



MAY 2020

IASBABA'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Labour Rights

**Border Issues - India-Nepal &
India-China**

Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan

Chemical Disasters

One Nation One Ration Card

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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 **60th edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **MAY 2020** which can be accessed from <https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/>

VALUE ADDITIONS FROM IASBABA

- **Must Read and connecting the dots.**
- **Also, we have introduced Prelim and mains focused snippets and Test Your Knowledge (Prelims MCQs based on daily current affairs) which shall guide you for better revision.**
- **'Must Read' section**, will give you important links to be read from exam perspective. 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."

Contents

HISTORY/CULTURE/GEOGRAPHY	6
GI tag for Chak-Hao and Gorakhpur terracotta	6
Kovilpatti Kadalai Mittai.....	7
Kashmir Saffron.....	7
Chakma and Hajong	7
Seasonal advancement in surging glaciers in the Karakoram Range.....	8
GI tag for Jharkhand's Sohrai Khovar painting and Telangana's Telia Rumal.....	9
Complete solarisation of Konark Sun Temple and Konark town launched	10
Birthplace of Purandara Dasa to be researched upon.....	11
Earth's magnetic field weakens	12
Kheer Bhawani Mela gets cancelled amidst COVID-19 pandemic.....	13
'Heatwave to severe heatwave' conditions forecasted in India	13
POLITY/GOVERNANCE	15
New Parliament project gets Central Vista panel nod.....	15
Employment Guarantee Programme.....	15
COVID-19: A pandemic patent pool needed.....	16
COVID-19: Countries should commit for Universal Bio-deterrence	18
J&K Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) Bench to deal with service matters	19
Cauvery Waters Authority	20
Saras Collection launched on the Government e Marketplace (GeM) portal	21
Multiple entry life-long visa facility for OCI holders suspended.....	22
Abolition of Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)	22
Vizag gas leak	24
Changes brought to Labour laws by U.P and M.P governments	25
Is the Rajya Sabha essential?	26
Arogya Setu app: Advantages and Issues	29
Dr. B. R. Ambedkar insights on Labour Rights	31
Cooperative federalism amidst COVID-19	33
Medical Education: Over-centralisation is harsh	35
Initiatives to boost Education Sector announced	36
J&K Grant of Domicile Certificate Procedure Rules, 2020 notified	36
CoAST India launched to monitor the movements of migrants	37
A time for reform in courts	38
The Competition Commission of India: Google's anti-trust case probed	39
On Supreme Court's move on migrant workers	40
India and Self-reliance – A brief History	41
SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE	44
Kisan Sabha App: To connect farmers to supply chain and freight transportation.....	44
Employment schemes launched by Jharkhand	44
Amendments brought in the Prime Minister's Research Fellowship Scheme.....	45

Changes to Labour laws bane for the most vulnerable	46
ReStart Programme by Andhra Pradesh government for MSMEs.....	47
Katkari tribe generate income through Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana	48
A moment to trust the teacher.....	49
WOMEN ISSUE	Error! Bookmark not defined.
HEALTH ISSUE	51
World Health Organization (WHO) cautious of using BCG vaccine for COVID-19	51
India's disease surveillance system needs a reboot	52
States with most Swine Flu cases now victims of majority of COVID-19 cases as well	53
Global Nutrition Report 2020: India likely to miss nutrition targets	53
Accelerating India's COVID-19 Social Protection Response Programme.....	54
Less Invasive Surfactant Administration (LISA).....	55
Neutralizing antibodies & Protective immunity	55
GOVERNMENT SCHEMES	Error! Bookmark not defined.
INTERNATIONAL	57
Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID), 2019 released	57
Non-Aligned Movement (NAM): Indian PM to attend the Virtual Summit.....	58
Possible trends across the world post COVID-19.....	58
COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project	61
China teams up with Pakistan to build Diamer-Bhasha Dam	61
Diplomatic tussle at WHO	62
WTO: India needs to look at larger picture.....	63
INDIA AND THE WORLD	65
India can take the lead in reshaping global order.....	65
India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations appointed.....	66
India amidst challenging geopolitical situation.....	67
Nepal's new official map is "artificial" and unacceptable to India	68
India-Nepal Border issue.....	69
The India-China border flare-up.....	71
Delhi and complex geopolitics of Pashtun lands	73
ECONOMY.....	75
SLF-MF scheme benefits extended to all banks.....	75
Raghuram Rajan suggests spending ₹65,000 crore for the poor.....	75
RBI's job involves trade-offs, not conflicts.....	76
India's Foreign Exchange (Forex) reserves decline	77
Confederation of Indian Industry argues for calibrated exit from the lockdown.....	78
Excise duty on alcohol: a major contribution to States' revenue	78
SC brings Co-operative Banks within the ambit of Sarfaesi Act.....	79
CONSOL BOND	80
To sustain growth, India needs fiscal stimulus	81

Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan announced	84
Major stimulus package for MSMEs and other sectors announced	85
Atma-nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (or Self-reliant India Mission)	87
Money laundering and fugitive offender issue.....	88
Second tranche of economic stimulus package announced.....	89
Reforms concerning various sectors of economy announced	90
Reviving the automobile sector	93
Financing the Stimulus: Privatization.....	95
WAG12: Indian Railways' first indigenous electric locomotive	96
Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia: Report by the UNODC released.....	97
COVID-19: An opportunity to Biomedical Industry.....	98
Special liquidity scheme for NBFCs/HFCs approved	99
Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) approved for implementation.....	99
A Moment to Revive MGNREGA.....	100
Measures announced by RBI for strengthening the economy	102
An insufficient relief.....	103
The problem with the liquidity push.....	105
Lessons for One Nation One Ration Card	106
COVID-19: Opportunity for India to deepen its engagement with Africa.....	108
AGRICULTURE	110
Third tranche of the economic stimulus package announced.....	110
Reviving agriculture and economy with farm export policies	111
A 1991 moment for agriculture	112
Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyaya Yojana	114
India and Bangladesh Relations: Second Addendum to the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade signed.....	114
Income Transfer Schemes for farmers.....	115
Farmers' protest against restriction on paddy cultivation.....	116
How India can push its dairy cart ahead	117
Unusual Locusts attack in urban areas of India	118
ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION	120
Economy vs Clean air	120
IDEathon on "The Future of River Management'	121
Study of flowering plant endemism of Northern Western Ghats highlights importance of plateaus in conservation plans	122
Increase in the tiger count in the Sundarbans.....	122
LG Polymers liable under Principle of 'Strict Liability' for Vizag gas leak: NGT	123
Ensuring environment sustainability post COVID-19 lockdown	124
Decision on Dibang Multipurpose Project postponed.....	125
Scientists conserve the germplasm of Pinanga Andamanensis	126
New plant species found in Western Ghats.....	127

Charru mussel: An invasive species in Kerala	128
ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS.....	129
Black panther spotted in Goa's Netravali Sanctuary.	129
Potential distribution of the Sal forest tortoise over unprotected areas	130
Puntius Sanctus: a new freshwater fish found in Velankanni.....	130
World Turtle Day 2020.....	131
World Dugong Day 2020	132
INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY	134
Impact of energy efficiency measures for the year 2018-19 report released	134
National Infrastructure Pipeline proposes to set up National Land Management Corporation	134
Coir geo textiles accepted for rural road construction	135
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	136
Shobhana Narasimhan elected as an International Honorary Member to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences	136
1-D Simulation Code to Study Earth's Magnetosphere	136
DST INSPIRE Faculty develops nanomaterials based supercapacitors.....	138
Luhman 16: Binary Brown Dwarf System	139
Wafer-scale photodetector (thin slice-based) device fabricated	139
A project to develop human monoclonal antibodies (hmAbs) approved	140
Rht14 & Rht18: Dwarfing genes in wheat mapped	141
Fountain of high-energy particles erupting from the ice found in Antarctica through ANITA.....	141
Tianwen-1: China's first Mars mission	141
INST scientists find route to fabricate precisely controlled nanostructures of desired geometry & location on 2D materials.....	142
A brewing storm: On Trump vs Twitter	143
DISASTER MANAGEMENT	145
Railways start Shramik Special Trains to move migrant workers and other stranded persons	145
Safeguards against chemical disasters in India.....	145
National Migrant Information System (NMIS) developed	146
A double disaster: On a cyclone amid the coronavirus	146
DEFENCE/INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY	148
Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS) approved.....	148
CBI alerts States, U.T.s and Central agencies to malicious software threat	148
Grasping the Defence Self-reliance.....	149
PERSON IN NEWS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
MISCELLANEOUS.....	151
(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)	160
Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)	160
2020 MAY MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS	176

HISTORY/CULTURE/GEOGRAPHY

GI tag for Chak-Hao and Gorakhpur terracotta

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I - Art and culture

- Chak-Hao, the black rice of Manipur and the Gorakhpur terracotta have bagged the Geographical Indication (GI) tag recently.
- Chak-Hao has been cultivated in Manipur over centuries.
- It is characterised by its special aroma.
- It is normally eaten during community feasts.
- Chak-Hao has also been used by traditional medical practitioners as part of traditional medicine.
- Gorakhpur terracotta is a centuries-old traditional art form, where the potters make various animal figures like, horses, elephants, camel, goat, ox, etc. with hand-applied ornamentation.



Image source: <https://www.indianholiday.com/india-photo-gallery/uttar-pradesh/terracotta-and-clay-sculptures-in-uttar-pradesh.html>



Image source: <https://momamanipur.com/chak-chao/>

Kovilpatti Kadalai Mittai

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I - Art and culture

- **Kovilpatti kadalai mittai** (chikki or sweet made of peanuts and jaggery) has got **geographical indication (GI) tag**.
- It is produced in Kovilpatti and adjacent towns of **Tamil Nadu**.
- The **uniqueness** about the sweet are the **ingredients** used for its manufacture which are procured from the geographical area of Kovilpatti.
- The ingredients include **groundnuts** grown in the **native black soil of Kovilpatti**, **organic jaggery** and **water** sourced from the **Thamirabarani river**.
- It is produced using 'veragu aduppu' (firewood stove).

Kashmir Saffron

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I - Art and culture

- **Kashmir saffron** has been given the **Geographical Indication (GI) tag** by the Geographical Indications Registry.
- It is cultivated and harvested in the **Karewa (highlands)** of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The **unique characteristics** of Kashmir saffron are:
 - longer and thicker stigmas
 - natural deep-red colour
 - high aroma
 - bitter flavour
 - chemical-free processing
 - high quantity of **crocin** (colouring strength), **safranal** (flavour) and **picrocrocin** (bitterness).
- It is the **only saffron in the world** grown at an altitude of 1,600 m to 1,800 m above mean sea level.
- It is renowned globally as a spice.
- It **rejuvenates health** and is **used in cosmetics** and for **medicinal purposes**.
- It is associated with **traditional Kashmiri cuisine**.

Chakma and Hajong

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I - Geography

- The Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region (DoNER) has directed the **Arunachal Pradesh** government to include the **Chakma and Hajong communities** in the **COVID-19 relief programme**.
- The Chakmas and Hajongs are **ethnic people**.
- **Chakmas** are predominantly **Buddhists** while **Hajongs** are **Hindus**.
- They were inhabitants of the **Chittagong Hill Tracts** of erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) who migrated to India due to:
 - Submergence of their land by the Kaptai dam on the Karnaphuli River in the 1960s.
 - religious persecution they faced in East Pakistan as they were non-Muslims.

- The Indian government set up **relief camps in Arunachal Pradesh** and a majority of them continue to live there even after 50 years.

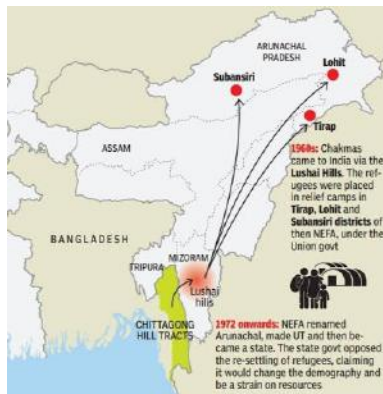


Image source: https://www.google.com/amp/s/m.timesofindia.com/india/chakma-and-hajong-refugees-indias-new-citizens/amp_articles/60733409.cms

Seasonal advancement in surging glaciers in the Karakoram Range

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Geographical phenomenon

In News:

- Recently, scientists from the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG), Dehradun have observed a **seasonal advancement in surging or surge-type glaciers in the Karakoram Range**.
- WIHG is an autonomous institute under the Department of Science and Technology (DST).



Image source: [Click here](#)

Important value additions:

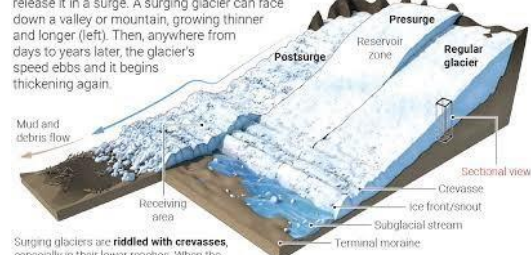
Surging or Surge-type glaciers

- These are **short-lived events** where a glacier can advance and move at velocities up to 100 times faster than normal.
- They **cluster** around a few areas.

- High concentrations of surging glaciers occur in **Svalbard**, the **Canadian Arctic islands**, Alaska and Iceland.
- They also represent **40% of the total glaciated area** of the Karakoram range.
- These can lead to the **destruction** of villages, roads and bridges.
- Therefore, monitoring of glacier surges is important.

A glacier unleashed

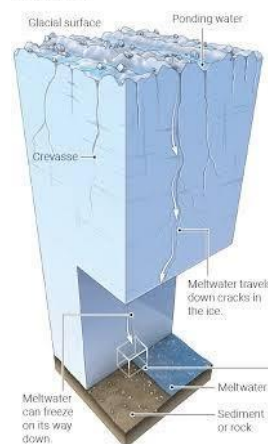
Glaciers gain mass in their upper reaches, where snowfall is heavier, and lose it at their snouts, where the ice breaks up and melts (right). Most glaciers flow steadily, but some get stuck and accumulate mass (center), then release it in a surge. A surging glacier can race down a valley or mountain, growing thinner and longer (left). Then, anywhere from days to years later, the glacier's speed ebbs and it begins thickening again.



Surging glaciers are riddled with crevasses, especially in their lower reaches. When the surge ends, meltwater that built up under the glacier before the surge may sweep mud and debris from its snout.

Trickling down

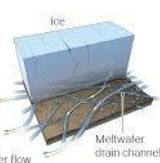
Meltwater plays a key role in triggering surges. Pooling on the glacier's surface, it can seep down into crevasses. There it can refreeze, releasing heat that softens the ice; it can also pool at the base of the ice.



CREDITS: (GRAPHIC) C. BIOKEU/SCIENCE

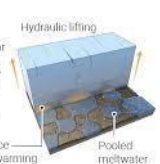
Steady state

In a "normal" glacier, meltwater drains efficiently from its base, carrying away heat and leaving the ice anchored to its bed. Steady meltwater flow under glacier releases heat and pressure.



Buildup to a surge

If drainage is poor or melting accelerates, meltwater can accumulate under a glacier, warming the ice and lifting it off the ground.



Aftermath

Once the surge releases the meltwater, the glacier subsides onto its bed, and the cycle begins again. Majority of meltwater expelled during surge.



Image source: [Click here](#)

GI tag for Jharkhand's Sohrai Khovar painting and Telangana's Telia Rumal

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Intellectual Property Rights

In News:

- Jharkhand's **Sohrai Khovar** painting and Telangana's **Telia Rumal** were given the GI tag recently by **Geographical Indications Registry**.

Important value additions:

Sohrai Khovar

- It is a **traditional and ritualistic mural art**.
- It is practised by **local tribal women** during local harvest and marriage seasons.

- **Local**, naturally available **soils of different colours** are used.
- It is mainly practiced in Hazaribagh district of **Jharkhand**.



Image source: [Sohrai Khovar](#)

Telia Rumal

- This cloth involves **intricate handmade work** with cotton loom displaying a variety of designs and motifs in **three particular colours — red, black and white**.



Image source: [Telia Rumal](#)

Geographical Indication (GI) tag

- It is an indication which is definite to a **geographical territory**.
- It is used for **agricultural, natural and manufactured goods**.
- The goods need to be produced or processed or prepared in that region.
- The product must have a special quality or reputation.
- **The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999** provides registration and also protection of GI goods in India.
- The **Geographical Indications Registry** for India is located in **Chennai**.
- A registered GI tag **prohibits** a third party to use such products.
- GI is a **collective intellectual property right** and is thus **owned** by **all the producers** within the defined GI territory.
- Patents and trademarks are **owned** by an **individual** or a business entity.

Complete solarisation of Konark Sun Temple and Konark town launched

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-I – Culture & GS-III- Energy; Environment

In News:

- Government of India has launched a scheme for **100% solarisation** of **Konark sun temple** & Konark town in **Odisha**.

Key takeaways:

- **The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)** will be responsible for the solarisation.

- **Odisha Renewable Energy Development Agency (OREDA)** shall implement the project.
- The Scheme **aims** to set up **10 MW grid** connected solar project and various **solar off-grid applications** like solar trees, solar drinking water kiosks, etc.
- There will be 100% Central Financial Assistance (CFA) support of around Rs. 25 Crores.
- The scheme will meet **all the energy requirements** of Konark town with solar energy.

Important value additions:

Konark Sun Temple

- It is a 13th-century CE Sun temple at Konark on the coastline of Odisha, India.
- The temple is attributed to king Narasimhadeva I of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty about 1250 CE.
- It is dedicated to the Hindu Sun God Surya.
- This temple was called the "**Black Pagoda**" in European sailor accounts.
- It was declared a **UNESCO world heritage** site in 1984.
- It is a major pilgrimage site for Hindus,
- Large number of devotees gather here every year for the **Chandrabhaga Mela** around the month of February.



Image source: [Konark Sun Temple](#)

Birthplace of Purandara Dasa to be researched upon

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-I – Culture

In News:

- Department of Archaeology, Karnataka will commence field research work to explore archaeological evidences regarding the birthplace of **Purandara Dasa**.
- It was widely believed earlier that he was born in Purandharagad, Maharashtra.
- However, it is also claimed that he belonged to Malnad region of Southern Karnataka.

Important value additions

Purandara Dāsa (1484 – 1565)

- He belonged to the Haridasa movement (servant of Lord Hari or Lord Krishna)
- He was a renowned composer of Carnatic music, a Vaishnava poet, a saint and a social reformer.
- He was a disciple of the Dvaita philosopher-saint Vyasatirtha.
- He made **Srimad Bhagavatam** available to everyone in simple and melodious songs.
- He formulated the basic lessons of teaching Carnatic music by structuring graded exercises known as **Svaravalis** and **Alankaras**.
- He is widely referred to as the "**father**" of **Carnatic music** in honour of his significant contributions to Carnatic music,

- He is noted for composing Dasa Sahithya.

Earth's magnetic field weakens

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-I – Geographical phenomenon

In News:

- As per the reports, the **magnetic field** around the earth, on an average, has **lost** almost **10% of its strength** over the last two centuries.
- The magnetic field of the earth protects us from the solar radiation.

Key takeaways

- A rapid shrink has been observed in the **South Atlantic Anomaly (SAA)**.
- One most speculated reason behind this is that there is a **chance** that the time for **Earth's pole reversal** is approaching.
- Pole reversal happens when the north and south magnetic poles flip.
- This flip **does not occur** immediately or suddenly.
- It takes place over **centuries** and while it is taking place, there would be multiple north and south magnetic poles during this period, all around the planet.
- This is not the first time for the pole reversal to take place.
- These reversals take place roughly every 250,000 years.
- This is not going to affect or alarm the general public.
- However, It is causing technical difficulties for various satellites and spacecrafts.
- As the magnetic field becomes weaker, charged particles from the cosmos can penetrate through to the altitudes at which low-Earth orbiting satellites fly.

Important value additions

South Atlantic Anomaly (SAA)

- SAA is a stretch between Africa and South America.
- It is an area where the Earth's inner Van Allen radiation belt comes closest to the Earth's surface.
- The SAA is the near-Earth region where the Earth's magnetic field is weakest relative to an idealized Earth-centered dipole field.

A Van Allen radiation belt

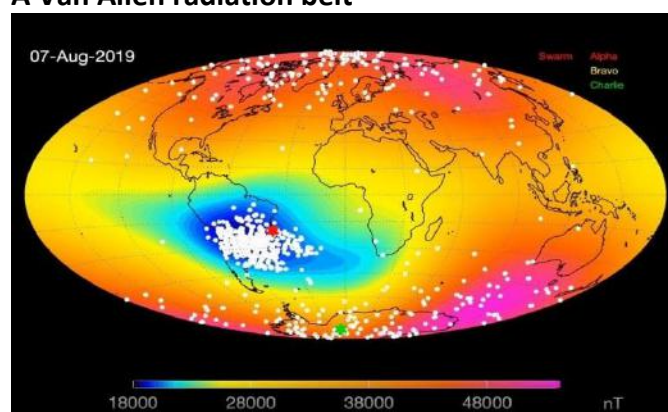


Image source: [Click here](#)

- It is a zone of energetic charged particles, most of which originate from the solar wind, that are captured by and held around a planet by that planet's magnetic field.
- Earth has two such belts and sometimes others may be temporarily created.

Kheer Bhawani Mela gets cancelled amidst COVID-19 pandemic

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-I – Culture

In News:

- The Annual Kheer Bhawani Mela was cancelled recently because of COVID-19 pandemic in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Important value additions

Kheer Bhawani Mela

- It is an Annual Festival celebrated by Kashmiri Pandits.
- The devotees of the Goddess Mata Kheer Bhawani fast and gather here on the day of "Zeshta Ashtami," the eighth day of the full moon in the month of May/June.
- According to belief, the Goddess changes the colour of the spring's waters during this month.
- **Ragyna Devi Temple** in Tulmulla Ganderbal village, near Srinagar (J&K) is popularly known as "**Mata Kheer Bhawani temple**".
- The temple is dedicated to the Goddess kheer Bhawani.
- The term kheer refers to rice pudding that is offered in the spring located in the temple to Please the Goddess.
- This is the most important temple for Kashmiri Pandits.



Image source: [Click here](#)

'Heatwave to severe heatwave' conditions forecasted in India

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-I – Geophysical phenomenon

In News:

- Recently, the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** forecasted the heatwave to severe heatwave conditions over **northwest, central** and adjoining **peninsular** India.
- Increase in temperatures was observed in parts of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Maharashtra as well, triggering heatwave conditions
- The heat wave was due to dry northwesterly winds present over northwest and central India.

Important value additions

Heat wave

- It is a period of **abnormally high temperatures**, more than the normal maximum temperature that occurs during the summer season in the North-Western and South Central parts of India.
- Heat waves typically **occur between March and June**.
- Heat wave is declared under these circumstances:
 - An increase of 5°C to 6°C when the normal maximum temperature is less than or equal to 40°C.
 - An increase of 7°C or more from the normal temperature is considered as **severe heat wave** condition.
 - An increase of 4°C to 5°C when the normal maximum temperature of a station is more than 40°C.
 - An increase of 6°C or more is considered as **severe heat wave** condition.
 - If the actual maximum temperature remains 45°C or more irrespective of normal maximum temperature.

Prelims 2020 Exclusive :Current Affairs Classes

Beat the Heat of Current Affairs Prelims 2020 in 12 Uber Cool Sessions by Tauseef Ahmad (One of the Founders of IASbaba)

MOST PROBABLE PRELIMS
CURRENT AFFAIRS TOPICS
FROM PAST 1.5 YEARS WILL
BE COVERED IN 12 SESSIONS



CRISP AND ORGANISED
NOTES/CONTENT TO MAKE
YOUR REVISION EASIER



Starts 15th April

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

New Parliament project gets Central Vista panel nod

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Parliament

In News:

- The Indian government's plan to construct a new Parliament building was recently approved by the **Central Vista Committee**.
- The committee is **chaired by Central Public Works Department (CPWD) additional director general** (works).
- The committee met through videoconferencing.

Important value additions:

- The **construction of a new Parliament** is a **part of** the larger **revamp** of the entire 3-km Central Vista **from Rashtrapati Bhavan till India Gate**.
- The project was proposed by the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry and its construction agency, the CPWD.
- The plan **includes** constructing a **new triangular Parliament** opposite the existing heritage structure and building a **central secretariat for all Ministries**.
- The CPWD said the estimated cost of the project was Rs.922 crore.

Employment Guarantee Programme

Context: Due to crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic, workers especially belonging to informal sector have been the worst affected. They are being forced to stay in camps or cramped accommodation, foregoing the comfort of family, food, and mental peace.

What should government do now?

- They should treat labour force not in utilitarian terms but in human terms
- They should facilitate migrant workers to go home
- Government should come up with policies assuring all Indians a measure of livelihood and income security. For Ex: Expanded MGNREGA

About MGNREGA

- It stands for **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005**
- It guarantees **100 days of wage employment** in a financial year to a **rural** household whose adult members (at least 18 years of age) volunteer to do **unskilled** work.
- It has unique legal architecture of being **demand-driven**, and not budget constrained.
- It is social security and labour law that aims to enforce the 'right to work'.
- It has provision for **unemployment allowance**, when the state cannot provide work
- The **central government bears the full cost of unskilled labour**, and 75% of the cost of material (the rest is borne by the states).
- Agriculture and allied activities constitute more than 65% of the works taken up under the programme.
- MGNREGA has helped build rural infrastructure through approximately 10 crore families.

Solution to Pandemic: Expanded Employment Guarantee Act

- Government should use the MGNREGA budget to pay full wages to all active job card holders during the lockdown
- MGNREGA must be expanded to allow access to any adult seeking any number of days of work during the period of recovery from the COVID crisis.
- Utilizing the existing provision in act (in the event of calamities) to expand the MGNREGA work by at least another 50 days
- Work must be guaranteed on demand – No delay in process
- Payment of part of the wages in subsidised foodgrain enabling cost efficiency for government
- An Urban Employment Guarantee should also be put in place
- Home-based activities can be permitted in the expanded employment guarantee programme: making masks, soaps and sanitisers
- Following Kerala's success, panchayats and local government units should be empowered and involved in disbursement of funds.
- This will act as human response to this epidemic

Did You Know?

- In 1975, Maharashtra passed an employment guarantee law with no restrictions on the number of days or people.
- To fund this, the legislature identified four taxes to be put into a dedicated employment guarantee fund.
 - A professional tax on all salary earners,
 - Tax on petrol
 - Sales tax surcharge and
 - Tax on the income of three-crop irrigated farms
- The Maharashtra Act served as a model for the MGNREGA although its innovative funding pattern was not adopted

Connecting the dots

- Rights based governance framework
- Union Government's Four Labour Codes

COVID-19: A pandemic patent pool needed

Context: Every April 26, World Intellectual Property Day is celebrated. This year provided an opportunity to reflect upon the role of intellectual property (IP) in the ongoing health crisis

Vaccines as solution to Pandemic: Critical Analysis

For human life to become normal again, vaccines or medicines are the only permanent solutions. However, there are several obstacles like:

- **Time Constraints:** Even by conservative estimates, it will take at least 6-10 months for any vaccine/drug to be available.
- **Scalability:** Even when approval for marketing of a vaccine/drug is granted, it will be impossible for it to be made instantly available across the world.

- **National Boundaries:** For the product to be available across the world, approvals will be required in each and every country.
- **Large scale Collaboration:** For the vaccine/drug to be available continuous dialogue has to take place among innovators, manufacturers and supply chains.
- **Exclusivity claims:** Innovations may be subjected to **patent applications** around the world to reap commercial benefits, which enhances above constraints

What is the purpose of Patents/Intellectual Property?

- The purpose of creating and recognising patent rights is for the common public good, i.e., innovation should be made public in exchange for a limited monopoly.
- Thus, patents need to be disclosed to the public in order to enable further research.

Dangers of Patents in present times

- It will create obstacles in delivering the medicine to patients
- It will result in dividing countries, corporations and international organisations.
- **Anti-IP sentiment** will build up across society, when patents are excessively utilized during public health crisis like this- it is not in the long term interest of IP

Solution is Creating a Patent Pool

- Patent pools are usually effective in aggregating, administering and licensing patents related to specific areas of technology
- Such pools are usually **managed by a central agency** and the patents which become part of the pool are readily made available for licensing.
- They publish the royalty rates payable for such licences.
- Anyone who wishes to obtain a licence will be able to approach the pool, agree to the terms, and begin to manufacture and sell the products.
- Such pools are prevalent in, for instance, standard essential patents related to telecom and digital innovations.
- A fruitful endeavour would be to create **a global pool of COVID-19-related innovations**, managed by a trustworthy international organisation

Advantages of Global Patent Pool for COVID-19

- It will be in line with the Doha Declaration on Public Health which is a part of the TRIPS agreement.
- It ensures **countries have the right** to implement these innovations without further permission from the patent-holders and without resorting to provisions such as compulsory licensing, state acquisition, etc
- It will ensure that there are hundreds of manufacturers across the world. As a result, vaccines and medicines will be **quickly available**.
- Though royalties will be at a minimal level, the **revenues would be high** due to the large population affected by the pandemic
- Some part of the royalties could then be disbursed to patent owners on a periodic basis and some part **could be used to fund further research** to deal with such pandemics in future.

Conclusion

Global patent pool needs the cooperation of not just countries and international organisations but also the hundreds of researchers, innovators, companies and universities involved.

Connecting the dots

- Compulsory licensing and India
- National IPR Policy of India

COVID-19: Countries should commit for Universal Bio-deterrence

Context: COVID-19 pandemic has awakened the world to the destructive potential of a possible biological weapon. Many see COVID-19 as a quasi-biological war in its scale, scope, duration and impact.

Health and biosecurity have, thus, become paramount in national security in 2020.

Challenges of Biological Weapons

- Difficult to differentiate between intentional harm and accidental transmission.
- New biological agents cannot be anticipated
- Highly transmissible and deadly
- The time lag in finding treatment and vaccines inflicts high morbidity and mortality on defenceless populations.
- The latency period and mutation into different strains makes disease detection and control difficult.
- It affects the armed forces' capacity to deal with other conventional and terrorist threats
- Amenable to be used by non-state actors: **Bioterrorism** by non-state actors through accidental release or theft of biological disease agents from research facilities
- Mass contagion and fatalities can bring even the most powerful economies to a halt.
- Societies can be put into turmoil and governance can suffer serious crises.

What measures are need to tackle dangers of Bio-weapons?

1. Integration with National Security

- Biosecurity should be mainstreamed into our defence, security and counterterrorism strategies.
- A dedicated National Rapid Deployment Biosecurity Force should be established
- This would consist of armed forces, police and health responders who perform frontline pandemic-related bio-defence, and disaster relief and response roles.

2. Developing Bio-intelligence

- Effective, credible, national and international, bio-intelligence systems — especially for new diseases and potential bioweapons — should be put in place.
- National defence intelligence should incorporate medical intelligence and infectious diseases-risk assessment, and pandemic predictions.
- Countries should develop National strategies for bio-intelligence and cooperate with other friendly biosecurity powers

3. Bio-safety of Research facilities

- Governmental and private R&D labs, biotech and virology centres need to be catalogued according to established safety levels, especially for dangerous biological toxins.
- Protocols in case of accidents and theft need to be established for them.

4. Developing multilateral bio-surveillance mechanisms.

- Empowering WHO's health security mechanisms to surveil and access facilities in countries free from geopolitical pressures.
- Non-proliferation and export control on dual-use biological materials and technologies.
- All countries need to recommit to a doctrine of **universal bio-deterrence**.

5. Changes in Governance

- Countries need to make all normal laboratories and medical facilities transformable into a seamless biosecurity infrastructure for quick and reliable testing
- Countries should pursue national self-sufficiency in medical and healthcare supply chains

Conclusion

India needs to propel the early reinforcement of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention with a comprehensive, legally-binding protocol on credible biosurveillance, verification and compliance mechanism at the 2021 review conference.

Connecting the dots

- Chemical Weapons
- Trade control regimes: Wassenaar agreement, Australia Group, MTCR and NSG

J&K Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) Bench to deal with service matters

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Polity

In News:

- The **Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) Bench of J&K** will deal with **all service matters** of the **employees of the Central government** and the **Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh**
- Earlier, Chandigarh Bench of CAT used to deal with these matters..

Important value additions:

Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT)

- It was established under **Article 323 - A** of the Constitution.
- Mandate: **To adjudicate** (formal judgement) **disputes and complaints** related to recruitment and conditions of service of persons who are appointed to public services and posts.
- The Tribunal exercises the **same jurisdiction** and authority in case of **contempt** of itself as that of a **High Court** under Section 17 of the Administrative Tribunal Act, 1985.
- The Tribunal is guided by the **principles of natural justice** in deciding cases.
- It is **not bound** by the **procedure** prescribed by the Civil Procedure Code.
- Salaries, allowances and conditions of service: As specified by the Central Government.

Cauvery Waters Authority

Context: Central Government through notification on 24th April 2020 brought the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) under the administrative control of the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti.

Brief History of Cauvery Waters Authority

- Central Government, in exercise of the powers under Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956 had constituted the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal in 1990.
- The Tribunal adjudicated upon the water sharing of Cauvery river among the States of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Union territory of Puducherry.
- The Tribunal gave its verdict in 2007. However, the party States filed case in the Supreme Court against the said verdict.
- The Supreme Court delivered its verdict in 2018 modifying the Tribunal's order. [Click here](#) for details
- SC also directed the Central Government to frame a scheme under section 6A of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, to implement the verdict.
- As a result, the Central Government notified the **Cauvery Water Management Scheme** on 01st June, 2018, constituting the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) and the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC)

What is the criticism of the notification?

Farmers groups & political parties are alleging that notification has reduced the Authority to a "puppet" of the Centre. The reason cited for this allegation are

- CWMA was created on the direction of the Supreme Court in February 2018 and Ministry of Jal Shakti was formed in May 2019 through merging of two ministries.
- It is argued that between June 2018-May 2019, there was no public notification on the CWMA being designated as an organisation under then Union Ministry of Water Resources. Hence, the new notification is a move without any precedence.

Is the above Criticism justified?

Not necessarily, this is because

- CWMA has been working all along under the Water resources Ministry.
- Even in the case of its predecessor, the Cauvery River Authority (1998-2013) with the Prime Minister as the Chairman and Chief Ministers of the basin States as Members, the Union Ministry of Water Resources had administrative control
- Besides, eight inter-State river water boards will come under the Jal Shakti Ministry as a result of this notification. Hence, it is not specific to Cauvery river.
- The notification is just an allocation of business rule which means the authority will have to report to the Jal Shakti Ministry
- Thus, the notification is just a procedural requirement (after the merger of water ministries) and has no impact on the independent nature of the functioning of the authority.

Is everything fine with CWMA?

No, there are criticisms against Centre vis-à-vis CWMA on the following grounds

- Even two years after its formation, the Authority does not have a full-fledged chairman.
- Centre has been reluctant to act decisively in aspects relating to CWMA, other than under the orders of the Supreme Court, for fear of alienating voters in one of the States involved
- The body has thus been not fully operational.

Conclusion

- River Water sharing being a sensitive issue, Centre must ensure that all stakeholders are communicated properly as to avoid confusion.

Connecting the dots

- Do you think that the next World War will be over water? Discuss
- 'Rivers as a mechanistic producer of water, not as a dynamic life-giving system that is responsive to local and global triggers of use and abuse'. Comment.

Saras Collection launched on the Government e Marketplace (GeM) portal

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Governance

In News:

Recently, the Indian government launched the Saras Collection on the Government e Marketplace (GeM) portal.

It is a unique initiative by the GeM, Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) and Ministry of Rural Development.

Key takeaways:

- It shall showcase daily utility products made by rural Self-Help Groups (SHGs).
- It aims to provide SHGs with market access to Central and State Government buyers.
- The initiative is first launched in the states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.
- It shall cover other states in the upcoming phases.
- It will do away with intermediaries in the supply chain and ensure better prices for SHGs.

Important value additions:

Government e-Marketplace

- It is a National Procurement Portal to facilitate online procurement of common use goods and services required by various central and state government departments/organizations/public sector undertakings (PSUs).
- It was launched in 2016 to bring transparency and efficiency in the procurement.

- It functions under Directorate General of Supplies and Disposals (DGS&D), Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana or DAY

- It is a Government of India scheme for helping the poor by providing skill training in both rural and urban areas as per requisite international standards.
- The Government of India has provisioned ₹500 crore (US\$70 million) for the scheme.

Multiple entry life-long visa facility for OCI holders suspended

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Citizenship

In News:

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has suspended the right of multiple entry life-long visa facility of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders for visiting India .

The order will be valid till the prohibition on international air travel of passengers from/to India is lifted by the Government of India.

Important value additions:

Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI)

- It is an immigration status permitting a foreign citizen of Indian origin to live and work in the Republic of India indefinitely.
- It was introduced by The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2005.
- It was launched during the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention held in Hyderabad in 2005.

Abolition of Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)

Context:

Recently, Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) was suspended by the Central government for two years.

All Opposition parties have criticised the Government's move.

However, the government has reasoned that these funds are needed to strengthen the government's efforts in managing the challenges and adverse impact of COVID-19 in the country.

What is MPLADS?

- Under the scheme, each Member of Parliament may suggest works to the District Collector amounting ₹5 crores per year which can be taken up in his/her constituency.
- However, the experts feel that the MPLADS scheme should be completely abolished due to following reasons:

Separation of powers

- The scheme gives an executive function to legislators.
- hardly any authorities in the district who have the courage to defy the wishes of an MP.

CAG's observations

- According to Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)'s report, utilisation of funds is between 49 to 90% of the allotted amount.
- Though the scheme envisages that works under the scheme should be limited to asset creation, 78% of the works that were recommended were for improvement of existing assets.
- Lesser quantities of material were used than specified by contractors resulting in excess payments and sub-standard works.
- There was no accountability for the expenditure in terms of the quality and quantities executed.
- Delays in issuing work orders ranged from 5 to 387 days in 57% of the works. The work order must be issued within 45 days of the receipt of recommendation by the MP.
- Without following the correct procedure, extensions of time were granted to the contractors.
- Register of assets created were not maintained. Thus, location and existence of assets could not be verified.

Gaps in utilization

- There are wide variations in the utilisation of the MPLAD amount in various constituencies.
- According to a report published in IndiaSpend:
- 298 of 542 Lok Sabha members had not spent a rupee from the ₹5 crore that is set aside annually for them to develop their constituencies even after a year of their election.
- Though ₹1,757 crore had been released for MPLADs, only ₹281 crore had been utilised by all the 543 MPs till May 15, 2015.
- This means only 16% of the money had been spent in one year by all the MPs put together.
- Since the MPLADS began in 1993, ₹5,000 crore was lying unspent with various district authorities by May 15, 2015.

Funds being utilised for appeasement

- MPLADS funds are also used to appease opinion-makers and favourite contractors.

- Often, the contractor is a relative, close friend, or a confidant of the MP.

Constitutional validity

- Constitutional validity of MPLADS was challenged in the Supreme Court of India in 1999, followed by petitions in 2000, 2003, 2004, and 2005.
- The combined judgment for all these petitions was delivered in 2010 and the scheme was held constitutional.
- It is often pointed out that the judgement was pronounced without an assessment of the situation prevalent in the field.
- Audit reports wherein gross irregularities and infirmities in implementation have been pointed out were not considered as evidence .

Conclusion

- Reports of underutilisation and misutilisation of MPLADS funds continue to surface at regular intervals but no serious attempt has been made to do anything about it till now.
- It would be in public interest to convert the two-year suspension into the complete abolition of this scheme.
- The same fund could be utilised for health and education purposes and in generating employment.

Connecting the dots

While taking over MPLADS funds to fight the virus, Centre must allocate judiciously.

Vizag gas leak

Context:

- Recently, there was a **leak** of a toxic chemical, **Styrene**, near Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh.
- The source of the leak was a **styrene plant** owned by South Korean electronics giant **LG**.
- It has killed several people and left thousands sick.

What is styrene?

- Styrene is a **flammable liquid**
- It is used in the **manufacturing** of:
 - polystyrene plastics
 - fiberglass
 - rubber
 - latex.
- It is also found in:
 - vehicle exhaust

- cigarette smoke
- natural foods like fruits and vegetables.
- **Short-term exposure** can result in:
 - respiratory problems
 - irritation in the eyes
 - irritation in the mucous membrane
 - gastrointestinal issues.
- **Long-term exposure** can lead to :
 - central nervous system issues
 - peripheral neuropathy.
 - cancer
 - depression
- Symptoms:
 - headache
 - hearing loss
 - fatigue
 - difficulty in concentrating.
- Styrene is included in the **schedule of the Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemical Rules, 1989.**
- **Strict norms** are to be followed while handling and storing the chemical.

Cause of the leak

- An **inquiry is yet to be commissioned** to know the exact cause of the leak.
- **Faulty** safety mechanisms or **ignoring** them are being cited as the causes of the leak.

Way forward

- The Andhra Pradesh government must **focus immediately** on the **medical needs** of those grievously affected by the gas leak.
- Compensation for the victims and families.
- **Access** to the highest quality of **health care** for the victims must be ensured.
- Safety of industrial chemicals must be on continuous watch, irrespective of any pandemic.
- The approach to **public and occupational safety** must be strengthened.

Conclusion

- The gas leak tragedy is a reminder that safety is paramount when exiting the lockdown.

Connecting the dots

- Industrial disasters are a result of lack of systemic accountability.
- Presence of Industrial unit in a residential area is a disaster waiting to happen.

Changes brought to Labour laws by U.P and M.P governments

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Employment

In News:

- The **Uttar Pradesh government** has approved an **Ordinance exempting** businesses from all the [labour laws](#) except few for the **next 3 years**.

- **Madhya Pradesh government** has also **suspended** many labour laws for the next **1000 days**.

Key takeaways:

Uttar Pradesh:

- Laws related to the following have become **defunct**:
 - Settling industrial disputes
 - Occupational safety
 - Health and working conditions of workers
 - Trade unions, contract workers, and migrant labourers
- **No relaxation** in laws related to the following:
 - Bonded labour
 - Deployment of women and children
 - Timely payment of salaries
- These changes will **apply** to both the **existing businesses** and the **new factories** being set up in the state.

Madhya Pradesh

- Few **important amendments** are:
 - Employers can **increase working hours** in factories from 8 to 12 hours.
 - The **factory registration** will be done **within a day**, instead of 30 days.
 - The licence renewal will be done **after 10 years**, instead of a year.
 - Industrial Units will be **exempted** from majority of the provisions of the **Industrial Disputes Act, 1947**.
 - Contractors employing **less than 50 workers** will be able to work **without registration** under the **Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970**.
- Reasons for change in labour laws in both states:
 - To **attract** investment.
 - To **encourage** industrial activity.
 - To **protect** the existing employment.
 - To **provide** employment to workers. who have migrated back to their respective States.
 - To **increase** the revenue of states which have fallen due to closure of industrial units during Covid-19 lockdown.
- The changes could lead to **denying** the rights of workers which is a **violation** of human and fundamental rights.
- It may **create insecurity** among the workers.
- The changes may lead to **desperate conditions for workers**.

Important value additions:

The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947

- It was enacted to promote industrial peace by providing appropriate machinery for amicable settlement of disputes arising between employers and employees.

Is the Rajya Sabha essential?

Context:

Below editorial covers the following areas -

1. Basics or key facts about Rajya Sabha
2. Whether we need Rajya Sabha? - Arguments in favour and arguments in against
3. Views of proponents and opponents

Key facts about Rajya Sabha

- The [Rajya Sabha](#) is the Upper House (Second Chamber or House of Elders) and it represents the states and union territories of the Indian Union.
- It came into being on April 3, 1952 and held its first session on May 13 the same year.
- [Government of India Act of 1919](#) introduced, for the first time, bicameralism. [Government of India Act, 1935](#) proposed an elaborate and improved version of the second chamber, but this never materialised.
- [Bicameralism](#) is a specific feature of Federal form of government and was borrowed from the British Constitution.

Do we need Rajya Sabha?

Arguments in favour

1. The Rajya Sabha is required to maintain the federal equilibrium by protecting the interests of the states against the undue interference of the Centre.
2. The second chamber enables a second and reflective expression of representative opinion.
3. Both the Houses check one another and hence instances of parliamentary tyranny can be avoided. In other words, it can ensure that the majoritarian thrust of the Lower House does not undermine rule of law and public institutions.
4. Legislation is checked by members who are expected to be sober, wise and well-informed with domain knowledge.
5. It represents the interests of the States as a federal chamber. (Promotes Federalism)
6. It acts as a deliberative body holding high-quality debates on important issues.
7. It helps to initiate proposals for public policy.
8. Rajya Sabha can be the voice of sanity, of the excluded, and of citizen rights.

Arguments against

1. In 2006 in *Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India and Others*, the SC held that - Rajya Sabha has turned out to be another chamber of the Parliament akin to the Lok Sabha, except for the mode of selection of its members.
2. The deadlock between both Houses on parliamentary matters is a major setback to India's progress and shows the leadership of all parties in a bad light.
3. Cronyism and patronage appointments are increasing.
4. Only some members have the necessary qualifications that will do justice to the role of the Rajya Sabha, others do not measure up.

5. Many parties are now using the Rajya Sabha as a backdoor to get members elected, most of whom will not be able to win a Lok Sabha election.
6. People get in from States they are least connected with.
7. Parliamentary logjams and stalling of legislation can be avoided.

Opponents view

1. According to **Mr. Mohd. Tahir (Constituent Assembly member)** - "Upper House was not *essential and viewed it as a creation of imperialism.*"
2. According to **Professor Shibban Lal Saksena** - "the second chamber acts as an obstruction in the wheel of progress of the nation as it doesn't enable quick law-making."

Proponents view

1. According to **Naziruddin Ahmad** - a second chamber would introduce an element of sobriety and second thought besides lending voice to the constituent units in legislative scheme of things.
2. According to **M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar** - a second chamber would check hasty *legislation and it can make place for genius people "who may not be able to win a popular mandate".*
3. According to **N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar** - a second chamber will help to "hold dignified debates on important issues and to delay legislation might be the outcome of passions of the moment until the passions have subsided and calm consideration could be bestowed on the measures which will be before the Legislature."
4. According to **Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan**, the first Chairman of the Rajya Sabha - Because of Rajya Sabha, Parliament is not just a mere legislative body but also deliberative one. It enables the members to debate major issues *report public i*
5. **Lokanath Mishra** described it as "a sobering House, a reviewing House, a House standing for quality and the members will be exercising their right to be heard on the merits of what they say, for their sobriety and knowledge of special problems."
6. Rajya Sabha largely duplicates the functions of the Lok Sabha and is unnecessary. - **Abbé Sieyès**

Conclusion:

- The council of states emerged after it was subjected to serious argumentation and undergoing severe scrutiny in the Constituent Assembly. It should be our responsibility to make it an effective and time-bound contributor to India's parliamentary system.
- It has the role of a watchdog, it must assert itself as a House of correction. Its function is to improve legislation passed by the Lower House and is not one of obstruction.

Connecting the dots:

- What measures are needed to make the Council of States more effective and a deliberative body?

- Do you think Rajya Sabha needs reforms? If yes, why and what type of reforms are needed?
- Rajya Sabha is the repository of diverse intellect that ensures in depth scrutiny and wide ranging debates. Even though, it has limited functional powers, its role in India's polity can't be belittled. Critically comment.

Arogya Setu app: Advantages and Issues

Below editorial covers the following areas -

1. What is [arogya setu](#) app?
2. Its advantages
3. Issues concerning the app
4. How to overcome the issues

Aarogya Setu

- It is Indian **COVID-19 tracking** mobile application.
- It is developed by the **National Informatics Centre** which comes under the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology**.
- Purpose:
 - To **spread awareness** of COVID-19
 - To **connect** essential COVID-19 - related health services to the people of India.
- It uses the smartphone's **GPS and Bluetooth features** to track the coronavirus infection.
- With Bluetooth, it determines the risk if one has been near (within six feet of) a COVID-19 - infected person, **by scanning** through a **database** of known cases across India.
- Using location information, one can determine whether a particular location is one of the infected areas.
- It is an updated version of an earlier app called **Corona Kavach** (now discontinued).

For which category of people has the installation of the app been made compulsory?

- As per the directive issued under the Disaster Management Act, it is compulsory for following people to install the app:
 - all people residing in 'containment zones',
 - all government and public sector staff,
 - all employees, both public and private, who are allowed to work during the lockdown,
 - **Stranded Indians** in abroad, once they landed in India through **Vande Bharat Mission**.
 - **Travelers** who will be traveling in special passenger trains.

Advantages of the app:

- Individuals and authorities shall **remain informed** in case they have crossed paths with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus.
- It works on **Bluetooth-based technology**. Absence of internet connectivity won't pose a problem.
- The app recommends several measures such as **Self Assessment Test, Social distancing, do's and don'ts**.
- It informs about the **precautionary measures**.

- As per the statement by the Prime Minister's Office, it could also be used as an **e-pass** for traveling.
- In case, a user is at **high risk**, the app will advise him/her to go for a **test** at a nearby **testing centre** and call the **toll-free number 1075 immediately**.
- The **helpline number** for each state is also available.



Image source: [Click Here](#)

Issues with the app

- It is **imposed** through executive order without any legalisation.
- It is being regarded as **sophisticated surveillance system**.
- Recently, **Robert Baptiste** tweeted that **security vulnerabilities** in Aarogya Setu allowed hackers to know who is infected or unwell in the area of his choice. He also **gave details** of how many people were unwell and infected at the Prime Minister's Office, the Indian Parliament and the Home Office.
- The app's Terms of Service (TOS) provides **blanket limited liability** on the government. Thus, there is **no government accountability** in case of data theft of users.
- The app **breaches the fundamental right to privacy**. There is **no legal framework** to show the breach as reasonable.
- If users have no control over their data, it is a complete **violation** of their **right to informational self-determination** and the **right to be forgotten**.
- The **closed source architecture** of the app **violates transparency** principles.

- Under the TOS, the government is **obligated to delete** certain **personal data** after a **30-day time period**. However, there exists **no framework to check compliance** of the same.
- **Ever-changing rules** add to the problem. Recently, the app updated its privacy policy without notifying users. Such actions do not inspire trust.
- There are **no safeguards** against data theft and other breaches.
- It is **not clear** if the government has **conducted scenario analyses** of how the app can be **misused or abused**. This is **crucial** in India given how much stigmatisation has already occurred (communities refusing to bury bodies of COVID patients and an instance of the lynching of a person suspected to be positive).
- There are **no guidelines** about how the government plans to deal with **cases of false positives**.
- There are **no clear instructions** to **deal** with people who may make wrong **inference or stigmatise someone on the basis of faulty algorithms**.
- The app is **useless** for the **low-income non-smartphone users**. There exists no alternative for them as well.

How to overcome the issues?

- The government must **heed privacy concerns** raised by the Opposition,
- It should look at the **experiences** and experiments in **other countries**.
- The app code must be **opened** so that they can be **audited for design and programming flaws**. For example, Singapore's TraceTogether app was made open source, thus allowing researchers and experts to test the architecture and suggest measures to correct vulnerabilities.
- It will help in bringing **transparency** and deal with **bugs**.
- India must **contemplate a legal design** around the app, which strikes a **balance** between **disease containment** and **privacy**.
- It should **address fears** among the public that it may become a permanent mass surveillance instrument.
- It should also ensure that there is **sufficient anonymity** of data and access is limited.
- It must **resort to methods** that cause the least harm.

Conclusion

Across India, there are efforts to build databases of people's health records to enable easier treatment, including through telemedicine.

If instances of misuse of the Aarogya Setu app emerge, then people **will not trust** other government initiatives involving health records, even if they are undertaken with due care, inclusive consultations, and respect for privacy.

Connecting the dots:

- How well is India equipped to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic post the lockdown? Examine.
- What are the controversies surrounding the Aarogya Setu app? Discuss in detail.

[Dr. B. R. Ambedkar insights on Labour Rights](#)

Context:

[Some state governments](#) have recently decided to relax the application of labour laws in order to restart economic activity stalled by the coronavirus pandemic.

However, such a move, even if it delivers results in the short-term, is myopic and grossly unconstitutional in nature.

Note: Below editorial covers the following important dimensions -

1. How Labour Laws emerged in India?
2. Concerns with current labour laws in India
3. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar insights on Labour Rights

Labour laws in India

- Labour laws arose out of a long period of struggle.
- **Pre-Independence labour movements**, 1931 Karachi Declaration and Bill of Rights - expressly placed labour rights on a par with ordinary civil rights such as the freedom of speech and expression.
- Preamble of **1931 Karachi Declaration and Bill of Rights** declared that “political freedom must include... real economic freedom of the... millions”.
- **Dr. B. R. Ambedkar** was a long-time advocate for the rights of labour. He was instrumental in the passage of an eight-hour working day law.
- **Role of Supreme Court** - In a landmark judgment, PUDR vs. Union of India, the Supreme Court had held that the right against forced labour included the right to a minimum wage.

All the above principles and laws eventually found their way into the Indian Constitution in the form of “**Directive Principles of State Policy**” and “**fundamental rights.**” (Example, Article 23 - guarantees right against forced labour.)

Concerns/Problems:

India’s labour law structure has been criticised on multiple counts.

1. It is argued that there is a structural inequality that enables the capitalists to “make the rules” for the labour. (which amounts to a form of “private government”)
2. Of late, with the rise of the platform or gig economy, this inequality of power has only grown starker.
3. It is argued that it sets up a labour bureaucracy that is prone to corruption.
4. Adjudicatory mechanisms are inefficient.
5. Majority of the workforce, engaged in contract labour or informal employment, has very few rights.
6. Labour laws doesn’t represent the interests of the employees.
7. Many prominent labour unions prefer to arrive at an accommodation with the management, rather than represent the interests of their constituents.

All these problems calls for a debate on the future of labour rights, especially in a world where the nature of work is changing rapidly.

This debate can be guided by B.R. Ambedkar's insights that remain relevant even today, the Constitutional guarantee against forced labour.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar ideas on Labour Rights

- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar observed that the purpose of Constitutions has been to limit state power, in order to preserve the freedom of the individual.
- Ambedkar argued that fundamental rights must “eliminate the possibility of the more powerful having the power to impose arbitrary restraints on the less powerful by withdrawing from the control he has over the economic life of the people”.
- The purpose of labour laws should be to mitigate the imbalance of power between capitalists and labour. It should aim to secure the “rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”, in both the public and the private spheres.

Conclusion:

However, the recent decisions by several state governments are grossly unconstitutional as the economic power exercised by capital will be left unchecked.

An increase in working hours and a removal of minimum wages are two proposals strongly under discussion.

This would be nothing other than the freedom to “increase hours of work and reduce rates of wages”.

According to Ambedkar's words, the Constitution provides for equal freedom and that must be the yardstick from which the proposed legal changes in the shadow of COVID-19 should be measured.

Connecting the dots:

- Bring out the significance of labour reforms for sustained economic growth and employment generation.
- Was labour the obstacle to the growth of the Indian economy all this while?
- What are the labour laws in the country, and how can such changes impact firms, their workers, and the economy?

Cooperative federalism amidst COVID-19

Context:

- India's success in defeating [Covid-19](#) rests upon Centre-State cooperation .
- However, some recent developments have revealed tensions in the Centre-State relationship.
- States act as first responders to the pandemic. It is important to supply them with adequate funds and autonomy instead of making them dependent upon the Centre.

This editorial deals with the following:

1. Nature of Indian federalism reflecting centralising tendency
2. Causes of tension between Centre & states
3. Steps to be taken

Nature/features of Indian federalism reflecting centralising tendency

- Due to the centralising tendency of Indian federalism, **K C Wheare** referred to it as “Quasi federal”.
- The **Union List** contains **more numbers** and important subjects (like defence, currency, external affairs, citizenship, railways) than the State List.
- The Centre has **overriding authority** over the Concurrent List.
- The Parliament can by **unilateral action** change the area, boundaries or name of any state (Article 3 of Indian constitution).
- The bulk of the Constitution can be amended by the unilateral action of the Parliament.
- During an **emergency**, the Central government becomes all-powerful and the states go into the total control of the Centre.
- The governor is the head of the state but holds office during the pleasure of the President.
- Features like Single Citizenship, Integrated Judiciary and All India Services also signifies centralising tilt.

Issues between the Centre & states during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Inadequate finances

- Due to the Covid-19 induced lockdown, the sources of states’ revenue have collapsed.
- Their **major revenues** come from liquor sales, stamp duty from property transactions and the sales tax on petroleum products.
- However, their **expenditure** such as on interest payments, social sector schemes, etc. **remain unchanged**.
- States’ GST collections have also been severely affected.
- Contributions to the ‘Chief Minister’s Relief Fund’ or ‘State Relief Fund for Covid-19’ do not qualify as CSR expenditure while contributions to [PM-CARES](#) qualify as CSR.
- The suspension of [MPLADS](#) has created more differences.

Managing COVID-19 zones

- Zone classifications into ‘red’, ‘orange’ and ‘green’ have evoked sharp criticisms from several States which demanded more autonomy in making such classifications.
- State consultation is a legislative mandate cast upon the centre under the **Disaster Management Act of 2005**.

Migrant Crisis

- The influx of migrant workers into their home states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, which already face financial and medical inadequacy, would worsen matters for the states.

Measures to be taken

- The Union government should direct Food Corporation of India to move the grains from the godowns to states.
- Forming of the Inter-State Council a permanent body should be considered.
- Management of disasters and emergencies should be included in the Concurrent List.

Conclusion

The Centre is required to view the States as equals, and strengthen their capabilities, instead of increasing their dependence upon itself.

The Centre and States must come together to fight this global pandemic.

Connecting the dots:

- Do you think the Indian federalism is biased towards the Centre? Analyse.
- In what ways can the Centre facilitate the states in fighting the covid-19 pandemic?

Medical Education: Over-centralisation is harsh

Context: The introduction of National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) has been criticised as excessive state interference in the functioning of Private-unaided and minority medical educational institutions

What Is NEET?

- It is an entrance exam for medical courses like MBBS, BDS, and Post Graduation in both government and private medical colleges.
- The NTA – National Testing Agency, the regulatory body for NEET UG Exam, conducts it every year in various parts of India.
- NEET is based on a core curriculum approach, whereby the syllabi of all the school boards have been taken into consideration.

What are the issues with NEET?

- **Against Federal Spirit:** There are allegations that NEET is infringing upon the state governments' power to hold admissions in the medical colleges funded by them.
- **Infringes on Autonomy:** NEET is an assault on the autonomy of universities and higher education institutions, particularly private, unaided ones
- **Against Article 30 and 19(1)(g):** This provides right to minority educational institutions to administer themselves.
- If a minority institution wants additional qualifications over and above the NEET score, denial of such additional and superior qualifications undermines its choice
- **Regional Imbalance:** Students from some of the state boards (Ex. North East) are at a disadvantage from progressive boards (Ex: Delhi).
- **Urban Bias:** Students in rural India and those studying in state government-run schools in vernacular medium seem to have a lesser chance of success.
- **Lack of Uniformity:** There are wide variations with regard to curriculum design and curriculum evaluation among CBSE and State Boards
- **Enhances the risk:** If a student has to give multiple tests (different state boards/institutions), then the chances of failure in one can be made up in another.
- **Credibility Issues:** The NEET paper was leaked twice in the last four years; therefore, there is not much confidence in NEET's fairness and transparency.
- **Issue of wrong translation:** In the 2018 NEET, as many as 49 questions had errors in Tamil translation
- **Element of Class:** Empirical research in the USA on standardised common tests has found that these tests are biased against the poorer and underprivileged sections of population, women and minorities
- **Not Comprehensive:** Common admission tests cannot measure abilities that are essential for learning such as imagination, curiosity and motivation.

What has been the Supreme Court verdict on NEET?

- In T.M.A. Pai Foundation, SC had held that admission by the management can be by a common entrance test held by “itself or by the State/University
- NEET was initially struck down as unconstitutional in Christian Medical College, Vellore (2013) by a 2:1 majority.
- However, in 2016, the Supreme Court approved the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) as a single-level examination

What is the Supreme Court view on Article 30?

Supreme Court itself termed Article 30 as

- ‘An article of faith’ in Lilly Kuria (1978)
- A ‘sacred obligation’ in Kerala Education Board (1957)
- ‘The conscience of the nation’ in Ahmedabad St. Xaviers College (1974)
- ‘An absolute right’ in Rev. Sidhajibhai Sabhai And Others (1962)
- Part of the ‘basic structure’ in Kesavananda Bharati (1973)

Conclusion

However, SC has consistently held that Article 30 is not so absolute as to be above the law and regulations made in the interests of efficiency of instruction, discipline, health, sanitation, morality and public order.

Connecting the dots

- Joint Entrance Exam and Common Law Admission Test – Critically analyse

Initiatives to boost Education Sector announced

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Education; Governance

In News:

- Recently, we had discussed reforms in the [education sector](#).
- Several other initiatives to boost the education sector were also announced by the Union Finance Minister.

Key takeaways:

- **Manodarpan initiative:** It would provide **psychosocial support** to students, teachers and families for mental health and emotional wellbeing through a website, a toll-free helpline.
- A new **National Curriculum and Pedagogical Framework** for school education, teacher education and early childhood stage shall be prepared to prepare students and future teachers as per **global benchmarks**.
- A **National Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission** will be launched. This will ensure that every child in the country **necessarily** attains literacy and numeracy of foundation level.
- The learning needs of nearly 4 crore children will be covered through this mission in the age group of 3 to 11 years.

J&K Grant of Domicile Certificate Procedure Rules, 2020 notified

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Polity

In News:

- The J&K administration has recently notified the **J&K Grant of Domicile Certificate Procedure Rules, 2020**.
- It also set a **fast-track process** in motion to issue the certificates within a stipulated time of **15 days**.

Key takeaways:

- **Eligible non-locals** can also apply for the certificate.
- Domicile certificates were also made a **basic eligibility condition** for appointment to any post under the Union Territory of J&K.
- Any officer not able to issue the certificate would be **penalised ₹50,000**. The amount would be recovered from his salary.
- **Kashmiri migrants** living in or outside J&K can get domicile certificates by producing their **Permanent Residence Certificate (PRC)**, ration card copy, voter card or any other **valid document**.
- **Bonafide migrants** can apply with the Relief and Rehabilitation department by providing documents like electoral rolls of 1988, **proof of registration** as a migrant in any State in the country or any other **valid document**.

CoAST India launched to monitor the movements of migrants

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-II – E-Governance

In News:

- India Observatory has come up with a Geographic Information System (GIS)-enabled **dashboard** called **Collaboration/Covid Action Support Group (CoAST India)** to monitor the movements of migrants.

Key takeaways

- The CoAST India dashboard includes an India map, which will show the movement of migrants in real time, often on foot.
- Facilities and relief organisations on their routes will also be shown.
- Such data can be used by governments and small local civil society groups for planning and providing assistance to migrants.
- The dashboard has been made in collaboration with **Foundation for Ecological Security (FES)**.

Important value additions

India Observatory

- It was set up in December 2019, with FES.
- It focuses mainly on ecological issues about forests, water bodies, conservation, etc.
- It is freely available for civil society organizations, students, government departments and citizens.

Geographic Information System (GIS)

- A GIS is a computer system for capturing, storing, checking, and **displaying data** related to positions on Earth's surface.
- GIS can help individuals and organizations better understand **spatial patterns** and relationships.
- GIS can use any information that includes location.

- GIS can include data about people, information about the sites of factories, farms, and schools, or storm drains, roads, and electric power lines etc.

Foundation for Ecological Security

- The Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) is a registered non-profit organisation based in Anand, Gujarat.
- It works towards the ecological restoration and conservation of land and water resources in ecologically fragile, degraded and marginalised regions of the country.

A time for reform in courts

Context: The pandemic has affected the functioning of courts and tribunals.

Courts during COVID-19 pandemic

- The judiciary has limited its work to hearing urgent matters via video conferencing.
- This experience has provided an opportunity to improve IT infrastructure of courts so that they can move to video conference hearings as the norm.
- However, any such move without first revamping procedural law would be futile.

What procedural changes have to be made?

1. Changes in Listing of cases in subordinate civil courts and High Courts

- A significant time of daily proceedings is taken up by cases where only adjournments are sought for procedural matters like filing of replies.
- This system can be done away with.
- Also, a system needs to be devised where cases are not listed before the court unless all the documents are filed within strict timelines and every procedural requirement complied with.
- Additionally, there has to be circulation of cases to be listed in advance (two weeks before hearing) which will give advocates enough time to take instructions from clients and prepare for arguments.

2. Supreme Court amending the provisions pertaining to Special Leave Petitions (SLPs)

- **Article 136** of the Constitution enables people to file a SLP in SC against any decision of any judicial or quasi-judicial authority.
- SC grants leave to appeal through A-136, if the petition raises a question of law of general public importance, or if the judgment appealed against is perverse that requires interference from it.
- SLPs has been abused over the years leading to increased burden on SC (SLPs comprise about 60-70% of the Supreme Court's docket)
- 80-90% of SLPs are dismissed, which means only 10-20% of such cases raise important questions of law
- A simple solution would be to **do away with immediate oral hearing of SLPs** and instead provide for a structure of pre-hearing of SLPs

What can be the structure for pre-hearing of SLPs?

- Every SLP must be accompanied by an application for oral hearing which must be decided first by the Court, and that too in chambers.

- To assist the Court for that, a cadre of judicial research assistants made up of qualified lawyers should be created.
- Thereafter, the Court may or may not allow applications for oral hearings based on whether the case deals with important questions of law.
- Only such SLPs in which oral hearing is permitted should be listed for hearing.
- SLPs in which no questions of law are raised, or frivolous ones are raised, should be dismissed without oral hearing and upon imposition of costs.
- This would reduce pendency exponentially as the system will free up the Court's time to hear matters pertaining to interpretation of the Constitution

Conclusion

Without procedural changes in how courts function, mere modernization through enabling video-conferencing facilities will not lead to radical change in judiciary

Connecting the dots

- Tribunalization of Judiciary
- Judicial Appointments and transfers – challenges associated with it

The Competition Commission of India: Google's anti-trust case probed

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-II – Statutory Bodies & GS-III – Information and Technology; Computers

In News:

- The **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** is looking into allegations that Google is **abusing its market position** to unfairly promote its mobile payments app in the country.

Key takeaways

- The complaint alleges that Google showcases its Google Pay app inside its Android app store in India more prominently.
- Thus, it gives it an unfair advantage over apps of competitors, which hurts consumers.
- This is Google's **third major antitrust challenge** in India.
- In 2018, the CCI fined Google **\$21 million** for "search bias".
- In 2019, the CCI also started probing Google for allegedly **misusing its dominant position** to reduce the ability of smartphone manufacturers to opt for alternate versions of its Android mobile operating system.

Important value additions

Competition Commission of India (CCI)

- It is a statutory body of the Government of India.
- It is responsible for enforcing **The Competition Act, 2002** throughout India.
- It prevents activities that have an appreciable adverse effect on competition in India.
- It was established on 14 October 2003 and became fully functional in May 2009.
- CCI consists of a Chairperson and 6 Members appointed by the Central Government.
- It is the duty of the Commission to:
 - eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition,
 - promote and sustain competition,
 - protect the interests of consumers,

- ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.

Competition Act, 2002

- It follows the philosophy of modern competition laws.
- The Act prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises.
- It regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and Merger and acquisition), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

On Supreme Court's move on migrant workers

Context: The Supreme Court took cognisance of the plight of millions of inter-State workers looking for transport home & relief from the crisis. It has given directives to mitigate the sufferings of these people.

Did you know?

- The most acute problem during lockdown was faced by migrant labourers as they had no work, no source of income, no access to basic necessities, no quality testing facilities, no protective gear, and no means to reach home
- Between May 1 and 27 total of 3,700 special trains were arranged by Union government for carrying nearly 50 lakh migrant workers to their home states

Criticism of Supreme Court (SC) during initial period of lockdown

- **Against spirit of PILS:** Petitions were filed before SC on behalf of migrant workers so as to provide directives to executive to provide relief to them. However, SC refused to admit these petitions or adjourned them
- **Matter of Policy:** SC remarked that the condition of migrant labourers is a matter of policy and thus, does not require judicial interference
- **Not in line with Institutional history:** There are numerous judgments where SC has laid out matters of policy. Ex: The Vishaka guidelines on sexual harassment in the workplace; the right to food; and various environmental protection policies.
- **Failure to question Executive:** Solicitor-General argued that the exodus of workers was due to fake news. Apex Court accepted this without digging deeper, and advised media houses to report more responsibly.
- **Failure to perform Constitutional Duty:** By not acting early, the SC has failed to adequately perform as a constitutional court in safeguarding the rights of people.
- A former High Court judge recalled **ADM Jabalpur case** (now overruled) that held that personal liberty was not absolute during a state of emergency.
- **Islands of Hope:** When SC failed to act, High Courts (Karnataka, Madras, AP and Gujarat) asked questions to State governments about migrant rights and held these administrations accountable

Recent Developments

- Three-judge Bench of SC initiated suo motu proceedings based on media reports and representations from senior advocates

- SC observed that there have been inadequacies and lapses on the part of the Centre and States in dealing with the crisis faced by workers
- It has provided directives to Centre and states (which could have taken place 7-8 weeks earlier) so as to cater to the miseries faced by migrant workers

What were the Supreme Court's order on migrant?

- **Responsibility of Railways:** As and when the state governments put in a request for trains for transport of migrant workers, railways has to provide them.
- **Free Service:** No fare for train or bus shall be charged from migrant workers. The fare will be shared by the states.
- **Free Food:** The originating state shall provide meals and water at the station and during the journey, the Railways would provide the same to the migrant workers.
- **Information Sharing:** The state shall oversee the registration of migrant workers and ensure that after registration, they board the train or bus at an early date. Complete information should be provided to all concerned.
- **Ensure Care:** Those migrant workers found walking on the roads, should be immediately taken to shelters and provided food and all facilities.

Way Ahead

- After registration, migrants should not have to wait for a long time for their turns to come. Hence, the need to increase the number of trains
- SC must now find out if the Centre, which imposed a stringent lockdown to buy time for preparing the health infrastructure, had discharged its responsibilities.
- SC may even lay down guidelines for planning, coordination and establishment of a mechanism to address the inter-state issues arising out of pandemic

Conclusion

All three branches of the State must realise that facilitating the movement of the migrants is not an act of charity, it is their duty and responsibility.

Connecting the dots

- Judicial Activism vs Judicial Overreach
- Separation of Powers and Doctrine of Checks & Balances

India and Self-reliance – A brief History

Context: In the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, Prime Minister emphasised the necessity of a self-reliant India.

India during Early days of Independence – Self-reliance losing way to License Raj

- Self-reliance in state-run heavy industries and strategic sectors in the decades following independence had placed India ahead of most developing countries.
- In the 1970s and 80s, however, India did not modernise these industries to climb higher up the technological ladder.
- The private sector, which had backed the state-run core sector approach in its Bombay Plan, stayed content in a protected market.
- Little effort was made to modernise light industries or develop contemporary consumer products.

- The industrial ecosystem was kept hostage to Licence-Permit-Quota system which stifled innovation. As a result, self-reliance gave way to corruption & import dependence

Consequence of these policy measures

- India's industrial ecosystem was thus characterised by **low productivity**, poor quality and low technology, and was globally uncompetitive.
- India completely **missed out on the 'third industrial revolution'** comprising electronic goods, micro-processors, personal computer etc.
- Today, India is the world's second largest smartphone market. However, it does not make any of these phones itself

India at the turn of 1990s

- India embarked on liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation, shunning previous restrictive industrial policies
- The very concept of self-reliance was rubbished; in the belief that advanced technologies could simply be bought from outside at lower costs
- Two related ideas have prevailed since then, and neither delivered the desired results
- **First is ignoring Public Sector Units**
 - PSUs were considered inefficient and sluggish for the competitive globalised scenario.
 - Hence, no effort was made to engender either real autonomy or a transition to new technological directions.
 - Instead, PSUs were undermined or abandoned, along with many nascent research and development (R&D) efforts
 - On the other hand, the private sector displayed little interest in these heavy industries and showed no appetite for technology upgradation.
 - With entry of foreign corporations, most Indian private companies retreated into technology imports or collaborations.
- **Second is inviting Foreign Direct Investment**
 - This was envisaged to bring new technologies into India's industrial ecosystem, removing the need for indigenous efforts towards self-reliance.
 - However, mere setting up of foreign manufacturing facilities in India is no guarantee of absorption of technologies (the ability to independently take them to higher levels).

Consequences of above two ideas – Inequitable Growth

- **Meagre technology transfer:** Foreign majors jealously guarded commercially significant or strategic technologies in off-shore manufacturing bases.
- **Outlier among Asian Countries:** Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong strengthened their self-reliant capabilities through planned state investments in R&D including basic research (3-5% of GDP), technology and policy support to private corporations, infrastructure, education and skill development (4-6% of GDP).
- **Dwarfed by China:** Both India and China were on similar levels during first four decades of Independence. However, China now is self-reliant S&T and industrial capability and

has set itself a target of becoming a world leader by 2035 in 5G, supercomputing, Internet of Things, artificial intelligence (AI)

- **Inactive Private sector in R&D:** Most R&D in India is conducted by PSUs, with little efforts from private players as they prioritized short-term profits over innovations
- **Widened Inequality:** Privatization and FDI benefits were largely reaped by already wealthy sections of society which led to increased gap between rich & poor

Way Ahead – Self-Reliance requires enhanced R&D

- State-funded R&D, including in basic research, by PSUs, research institutions and universities needs to be scaled-up significantly, well above the dismal 1% of GDP currently.
- Private sector delivery-oriented R&D needs to be supported through policy & fiscal measures
- India's meagre public expenditure on education needs to be substantially ramped up (as against current trends of privatisation which would only shrink access)

Connecting the dots

- Neoliberalism
- Globalisation in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic

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SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE

Kisan Sabha App: To connect farmers to supply chain and freight transportation

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Welfare Schemes

In News:

- Kisan Sabha App was launched recently by CSIR-Central Road Research Institute (CSIR-CRRI), New Delhi.
- The app is developed to **connect farmers to supply chain and freight transportation management system.**

Key takeaways:

- The portal **connects** the farmers, transporters, Service providers (like pesticides/fertilizer/ dealers, cold store and warehouse owner), mandi dealers, customers (like big retail outlets, online stores, institutional buyers) and other related entities for **timely and effective solution.**
- The portal acts as a **single stop for every entity** related to agriculture.
- Kisan Sabha has **6 major modules** taking care of:
 - Farmers
 - Mandi Dealers
 - Transporters
 - Mandi Board Members
 - Service Providers
 - Consumers.
- Kisan Sabha **aims** to provide **the most economical and timely logistics support** to the farmers.
- The goal of the app is to **increase farmers' profit margins** by minimizing interference of middlemen and directly connecting with the institutional buyers.
- It will also **help in providing best market rates** of crops by comparing nearest mandis, booking of freight vehicles at cheapest cost.

Employment schemes launched by Jharkhand

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Welfare Schemes

In News:

Recently, Jharkhand launched three employment schemes — Birsa Harit Gram Yojana (BHGY), Neelambar Pitambar JAL Sammriddhi Yojana (NPJSY) and Veer Sahid Poto Ho Khel Vikas Scheme (VSPHKVS) — to create wage employment for workers in rural areas.

The schemes are formulated in convergence with the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Important value additions:

- Birsa Harit Gram Yojana (BHGY):

It shall bring over two lakh acres of unused government fallow land under the afforestation programme.

About 5 lakh families will be provided 100 fruit-bearing plants

The afforestation will be taken up through MGNREGA.

The ownership of land will remain with the government.

- Neelambar Pitambar Jal Samridhi Yojna (NPJSY):

Under this, the government is aiming at creating agro-water storage units by arresting rainwater and runaway groundwater.

- Veer Sahid Poto Ho Khel Vikas Scheme (VSPHKVS):

Under VSPHKVS, the government is linking sports with rural job schemes for creation of assets in the rural areas in order to give a boost to sports.

Amendments brought in the Prime Minister's Research Fellowship Scheme

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Education;

In News:

- Recently **various amendments** have been brought in the **Prime Minister's Research Fellowship Scheme** by the Ministry of Human Resources and Development to boost research in the country.

Key takeaways:

- Now, students from **any recognized university** can apply for the **Fellowship**. Earlier it was open only for students from Central Universities, IITs, IISc, NITs, IISERs, IIST and IIITs.
- The requirement of **GATE score** has also been **reduced** from 750 to 600.
- There will be two channels of entries i.e **direct entry** and **lateral entry**.
- **National Institute of Technologies** (NITs) can also become **PMRF Granting institution**. NITs appear in top 25 institutions in the National Institute Ranking Framework (NIRF).
- A **dedicated division** "Research and Innovation Division" will be formed in the MHRD to **boost research**.

Important value additions:

Prime Minister's Research Fellowship (PMRF) Scheme

- It was launched to attract **meritorious students** into research in 2018.
- It offers **direct admission** to such students in the Ph.D programmes in various higher educational institutions in the country.

- The research under PMRF will be carried in **cutting edge science and technology domains**.
- The institutes which can offer PMRF include all the **IITs, IISERs, Indian Institute of Science**, Bengaluru and some of the **top Central Universities/NITs**.

A research grant of **Rs. 2 lakh per year** is provided to each of the Fellows for a period of 5 years to cover their academic contingency expenses and for foreign/national travel expenses along with monthly stipend.

Changes to Labour laws bane for the most vulnerable

Context:

- Due to the lockdown amidst COVID-19 pandemic, Indian economy has suffered losses across sectors.
- In order to incentivise economic activity, some of the state governments have made significant changes in the labour laws.
- However, the changes may affect the rights and interests of labourers, who are one of the most vulnerable sections that have been impacted by the pandemic.

The editorial throws light on the following points:

1. States that have brought changes to the labour laws
2. Issues related to changed labour laws
3. What steps can be taken to overcome the issues

Which states have changed labour laws?

- **Madhya Pradesh** has allowed business and industries to run without many of the requirements of the Factories Act.
- **Uttar Pradesh** has cleared an ordinance which exempts businesses and industries from labour laws, except for a few, for 3 years.
- Several other states may pursue similar measures in the coming future.
- You can read more about these amendments [here](#).

Issues related to changed Labour Laws

1. Exploitation risk

- These reforms will strip the labour of its **basic rights**.
- Wages might decrease too.
- Suspending most of the provisions under the **Factories Act, 1948** and the **Industrial Disputes Act, 1947** would deny workers of basic working facilities such as cleanliness, drinking water, etc.

2. From formal to informal

- This move will turn the existing formal workers into informal workers as they **won't** be any **social security**.
- They won't be able to **seek grievance redressal**.
- Fall in wages will further reduce the demand in the economy.

3. Rise of forced Labour

- **Bargaining power of labour** and their **right to negotiate** will reduce and may turn them into Forced Labour.

What steps can be taken to protect the labourers?

- The government should **partner** with the industry and a percentage of the **GDP** must be **allocated** for sharing the wage burden and ensuring the health of the labourers.
- The **labour codes** proposed by the government should be **passed** by the parliament as soon as possible.
- These labour codes are:
 - Labour Codes on Wages
 - Labour Code on Industrial relations
 - Labour Code on Occupational safety, health and working conditions
 - Labour Code on Social Security and Welfare
- **Labour laws** which are applicable to the formal sector should be **modified** so that an optimum combination of **flexibility and security** can be ensured.
- The compliance of **working conditions** and regulations should be made more **effective** and **transparent**.

Conclusion

There is a need for comprehensive **labour laws reforms**, so that Indian industries grow sustainably.

Then only firms will be able to expand and interests of labourers will also be intact.

Connecting the dots:

- Do you think the recent amendments brought by State governments to labour laws will boost the Indian economy?
- Ordinance in labour laws will cause more harm than good to the labour sector. Critically analyse?

ReStart Programme by Andhra Pradesh government for MSMEs

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-II – Welfare Schemes

In News:

- Recently, the Chief Minister of **Andhra Pradesh** launched a new programme '**ReStart**' to support the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector in the State.

Key takeaways

- The government will spend ₹1,100 crore on revival of the sector.
- It is expected to benefit 98,000 units that can provide employment to more than 10 lakh people.
- A special fund of **₹200 crore** to provide input capital loan to the firms at low interest rates.
- The minimum power demand charges for the months of April, May and June, shall be waived off.
- The government will purchase around 360 products from the MSMEs.
- Payments would be cleared in 45 days.
- Skills required by the industries (MSMEs) will be imparted through **Skill Development Colleges**.

Katkari tribe generate income through Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-I - Culture & GS-II – Welfare schemes

In News:

- **Katkari tribal youth** from Shahpur in Maharashtra were in news recently for selling **Giloy** and other products online during lockdown.
- They received help under the **Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (PMVDY)**.
- **Giloy** is an **Ayurvedic herb** that has been used and advocated in Indian medicine for ages.

Important value additions

Katkari tribe

- The Katkari are an Indian Tribe mostly belonging to the state of **Maharashtra**.
- Katkari is one of the 75 **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)**.
- The **Madia Gond** and the **Kolam** are other tribal groups included in this group.
- Their vulnerability derives from their history as a **nomadic, forest-dwelling people**.
- They were listed by the British Raj under the **Criminal Tribes Act of 1871**.
- They are subjected to the stigma even to this day.
- Presently, the Katkari are a fragmented and very scattered community.
- They are highly dependent on others for their livelihoods.
- Most Katkari are landless workers.

The Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (PMVDY)

- It was launched in 2018.
- The scheme is run by the [Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India \(TRIFED\)](#).
- It is an initiative targeting **livelihood generation** for **tribals** by harnessing the wealth of forest i.e. Van Dhan.
- The programme aims to tap into traditional knowledge & skill sets of tribals by adding technology & IT to upgrade it at each stage.
- The initiative shall provide enhanced livelihood to about 45 lakhs tribal gatherers in one year.
- Tribal community owned Minor Forest Produce (MFP)-centric multi-purpose **Van Dhan Vikas Kendras** (the Kendra) are set up.
- Essential Features of the PMVDY:
 - The State Nodal Department will have the flexibility to appoint any State Implementing Agency / District Implementing Unit for implementation of the PMVDY in the State and District levels.
 - The Kendras would act as common facility centres for procurement cum value addition to locally available MFPs.
 - A typical Van Dhan Vikas Kendra shall constitute of 15 tribal Van Dhan Self Help Groups (SHG)

A moment to trust the teacher

Context: The government of Tamil Nadu has decided to conduct the Grade X board examination from June 15. To enable for social distancing norms, the number of exam centres has been radically increased from over 3,000 to 12,690

Criticism of Board Examination system

- **Not Evolved:** All examinations follow a strict ritual that has remained unchanged for over a century
- **Little to do with education or learning** - The set pattern board examination follows ensures that the questions will have no intellectual substance
- **Encourages negative values:** Examinations promote the values of fear of failing, sacrifice of joy and selfish competitiveness and submission to an opaque system
- **Suppresses Passion:** Exam scores are used to sort children into subject streams, often at the cost of child's interest, skills and passion.
- **Induces Mental Agony:** The pressure of scoring high marks due to peer pressure and parental pressure, at times pushed [students to suicide](#)
- **Ignores Social Skills:** Board examination system primarily tests person's memory retention ability and this leads to neglect of soft skills like communication, EQ etc
- **Spurs private coaching institutes:** The desire to "crack" exams has led to mushrooming of private coaching centres – which are often business oriented ignoring the purpose of education (creating a responsible human being)
- **Sorts Students on artificial basis:** Exams are used to select a few who can proceed further and eliminate the rest, which is attained by dividing students into "pass"–"fail" categories and into divisions based on marks.

An Alternate Suggestion - School-based system of evaluation.


- Teachers & parent are complaining that the notice period given for the June exam is much too short to "refresh" the children.
- A school based evaluation system would make the Board exams not mandatory
- There is also recommendation in National Curriculum Framework (2005) for making the Grade X exam voluntary.
- Whenever schools reopen, children who want to take the board exam can do so. Others can carry on in the next grade
- Such an approach ensures that trust & responsibility is now reposed on Teachers (whose position & status in society has declined when compared to ancient times)
- As a result, each individual will be evaluated by a Teacher based on her own capabilities and the progress achieved, rather than one-size-fits-all testing system
- There will be **continuous evaluation** of a student throughout the academic year rather than pressurizing the student during exam time
- The **focus of such a system will be on values**, knowledge and creativity rather than rote learning of facts

Conclusion

The novel coronavirus crisis is the right time to create the energy for examination reform


Connecting the dots

- Right to Education
- Happiness classes by Delhi's Educational Board



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HEALTH ISSUE

World Health Organization (WHO) cautious of using BCG vaccine for COVID-19

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In News:

- The [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) highlighted a few **critical issues** over the use of **BCG vaccine** for COVID-19 recently.
- They emphasized the **importance of randomised controlled trials** (RCTs) of the vaccine to understand its safety and efficacy **before using it** on healthcare workers.

Key takeaways:

- **Randomised controlled trials** using BCG vaccine are under way in the **Netherlands and Australia** to find out whether the vaccine can reduce the incidence and severity of COVID-19 among healthcare workers.
- The reasons as to why **countries should wait for the results** of the BCG vaccine RCTs are:
 - The **association of fewer COVID-19 cases** in countries that have a **universal BCG vaccination** programme is **based on population** rather than individual data.
 - The beneficial effects of the BCG vaccine given at birth are “**unlikely**” to **reduce the severity** of COVID-19 decades later.
 - It is already known that the virus induces **cytokine storm** in some patients, leading to further complications — and even death.
 - BCG vaccination is likely to give a **false sense of security** to people, especially during the pandemic, especially if it is not effective against the novel coronavirus.
 - Using the vaccine without evidence of its benefits could further **decrease vaccine supply** to protect children against TB in high-risk countries.

Important value additions:

Randomised controlled trials

- These are **quantitative, comparative, controlled experiments** in which investigators study two or more interventions in a series of **individuals** who receive them in **random order**.
- The RCT is one of the **simplest and most powerful tools** in clinical research.

BCG vaccine

- Bacillus Calmette–Guérin (BCG) vaccine is **used against tuberculosis** (TB).
- In countries where tuberculosis or leprosy is common, **one dose** is recommended in healthy babies **at the time of birth**.

Cytokine storm syndrome (CSS)

- It is a form of **systemic inflammatory response syndrome** (SIRS) that can be triggered by a variety of factors such as infections and certain drugs.
- It occurs when large numbers of **white blood cells are activated** and release inflammatory cytokines, which in turn activate yet more white blood cells.

India's disease surveillance system needs a reboot

Context: COVID-19 data in India show the following trends:

- 75.3% of deaths have been concentrated in the **age group of 60 years and above**
- In 83% of deaths, the deceased were battling **pre-existing identified health conditions**.

What does the above data indicate?

- India appears to have the advantage of a relatively young population when compared to western countries. However, this is negated by the poor health infrastructure
- It also indicates that Corona disease is lethal for those with compromised immunity brought on by age, existing respiratory infections, or essentially, malnutrition
- In technical medical terms, it is a situation of **comorbidity**, whereby it is difficult to differentiate between dying of COVID-19, or, dying with COVID-19.
- Therefore, it becomes imperative that we do not ignore the existing diseases & illness.

How has COVID-19 impacting the healthcare of existing illness?

- The poor who are battling various diseases now have little access to major public hospitals in the wake of the lockdown.
- Various hospital departments that cater to elderly sick patients are turning away many in the bid to streamline "critical" cases.
- This leads to aggravations of poor health conditions already affecting large sections of people

Critical Analysis of India's disease surveillance system

Many of the adverse medical conditions prevalent among the vast majority of our country are not even identified due to the lax disease surveillance system

Some of the reasons for the failure of disease surveillance are:

- **Accessibility:** Significant number of the infected (poor and marginalised people) do not have access to health-care facilities and so fail to report their condition to certified medical practitioners
- **Inadequate Testing:** Even when an infected person has access to such facilities, their clinical case does not always culminate in the required testing (blood/serum, throat swab, sputum, stool, urine).
- **Pervasive non-identification of a definitive Cause:** Even if there is a testing, there is a tendency for laboratories to categorise diseases on the basis of the pre-existing classificatory system, which results in failure to identify the definitive cause for an illness
- **Undifferentiated Illness leading to undeclared silent epidemics:**
 - Due to poor laboratory analysis, many ailments are simply clubbed together and referred to by generic names such as Respiratory Tract Infection (RTI), Urinary Tract Infection, Acute Undifferentiated Fever, Fever of Unknown Origin (FUO) etc.
 - These are known to affect lakhs of people every year worldwide. For Ex: RTI kills over 900 people in India every day
- **Inadequate R&D:**
 - Even if the definitive cause of an illness is identified, it does not necessarily gain the focused attention of scientific research.

- The mainstream scientific research has a biased approach that is driven by the profits of private pharmaceutical companies and is a fallout of lack of governmental support to general healthcare
- **Inadequate Implementation/Political Will**
 - Even when the identity of a contagious disease and its treatment are well known it does not mean that the disease's prevalence will generate the necessary reaction. TB is a suitable example
 - One person in every 10 seconds contracts TB, and up to 1,400 people in India die every day of the disease.

Way Ahead

- It becomes imperative to identify the comparative fatality rates of many of the silent epidemics, which in their own right require urgent attention.
- Public health infrastructure needs be improved and missions targeting ordinary diseases like TB needs to be implemented with full vigour.

Connecting the dots

- India's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP)
- India's Revised National TB Control Program (RNTCP)

States with most Swine Flu cases now victims of majority of COVID-19 cases as well

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In News:

- Data from the Health Ministry's National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), show that the **five States/UTs** - Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Delhi and Tamil Nadu accounted for the **highest number** of swine flu cases (H1N1) since 2015.
- These states are **hotspots** for people infected with **COVID-19** as well.

Important value additions:

Swine Flu

- H1N1 Flu Virus (Swine Flu) is an infection caused by **type A influenza viruses**.
- It is usually found amongst **pigs**.
- Human infections may take place as well.
- It is **contagious** and spreads **from human to human**.
- Symptoms: Fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue.
- Both H1N1 and COVID-19 belong to different virus families.
- Both **infiltrate the lungs** and cause respiratory infections with varying fatality.
- Swine flu has a higher fatality rate (deaths per confirmed cases).
- It also causes **significant deaths** in **children** as well as those **less than 60**.
- COVID-19 is relatively **more dangerous** to those **above 60** and almost **harmless in children**.

Global Nutrition Report 2020: India likely to miss nutrition targets

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In News:

- According to the Global Nutrition Report 2020, India is among 88 countries that are likely to **miss** global **nutrition targets** by 2025.

Key takeaways:

- India will miss targets for all four nutritional indicators for which there is data available
 - stunting among under-five children
 - anaemia among women of reproductive age
 - childhood overweight
 - exclusive breastfeeding
- Underweight rates:
 - Between 2000 and 2016, these rates have decreased from 66.0% to 58.1% **for boys** and 54.2% to 50.1% **in girls**.
- Stunting:
 - **37.9%** of children under five are **stunted** and **20.8%** are **wasted**.
- Anaemia:
 - One in two women of reproductive age is anaemic.
- Overweight and obesity:
 - They continue to rise, affecting almost one-fifth of the adults, at 21.6% of women and 17.8% of men.
- India is identified as among the **three worst countries**, along with Nigeria and Indonesia, for **steep** within-country **disparities** on stunting.

Important value additions:

The Global Nutrition Report

- It is a **peer-reviewed, independently** produced annual publication on the state of the world's nutrition.
- It was conceived following the first **Nutrition for Growth Initiative Summit (N4G)** in 2013.
- The first series was published in 2014.

Stunting

- It is a **reduced growth rate** in human development.
- It is a primary manifestation of **malnutrition** (or more precisely undernutrition) and recurrent infections, such as diarrhoea and helminthiasis, in early childhood.

Anaemia

- A state in which haemoglobin in blood is below the reference range.

Accelerating India's COVID-19 Social Protection Response Programme

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health; Global groupings

In News:

- The **Government of India** and the **World Bank** have recently signed an agreement for \$750 million of \$1 billion assistance.

Key takeaways:

- Assistance is proposed for **Accelerating India's COVID-19 Social Protection Response Programme** to support India's efforts at **protecting vulnerable** households impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It will be implemented by the **Ministry of Finance**.

- Also, \$1 billion support was announced earlier in April 2020 as well by the Bank.
- The new support will be funded in two phases.
- The **first phase** will be an immediate allocation of **\$750 million** for fiscal year 2020.
- It will be implemented countrywide through the [Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana](#) (PMGKY).
- The remaining allocation of **\$250 million** will be made available for fiscal year **2021** in the **second phase**.
- In this phase, **additional cash** and **in-kind benefits** based on **local needs** will be extended through state governments and social protection delivery systems.

Important value additions:

[World Bank](#)

- It is an international financial institution.
- It provides loans and grants to the poorer countries for the purpose of pursuing capital projects.
- It comprises two institutions:
 - the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)
 - the International Development Association (IDA)
- Headquarter : Washington D.C

[Less Invasive Surfactant Administration \(LISA\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health

In News:

- **Less invasive surfactant administration** (LISA) is a recent **medical technique** which started at J.K. Lon Government Children's Hospital in Jaipur.
- This technique is used for **treatment of lung disease** or respiratory distress syndrome among **premature babies**.

Key takeaways:

- It is developed as a **lung protective strategy** for respiratory management and ventilation.
- It has been observed that **mechanical ventilation** causes damage to the **preterm lungs** of newborns.
- Infants who are showing evidence of increasing respiratory distress and rising oxygen requirement are provided with LISA.
- The procedure has yielded encouraging results when it was started initially for newborn children with the birth weight of less than 1,500 grams.
- The regular application of LISA would help save the lives of premature babies.

[Neutralizing antibodies & Protective immunity](#)

- Recently, the paper 'Serologic responses to SARS-CoV-2 infection among hospital staff with mild disease in eastern France' showed that **neutralising antibodies** were found in 91% of the individuals of the Strasbourg University Hospitals who participated in the study.

- Several lines of evidence also suggested that the presence of neutralising antibodies may be associated with **protective immunity** for SARS-CoV-2 infection.
 - A neutralizing antibody (NAb) is an antibody that defends a cell from a pathogen or infectious particle by neutralizing any effect it has biologically.
 - They prevent the particle from interacting with its host cells which it might infect and destroy.
 - Protective immunity develops when the immunity is achieved through immunization, previous infection or by other factors.
-



INTERNATIONAL

Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID), 2019 released

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Society & GS-III – Disaster; Conflicts/Terrorism

In News:

- Recently, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre released its **annual report on internal displacement of people**.

Key takeaways:

- According to the **Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's (IDMC)** annual report, around **50 million people** worldwide were **internally displaced in 2019**.
- The causes of displacement were **conflict or disaster**, with coronavirus posing a new threat.
- Around **33 million new displacements** were recorded in 2019, the **highest annual figure since 2012**.
- The IDMC calls on governments to **work towards solving conflicts** like the civil war in Syria.
- It also **highlights conflicts** in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, and Afghanistan.

Important value additions:

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)

- It is the **world's authoritative source of data** and analysis on internal displacement.
- It is based in **Geneva, Switzerland**.
- It was **established in 1998** as part of the **Norwegian Refugee Council**, a humanitarian, non-governmental organisation.
- The Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID)** is the **annual flagship report** of IDMC.

Five countries with most displacement in 2019 (conflict)

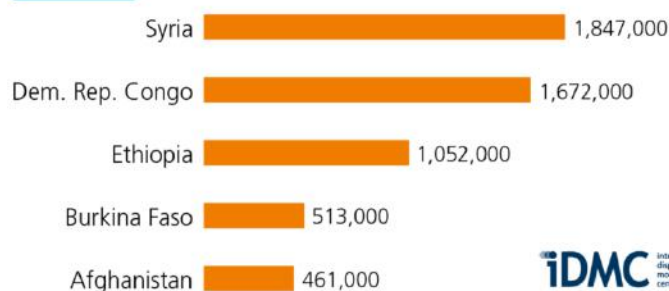


Image source: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>

Five countries with most displacement in 2019 (disasters)

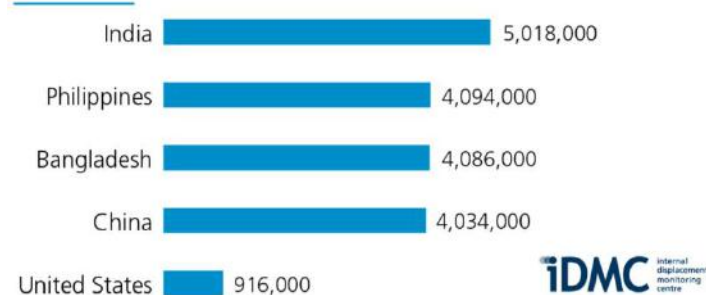


Image source: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>

Non-Aligned Movement (NAM): Indian PM to attend the Virtual Summit

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - International Groupings

In News:

Indian Prime Minister will participate in the **Virtual Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** Summit through Video Conferencing on May 4, 2020.

- The summit will **discuss the enhanced coordination** of the member states in their fight against the **coronavirus pandemic**.

Important value additions:

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)

- It is a **forum of 120 developing nations** of the world that are not formally aligned with or against any power bloc.
- NAM represents the **biggest grouping** of countries **outside the United Nations** comprising countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America.
- Drawing on the principles agreed at the **Bandung Conference in 1955**, the NAM was established in 1961 in Belgrade, SR Serbia, through an **initiative** of the Indian Prime Minister **Jawaharlal Nehru**, Egyptian President **Gamal Abdel Nasser** and the Yugoslav President **Josip Broz Tito**.

Possible trends across the world post COVID-19

Context:

- As we know, the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) is a **global health crisis**.
- Its **rapid spread** across the world compelled the governments to implement various degrees of **lockdown** which affected the **global economy significantly**.
- The world, right now, is facing the **global economic crisis**.
- [In one of the posts on 9th May](#), we discussed how India should respond to the current geopolitical situation.
- Today, we discuss what trends we might get to see geopolitically in the post COVID-19 world.

Ascent of Asia

Economic forecasts indicate that only **China and India** are likely to register **economic growth** during 2020 out of the [G-20 countries](#).

- **Asian countries** along with China have tackled the pandemic with greater **swiftness, responsiveness** and more **effective state capacity** as compared to the United States and Europe.
- Thus, It is likely that they will **recover faster** than those in the West.

Rising China

- The emergence of a **stronger and more assertive China** is also one of the changing geopolitical situations.
- China has been **growing economically** since it joined the World Trade Organization in **2001**.
- Its **assertiveness** has increased under the current President Xi Jinping's leadership which has **raised concerns** in its neighbourhood and the U.S.
- In recent years, the **U.S.-China relationship** has moved from **cooperation to competition**.
- The **Belt and Road Initiative** which seeks to connect China to the Eurasia and Africa through both **maritime and land routes** is seen as a **move against** any U.S. attempts at containment.
- The ongoing **trade and technology wars** may lead to **confrontation** between the two nations.
- Recently, both countries have been involved in **verbal confrontation** due to **COVID-19**.

U.S taking a backseat

- The U.S. has been in the **forefront** of **shaping the global order** since centuries.
- It has played a **pivotal role** right from the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations **after World War I** to the creation of the United Nations and Bretton Woods institutions **after World War II**.
- It was **decisive** in leading the western world during the **Cold War**, shaping global responses to **threats posed by terrorism** and taking action against **climate change**.
- However, its **interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq** generated **resentment**. These interventions also led to **decreased domestic political will and resources**.
- During the current COVID-19 crisis, "**America first**" attitude seems to be changing into "**America alone**". It has been reported that the U.S. is cornering supplies of scarce medical equipment and medicines just for itself.
- It is also **acquiring biotech companies** which are engaged in research and development in allied states.
- Countries are **losing trust** in the U.S.'s **competence** due to its **poor response** at handling the pandemic in its own country.
- Despite being the largest economy and the military power, it seems to **lose the will and ability to lead**.
- This mood is unlikely to change irrespective of the outcome of the upcoming presidential election in November 2020.

Tension among the European countries

- European UNION (EU) is continuously preoccupied with **internal challenges** due to:

- its **expansion** of membership to include East European states,
- **impact** of the financial crisis among the Eurozone members,
- **ongoing** [Brexit](#) negotiations.
- It is becoming increasingly difficult to reach **agreement on political matters**, e.g. relations with Russia and China.
- The trans-Atlantic divide is increasing rift within the EU.
- **Rising trend** of political approach which appeals to ordinary people (**populism**) has led to some EU members supporting the virtues of “**empty democracy**”.
- The **North-South divide** within the EU is also apparent. This tension began particularly when **austerity measures** were imposed on **Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal** in 2010 by the European Central Bank. These measures were **persuaded by Austria, Germany and the Netherlands**.
- Most recently, **Italy** was **denied medical equipment** by its EU neighbours who had introduced controls on its exports. Ultimately, **China had to airlift** medical teams and critical supplies to Italy.
- Rediscovering the limits of free movement of goods, services, capital and people will be one of the trends to be seen post COVID-19.

Weakening of the world organisations

- Global problems demand global responses.
- However, **international and multilateral bodies** have **failed** to take responsible measures during this pandemic.
- The [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) should have led global efforts against COVID-19 but it has become a **victim of politics** involving China and the USA.
- The [UN Security Council](#) (UNSC), the **G-7** and the **G-20** are **paralysed financially** when the world faces the worst recession since 1929.
- These **institutions** were always subjected to **big power politics**.
- **Agencies**, such as WHO, have **lost autonomy** over decades as their regular budgets decreased. Now, they mainly **rely on voluntary contributions** by western countries and foundations.
- Reform of these bodies is needed at the earliest. This can happen only with collective global leadership.

The energy politics

- The final trend relates to **energy politics**.
- Growing interest in **renewables** and **green technologies** due to climate change concerns and emergence of the **U.S.** as a **major energy producer** were changing the energy markets before COVID-19 pandemic.
- Now, due to possible **economic recession** and **depressed oil prices**, **internal tensions** in West Asian countries may **increase** since these countries are solely dependent on **oil revenues**.
- This may create **political instability** in countries where governments are fragile.

Conclusion

- **Rising nationalism** and **protectionist policies** may turn the [economic recession](#) into a **depression** which will enhance **inequalities**.

- The world may become more **polarised**.
- There will be **greater unpredictability** and more disturbed times ahead of us.

Connecting the dots

- What comprises G-20? Discuss its relevance and significance in the current geopolitical scenario.

COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

In News:

- Recently, **India** and the **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)** signed a \$500 million **“COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project”** to **strengthen** India's public health preparedness.
- The project was launched in New Delhi, India.
- This is the **first ever health sector support** from AIIB to India.

Key takeaways:

- This will **cover all States and Union Territories** across the country and
- It will **address** the needs of:
 - infected people,
 - at-risk populations,
 - medical and emergency personnel and service providers,
 - medical and testing facilities,
 - national and animal health agencies.
- It will help **strengthen** the country's Integrated Disease Surveillance Program and **revamp** infectious disease hospitals and medical colleges.
- It will be **implemented** by:
 - the National Health Mission (NHM)
 - the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC)
 - the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)
- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare will be the responsible Ministry for the program.
- The project is being financed by the World Bank and AIIB:
 - \$1.0 billion - World Bank
 - \$500 million - AIIB.

Important value additions:

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

- It is a **multilateral development bank**.
- Mission: To **improve** social and economic outcomes in **Asia** by investing in **sustainable infrastructure** and other productive sectors.
- Headquarters: Beijing.
- It began operations in **2016**.

China teams up with Pakistan to build Diamer-Bhasha Dam

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International relations

In News:

- **China** has recently teamed up with **Pakistan** to build the **Diamer-Bhasha dam** in Gilgit-Baltistan region.
- It has created some tension between India and China since India has laid claims over this region.

Key takeaways:

- Power China, one of the biggest Chinese power companies, received a contract to build the Diamer-Bhasha dam.
- Once completed, the dam will allow Pakistan to use the waters of the Indus for irrigation.

Important value additions:**Diamer-Bhasha Dam**

- It is a **concrete-filled gravity dam**, in the initial stages of construction, on the River Indus between Kohistan district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Diamer district in Gilgit Baltistan.
- The dam site is situated near a place called "Bhasha", hence the name.
- Its foundation stone was laid by the then Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1998.

Diplomatic tussle at WHO

Context: A resolution is being moved at World Health Assembly seeking a probe into the origin of Covid-19 and role of WHO

Did You Know?

- The call for an international investigation was first voiced formally by the Australian prime minister.
- India is set to be elected Chair of the WHO's decision-making Executive Board at its 73rd World Health Assembly on 18-19 May 2020

What is the resolution all about?

- Besides a scientific investigation into the origins of the virus, the resolution calls for an "impartial, independent and comprehensive" evaluation into the international response to the corona pandemic
- The resolution does not mention China by name, which is one of the key demands of US.

Critical Analysis of the resolution proposed

- **Diluted:** The resolution was watered down to get the maximum possible backing at the WHO
- **Not powerless:** The resolution is said to have enough teeth to dig deep into the issues raised by the corona crisis.
- **Overrides China's opposition:** Despite the open threats of trade sanctions from China, Australia has pressed ahead working with the EU to introduce the resolution.
- **Accountability:** The resolution indicates that international community wants accountability from China and WHO on their handling of pandemic
- **Setback for China:** A unanimous approval of the resolution will be a diplomatic setback for China, since limiting the demands for an external inquiry has been a major political priority for Beijing.

What must India do at these times?

India must look at the deeper issues that have troubled the WHO

- There is the need to develop **new international norms** that will increase the powers of the WHO in facilitating early detection & notification of pandemics
- India must help change the **funding of WHO** -It depends on donations rather than membership fees, as a result, donors will set the agenda
- India must also ask if the WHO is trying to do too many things.
- WHO's initial successes came when it focused on a few objectives like combatting malaria and the elimination of smallpox.
- **A limited agenda** will make thus WHO a more effective organisation.

Conclusion

Sustained engagement with China, then, is as important for India as deeper cooperation with the "Quad plus" nations in promoting a new global regime on preventing and managing pandemics.

Connecting the dots

- WTO in post-COVID world and future of RCEP

WTO: India needs to look at larger picture

Context: In the wake of COVID crisis many countries will be focus inwards thus threatening the significance of international Trade and WTO.

Do You Know?

WTO has two-tier resolution of trade disputes—

- First, the hearing of disputes by a specially constituted ad hoc 'panel' comprising of three members, and
- Next an appellate level for appeals on questions of law.

What has been the status of WTO now?

- The WTO's dispute settlement system has been rendered dysfunctional since December 11, 2019
- This is due to US blocking the appointment of any new members to the WTO's standing Appellate Body.

Consequences of WTO appellate body being dysfunctional

- The entire WTO dispute settlement system will no longer be fully operational
- Once the Appellate Body is paralysed, the losing party will in most cases appeal the panel report and thus prevent it from becoming legally binding
- Panel reports are likely to remain unadopted.
- It weakens one of the most effective instruments of international law enforcement.
- The fall-out of a dysfunctional WTO dispute settlement will be **increasing use of unilateral measures**.

What has been the impact on India?

- India is faced with several sensitive disputes, including against its **sugar subsidies** (initiated by Australia, Brazil and Guatemala), and its tariffs on IT products (EU and China have both asked for panels to be established)
- As a result, India's **short-term interest** is to have a **status quo position** that would ensure that no adverse ruling from a WTO panel
- India has taken a view that it **need not implement** a recent adverse panel ruling against its export subsidies, since an appeal has been filed against it
- However, in the long-run India will be left with no avenues to ensure rules-based international trading system

Is there any interim arrangement made to replace WTO appellate body?

- On April 30, 2020, EU and 18 other countries submitted to the WTO a Multi-Party **Interim** Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA)
- The MPIA brings **temporary relief** to the crisis at the WTO caused by the absence of an Appellate Body.
- MPIA is a **contingency measure** whose purpose is to preserve the essential principles and features of the WTO dispute settlement system
- India and USA has so far stayed away from the MPIA.

India and MPIA – Way forward

- Not being party to the MPIA would essentially negate the possibility for any effective dispute resolution in the absence of an appellate process.
- Absence of rules-based trading order would lead to anarchy and India should play an active role in preventing it, especially in the wake of COVID-19 crisis where collaboration with all stakeholders is required
- India being an original multilateralist and a founding member of WTO has to play active role in shaping MPIA

Conclusion

India should be part of the MPIA, while working out clear strategies to address both the Appellate Body crisis as well as other systemic issues of the WTO

Connecting the dots

- UNESCO and its future with US not being a member of it
- RCEP and India opting out of it

INDIA AND THE WORLD

India can take the lead in reshaping global order

Context: At a time when the UNSC, G20, G7 and the EU were not active, India stood out with its initiatives to develop a joint response Ex. SAARC fund to tackle COVID-19

The rapid spread of coronavirus around the world has created fresh opportunities for creating a new global compact. India can offer its leadership in this endeavour.

How can India reshape the world?

1. Indian can help build Multilateral Cooperation

- India enjoys good relations with multiple powers and is well-regarded across the world.
- India can share ideas and resources to develop an international mechanism for monitoring, verification, early warning and cooperation among countries, including in vaccine development

2. Indian can make efforts to strengthen the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

- In light of COVID-19, there is a need for greater scrutiny of wet(animal) markets in China, south-east Asia, and many other countries around the world.
- There is also a need to eradicate animal farms that breed and trade exotic species.
- Such wet markets and breeding centres increases the potential for zoonotic transmission of unknown, deadly viruses and hence a need for greater monitoring.
- Efforts need to be made to pass and enforce legislation to control the domestic consumption of wild animals, which also contributes to environmental conservation

3. Promotion of Yoga

- The ancient Indian practice of yoga is known to boost immunity levels through the cultivation of a healthy mind and body.
- This is the time to further reinforce the worldwide practice of yoga

4. Potential to emerge as pharmacy to the world

- India's readiness to ship the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine to fight COVID-19 is in consonance with the ethos of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"
- India's strength in generic medicines can be leveraged to establish it as Pharmacy of the world
- This provides an opportunity to promote ayurveda, which complements yoga.

5. India can strengthen Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) of 1975

- It is a disarmament treaty that does not prohibit the retention and use of biological agents, including coronaviruses, for preventive purposes which encompass medical research for diagnosis and immunisation
- It has no verification protocol to deal with any suspected use of biological agents.
- Indeed, the UNSC can investigate complaints in this regard, but the veto power enjoyed by the permanent members, including China, renders it powerless
- In the BWC Conference in 2021, India could engage in consultations with other middle powers to evolve a regime that can provide better oversight.

6. India must push for multi-stakeholder model of internet governance

- Post COVID-19, there will be even greater reliance on artificial intelligence (AI), surveillance technologies, online platforms and big data.
- Hence, there is a need for better governance models

Conclusion

Despite hardships, India can, and must, take the lead in bringing the world together to practice a new multilateralism that places the common interests of humanity above narrow national interests.

Connecting the dots

- Impact on COVID-19 on G-7 and G-20
- Will there be a change in India's foreign policy in post-COVID world?

India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations appointed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations; International Groupings

In News:

- India has appointed diplomat **T S Tirumurti** as its **Permanent Representative to the United Nations**.

Important value additions:

The Permanent Mission

- It is the **diplomatic mission** that **every member state appoints** to the **United Nations**.
- It is **headed** by a **Permanent Representative**, who is also referred to as the “**UN ambassador**”.
- It is also mentioned in the **Article 1 (7) of the Vienna Convention**.

United Nations

- It is an **intergovernmental organization** that **aims** to maintain **international peace and security**, develop **friendly relations**
- It is the **largest** and **most powerful** organization in the world.
- Headquarters: New York City; other main offices: Geneva, Nairobi, Vienna and The Hague.
- Official languages:
 - Arabic
 - Chinese
 - French
 - English
 - Russian
 - Spanish
- India was among the **original members** of the UN that **signed** the **Declaration by United Nations** at Washington, D.C. in 1944.
- It also **participated** in the **United Nations Conference on International Organization** at San Francisco from 25 April to 26 June 1945.

India amidst challenging geopolitical situation

Context:

Today, India is in the midst of a new geopolitical situation:

- The world is moving in the direction of **multi-polarity** which may turn into a US-Chinese bipolar system in the long run.
- The world faces a **destabilising power transition** as China seeks to demonstrate international power in a world so far dominated by the U.S.
- “**America First**” attitude of the United States President has also caused rapid shifts in the balance of power.
- **China-U.S. strategic contention** is growing despite both countries being economically dependent on each other.
- Indo-Pacific Region (IPR), including countries of Indonesia, South Korea and Vietnam, is gradually turning into one of the world’s **primary regions**.

The geopolitical aspect of relations between India, China and the United States is thus becoming increasingly complex and multifaceted.

What should be India’s response in such a scenario?

- The current Indian government has set itself **ambitious, long-term goals** aimed at strengthening the country’s international standing as a “serious global player.”
- To counter unstoppable growth of China, many experts advocate that **India should enter into an alliance with the U.S.**
- However, an alliance seems to be the wrong answer for India's growth quests which may harm its development ambitions.
- **Strategic autonomy** has been the pursuit for India since many decades. Hence, this is the **most opportune time** for India to **not get entangled** in contention concerning other countries which might affect India's national interests.
- India must follow **diplomacy and flexibility**, and **adjust** itself to the fast-changing balance of power and correlation of forces around it.
- The experts also believe that India can **gain a full-fledged status** of a great power only if it **creates multilateral organizations independently** that would safeguard its interests and express its values.
- India must develop a **strategy of counterbalancing** China.
- India is already trying to counterbalance the USA by **strengthening and diversifying ties with Russia**.
- **Europe**, though equally burdened by its own problems, could also play its part by **recognizing and supporting** India’s growth.
- India’s investment needs are increasing like never before. Thus, India must come up with such a **foreign policy** that could **lure investors** from both China and the United States, without getting involved in their politics.
- India should also retain for itself **maximum freedom of maneuver and flexibility** in international relations and **uphold its claim** to be the **system-forming power** of South Asia.
- **High-level strategic dialogue** between these countries about their core interests, red differences and areas of convergence should take place.

Way forward

- The world also knows that without India's participation neither **USA's IPR project**, nor **Beijing's "Community of Common Destiny"** concept can be fully implemented.
- On the other hand, India may not become a developed country if it continues business and politics as usual, or tries to imitate China's experience in the last 40 years.
- It must adapt and manage **its internal social and political** situations better.

Conclusion

- Today, India is **more dependent** on the outside world than ever before.
- It relies on the world for energy, technology, essential goods like fertilizer and coal, access to markets, and capital.
- Thus, the most important improvement that India needs to make involves its national security structures and their work.

Connecting the dots

- India - China relations are of global significance
- India's participation is significant for USA's India-Pacific Region project

Nepal's new official map is "artificial" and unacceptable to India

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-II- International Politics

In News:

- Ministry of External Affairs has claimed that Nepal's new official map is "artificial" and unacceptable to India.

Key takeaways:

- Nepal's new political map claimed Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh of Uttarakhand as part of its sovereign territory.
- Nepal claims that India has encroached upon this area, claiming tracts of land, and **wants Delhi to evacuate population** from the location
- Nepal has been on a collision course with India since Defence Minister has inaugurated a link road to Tibet on May 8th.
- The newly inaugurated **Darchula-Lipulekh link** road passes through the disputed region and will cut travelling time to Mansarovar pilgrimage destinations. Nepal asserts the area belongs to it.

Important value additions:

- India had published a new map on November 2, 2019, representing the political boundaries of the country which showed the status of the newly created Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.
- The same map also showed the region of Kalapani as part of the Indian territory.
- Nepal, however, maintains that not just the Kalapani region, but Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh are parts of its territory as demarcated in the **1816 Treaty of Sugauli**

India-Nepal Border issue

Context: The inauguration of a road from Dharchula to Lipu Lekh (China border) by India's Defence Minister over videoconferencing on May 8th 2020. This has now been followed by Nepal's charge claiming that the stretch passes through Nepalese territory.

Did You Know?

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



Pic Source: [Eenadu](#)

Significance of the route:

- The conversion of the trekking route to a metalled road is a boon to both pilgrims and traders.
- At present, the travel to Kailash Mansarovar takes around two to three weeks through Sikkim or Nepal routes.
- Lipulekh route had a trek of 90 Km through high altitude terrain and the elderly yartris faced lot of difficulties.
- Now, this yatra will get completed by vehicles.
- Additionally, this road follows the traditional pilgrim route for the Kailash-Mansarovar yatra.

The Sugauli Treaty

- 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 Survey of India maps since the 1870s showed the area of Lipu Lekh down to Kalapani as part of British India.
- Both the Rana rulers of Nepal and the Nepalese Kings accepted the boundary and did not raise any objection with the government of India after India's Independence

What is the present controversy?

- The present controversy has arisen since the Nepalese contest that the tributary that joins the Mahakali river at Kalapani is not the Kali river.
- Therefore, Nepal now contends that the Kali river lies further west to the Lipu Lekh pass and claims both Kalapani & Susta belong to 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**.

Nepal's reaction has been unusually aggressive towards India

- **Force Deployment:** Nepal has deployed its armed police close to Kalapani. The timing and the manner in which it was deployed has raised concerns in New Delhi
- **India's passive presence:** The Indo-Tibetan Border Police is also located in Kalapani since it is close to the India-China border. Indian forces are not there because of Nepal.
- **New Nepalese Maps:** Nepal's actions of authorising a new map extending its territory across an area sensitive for India's defence, has further complicated the situation
- **Political Opportunism:** The controversy has given Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli an opportunity to divert attention about criticism of his own government's shortcomings
- **China's Politics:** Nepal at the behest of China has objected to India's initiative as China is bound to benefit by deteriorating India-Nepal relations

Way Ahead

- The approval of the strip maps by the respective governments (that of the Nepalese Government is still awaited),
- The resolution of the differences of opinion over Kalapani and Susta
- Speeding up the erection of damaged or missing border pillars.

Conclusion

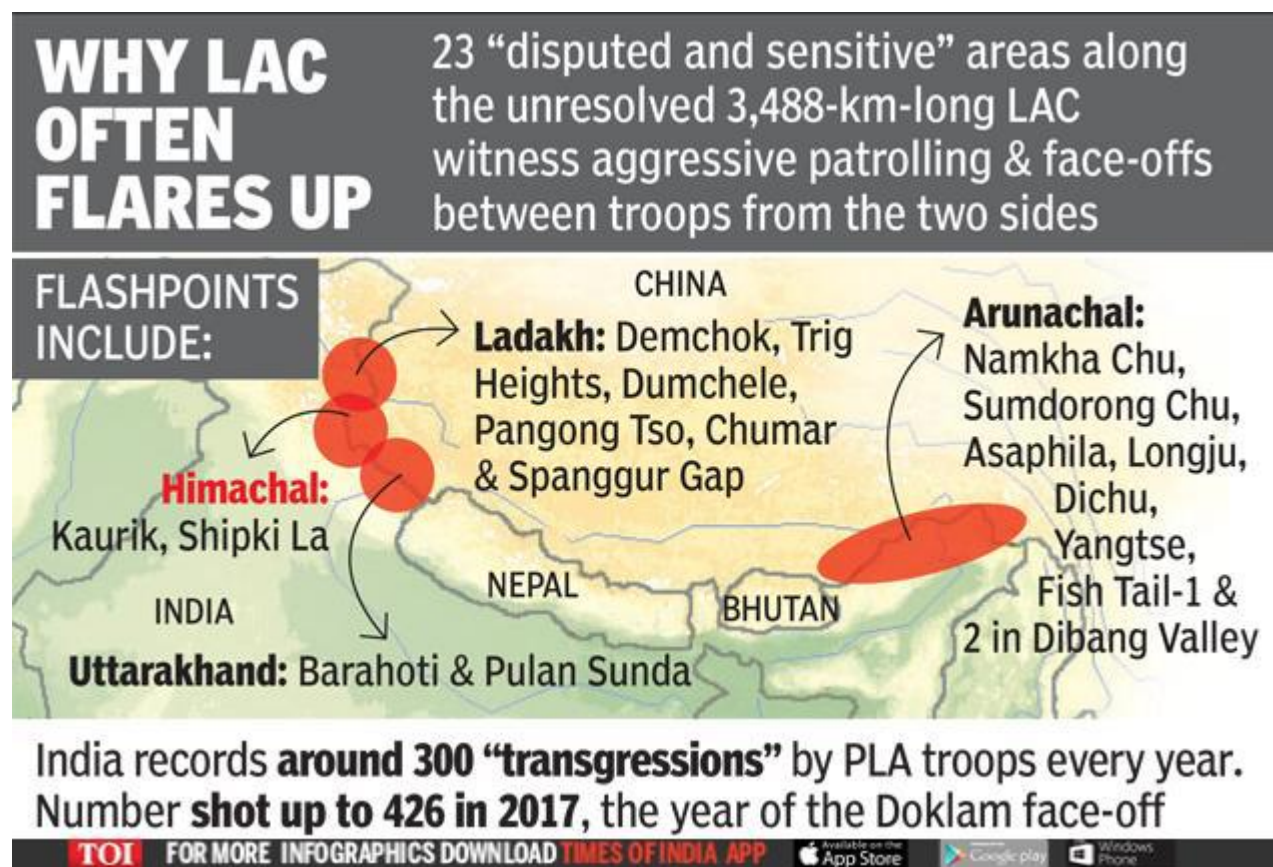
Compared to what was accomplished between India and Bangladesh, the India-Nepal border issues appear more easily solvable

Connecting the dots

- China's Belt and Road Initiative & India's Neighbourhood First Policy
- India- Bangladesh Border (maritime & land) dispute resolution

The India-China border flare-up

Context: The India-China border has been witnessed tensions during April-May 2020, with incidents reported in at least four different locations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).



Pic Source: [Times of India](https://timesofindia.com)

Where have the incidents (army clashes) happened?

- The Pangong lake in Ladakh
- Naku La in Sikkim
- Galwan valley and Demchok in Ladakh

Why do face-offs occur?

- **Non-Demarcation of LAC:** LAC that has never been demarcated. As a result, India and China have overlapping claim lines along LAC which leads to such clashes
- **Non-implementation of protocols:** Additionally, the Protocols agreed to in 2005 and 2013 regarding rules of engagement to prevent such incidents, have not always been adhered to.

What is behind the latest tensions?

- The northern bank of **Pangong lake** has always been a point of contention where there are differing perceptions of the LAC.

- The stand-off in **Galwan valley**(not many incidents in past as LAC was thought to be settled here) was triggered by China moving in troops & equipment to stop construction activity by India
- Delhi says that construction was well within India's side of the LAC, but China thinks otherwise.
- The broader context for the **unexpected tensions in Sikkim** appears to be a changing dynamic along the LAC, as India plays catch-up in improving infrastructure there.
- China has enjoyed an **advantage in infrastructure** as well as terrain that is more favourable to mobilisation in Sikkim area and likes to maintain status-quo.

Why has not the LAC been clarified?

- India has long **proposed an exercise** to clarify differing perceptions of the LAC to prevent such incidents.
- The exercise could pave the way to regulate activities in contested areas until a final settlement of the boundary dispute.
- Maps were exchanged in the Middle Sector, but the exercise fell through in the Western Sector where divergence is the greatest.
- China has since **rejected this exercise**, viewing it as adding another complication to the on-going boundary negotiations.

What is the state of boundary negotiations?

- In 2005, an agreement on political parameters and guiding principles completed the first of three stages of the talks.
- The 2005 agreement said both sides "shall safeguard due interests of their settled populations in border areas".
- The current, and most difficult, stage involves agreeing a framework to resolve the dispute in all sectors.
- The final step will involve delineating and demarcating the boundary in maps and on the ground.

What are the prospects of a settlement?

- The likelihood appears remote.
- The main differences are in the Western and Eastern sectors.
- India sees China as occupying 38,000 sq km in **Aksai Chin**. In the east, China claims as much as 90,000 sq km, extending all across **Arunachal Pradesh**.
- One particular sticking point appears to involve **China's claims to Tawang** in Arunachal Pradesh, which has been increasingly raised by China in recent years
- A swap was hinted at by China in 1960 and in the early 1980s, which would have essentially formalised the status quo.
- Both sides have now ruled out the status quo as a settlement, agreeing to meaningful and mutual adjustments.
- At the same time, the most realistic solution will involve only minor adjustments along the LAC, considering neither side will be willing to part with territory already held.

What is the Strategic Calculation behind boundary dispute?

- India insists that its relations with China won't improve fundamentally until the border dispute is resolved
- 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

- Until the strategic calculus — and China's broader view of its relations with India — changes, the stalemate will likely continue

Connecting the dots

- China's Belt and Road Initiative & India's Neighbourhood First Policy
- Panchsheel agreement between India & China in 1954

Delhi and complex geopolitics of Pashtun lands

Context: USA has called on India to open a political conversation with the Taliban. There was also a signal from the Taliban that it is eager for a productive relationship with India

Taliban- A brief history

- Taliban – considered as Terror organisation in Indian Diplomatic circles- is a conservative religiously orthodox political organisation which uses violence as strategy to achieve its objectives
- Taliban which was ousted from power by US in 2001 has been engaged in a civilian war against Afghanistan government (ally of US)
- US troops stationed in Afghanistan since 2001 has been losing ground to Taliban and wants an exit from country.
- The recent [US-Taliban deal](#) has emboldened Taliban and given it an international recognition and legitimacy

India and Taliban

- India has historically sided with Northern Alliance- an opposition to Taliban.
- Due to Taliban's close nexus with Pakistan's ISI, India is strategically opposed to it
- Some argue that there is no reason for Delhi to join the international trend to embrace the Taliban, in the wake of US-Taliban deal
- They argue that when the Taliban becomes a peaceful entity and joins the quest for a political settlement with Kabul, Delhi should have no objection to direct talks.

Should India have direct talks with Taliban?

- The question of Delhi opening a dialogue with the Taliban is a tactical issue focused on when, how and on what terms.
- But the Taliban remains an important sub-set of the larger and more strategic Pashtun question that holds the key to India's enduring interest in Afghanistan

What is India's interest in Afghanistan?

- Promoting a peaceful, independent and a sovereign Afghanistan that is not a subaltern to the Pakistan army.
- This ensures a safer regional environment and better prospects for Indian trade to Central Asia & Europe through Afghanistan

What is Pashtun issue in Afghanistan?

- The Pashtuns constitute nearly 42 per cent of the population.
- The sizeable Afghan minorities include 27 per cent Tajiks, 9 per cent each of Hazaras and Uzbeks.
- The Taliban, an essentially Pashtun formation, had brutally crushed the minorities during its brief rule in the late 1990s.
- The core of stability in country is reconciling the interests of multiple ethnic groups in Afghanistan especially between Pashtuns and minorities
- The problem of constructing internal balance in Afghanistan has been complicated by Pakistan's meddling, which is driven by unreasonable fear and ambition.

Complicated relationship between Pakistan & Pashtuns – Opens a Strategic space for India

- Pashtuns who are majority in Afghanistan (need their support for Pakistan's influence) are however minority in Pakistan (clashes with Pakistan's majority)
- The Pashtun population is estimated to be around 15 million in Afghanistan and 35 million in Pakistan.
- Although **Pashtun separatism** has long ceased to be a force in Pakistan, Islamabad finds the Pashtun question re-emerge in a different form.
- Also, the Taliban has never endorsed the Durand Line as the legitimate border with Pakistan
- A stronger Taliban will push Pashtun Nationalism across the border

Conclusion

- Delhi can't escape the complex geopolitics of the Pashtun lands.
- That the Taliban wants to talk to India and Pakistan brands Pashtun leaders as Indian agents only underlines Delhi's enduring salience in Afghanistan.
- Also, those calling for direct engagement with the Taliban say that Delhi can't ignore such an important force in Afghan politics

Connecting the dots

- Operation Enduring Freedom
- Rise and decline of ISIS- Role of International Coalition

ECONOMY

SLF-MF scheme benefits extended to all banks

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In News:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has extended **regulatory benefits** to all banks under the **Special Liquidity Facility for Mutual Funds (SLF-MF) scheme**.
- The extension **includes those banks** also which are **using their own resources** to extend liquidity support to the mutual funds.

Important value additions:

Special Liquidity Facility for Mutual Funds (SLF-MF) scheme

- Recently, the RBI had announced **Rs 50,000-crore SLF-MF scheme** to **bailout the mutual funds** facing redemption pressure.
- The scheme was announced in the backdrop of **Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund deciding to shut several schemes**.
- Banks meeting the liquidity requirements of MFs will be eligible to claim all the regulatory benefits available under the scheme.

Mutual Fund

- A mutual fund is a type of financial vehicle made up of a **pool of money collected from many investors** to **invest in securities** like stocks, bonds, money market instruments, and other assets.

Redemption

In finance, redemption describes the **repayment of any money market fixed-income security** at or before the asset's maturity date.

- Investors can make redemptions by **selling part or all of their investments** such as shares, bonds, or mutual funds.

Raghuram Rajan suggests spending ₹65,000 crore for the poor

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In News:

- In a recent online conversation with a political leader, former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan has suggested ways to revive Indian economy in measured manner.

Key takeaways:

- He cautioned not to have a divided house in challenging times.
- He also estimated that India needs to spend about **₹65,000 crore to take care of the vulnerable sections** like the migrant workers.
- He also emphasized that the **economy** needs to be **opened up in a sequential way in working out a balance** in fighting the virus and facing the consequences of the economy.
- He also suggested that India should **leverage its Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) network** to protect livelihoods, keep people alive.

RBI's job involves trade-offs, not conflicts

Context: The economic crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the role of Central Banks. This is to avoid the repeat of history where central bankers of the 1920s failed to fight the Great Depression.

The job of Central Bank involves complex trade-offs —

- Next quarter(Short term) vs quarter century (Long term)
- Growth vs stability
- Mandates (accountability) vs Expectations (autonomy)

Some of the measures taken by Central Banks to tide over COVID crisis are:

- Buying corporate bonds to improve liquidity in system
- Making corporate loans to boost economic cycle
- Cutting interest rates to spur investments
- Conducting open market operations to keep rates low & adequate liquidity
- Reducing reserve ratios to avoid banks parking their funds with Central Banks
- Additionally, banks have been permitted to
 - Grant loan moratoriums
 - Hold less capital
 - Restructure loans
 - Pay lower deposit insurance premiums
 - Delay bad loan recognition
- Majority of these measures have been undertaken by RBI also – [Part I](#) and [Part II](#)

RBI's COVID measures is **constrained by pre-existing conditions in Indian banking**, some of which are as follows:

- Bad loans (peaked at Rs 14 lakh crore but still large)
- Inadequate competition (scheduled commercial bank numbers have remained between 90 and 100 since 1947)
- Private bank governance (CEO so powerful that boards and shareholders are weak)
- Public sector bank governance (shareholder so powerful that boards and CEOs are weak)

Way Ahead for RBI

1. Acting cautiously to balance the next quarter and quarter century

- It must ensure that debt levels are not very high which imposes burden on future generations
- RBI cannot mimic the model of developed countries as India's position is different. For ex: US fiscal deficit is expected to be around 15 per cent of GDP and Japan's public debt levels is nearly 240 per cent of GDP.
- An analogy here will be "We are all in the same storm but we are all not in the same boat"

2. Acting flexibly to blunt this economic crisis

- RBI's mandate of Inflation targeting needs to be relooked in the light of economic disruption caused by COVID-19 pandemic
- Other flexibility options include repayment moratoriums and bank windows for NBFC/Mutual Fund liquidity.

3. Acting within its mandate to ensure institutional legitimacy and immunity

- RBI must build on its track record of wisely balancing the trade-offs between depositors vs borrowers, companies vs banks, and stability vs growth.
- RBI must continue to stay out of excessive government interference.

Conclusion

Creating a prosperous India needs many things. One of them is an independent, accountable, and bounded central bank that listens.

Connecting the dots

- Keynesian Economics
- 2008 Financial crisis and measures taken to come out of the crisis

India's Foreign Exchange (Forex) reserves decline

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- According to the recent data from the RBI, **India's Foreign Exchange (Forex) reserves** have **declined** by \$113 million to \$479.45 billion in the week due to a fall in foreign currency assets.
- The main reason for the decline is attributed to fall in Foreign Currency Assets (FCAs).

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.

India's Forex Reserve

- It includes
 - Foreign Currency Assets (FCA)
 - Gold reserves
 - Special Drawing Rights
 - Reserve position with the International Monetary Fund (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 International Monetary Fund (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.

Confederation of Indian Industry argues for calibrated exit from the lockdown

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has highlighted the following in its strategy paper recently:
 - The country's **high performing economic districts** should be allowed to **function by different rules** in the 3rd phase of the lockdown.
 - **100-150 districts with the highest economic value** should be **allowed to restart industrial activity** by implementing strict rules.
 - These districts are to be **identified either through GDP contribution or density of industrial clusters**.
 - **Cost of 100% testing and aggressive health protocols** is **lower** than continued shutdown in these areas.
 - **Calculated exit** from the lockdown in the **most crucial economic regions**.
 - Within these districts, **small restricted areas** where **COVID-19 cases** have been identified should be treated as **containment zones**.
 - An area of about **500 metres radius** around these areas should be treated as **orange zones**.
 - The **remaining area** of the district should be classified as **green zones**.
 - Workers would have to be housed on the premises or within walking distance.

Important value additions:

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)

- It is a **non-government**, not-for-profit, industry-led and **industry-managed organization** in India.
- It works to **create and sustain an environment conducive** to the development of India, partnering industry, Government, and civil society, through advisory and consultative processes.

Excise duty on alcohol: a major contribution to States' revenue

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- Recently, the Delhi government announced a **70% hike** in the price of liquor.

- Delhi's "**special corona fee**" on alcohol underlines the **importance of liquor** to the economy of the states.

Important value additions:

- Liquor contributes a **considerable amount** to the **exchequers** of all states and Union Territories.
- It is the 2nd or 3rd largest contributor to the State's revenue; GST is the largest.
- However, in **Gujarat and Bihar**, liquor **sale is prohibited**.
- Kind of charges/tax/fees States may levy on liquor:
 - Excise duty on manufacture and sale of liquor
 - Value added tax (Tamil Nadu)
 - Special fees on imported foreign liquor
 - Transport fee
 - Label & brand registration charges.
 - Special duty on liquor to collect funds for special purposes, such as maintenance of stray cattle (UP)
- According to a report published by the RBI in September 2019, **state excise duty** on alcohol accounts for **around 10-15%** of a majority of states.

Value added tax

It is a tax on the amount by which the **value** of an article has been **increased** at each stage of its production or distribution.

SC brings Co-operative Banks within the ambit of Sarfaesi Act

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Banking Sector

In News:

- Recently, the **Supreme Court** held that Co-operative banks and co-operative societies shall come within the ambit of the **Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (Sarfaesi)** Act of 2002.

Key takeaways from the verdict:

- Co-operative banks come within the **definition of "Banks"** under the **Banking Regulation Act, 1949** for the purposes of the Sarfaesi Act.
- The **recovery procedure** under the Sarfaesi Act is also **applicable** to co-operative banks.
- The Parliament has **legislative competence** to **provide procedures** for **recovery of loans** under the Sarfaesi Act with respect to cooperative banks.

Important value additions:

Sarfaesi Act

- It allows banks and other financial institutions **to auction** residential or commercial properties **to recover loans**.
- The **first asset reconstruction company** of India, ARCIL, was set up under this act.
- Banks utilize Sarfaesi Act as an **effective tool** for bad loans (Non-Performing Asset) recovery.
- It is **effective** only against **secured loans**.

- It promotes the **setting up of asset reconstruction companies (ARCs) and asset securitization companies (SCs)** to deal with NPAs.
- **Objectives** of the Act are:
 - To **provide** the legal framework for securitization activities in India.
 - To **give the procedures** for the transfer of NPAs to asset reconstruction companies.
 - To **give powers** to banks and financial institutions to take over the immovable property that is pledged to enforce the recovery of debt.
- NPAs can be **recovered** through:
 - Securitisation: Practice of pooling together various types of debt instruments (assets) and selling them as bonds.
 - Asset Reconstruction: Activity of converting NPA into performing assets.
 - Enforcement of Security without the intervention of the Court.

CONSOL BOND

Context: As COVID-19 curve stretches further, there is a call for a large stimulus to pull the economy back from recession.

What were the concerns with India's fiscal situation in pre-COVID time period?

- In the Budget before the pandemic, India projected a deficit of ₹7.96-lakh crore
- There were concerns about off-balance sheet borrowings of 1% of GDP
- Excessive target of ₹2.1 lakh crore through disinvestments
- In recent times, both Union government and RBI have tried several times to nudge banks into lending to below investment grade MSMEs, but have not been successful.

What will be the challenges with India's fiscal situation in post-COVID time period?

- In addition to the expenditure that was planned, the government has to spend between ₹5-lakh crore and ₹6-lakh crore as stimulus.
- The financial deficit number is set to grow by a wide margin due to revenue shortage caused due to lockdown
- There is lack of appetite for disinvestment.
- Even though RBI has increased the [limit on ways and means for States by 60%](#), many of them have asked to double the limits. This is due to the shortages faced by States in indirect taxation collections from GST, fuel and liquor.

What are the avenues for government to raise finances in post-COVID times?

- Firstly, there is a traditional option of monetising the deficit by having the RBI buy government bonds
- Relaxing FDI norm to attract foreign investment. However, this is not promising given the rise in Nationalistic sentiment during COVID crisis
- The other alternative suggested is Consol Bonds

Consol Bond- A Brief History

- This has been used as early as the First World War (WWI)
- The bonds, which paid out an **interest of 5%**, were issued in 1917 by UK government to raise more money to finance the ongoing cost of war

- Citizens were asked to invest in these bonds with a message that their investment will help fight the country, akin to a soldier's fight but with no risk to their lives.
- As a result, most of the Consol bonds in the UK were **owned by small investors**, with over 70% holding less than £1,000
- In 2014, the British government, a century after the start of the WWI, paid out 10% of the total outstanding Consol bond debt

Why Consol Bond is a better option?

- An attractive coupon rate for the bond or tax rebates could also be an incentive for investors, who are looking for avenues to invest.
- **Participative:** It makes citizens active participants in the fight against slowdown caused by pandemic
- **Attractive:** With the fall of real estate and given the lack of profitable alternatives, the bond would offer a dual benefit as a risk free investment for retail investors.
- **Guaranteed:** It would be issued by the central government on a perpetual basis with a right to call it back when it seems fit
- **Flexibility:** The government can consider a phased redemption of these bonds after the economy is put back on a path of high growth
- **Welfare Oriented:** Unlike PM-CARES, the proceeds of the bonds could be used for everything — from Personal Protective Equipment for doctors to a stimulus for MSMEs

Conclusion

- With the pandemic's shadow over the economy, a Consol Bond issue seems like a compelling solution for the government

Connecting the dots

- Impact of WWI on global economy
- Measures adopted in the wake of 2008 financial crisis

To sustain growth, India needs fiscal stimulus

Context:

We are aware that the impact of COVID-19 will debilitate or weaken the global as well as the Indian economies.

- Various institutions have assessed India's growth prospects for 2020-21 ranging from 0.8% (Fitch) to 4.0% (Asian Development Bank).
- IMF has projected India's growth at 1.9%, China's at 1.2%, and the global growth at (-) 3.0%.

India was already facing a persistent economic downside before it slid into the novel coronavirus crisis.

- There was a sustained fall in the saving and investment rates especially with unutilised capacity in the industrial sector.
- 2019-20 Centre's gross tax revenues also showed contraction.

All these trends would continue to trouble the Indian economy in this crisis.

2019-20 India's economic growth

- Central Statistics Office (CSO) had estimated gross value added (GVA) growth of about 4.9% for 2019-20.
- IMF's GDP growth estimate for 2019-20 is at 4.2%.
- However, India may show real GVA growth of 4.4% for 2019-20.

India's growth prospects for 2020-21

- GVA is divided into eight broad sectors (as shown in fig/table below) and all the sectors have been disrupted.

Sectoral growth prospects in 2020-21 						
Differential impact of the novel coronavirus on Gross Value Added in 2020-21						
Group	Sector	Share 2019-20 (MAE)	Average growth (2017-18, 18-19, 19-20 MAE)	2019-20 MAE	Targeted growth (2020-21)	Contribution to growth (% points)
A	Agriculture, forestry & fishing	14.4	4.0	3.1	2.8	0.40
B	Mining & quarrying	2.6	0.6	2.2	1.1	0.03
C	Manufacturing	17.4	4.4	0.3	1.8	0.31
B	Electricity, gas, water supply & other utility services	2.3	8.0	4.1	2.1	0.05
B	Construction	7.8	4.7	2.4	1.2	0.09
D	Trade, hotels, transport, communication, etc.	19.6	7.0	5.1	1.5	0.30
B	Financial, real estate & professional services	22.3	6.3	6.8	3.4	0.76
A	Public Administration, defence and other services	13.6	9.3	8.2	7.4	1.00
	GVA at Basic Price	100.0	5.9	4.4	2.94	2.94

MAE refers to modified advance estimates that are derived by adjusting downwards, CSO advance estimates dated February 28, 2020

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Group A sectors

- This group comprises of two sectors - agriculture and allied sectors, and public administration, defence and other services.
- Total contribution to growth is expected to be highest as the sectors under this group have suffered only limited disruption.

Agriculture and allied sectors

- In the case of agriculture, rabi crop is currently being harvested and a good monsoon is predicted later in the year.
- Despite some labour shortage issues, this sector may show near-normal performance.

Public and defence sector

- This sector has been nearly fully active, especially with the health services at the forefront of the COVID-19 fight.

Group B sectors

- This group comprises four sectors which may suffer average disruption.
- These sectors are mining and quarrying, electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services, construction, and financial, real estate and professional services.

Group C sectors

- Manufacturing sector has suffered significantly. However, it is feasible to stimulate this sector by supporting demand.
- This sector requires strong policy support.

Group D sectors

- This group is likely to suffer maximum disruption.
- This includes, trade, hotels, restaurants, travel and tourism under the broad group of “Trade, Hotels, Transport, Storage and Communications”.

Note: Considering these four groups together, the growth of 2.9% is estimated for 2020.

Measures taken:

- Monetary policy initiatives – RBI has reduced the repo rate to 4.4%, the reverse repo rate to 3.75%, and cash reserve ratio to 3%.
- RBI has also opened several special financing facilities.
- The Centre has announced a relief package of ₹1.7-lakh crore.
- Now, these measures need to be supplemented by an appropriate fiscal stimulus.

What measures are required?

The actual growth outcome for India would depend on 3 important areas -

1. the speed at which the economy is opened up;
2. the time it takes to contain the spread of virus, and,
3. the government’s policy support.

Need for Fiscal Stimulus

Fiscal stimulus can be of three types:

- (a) **relief expenditure** for protecting the poor and the marginalised;
- (b) **demand-supporting expenditure** for increasing personal disposable incomes or government’s purchases of goods and services, including expanded health-care expenditure imposed by the novel coronavirus, and,
- (c) **bailouts** for industry and financial institutions.

Way ahead:

- Centre's budgeted fiscal deficit of 3.5% of GDP may have to be enhanced substantially and provide for a stimulus.
- Expenditure on construction of hospitals, roads and other infrastructure and purchase of health-related equipment and medicines require prioritisation. These expenditures will have high multiplier effects.
- Similar initiatives may be undertaken by the State governments under their respective Fiscal Responsibility Legislation/Law and to provide for the shortfall in their revenues and some stimulus.

Connecting the dots

- Do you think India needs a strong fiscal stimulus when already its fiscal deficit poses a major challenge?
- Which sector needs major policy support and why? What measures are needed?

Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan announced

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- The Indian Prime Minister recently announced a **special economic package** worth ₹20 lakh crore known as **Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan**.
- The **aim** of the abhiyan is to make India **self-reliant**.

Key takeaways:



Image source: [Click here](#)

The abhiyan shall include:

- **new economic package** (recently announced by the Finance Minister)
- **earlier government announcements** during COVID crisis
- **decisions** taken by RBI

This is equivalent to almost **10% of India's GDP**

India's self-reliance will be based on **five pillars** -

- Economy
- [Infrastructure](#)
- Technology driven system
- Vibrant demography
- Demand

[Major stimulus package for MSMEs and other sectors announced](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In News:

Several **relief measures and packages** were announced for MSMEs, salaried workers, contractors recently as part of Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan.

Key takeaways:

[MSMEs](#)

- ₹3 lakh crore **collateral free loan schemes** for businesses, especially MSMEs.
- For 2 lakh NPAs/stressed MSMEs, **₹20,000 crore** as **subordinate debt** will be facilitated.
- A ₹50,000 crore **equity infusion** through an MSME fund of funds with a corpus of ₹10,000 crore.
- The definition of an MSME is being expanded to allow for **higher investment limits** and the **introduction of turnover-based** criteria.

For salaried workers and taxpayers

- [Income tax](#) returns for financial year 2019-20 have been extended with new due date being November 30, 2020.
- The rates of **tax deduction at source** (TDS) and **tax collection at source** (TCS) have been cut by 25% for the next year.
- **Statutory provident fund** (PF) payments have been **reduced** from **12% to 10%** for both employers and employees for the next three months.

NBFCs, housing finance companies and microfinance institutions

- ₹30,000 crore **investment scheme** fully guaranteed by the Centre.
- **Partial credit guarantee scheme** worth ₹45,000 crore. First 20% of losses will be borne by the Centre.

[Power distribution companies](#)

- ₹90,000 crore liquidity injection

Contractors

- 6 month extension from all Central agencies

- Partial bank guarantees to ease cash flows

Registered real estate projects

- 6-month extension, with COVID-19 to be treated as a “**force majeure**” event

Employee Provident Fund

- EPF provided to low-income organised workers under the [PMGKY](#) will be **extended for another three months**.
- Mandatory **EPF contributions** are also being **reduced from 12% to 10%** for both employees and employers in all other establishments.

Important value additions:

Lockdown antidote
Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the features for the first part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan

For small businesses	For employees/ tax payers	For infrastructure sector	For financial sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ₹3,00,000 crore emergency credit for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) ▪ Only domestic firms can bid for govt. procurements up to ₹200 crore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EPF deductions slashed for 3 months to 20% from 24% of salary; IT returns deadline extended ▪ This will enhance take-home pay if employers pass it on, but dent retirement savings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Power PSUs to lend ₹90,000 crore to stressed State distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deadlines for realty projects and public infrastructure contracts extended ▪ Fresh ₹45,000 crore partial credit guarantees for non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) ▪ ₹30,000 crore special liquidity for microfinance/ housing finance firms and NBFCs

Relief at hand: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addressing a press conference to announce details of the economic stimulus package in New Delhi on Wednesday.
■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Image source: [The Hindu](#)

Employee Provident Fund

- It is a scheme for providing a monetary benefit to all salaried individuals after their retirement.

Tax deduction at source (TDS)

- As per the Income Tax Act, any company or person making a payment, is required to **deduct tax at source** if the **payment exceeds** certain threshold limits.

Tax collection at source (TCS)

- It is the tax **payable** by a **seller** which he **collects from the buyer** at the time of sale.

Collateral

- It means a property or something **valuable** that one **agrees to give** to somebody if he/she cannot pay back money that he/she has borrowed.

Subordinate debt

- It is debt which ranks after other debts if a company falls into liquidation or bankruptcy.
- Such debt is referred to as 'subordinate', because the debt providers have subordinate status in relationship to the normal debt.

Statutory provident fund

- It is meant for employees of Government or Universities or Educational Institutes affiliated to University.

Equity

- It is the value of the shares issued by a company.

Atma-nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (or Self-reliant India Mission)**Context:**

In his address to the nation, PM Modi observed that -

- Country should view the Covid-19 crisis as an opportunity to **achieve economic self-reliance**.
- He stressed on the importance of **promoting “local” products**.
- He called it Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (or **Self-reliant India Mission**)

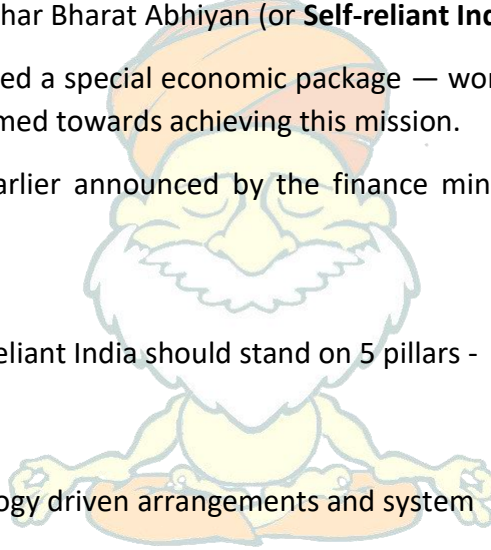
Indian government announced a special economic package — worth Rs 20 lakh crore or 10% of India's GDP in 2019-20 — aimed towards achieving this mission.

It includes the measures earlier announced by the finance ministry and steps taken by the Reserve Bank of India.

5 pillars

According to the PM a self-reliant India should stand on 5 pillars -

1. Economy
2. Infrastructure
3. 21st century technology driven arrangements and system
4. Demand
5. Vibrant Demography

**About the package:**

- As mentioned above, it is worth Rs 20 lakh crore or 10% of India's GDP in 2019-20 — which is aimed towards achieving economic self-reliance.
- The package will focus on land, labour, liquidity and laws.
- It will cater to various sections including cottage industry, MSMEs, labourers, middle class, industries, among others.
- The package will also focus on empowering the poor, labourers, migrants, etc., both from organized and unorganized sectors.

Reforms needed for achieving economic self-reliance

Several bold reforms are needed to make the country self-reliant, so that the impact of crisis such as COVID, can be negated in future.

These reforms include -

- supply chain reforms for agriculture,
- rational tax system,
- simple and clear laws,
- capable human resource and
- a strong financial system.

These reforms are expected to promote business, attract investment, and further strengthen Make in India.

Also for India to be truly self-reliant and self-confident, public investment in education, human capability and research and development has to increase.

'Coronavirus stimulus packages'

- The US has committed to the largest rescue package by any country in pure dollar terms of USD 2.7 trillion but as percentage of GDP it trails behind Japan. The US measures work out at an estimated 13 per cent of GDP.
- Japan has announced a package equivalent to 21.1 per cent of its GDP. It has outlined USD 1.1 trillion recovery package and plans for further spending.
- Sweden - stimulus equal to 12 per cent of its GDP and Australia (10.8 per cent).
- Germany has announced a spending of around USD 815 billion, equal to 10.7 per cent of its GDP.

Connecting the dots:

- Highlight the measures announced by the current government to help boost the economy during the COVID-19 crisis.

Money laundering and fugitive offender issue

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Money Laundering

In News:

- The UK High Court **rejected** businessman Vijay Mallya's **plea** for permission **to move the UK Supreme Court (SC)**.
- He wanted to **challenge** the **lower court's approval** of **his extradition** to India in the **IDBI Bank fraud case**.

Key takeaways:

- The UK government may soon issue a **directive** allowing his extradition.
- It is important to bring him back **within 28 days** after he **exhausts** all legal avenues.
- He may be brought on board a special plane, as international flight operations have been suspended due to the global lockdown.

Important value additions:

- The case was registered against Vijay Mallya for **fraud, misrepresentation** to the bank in securing credit facilities, **conspiracy** and **money laundering**.
- The Enforcement Directorate (ED) of India attached assets worth Rs.13,000 crore in connection with the cases against him.
- On its request, a Mumbai court declared him a **fugitive** under the **Fugitive Economic Offenders Act**.

Enforcement Directorate

- It is a **law enforcement** and **economic intelligence** agency.
- It is responsible for enforcing **economic laws** and fighting **economic crime** in India.
- It is part of the **Department of Revenue**, Ministry of Finance, Government Of India.
- The prime objective of the agency is the enforcement of two key Acts -
 - Foreign Exchange Management Act 1999 (FEMA)
 - Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002 (PMLA)

The Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018

- It **empowers** any special court to **confiscate** all properties and assets of economic offenders who are charged in offences measuring over ₹ 100 crores and are **evading prosecution** by remaining outside the jurisdiction of Indian courts.

Second tranche of economic stimulus package announced

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- **Second tranche** of [economic stimulus package](#) was recently announced.
- This package shall benefit **migrant workers, street vendors** and **small farmers**.

Key takeaways:MGNREGS workers

- ₹10,000 crore has been spent in the last two months on creating man-days of work under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS)** to help migrant workers.
- The work has been offered to 2.33 crore wage seekers till May 13.
- About 40-50% more persons have been enrolled as compared to May last year.
- **Universal right to minimum wages** and a **national floor wage** are reforms which will be considered in the coming future.

Migrant workers

- Free foodgrains for an estimated eight crore migrant workers for next two months at a cost of ₹3,500 crore.
- Migrant workers who **do not have** either Central or State Public Distribution System (**PDS**) card would get **5kg grains** per person and **1kg of chana** for two months.
- **PDS ration cards** would be made **portable**, allowing migrant workers to use their ration cards across States.
- This would benefit 83% of PDS beneficiaries, in 23 States by August.
- By March 2021, 100% coverage under [‘One Nation One Ration Card’](#) will be done.

Interest subvention on MUDRA loans

- A **2% interest subvention** (subsidy offered on interest rates) shall be given under the **MUDRA-Shishu loans** of up to ₹50,000.

Housing subsidy scheme extended

- ₹70,000-crore boost to housing sector by **extending** the **subsidy scheme for affordable housing** to the middle-income group by one year to 2021.

Street vendors

- ₹5,000-crore **special credit facility** for street vendors by providing them with **working capital** of up to ₹10,000.

Farmers

- ₹30,000-crore additional emergency working capital funding through the [National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development](#) (NABARD).
- This loan will cover requirements of rural co-op banks and regional rural banks. This would benefit mostly small and marginal farmers.

Important value additions:

The Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS)

- It is a benefit under the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana** under which housing loan EMIs are reduced by over Rs. 2,000 per month by offering an **interest subsidy**.
- It focuses on helping
 - Middle Income Groups
 - Economically Weaker Sections
 - Lower Income Groups

Reforms concerning various sectors of economy announced

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- Recently more reforms concerning various sectors of economy were announced by the Indian Finance Minister.

Read: [First](#), [second](#) and [third](#) economic stimulus package

Key takeaways:

Atomic energy

- **Private involvement** to be brought into certain areas through PPP mode.
- **Research reactor** to be set up in PPP mode for production of medical isotopes which can be used for treatment of cancer and other diseases.
- **Irradiation technology facilities** for food preservation to be set up in PPP mode, to assist farmers.
- Indian start-ups and tech entrepreneurs will be linked up with nuclear research facilities through **tech development-cum-incubation** centres.

Space

Central government will allow **private sector** to use **ISRO** facilities.

- Future **projects** related to **space** will be open to the **private sector**.
- **Geo-spatial data policy** will be eased to make remote-sensing data more widely available with proper safeguards.

Power distribution companies (Discoms)

- Discoms in **union territories** shall be privatised.
- Tariff policy reforms will be introduced to protect consumer rights.
- **Load shedding** will be **penalised**.
- There will be a progressive reduction in **cross subsidies** (a subsidy granted to a business or activity out of the profits of another business or activity).
- Smart prepaid meters will be set up.
- Subsidies will be paid by direct benefit transfer.

Civil aviation

- **Restrictions** will be **eased** to make civilian flying faster and more efficient.
- Six more airports are up for auction on PPP basis by **Airports Authority of India**.
- Additional **investment** by **private players** to be invited in 12 airports.
- To make India a global hub for aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) hub, the tax regime for **MRO ecosystem** will be rationalised.
- This will save maintenance cost for airlines, allow convergence between defence and civil aviation MROs.
- The target is to grow MRO market in the country from Rs. 800 crore to Rs. 2000 crore over three years.

Ordnance Factory Boards

- They are being **corporatised** to improve professional management, transparency and accountability.
- They will be **listed on the stock market** but they will not be privatised.
- **FDI limit** in defence manufacturing under automatic route will be raised from 49% to 74%.

Defence production

- A list of **weapons and platforms** which will **not** be **allowed for import** will be announced.
- They will have to be bought in India.
- Every year, this list will be increased as capacity to make weapons that meet necessary standards grows.
- **Indigenisation** of some imported spares will also be given priority.
- There will be separate budget provision for **domestic capital procurement**.
- This will help reduce defence import bill and also encourage domestic manufacturing.

Composite regime for minerals

- Under the regime, **500 mining blocks** will be offered through an open and transparent auction process.
- **Bauxite and coal blocks** will be **auctioned jointly**.
- Distinction between **captive and non-captive mines** will be removed to allow transfer of mining leases and sale of surplus unused mineral blocks.

Reforms in coal sector

- **Any private player** can bid for a coal block and sell it in the **open market**.
- Earlier, only captive consumers with end-use ownership could bid for coal blocks.
- Almost **50 blocks** will be offered **immediately**.

- **Incentive** to convert **coal into gas** in order to meet environmental needs shall also be provided.
- **Coal bed methane extraction** will be done through auction.
- Infrastructure development financing of Rs. 50,000 crore will be provided to support 1 billion tonnes of coal from Coal India by 2023-24, plus coal from private blocks.
- **Revenue sharing mechanism** will be allowed for more coal availability at competitive market prices.

Empowered Group of Secretaries

- Fast track clearances shall be done through an **Empowered Group of Secretaries**.
- **Incentive schemes** to promote **new champion sectors** shall be introduced.
- **Schemes** will also be implemented in **States** through **challenge mode** to upgrade infrastructure facilities, connectivity in industrial clusters and to make available land for new investments.

MGNREGS

- An **additional ₹40,000 crore** shall be allocated to MGNREGS in addition to the budget estimate of ₹61,000 crore to ensure that workers returning to villages are provided employment, especially in the upcoming monsoon period.

Health infrastructure

- **Public expenditure** on health will be **increased**.
- Investments in **grassroots health institutions** and **wellness centres** in rural and urban areas will be increased too.
- All districts shall have **infectious diseases blocks** which will be set up in their hospitals.
- **Public health labs** will be set up in every block.

Education

- Top **100 universities** will be **automatically allowed** to start online classes from May 30, 2020.
- The **PM e-vidya programme** for multi-mode access to digital education will be launched.
- **DIKSHA digital platform** will provide e-content and QR coded textbooks for all classes for school education across the country.
- One **earmarked TV channel** for each class. There will be extensive use of radio, community radio and podcasts.
- Special e-content for visually and hearing impaired children.

Companies

- In an attempt to give relief to companies defaulting on loans due to the COVID-19 stress, **no fresh insolvency** will be initiated for one year under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.
- **Coronavirus-related debt** will be **excluded** from definition of default.
- Minimum threshold to **initiate insolvency** proceedings has been **raised to ₹1 crore** from ₹1 lakh to benefit MSMEs.
- An ordinance will be promulgated to bring this change in IBC.

- **Decriminalisation** of the Companies Act in violations involving minor technical and procedural defaults such as - shortcoming in CSR reporting, filing defaults, delay in holding AGM, etc.
- Majority of the **compoundable offences** sections will be shifted to **internal adjudication mechanism** (IAM).
- Amendments will be brought through an Ordinance to **de-clog** the criminal courts and NCLT.
- Companies will be permitted to **directly list their securities** in permissible foreign jurisdictions.

Public sector policy

- A new coherent **public sector enterprises policy** will be formulated to define strategic sectors which will have not more than four PSUs.
- In sectors notified as strategic, at least one public sector enterprise will still be present but private sector will be allowed too.
- In other sectors, public sector enterprises will be privatised.
- This is being done to minimise wasteful administrative costs.

Support to the states

- The States' borrowing limits will be raised from **3% to 5% of State GDP**.
- This increase in borrowing limits is **conditional** which will be linked to specific reforms such as 'One Nation, One Ration Card', ease of doing business, power distribution issues and urban local body revenue.
- The first 0.5% increase from 3% to 3.5% shall be unconditional.

Important value additions:

Captive Mining

- It means the mining which is taken out by a company for its own use & it won't be able to sell it in the market.

Coalbed methane extraction (CBM extraction)

- It is a method for extracting methane from a coal deposit.

Revenue sharing

- It is a somewhat flexible concept.
- It involves sharing operating profits or losses among associated financial actors.
- It can exist as a profit-sharing system that ensures each entity is compensated for its efforts.

Reviving the automobile sector

Context: In the post-Covid world, electric vehicles will be key not only to breathing new life into the automotive sector but also to decarbonising it

Did You Know?

- By 2050, every second car produced globally would be electrically powered.

- Research by Deloitte Global Automotive shows that over 50% of the consumers are still unclear about the safety of the battery and the availability of adequate charging stations leading to slower adoption of E-vehicles

Problems of Indian Automobile Sector

1. In pre-COVID times

- Declining consumer demand
- Difficulty in transitioning into BS-VI technology
- Extinguishing inventories of left-over BS-IV vehicles
- Credit crunch in the NBFC sector

2. In Post-COVID times

- Challenges of dealing with a completely new environment – rising protectionism and decline in international trade
- Decreased purchasing power of consumers
- Disruption in manufacturing capabilities
- Issues with inventory management and labour shortages
- Need for emergency response mechanisms in the backdrop of disrupted global supply chain

India and E-Vehicles

- **Strong growth:** The EV industry in India managed to post a decent 20% increase in sales in FY20 compared to FY19
- **Policy Push by government for e-vehicles:** The GST council reduced the rates from 12% to 5% for vehicles, and from 18% to 5% for vehicle chargers.
- **Push by State governments** to adopt e-vehicles For ex: Kerala government has instructed all its departments to purchase only e-vehicles from the next financial year.
- **Dedicated schemes like FAME** (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles) have incentivised local manufacturing and the growth of domestic technology.

Electric Vehicles – Prospects in Post-COVID times

- **Personal mobility** is going to pick up again post-Covid, as people would avoid mass transport thus giving boost to e-vehicles
- **Driver of growth:** In Post-COVID times, fastest growth for automotive sector would come from the e-rickshaws segment that plugs last-mile connectivity.
- **India's Demographic advantage:** Surveys point that younger consumers, particularly females, are more willing to invest in EVs than older generation.
- **Environmental friendly:** Increased environmental awareness among public, especially after COVID crisis, could lead to increased adoption for e-vehicles

Way Ahead

- There should be a **further policy push** for a visible shift towards increased EV adoption
- Banks should devise **innovative credit schemes** to push for such a shift.
- The government should focus on augmenting the **charging infrastructure**
- Governments should also have in place a **scrappage policy** that drives new-vehicle sale.

- Existing automobile companies should make e-vehicles more affordable and maintenance easier, with quick availability of parts (**no dependence on import**)

Conclusion

- EVs are the only way to decarbonise the transport sector and achieve India's ambitious target of complete green mobility by 2030.

Connecting the dots

- EV Batteries – dependence on China for supply of Lithium
- Challenges with regard to air transport in Post-COVID times

Financing the Stimulus: Privatization

Context: As the government announced COVID relief & stimuli package equivalent to nearly 10% of India's GDP, there are questions regarding the means to finance it

Overall Stimulus provided by Atmanirbhar Bharat [Package](#) is as follows:

	Sectors	(Rs. Cr.)
Part 1	Support for MSME, EPF, Liquidity scheme for NBFC/HFC/MFI, DISCOMs	5,94,550
Part 2	Foodgrain for Migrants, Interest subvention for MUDRA loans, Support to Street Vendors, NABARD, KCC	3,10,000
Part 3	Food Micro Enterprises, PM Matsya Sampada Yojana, Agri Infrastructure fund, Animal Husbandry etc.	1,50,000
Part 4 and 5	Viability Gap funding, MGNREGA funding	48,100
	Sub-Total	11,02,650
	Earlier Measures incl PMGKY	1,92,800
	RBI Measures (Actual)	8,01,603
	GRAND TOTAL	20,97,053

Can government find the money through increase in fuel tax?

- Government has already increased the excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 3 per litre in March, hence the space for further increase is less
- Also, such a move would contradict the very idea of a relief and stimulus package. This is because an increase in the fuel price would affect purchasing power especially that of poor

Can government fund the package through borrowings?

- The rupee is at its lowest level compared to the US dollar and any borrowings will make it harder for the government to pay back its debt
- Since external borrowings must be paid back in borrowed currency, exports and foreign reserves are generally the only two reliable options to pay back debt.

- However, with inevitable global slowdown there will be consequent drop in exports which impacts India's debt repaying ability
- More overseas borrowing, combined with the industry's high debt status, could lead to rating agencies downgrading India's investment ratings
- On the positive side, India's foreign reserves stand at an all-time high which could be strategically used to finance its needs

Privatization as a route to finance the relief package

- Governments across the world are resorting to privatisation to fill budgetary gaps
- According to India's new Public Sector Enterprises Policy (PSEP), a list of strategic sectors will be notified where there will be no more than four PSUs
- Before the COVID-19 crisis, the government needed the privatisation money partly because its revenue (from GST among other things) was declining
- Today, the government needs this money to fund the relief package without excessively crossing the fiscal limits
- Government is planning the privatization of BPCL, Shipping Corporation of India, Container Corporation of India, THDC, NEEPCO and Air India among other PSUs

Challenges with regard to Privatization

- Revenue from privatisation is a one-off benefit
- Generally, only profit-making PSUs are sold at a good price.
- Successful privatisation requires a prospective buyer. In the present slowdown times, Industrialists are facing problems running their own business
- Excessive political interference with the private sector makes owning an ex-government entity even riskier thus discouraging participation in privatization process
- A handful of Indian capitalists who are capable of buying big PSUs leads to sectors of economy coming under the influence of quasi-monopolies
- Buying of PSUs by few Capitalists could also foster crony capitalism and may even result in the making of oligarchs.

Conclusion

Funding has to come from privatisation, taxation, loans and international aid.

Connecting the dots

- 1991 LPG reforms – Critical Analysis
- Investment Models

WAG12: Indian Railways' first indigenous electric locomotive

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-III- Economy, Infrastructure

In News:

- The Indian Railways has operationalised its first **12,000 hp electric locomotive named WAG12.**
- It is manufactured locally.

Key takeaways:

- The locomotive made its maiden commercial run between Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Station, UP to Shivpur, UP
- India became the **sixth country in the world** to produce high horsepower locomotive indigenously.
- It is manufactured at the Madhepura Electric Locomotive Pvt. Ltd. (MELPL), Bihar.
- It is a joint venture between the French major and the Indian railways holding an equity share of 74% and 26% respectively.
- It is the **largest FDI in the railways sector**.
- WAG12 will allow **faster and safer movement** of heavier freight trains.
- Such locomotive has been operationalised on **broad gauge track** in the world for the **first time**.

Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia: Report by the UNODC released

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-III- Economy, Health

In News:

- **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** recently released the report on **“Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia”**.

Key takeaways:

- Movement restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic may lead to an **initial statistical reduction** in drug seizures (confiscation).
- However, there will be hardly any change in terms of supply in the **East and Southeast Asia region**.
- A large proportion of **methamphetamine** was manufactured, trafficked and consumed without the need for globalised supply chains.
- An already **vulnerable** population of **drug users** may be exposed to **additional risks** as **funding** is **re-prioritised**, **access** to programmes and services becomes **difficult**, **activities** of treatment providers are **hampered**, and **communities** concentrate on **coping** with the effects of the pandemic.
- Additional efforts would be required at all levels to carefully analyse methods and trends to understand changes to drug markets.

Important value additions:

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

- **Established** in 1997 it is a **member** of the United Nations Development Group.
- Headquarters: Vienna, Austria
- Functions: To assist the UN in addressing:
 - interrelated issues of illicit trafficking in and abuse of drugs
 - crime prevention and criminal justice
 - international terrorism

- political corruption.
- These goals are pursued through three primary functions: research, guidance and support to governments through various conventions, treaties and protocols.

COVID-19: An opportunity to Biomedical Industry

Context: As the COVID-19 pandemic wreaks economy, there is enhanced focus on health & biomedical sector, where every country is trying to strengthen its indigenous capacity.

Did You Know?

- In India, presently, a third of all authorised testing labs are concentrated in three states
- US is aiming for a million daily tests. Germany already has walk-in test centres.

Why universal testing is necessary?

- **To contain pandemic:** The virus currently has no effective treatment and a safe vaccine is possibly a year away, thus testing is needed to contain the pandemic
- **To restart Economy:** The main driver of increased COVID testing globally is the need to make people safe so that they begin to engage in market activities.
- **To attract investment:** Global investment destinations will be influenced by the relative reputation of national testing protocols.
- Moreover, recovery from infection doesn't guarantee immunity from future infection. Hence the necessity of multiple and regular testing of workers is needed to protect workplaces

Scope for Biomedical Industry to expand

- **Potential for Testing industry:** If one only targets urban workers in India, there will be a testing pool of approximately 200 million people.
- **Decentralisation:** In India, the number of labs that can test for the virus needs to be increased to at least 2,000 with each lab having the capacity to test 5,000 samples a day. Also, labs need to be spread across country to ensure timely results.
- **Scope for Biomedical R&D:** India needs to incentivise its universities, research laboratories and biomedical supply chains to develop cheaper and faster testing methods
- **Employment benefits:** Massive testing requires hiring of testers, transporters and contact tracers thus increasing labour demand leading to job opportunities
- **Export Potential:** Massive testing will likely be a worldwide phenomenon over the next year or two. Consequently, world demand for testing kits will explode.
- **MSME boost:** Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) can be manufactured by MSMEs at a much cheaper cost provided they are provided adequate governmental support
- **Complements India's pharmaceutical Sector:** India is already a leading player in global pharmaceutical market. Enhanced strength in biomedical field will make India a strong player in overall Health Sector

Conclusion

The pandemic could do for the biomedical industry what the Y2K scare did for the Indian IT sector. India needs to give an unambiguous signal to its entrepreneurs about the centrality of this mission

Connecting the dots

- Medical devices parks in India
- Generic Medicines and India's provision of compulsory licensing

Special liquidity scheme for NBFCs/HFCs approved

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- Recently, the proposal to launch a new **Special Liquidity Scheme** for Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) and Housing Finance Companies (HFCs) was approved.
- This shall improve **liquidity position** of the NBFCs/HFCs.

Key takeaways:

- A large public sector bank would set up a **Special Purpose Vehicle** (SPV) to manage a **Stressed Asset Fund** (SAF) whose special securities would be **guaranteed** by the Government of India and **purchased** by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) only.
- The SPV would issue securities as per requirement.
- Total amount of securities should not exceed Rs. 30,000 crore.
- The Scheme will be administered by the **Department of Financial Services**.

Important value additions

Non-Banking Financial Company

- It is a **financial institution** that does not have a **full banking license** or is **not supervised** by a national or international banking regulatory agency.
- The most important difference between non-banking financial companies and banks is that NBFCs **don't take demand deposits**.

Housing Finance Company

- It is a company registered under the Companies Act, 1956.
- It primarily transacts business of providing finance for housing, directly or indirectly.

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) approved for implementation

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-II –Welfare Schemes & GS-III - Economy

In News:

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for implementation of the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)**.

Key takeaways:

- It is a scheme to bring **Blue Revolution** through **sustainable** and **responsible** development of fisheries sector in India.
- Scheme will be implemented during a period of **5 years** from FY 2020-21 to FY 2024-25.
- It will have two separate Components namely
 - Central Sector Scheme (CS)

- Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS).
- Under the Central Sector Scheme Component, an amount of 1,720 crores has been earmarked.
- Under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) Component, an investment of 18,330 crores has been envisaged,
- For optimal outcomes, '**Cluster or area-based approach**' would be followed.
- This approach will have forward and backward linkages and end to end solutions.
- **Aims and objectives** of PMMSY
 - Harnessing of fisheries potential in a sustainable, responsible, inclusive and equitable manner.
 - Enhancing fish production and productivity through expansion, intensification, etc.
 - Modernizing and strengthening of value chain - post-harvest management and quality improvement.
 - Doubling fishers and fish farmers incomes and generation of employment.
 - Enhancing contribution to Agriculture Gross Value Addition and exports.
 - Social, physical and economic security for fishers and fish farmers.
 - Robust fisheries management and regulatory framework.
- The scheme intends to address:
 - critical gaps in fish production and productivity
 - modernization and strengthening of value chain
 - establishing a robust fisheries management framework and fishers' welfare
 - sanitary and phyto-sanitary matters

Important value additions:

- **Fisheries and aquaculture** are an important source of food, nutrition, employment and income in India.
- The sector provides **livelihood** to more than 20 million fishers and fish farmers at the primary level and twice the number along the value chain.
- Fish being an **affordable** and **rich source** of animal protein, is one of the healthiest options to reduce hunger and malnutrition.

A Moment to Revive MGNREGA

Context: The lockdown has resulted in a massive loss of livelihoods, and the 400-million strong unorganised workforce has been the worst hit.

About MGNREGA

- It stands for Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005
- It guarantees **100 days of wage employment** in a financial year to a **rural** household whose adult members (at least 18 years of age) volunteer to do **unskilled** work.
- It has unique legal architecture of being **demand-driven**, and not budget constrained.
- It is social security and labour law that aims to enforce the 'right to work'.
- It has provision for **unemployment allowance**, when the state cannot provide work

- Agriculture and allied activities constitute more than 65% of the works taken up under the programme.
- MGNREGA has helped build rural infrastructure through approximately 10 crore families.

Problems facing MGNREGA

- Governments capping its financial resources and turning it into supply-based programme
- Workers had begun to lose interest in working under it because of the inordinate delays in wage payments.
- With very little autonomy, gram panchayats found its implementation cumbersome
- As a result, over the last few years, MGNREGA had begun to face an existential crisis.

MGNREGA- a saviour in crisis times

- Migrants returning to villages in the wake of COVID crisis have a source of livelihood in MGNREGA programme
- The scheme provides employment to unskilled rural labour especially in the times of rising unemployment
- It provides social security especially during agricultural lean season
- Nearly half of the beneficiaries of the scheme are women and SC/STs, hence it acts as social empowering tool

MGNREGA and COVID-19

- As a part of stimulus package government has sanctioned additional Rs 40,000 crore for MGNREGA amounting to nearly Rs 1 lakh crore for FY 2020-21
- However, the allocation which amounts to 0.47% of the GDP continues to be much lower than the World Bank recommendations of 1.7% for optimal functioning of the programme.

Way ahead with regard to MGNREGA

1. Proactive State governments

- They must ensure that public works are opened in every village
- Workers turning up at the worksite should be provided work immediately, without any delay or restrictions

2. Proactive local governments to ease administrative process

- Local bodies must proactively reach out to returned and quarantined migrant workers and help those in need to get job cards
- Gram panchayats and elected representatives need to be provided with adequate resources, powers, and responsibilities to sanction works, provide work on demand, and authorise wage payments

3. Precautions at work site

- Adequate facilities such as soap, water, and masks for workers must be provided free of cost at the worksite
- For reasons of health safety, MGNREGA tools should not be shared between workers

4. Simplified Payments Procedures

- Attempts to distribute wages in cash, sans biometric authentication, must be rolled out as there is limited coverage of bank infrastructure in rural areas

5. Flexibility of the work done

- Many governments will possibly prioritise individual land-based works to comply with instructions of physical distancing.
- However, it is important to also ensure community works are taken up so that landless workers are not left out of the programme

Conclusion

With nearly eight crore migrant workers returning to their villages, and with an additional allocation for the year, this could be a moment for the true revival of MGNREGA. A revival led by workers themselves.

Connecting the dots

- Rights based governance framework
- Union Government's Four Labour Codes

Measures announced by RBI for strengthening the economy

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- RBI announced another set of measures for strengthening the economy recently.

Key takeaways

- Repo rate: It is reduced from 4.4% to 4.0%.
- Marginal Standing Facility rate & Bank rate: Reduced from 4.65% to 4.25%.
- Reverse repo rate: Reduced from 3.75% to 3.35%.
- States have been allowed to borrow more from the **Consolidated Sinking Fund**. It is being maintained by state governments as a buffer for repayment of their liabilities.
- The RBI had announced a **special refinance facility** of ₹15,000 crore to **SIDBI** at RBI's policy repo rate for a period of 90 days. This facility has now been extended by another 90 days.
- A **line of credit of ₹15,000 crore** will be given to the **EXIM Bank**, for financing India's foreign trade.
- The loan facility has been given for a period of 90 days, with a provision to extend it by one year.
- The **maximum credit** which banks can extend to a particular corporate group has been **increased** from 25% to 30% of the bank's eligible capital base.

Important value additions:

Repo rate

- It is also known as the benchmark interest rate.
- It is the rate at which the RBI lends money to the banks for a short term.
- When the repo rate increases, borrowing from RBI becomes more expensive.

Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) rate

- It refers to the rate at which the scheduled banks can borrow funds overnight from RBI against government securities.

- MSF is a very short term borrowing scheme for scheduled commercial banks.

Bank rate

- It is the interest rate at which a nation's central bank lends money to domestic banks, often in the form of very short-term loans.
- Managing the bank rate is a method by which central banks affect economic activity.

Reverse repo rate

- It is the rate at which the RBI borrows money from commercial banks within the country.
- It is a monetary policy instrument which can be used to control the money supply in the country.

Consolidated Sinking Fund (CSF)

- CSF was set up in 1999-2000 by the RBI to meet redemption of market loans of the States.
- Initially, 11 States — Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Uttaranchal and West Bengal — set up sinking funds.
- Later, the 12th Finance Commission (2005-10) recommended that all States should have sinking funds for amortisation of all loans, including loans from banks, liabilities on account of NSSF National Small Saving Fund), etc.
- The fund should be maintained outside the consolidated fund of the States and the public account.
- It should not be used for any other purpose, except for redemption of loans.
- As per the scheme, State governments could contribute 1-3% of the outstanding market loans each year to the Fund.
- The Fund is administered by the Central Accounts Section of RBI Nagpur.

An insufficient relief

Context: Union government announced a relief package of Rs 20 trillion, about 10 per cent of the country's GDP, for the economy in crisis

Click [here](#) for details

Did You Know?

- The US has committed to the largest rescue package by any country in pure dollar terms of USD 2.7 trillion at an estimated 13% of GDP.
- Japan has announced a package equivalent to 21.1% of its GDP totalling USD 1.1 trillion
- Sweden – stimulus equal to 12 per cent of its GDP and Australia (10.8 per cent).
- Germany has announced a spending of around USD 815 billion, equal to 10.7 per cent of its GDP.

Criticism of the relief package

1. The design of this relief package seeks to focus on the supply side, with an emphasis on providing liquidity through lines of credit
 - This is with the aim of minimising the cost to the government.
 - Even in normal circumstances, the speed of adjustment of the supply-side is slow because supply responses take time

- Also, producers would not wish to pile up inventories of unsold goods
- Rather it should have focused on the demand side by stepping up government expenditure
- 2. Difficulties in Agricultural package implementation
 - There is relief for agriculture in the form of a concessional credit line of Rs 2 trillion, but loans are neither automatic or assured
 - Agri-marketing reforms and infrastructure creation are long-term promises.
- 3. There is nothing for the corporate sector in manufacturing or services.
- 4. The distressed sectors such as airlines, automobiles, hotels, restaurants, and tourism have been ignored.
- 5. There is very little for public health, already in a dilapidated state.
- 6. Structural difficulties of MSME sector
 - The MSME sector, the backbone of the economy that provides 25% of employment, 32% of the GDP and 45% of exports.
 - For MSMEs, lenders are not always supportive in extending loans, despite government announcement of Rs 3 trillion line of credit for loans without collateral.
 - Also, buyers (central and state governments, public sector firms and the private sector) owe MSMEs as much as Rs 5 trillion.
 - MSMEs just do not have the resources to pay wages or meet fixed costs on electricity, rent or interest during the lockdown period and relief package does not address this.
- 7. There is a recycling of ideas or schemes from earlier budgets
- 8. There is little cohesive focus on stabilisation and revival of the economy in the short-run
- 9. Insufficient Fiscal Stimulus (government spending)
 - There are 12 estimates by analysts in financial sector institutions, suggesting that the fiscal stimulus is in the range of 0.7 to 1.3% of the GDP
 - Even then the fiscal stimulus' contribution to domestic demand will be minuscule, given that private final consumer expenditure in India is about 60 per cent of the GDP.

Suggestion is Extra Fiscal Stimulus

- The extra fiscal stimulus should have been Rs 7-9 trillion (3-4 per cent of the GDP)
- This enlarged fiscal deficit cannot be financed by market borrowing, which would simply drive up interest rates and nip recovery in the bud.
- It would have to be financed by monetising the deficit - RBI buying government T-bills & printing money
- The concerns about inflation and downgrade by rating agencies are often exaggerated given that the entire world is going through similar phase

Connecting the dots

- 1930s Great Economic Depression
- Expansionary & contractionary fiscal (or monetary) policy

The problem with the liquidity push

Context: The government's relief-cum-stimulus amounting to 10% of GDP has relied heavily on measures aimed at pushing credit to economy.

The Liquidity push

- In the wake of economic crisis unleashed by COVID-19, Union Government's agenda of "self-reliant India" has identified land, labour, laws and liquidity as focus areas.
- In economic and business parlance, liquidity refers to **ease of access to money**.
- In periods of crisis, individuals, small businesses, firms, financial institutions and even governments tend to experience a liquidity crunch
- Relaxing that liquidity crunch is a focus of the government's crisis-response package.

Why the need for pushing credit?

- The thrust is to get RBI and other public financial institutions to infuse liquidity and increase lending by the financial system
- This would ensure that businesses big and small, use borrowed funds to lend to others, make pending payments and compensate employees
- Also, this would increase the money in the hands of consumers driving demand
- Thus, increased liquidity addresses both demand and supply side of economic cycle, reviving demand, investment and expenditure
- Enhancing liquidity is thus considered as productive as direct transfers to the poor.

What is the focus area of liquidity transmission?

- The main intermediaries being enlisted for the task of transmitting liquidity are the banks, with NBFCs constituting a second tier
- Among the first steps taken by the RBI was the launch of special and 'targeted' long term repo operations ([TLTROs](#))
- First round of such operations, called for investment of the cheaper capital in higher quality investment grade corporate bonds, commercial paper, and non-convertible debentures. This allowed big business access to cheap capital
- The second round was geared to saving NBFCs, whose balance sheets were under severe stress even before the COVID-19 strike
- The COVID-19 package identified more intermediaries like SIDBI, NABARD, NHB that could increase liquidity in different sectors
- Also, in some instances the government offered them partial or full credit guarantees in case their clients defaulted

Challenges with liquidity transmission

- **Ineffective:** There is little evidence to suggest that first round of RBI's TLTROs aimed toward big business triggered new investment decisions. This is because they used the cheap capital to substitute for past high-cost debt or finance ongoing projects
- **Practical Challenges:** Given the circumstances, the liquidity push, even if partially successful, would only culminate in eventual default, as borrowers use the debt to just stay afloat in the absence of new revenues.
- **Banks were reluctant** about lending to NBFCs/MFI, because of fears that their clients could default in repayments due to weak business cycle. Ex: [Franklin Templeton issue](#)

- **Weak Transmission:** Those who can access credit would either not borrow or only do so to protect themselves and not use the funds either to pay their workers or buy and stock inputs, due to grim economic outlook
- **Medium term issue:** Even after the lockdown is lifted, the compression of demand resulting from the loss of employment and incomes would be considerable.
- **Inadequate Fiscal Measures:** Demand decline would be aggravated by the fact that spending by a government would fall sharply because of a collapse in revenue collections.

Way Ahead

- New and additional transfers to people in cash and kind
- Increased wage subsidies and enhanced spending on employment programmes
- Debt financed spending by the government, with borrowing at low interest rates from the central bank or a “monetisation” of the deficit

Connecting the dots

- Taper tantrum by US Fed in the wake of post-2009 financial crisis
- Keynesian Economics in the wake of Great Depression

Lessons for One Nation One Ration Card

Context: The economic crisis precipitated by COVID-19 has focussed the country’s attention on inter-state migrants and the need portable welfare benefits.

Did You Know?

- Portable welfare benefits mean that a citizen should be able to access welfare benefits irrespective of where she is in the country.
- In the case of food rations, the idea was first mooted by a Nandan Nilekani-led task force in 2011.
- 45.36 crore people or 37% of the population is that of migrant labourers.

What is One Nation One Ration Card (**ON-ORC**)?

- The scheme seeks to provide **portability of food security benefits** all across the nation.
- Families who have food security cards can buy subsidized food from any ration shop in the country.
- Ration cards should be linked with Aadhar Number to avail this service.
- It was started in mid-2019 with pilot project in 4 states and was supposed to be rolled-out across country by June 2020
- However, the government has extended the deadline of March 2021 in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic

What are the challenges with ON-ORC?

- First, **the fiscal implications:** ON-ORC will affect how the financial burden is shared between states.
- **Second, the larger issues of federalism** and inter-state coordination: Many states are not convinced about a “one size fits all” regime.
- This is because States have customised the PDS through higher subsidies, higher entitlement limits, and supply of additional items.

- **Third, the technology aspect:** ON-ORC requires a complex technology backbone that brings over 750 million beneficiaries, 5,33,000 ration shops and 54 million tonnes of food-grain annually on a single platform.

Learning from GST to resolve above challenges of ON-ORC

1. About Fiscal Challenges – Compensation to States

- Fiscal concerns had troubled GST from the start Ex: States like Tamil Nadu and Gujarat that are “net exporters” were concerned they would lose out on tax revenues to “net consumer” states like UP and Bihar
- Finally, the Centre had to step in and provide guaranteed compensation for lost tax revenues for the first five years
- The Centre could provide a similar assurance to “net inbound migration” states such as Maharashtra and Karnataka that any additional costs on account of migrants will be covered by it for the five years.

2. Issues of Federalism- Creation of inter-state council

- In the spirit of cooperative federalism, the central government created a GST council consisting of the finance ministers of the central and state governments to address the issues of inter-state coordination
- The government could consider a similar national council for ON-ORC.
- To be effective, this council should meet regularly, have specific decision-making authority, and should operate through consensus building.

3. Technology Aspect – A special Vehicle for faster implementation

- GST is supported by a sophisticated tech backbone, housed by the GST Network (GSTN), an entity jointly owned by the Centre and states.
- The Nilekani-led task force recommended setting up of a PDS network (PDSN)
- PSDN would track movement of rations, register beneficiaries, issue ration cards, handle grievances and generate analytics.
- Such a platform should incorporate principles such as inclusion, privacy, security, transparency, and accountability.

4. Learning from the shortcomings and challenges of the GST rollout.

- Delay in GST refunds led to cash-flow issues. Similar delays in receiving food rations could be catastrophic
- Compliance burden for MSMEs during GST implementation. Likewise, PDS dealers need to be brought on board with adequate training

Conclusion

If done well, ON-ORC could lay the foundation of a truly national and portable benefits system that includes other welfare programmes like LPG subsidy and social pensions.

Connecting the dots

- Cooperative Federalism and Competitive Federalism
- Direct Tax Code

COVID-19: Opportunity for India to deepen its engagement with Africa

Context: Africa Day is observed every year on May 25 to commemorate the founding of the Organisation of African Unity (now known as the African Union). India has been closely associated with it on account of its shared colonial past and rich contemporary ties

Significance of Africa

- **Africa's rich natural resources** becomes importance in the light of growing global population
- **Trade & Investment opportunities**, including in energy, mining, infrastructure and connectivity.
- **Long-term economic potential** due to huge market and rising purchasing power
- **Youthful demography** of the region provides much needed human resources
- **Political Significance:** Africa as a bloc of 54 countries in multi-lateral organisations can play a decisive role in International politics

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Africa

- **Recession:** COVID-19 outbreak has sparked off the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region's first recession in 25 years.
- **Unemployment:** Growth is expected to plummet to between -2.1 and -5.1 per cent in 2020, from a modest 2.4 per cent in 2019 which leads to more job losses
- **Deepens Health Crisis:** With high rates of HIV, malaria, diabetes, hypertension and malnourishment prevalent in Africa, COVID-19 pandemic will further deepen the health and economic crisis.
- **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
- **Forced to seek aid from international Community:** 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.

India- Africa Relationship

- India-Africa **trade** reached \$62 billion in 2018 compared to \$39 billion during 2009-10.
- After South Asia, Africa is the second-largest recipient of **Indian overseas assistance** with Lines of Credit (LOC) worth nearly \$10 billion (42% of the total) spread over 100 projects in 41 countries.
- 40% of all **training and capacity building** slots under the ITEC programme have traditionally been reserved for Africa.
- Approximately 6,000 Indian soldiers are deployed in **UN peace-keeping missions** in five conflict zones in Africa.
- To develop closer relations, India launched the first-ever **India Africa Defence Ministers conclave** in February 2020 on the margins of the Defence Expo 2020.
- India provides about 50,000 scholarships to African students each year.

In the wake of pandemic, what can India do to improve its relationship with Africa?

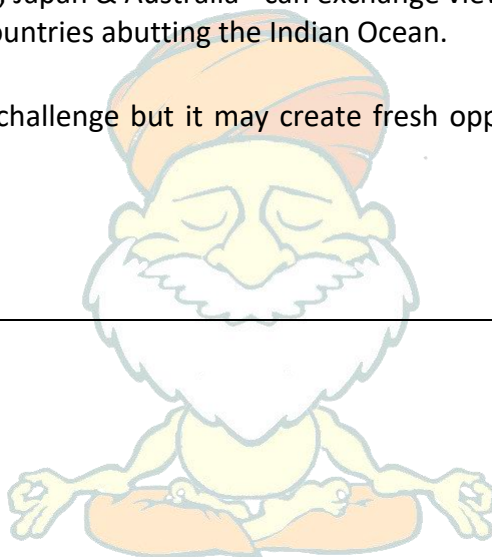
- China's engagement with Africa is huge (annual trade ~ \$208 billion) but is increasingly regarded as predatory and exploitative (defective PPE gear by China during Pandemic). This provides an opportunity for India to increase its strategic space in Africa
- India could consider structuring a series of **virtual summits** with African leaders that could both provide a platform for a cooperative response to the pandemic
- The **Aarogya Setu App** and the **E-Gram Swaraj App** for rural areas for mapping COVID-19 are technological achievements that could be shared with Africa.
- Since the movement of African students to India for higher education has been disrupted, India may expand the **e-VidyaBharti (tele education)** project to establish an India-Africa Virtual University.
- India could also create a **new fund for Africa** and adapt its grant-in-aid assistance to reflect the current priorities
- India could direct new **investment projects by Indian entrepreneurs** in Africa especially in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors.
- **Quad Plus** - US, India, Japan & Australia - can exchange views and propose cooperation with select African countries abutting the Indian Ocean.

Conclusion

The pandemic is a colossal challenge but it may create fresh opportunities to bring India and Africa closer together.

Connecting the dots

- European Union
- Asia-Africa Growth Corridor



AGRICULTURE

Third tranche of the economic stimulus package announced

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Agriculture; Economy

In News:

- **Agricultural marketing reforms** were introduced in the **third tranche** of the [Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan economic stimulus package](#).

Key takeaways:

- A central law to permit **barrier-free inter-State trade** of farm commodities shall be framed.
- A legal framework to facilitate **contract farming** may also be brought in by the Central government.
- Contract farming would provide farmers with **assured sale prices** and quantities even **before** the crop is sown and also **allow private** players to **invest** in inputs and technology in the agricultural sector.
- ₹1.5 lakh crore shall be invested to build **farm-gate infrastructure** and **support logistics** needs for fishworkers, livestock farmers, vegetable growers, beekeepers and related activities.
- The **sale** of six types of agricultural produce - cereals, edible oils, oilseeds, pulses, onions and potatoes will be **deregulated** by amending the **Essential Commodities Act, 1955**.
- **Stock limits will not be imposed** on these commodities except in case of national calamity or famine or an extraordinary surge in prices. These stock limits would not apply to processors and exporters also.

Important value additions:



Booster dose
The third tranche of the measures announced under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan focuses on agriculture and allied activities

- Funds worth **₹1 lakh crore** to be given to agricultural cooperative societies, farmer producer organisations and start-ups for boosting farm-gate infrastructure
- **₹10,000 crore** for formalisation of micro-food enterprises; cluster-based farming approach to be followed
- **₹20,000 crore** for fishermen under PM Matsya Sampada Yojana; expected to pave way for additional fish production of 70 lakh tonnes over 5 years
- **₹13,000 crore** drive to achieve 100% vaccination of cattle, buffalos, sheep, goats and pigs
- **₹15,000 crore** boost for animal husbandry infrastructure
- **₹4,000 crore** for promotion of herbal cultivation; 10 lakh hectares to be covered
- **₹500 crore** for beekeeping initiatives
- Essential Commodities Act, 1955, to be amended to de-regulate cereals, edible oils, oilseeds, pulses, onion and potato
- Marketing reforms to be undertaken to provide adequate choice for farmers to sell produce at prices of their choice

A farmer carries strawberries after harvesting them in Srinagar on Friday. • NISSAR AHMAD

Image source: [The Hindu](#)

Essential Commodities Act, 1955 (ECA)

- The ECA was enacted in 1955.
- The act provides for the control of production, supply, distribution, trade and commerce in any farm good deemed “essential” and “in the interest of the general public”.

- The list of items under the Act includes drugs, fertilisers, pulses and edible oils, and petroleum and petroleum products.
- The Centre under the Act has the power to include new commodities as and when the need arises, and can take them off the list once the situation improves.
- It protects consumers against irrational spikes in prices of essential commodities.

Reviving agriculture and economy with farm export policies

Context:

One of the long term and complex challenge that the country will face would be to get back its economy back on the rails.

Eminent thinkers and experts have suggested for gradual opening up of all agri-produce to exports, so that the country can set an inspiring and exciting new horizon for itself.

Agriculture sector during lockdown

- Despite severe disruptions in long-distance road transport and shortage of labour, the agri supply chains still kept running, while the industrial and service sectors largely ground to a halt and are now struggling to restart.
- However, the closure of local mandi across the majority of states impacted many farmers as it choked off the only real marketing platform available to them.
- Yet, all major cities across the country continued to receive supplies of fresh vegetables, fruits, and milk throughout the lockdown. Farmers as a community have kept the agri-engine running.
- All this has been achieved against a backdrop of institutional credit virtually drying up and informal credit rates shooting up very high.
- Government procurement is progressing satisfactorily and also beginning to function normally.

Concerns:

- Agri sector had witnessed sub-4% growth for several years.
- Prices for most crops are stagnant or falling.
- No technology breakthrough has been delivered in over a decade.
- Institutional credit drying up and informal credit rates rising up.
- Markets remain restricted by APMC-led monopolies.
- Failure of e-NAM in its promise to deliver an alternate channel to farmers to tap a wider, pan-India market.
- States are yet to liberalise direct sourcing of farm produce.
- There is now an unprecedented reverse migration of lakhs of migrant labourers and this burden have to be shouldered by agriculture for the next couple of years.

- Country might face downward pressure on demand for basic agri-products in the domestic market, arising from the closure of lakhs of eateries, restaurants, hotels and catering establishments, factory canteens, hostels, etc.
- Layoffs and pay cuts, and restrictions on the functioning of industrial units as well as construction, transport, etc, will force millions of households to curb consumption and rein in expenditure on food.

Need of the hour:

- Demand should be restored to pre-Covid levels.
- Export-led agricultural strategy can offer an inclusive pathway towards growth, income, employment and rural poverty reduction.
- India is already a major exporter of items like frozen buffalo meat, marine products like shrimp, and basmati rice, besides a varied basket of goods ranging from grapes to spices.
- We need a proactive agriculture export strategy, covering every category of agri-produce available in India: field crops, horticulture, dairy, livestock, poultry, and fisheries.

Conclusion:

India can address both the needs of food security and become reliable suppliers in the international market.

For which it first needs to align its cropping systems with globally accepted production, storage, packaging, transportation, and handling norms. Its farmers and supply chains will need to reorganise and reorient themselves to address a global market and its attendant challenges.

No other sector offers such an inclusive and pan-India potential for reviving growth, employment, and incomes in the next 18-24 months.

Connecting the dots:

- By setting a goal to gradually open up all agri-produce to exports, the country can set an inspiring and exciting new horizon for itself. Do you agree? Elucidate.
- Do you think the health crisis around Corona would offer opportunities to correct the health of Indian agriculture? Elucidate.

A 1991 moment for agriculture

Context: In the wake of COVID-19 induced crisis, Union government announced set of reforms aimed at farm sector.

Did you know?

- 45 per cent of India's labour force (agricultural) generates only 14 per cent of GDP
- India is the largest exporter of rice in the world and the second-largest producer of both wheat and rice, after China

- The project to double farmers' incomes by 2022 and the programme to complete 99 irrigation projects by 2019, have had a success rate of less than 50 per cent.

What were the major components of agricultural package announced?

1. Agri-Infrastructure: ₹1-lakh crore fund to finance agriculture infrastructure projects at the farm gate and produce aggregation points

- It will ensure creation of adequate cold-storage facilities
- This would prevent wastage of agri-produce, especially in perishables

2. Effective Fund delivery: These funds are channelled through agricultural cooperatives, farmer producer organisations, rural entrepreneurs and start-ups

- This ensures that benefit & responsibility of fund utilization lies with principal beneficiaries (farmers)

3. Formalisation: A ₹10,000 crore scheme to promote the formalisation of micro food enterprises

- It will assist unorganised enterprises in scaling up food safety standards to earn the products certification and build brand value

4. Amending the Essential Commodities Act (ECA) of 1955

- The legislation helped government cracks down on hoarders and black-marketeers of such commodities (by putting stock limits) to ensure normal supply of goods.
- It is a scarcity era legislation enacted when India was facing famines and droughts, however India is a surplus producer today.
- This law has been abused multiple times which has stifled private investment in agriculture and stunted agri-exports
- The amendments proposed allows for deregulating cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onions and potato, encouraging greater participation by private players in the agricultural sector.

5. Agri-Market reforms: Bringing a Central legislation to allow farmers to sell their produce to anyone, outside the APMC mandi yard and having barrier-free inter-state trade.

- It will bring greater competition amongst buyers, lower the mandi fee and commission fee, benefitting both farmers and consumers
- This would provide enhanced marketing freedom for farmers and enable better price realisation.
- Allowing for free inter-state trade could lead to better spatial integration of prices.
- Finally, India will have one common market for agri-produce.

6. Creating a legal framework for contract farming

- It will help farmers take cropping decisions based on forward prices
- This will enable farmers to engage with processors, aggregators, large retailers thus reducing the dependency on APMC monopolies

Challenges ahead

- The package may be more beneficial in the longer term than providing any immediate relief from the lockdown-caused distress in the rural areas.

- Total deregulation for foodgrains has the risk of future inflationary food price spikes
- Agri-market reforms means privileging market forces without necessarily safeguarding food security.
- Building farmer producer organisations (FPOs), based on local commodity interests, is a necessity for empowerment of farmers

Connecting the dots

- Critically analyse the 1991 economic reforms

Second Green revolution

Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyaya Yojana

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-II – Welfare Schemes; GS-III - Agriculture

In News:

- **Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyaya Yojana** is a new income support programme announced by the State government of Chhattisgarh.

Key takeaways:

- Farmers would get up to ₹13,000 an acre a year under the scheme.
- In the first instalment, ₹1,500 crore would be distributed among 18 lakh farmers among whom more than 80% are small and marginal farmers.
- The annual cost of the scheme would be ₹5,700 crore.
- Initially, the scheme would **cover** rice, maize and sugarcane farmers.
- It would later expand to other crops as well.
- Rice and maize farmers would get ₹10,000 an acre, while sugarcane farmers would get ₹13,000.
- The money would be distributed in four instalments.
- This will **help them** through the agricultural cycle and help with extension activities.
- The **additional income** to farmers would increase **rural demand** and also act as a **stimulus** for the State's economy.

India and Bangladesh Relations: Second Addendum to the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade signed

- Recently, the **Second Addendum to the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade** was signed between India and Bangladesh.
- To boost trade, economic activity and connectivity, India and Bangladesh have added five more "ports of call".
- The protocol (water) routes have also been increased from 8 to 10.
- Inclusion of Sonamura- Daudkhanda stretch of 'Gumti river' (93 Km): It will improve the connectivity of Tripura and adjoining States with Indian and Bangladesh's economic centres.

Important value additions:

Protocol on Transit and Trade

- **Protocol on Transit and Trade** through inland waterways between Bangladesh and India was first signed in 1972 (immediately after independence of Bangladesh)

- It was last renewed in 2015 for five years with a provision for its automatic renewal for a further period of five years giving long term assurance to various stakeholders.

Income Transfer Schemes for farmers

Context: Chhattisgarh government has recently launched the Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana (RGKNY), an income transfer scheme for farmers

About RGKNY

- It aims to supplement the income of the Chhattisgarh State's 18 lakh rice, maize and sugarcane farmers through direct cash transfers
- RGKNY provides 10,000/acre for paddy farmers and Rs 13,000/acre for sugarcane farmers.
- The scheme will be extended to farmers of other crops — in fact, to landless labourers as well
- This is in addition to the Centre's [PM-KISAN scheme](#) that provides ₹6,000 to farm families owning less than five acres of land

Did You Know about similar income transfer schemes by State governments?

- **Telangana** Rytha Bandu Scheme offers cash transfer scheme of Rs 5,000/acre, per season
- **Odisha** government launched the KALIA scheme (Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation)
- **West Bengal** has Krishak Bandhu scheme
- **Jharkhand** has Mukhya Mantri Krishi Aashirwad Yojana

What are the Challenges of income transfer scheme?

1. Targeting the Real Beneficiary:

- Ideally, the money should go to the real tiller. But in large parts of the country, there is no record of tenancy.
- The government data shows only 10% tenancy in the country while several micro-level studies indicate that it could be anywhere between 25-30%.

2. Identification issues:

- The other issue is identifying the landless labourers working on farms as majority of them are temporary and seasonal workers.
- This leaves the task of identification to panchayats which can open doors for large leakages and corruption

3. Short-term solution:

- Income transfers are only palliative and cannot address the underlying problem, which is the non-remunerative nature of farming.
- Transfer of income can lead to conspicuous consumption diverting money away from productive investments

Why is there a low record of tenancy in India?

- The current law, favouring "land to the tiller", is loaded against the owner.
- As a result, much of tenancy in the country remains oral.

- Hence, there is a need to change the tenancy laws, and open up land lease markets, ensuring that the owner of the land has full rights to take his land back after the expiry of the lease period

Way Forward

1. Information and persuasion campaigns:

- Fully inform the tiller that the owner has got income support and then appeal to the owner to pass on this benefit to the tiller or adjust the rent accordingly
- This would increase the chances of the benefits being passed on to the real tillers — or at least help the tenants to bargain on the terms of tenancy.

2. Creation of Umbrella Scheme by merging of Various Schemes:

- Merging income support schemes, including the PM KISAN and state-level schemes, with the MGNREGA and price-subsidy schemes (food & fertilizer) to start a basic income cover for poor households
- This approach can cover landless labourers, farmers, and poor consumers

3. Structural Changes to Agriculture: This includes the following

- Rectifying messy land records
- Getting rid of unscientific and unsustainable crop patterns,
- Correcting market linkages that make the farmers vulnerable to exploitation by officials and middlemen
- Ensuring adequate irrigation
- Adoption of technology
- Resolving conflict with wildlife, and
- Adapting agriculture to changing weather and climate patterns.

Connecting the dots

- Zero Budget Natural Farming
- Cooperative Farming

[Farmers' protest against restriction on paddy cultivation](#)

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Agriculture

In News:

- Several farmers staged a tractor march in Haryana against the state government's decision to restrict paddy (rice) cultivation to a few areas in the State.

Key takeaways

- The Haryana government had recently launched '**Mera Pani Meri Virasat**' scheme.
- It aimed at **crop diversification** to move away from water-guzzling paddy.
- Under the scheme, farmers sowing alternative crops other than paddy during the kharif season will get an **incentive** of ₹7,000 per acre.
- Government is aiming to replace 50% of the paddy area with alternative crops, including maize, cotton, millet, and pulses.
- Farmers have started a '**Kisan Bacho-Kheti Bachao**' campaign against the decision.
- They informed that soil and climate is not conducive in most parts for their cultivation.
- According to them, the compensation offered is inadequate as well.

Important value additions

Crop diversification

- It refers to the addition of new crops or cropping systems to agricultural production on a particular farm.
- It takes into account the different returns from value-added crops and other marketing opportunities.
- Advantages:
 - It can help in increasing the farmers' income to a certain extent.
 - Dependency of farmers on a single crop decreases.
 - Increase in natural biodiversity
 - strengthening the ability of the agro-ecosystem to respond to the stresses.
 - Building crop resilience to diseases, pest organisms and environmental stresses.
 - It reduces the risk of total crop failure.
 - Enable farmers to gain access to national and international markets with new products, food and medicinal plants.

How India can push its dairy cart ahead

Context: India through centre's COVID relief package has ushered in [agricultural reforms](#). This has also provided an opportunity to reorient the thinking on dairy sector.

Merits of Dairy Sector

- **Leads to equitable income:** Milch animal holding is far more equitable than land holding. About 85% of the total farmers are small and marginal. While they together own about 47% of farmland, they own about 75% of milch animals.
- **Driven by Small and Marginal Farmers:** Land prices in India are very high, which makes running large dairy farms unviable. So, dairy farming in India will continue to be dominated by small and marginal farmers.
- **Leads to enhanced farmers' health:** Estimates suggest that 48% of the milk produced is consumed by dairy farmers themselves, and 52% is marketable
- **Helps Achieve Policy Goals:** The livestock sector—within it, dairy—plays larger role in the India's goal to double farmer's income by FY23.
- **Potential for growth in Value Addition:** By 2020, the share of Value Added Products like cheese and paneer, in the organised milk market is likely to increase to 30% from the current 23%.

Challenges of the dairy Sector

- **Inadequate Formalisation of Dairy Processing:** Of the total surplus, 20% is processed in the cooperative sector, 30% by branded private dairy companies, and the rest by the unorganised sector (milk for sweet shops, loose milk, etc).
- **Regionally Imbalanced:** UP, AP, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, MP, Haryana, and Punjab together account for 65% of the country's milk production.
- **Highly Skewed Infrastructure:** The processing capacity, measured in terms of milk chilling infrastructure (cooperatives), is highly skewed, with Gujarat alone accounting for 46% of this.

- **Out-dated Technologies:** Most of the milk processing plants with cooperatives are old and need to be expanded or modernised
- **Gaps in artificial insemination (AI) and breeding services:** Against requirement of 200 mn doses of AI, only 115 mn doses are being produced.
- **Increasing Feed Constraint** as land is increasingly being put to non-agricultural uses. Percentage of gap to demand in case of concentrates, dry fodder, and green fodder is 39%, 36%, and 57%, respectively.
- **Credit Issues:** There are basically two challenges: flow of credit vis-a-vis the potential; and mismatch between regional flow of credit to the sector
- **Inadequate Refrigeration Capacity:** Refrigeration penetration in India is not more than 10-20% at the household and retail level—lower, in rural India (1-2%).

Way Ahead

- **Enhanced Funding:** It is estimated that additional capacity of 75 lakh litres per day, modernising capacity of 75 lakh litres, and milk processing capacity of 12.5 crore tonnes per day can be augmented with an investment of Rs 5,000 crore
- **Leveraging Technology:** IoT and data analytics has to be harnessed for digitising milk production, procurement, processing, and marketing
- **Increase Efficiency:** Digitisation should also focus on solutions for herd management, smart milk procurement, cold chain management to increase logistical efficiency
- **Secure and seamless:** There has be enhanced penetration of livestock insurance to reduce risk and promotion of fintech for dairy farmers for seamless transactions.
- **Regionally Balanced development:** There is need to promote the dairy sector in newer areas especially in Eastern India
- Bridging the gaps in fodder requirements
- Creating and modernising dairy infrastructure

Conclusion

The future of dairy in India hinges on modernising infrastructure, and giving the sector a technological face-lift

Connecting the dots

- Impact of [RCEP on India's dairy](#) sector
- Ashok Dalwai Committee

[Unusual Locusts attack in urban areas of India](#)

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Climate change; Food security

In News:

- There have been unusual sightings of swarms of locusts even in urban areas of **Rajasthan**, parts of **Madhya Pradesh** and Vidarbha region of **Maharashtra**.

Key takeaways

- The desert **locust** (*Schistocerca gregaria*) is a short-horned grasshopper.
- It is usually harmless when it is unaccompanied.
- However, locusts undergo a behavioural change when their population builds up rapidly.

- They form huge swarms that can travel up to **150 km per day**, eating up every bit of greenery on their way.
- These insects **feed** on a large **variety of crops**.
- They can threaten the food security of a country.
- In India, locusts are normally sighted during **July- October** along the Pakistan border.
- Their early arrival can be attributed to the following factors:
 - Cyclonic storms **Mekunu** and **Luban** that had struck Oman and Yemen respectively in 2018 had turned large deserts tracts into lakes which facilitated locust breeding.
 - Swarms attacking crops in East Africa reached peak populations from November 2019.
 - The population increased in southern Iran and Pakistan since the beginning of 2020.
 - Heavy rains in East Africa in March-April enabled further breeding.
 - The swarms were aided by high-speed wind and thus they made their way to such urban areas.
- Their growth can be controlled by spraying insecticide on locusts' night resting places like trees.
- Till date, the Locust Warning Organisation (LWO) has carried out spraying operations in Rajasthan.
- India has also ordered for specialised insecticide sprayers with the UK.
- Drones will also be used to spray the resting places.

Important value additions

Locust Warning Organisation (LWO)

- It comes under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.
- It is responsible for monitoring, survey and control of Desert Locust in Scheduled Desert Areas mainly in the States of Rajasthan and Gujarat.



Image source: [Click here](#)

ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

Economy vs Clean air

Context: As the lockdown exit strategies are being designed, there is pressure on governments to lower environmental standards to give impetus to growth

Do You Know?

- According to IMF, crisis caused due to COVID-19 pandemic can trigger the worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s.
- At the end of March, the US announced a significant reduction in fuel efficiency standards for new cars, which could result in increased gasoline consumption by 80 billion tonnes
- India is home to 21 of the world's 30 most polluted cities

Dangers to Environment

- There is a demand to lower environmental standards, suspend environmental monitoring requirements and reduce environmental enforcement, in the belief that this is necessary to rescue economic growth.
- It is assumed that one has to make necessary trade-offs between saving livelihoods and protecting the environment
- COVID-19 is being used as an excuse to weaken environmental protection.
- Overlooking environmental protection is seen as short-term solutions in response to the present crisis

Why it is necessary to resist the temptation to overlook environment protection?

1. Increased pollution increases vulnerability to Corona Deaths

- People living in areas with higher levels of air pollution face increased risk of premature death from COVID-19
- Continued air pollution directly translates to mortality under COVID-19.

2. Pollution leads to increased mortality

- The State of Global Air 2019 Report finds air pollution responsible for over 1.2 million deaths India each, based on 2017 data.
- Weakening Environmental Standards will further increase the risk to lives

3. Pollution imposes disproportionate burden on poor

- There is enormous inequality in the impact of the COVID-19 fallout.
- Those who suffer the most from air pollution are the poor, who cannot afford air-purifiers or other mitigating measures

4. Pollution increases the risk of future epidemics

- There is good evidence that three-quarters of the emerging infectious diseases migrate from wild or domesticated animals into humans. This includes Ebola, SARS, MERS and now COVID-19.
- Deforestation, industrial agriculture, illegal wildlife trade, climate change and other types of environmental degradation increase the risk of future pandemics.

5. Weakening environmental standards may go against public opinion

- The dramatic improvement in the quality of air and water in the most polluted cities around the world due to lockdown, has led to wide public approval
- Weakening environmental standards to kick start economy may again lead to increased pollution levels not acceptable to public

6. Changed drivers of value

- Corona crisis has given a clean, healthy and sustainable environment the economic value it deserves
- This has resulted to urgent call to action for increased focus on healthy lifestyle and sustainable development

Conclusion

Covid must not be used as an excuse to ignore environment protection. Rather there should be enhanced coordination at an international level to continue to work towards reduced emissions under the Paris Agreement.

Connecting the dots

- Paris Climate Deal
- Sustainable Development Goals and its target of 2030 – will be achievable?

IDEathon on “The Future of River Management”

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment

In News:

Recently, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) and the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) had organized an IDEathon on “The Future of River Management”.

Aim of the event was to explore how the Covid-19 crisis can shape river management strategies for the future.

Namami Gange (implemented by the NMCG) and NIUA plan to bring out a policy paper based on the event.

Important value additions:

National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)

- It is the implementation wing of the National Ganga Council.
- It was established in the year 2011 as a registered society.
- It is under the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- It has a two-tier management structure.
- It comprises of Governing Council and Executive Committee.

Objectives

- To ensure effective control of pollution and rejuvenation of the river Ganga by adopting a river basin approach.
- To maintain minimum ecological flows in the river Ganga with the aim of ensuring water quality and environmentally sustainable development.

National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA)

- It is an institute for research, training and information dissemination in urban development and management.
- It is located in New Delhi, India.
- It was established in 1976 as an autonomous body under the Societies Registration Act.

Study of flowering plant endemism of Northern Western Ghats highlights importance of plateaus in conservation plans

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment & Biodiversity

In News:

- Scientists at the **Agharkar Research Institute (ARI)**, Pune have published a **plant data** of the **Northern Western Ghats**.
- The institute is an **autonomous institute** of the Department of Science and Technology.
- As per their data, the **plateaus** and the **cliffs** harbour **most of the endemic species** in these areas.
- The plateaus along with forests should be **prioritized for conservation** of the Northern Western Ghats.
- The study suggested that the **Northern Western Ghats** is the **region of rapid diversification** of specific herbaceous endemic genera like **Ceropegia, Glyphochloa**, etc.

Important value additions:

Northern Western Ghats

- The Indian **Western Ghats** is one of the **global biodiversity hotspots** due to the endemism of various flora and fauna.
- The **northern part** of the Ghats receives more precipitation than southern and central parts.
- Plateaus and cliffs display **maximum endemic species**.
- Forests harbour many non-endemic species.

Increase in the the tiger count in the Sundarbans

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment

In News:

- As per the latest census conducted by the West Bengal Forest Department, **the tiger count in the Sundarbans** for 2019-20 has increased from 88 to 96.
- It is the **highest annual jump** reported from the Sundarbans.
- **Estimation** of the number of tigers in the Sunderbans has always been a **challenge** because of the **difficult terrain** that comprises dense mangrove forests, with creeks and rivulets, and floods twice a day during the high tides.

Important value additions:

Sundarbans

- It is a vast **mangrove forest ecosystem** in the coastal region of **Bay of Bengal**.

- It is spread over **India** and **Bangladesh** on the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers.
- It is the **only mangrove forest** in the world inhabited by **tigers**.
- Indian Sundarbans has been **recognised** as **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in 1987.
- It also comes under 'Wetland of International Importance' under the **Ramsar Convention**.
- It is **home** to **rare** and **globally threatened** species, such as the **Northern River Terrapin**, **Royal Bengal Tiger**, **Irrawaddy Dolphin**, and the **Fishing Cat**.

LG Polymers liable under Principle of 'Strict Liability' for Vizag gas leak: NGT

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health & GS-III – Industries; Environment

In News:

- The **National Green Tribunal's** (NGT) order in the Visakhapatnam **gas tragedy** found LG Polymers liable under **Principle of "strict liability"**.
- It was **sacked** in India by the Supreme Court in 1986.
- However, lawyers say the term **"absolute liability"** should have been used.

Important value additions:

Strict liability principle

- Under this principle, a party is **not liable** and **need not pay compensation** if a hazardous substance escapes his premises by accident or by an "act of God" among other circumstances.
- It was evolved in an 1868 English case which provided companies with **several exemptions** from assuming liability.

Absolute Liability Principle

- The Supreme Court, while deciding the **Oleum gas leak** case of Delhi in 1986, found strict liability **inadequate** to protect citizens' rights and replaced it with the 'absolute liability principle'.
- Under this principle, a company in a hazardous industry **cannot claim any exemption**.
- It has to **mandatorily pay compensation**, whether or not the disaster was caused by its negligence.
- It is part of Article 21 (right to life).

National Green Tribunal

- It is an Act of the Parliament of India which enables **creation** of a **special tribunal** to handle the cases pertaining to environmental issues.
- It draws inspiration from the **Article 21** - Protection of life and personal liberty - which **assures** the citizens of India the right to a **healthy environment**.
- India became the third country in the world to set up a specialised environmental tribunal, only after **Australia** and **New Zealand**, and the **first developing country** to do so.
- NGT is mandated to make **disposal of applications** or appeals within 6 months of filing.
- The NGT has **five places of sittings** -
 - New Delhi and Bhopal (Principal place)
 - Pune

- Kolkata
- Chennai
- The Tribunal has jurisdiction over all civil cases.

The Visakhapatnam gas leak

- It was an **industrial accident** that occurred at the LG Polymers chemical plant on the outskirts of Visakhapatnam, **Andhra Pradesh**, India, on 7 May 2020.
- Preliminary investigations concluded that the accident was likely the **result of improper maintenance** of units storing the **styrene monomer**, **improper storage** and **operation errors**.

Ensuring environment sustainability post COVID-19 lockdown

Context:

- As we all know, the lockdown imposed to contain [COVID-19 pandemic](#) has caused a [negative impact](#) on the livelihood of the people.
- However, it had a positive impact on the environment.
- The **air and water quality** improved dramatically since major industrial activities were brought to halt and material consumption, water usage and waste production were reduced.
- The **pre-Covid-19 growth** was based on **blind exploitation** of natural resources.
- The lockdown has given a rare opportunity to move towards the principles of sustainable development in every human action including public policy making.

In earlier posts, we have discussed about [economy & clean air](#) and also [coronavirus impact on Environment](#). Following on the same lines, this editorial focuses on

1. Effects of the lockdown
2. Ways to maintain the sustainability

Effects of Economic Shutdown on Environment

- Data from the CPCB (Central Pollution Control Board) shows that **pollution level in the Ganges water** has significantly **reduced**.
- Its **Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD)** and **total coliform concentration** has also fallen indicating **improved** water quality.
- Similar positive developments have been reported for the **Yamuna**.
- There are several reports that reflect the **improved air quality**:
 - The Delhi/NCR pollution level has significantly reduced.
 - Dhauladhar ranges from Jalandhar, Mt. Kanchenjunga from Siliguri and Mt. Everest from parts of Bihar were recently visible.
- **Groundwater levels improved** with the reduced industrial and commercial activity.
- **Municipal solid waste (MSW)** generation got reduced remarkably.

Ways to Maintain this Sustainability

Nature-Based Solution (NBS):

- It refers to the sustainable use of nature for tackling **socio-environmental challenges**, such as climate change, water security, human health, and disaster risk management.
- **Example of NBS** may include:
 - Restoration of mangroves

- Green roofs or walls in cities to moderate the impact of high temperatures.
 - Upsloping vegetation to reduce the risks of landslides.
 - Creating lesser concrete areas to help replenish groundwater in regions facing water scarcity.
- NBS are an **essential component** of the overall **global effort** to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Bio-composites

- These are structures that have naturally occurring **minerals woven together** into a matrix of natural fibres, such as cellulose and lignin.
- Their products are being used as **environmentally superior alternatives** to traditional raw materials such as wood and plastic due to their **strength, lower weight** and **recyclability**.
- For example, starch-based clay nanocomposites can be a possible alternative for food packaging.

Effective Waste Management

- **Waste segregation** across urban India at household-level.
- **Generating organic manure** and megawatts of bioenergy through cost-effective means by using bio - recycling methods like vermicomposting.
- For the water-heavy industries of pharmaceuticals, paper, food and beverage, adopting best practices in minimising water consumption would progress them towards **Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD)**.
- **Bio-treatment** of industrial effluents such as chemicals, detergents and toxic sludge can also be done, but there must be mandatory compliance to keep the rivers clean.

Building Natural Infrastructure

- It is defined as a **strategically** planned and managed network of natural lands that **conserves** or enhances **ecosystem values** and provides **associated benefits** to human populations.
- Establishing interconnected networks of green spaces can be one of the ways of building natural Infrastructure.
- Example: Concept of biosphere reserves. It **incorporates core protected** areas for nature conservation and **buffer zones** and **transition areas** where people live and work in a sustainable way.

Conclusion

For long-term sustenance, bringing behavioural changes like sustainable consumption, mindful wastage is of utmost importance.

Connecting the dots

- Lockdown and coronavirus will help achieve sustainable development goals earlier than the targeted years. Analyse.
- In what ways has COVID-19 pandemic affected the livelihood of the people and the environment? Examine.

Decision on Dibang Multipurpose Project postponed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Biodiversity

In News:

- The **Forest Advisory Committee (FEC)**, has **once again deferred** (postpone) its decision on **Dibang project** in **Arunachal Pradesh**.
- The project has been delayed for over six years because it requires **diverting** 1,165 **hectares of forest** which is rich in biodiversity.

Important value additions:

Dibang Multipurpose Project

- It is located on **river Dibang**, in Lower Dibang Valley District of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The project shall generate 2, 880 MW power.
- This is the **largest** ever **Hydro Electric Project** to be constructed in India.
- The dam will be Concrete Gravity Dam.

Forest Advisory Committee (FEC)

- It is the apex body of the Environment Ministry responsible for deciding whether forest land can be diverted for industrial projects.

Scientists conserve the germplasm of Pinanga Andamanensis

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment

In News:

- The scientists at Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI), Thiruvananthapuram, 2019 are conserving the germplasm (genetic material of germ cells) of **Pinanga Andamanensis**.
- This would ensure its **continued survival** of its original home gets wiped out by a natural calamity.

Important value additions



Image source: [The Hindu](#)

Pinanga Andamanensis

- It is a **critically endangered** species.
- It is one of the **least known** among the endemic palms of the **Andaman Islands**.
- Its entire population consists of some 600 specimens only.
- It naturally occurs only in a tiny, evergreen forest pocket in **South Andaman's Mount Harriet National Park**.

- This elegant palm can be used as an avenue tree for gardens, pavements and homesteads.

New plant species found in Western Ghats

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III - Environment

In News:

- Three **new plant species** have been recently discovered by a team of scientists of the Botanical Survey of India.
- These species were found in the evergreen forest patches of the southern end of the **Western Ghats in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.**

Key takeaways:

These species are:

- **Eugenia sphaerocarpa**
 - It belongs to the Myrtaceae or Rose apple family.
 - A good population of Eugenia sphaerocarpa is growing in the **Kakkayam area** of the **Malabar wildlife sanctuary** in Kerala above 800m.
 - 'Sphaerocarpa' denotes to the large, showy lemon-yellow spherical fruits.
 - The fruits of Eugenia species are known for their palatability (pleasant to taste).
- **Goniothalamus sericeus**
 - It belongs to the Annonaceae family of custard apple.
 - A small number of Goniothalamus sericeus plants has been found in the **Kanyakumari wildlife sanctuary** in Tamil Nadu at an altitude of 1400m.
 - Mature flowers with characteristic greenish-yellow to beige petals are fragrant while the fruits are very showy and an attractive golden yellow in colour.
 - Sericeus refers to the presence of dense silky hair on petals.
- **Memecylon nervosum**
 - It belongs to the **Melastomataceae** (Kayambo or Kaasavu in local parlance) family.
 - A small population of nervosum was also found at the **Kanyakumari wildlife sanctuary** in Tamil Nadu at an altitude between 700-900m.
 - The species has showy purplish-blue flowers and mauve to purplish red fruits.
 - **Nervosum** refers to the presence of prominently raised lateral and intramarginal veins on the lower surface of the lamina.

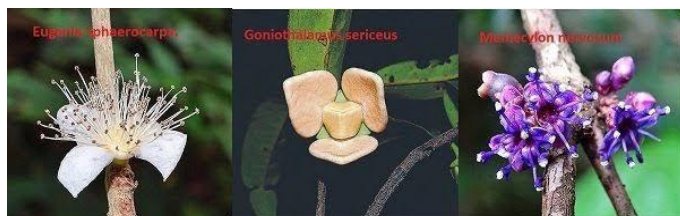


Image source: [Click here](#)

Charru mussel: An invasive species in Kerala

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Environment

In News:

- An invasive mussel native to the South and Central American coasts is spreading quickly in the backwaters of Kerala.

Key takeaways

- It is **affecting the growth** of other mussel and clam species and
- It is also **threatening** the livelihoods of fishermen engaged in molluscan fisheries.
- It is speculated that the mussel may have reached the Indian shores **attached to ship hulls** or as **larval forms in ballast water discharges**.
- Then, the rapid spread of the **Charru mussel** (*Mytella strigata*) may have been triggered by **Cyclone Ockhi** which struck the region in 2017.
- **Ashtamudi Lake**, a Ramsar site in Kollam district, Kerala, remains the worst-hit.
- With a high population, it has replaced the **Asian green mussel** (*Perna viridis*) and the edible oyster **Magallana bilineata** (known locally as muringa).
- Externally, the Charru mussel resembles the **green and brown mussels** (kallummekka in Malayalam), but is much smaller in size.
- Its colour varies from black to brown, purple or dark green.

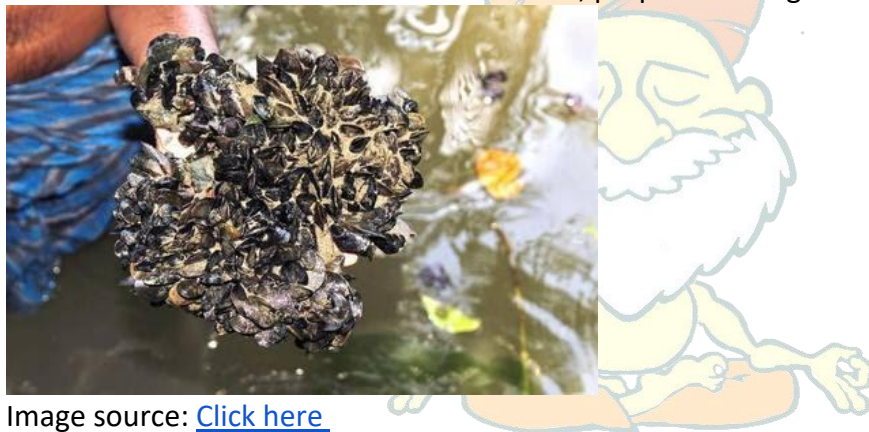


Image source: [Click here](#)

ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS

Black panther spotted in Goa's Netravali Sanctuary.

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Biodiversity

In News:

- A black panther has been captured on camera in Goa's Netravali Sanctuary for the first time.

Important value additions:

Black Panther



Image source: [The Indian Express](#)

- It is the **melanistic** (increased development of the dark-colored pigment) **colour variant** of any Panthera, particularly of the **leopard** in Asia and Africa, and the **jaguar** in the Americas.
- It is very difficult to detect/spot.
- It is mostly found in **densely forested areas** of southern India.
- IUCN status: Vulnerable



Image source: [Click here](#)

- It is located in **South Eastern Goa**.
- It constitutes one of the **vital corridors of the Western Ghats**.
- It is **bounded by** Cotigao wildlife sanctuary on the **eastern side** and Bhagwan Mahaveer Sanctuary and Mollem National Park on the **northern side**.
- Netravali is an **important tributary** of River Zuari, which **originates** in the sanctuary.
- It has **two important waterfalls** namely, Savari and Mainapi.

- It consists of **moist deciduous forests** interspersed with evergreen and semi-evergreen forests.

Potential distribution of the Sal forest tortoise over unprotected areas

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment

In News:

- According to a recent study by ecologists in the **Wildlife Institute of India**, Dehradun, over 90% of the **potential distribution** of the **Sal forest tortoise** falls outside the current protected area's network.



Image source : [The Hindu](#)

Important value additions:

Sal forest tortoise

- It is a species of tortoise.
- It is also known as **Elongated tortoise** and **Yellow Tortoise**.
- It is found in **Southeast Asia** and parts of the Indian Subcontinent, particularly **Northeast India**.
- IUCN Status: **Critically Endangered**.
- It is **heavily hunted** for food and collected both for local use, such as **decorative masks**, and **international wildlife trade**.
- In china, a mixture, made by grinding up the tortoise's shell, also serves as an aphrodisiac.

Puntius Sanctus: a new freshwater fish found in Velankanni

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Agriculture

In News:

- Recently, Puntius Sanctus, a new freshwater fish, has been found in Velankanni, Tamil Nadu.
- It was found in a small waterbody.



Image source: [The Hindu](#)

Key takeaways

- Sanctus means holy (pilgrim town) in Latin.

- Species of *Puntius* are known from India mainly from the Western and Eastern Ghats and the Eastern Himalayas.
- *Puntius* Genus:
 - The genus shows great species richness in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
 - The species are known locally as **Paral** in Kerala and **Kende** in Tamil Nadu.
 - It belongs to the family '**Cyprinidae**'.
- *Puntius Sanctus*:
 - It is a silver-hued fish.
 - It grows only upto to a length of 7 cm.
 - It is different from other species in terms of **protractible** (extended) **mouth** and a pair of **maxillary barbels** (a sensory organ near the snout).
- Family Cyprinidae:
 - It is the family of freshwater fish.
 - It includes the minnows, goldfish, bitterlings, barbs, and carps.
 - It ranges from small aquarium sized species to huge fish.
- *Puntius Sanctus* has been deposited in the **Zoological Survey of India** at Pune.
- It has also been registered with **Zoo Bank of the International Commission** of Zoological Nomenclature, the official authority for naming animals.

World Turtle Day 2020

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Biodiversity

In News:

- [The National Mission for Clean Ganga](#) (NMCG) and **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** celebrated World Turtle Day recently in India (23rd May, 2020).
- NMCG and WII are project partners in the '**Biodiversity Conservation Initiative Phase II**'.

Important value additions

World Turtle Day

- It is an annual event which is celebrated since 2000.
- It is organised by the **nonprofit Organisation** - American Tortoise Rescue (ATR).
- It aims to **protect** the turtles and tortoises from **illegal smuggling, exotic food industry, habitat destruction, global warming and pet trade**.
- The theme for the World Turtle Day 2020 is 'Adopt, Don't Shop'.

Significance of turtles

- They provide **habitat** for an array of aquatic creatures like barnacles and other small crustaceans.
- They help to **transport** these species because they undergo long migrations.
- They also act as sort of an umbrella for fish that use them as **shelter** from predators.
- Turtles play an important role in the river by **scavenging** dead organic material and diseased fish by controlling the water pollution.

Status of turtles in India

- **Five species** of Indian turtles along with their IUCN status are as follows:
 - Olive Ridley - Vulnerable

- Green turtle - Endangered
- Loggerhead - Vulnerable
- Hawksbill - Critically Endangered
- Leather back - Vulnerable
- They are protected in **Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972**, under Schedule I.
- They are also protected under the **Biodiversity Conservation and Ganga Rejuvenation programme**.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII)

- It is an **autonomous** institution under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- It was established in 1982.
- WII carries out wildlife research in areas of study like Biodiversity, Endangered Species, Wildlife Policy, Wildlife Management, etc.
- The institute is based in Dehradun, India.

World Dugong Day 2020

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Biodiversity

In News:

- 'World Dugong Day' was recently celebrated on May 28, 2020.
- The special emphasis was laid down on its fight for survival in Indian waters.
- Experts have also expressed fear that unless conserved, it could one day become extinct.

Important value additions

Dugong

- It is commonly known as the **sea cow**.
- It is an **endangered marine species** like sea turtles, seahorses, sea cucumbers and others.
- They are protected in India under **Schedule I of the Wild (Life) Protection Act, 1972**.
- In India, it is found in the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay, Gulf of Kutch and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- It is an important part of the marine ecosystem.
- Its depletion will have effects all the way up the food chain.
- It grazes on seagrass, especially young shoots and roots in shallow coastal waters.
- Main threats to dugongs are human activities such as:
 - the destruction and modification of habitat,
 - pollution,
 - rampant illegal fishing activities,
 - vessel strikes,
 - unsustainable hunting or poaching
 - unplanned tourism
 - loss of seagrass beds due to ocean floor trawling
- The Government of India is also a signatory to the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) since 1983 where it has signed **non-legally binding Memorandums of**

Understanding on the conservation and management of Siberian Cranes (1998), Marine Turtles (2007), Dugongs (2008) and Raptors (2016).

- Proper conservation is the only way to save dugongs from extinction.



Image source: [Click here](#)



INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Impact of energy efficiency measures for the year 2018-19 report released

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure (Energy)

In News:

- The Union Minister of Power has released a Report on “Impact of energy efficiency measures for the year 2018-19” recently.

Key takeaways from the report:

- India has **reduced the energy intensity** of economy by 20% compared to 2005 levels.
- **Total electricity savings** is up to **9.39%** of the net electricity consumption (113.16 Billion Units) in 2018-19.
- The **total energy savings** in 2018-19 is **2.69%** of the total primary energy supply (23.73 million Tonne of Oil Equivalent). This **includes both supply side and demand side** sectors of the economy.
- 151.74 Million Tonnes of Carbon Dioxide (MTCO₂) emissions have been reduced. Last year it was 108 MTCO₂.

Important value additions:

Impact of energy efficiency measures for the year 2018-19 report

- It was **prepared** by an **Expert agency PWC Ltd**, which was engaged by **Bureau of Energy efficiency (BEE)** for an **independent verification** to assess the resultant annual savings in energy as well as CO₂ emissions through various initiatives in India.
- **Objective:** To evaluate the performance and impact of all the key energy efficiency programmes in India, in terms of total energy saved and the related reduction in the CO₂ emissions.
- It assesses the **resultant impact of current schemes** at national and state level for the FY 2018-19.
- It then compares the result with a situation where the same schemes were not implemented.

The Bureau of Energy Efficiency

- It is an agency of the Government of India, under the **Ministry of Power** created in March 2002 under the provisions of Energy Conservation Act, 2001.
- **Function:** To develop such programs which will **increase the conservation and efficient use of energy** in India.

National Infrastructure Pipeline proposes to set up National Land Management Corporation

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

In News:

- The task force on **National Infrastructure Pipeline** has recommended setting up a **National Land Management Corporation**
- This corporation would help in **monetising** state-owned **surplus land assets** in a systematic manner.

Key takeaways:

- Such a corporation should be set up under **Companies Act**.
- It would act as a **facilitator** for land monetisation and an **asset manager** for lands owned by the government and public enterprises.
- The Corporation should have representation from:
 - Finance Ministry
 - Department of Public Enterprises
 - Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
 - Independent directors from finance and real estate industry.
- The Corporation will be able to **raise capital** from the **equity market**, based on the value of its leased assets.

Important value additions:**National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)**

- It is the **investment plan** unveiled by the Central Government for **enhancing infrastructure** in **identified sectors** for a period of five years from **2020-25**.
- \$1.4 trillion have been allotted to NIP.
- It will help India to become the **\$5 trillion economy** by 2025.
- The **funding** will be **jointly** made by the **Centre, states** and the **private sector** in the proportion of **39:39:22** ratio.

Coir geo textiles accepted for rural road construction

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III - Infrastructure; Environment

In News:

- **Coir Geo textiles** has been accepted as a good material for rural road construction under the **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana-III (PMGSY-III)**.
- As per these instructions, **5% length** of the rural roads under PMGSY-III will be constructed using Coir Geo textiles.
- The decision opens up a **huge market potential** and will be a boon to the **Coir Board** which comes under the Ministry of MSME of the Central government.

Important value additions:**The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)**

- It is a **nationwide plan** in India to provide good **all-weather** road connectivity to unconnected villages.
- This is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme**.

Coir Geo Textile

- It is a **permeable** fabric, **natural**, **strong** and **highly durable**.
- It is **resistant** to rots, moulds and moisture and is free from any microbial attack.
- It is **totally biodegradable**.
- It helps in **soil stabilisation** and renew vegetation in varying slopes.



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Shobhana Narasimhan elected as an International Honorary Member to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Achievements of Indians in science & technology.

In News:

- **Professor Shobhana Narasimhan** from the Theoretical Sciences Unit (TSU) at the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), has been **elected as an International Honorary Member** to the **American Academy of Arts and Sciences**.

Important value additions:

- Prof Narasimhan **heads the Computational Nanoscience** group at JNCASR.
- She became a Fellow of the National Academy of Sciences, India in 2011.
- She has also received awards like the **Stree Shakti Samman Science Award** in 2010 and the **Kalpana Chawla Woman Scientist Award** of the Government of Karnataka in 2010.

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences

- It is one of the **oldest learned societies** in the United States.
- It was founded in 1780.
- The Academy is **dedicated** to honoring excellence and leadership, working across disciplines and divides, and advancing the common good.
- It **honours scholars and leaders** who have distinguished themselves in the sciences, arts, humanities and public life.
- Membership in the academy is considered a **high honor of scholarly and societal merit**.
- The list of previous International Honorary Members includes Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein and Nelson Mandela.

1-D Simulation Code to Study Earth's Magnetosphere

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In News:

- Scientists at the **Indian Institute of Geomagnetism (IIG)** have developed a generalized **one-dimensional fluid simulation code**.
- It shall **study** a wide spectrum of **electric field structures** in **near-earth plasma environments** or earth's **magnetosphere**.
- It is expected to help in **planning** future **space missions**.

Important value additions:

Formation of Earth's Magnetosphere

- Plasma is the **most common state of matter** in the universe as a whole.
- It consists of a **gas of ions and free electrons**.
- Sun is the major source of **plasma deposition** in space around the Earth.

- It forces some of its plasma towards the earth in the form of the solar wind.
- The solar wind **carries** with it a solar magnetic field, called the **Interplanetary Magnetic Field (IMF)**.
- The **interaction of the IMF with the earth's magnetic field** creates the magnetosphere of the earth.

Significance of magnetosphere

- It shields Earth from **solar and cosmic particle radiation** and **erosion** of the atmosphere by the solar wind.

Regions of the Earth's Magnetosphere:

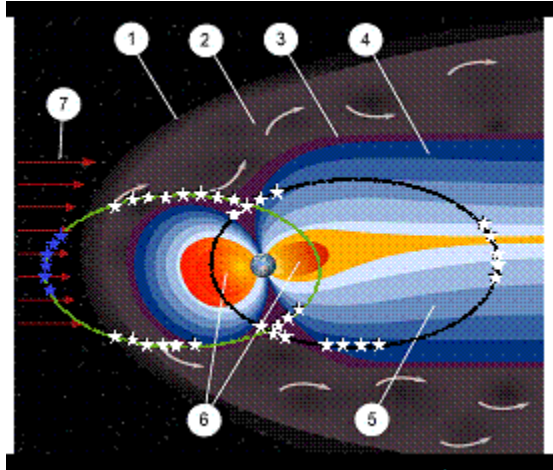


Image Source: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1619551>

The schematic diagram of Earth's magnetosphere shown consists of different regions: Bow shock : It occurs when the Earth's magnetosphere interacts with the nearby flowing Plasma.

- Magnetosheath: **Region** of space **between** the magnetopause and the bow shock.
- Magnetopause : It is the **boundary** between the planet's magnetic field and the solar wind.
- **Northern tail lobe** : Earth's magnetosphere lobe on the northern side. Magnetic field lines of the lobe point towards the earth.
- **Southern tail lobe**: Earth's magnetosphere lobe on the southern side.
- **Plasmasphere**: Earth's magnetosphere consisting of low energy (cool) plasma.
- **Solar winds**: Stream of charged particles released from the upper atmosphere of the Sun (corona).

Significance of Study of Plasma Processes:

- The plasma processes may **hamper** the **working of satellites** that are in the magnetospheric region.
- The **changes** in plasma processes can be **deciphered** only through **computer simulations**.
- The study will help **advance the knowledge** of plasma waves, instabilities and effects associated with wave-particle interactions.

Indian Institute of Geomagnetism

- It conducts basic and applied research in Geomagnetism (study of dynamics of earth's magnetic field) and allied fields.
- The Institute also supports a **World Data Centre for Geomagnetism (WDC, Mumbai)**, which is the **only International centre** for Geomagnetic data in South Asia.

DST INSPIRE Faculty develops nanomaterials based supercapacitors

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

In News:

- Recently, a **DST INSPIRE Faculty**, at IIT (Varanasi), along with his team has developed **nanomaterials** which have **energy storage application & optical sensors** for water pollution control.
- They have also developed **Surface-Enhanced Raman spectroscopy (SERS)** that can help **detect harmful molecules** present in water at **ultra-low concentrations**.

Key takeaways:

- These nanomaterials are based on **supercapacitors** to achieve **high energy density**.
- **Constant current** can be **withdrawn for longer duration without recharging** due to such density.
- Automobiles will be able to run **longer distances** by using supercapacitors.
- The team has also developed a **novel green approach** for synthesis of **Iron-based nanocatalyst**, which can be used for large scale production of **Carbon Nanotubes**.
- These findings shall help in producing materials which can be used as **advanced photo detectors** that may help in water pollution control.

Important value additions:

Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research (INSPIRE)

- It is an **innovative programme**.
- It is **sponsored and managed** by the **Department of Science & Technology** for attraction of talent to Science.
- Objective:
 - To communicate to the youth the excitements of creative pursuit of science
 - To attract talent to the study of science at an early age
 - To build the required critical human resource pool for strengthening and expanding the Science & Technology system and Research & Development base.
- No competitive exams are conducted for identification of talent at any level.
- The programme relies on the efficiency of the existing educational structure

Carbon nanotubes (CNTs)

- These are tubes made of carbon with diameters measured in nanometers.
- Bulk carbon nanotubes are used as composite fibers to **improve** the **mechanical, thermal and electrical properties** of the bulk polymer product.
- They can act as antennas for radios and other electromagnetic devices.
- They are used in brushes for commercial electric motors.

Luhman 16: Binary Brown Dwarf System

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Space

In News:

- Recently, a group of astrophysicists have found that the closest known **brown dwarf**, **Luhman 16A**.
- It also shows **signs of cloud bands** similar to those seen on **Jupiter** and **Saturn**.

Key takeaways:

- They used **polarimetry technique** to determine the properties of atmospheric clouds.
- They have found the **actual structure** of the clouds (not only their presence) in case of Luhman 16A.

Important value additions:

Luhman 16

- Luhman 16A is **part of a binary system** (Luhman 16) containing a second brown dwarf, Luhman 16B.
- This pair orbits each other.
- It is situated at a distance of about **6.5 light years from the Sun** and
- It is the **third closest system** to the Sun after Alpha Centauri and Barnard's star.

Brown Dwarfs

- They are also called **failed stars**.
- Their **masses** are **heavier than planets** but **lighter than stars**.

Binary Stars System

- Binary stars are **two stars orbiting a common center** of mass.
- Calculations** of their orbits **allow** the **masses** of their component stars **to be directly determined**.

Polarimetry

- It is the **study of polarization**.
- It is a **property of light**.
- It **represents** the direction in which the light wave oscillates.
- When light is **reflected off** of particles it can favor a certain angle of polarization.
- By **measuring** the angle from a distant system, astronomers can **deduce** the presence of clouds.

Wafer-scale photodetector (thin slice-based) device fabricated

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

In News:

- Recently, scientists from the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR) have fabricated a **wafer-scale photodetector (thin slice-based) device, using gold-silicon interface**.
- JNCASR is an autonomous institute under the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

Key takeaways:

- The gold (Au)-silicon (n-Si) interface shows **high sensitivity** towards light.

- The Au-Si interface was brought about by **galvanic deposition** (a technique for electroplating of metals) wherein **water-based solutions** (electrolytes) are used, which contain the metals to be deposited as ions.

Important value additions:

Photodetectors

- These are an important part of an **opto-electronic circuit** that can **detect light**.
- Their applications include:
 - Controlling automatic lighting in supermarkets.
 - Being used in security-related applications.
- Photodetectors are **unaffordable** for daily applications due to high material costs.
- **Au-Si interface** Photodetectors has many **advantages**:
 - The fabricating process is **quick and simple**.
 - The method is **highly economical** since it is a solution-based technique.
 - It can detect **weak scattered light** as an indication of unwanted activity.
 - The device **does not require external power** to operate and runs on self-operated mode.

A project to develop human monoclonal antibodies (hmAbs) approved

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health & GS-III - Science and Technology

In News:

- Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has approved a project to **develop human monoclonal antibodies (hmAbs)** through **New Millennium Indian Technology Leadership Initiative (NMITLI)** programme.
- These antibodies can neutralize SARS-CoV-2 in patients.
- **Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)** is responsible for causing **coronavirus disease (COVID-19)**.

Key takeaways:

- hmAbs shall be generated from **convalescent phase** of COVID-19 patients.
- **High affinity** and **neutralizing antibodies** shall be selected.
- The project aims to **anticipate future adaptation** of the virus and **generate hmAbs clones** that can neutralize the mutated virus and combat future SARS-CoV infections.

Important value additions:

New Millennium Indian Technology Leadership Initiative (NMITLI)

- It is the largest [public-private-partnership](#) effort within the Research & Development field in the country.
- It seeks to **act as a catalyst** in innovation-centered scientific and technological developments.
- It also aims to help Indian industry **achieve a global leadership** position.

Monoclonal antibodies (mAb or moAb)

- They are antibodies that are made by **identical immune cells** that are all **clones** of a **unique parent cell**.
- They can have **monovalent affinity**, in that they bind to the same epitope (the part of an antigen that is recognized by the antibody).

Rht14 & Rht18: Dwarfing genes in wheat mapped

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Science & Technology

In News:

- Scientists at Pune based Agharkar Research Institute (ARI) have **mapped** two **alternative** dwarfing **genes Rht14** and **Rht18** in wheat.
- ARI is an autonomous institute of the Department of Science and Technology.

Key takeaways

- These genes have better **seedling vigour** and **longer coleoptiles** (sheath protecting the young shoot tip).
- Dwarfing genes were mapped on **chromosome 6A** in durum wheat.
- DNA-based markers were developed for a better selection of genes.
- Advantages of wheat lines having these genes are:
 - Suitable for sowing under rice stubble-retained conditions and dry environments.
 - Reduce crop residue burning

Allow deeper sowing of wheat seeds to avail advantage of residual moisture in the soil under dry environments.

Fountain of high-energy particles erupting from the ice found in Antarctica through ANITA

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

In News:

- Researchers using NASA's **Antarctic Impulsive Transient Antenna (ANITA)** have found a fountain of high-energy particles erupting from the ice in Antarctica.
- This could be proof of a parallel universe.

Important value additions:

Antarctic Impulsive Transient Antenna (ANITA)

- The ANITA instrument is a radio telescope to detect ultra-high energy cosmic-ray neutrinos from a scientific balloon flying over the continent of Antarctica.
- It is the first NASA observatory for neutrinos of any kind.
- Neutrinos are of great interest to astrophysicists as they are the only particle that can reach earth unattenuated (not weakened) at all energies.
- It detects these ultra-high energy neutrinos by use of the **Askaryan effect**.
- This effect predicts the production of a coherent radio emission from the cascade of particles produced in a high-energy particle interaction.
- ANITA-I was launched in 2006–07 and ANITA-IV was launched in 2016.

Tianwen-1: China's first Mars mission

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Space; Science and Technology

In News:

- In July, China will launch its **first Mars mission**, the 'Tianwen-1'.
- It is expected to land on Mars in the first quarter of 2021.

Key takeaways

- Tianwen-1 is an all-in-one orbiter, lander and rover.
- It will search the Martian surface for water, ice, investigate soil characteristics, and study the atmosphere.
- The Tianwen-1 mission will lift off on a Long March 5 rocket.
- If the mission is successful, China will become the third country to achieve a Mars landing after the USSR and the United States.
- Around the same time in July, NASA will also launch its own Mars mission—'Perseverance'.
- It aims to collect Martian samples and bring them back to Earth in a two-part campaign.

INST scientists find route to fabricate precisely controlled nanostructures of desired geometry & location on 2D materials

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

In News:

- Researchers at Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST) Mohali, have found a straightforward and unique route to **fabricate** precisely controlled **nanostructures** of **desired geometry** and location on 2D materials.
- The route is through a rapid one-step low power laser writing process.
- INST is an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology (DST).

Key takeaways

- The INST group developed a **hybrid Surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy (SERS)** platform of **Molybdenum disulfide (MoS₂)** nanostructure.
- It was decorated with gold nanoparticles where direct laser writing is used to engineer the **artificial edges** on the surface of MoS₂.
- This **created localized hotspots** with remarkable precision and control.
- A focused laser beam of low power of a conventional **Raman spectrometer** was used to do nanostructuring on 2D flakes of desired feature size and geometry.
- They achieved the minimum feature size of ~300nm.
- This technique enhanced the local electromagnetic field leading to formation of hotspots.
- Advantages:
 - This will open a new avenue for the development of **commercialized SERS substrate** with a localized detection capability of analytes.
 - SERS hybrid platform will also shed **new light** in the SERS sensing of biological and chemical molecules.
 - The artificial edges of the 2D layers can be **functionalized** with an **antibody** with adequate coating and linkers for the SERS detection of **various biomarkers**.

Important value additions

Surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy (SERS)

- It is a **surface-sensitive technique** that enhances Raman scattering by molecules adsorbed on rough metal surfaces or by nanostructures such as gold.
- The technique may detect single molecules.

Raman spectroscopy

- It is a spectroscopic technique typically used to determine vibrational modes of molecules.
- It is commonly used in chemistry to provide a structural fingerprint by which molecules can be identified.

A brewing storm: On Trump vs Twitter

Context: Twitter flagged two of President Trump's posts as factually inaccurate and he retaliated by threatening to "strongly regulate" or "close down" all social media platforms.

Criticism of Social Media

- Outrage is richly rewarding on digital platforms, which has led to rise of conservative politics
- Use of social media for provocative politics has led to increased polarisation of society
- They have played major role in genocides and election rigging Ex: Cambridge Analytica
- The misuse of social media to spread falsehoods that often incite violence has led to law & order issues
- Anonymous and decentralised nature of Social media has led to spread of [rumours](#)
- Increased bullying and rape threats to women via social media
- There are also concerns over
 - Privacy of users
 - Data misuse
 - Political bias
 - Monopoly behaviour due to distorted competition
 - Tax avoidance
 - Infringing on national security: Facebook's attempt to launch a digital currency Libra has triggered sovereignty concerns among nations.

What is the current conflict all about?

- Faced with the criticism of being the platform to spread false news, Twitter wants to increase the credibility of platform by ensuring the political discussion are factually correct.
- The **intention** to ensure all discussions on social media platform are fact-bound and decent is laudatory, but no one body can be the enforcer of this
- Given their non-traditional business models and the democratic nature, Social media platforms like twitter are largely unregulated as it is considered as better for Democratic Societies.
- The current conflict between the US President and social media platforms is only a component of the ongoing **wider debate** in the U.S. on the nature of large tech companies.
- Big tech companies in US now wield enormous economic, political and social influence on its users that at times conflicts with State authorities
- There is growing Political Consensus about the need for increased regulation of big tech companies

- Republicans say social media platforms are anti-conservative.
- Democrats believe some of these platforms are easily manipulated by enemies of the nation and accuse them of unfair trade and labour practices, and call for breaking them up.

Way Ahead

- Some reordering of big tech companies is needed given their rising powers to control society
- However, freedom of speech should not be constrained in the process of regulating Social media platforms

Conclusion

Twitter did well to call out President Trump, but fake news is an ecosystem by itself and needs socio-political measures to tackle it

Connecting the dots

- Concept of Net neutrality
- Equalisation levy



DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Railways start Shramik Special Trains to move migrant workers and other stranded persons

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Disaster Management; Infrastructure (Railways)

In News:

- As per the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, “**Shramik Special**” trains shall start running from May 1 (Labour Day).
- The trains shall **move migrant workers**, pilgrims, tourists, students and other **persons stranded at different places** due to lockdown which is in force due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Key takeaways:

- These special trains will run from point to point on the **request of both the concerned State Governments** as per the standard protocols for sending and receiving such stranded persons.
- The passengers shall be **screened by the sending states**.
- Passengers who are found **asymptomatic** (showing no symptoms) would be **allowed to travel**.
- Passengers shall be brought to the railway station in batches in sanitized buses while maintaining strict social distancing norms by the sending state governments.
- It will be **mandatory** for every passenger to wear **face cover**.
- **Meals and drinking water** would be provided.
- **On arrival** at the destination, passengers will be received by the State Government, who would make all **arrangements for their screening, quarantine if necessary** and further travel from the Railway Station

Safeguards against chemical disasters in India

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health & GS-III – Disaster Management

In News:

- The law in India provides **protection to victims of chemical disasters** such as the one which recently occurred in Visakhapatnam.

Important value additions:

Here's a look at some of these provisions:

Bhopal Gas Leak (Processing of Claims) Act, 1985: Gives powers to the central government to **secure the claims** arising out of or connected with the Bhopal gas tragedy.

The Environment Protection Act, 1986: Gives powers to the central government to **undertake measures for improving the environment** and set standards and inspect industrial units.

The Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991: It is an insurance meant to **provide relief** to persons **affected by accidents** that occur while handling **hazardous substances**.

National Environment Appellate Authority Act, 1997: Under this act, the **National Environment Appellate Authority** (NEAA) can hear **appeals** regarding the **restriction of areas** in which any

industries shall not be carried out or shall be carried out subject to certain safeguards under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

National Green Tribunal Act, 2010: Provides for the establishment of a Tribunal for **disposal of cases** related to **environmental protection** and **conservation of forests**.

National Migrant Information System (NMIS) developed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Disaster Management

In News:

- **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** has developed '**National Migrant Information System (NMIS)**'.
- It is a **central online repository** on **Migrant Workers** to facilitate their seamless movement across States.

Important value additions:

National Disaster Management Authority

- It is an apex Body of Government of India, with a mandate to lay down policies for disaster management.
- It was established through the **Disaster Management Act** in 2005.
- It comes under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Headquarters: New Delhi.
- The **Prime Minister** is the **ex-officio** chairperson of the NDMA, who chairs a 9-member board.
- It is responsible for:
 - framing policies,
 - laying down guidelines and best-practices
 - coordinating with the State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs).

A double disaster: On a cyclone amid the coronavirus

Context: Cyclone Amphan, a tropical cyclone formed over Bay of Bengal has affected states of Odisha and West Bengal. At least 72 people are dead and normal life is paralysed for millions in Kolkata and in the rural areas of both the States.

Did You Know?

- Cyclone Amphan has been named by Thailand.
- Amphan is the second pre-monsoon cyclone to form in the Bay of Bengal in two years. The first one was Cyclone Fani
- The pre-monsoon period is generally considered to be unsupportive for the formation of tropical cyclones.

About Cyclones

- Cyclones are low-pressure systems that form over warm tropical waters, with gale force winds near the centre.
- The winds can extend hundreds of kilometres (miles) from the eye of the storm.
- Cyclones can unleash catastrophic storm surges — tsunami-like flooding — when they make landfall.

- The term "storm surge" refers to rising seas whipped up by a storm, creating a wall of water several metres higher than the normal tide level
- The tropical cyclone season in the Bay of Bengal and neighbouring Arabian Sea has two peaks around May and November, according to the World Meteorological Organisation.

What has been the response of States during Cyclones?

- National and State Disaster Response Force units are alerted by weather forecasting agencies through governments
- A code of practice has been evolved for a storm coming under category 3 and above: (following points will be useful for Ethics Case Studies)
 - Quick evacuations through all routes
 - Arranging for backup power
 - Warning people to stay far from the coasts
 - Designating strong buildings as cyclone shelters
 - Providing for at least a week's supply of cooked food
 - Bolstering medical supplies in these temporary shelters
- Some vital activities such as functioning of the Kolkata airport were restored a day after the cyclone struck, facilitating movement of essentials.

What are the additional challenges associated with Cyclone Amphan?

- **Threat of COVID-19:** Thousands of people have been moved to crowded shelters where the COVID-19 pandemic poses a continuing threat.
- **Administrative Challenges:** There are logistical difficulties in adhering to hygienic practices, monitoring those requiring medical assistance and testing for the virus.
- **Livelihoods of migrants:** Many who were working in distant States have returned to Odisha and Bengal in the wake of the economic paralysis caused by COVID-19, and thus need sustained support after the storm.
- **Shelter Challenges:** There is also challenge to provide pre-fabricated facilities for safe shelter in outlying areas, such as the Sunderbans
- **Fund Constraints:** State governments are facing revenue shortages due to lockdown imposed in the wake of COVID-19. Thus, their ability to rehabilitate lives post cyclone is constrained

Way Ahead

- Strong support from the Centre, which the State must be provided to help it overcome the double jeopardy of the pandemic and the cyclone.
- Using off-the-shelf solutions such as solar power to mobilise communities
- Decentralised governance for ensuring quick rehabilitation of communities adapting to local needs

Connecting the dots

- Indian Monsoon, El-Nino & La-Nina, Indian Ocean Dipole
- Disaster Management Act, 2005

DEFENCE/INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY

Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS) approved

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Defence; Indigenization of Technology and Developing New Technology.

In News:

- To give a **boost to domestic defence** and **aerospace manufacturing**, Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS) was approved recently with an outlay of Rs 400 crore.
- State of the art testing infrastructure shall be created for the defence sector under this scheme.

Key takeaways:

- Six to eight new test facilities in partnership with private industry shall be set up.
- This will facilitate **indigenous** defence production and **reduce** imports of military equipment making the country self-reliant.
- The projects will be provided with up to **75% government funding** in the form of '**Grant-in-Aid**'.
- The remaining 25% of the project cost will have to be borne by the **Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)**.
- The constituents of SPV will be Indian private entities and State Governments.
- The SPVs will be registered under **Companies Act 2013** and shall also operate and maintain all assets under the Scheme, in a self-sustainable manner by collecting user charges.

CBI alerts States, U.T.s and Central agencies to malicious software threat

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-III- Security, GS-II- Governance

In News:

- CBI has sent alerts to all the States, Union Territories and the Central agencies on a malicious software threat that uses an update related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key takeaways:

- The alert related to banking Trojan and Cerberus has been sent on the basis of inputs received from the Interpol.
- It is primarily used to steal financial data, such as credit card numbers.
- This malicious software sends SMS using the lure of COVID-19 related content to download the embedded malicious link.
- It can also trick victims into providing personal information and can capture two-factor authentication details.

Important value additions:

- The International Criminal Police Organisation (commonly known as INTERPOL) is an international organization that facilitates worldwide police cooperation and crime control.
- Headquartered in Lyon, France,

- It has seven regional bureaus worldwide and a National Central Bureau in all 194 members states, making it the world's largest police organization.

Grasping the Defence Self-reliance

Context: COVID-19 has brought to focus the impact of supply chain disruptions caused to defence sectors and increased the necessity for self-reliance

Did You Know?

- For most of the past decade, India was the world's largest arms importer, accounting for about 12% of global arms imports.
- Saudi Arabia jumped to first place in 2018 and 2019, but India still takes over 9% of global imports

Why defence self-reliance is necessary for India?

- India's external dependence for its defence-preparedness creates vulnerabilities during military crises.
- Given two hostile neighbours and the threat of terrorism, defence self-reliance is of utmost need
- Given its great power ambitions, India cannot afford to rely on other powers for defensive purposes
- There is no dearth of skills as India does have technological capabilities but remains unutilized.

Steps taken by Union government to enhance defence preparedness

- [Chief of Defence Staff \(CDS\)](#) has been created
- Make in India initiative for promoting indigenous equipment in the armed forces
- A list of weapons systems for sourcing entirely from Indian manufacturers has been released by the government
- A separate Budget provision for domestic capital procurement has been made to encourage private defence manufacturers
- New Defence Procurement Procedures (DPP) 2020 are under formulation
- Liberalisation of foreign direct investment in defence manufacturing, raising the limit under the automatic route to 74%,

Way Ahead

1. A **time-bound defence procurement** process through
 - a. Overhauling trial and testing procedures to speed up the procurement process
 - b. Establishing a professional project management unit
2. **Corporatisation** of the Ordnance Factory Board.
 - a. OFBs structure, work culture and product range now need to be responsive to technology and quality demands of modern armed forces.
 - b. Corporatisation, including public listing of some units, ensures a more efficient interface of the manufacturer with the designer and end user
3. **Self-reliance should not be taken to extremes:** Thrust for indigenous R&D should coexist with the import of cutting-edge military technologies to safeguard defence vulnerabilities

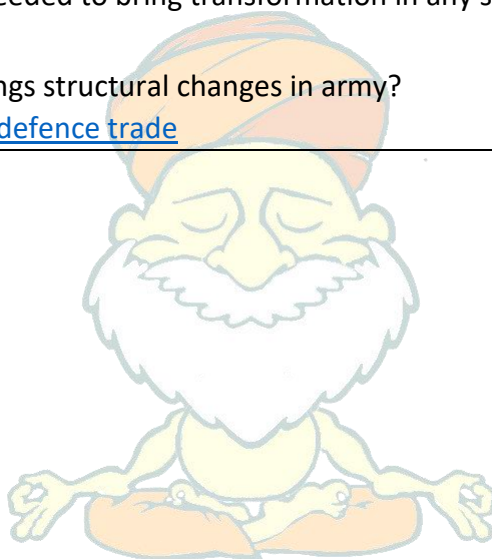
4. **Domestic Procurement:** When we import weapon systems, we should plan for the ammunitions and spares for them to be eventually manufactured in India
5. **A long-term integrated perspective plan** of the requirements of the armed forces is needed to give industry a clear picture of future requirements.
6. The **definition of indigenisation** itself needs to privilege technology over value or volume
7. **Export Promotion:** Investment, Indian or foreign, will be viable only if the door to defence exports is opened, with a transparent policy.
8. Promoting **indigenous research and development** through tax incentives
9. **To give private industry a level playing field** for developing defence technologies, conflicts of interest, created by the role of DRDO as the government's sole adviser, developer and evaluator of technologies have to be addressed.

Conclusion

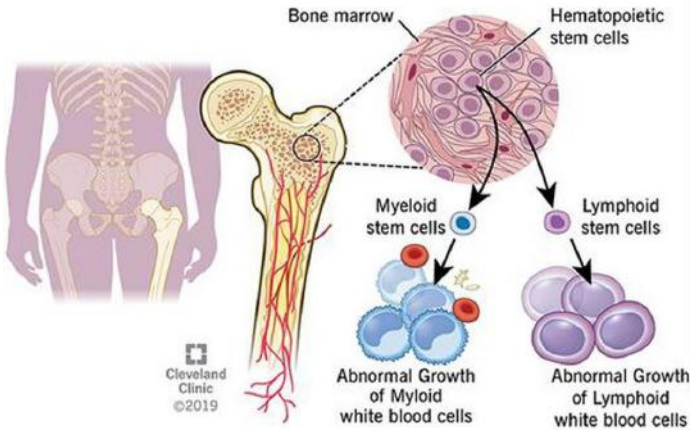
Of the key components of any major reform — money, method and mindset — mindset is the most critical and the most needed to bring transformation in any sector.

Connecting the dots

- Do you think CDS brings structural changes in army?
- Challenges in [India's defence trade](#)



MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
1. Leukemia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a type of cancer found in the blood and bone marrow and is caused by the rapid production of abnormal white blood cells. These abnormal white blood cells are not able to fight infection and restrict the ability of the bone marrow to produce red blood cells and platelets. It occurs in both adults and children. 
1. Neuroendocrine cancer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is one form of rare cancer that affects the specialized cells of the body. These mostly include neural and hormone-producing cells. Neuroendocrine tumors (NET's) can be found anywhere in the body. However, common occurrences of the tumor include the lungs, pancreas, intestines and rectum.
3. Bank of Schemes, Ideas, Innovation & Research Portal on MSMEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Union Minister of MSME launched Bank of Schemes, Ideas, Innovation and Research portal on MSMEs. The Portal gives access to all Schemes of Union, State and UT Governments associated with MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises). It has the provision for uploading Ideas, Innovations & Researches in the sector.
4. Year of Awareness on Science & Health (YASH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Council for Science & Technology Communication (NCSTC), Department of Science & Technology (DST) has launched a programme on health and risk communication 'Year of Awareness on Science & Health (YASH)' with focus on COVID-19. The programme is aimed at <ol style="list-style-type: none"> minimizing risks at all levels with the help of public communication and outreach activities,

	b. promoting public understanding of safety measures.
5. The World Press Freedom Index 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the latest survey of Reporters Without Borders, India dropped two places on the global press freedom index ranking to 142nd place in the list of 180 countries. India's neighbours — Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka — are ranked higher in the list. Norway is ranked first in the Index for the fourth time consecutively. China at 177, is just three places above North Korea, which is at 180.
6. eCovSens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A portable biosensor that can be used to detect the presence of novel coronavirus antigens in human saliva within 30 seconds using just 20 microlitres of the sample. It is developed by Researchers from the National Institute of Animal Biotechnology (NIAB), Hyderabad.
7. The Bay of Bengal Boundary Layer Experiment (BoBBLE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A team from Indian Institute of Science in Bengaluru and UK based University of East Anglia have created a blueprint for accurate prediction of monsoon, tropical cyclones and other weather related forecasts.
8. Snakebite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Four venomous snakes that cause deaths in India due to snakebites are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Russell's viper Saw-scaled viper Common krait Cobra
9. Covid toe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a kind of rash being reported in some Covid-19 patients' toes. The researchers have likened it to pseudo-chilblain lesions
10. Year of Awareness on Science & Health (YASH)	The National Council for Science & Technology Communication (NCSTC), Department of Science & Technology (DST) has launched a programme on health and risk communication, 'Year of Awareness on Science & Health (YASH)' with focus on Covid-19.
11. UV blaster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has developed an Ultra Violet (UV) Disinfection Tower for rapid and chemical free disinfection of high infection prone areas. The equipment is named UV blaster.
12. Samudra Setu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indian Navy has launched Operation Samudra Setu (Sea Bridge) to repatriate Indian citizens from overseas. Evacuation operations of Phase-1 will begin from Malè, Republic of Maldives.
13. Atal Tunnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is being constructed in the Pir Panjal ranges of Himachal Pradesh by Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an important tunnel since Manali-Sarchu-Leh road remains closed for six months every year due to Rohtang Pass being completely snow bound between November and May. The tunnel will connect Manali to Lahaul Valley throughout the year. It will also aid the forward connectivity offering the security forces a major strategic advantage.
14. Arktika-M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Russia announced that it will launch first Arktika-M satellite for monitoring Arctic climate by the end of the year 2020.
15. Pulitzer Prize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 Indian photojournalists have recently won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for feature photography. It is awarded for outstanding public service and achievement in American journalism, letters, and music. It is awarded in the name of Joseph Pulitzer. Each winner receives a certificate and a US\$15,000 cash award. The winner in the public service category is awarded a gold medal.
16. Silent hypoxia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is observed in COVID-19 patients. They have extremely low blood oxygen levels, yet they do not show signs of breathlessness. It is a form of oxygen deprivation that is harder to detect because patients appear to be less in distress. Medical device called a pulse oximeter can be used in the early detection of silent hypoxia
17. Toman: Iran's new currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iran's parliament has passed a bill allowing the government to slash four zeros from the rial and Iran's national currency will be changed from the Rial to the Toman, which is equal to 10,000 rials. The move came after a sharp fall in the value of the currency as a result of crippling US sanctions. The currency has been devalued 3,500 times since 1971.
18. Vande Bharat Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is one of the largest evacuation exercises. The government will operate 64 flights to bring home nearly 14,800 Indian nationals stranded abroad due to the Corona virus lockdown.
19. NSafe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an antimicrobial and washable face mask launched by an IIT Delhi startup 'Nanosafe Solutions'. It is reusable up to 50 launderings, thus greatly cutting down the cost of use.
20. Long March 5B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a rocket launched by China in a major test of its ambitions to operate a permanent space station and send astronauts to the Moon.

21. African Swine Fever (ASF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since February 2020, over 2,900 pigs have died in Assam due to African Swine Fever (ASF). • The outbreak is reported for the first time in India. • It is a highly infectious viral disease that affects pigs, warthogs, bush pigs, • <u>Cause</u>: African swine fever virus, member of the Asfarviridae family. • <u>Transmission</u>: Either directly through sick animals or indirectly through contaminated feed. • <u>Symptoms</u>: High haemorrhagic fever, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, reddening of the skin. • No effective vaccine is available. • Culling (slaughtering) is often the only effective way. • The ASF virus doesn't infect humans.
22. FlytNow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is an Internet of Drones (IoD) platform that allows seamless integration of intelligent fleets of drones with cloud-based business applications. • It can assist the Police officials to stream live multi-video feeds from multiple drones to their control room which shall enable them to respond quickly to emergencies. • It is developed by FlytBase, an enterprise drone automation company.
23. Rath Yatra at Jagannath Puri	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has allowed the construction of chariots for the annual Rath Yatra at Jagannath temple, Puri in Odisha. • It is a Hindu festival associated with Lord Jagannath. • During the festival, the three holy chariots carrying idols of Lord Jagannath, his brother Balaram and sister Subhadra are pulled by devotees. • The temple is believed to be constructed in the 12th century by King Anatavarman Chodaganga Deva of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty. • The temple was called the "White Pagoda" and is a part of Char Dham pilgrimages (Badrinath, Dwaraka, Puri, Rameswaram).
24. 'AYUSH Sanjivani' App	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recently, it was launched by the Government. • It is developed by the Ministry of AYUSH and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY). • It intends to generate data on usage of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-rigpa and Homoeopathy) medicines and measures among the population and its impact in prevention of Covid-19. • It targets to reach out to 50 lakh people in the country.
25. Naku La	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a pass in North Sikkim at an altitude of more than 5,000

	<p>metres above Mean Sea Level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently, Indian and Chinese Troops clashed near the pass which lead to many injuries.
26. Shekatkar Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently, Indian Defence Minister has approved a proposal for the abolition of numerous posts in the Military Engineering Service (MES). This was done according to recommendations of the Lt. Gen. D.B. Shekatkar (Retd.) Committee. It was appointed in 2016, The recommendations ranged from optimising defence budget to the need for a Chief of the Defence Staff.
27. Todas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They were recently in news for producing thousands of masks with exquisite embroidery for local residents, police, and sanitary workers. Toda people are a Dravidian ethnic group who live in the Nilgiri Mountains of Tamil Nadu They traditionally live in settlements called Mund. Their huts, called dogles, are of an oval, pent-shaped construction built of bamboo. The Toda lands are now a part of The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO-designated International Biosphere Reserve. Their territory is declared as UNESCO World Heritage Site.
28. COVID Kavach ELISA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Institute of Virology, Pune, has developed India's first indigenous antibody-based ELISA test kit - COVID KAVACH for diagnosis of COVID-19. The kit has displayed high sensitivity and accuracy in the validation tests at different sites. ELISA is routinely used for detecting HIV infection. The test will detect antibodies in blood samples that the body develops in response to COVID-19 INFECTION. The ELISA test gains significance as the rapid antibody tests imported from China were found to be unreliable and hence the States were instructed not to use them.
29. CHAMPIONS Portal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Union Ministry of MSME has launched CHAMPIONS portal, a technology driven control room-cum-management information system. The name CHAMPIONS stands here for Creation and Harmonious Application of Modern Processes for Increasing the Output and National Strength. It is aimed at assisting Indian MSMEs to emerge as National and Global CHAMPIONS.
30. ACE2 Enzyme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACE2 enzyme responds to the novel coronavirus and enables it to infect the human cell in Covid-19.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The new, large study of several thousand patients found men have higher concentrations of ACE2 in their blood than women. This has suggested reasons for why men seem to be more vulnerable to Covid-19 than women.
31. Cyclone Amphan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a tropical cyclone formed over Bay of Bengal It is likely to turn into a “super cyclonic storm. It has been named by Thailand. West Bengal, Odisha and Bangladesh will be the most affected regions.
32. SwasthVayu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL), Bengaluru, has developed a BiPAP Non Invasive Ventilator “SwasthVayu” for COVID -19. CSIR-NAL is a constituent of lab of CSIR. The ventilator is a microcontroller-based precise closed-loop adaptive control system with a built-in biocompatible 3D printed manifold & coupler with HEPA filter (Highly Efficient Particulate Air Filter). The portable ventilator was developed in a record 36 days.
33. Mission Sagar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indian Naval Ship Kesari recently departed for Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros, to provide food items, COVID related Medicines as part of the Government of India outreach programme. This deployment, being called as ‘Mission Sagar’, is in line with the Prime Minister's vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region ‘SAGAR.’
34. Defence Research Ultraviolet Sanitiser (DRUVS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an automated contactless UVC sanitisation cabinet developed by Hyderabad based Research Centre Imarat (RCI), a DRDO lab. It can be used to sanitise mobile phones, iPads, laptops, currency notes, passbooks, envelopes, etc. It provides 360 degree exposure of UVC to the objects placed inside the cabinet. The RCI has also developed an automated UVC currency sanitising device, called NOTESCLEAN.
35. Anakkampoyil-Kalladi-Meppadi Road Tunnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The government has cleared the construction of a ₹658 crore two-lane tunnel road in the Anakkampoyil-Kalladi-Meppadi corridor that would run parallel to the landslide-prone Thamarassery pass that links Kozhikode to Wayanad.
36. Agappe Chitra Magna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a magnetic nanoparticle-based RNA extraction kit for use during testing for detection of COVID-19. It uses an innovative technology for isolating RNA using magnetic nanoparticles to capture the RNA from the patient sample.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The magnetic nanoparticle beads bind to the viral RNA and, when exposed to a magnetic field, give a highly purified and concentrated RNA. This innovation enhances the chances of identifying positive cases.
37. SpaceX Demo-2 Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On May 27, 2020, NASA's SpaceX Demo-2 test flight will lift off for the International Space Station (ISS). It will become the first crewed flight to launch from American soil since the conclusion of the space shuttle era in 2011.
38. International Day for Biological Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Day for Biological Diversity 2020 was celebrated on 22 May with the theme "Our solutions are in nature." The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the international legal instrument for "the conservation of biological diversity" that has been ratified by 196 nations.
39. Khudol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth has listed Manipur's 'khudol' (gift) among the top 10 global initiatives for an inclusive fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Khudol is a crowdfunded initiative of Ya_All, an Imphal-based NGO. The initiative entails ensuring food supplies and health services for the LGBTQI+ community, people living with HIV, daily-wage earners, children and adolescents.
40. Wadi Rum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is also known as the Valley of the Moon. It is a valley cut into the sandstone and granite rock in southern Jordan. It is the largest wadi in Jordan.
41. Number-18 - Flying Bullets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Indian Air Force (IAF) is set to operationalize its squadron called the Number-18 - Flying Bullets with a fleet of the Light Combat Aircraft, LCA Tejas at its Sulur base near Coimbatore. It will be launched by the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal. It will be the second Indian Air Force squadron to operate with the modern multi-role light fighter aircraft. The No.18 Squadron was formed in 1965. It has the distinction of being the first to land and operate from Srinagar. It was revived on the 1st April 2020 at the Sulur base. The LCA Tejas is a tailless, fourth generation, compound delta-wing aircraft developed by the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. <p>The supersonic combat aircraft is considered the lightest and the smallest of its kind</p>
42. APOE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new study has found a link between the severity of Covid-19 and a gene linked to dementia.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The gene is called APOE. • It exists in different forms, one of which is termed e4e4 • The team found that people with the APOE e4e4 genotype were at double the risk of developing severe Covid-19, compared to those with the common e3e3 form of the APOE gene. • APOE (Apolipoprotein E) is a Protein Coding gene. • APOE transports lipids, fat-soluble vitamins, and cholesterol into the lymph system and then into the blood.
43. Shahi Lichi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Shahi Lichi is a variety of lichi that is grown in Muzaffarpur. • Ideal conditions for growth: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Humid condition ◦ Alluvial soil ◦ Good amount of calcium content in the soil • India is the second largest producer of lichi in the world after China. • Bihar is the leading state for lichi production in the country. • It has been accorded the Geographical Indication (GI) tag recognition (2018).
44. Zardalu Mango	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zardalu is a unique mango variety from Bhagalpur, Bihar. • It is known for its light yellow skin and distinct special aroma. • It received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2018.
45. Kangra Tea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is grown in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh • It is well known for its unique colour and flavour. • It has got the Geographical Indication (GI) tag. • It is loaded with antioxidants like catechins and polyphenols. • It has several health benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Promotes weight loss ◦ Builds immunity ◦ Improves oral health ◦ Improves mental alertness • It is also used in making sentizers, soap, vinegar, wine etc.
46. The Border Roads Organisation (BRO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was formed in 1960 by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. • It was established for coordinating the speedy development of a network of roads in the North and the North Eastern border regions of the country. • It works under the Ministry of Defence. • It undertakes variety of construction and development works such as airfields, building projects, defence works, etc.
47. Chardham Pariyojana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Border Roads Organisation has completed construction of a 440 m long tunnel below the Chamba town on the Rishikesh-Dharasu road highway (National Highway - 94). • The construction is a part of the Chardham Pariyojana. • It is a programme taken up by the Ministry of Road Transport

	<p>and Highways for connectivity improvement for Chardham (Kedarnath, Badrinath, Yamunotri and Gangotri) in Uttarakhand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cost of the project is around Rs. 12,000 Crore.• The work under the programme is being implemented on Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) mode.
48. <u>Aarogya Setu</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recently, the source code of <u>Aarogya Setu</u> Mobile App has been made open source for software developers.• It has been uploaded on GitHub which will help in identifying any vulnerabilities or code improvement in order to make Aarogya Setu more robust and secure.



(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)

Q.1 Global report on internal displacement is published by which of the following?

- a) Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
- b) UNICEF
- c) World Economic Forum
- d) SAARC

Q.2 With regard to recently released Global report on internal displacement considered the following statements:

- 1. Around 50 million people have been displaced worldwide internally.
- 2. The highest annual displacement has taken place in 2019 since 2012.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.3 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre is based in which of the following country?

- a) Switzerland
- b) Sweden
- c) Greenland
- d) Russia

Q.4 Leukaemia is a cancer, found in which of the following part of the body?

- a) Blood and bone marrow
- b) Pancreas
- c) Stomach
- d) Lungs

Q.5 Consider the following statements regarding neuroendocrine cancer:

- 1. It is a rare form of cancer.
- 2. It occurs only in the lungs.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.6 Chak Hao, the black rice is cultivated in which of the following state of India?

- a) Manipur
- b) Assam
- c) Mizoram
- d) Nagaland

Q.7 With regard to the Shramik special trains, consider the following guidelines issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs:

- 1. It will be mandatory for every passenger to wear face cover.
- 2. Passengers, irrespective of symptoms would be allowed to travel.

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 Consider the following statements regarding Kisan Sabha App:

- 1. It will increase the interference of middlemen by connecting the farmers with institutional buyers.

2. It will have only one major module taking care of the farmers

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.9 Which of the following is/are correct about the American Academy of Arts and Sciences:

1. Recently Indian Professor Shobhana Narasimhan has been elected as an International Honorary Member.
2. It is one of the recently established learned societies in the United States.

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.10 Majority of Chakma and Hajong communities live in which of the following state of India?

- a) Assam
- b) Manipur
- c) Nagaland
- d) Arunachal Pradesh

Q.11 With regard to Kashmir saffron, which received GI tag recently, consider the following statements:

1. It is the only Saffron in the world grown at an altitude of 1600 metres to 1800 above mean sea level
2. It has high quantity of Crocin which gives the product to which it is added, a strong colour.

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 Kovilpatti Kadalai Mittai which receive GI tag recently belongs to which of the following state of India?

- a) Tamil Nadu
- b) Andhra Pradesh
- c) Telangana
- d) Kerala

Q.13 BCG vaccine is used against which of the following disease?

- a) Tuberculosis
- b) Typhoid
- c) Malaria
- d) Smallpox

Q.14 Consider the following statements regarding The World Press Freedom Index 2020 report:

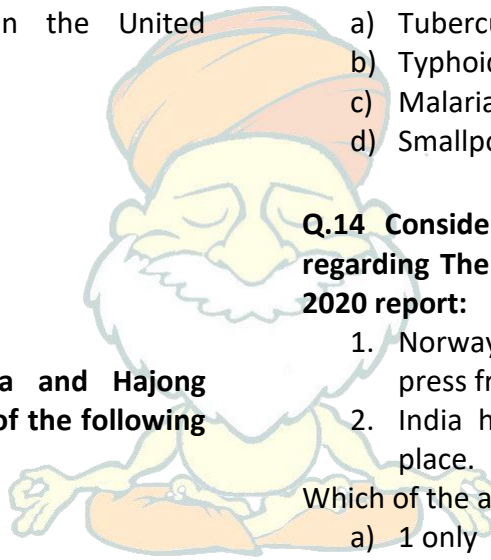
1. Norway is ranked first in the global press freedom.
2. India has dropped down to 142nd place.

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 The value of the SDR is not calculated from a weighted basket of which of the following currency?

- a) U.S. Dollar
- b) Euro
- c) Yen
- d) None of the above



Q.16 Which of the following is one of the founding members of Non Aligned Movement?

- a) India
- b) USA
- c) Russia
- d) Japan

Q.17 Which of the following article deals with establishment of Central Administrative Tribunal?

- a) Article 212-A
- b) Article 323-A
- c) Article 322-A
- d) Article 300-A

Q.18 Which of the following is not the official language of the United Nations?

- a) Japanese
- b) Spanish
- c) Russian
- d) Arabic

Q.19 Consider the following statements regarding United Nations:

1. The headquarter of the UN is in Washington D.C.
2. India was among the original members of the UN.

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 Consider the following statements regarding one-dimensional fluid simulation code recently developed at the Indian Institute of Geomagnetism (IIG):

1. It shall study a wide spectrum of electric field structures Earth's magnetosphere.

2. It is expected to help in planning future space missions.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.21 Consider the following statements:

1. National Mission for Clean Ganga comes under the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
2. National Institute of Urban affairs is an autonomous body.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

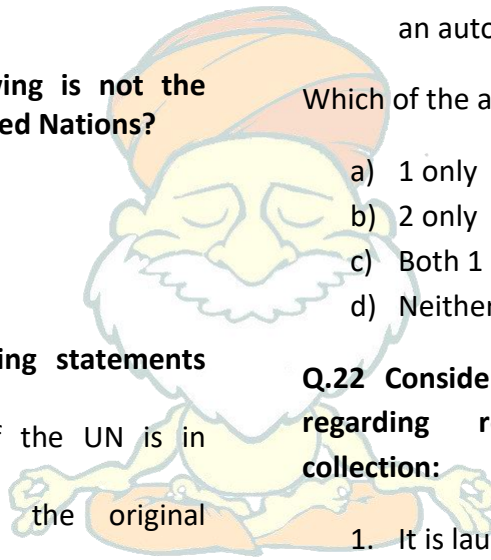
Q.22 Consider the following statements regarding recently launched Saras collection:

1. It is launched all over India.
2. It will help in providing self-help groups market access which will involve middlemen as well.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.23 Consider the following statements regarding Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana:



1. Under the scheme, skill training is provided in only rural areas.
2. It is managed by 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.24 With regard to Overseas Citizenship to India, consider the following statements:

1. It was launched during the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas held in Mumbai in 2005.
2. A foreign citizen of Indian Origin can live and work in India for 10 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.25 Swine flu is caused by which of the following virus?

- a) H1N1
- b) Coronavirus
- c) Kobuvirus
- d) Alphavirus

Q.26 Consider the following statements regarding Sarfaesi Act:

1. It allows banks and other financial institutions to auction residential or commercial properties to recover loans.

2. The first asset reconstruction company of India, ARCIL, was set up under this act.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.27 Arktika-M satellite, recently seen in news, will be launched by which of the following country?

- a) Russia
- b) China
- c) Australia
- d) USA

Q.28 Pulitzer Prize is awarded for which of the following?

- a) Wildlife Conservation
- b) Water conservation
- c) Photography in journalism
- d) Fight against nuclear weapons

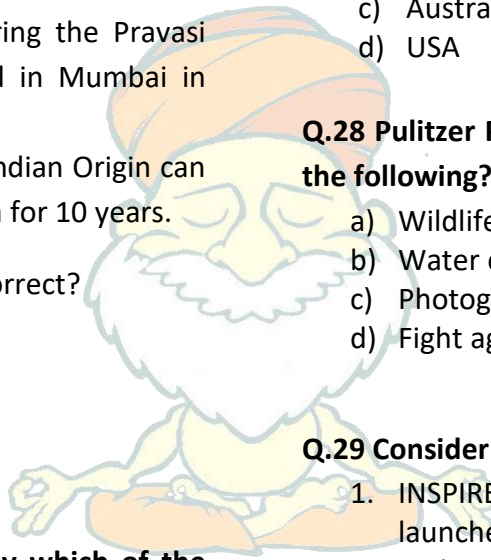
Q.29 Consider the following statements:

1. INSPIRE is an innovative program launched by Department of Science and Technology.
2. Automobiles can run for longer distances by using supercapacitors.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.30 With regard to uses of carbon nanotubes, which of the following is/are correct?



1. They are used to improve the mechanical and thermal properties of the polymer products.
2. They act as antenna for radios.

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.31 Consider the following statements regarding the Bureau of Energy Efficiency:

1. It is an autonomous body under Ministry of Power.
2. It develops programs to increase the conservation efficiency in 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.32 Which of the following is not the biodiversity Hotspot in India?

- a) Western Ghats
- b) The Himalayas
- c) The Sundaland
- d) Manas National Park

Q.33 Long March 5B was recently launched by which of the following country?

- a) China
- b) Japan
- c) India
- d) Pakistan

Q.34 Consider the following statements regarding African swine fever:

1. It is reported in India for the first time in Meghalaya.
2. Vaccines are available for its treatment.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.35 With regard to National infrastructure Pipeline, consider the following statements:

1. It is an investment plan in identified sectors for a period of 10 years, 2020-2030.
2. The funding will be jointly made by the centre and state in the proportion of 50:50 ratio.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

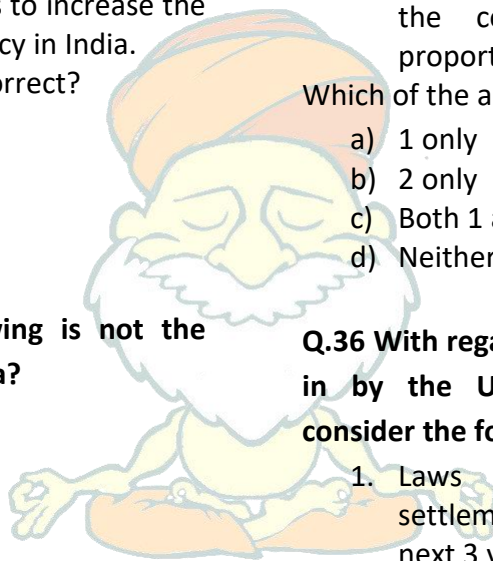
Q.36 With regard to the ordinance brought in by the Uttar Pradesh Government, consider the following statements:

1. Laws related to the dispute settlement will be different for the next 3 years.
2. There will be no relaxation in laws related to the bonded labour.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.37 Consider the following statements regarding the amendments brought in by the Madhya Pradesh government:



1. Employers can increase the working hours in factories.
2. Registration of factories will be done within 2 days instead of 30 days.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.38 Recently, signs of cloud bands were observed by astrophysicists on the brown dwarf, Luhman 16A. Which of the following planets also show signs of cloud bands?

- a) Jupiter and Neptune
- b) Saturn and Jupiter
- c) Mercury and Jupiter
- d) Mercury and Venus

Q.39 In which of the following city of Odisha is Jagannath temple situated?

- a) Sambalpur
- b) Bhubaneswar
- c) Puri
- d) Cuttack

Q.40 With regard to Au-Si interface photodetectors, which of the following is/are correct?

1. It is very difficult to assemble.
2. It requires external power to operate

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.41 Consider the following statements regarding the Black Panther:

1. Recently it was spotted at Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary for the first time.
2. It is very easy to detect.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.42 Netravali Wildlife Sanctuary is situated in which of the following state of India?

- a) Goa
- b) Maharashtra
- c) Karnataka
- d) Telangana

Q.43 With regard to new Millennium Indian Technology Leadership Initiative Program, consider the following statements:

1. It is an initiative launched by private Research and Development companies of India.
2. A project to develop human monoclonal antibodies was recently approved by CSIR through this program

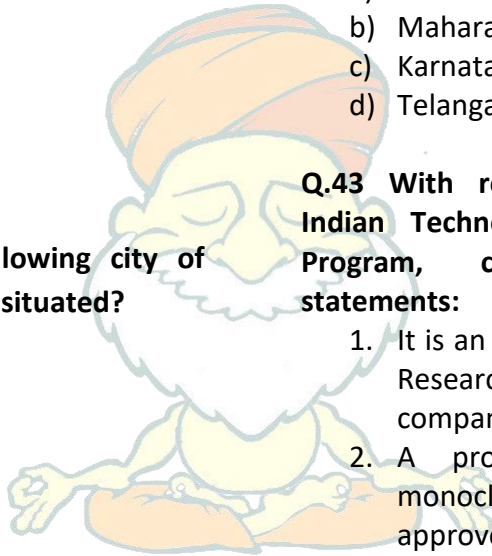
Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.44 Consider the following statements regarding monoclonal antibodies:

1. They are all made by immune cells which are identical.
2. They have multivalent affinity to the same epitope.

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 COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project was launched between India and which of the following organisation/Bank?

- a) The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
- b) International Monetary Fund
- c) World Health Organisation
- d) Asian Development Bank

Q.46 Consider the following statements regarding Sal forest tortoise:

1. It is critically endangered according to IUCN status.
 2. It is also used as an aphrodisiac
- Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.47 Consider the following statements regarding Sundarbans:

1. It is the only mangrove forest in the world inhabited by tigers.
2. It is covered under the Ramsar convention.

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 Consider the following statements:

1. Under strict liability principle, a company has to pay compensation

in case of accident involving hazardous substances.

2. Under absolute liability principle, a company does not have to pay compensation

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.49 With regards to the safeguards against chemical disasters in India, consider the following:

1. Appeals regarding the restriction of areas in which any industries shall not be carried out are heard through National Environment Appellate Authority Act, 1997
2. Disposal of cases related to conservation of forests takes place under National Green Tribunal Act, 2010.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

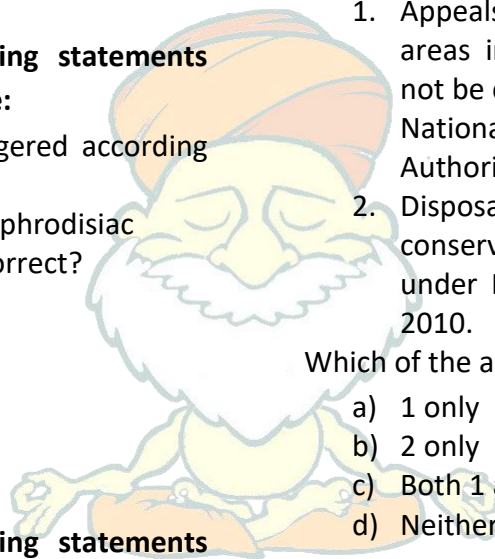
Q.50 Consider the following statements:

1. Sohrai Khovar mural art is practiced in Chhattisgarh.
2. Telia Rumaal is manufactured in Jharkhand.

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 With regard to GI tag, consider the following statements:



1. Geographical indications registry is located in Chennai.
2. GI tag is an intellectual property right owned by individuals.

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 Which of the following is the basic aim of the Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan?

- a) To make India self-reliant
- b) To increase FDI in the country
- c) To increase the export capacity of the country
- d) To enhance the quality of educational institutes

Q.53 With regard to Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, consider the following statements:

1. The package would constitute 10% of India's GDP.
2. It is based upon three pillars – infrastructure, economy and innovation

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.54 With regard to the recent package announced for MSMEs, consider the following:

1. ₹3 lakh crore collateral free loan scheme for businesses, especially MSMEs.
2. A ₹50 crore equity infusion through an MSME fund of funds.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q. 55 Consider the following statements with regard to the recent announcements made under Atma nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan:

1. EPF contributions have been reduced from 12 % to 10%.
2. EPF provided to low-income organised workers under the PMGKY will be extended for another 5 months.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.56 With regard to Enforcement Directorate, consider the following statements:

1. It deals with money laundering in India.
2. it is an autonomous agency.

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 Consider the following statements regarding The Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018:

1. Any special Court can confiscate the properties of the offenders.
2. The offences measuring over Rs 100 crores are considered under this act.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.58 Consider the following statements with regard to the stimulus package announced for street vendors and farmers:

1. Rs. 5000 crore special credit facility will be provided for Street vendors.
2. Emergency working capital funding will be provided to the farmers through NABARD.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.59 The Todas are Dravidian ethnic groups belonging to which of the following state of India?

- a) Kerala
- b) Tamil Nadu
- c) Karnataka
- d) Andhra Pradesh

Q.60 ELISA test is used for detecting which of the following disease?

- a) Tuberculosis
- b) Malaria
- c) HIV
- d) Dengue

Q.61 With regard to the recently released Global Nutrition Report, 2020, consider the following statements:

1. India is identified as among the three worst countries for within-country disparities.
2. India shall be unable to reach its nutrition targets by 2025.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.62 Consider the following statements regarding the Global Nutrition Report:

1. It is published by World Health Organisation.
2. It was first published in 2014.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.63 Consider the following statements about Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme:

1. The projects will receive 75% of government funding under the scheme.
2. The scheme shall facilitate indigenous defence production.

Which of the above is/are correct?

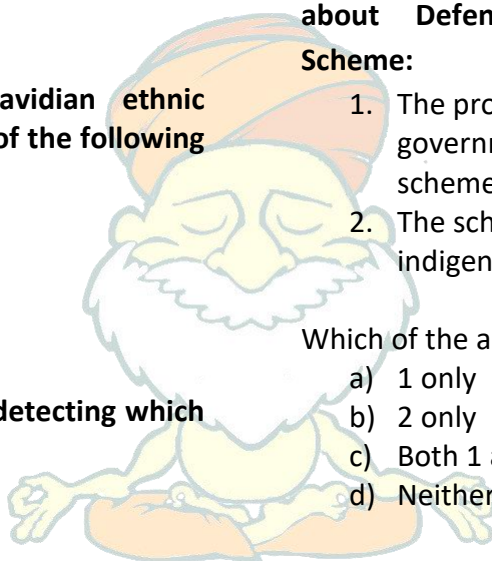
- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.64 CHAMPIONS portal, recently seen in news, was launched for which of the following sector of economy?

- a) MSME
- b) Agriculture
- c) Bank
- d) Automobile

Q.65 Consider the following statements regarding ACE2 enzyme:

1. It responds to the novel coronavirus.
2. The recent study has found that women have higher concentrations of ACE2 enzyme.



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 Recently, the government announced many reforms in various sectors. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Future projects related to space will be open to the private sector.
- 2. Discoms in union territories shall be privatised.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.67 Which of the following statements is/are true with regard to the economic package announced by the Central government:

- 1. Load shedding will be penalised.
- 2. FDI limit in defence manufacturing under automatic route will be raised from 49% to 74%.

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.68 Consider the following statements with regard to the recent reforms announced by the government:

- 1. Coal bed methane extraction will be done through auction.

- 2. An Empowered Group of Secretaries will look through fast track clearances.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.69 Consider the following statements regarding Airports Authority of India :

- 1. It is an autonomous body.
- 2. It works with the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government 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.70 Cyclone Amphan, recently seen in news, has formed over which of the following?

- a) Bay of Bengal
- b) Indian ocean
- c) Arabian Sea
- d) South China Sea

Q.71 Where is river Dibang located?

- a) Arunachal Pradesh
- b) Sikkim
- c) Nagaland
- d) Mizoram

Q.72 Diemer-Bhasha Dam, recently seen in news, is proposed to be constructed on which of the following river?

- a) Indus
- b) Jhelum
- c) Chenab

d) Ravi

Q.73 Consider the following statements regarding World Bank:

1. The International Development Association is a part of the World bank
2. The headquarter of the World bank is in Washington DC

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.74 Accelerating India's COVID-19 Social Protection Response Programme was recently signed between which of the following?

- a) India and WHO
- b) India and the World bank
- c) USA and India
- d) India and South Korea

Q.75 Consider the following statements regarding National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA):

1. The President of India is the ex-officio chairman of NDMA
2. It is a non-statutory body.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.76 With regard to the initiatives recently announced by the Union Finance Minister, consider the following statements:

1. Manodarpan initiative would provide psychosocial support to students, teachers and families.

2. National Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission will benefit students in the age group of 3 to 11 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.77 Consider the following statements regarding Pinanga Andamanensis:

1. It is a vulnerable species.
2. It is found in a remote area of Nicobar Islands.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.78 Less Invasive Surfactant Administration (LISA) is a recent medical technique, used for which of the following?

- a) Infants who are showing evidence of increasing respiratory distress
- b) COVID-19 patients
- c) Pregnant HIV women
- d) Young diabetic patients

Q.79 Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh often seen in news is a disputed territory between India and which other country?

- a) Sri Lanka
- b) Bhutan
- c) Nepal
- d) China

Q.80 Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was set up on the recommendation of:

- a. Santhanam Committee

- b. Administrative Reforms Commission of India
- c. Gorwala Report
- d. Ashok Mehta Committee

Q.81 Consider the following statements about CVC and CBI:

1. Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) was established by an executive resolution of the Central government.
2. CVC establishment was recommended by the Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption.
3. Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was set up by a resolution of the Ministry of Home Affairs.
4. The establishment of the CBI was recommended by the Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption.

Which of the above given statements are correct?

- a. 1, 2 and 3 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 3 and 4 only
- d. All of the above

Q.82 Consider the following statements about The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

1. It assists UN in interrelated issues of illicit trafficking in and abuse of drugs
2. It was established in 1997 and is a member of G-20

Which of the above given statements are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only

- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q.83 Consider the following statements regarding Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana:

1. It will be implemented during the period of 5 years.
2. It will have two components - Central sector scheme and centrally sponsored 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.84 Consider the following statements regarding regular banks and Non-Banking Financing Companies (NBFCs):

1. Both banks and NBFCs are supervised by a national or international banking regulatory agency
2. Both accept demand deposits

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.85 Which of the following temple is also known as Black Pagoda?

- a) Jagannath Temple
- b) Sun Temple
- c) Meenakshi Temple
- d) Akshardham temple

Q.86 With regard to the advantages of Coir Geo Textiles, consider the following statements:

1. It is a strong fabric with poor durability.

2. It is resistant to microbial attack but non-resistant to rots.

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 Rht14 & Rht18, often seen in news, are associated with which of the following?

- a) Alternative Dwarfing genes in wheat
- b) Newly-discovered Spike proteins of coronavirus
- c) Herbicide resistant gene of rice
- d) Genes mapped in humans that could be used for AIDS treatment

Q.88 borrows money from the banks for a short term

- 1. Reverse repo rate is the rate at which RBI lends money to commercial banks
- 2. Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) rate refers to the rate at which the scheduled banks can borrow funds overnight from RBI against government securities.
- 3. The Consolidated Sinking Fund should be maintained outside the consolidated fund of the States and the public account.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 only
- c) 1 and 4 only
- d) 3 and 4 only

Q.89 Theme for International Day for Biological Diversity 2020 was:

- a) Our Biodiversity, Our Food, Our Health

- b) Celebrating 25 years of Action for Biodiversity
- c) Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism
- d) Our solutions are in nature

Q.90 Wadi Rum is located in which of the following Country?

- a) Yemen
- b) Jordan
- c) United Arab Emirates
- d) Saudi Arabia

Q.91 Consider the following Species recently found in Western Ghats of Tamil Nadu and Kerala:

- 1. Eugenia sphaerocarpa
- 2. Goniothalamus sericeus
- 3. Memecylon nervosum

Which of the above was/were discovered in Malabar wildlife sanctuary?

- a) 1 only
- b) 3 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.92 Which of the following state has recently announced Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyaya Yojana for farmers?

- a) Jharkhand
- b) Odisha
- c) Madhya Pradesh
- d) Chhattisgarh

Q.93 For which of the following sector has Andhra Pradesh government launched ReStart program?

- a) MSME
- b) Bank
- c) Farmers
- d) Automobile

Q.94 Consider the following statements regarding ReStart program recently

launched by the Andhra Pradesh government?

1. The minimum power demand charges for April, May and June months shall be waived off.
2. The government will purchase products whose payment will be cleared in 60 days.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.95 Consider the following statements with regards to the aircraft Tejas:

1. It is a Supersonic aircraft.
2. It is considered as the lightest and the smallest of its kind.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.96 Purandara Dasa belonged to which of the following movement?

- a) Bhakti movement
- b) Haridas movement
- c) Dharma Dasi Cult
- d) Mahadevi movement

Q.97 South Atlantic Anomaly is a stretch between which of the following continents?

- a) South America and North America
- b) North America and Africa
- c) Africa and South America
- d) North America and Europe

Q.98 APOE gene is associated with which of the following disease?

- a) Dementia
- b) Down syndrome
- c) Poly Cystic Ovary Syndrome
- d) COVID-19

Q.99 CoAST India was recently launched for which of the following purpose?

- a) To track the covid-19 patients in coastal regions of India.
- b) To track the movements of migrants on foot.
- c) To track the development of possible vaccines against COVID-19.
- d) To track the distribution of food packages to the poor people.

Q.100 Which of the following conditions are ideal for declaring heat wave or heat wave condition in a region?

1. An increase of 5°C to 6°C when the normal maximum temperature is less than or equal to 40°C.
2. An increase of 7°C or more from the normal temperature is considered as severe heat wave condition.
3. An increase of 4°C to 5°C when the normal maximum temperature of a station is more than 40°C.
4. An increase of 6°C or more is considered as severe heat wave condition.

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 and 4 only
- b) 2 only
- c) 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.101 Ragyna Devi Temple is situated in which of the following state of India?

- a) Rajasthan
- b) Gujarat
- c) Himachal Pradesh
- d) Jammu and Kashmir

Q.102 Tianwen-1, which was recently in news, is the first Mars mission of which of the following country?

- a) China
- b) Japan
- c) Singapore
- d) Vietnam

Q.103 Shahi Lichi and Zardalu Mango, which are popular all over India, are grown in which of the following state of India?

- a) Jharkhand
- b) Bihar
- c) Uttar Pradesh
- d) Madhya Pradesh

Q.104 Puntius Sanctus, a small fish recently found in Tamil Nadu, belongs to which of the following family of fish?

- a) Achiridae
- b) Bedotiidae
- c) Fundulidae
- d) Cyprinidae

Q.105 Katkari tribe belong to which of the following state?

- a) Maharashtra
- b) Chhattisgarh
- c) Madhya Pradesh
- d) Rajasthan

Q.106 The Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (PMVDY) is an income generation program for which of the following section of people?

- a) Tribal forest gatherers
- b) Small and marginal farmers
- c) Women belonging to scheduled castes
- d) Youth belonging to backward regions

Q.107 Consider the advantages of Crop diversification:

1. It helps in increasing in natural biodiversity
2. It builds crop resilience to diseases, pest organisms and environmental stresses.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.108 Consider the following statements regarding Turtles:

1. They are protected in Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, Schedule 3.
2. Olive Ridley is given status of vulnerable under IUCN.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.109 Which of the following species of Indian Turtles are found in India?

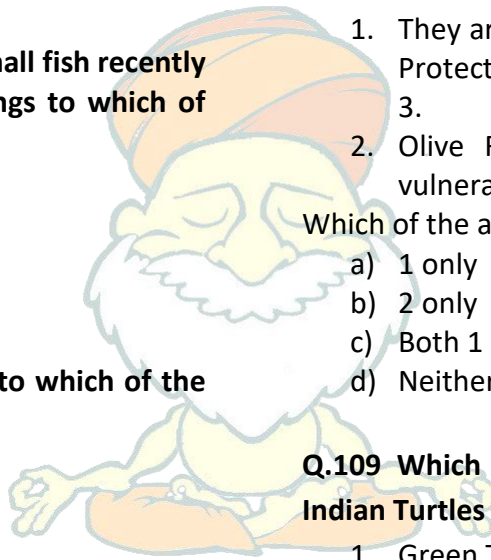
1. Green Turtle
2. Hawksbill
3. Leatherback

Select the correct code:

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

Q.110 Kangra tea is grown in which state of India?

- a) Uttarakhand
- b) Himachal Pradesh
- c) Punjab



- d) Jammu and Kashmir

Q.111 Border Roads Organisation works under which of the following Ministry of Indian government?

- a) Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- b) Ministry of Defence
- c) Ministry for Development of North Eastern Region
- d) Ministry of Road Transport and Highways

Q.112 Ashtamudi lake is found in which of the following state of India?

- a) Kerala
- b) Tamil Nadu
- c) Andhra Pradesh
- d) Karnataka

Q.113 Which of the following is an invasive species which was recently seen in news?

- a) Charru Mussel
- b) Asian green mussel
- c) Magallana bilineata
- d) Green and Brown mussel

Q.114 Consider the following statements regarding Competition Commission of India:

- 1. It is a non-statutory body.
- 2. It is responsible for ensuring the interests of consumers by regulating competition throughout India.

Which of the above is/are correct?

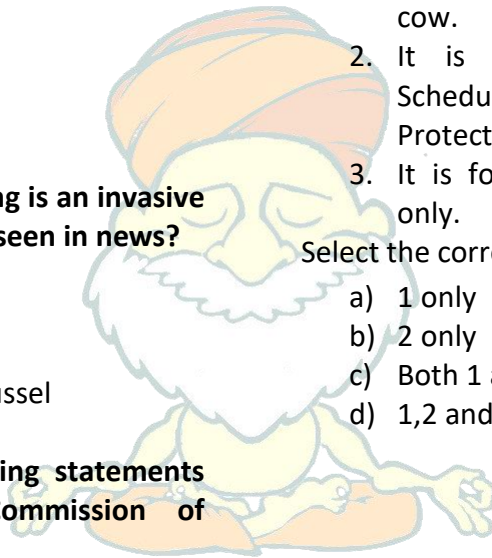
- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.115 Recently World dugong day 2020 was celebrated all over the world. Consider the following statements regarding Dugong:

- 1. It is commonly known as the sea cow.
- 2. It is protected in India under Schedule III of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 in India.
- 3. It is found in the Gulf of Mannar only.

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) 1,2 and 3



2020 MAY MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS

1 A	31 B	61 C	90 B
2 C	32 D	62 B	91 A
3 A	33 A	63 C	92 D
4 A	34 D	64 A	93 A
5 A	35 D	65 A	94 A
6 A	36 C	66 C	95 C
7 A	37 A	67 C	96 B
8 D	38 B	68 C	97 C
9 A	39 C	69 B	98 A
10 D	40 D	70 D	99 B
11 C	41 B	71 B	100 D
12 A	42 A	72 C	101 D
13 A	43 B	73 A	102 A
14 C	44 A	74 A	103 B
15 D	45 A	75 A	104 D
16 A	46 C	76 C	105 A
17 B	47 C	77 D	106 A
18 A	48 D	78 A	107 C
19 B	49 C	79 C	108 B
20 C	50 D	80 A	109 D
21 C	51 A	81 D	110 B
22 D	52 A	82 A	111 B
23 D	53 A	83 C	112 A
24 D	54 A	84 D	113 A
25 A	55 A	85 B	114 B
26 C	56 A	86 D	115 A
27 A	57 C	87 A	
28 C	58 C	88 D	
29 C	59 B	89 D	
30 C	60 C		

