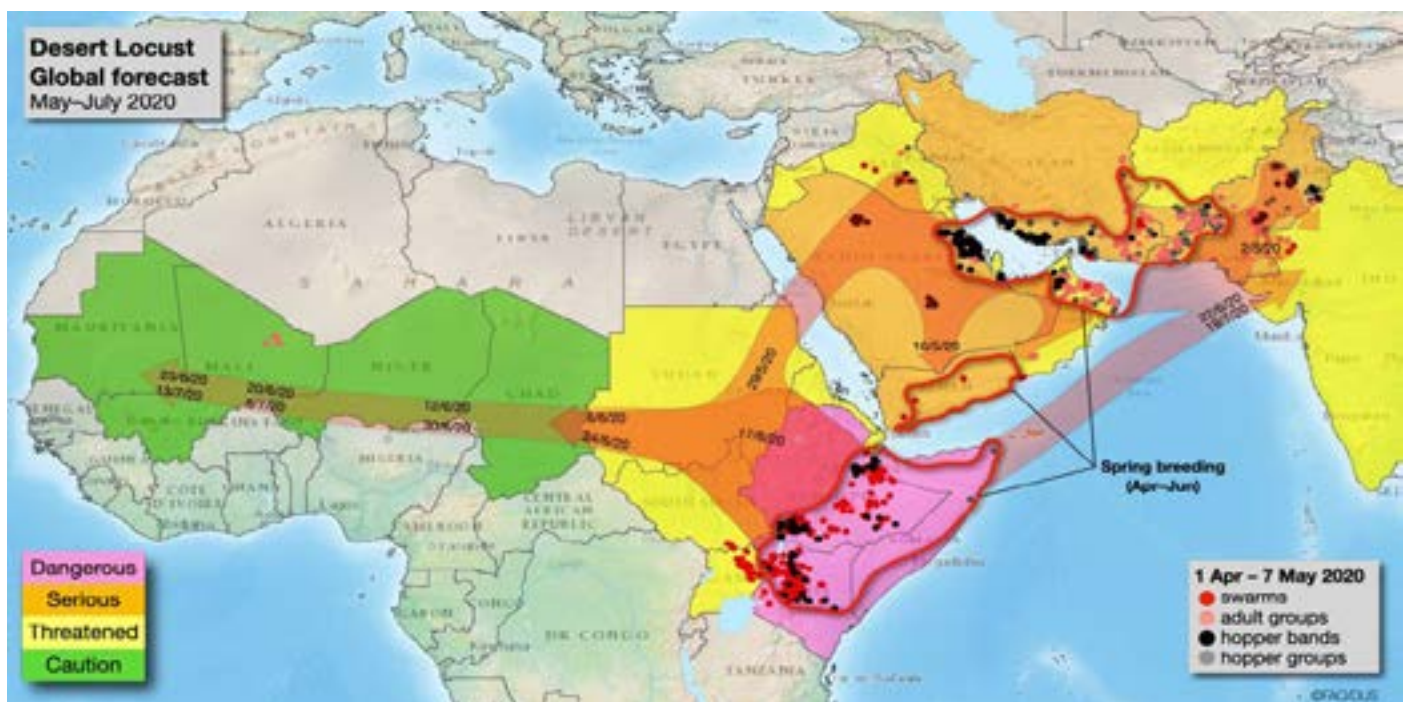
Operation Samudra Setu
Disaster Management

In news:
Operation Samudra Setu aims to repatriate citizens stuck abroad due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
• Amphibious vessel INS Airavat to bring back 198 passengers from Maldives.
• Earlier, INS Jalashwa and INS Magarhad evacuated 2,874 individuals from the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

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DEFENCE

Malabar exercise

About:
• It is an annual trilateral naval exercise between the navies of India, Japan, and the USA.
• It is held alternately in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
• It began as a bilateral naval exercise between India and the USA in 1992 and was expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan in 2015.
• India is prepared to expand the Malabar exercise to also include Australia now.
• Other exercises between India and Australia are Pitch Black and AUSINDEX.

USA's THAAD missile defence system

About:
• THAAD = Transportable, ground-based missile defence system.
• It is coupled with space-based and ground-based surveillance stations.
• These stations transfer data about the incoming missile and inform the THAAD interceptor missile of the threat type classification.
• It has been designed and manufactured by the US company Lockheed Martin.
• It has been deployed in South Korea, UAE, Guam, Israel and Romania.

Do you know?
• In South Korea, it is operated by the US army stationed in its army base in Osan, South Korea.
• Recently, China objected to the presence of the USA's THAAD missile defence system in South Korea.
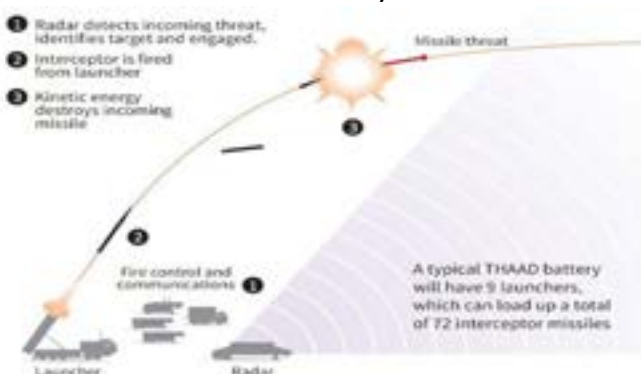
Anonymous: cyberattack in USA

In news:
• The 'hacktivist' group Anonymous has been accused of carrying out a cyberattack on the websites of Minneapolis city and its police department.
• The attack made the websites temporarily inaccessible.

Anonymous
• It is a decentralised online collective with no particular political affiliation.
• It protests against causes such as opposing censorship and government control and promoting freedom of speech.
• It also supported the Occupy movement and Julian Assange's WikiLeaks.
• It is believed to include anyone who wants to join.
• Its members are referred to as 'anons'.
• A signature characteristic of Anonymous is the Guy Fawkes mask, portrayed in the dystopian novel and film 'V for Vendetta'.

Cyber Attacks tactics used by Anonymous:
• **Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks:** hackers swamp a website's server with data that causes it to crash, making the website inaccessible.
• **Defacement:** the target website's pages are replaced with the hacktivists' messages and graphics.
• **Redirection:** a change in the chosen website's address causes its users to be redirected to another page.
• **Doxing:** private or sensitive information is stolen,
• **Destroying** data using computer viruses
• **Phishing** is used for extracting personal data.

India-Russia: Defence Deals
Outcomes of Defence Minister visit to Russia for the 75th anniversary of the Victory Day Parade

• Russia agrees to quickly address some urgent defence requirements sought by India.
• The long-pending deals and over-pricing for AK-203 assault rifles and Ka-226T light utility helicopters were discussed.
• S-400 deal deliveries would start by the end of 2021.
• Delays and over-pricing due to transfer of technology and conditions of jointly manufacturing some percentage of weapons indigenously.

AIPTS-2020

All India Prelims Test Series (ENGLISH/HINDI)

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MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
1. UMANG Mobile App	**Key pointers:** • UMANG = Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance • Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) added Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) weather services to the Umang Mobile App. • It is a Digital India initiative of the MeitY launched in 2017. • It integrates government services such as Aadhaar and DigiLocker
2. Global Economic Prospects (GEP)	**Global Economic Prospects (GEP)** • The World Bank recently released its Global Economic Prospects (GEP) June 2020 report. • According to the report, the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to have "severe" short and long-term effects on economic growth. • Current estimates show that 60 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty in 2020. These numbers are likely to increase. • EMDEs (Emerging Market and Developing Economies) are especially vulnerable. • These countries are expected to have a 3-8% output loss in the short term. • The report is the semi-annual flagship publication on the state of the world economy.
3. Missile Park "AGNEEPRASTHA"	**About:** • Foundation Stone for a Missile Park "AGNEEPRASTHA" was laid at INS Kalinga, Visakhapatnam. • It will be dedicated to all the Officers, Sailors and Support Staff of INS Kalinga. • It aims to capture glimpses of Missile History of INS Kalinga since 1981 till date. • The main attraction is P-70 'Ametist', an underwater launched anti-ship missile from the arsenal of the old 'Chakra' (Charlie-1 submarine) which was in service during 1988-91.
4. Rozgar Setu scheme	**About** • It is a scheme launched by Madhya Pradesh government. • It would help secure employment for skilled workers who have returned to their homes due to COVID-19 pandemic. • Skilled workers shall be surveyed who were employed at industries. • After the survey, the government will contact factory and workshop owners and contractors overseeing infrastructure projects such as road and bridge construction so that these workers could be employed.
5. World Environment Day	**About** • It is celebrated on 5th June every year. • This year's theme is 'Biodiversity'. • In India, Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change held virtual celebrations on this year's theme with focus on Nagar Van (Urban Forests). • It relaunched a scheme for creating urban forest in 200 corporations and cities because all these cities have gardens but not forests. • The urban forests will help in reducing pollution in these cities.

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
6. National Career Service Project	**About:** • The Ministry of Labour and Employment has started offering free online career skills training through its National Career Service (NCS) project for job-seekers registered with it. • The training will assist the learners in enhancing personality development. • The training module is available in Hindi and English on the NCS portal. • National Career Service (NCS) project is a Five Year Mission Mode Project launched by the Prime Minister in 2015. • It provides a wide array of employment and career related services to the citizens of India. • It is implemented by Directorate General of Employment, Ministry of Labour & Employment. • No fees are charged for the registration. • About 1 crore job seekers and 54,000 employers are registered on the portal.
7. Aditya: India's first solar-powered ferry	**About** • India's first solar-powered ferry, Aditya, which runs on the Vaikom-Thavanakadavu route in Kerala, has been shortlisted for the Gustave Trouvé Award. • It is the sole entrant from Asia. • Gussies Electric Boat Awards were instituted in memory of Gustave Trouvé, a French electrical engineer and pioneer in electric cars and boats.
8. Airborne Rescue POD for Isolated Transportation (ARPIT)	**About:** • It is designed, developed and manufactured by The Indian Air Force. • It utilises High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) H-13 class filters and supports ventilation using Transport Ventilator. • This pod will be utilised for evacuation of critical patients with infectious diseases including COVID-19 from high altitude areas, isolated and remote places.
9. COVID BEEP	**COVID BEEP (Continuous Oxygenation & Vital Information Detection Biomed ECIL ESIC Pod)** • It is India's first indigenous, cost effective, wireless physiological parameters monitoring system for COVID-19 patients. • The latest version of COVID BEEP has incorporated NIBP (non-invasive blood pressure) monitoring, ECG (electrocardiogram) monitoring and the respiratory rate.
10. Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab	**About** • It is a medical device with stringent specifications of quality, polymer grade, dimensions and sterilization. • It consists of a cylindrical plastic stick with a brush-like tip of synthetic bristles/flocks.
11. Prevention of Human and Animal Mortality on Highways	**About:** • Union Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways recently launched the UNDP national awareness campaign on 'Prevention of Human and Animal Mortality on Highways'. • It aims at generating awareness and education for the masses towards reducing or eliminating mortality on the roads.

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
12. Jaya Jaitly Task Force	**About:** • It is a task force constituted by The Women and Child Development Ministry. • The taskforce will be headed by former Samata Party President Jaya Jaitly. • Report is expected to be submitted in July. It shall examine the issues related to: • Infant Mortality Rate • Maternal Mortality Rate • Total Fertility Rate • Sex Ratio at Birth • Child Sex Ratio (CSR) • Any other issues related to health and nutrition
13. iCommit	**About:** • The Union Ministry of Power recently launched the 'iCommit' initiative on the occasion of World Environment Day. The initiative is a call to all stakeholders and individuals to continue moving towards: • Energy efficiency • Renewable energy • Sustainability to create a robust and resilient energy system in the future. The 'iCommit' initiative is driven by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL). It will also promote key undertakings of Government of India such as National Electric Mobility Mission 2020, FAME 1 and 2, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana etc.
14. KOI-456.04: new exoplanet-star pair found	**About:** • Scientists have found a new exoplanet-star pair having resemblance to the Sun-Earth system. • The Planet candidate, KOI-456.04 is similar to the Earth in size and orbit. • It belongs to the system of the Kepler 160, a sun-like star, which is believed to have three planets in its system.
15. Ananya	• Defence Institute of Advanced Technology (DIAT), a Deemed University, Pune has developed a Nano-technology based disinfectant spray to combat COVID-19 by disinfecting all types of surfaces.
16. 163348 (2002 NN4): Giant asteroid expected to pass Earth	**About** • NASA has announced that 163348 (2002 NN4), a giant asteroid is expected to pass Earth in June at a safe distance. • The asteroid is a Near-Earth Object (NEO) and is classified as a Potentially Hazardous Asteroid (PHA). • It is classified as a PHA which means the asteroid has the potential to make threatening close approaches to the Earth

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
17. Spectrin	**About:** • Scientists from Raman Research Institute (RRI), an autonomous institute under the Department of Science &Technology have found out that Spectrin act as 'shock absorbers' to protect axons from stretch-induced damage. • Spectrin are flexible rod-shaped molecules present in axons. • Axons are long tubular extensions of nerve cells that transmit electrical signals across long distances and can be up to a meter long in the case of humans. • The study can help in understanding and treatment of concussion from head injuries as well as stretch-induced nerve injuries.
18. Ramon Magsaysay Awards	**About:** • Awards have been cancelled this year due to the coronavirus pandemic. • Ramon Magsaysay award is popularly known as Asia's Nobel Prize. • It is given to individuals and organizations in Asia regardless of race, creed, sex, or nationality, who have achieved distinction in their respective fields. • It is named after Ramon Magsaysay, the third president (1953-57) of Philippines. • Awardees are presented with a certificate and a medal.
19. SPIC MACAY's International Convention	**About:** • Recently, the Prime Minister of India addressed the SPIC MACAY's International Convention via video conference. • SPIC MACAY (Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music And Culture Amongst Youth) is a non-political, nationwide, voluntary movement founded in 1977 by Dr Kiran Seth. • It is a participatory student movement registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 • It is supported nationally by the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, and the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
20. Ultra Swachh	• The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has developed a disinfection unit named Ultra Swachh to disinfect a wide range of materials, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), electronics items, fabrics, etc. • The system uses an advanced oxidative process (ozonation). • Ozonation is a type of advanced oxidation process, involving the production of very reactive oxygen species able to attack a wide range of organic compounds and all microorganisms.
21. AarogyaPath	**About** • It was recently launched by a CSIR. • It is a National Healthcare Supply Chain Portal that aims to provide real-time availability of critical healthcare supplies. • It is launched to serve manufacturers, suppliers and customers to effectively deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. • The vision of this initiative is to set up an information management and forecasting database platform at national level. • It will capture demand and supply scenarios for key healthcare needs items.

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
22. miR-155	**About:** • A team of researchers from IIT Madras, IISc Bengaluru and few other institutes have identified a specific microRNA (miRNAs) called 'miR-155' that is over-expressed in tongue cancer. • MicroRNAs (miRNAs) are small Ribo Nucleic Acid. • They are non-coding RNAs involved in the regulation of a variety of biological and pathological processes, including the formation and development of cancer. • This finding is important in that molecular strategies can potentially be devised to manipulate miR-155 expression to develop therapeutics for tongue cancer.
23. Axone	**About:** • The movie "Axone: A recipe for disaster" was recently released on NETFLIX. • Axone (spelled akhuni) is a fermented soya bean of Nagaland, known for its distinctive flavour and smell. • It is used to make pickles and chutneys, or curries of pork, fish, chicken, beef etc. • It is particularly popular among the Sumi (also Sema) tribe.
24. Justice G. Rohini commission	**Justice G. Rohini commission to examine sub-categorisation of OBCs** **About:** • OBC panel headed by retired Delhi High Court Chief Justice G. Rohini was appointed in October 2017 to examine sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes and look into the issues of communities that were not getting the benefits of reservation. • The Union Cabinet has approved a six-month extension to the commission as it needs more time as its work has been affected by the pandemic.
25. New Satellite Navigation policy soon	**About:** • A new satellite navigation policy, which has a strategic military element to it, is being proposed. • The older ones, namely Remote Sensing Data Policy and the SatCom Policy of 2000, are being revised.
26. Vande Bharat mission	**About** • The fourth round of the Vande Bharat mission, meant for the repatriation of Indians from around the world, will begin in July month. • It will focus on bringing back Indians from the Gulf countries, Malaysia and Singapore, among others. • Vandhe Bharat mission is the massive repatriation operation planned by the Indian government to bring back stranded Indians in different parts of the world in the wake of the coronavirus crisis.
27. Operation Samudra Setu	**About** • India has dispatched four Naval ships as part of the first phase of Vande Bharat mission. • Indian Navy's INS Jalashwa and INS Magar are operating to bring back Indian citizens from Maldives while INS Shardul and INS Airavat set sail to the UAE.

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
28. Virtues, vices, and character	**About:** • On Chinese actions at the border, PM Modi quoted a Sanskrit sloka that reveals a country's character based on its actions. • "Vidya vivaad dhanam madaya, shakti pareshan paripeedanaya. Khalasya sadho vipareetam etat, gyaanaya, daanaya cha rakshanam". • English translation - "For crooked persons, knowledge is meant for arguments, wealth for ego, power for troubling others. The opposite is the case among noble souls. Knowledge is meant for wisdom, wealth for donation and power to protect the weak".
29. ReSTART package for MSMEs	**About:** • Recently, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh had launched a new programme 'ReStart' to support the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector in the State. • AP govt decided to spend ₹1,100 crore on revival of the sector. • ReSTART scheme is aimed to bail out MSMEs from the vagaries of the market triggered by the pandemic and closure during the lockdown. • Government has also decided to procure about 360 types of goods and other materials from the MSMEs.
30. Chinese Apps banned in India	**About:** • Government of India banned 59 applications (majority are Chinese apps) citing threat to national security and sovereignty. • The ban comes amid continuing tensions on the border between India and China. • Ministry of Electronics and IT (Meity) has also issued instructions to Google and Apple to remove the banned applications from their respective application stores.
31. Bimal Julka Committee	**About:** • An Expert Committees on Rationalisation of Film Media Units and Review of Autonomous Bodies was recently formed under the chairmanship of Bimal Julka. • It has suggested an umbrella configuration with 4 broad categories under which institutes should work. • They are - Production, Festival, Heritage and Knowledge. • It has recommended that these categories should be headed by professionals. • It has also recommended creation of Film Promotion Fund for independent filmmakers for making commercial films.
32. Antifa	**About:** • It was recently designated as a terrorist organisation by the US President. • Its origin dates back to as far back as Nazi Germany. • The movement has had its presence in several European countries. • It came into focus in the United States following the election of President in 2016. • It does not have a formal organisational structure. • It draws its members from other movements such as Black Lives Matter and the Occupy movement. • Antifa members typically dress in black and often wear a mask at their demonstrations, and follow far-left ideologies such as anti-capitalism. • They take up causes such as LGBTQ and indigenous rights. • It is known for violence.

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Q.1) Band-tail scorpionfish is a rare fish which was recently seen in news. It was found from Sethukarai coast of which of the following:

a) Gulf of Mannar
b) Gulf of Kutch
c) Ashtamudi Lake
d) Pulicat Lake

Q.2) Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defence system, recently seen in news, is manufactured by which of the following country?

a) United States of America
b) Russia
c) China
d) Israel

Q.3) Consider the following statements regarding Hong Kong:

1. It is one of the Special Administrative Regions of China
2. It was a British Dependency till 1997.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.4) The UMANG Mobile App is a Digital India initiative of which of the following Minstry of the Indian government?

a) Ministry of Agriculture
b) Ministry of Commerce
c) Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)
d) Ministry of Defence

Q.5) The Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) is chaired by which of the following?

a) Prime Minister
b) Finance Minister
c) Chairman of RBI
d) Financial secretary of Department of Economic Affairs

**Q.6) PM SVANidhi scheme is launched for which of the following?**

a) Street vendors
b) Small shopkeepers
c) Cottage industry
d) Silk industry

Q.7 Consider the following statements regarding Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency (MUDRA):

1. Loans upto ₹10 lakh are given to micro enterprises under this scheme
2. Loans are collateral free.

Which of the above is/are correct?
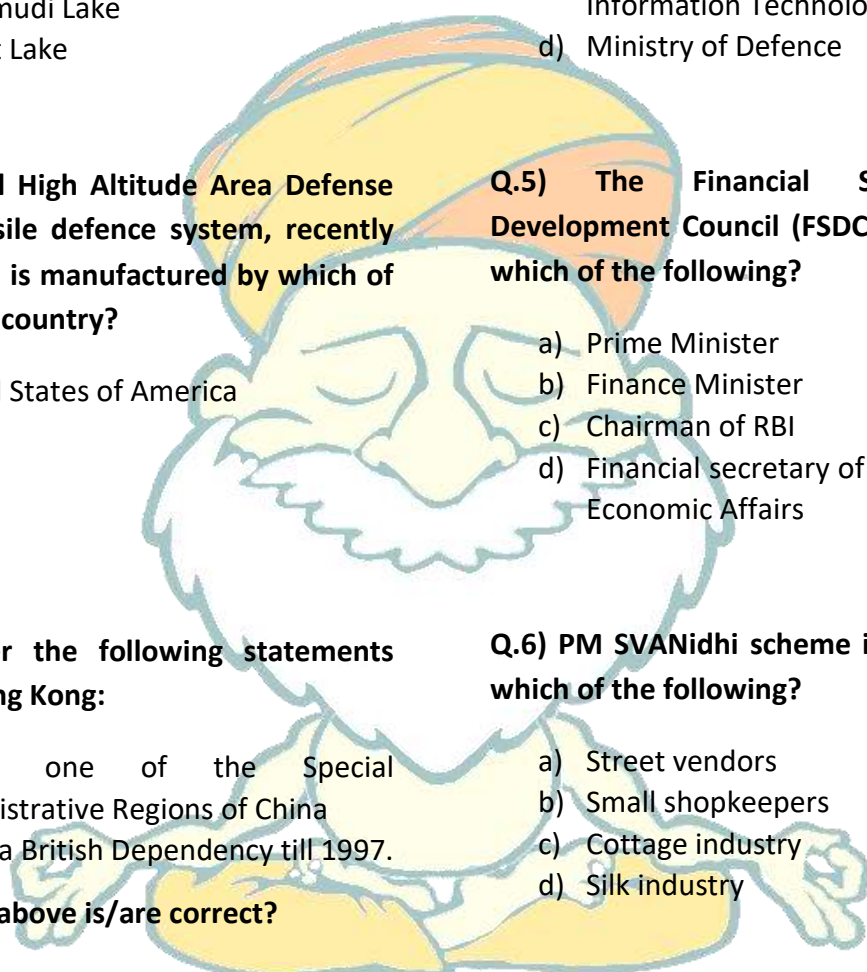
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.8) Which of the following province of China is mostly inhabited by the Uighur Muslims?

a) Guizhou
b) Hubei
c) Xinjiang
d) Jiangxi

Q.9) Consider the following statements regarding National Human Rights Commission:

1. It is a statutory body formed under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.
2. The chairperson of the commission should be a retired Chief Justice of India or a judge of the supreme court

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.10) Where is the headquarter of Asian Development Bank located?

a) Philippines
b) China

c) Singapore
d) Malaysia

Q.11) Recently, Bodoland University has developed a fungal powder to boost immunity using super mushroom of the genus Cordyceps. Consider the following regarding Cordyceps:

1. It is a fungus which parasitizes bacteria.
2. It is known for its ant-aging and anti-viral effects also

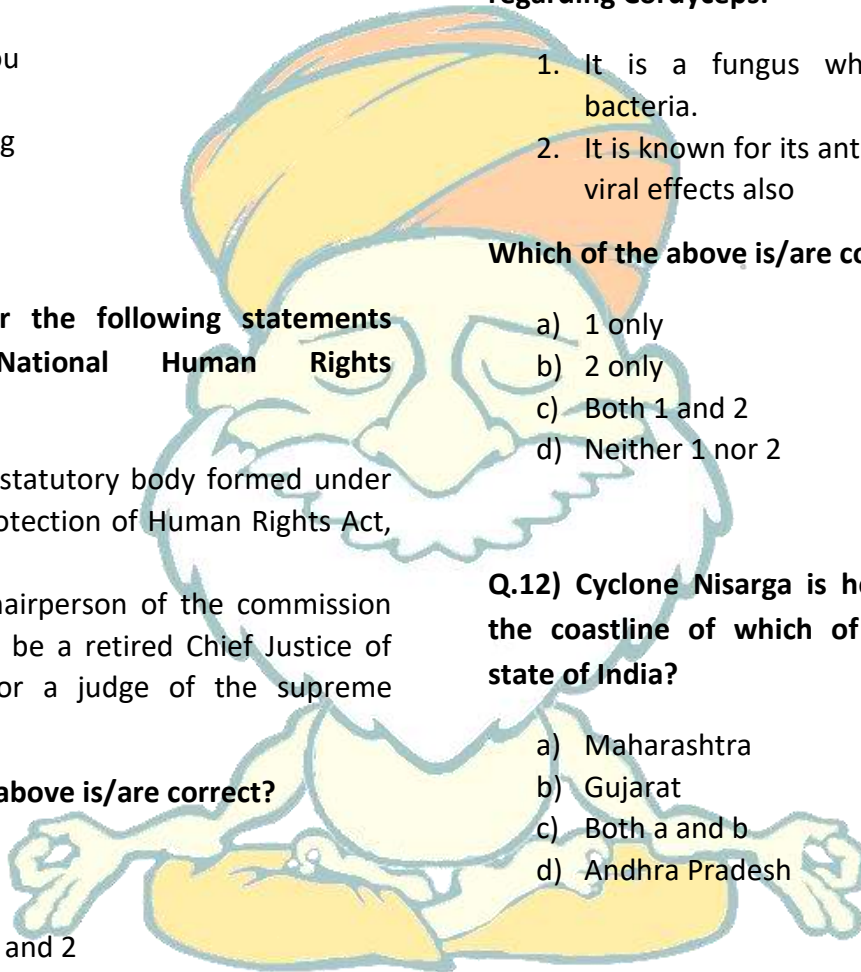**Which of the above is/are correct?**

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.12) Cyclone Nisarga is headed towards the coastline of which of the following state of India?

a) Maharashtra
b) Gujarat
c) Both a and b
d) Andhra Pradesh

Q.13) With regard to the Delimitation Commission, consider the following statements:

1. The members of the commission are appointed by the Election Commissioner of India.

2. Delimitation of constituencies is based on 2001 census.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

3. Germany
4. Italy

Select the correct code:

a) 1 and 2 only
b) 1,3 and 4 only
c) 1 and 4 only
d) None of the above

Q.14) Consider the following statements regarding nominal GDP and real GDP:

1. Nominal GDP is evaluated at some constant set of prices.
2. Real GDP is evaluated at current market prices.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.15) National Statistical Office comes under which of the following Ministry?

a) Ministry of Commerce
b) Ministry of Finance
c) Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
d) Ministry of Home Affairs

Q.16) Which of the following countries are not part of the G7 Summit?

1. Canada
2. France

Q.17) Which of the following is/are landlocked country/countries in South Asia?

1. Afghanistan
2. Bhutan
3. Nepal
4. Bangladesh

Select the correct code:

a) 1 and 3 only
b) 1, 3 and 4 only
c) 1, 2 and 3 only
d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.18) Kohala hydroelectric power project was recently finalized between which of the following countries?

a) India and China
b) India and Afghanistan
c) China and Pakistan
d) Pakistan and Afghanistan

Q.19) Consider the statements regarding China Pakistan Economic Corridor:

1. It will connect China's Xinjiang Province with Pakistan's Gwadar port.
2. India has raised objections against it because it passes through border areas of Rajasthan.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.20) SWADES initiative was recently launched by which of the following Ministry?

a) Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship
b) Civil Aviation Ministry
c) Ministry of External Affairs
d) All of the above

Q.21) Which of the following are diseases of Banana crop?

1. Panama wilt
2. Sigatoka disease
3. Fusarium Wilt TR4

Select the correct code:

a) 1 and 2 only
b) 1 and 3 only
c) 2 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.22) Fusarium wilt is a fungal disease which is caused by Fusarium oxysporum. It affects which of the following crops?

1. Tomato
2. Onion
3. Tobacco
4. Legumes

Select the correct code:

a) 1, 3 and 4 only
b) 1 and 2 only
c) 3 and 4 only
d) 2, 3 and 4 only

Q.23) Consider the following statements regarding Veer Savarkar:

1. He was the founder of Abhinav Bharat Society.
2. He was never the president of Hindu Mahasabha despite being involved in its formation.
3. The History of the War of Indian Independence was written by Veer Savarkar.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 and 2 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) None of the above

Q.24) Global Economic Prospects, a semi-annual flagship publication of the world economy, is published by which of the following?
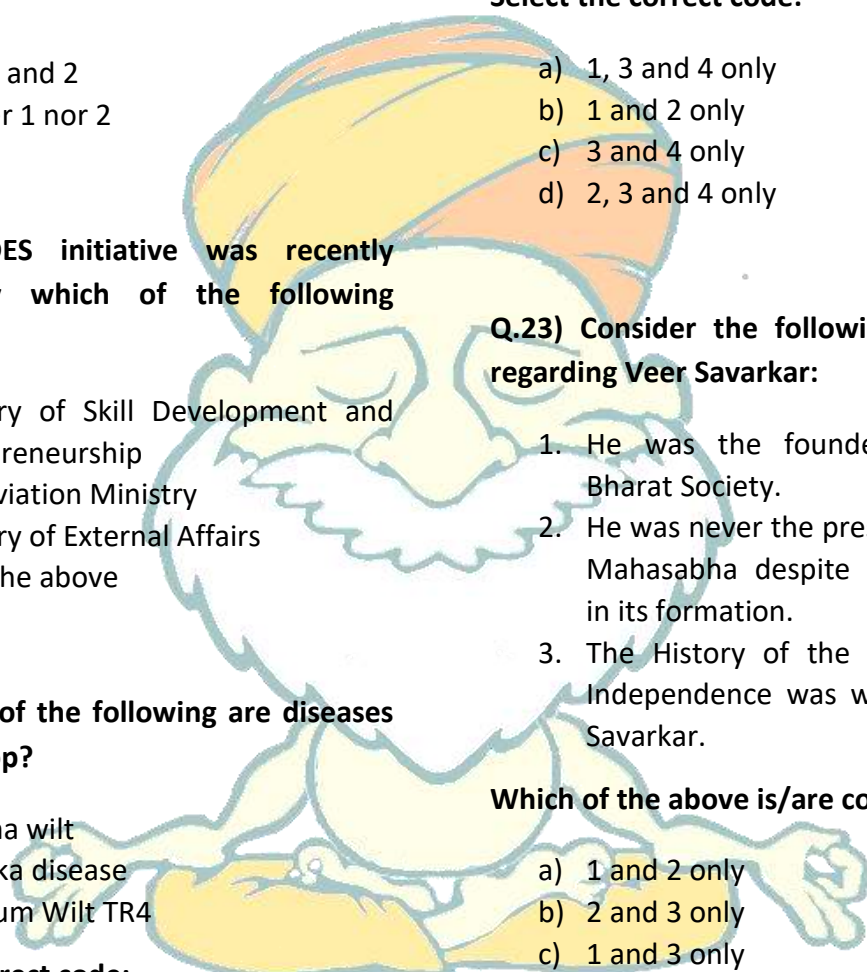
a) World Bank
b) International Monetary Fund
c) Asian Development Bank
d) World Economic Forum

Q.25) Which of the following are triple billion goals of World Health Organisation?

1. To protect 1 billion people from health emergencies.
2. To extend Universal health coverage to 1 billion people.
3. To bring 1 billion people out of poverty.

Select the correct code:

a) 1 and 2 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.26) 'One Sun, One World, One Grid' initiative was recently proposed by which of the following country?

a) Japan
b) India
c) Australia
d) South Africa

Q.27) Consider the following statements regarding International Solar Alliance:

1. It is a treaty-based organisation.
2. It aims to deploy 5,000 GW of solar generation capacity globally.
3. It aims to mobilize investment of over $1 trillion by 2050.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 and 3 only
b) 2 only
c) 1 only
d) 2 and 3 only

Q.28) Comprehensive Strategic Partnership was recently established by which of the following two countries?

a) India and Australia
b) Sri Lanka and Bangladesh
c) India and Vietnam
d) South Africa and India

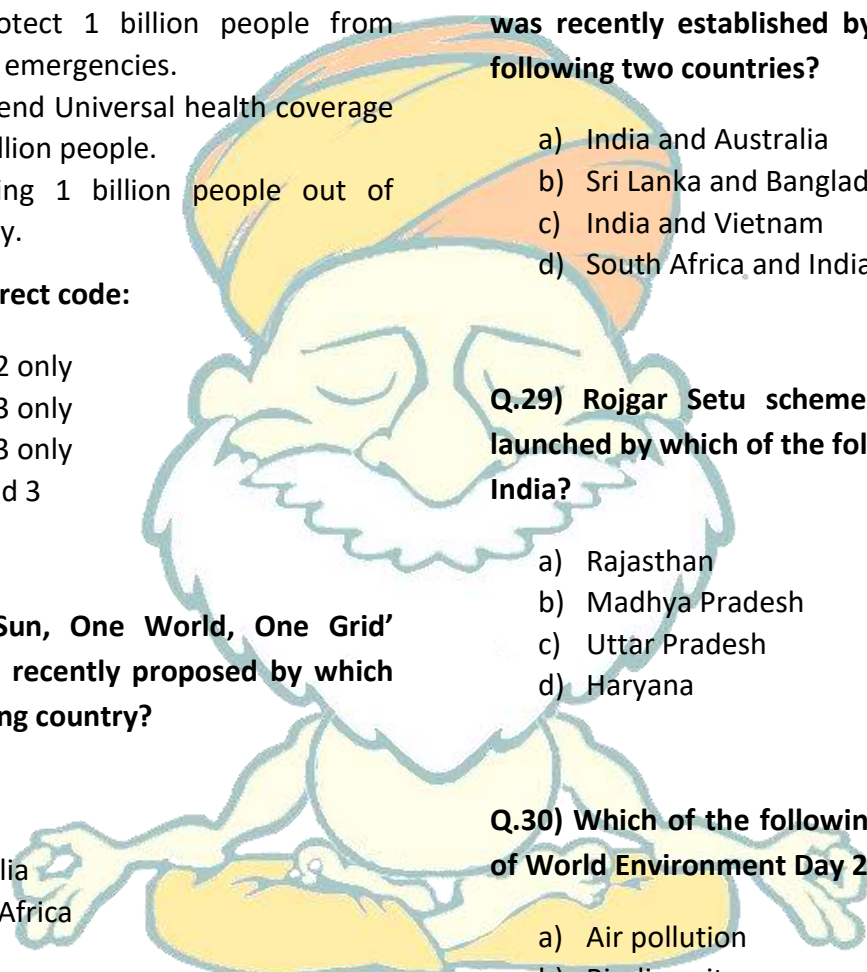**Q.29) Rojgar Setu scheme was recently launched by which of the following state of India?**

a) Rajasthan
b) Madhya Pradesh
c) Uttar Pradesh
d) Haryana

Q.30) Which of the following is the theme of World Environment Day 2020?

a) Air pollution
b) Biodiversity
c) Marine Life
d) Let's save Arctic and Antarctic circles

Q.31) Recently, the Government of India has discontinued 7.75% savings bonds, 2018. Consider the following statements regarding the same:

1. Each Bond was of Rs.1000 each.
2. The maximum limit for investment was Rs.10,000.
3. Premature encashment was permitted to individuals who were 75 years and above.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 3 only
c) 1 and 2 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.32) Consider the following statements regarding Great knots:

1. These birds are usually found in tundra region of Northeast Siberia.
2. They usually eat molluscus and insects.
3. They are endangered species according to IUCN status.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.33) Indian skimmers, recently seen in news, are accorded which of the following IUCN status:

a) Vulnerable
b) Threatened
c) Endangered
d) Extinct

Q.34) Dredging is an activity of clearing the bed of a river by scooping out mud. Which of the following is/are harmful impact(s) of the activity:

1. It creates disturbance to the aquatic ecosystems.
2. The spoils may contain toxic chemicals.
3. It dislodges chemicals and injects them into the water column.

Select the correct code:

a) 1 and 2 only
b) 1 and 3 only
c) 1, 2 and 3
d) 3 only

Q.35) Consider the following statements regarding Telecom Regulatory Authority of India:

1. It is a non-statutory body regulating telecom services of India.
2. It has recently recommended switching the mobile numbers from 10 to 11 digits.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.36) State of India's Environment report, 2020, was recently released by which of the following?
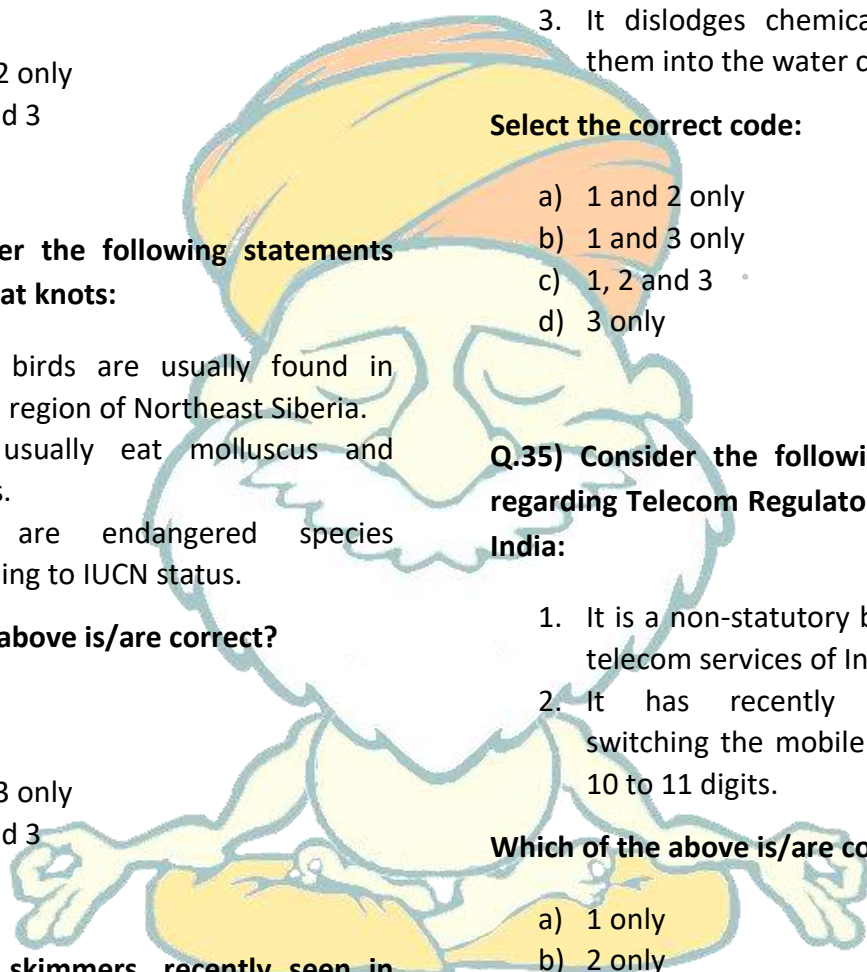
a) Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
b) United Nations Environment Programme
c) Centre for Science and Environment
d) Amnesty International

Q.37) MAITREE is a part of bilateral relationship between which of the following countries?

a) India and Nepal
b) India and USA
c) India and South Africa
d) India and Brazil

Q.38 Energy Efficiency Services Limited is a joint venture of PSUs under the administration of which of the following Ministry of India?

a) Ministry of Environment
b) Ministry of Power
c) Ministry of Urban Affairs
d) Ministry of Finance

Q.39) Which of the following article deals with the Central Administrative Tribunal?

a) Article 323-A
b) Article 332
c) Article 112
d) Article 234

Q.40) Anonymous group, recently seen in news, is associated with which of the following?

a) Militant group of Jammu and Kashmir
b) Activist group accused of cyber attacking
c) Hongkong support for Tiananmen Square protests
d) A group helping the migrant workers of India during lockdown

Q.41) Which of the following country is not a part of recently launched Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China?

a) Germany
b) USA
c) Japan
d) India

Q.42) Which of the following Ministry of India recently launched iCommit initiative?

a) Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
b) Ministry of Environment
c) Ministry of Power
d) Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways

Q.43) 38th parallel often seen in news is related to which two countries?

a) Israel and Palestine
b) India and Pakistan
c) North Korea and South Korea
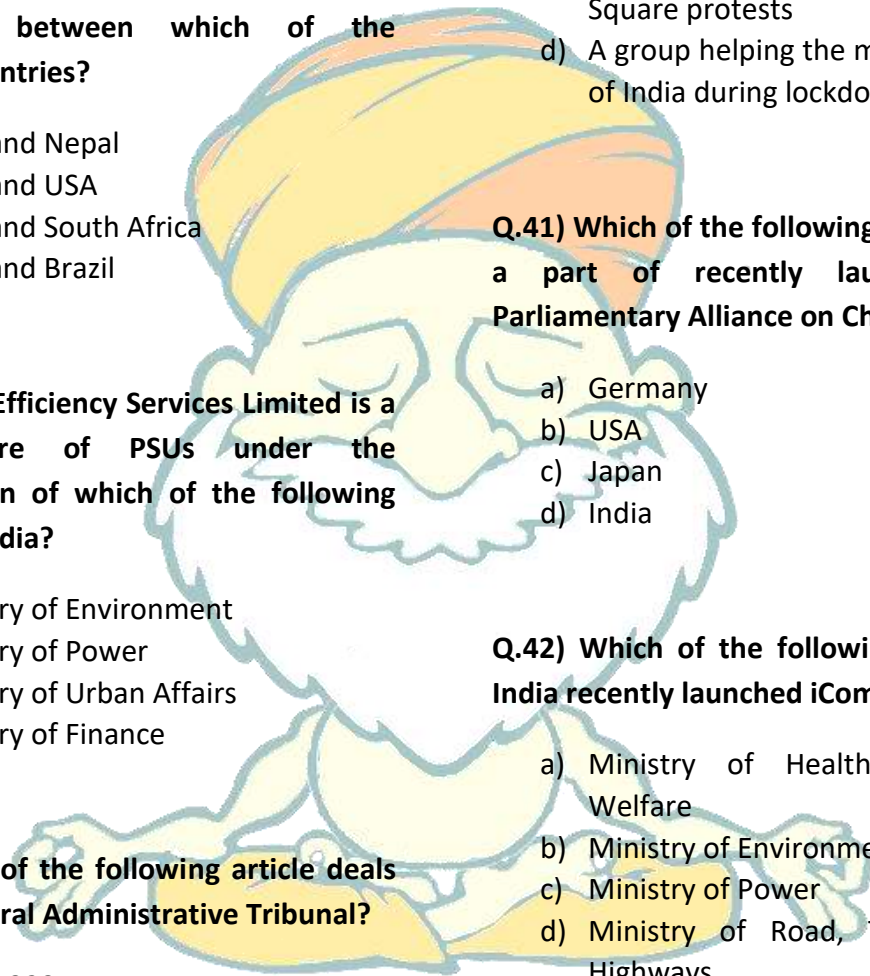
d) Iran and Iraq

Q.44) Consider the following statements regarding 'Responsible Artificial Intelligence for youth' program:

1. It was recently launched by Ministry of Science and Technology.
2. It is open to students of class 11th and class 12th from Central and state government Run schools all over India.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.45) Which of the following is not the application of Recombinant DNA technology?

a) It is useful in gene therapy.
b) It is used in carrying out RT-PCR test.
c) It is used in production of insulin.
d) it is used to produce Genetically Modified Organisms

Q.46) Which of the following is not the major initiative taken under Atal Innovation Mission?

a) Mentor India Campaign
b) ARISE
c) JIGYASA
d) Atal Community Innovation Centre

Q.47) Consider the following statements regarding the Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) remote sensing method:

1. It helps in generating information about the shape of the Earth.
2. It can be used to examine both natural and manmade environments.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.48) Which of the following is correct about Asiatic lion?

a) It is listed in the Schedule II of Wildlife Protection Act 1972.
b) It is given status of critically endangered on IUCN Red list.
c) It is slightly smaller than African lion.
d) It is found only in the Gir National Park.

Q.49) Which of the following is included in India's Forex Reserves?

1. Foreign currency assets
2. Gold reserves
3. Special Drawing Rights
4. Reserve position with the International Monetary Fund
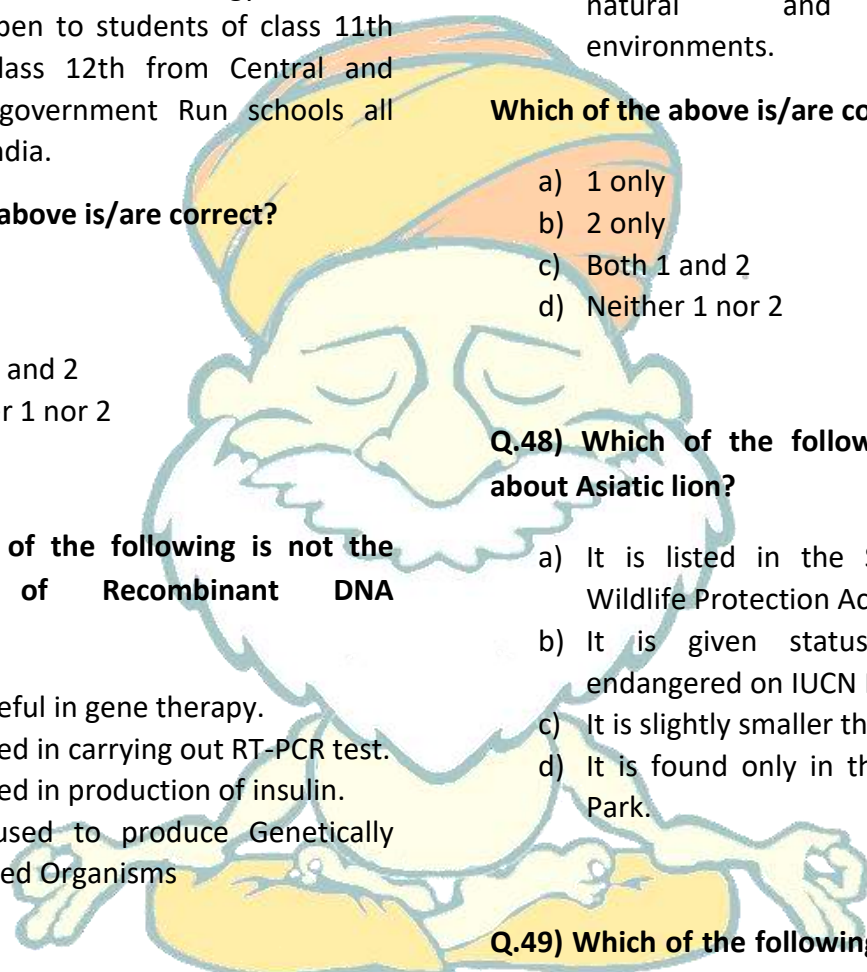
Select the correct code:

a) 1, 2 and 3 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1 and 4 only
d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.50) Consider the following statements regarding Central Board of Indirect taxes and Customs:

1. It is responsible for administering customs, GST and narcotics in India.
2. It comes under Ministry of Finance.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.51) Recently India's sovereign rating was downgraded from Baa2 to Baa3. Consider the following about the credit rating:

1. It can be assigned only to countries.
2. It can give investors insights into the level of risk associated with investing in the debt of a particular country.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.52) Consider the following statements regarding India rankings 2020 which was recently released:

1. It is released by Ministry of Human Resource and Development.
2. The National Institutional Ranking Framework outlines methodology to rank Institutions across the country.
3. Dental institutions have been included for the first time in the Ranking.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 3 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.53) Consider the following statements regarding Submarine rescue system:

1. It consists of hyperbaric medical equipment to decompress submariners after being rescued from a sunken submarine.
2. It can be rapidly mobilised by air only to carry out submarine rescue operations
3. It has been inducted on the Western and Eastern coasts of India.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.54) International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report is published by which of the following?

a) USA
b) France
c) Switzerland
d) United Nations

Q.55) Which of the following Article of the Constitution deal with the protection of interest of minorities?

a) Article 29
b) Article 21
c) Article 25
d) Article 27

Q.56) Consider the following statements regarding the office of the principal scientific Adviser (Office of PSA):

1. The Prime Minister's science technology and innovation Advisory Council facilitates PSA's office.
2. It functions as the secretariat to the scientific advisory committee to the Cabinet.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.57) Where is the International Criminal Court located?

a) Netherlands
b) Switzerland
c) France
d) Great Britain

Q.58) Recently, the International Criminal Court (ICC) was targeted with sanctions over Afghanistan war crimes case. Consider the following statements regarding ICC:

1. It has jurisdiction to prosecute individuals who are involved in the crimes of genocide.
2. It can investigate the crimes committed outside the member states also.
3. It has Universal territorial jurisdiction.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 3 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) 2 and 3 only

Q.59) Which of the following country's recently created world record by successfully running first Double-Stack Container Train in its electrified territory?

a) Japan
b) China
c) Russia
d) India

Q.60) Lonar lake is situated in which of the following state of India?

a) Rajasthan
b) Gujarat
c) Madhya Pradesh
d) Maharashtra

Q.61) Raja Parba festival is three-day unique festival of which of the following state of India?

a) Odisha
b) West Bengal
c) Chhattisgarh
d) Sikkim

Q.62) Which of the following is not true about permafrost?

a) It is any ground that remains completely frozen for two straight years.
b) Near the bottom, permafrost soils contain large quantities of organic carbon due to cold.
c) Microbes decompose plant material which releases greenhouse gases due to permafrost thawing.
d) A quarter of the land area in Northern hemisphere has permafrost underneath.

Q.63) RBI has recently constituted P K Mohanty committee to review ownership guidelines and corporate structure of which of the following bank?

a) Foreign banks
b) Private sector banks
c) Public sector banks
d) Regional rural banks

Q.64) Consider the following statements regarding Genetically Modified crop BT cotton:

1. It has two alien genes from the soil bacterium Bacillus thuringiensis.
2. The crop develops a protein which protects it from Pink bollworm.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.65) Consider the following statements:

1. The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee is the Apex body for allowing commercial release of GM crops in India.
2. Use of the unapproved GM variant can attract punishment under Environmental Protection Act, 1989.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.66) Where is Satkosia Tiger Reserve situated?

a) Odisha
b) Chhattisgarh
c) Madhya Pradesh
d) Rajasthan

Q.67) Interstate Tiger Translocation project was conceived by which of the following?

a) Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate change
b) National Tiger Conservation Authority
c) Wildlife Institute of India
d) All of the above

Q.68) Consider the following statements regarding National Tiger Conservation Authority:

1. It was constituted in 2006 by amending the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
2. It is responsible for implementation of Project Tiger.
3. It is set up under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister of India.

Which of the above is/are incorrect?

a) 1 and 2 only
b) 1 and 3 only
c) 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.69) Which of the following is not a nuclear armed Nation?

1. Italy
2. Russia
3. Japan
4. India
5. Pakistan

Select the correct code:

a) 1, 2 and 5
b) 1 and 3
c) 1, 2 and 4
d) 2, 3 and 4

Q.70) Consider the following statements regarding biosafety levels (BSL):

1. BSLs are categorised on the basis of the treatment required.
2. SARS-CoV-2 belongs to BSL-II category.
3. BSL-I is considered to be the most hazardous.

Which of the above is/are incorrect?

a) 1 only
b) 1 and 2 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) 3 only

Q.71) Consider the following statements regarding Artemis program:

1. It is an on-going government-funded program of Europe.
2. Its goal is to land the first woman and man on Mars.

(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.72) Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence is being hosted by which of the following?

a) United Nation
b) Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
c) South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
d) Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

Q.73) Which of the following country is not a part of Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence?

a) Russia
b) Australia
c) New Zealand
d) Singapore

Q.74) Consider the following statements regarding Indian Gas Exchange:

1. It is an online delivery-based trading platform for both imported and domestically produced natural gas.
2. It will allow buyers and sellers to trade both in the spot market and in the Forward Market.

Q.75) Schizothorax sikusirumensis is a new fish species recently discovered in which of the following state of India?

a) Arunachal Pradesh
b) Sikkim
c) West Bengal
d) Kerala

Q.76) Consider the following statements regarding Bose Einstein Condensate (BEC):

1. It is the fifth state of matter which is observed for the first time in space recently.
2. Rubidium was used to create BEC aboard International Space Station.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.77) In which of the following applications can Bose Einstein Condensate be used?

1. Studying gravitational waves
2. Spacecraft navigation
3. Searches for dark energy

4. Detecting subsurface minerals on the moon

Select the correct code:

a) 1, 2 and 4 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 2, 3 and 4
d) All of the above

Q.78) Consider the following statements regarding Rubidium:

1. It is a silvery white metal belonging to alkali group.
2. It can be stored under atmospheric oxygen.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.79) Consider the following statements regarding the Securities and Exchange Board of India:

1. It is a statutory body established through the SEBI Act, 1992.
2. It is the regulator of the securities and commodity market owned by the government as well as private companies of India.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.80) Which of the following drug has been recently found to cut death rates among critical covid-19 patients?

a) Remdesivir
b) Tocilizumab
c) Hydroxychloroquine
d) Dexamethasone

Q.81) Which of the following persons will be eligible for 10% Central reservation recently allowed by State of Sikkim?

1. His Annual family income should be less than 8 lakhs.
2. He should possess less than 2 acres of land.
3. He should possess less than 1000 square feet residential flat in any Municipal area.

Select the correct code:

a) 1 only
b) 1 and 3 only
c) 2 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.82) Consider the following statements regarding Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojna:

1. It is a campaign launched by Department of Science and Technology.
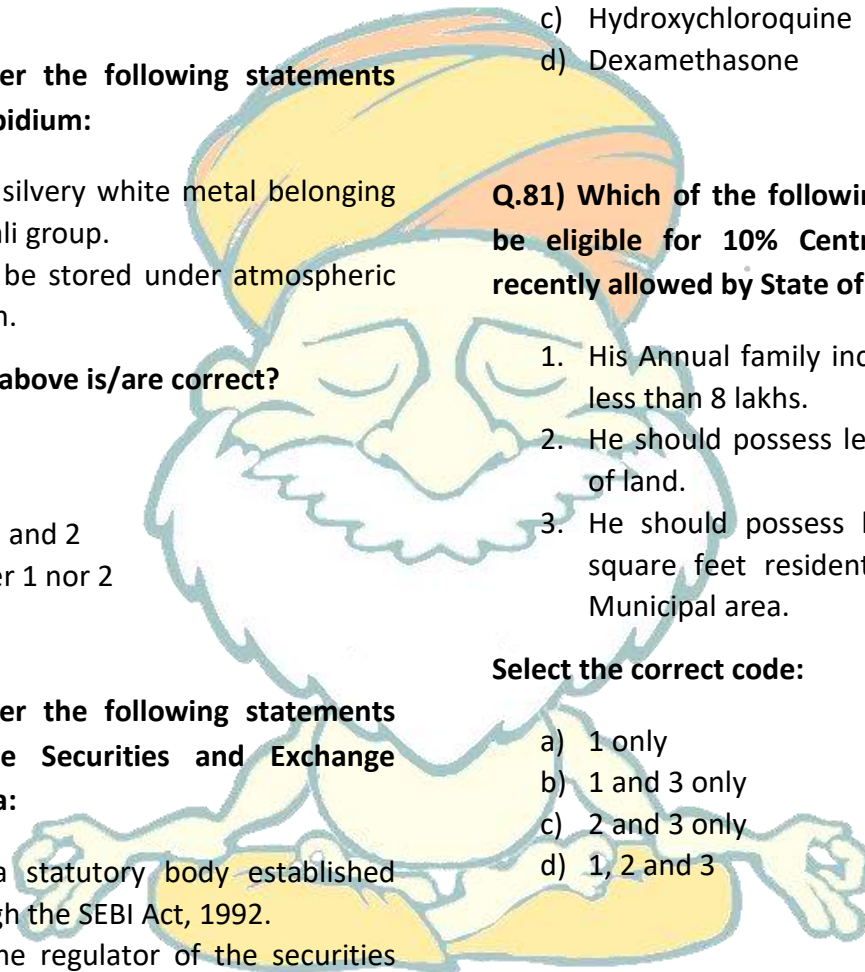
2. PMBJP Kendra provides generic drugs at affordable prices.
3. Bureau of Pharma Public Sector Undertakings of India is responsible for coordinating in procurement, supplying and marketing of generic drugs.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 and 2
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 3
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.83) Which of the following is not a permanent member of United Nation security council?

a) China
b) Russia
c) USA
d) Saudi Arabia

Q.84) Sumi tribe belongs to which of the following state of India?

a) Assam
b) Nagaland
c) Manipur
d) Mizoram

Q.85) Consider the following statements regarding Khelo India scheme:

1. This scheme is applicable only to the sports persons who have qualified for Olympics

2. Talented players are provided annual financial assistance of 5 lakh per year for 8 years.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.86) Consider the following statements regarding Amery ice shelf:

1. It is one of the largest Glacier drainage basins of the world located in Arctic.
2. Recently, the scientists have predicted increase in its expansion boundaries from 2010 positions.
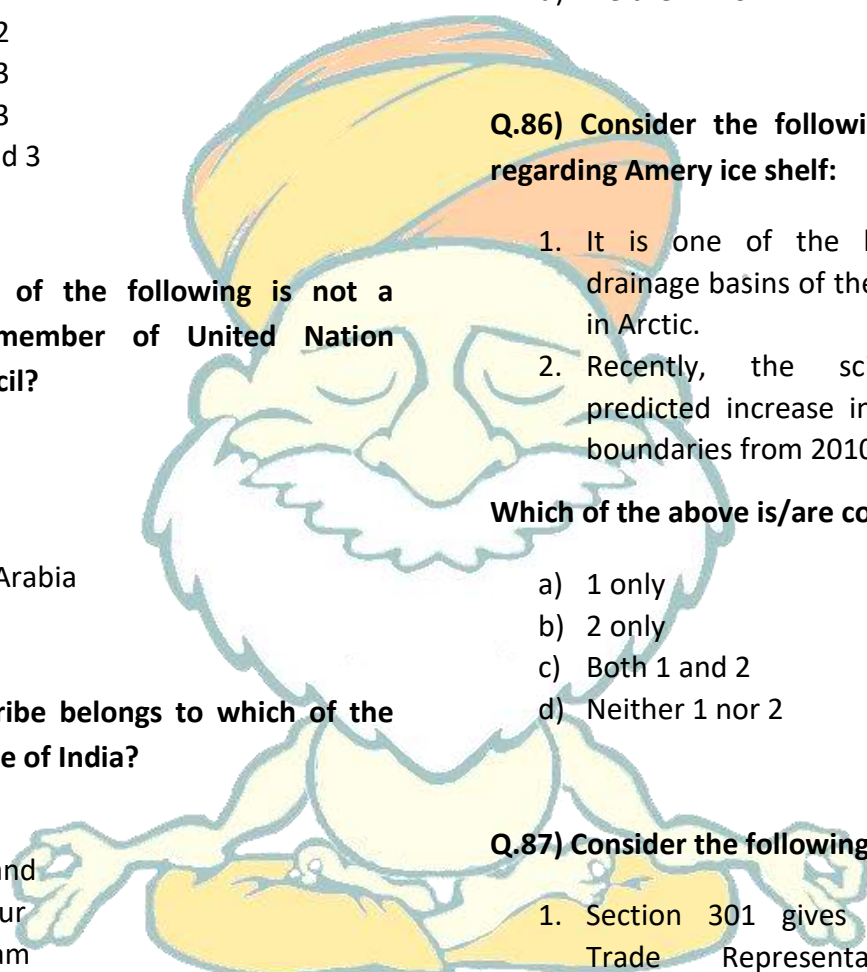
Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.87) Consider the following statements:

1. Section 301 gives United States Trade Representative (USTR) authority to investigate foreign country's actions which negatively affect US commerce.
2. India is included in the Priority Watch List of USTR.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only

b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.88) Maguri-Motapung wetland, which was in news recently, is located in –

a) Assam
b) Arunachal Pradesh
c) West Bengal
d) Manipur

Q.89) Consider the following statements regarding Dibru-Saikhowa National Park:

1. It is an identified Important Bird Area (IBA) notified by the Bombay Natural History Society.
2. It is the largest Salix swamp forest in north-eastern India.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.90) Consider the following statements about Jal Jeevan Mission:

1. The chief objective of the Mission is to provide piped water supply (Har Ghar Jal) to all rural households by 2022.
2. Jal Shakti Ministry is the nodal ministry for the implementation of the scheme.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.91) Ambubachi Mela, a festival to mark the menstrual period of the goddess is celebrated in –

a) Assam
b) Tamil Nadu
c) West Bengal
d) Manipur

**Q.92) Which of the following pairs is/are correctly matched?**

1. Tadoba Tiger Reserve – Maharashtra
2. Nameri National Park – Arunachal Pradesh
3. Pench Tiger Reserve – Madhya Pradesh

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 1 and 2 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.93) Consider the following statements about Ambubachi Mela

1. It is an annual Buddhist mela celebrated during the monsoon season.
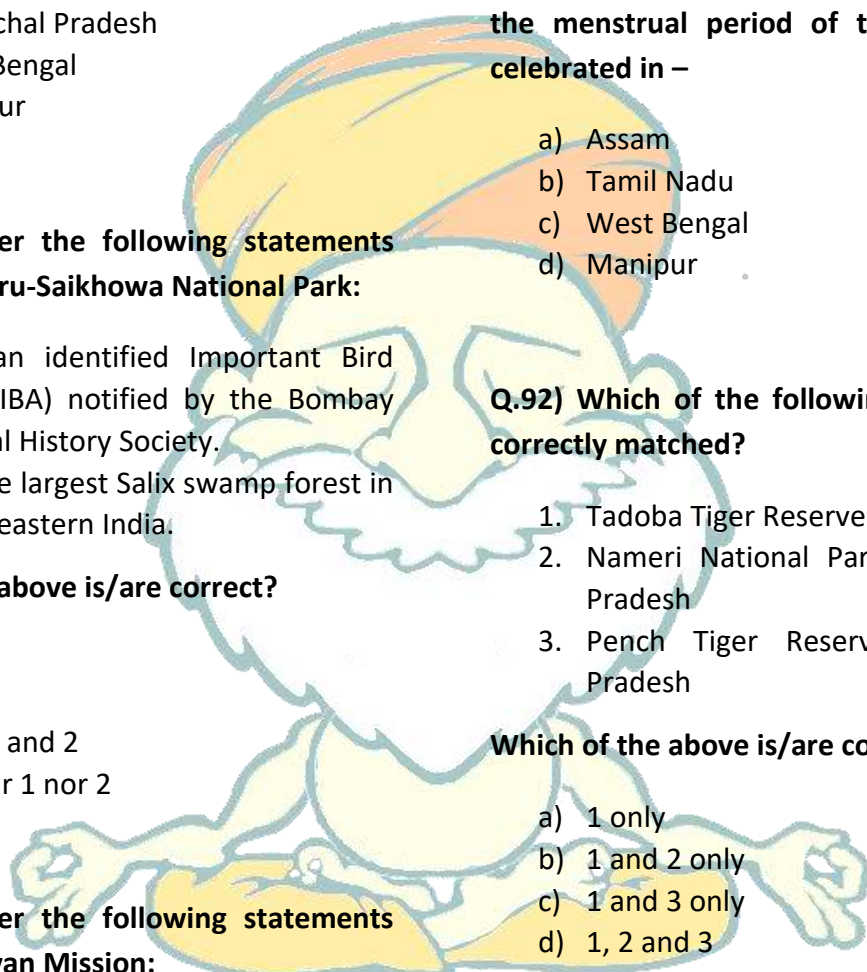
2. It is the celebration of the yearly menstruation course of goddess Mother Shakti.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.94) Where are Senkaku Islands located?

a) Tasman Sea
b) South China Sea
c) East China Sea
d) Bering Sea

Q.95) Variyankunnath Kunjahammed Haji is associated with which of the following revolts/rebellion?

a) Santal Rebellion
b) Chauri Chaura revolt
c) Moplah Rebellion
d) Fakhir revolt

Q.96) Which of the following pairs is/are correctly matched?

1. The Santhal Rebellion : : 1875.
2. Bengal Indigo Cultivators revolt : : 1860.
3. Moplah Uprising : : 1921.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 3 only
b) 2 and 3 only

c) 1 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.97) Consider the following pairs and choose the correctly matched pair/s from below options:

(Missile deal : : Associated country)

1. SPIKE anti-tank guided missile : : India-US
2. S-400 Triumf long-range surface-to-air missile systems : : India-Russia
3. SPYDER Surface-to-Air Missile System : : India-Israel

Choose appropriate code from options below:

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) 1 and 2 only
d) 2 and 3 only

Q.98) Which of the following organizations brings out the publication known as 'World Economic Outlook'?

a) The International Monetary Fund
b) The United Nations Development Programme
c) The World Economic Forum
d) The World Bank

Q.99) Which of the following statements is/are correct about Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan?
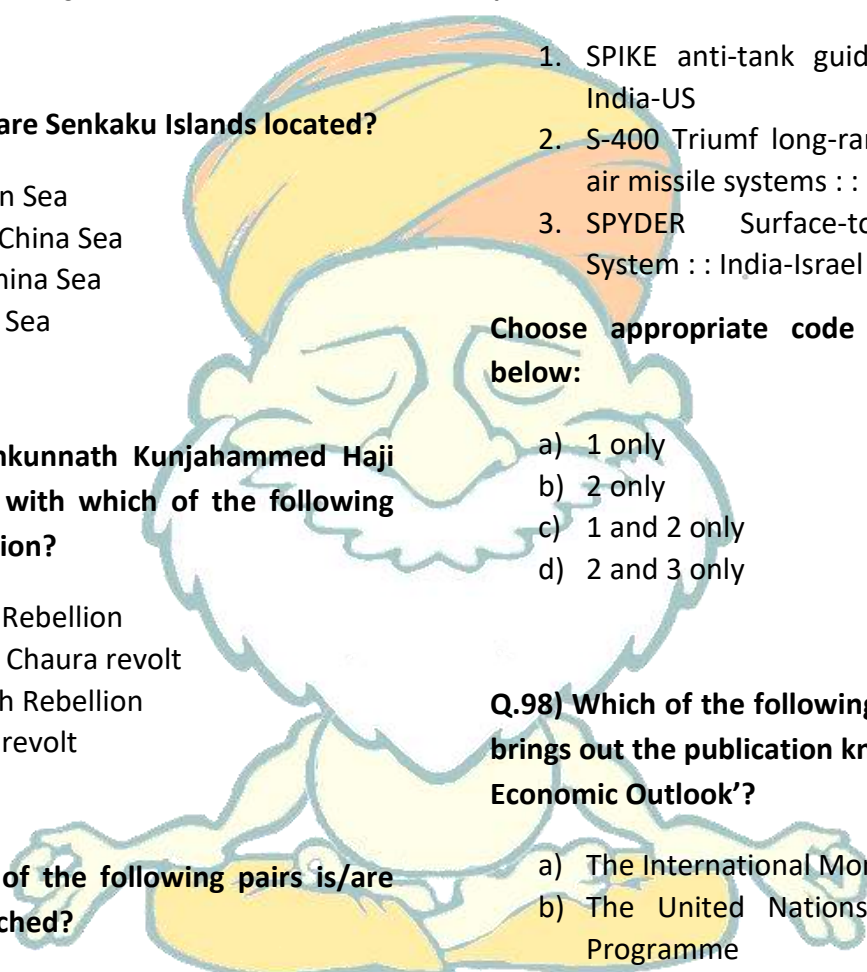
1. The Ministry of Railways is the nodal Ministry for this campaign.
2. The scheme will empower and provide livelihood opportunities to the returnee migrant workers and rural citizens who have returned to their home states due to the Covid-19 induced lockdown.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.100) Consider the following statements about New Space India Limited (NSIL)

1. It is the Department of Space's second commercial arm.
2. NSIL will deal with capacity building of local industry for space manufacturing.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.101) Global Education Monitoring Report is released by –

a) The International Monetary Fund
b) The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
c) The World Economic Forum
d) The World Bank

Q.102) Consider the following statements about Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

1. It is an inter-governmental body established by World Economic Forum.
2. It is a policy-making body and promotes operational measures for combating money laundering and terrorist financing.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.103) Consider the following and select the correct match:
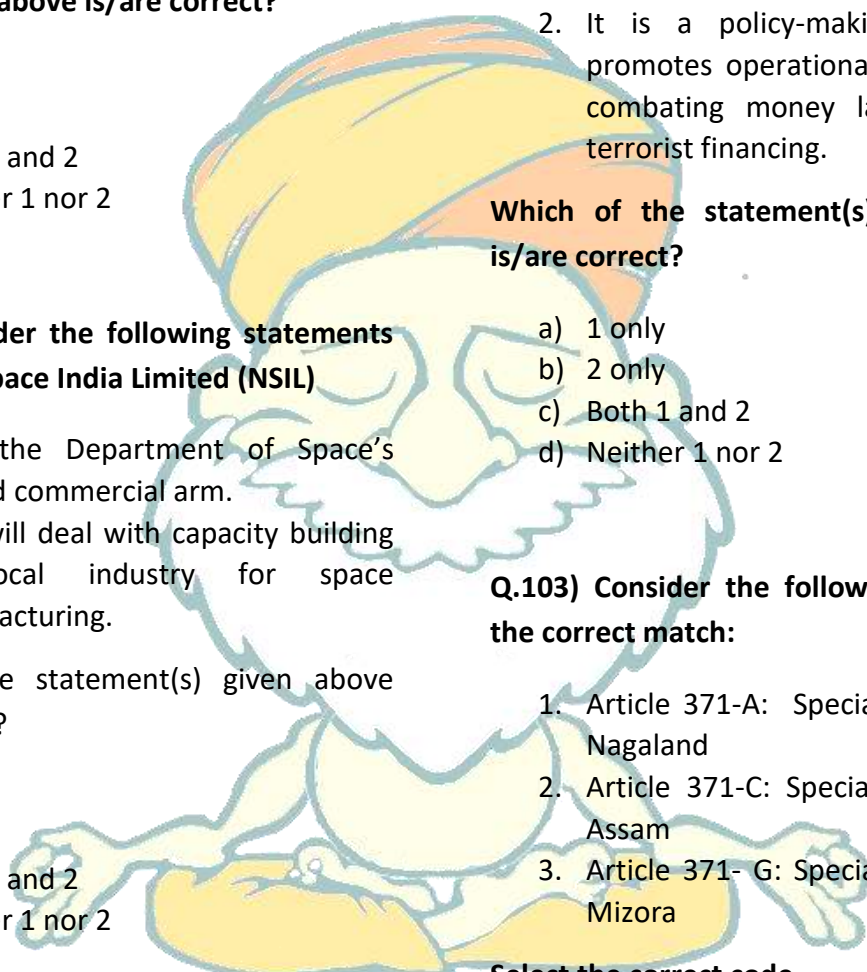
1. Article 371-A: Special provision for Nagaland
2. Article 371-C: Special provision for Assam
3. Article 371- G: Special provision for Mizora

Select the correct code

a) 1 only
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 3
d) 1, 2 and 3

(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

Q.104) Consider the following statements about IN-SPACe:

1. It is an innovative program launched by Department of Science and Technology.
2. It aims to provide a level playing field for private companies to use Indian space infrastructure.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.105) Consider the following statements about Smart Cities Mission

1. It is a central sector scheme.
2. The Mission covers 100 cities for the duration of five years starting from the financial year (FY) 2017-2022.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.106) Vande Bharat mission is associated with –

a) Building cultural links with countries around the world and connecting people to people through Cultural and Educational exchanges.
b) Creating sustainable model for providing adolescent girls and women an access to affordable sanitary products by leveraging Common Service Centres (CSCs)
c) Boosting employment and livelihood opportunities for migrant workers returning to villages, in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak.
d) Repatriation of Indians from around the world, in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak.

Q.107) Environment Impact Assessment in India is statutory backed by –

a) Environment Protection Act, 1986
b) Environmental Impact Assessment Act, 2006
c) Biological Diversity Act, 2002
d) Forest Rights Act, 2006

Q.108) Money Laundering and the Illegal Wildlife Trade is relased by –

a) United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
b) Financial Action Task Force (FATF)
c) Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
d) World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

Q.109) Consider the following statements regarding ozone depletion

1. Polar Stratospheric Clouds inhibits ozone depletion
2. Ozone depletion will affect human body by enhancing the chances of skin cancer and reduced level of Vitamin D in the body.
3. Montreal Protocol and Vienna Convention are related to Ozone Depleting Substances

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are incorrect?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) 1 and 2
d) 2 and 3

Q.110) How do CFCs reduce the concentration of ozone in the atmosphere?

a) Radiation caused CFCs to release atoms that converts ozone to oxygen
b) CFCs splits into troposphere and combine with carbon dioxide to form oxygen
c) CFCs splits into the troposphere and oxidise, preventing the formation of ozone
d) CFCs combine with ozone to produce oxidised molecules

Q.111) Consider the following statements

1. Ozone is a molecule that is composed of three oxygen atoms. It is responsible for filtering out harmful ultraviolet radiation from the Sun.

2. The gas is constantly being made and destroyed in the stratosphere, about 20-30km above the Earth.
3. Nearly 200 countries agreed to ban the chemicals most damaging to the ozone under the Paris Protocol of 2015.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

a) 1 and 2 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) 1,2 and 3

Q.112) 'Nasha Mukt Bharat' or drug-free India campaign is launched by –

a) Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
b) Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
c) Ministry of Drugs, Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals
d) Ministry of Social Development

Q.113) Consider the following statements about 'Exotic Species':

1. 'Exotic live species' shall be interpreted to mean only the animals named under the Appendices I, II and III of the CITES.
2. Species covered by the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 are not included.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

a) MSMEs
b) Farmers
c) Automobile
d) Banking

Q.114) Section 497 from the Indian Penal Code is often seen in news. It is associated with –

a) Adultery
b) Domestic violence
c) Anti-National Activity
d) Sedition

Q.117) PM SVANidhi scheme was launched recently to support?

a) Small businesses and cottage industries
b) MSMEs
c) Silk industry
d) Street vendors

Q.115) Which of the following statements is/are correct about Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana?

1. It is a pension scheme exclusively for senior citizens i.e. 60 years and above.
2. The scheme will be solely operated by LIC.
3. Pension will be paid to the pensioner as per time period decided by the pensioner at the time of purchase of policy.

Select the code from below:

a) 1 and 2
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 3
d) All of the above

Q.118) Which of the following are objectives of 'Swadesh Darshan Scheme'?

1. Promote cultural and heritage value of the country to generate livelihoods in the identified regions
2. To create employment through active involvement of local communities
3. Enhancing the tourist attractiveness in a sustainable manner by developing world class infrastructure in the circuit /destinations

Select the code from below:

a) 1 and 2
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 3
d) All of the above

Q.116) For which of the following sector has Andhra Pradesh government launched ReStart program?

Q.119) Kholongchhu project is a first joint hydel project signed between –

a) India and Nepal

b) India and Myanmar

c) India and Bhutan

d) India and Bangladesh

(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

2020 JUNE MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS

1	a	21	d	41	d	61	a	81	b	101	b
2	a	22	a	42	c	62	b	82	b	102	b
3	c	23	c	43	c	63	b	83	d	103	c
4	c	24	a	44	d	64	c	84	b	104	b
5	b	25	a	45	b	65	c	85	b	105	d
6	a	26	b	46	c	66	a	86	d	106	d
7	c	27	c	47	c	67	d	87	c	107	a
8	c	28	a	48	c	68	c	88	a	108	b
9	c	29	b	49	d	69	b	89	c	109	c
10	a	30	b	50	c	70	c	90	b	110	a
11	b	31	a	51	b	71	d	91	a	111	a
12	c	32	d	52	d	72	b	92	c	112	a
13	b	33	a	53	c	73	a	93	b	113	c
14	d	34	c	54	a	74	b	94	c	114	a
15	c	35	b	55	a	75	a	95	c	115	d
16	d	36	c	56	c	76	c	96	b	116	a
17	c	37	b	57	a	77	d	97	d	117	d
18	c	38	b	58	a	78	a	98	a	118	d
19	a	39	a	59	d	79	a	99	b	119	c
20	d	40	b	60	d	80	d	100	c		