INSTA SECURE SYNOPSIS

MAINS 2020

GS- II

MAY 2020
NOTE: Please remember that following ‘answers’ are NOT ‘model answers’. They are NOT synopsis too if we go by definition of the term. What we are providing is content that both meets demand of the question and at the same time gives you extra points in the form of background information.
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Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

How successful Indian polity has been in maintaining communal harmony in the state?

Debate.(250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why this question:
The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has downgraded India to the lowest ranking, “countries of particular concern” (CPC) in its 2020 report.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the scenario of communal harmony in the country, highlight the role being played by Indian polity and bring out the challenges therein.

Directive:
Debate — Weigh up to what extent something is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant research but also remember to point out any flaws and counter-arguments as well. Conclude by stating clearly how far you agree with the original proposition.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Present brief context of the question.

Body:
To start with explain that Indian polity is a system that is spreading knowledge among people about equal rights for everyone in the country. Communal harmony is maintained by the secular way that means treating all religions in same way and it allows no intervention by the government in religious principles. Highlight the recent incidents across the country that portrayed ill side of the religious violence. The article brings to us the fact that it’s time for India to protect its freedoms, and come down heavily on religious violence. Explain it in detail and address the dimensions asked for in the question.

Conclusion:
Conclude with solutions and suggest what should be the way forward.

Introduction:
India is a vast country, with people belonging to different religions living amicably for centuries together. The rich traditions of tolerance, perseverance, plurality and assimilation have kept the identity of the country intact, and civilization thriving. Declared a secular country in the constitution, India has several provisions for protection of minority communities. The State does not discriminate on the basis of any particular religion. There are constitutional provisions for equality of opportunities for all. Despite precautionary, preventive and positive measures having been envisaged in the constitution, to rule out any feeling of being left-out, communal disturbances keep recurring. The Government has, often expressed its commitment toward maintaining communal harmony in the country, and has been taking steps- statutory, legal, administrative, economic, and so on.

Body:
The Government has taken initiatives to promote communal harmony.

- The Constitution casts an important fundamental duty on its citizens in Part IVA. Article 51-A (e) of the Constitution says that “it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to promote harmony
and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities.”

- It is the spirit of brotherhood that is emphasized by the use of the term ‘fraternity’ in the preamble.
- These include constitution of the National Integration Council (NIC) (1960s), setting up of the National Foundation for Communal Harmony (1992) and laying down of the guidelines for the promotion of communal harmony from time to time.
- The NIC, comprising of prominent members of various sections of society, besides several union ministers and chief ministers of states, has been meeting regularly, to discuss and sort out the issues of discord.
- The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1988 was enacted by the Parliament for maintaining the sanctity of religious places and to prevent their misuse for political, criminal, subversive or communal purposes.
- Under this law, it is the duty of the manager to inform the police in the event of misuse of the place of worship. The Act also prohibits the storage of arms and ammunition inside any place of worship.
- Another initiative taken by the government, The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991, was passed to prohibit conversion of any place of worship and to provide for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on the 15th day of August, 1947.
- Other than these initiatives, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India has issued the “Guidelines On Communal Harmony, 2008” to prevent and avoid communal disturbances/riots and in the event of such disturbances occurring, action to control the same and measures to provide assistance, relief and rehabilitation to the affected persons.
- Communal Violence Prevention Bill, 2010 yet has to be passed by the Parliament which would help in controlling the menace of communal violence

However, in the present time, various untoward incidents are affecting the communal harmony in different parts of the country. Communalism is the most serious threat to our sovereign, secular, socialist and democratic polity. The number of communal incidents is increasing day by day, which is not a good sign for our democracy.

The result of communal violence is the loss of private property in the form of household articles of families, movables and loss of earning by loss of lives of bread earners. Even Communal peace and harmony gets completely shattered after any communal violence. It was observed in the recent past that the government has totally failed to control communal violence’s in the country.

The characterization by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) of India as a country of particular concern, in its annual report, is not entirely surprising, considering its dim and known views about sectarian violence and aggravating governmental measures over the last year.

Steps to check the growth of Communalism:

- Economic:
  - Poverty is one of the major factors for communal violence. Poverty alleviation measures are thus important for promoting communal harmony.
- **Eradicating the problem of unemployment** among the youths, illiteracy and poverty and that too with honesty and without any discrimination.

- Reducing educational and economic backwardness of minorities like Muslims.

- This can uplift their socio economic status and reduce their deprivation compared to Hindus

- **Social:**
  - The religious leaders and preachers should promote rational and practical things through religion promoting peace and security.
  - Children in schools must be taught through textbooks and pamphlets to maintain brotherhood and respect for all religions
  - Creating awareness in the society about the ill effects of communism through mass media

- **Political:**
  - Political communism should be avoided recent Supreme court’s directives
  - Identification and mapping of riot prone areas. For Example, Delhi police used drones to monitor to maintain vigil during communal festivals
  - **Media, movies and other cultural platforms** can be influential in promoting peace and harmony.
  - **Social Media** should be monitored for **violent and repulsive content** and taken off immediately.

- **Recommendations of Committee on National Integration**
  - Joint celebration of community festivals
  - Observing restraint by Hindus while taking processions before the mosques
  - Formation of peace and brotherhood communities at local level to prevent anti-social elements from engaging in communal riots
  - Respect for religious customs, rituals and practices

**Way forward:**
Utmost care and attention requires to be given to the planning and implementation of a range of measures to alleviate the sufferings of those affected by any incidents of communal violence, including the provision of relief and rehabilitation assistance to the victims of such violence.

**Conclusion:**
Communal harmony is the hallmark of democracy in a country governed by the rule of law. Rule of law pervades over the entire field of administration and every organ of the state is regulated and governed by the Rule of law. It is an eternal value of constitutionalism and inherent attribute of democracy and good governance has to be maintained.
Relying exclusively on the local bureaucracy for last mile delivery has been the bane of administration, examine the essential role of local governance in ensuring effective and efficient public delivery. (250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why this question:
The author in the article brings out the importance of local governance and devolution to the grassroots and the role it plays in ensuring effective and efficient public delivery.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the significance of grassroots empowerment in ensuring effective and efficient public delivery in the country.

Directive:
Examine – When asked to ‘Examine’, we must look into the topic (content words) in detail, inspect it, investigate it and establish the key facts and issues related to the topic in question. While doing so we should explain why these facts and issues are important and their implications.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Present briefly the importance of local governance in general in the country.

Body:
To start with explain the role of local bureaucracy in the public administration. Talk about the “confrontational federalism” that has characterized the Centre’s relations with the states in the current situation. Discuss the need to address the concerns, explain that the situation demands element of “cooperative federalism” to be incorporated in full spirit. Highlight the importance of devolution of power in bringing last mile connectivity and ensuring effective and efficient public delivery.

Conclusion:
Conclude with need to focus in further devolution to the panchayats and municipalities in keeping with the constitutional obligations under the 73rd and 74th amendments.

Introduction:
The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 is a significant landmark in the evolution of grassroots democratic institutions in the country. It transfers the representative democracy into participatory democracy. It is a revolutionary concept to build democracy at the grassroots level in the country.

Body

Importance of Self-governance institutions:

- A democratic form of government must be sustained by a system of vigorous local self-government institutions.
- Local government institutions provide an opportunity to the people to participate freely and actively in the governance and policy making which they formulate for their respective areas.
- These are necessary to encourage and foster initiative, independence, and enterprise on the part of the people.
- While inaugurating the first local self-government minister’s conference in 1948, our late Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru said “local government is and must be the basis of any true system of democracy. Democracy at the top may not be a success unless built on its foundation from below”.
- Laski said “local government offers the best opportunity to the people to bring local knowledge, interest and enthusiasm to bear on the solution of their problems.
It not only relieves congestion at the centre but it also checks the increasing power of democracy. It stands positively for the distribution and diffusion of power leading to administrative de-concentration and de-centralization. Being closer to the original base, it finds solution for local problems more efficiently (No ‘one size fits all’ approach).

A principal reason for Kerala’s amazing performance in “flattening the curve” is their robust system of effective devolution that has enabled the Kudumbashree programme to function in association with the panchayats.

Local Bodies acting as mere ‘Delivery Mechanisms’

- **Overwhelming dependency on government funding:** Panchayat’s own resource base to raise finances is low and the financial resources are tied to certain schemes and initiatives. When Panchayats do not raise resources and instead depend on external funding, people are less likely to enforce social audit and efficacy of the schemes.
  - **Eg:** In case of Urban local bodies, majority of municipalities have not increased property tax since many years and have not leveraged the municipal bonds for betterment of city infrastructure.

- **Creation of Parallel Bodies:** Parallel Bodies have usurped the legitimate space of local bodies. For instance, Smart City scheme is being implemented in major cities through Special Purpose Vehicles, squeezing the limited space of urban local governance in municipalities.

- **Lack of adequate Devolution:** Many states have not devolved the 3F’s of function, funds and functionaries, to enable local bodies to discharge their constitutionally stipulated functions.

- **Excessive control by bureaucracy**
  - In many Gram Panchayats, Sarpanches have to spend an extra ordinary amount of time visiting block Officers for funds and/or technical approval. These interactions with the Block staff office distort the role of Sarpanches as elected representatives.
  - Multiple institutions like parastatals, development authorities, public works departments, and ULBs themselves report to different departments of the state government and have been entrusted with overlapping responsibilities.

- **Poor Infrastructure:** It is found that nearly 25% of Gram Panchayats do not have basic office buildings. Capacity building of elected representatives is another hindrance in the grass roots democracy. In case of urban local bodies, Mayor position is merely ceremonial.

**Measures Need to strengthen local self-governance**

- The most important requirement is planning to receive the migrant labour influx, including testing, quarantine, isolation, social distancing to the extent possible, and ensuring that all without exception are fed and housed and receive the monetary grants that are essential to keep body and soul together.

- Last mile delivery can only be comprehensively ensured by empowered panchayats (and municipalities) reporting to their respective gram sabhas and ward sabhas mandated under Articles 243 A and 243 S.

- Central Government has started the **Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyaan.** The campaign is undertaken under the name of “**Sabka Sath, Sabka Gaon, Sabka Vikas**”.
• It aims to draw up Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) in the country and place them on a website where anyone can see the status of the various government’s flagship schemes.

• Gram Panchayats have been mandated for the preparation of GPDP for economic development and social justice utilizing the resources available to them.

• Government of India formulated E-Panchayat Mission Mode Project for e-enablement of all the Panchayats, to make their functioning more efficient and transparent.

- Social Audit: The power of social audit was proven by Jan Sunwai in Rajasthan. Transparent, third party Social Audit can enable people to hold the representatives accountable.

- Citizen Participation
  • Ward committees and area sabhas should be activated with a technology-enabled ‘Open Cities Framework’ and the use of digital tools for feedback and reporting.
  • In case of Gram Sabhas, their functions and roles must be clearly defined as in the PESA Act, to enable to function effectively.

Conclusion
Local self-government institutions are expected not only to provide for the basic civic amenities for the safety and convenience of the citizens but also mobilize local support and public cooperation for the implementation of various programmes of welfare. Another benefit of the local government is that the transmission of power from bureaucrats to the democratically formed local government has positively checked the influence of bureaucracy. Thus it can be said that the local government ensures close relationship between the people and the higher level of governments through this device of communication.

Critically examine the fiscal power of states amidst situations like the corona pandemic where resources needed to fight should be raised locally and not be dependent on centre. (250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Introduction:
The corona crisis has brought the country’s fiscal health into focus as never before. State governments which are financially broke are forced to adopt desperate and reviled measures such as opening liquor shops to mobilize money for their fight against COVID-19. Health being a constitutionally-determined state subject, the epidemic’s major financial burden towards medical and economic relief expenditures has descended on the states, for which they have little or no bandwidth. The states’ financial desperation was clearly evident from their recent agreement to borrow from the market at sky-high yields

Body:

State revenue situation:
• Revenues from own taxes account for just under half (45%) of the total revenues of the States, according to a Reserve Bank of India study of state finances.
• The central transfers account for 47.5%.
- Of the own tax revenues, 90% comes from taxes on liquor, petroleum products, stamp duty and registration of vehicles.

**Fiscal position of States:**

**Pre-GST era:**
- GST forced the States to surrender their powers to raise resources independently through local State taxes and place them entirely at the mercy of the Centre for most of their financial needs.
- Most States raise resources through a combination of their own taxes and a share in the Centre’s taxes.
- For richer States such as Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Delhi, Karnataka, Punjab, Haryana and Kerala, 70% or more of their revenue comes from taxes generated within their State boundaries.
- Nearly half of these were from the sale of goods and services within the State and the remaining half, from a combination of excise duties on petrol, electricity, alcohol, land registration fees, etc.
- If a State had a natural disaster, they could raise additional resources for rehabilitation by raising sales tax rates on goods and services.

**Post-GST era:**
- For the sake of GST, States sacrificed their fiscal powers in the promise of ‘economic efficiency’ and ‘tax buoyancy’, which never materialised.
- Under GST, States are legally entitled to their share of tax revenues collected in their State.
- When the GST was enacted, States were also guaranteed a minimum tax revenue every year for a period of five years.
- However, in the midst of the current pandemic, the Centre has reneged on both these promises. This has turned out to be a triple blow for the states because states are not being paid what they are owed;
- not being helped with additional resources;
- bearing the brunt of the pandemic’s impact.
- States have also lost the powers to raise their own sales tax revenues.
- The other available options for States to raise funds are through taxes on sale of petroleum products, alcohol, lottery tickets, electricity, land or vehicle registration.
- During this extreme lockdown, demand for petroleum products, electricity, land and vehicles has dwindled substantially.
- So, the only option left for most States is to raise funds through the sale of alcohol.
- For the large, richer States, alcohol sales account for more than one-third of their State tax revenues.

**Other means to raise funds is also challenged:**
- States’ need the Centre’s approval to raise their borrowing limit or to stand as guarantors.
- Since States do not have clear revenue visibility, the rates at which they can borrow are very high and their ability to borrow is severely undermined.
- They are once again dependent on the Centre to borrow funds from the market and then release them to the States.

**Way forward:**
The burden is on the Centre to find the resources to immediately release the dues of the States and also reimburse them for their COVID-19-related expenses.

Entreaties from States to the Centre to hasten the transfer of GST compensation.

Increase fiscal deficit limits from 3% to 4.5-5% and for higher ways and means advances (WMA) limits to be able to borrow more.

The RBI did increase the WMA limit as part of its relief package but that is not adequate.

The Centre should also give States the freedom to restart economic activity based on their own assessment.

Not all States are in the same virus-spread position and within each State, not all districts are the same. This has to be acknowledged while planning a phased lifting of the lockdown.

Greater leeway in restarting economic activity will relieve some of the financial stress, not just on the States but also on the Centre.

Without a paradigm shift in politics, Centre-state relations will only become more fractious, and federalism the victim in the current pandemic times in the country.

Critically analyse. (250 words)

Reference: Hindustan Times

Why this question:
The question is amidst the ongoing turmoil that the centre-state relations are facing owing to the pandemic.

Key demand of the question:
Analyse in detail how and why the centre-state relations will require a paradigm shift in politics to ensure that they don’t become fractious.

Directive:
Critically analyze – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary. When ‘critically’ is suffixed or prefixed to a directive, one needs to look at the good and bad of the topic and give a fair judgment.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Firstly explain the context of the question, highlight the changes that pandemic has posed to the federal fabric of the country.

Body:
Explain that the month-long national lockdown has exposed fault lines in a system under stress from competing alternate visions of what India should be. Centre-state conflicts are mounting over myriad issues: the management of the disease itself; the management of the lockdown; a roadmap for lifting restrictions so that normalcy returns; and allocation of financial resources to meet the health, social and economic challenges ahead. Discuss the need for strong political shift in favour of federalism.

Suggest solutions like – approach would have been for the Centre to give broad guidelines for the management of the epidemic and the lockdown, arrange for finances to tackle the health and economic emergencies overwhelming the country, and keep the inter-state supply chain functional so that there are no shortages and economic activity doesn’t die completely.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction
The Covid-19 response tracker by the University of Oxford’s Blavatnik School of Government recently termed India’s lockdown a perfect 100% in the world. For this, the due credit goes to the
Union government and states and most importantly country’s federal system that provides the institutional architecture for enforcing such a herculean task.

Body

Federalism in the time of pandemic: Is it becoming more fractious?

- **State’s dwindling resources:** The findings suggest that recent changes in India’s fiscal architecture, including the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, and increase in state shares for the Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSSs) had placed state finances in a precarious position, even prior to the crisis.

- **Lockdown without prior notice:** There was no prior consultation with states before the lockdown was imposed on 25th March. It caused serious supply chains breakdown and importantly migrant workers chaos.

- **Struggling for fiscal space:** The announcement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the Rs 20-lakh crore Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (Self-reliant India Campaign) package left many states scrambling with the fiscal maths.

- **Increasing dependency on Centre:** The dependency of states on the Centre for revenues has increased, with the share of the revenue from own sources declining from 55% in 2014-15 to 50.5% in 2020-21.
  - While part of this is inherent in India’s fiscal structure, wherein states are the big spenders and the Centre controls the purse strings, the situation has been exacerbated by the introduction of the GST.
  - Barring a few exceptions, such as petroleum products, property tax, and alcohol excise, indirect taxes have, to a large degree, been subsumed under the GST regime, eroding the ability of states to raise their own revenues.

- **Shortfall in devolution:** Adding to state woes is the significant divergence in past periods between the amount of GST compensation owed and the actual payments made, including for states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand that need greater fiscal support.
  - Even before Covid-19 hit, 11 states estimated a revenue growth rate below the estimated 14% level, implying higher amounts will be owed as GST compensation.
  - With the bulk of the states’ GST coming from goods such as electronics, fashion, and entertainment — all of which have been impacted by the pandemic — these revenues are likely to decline further.

- **Different Post-lockdown agenda:** For instance, when Kerala took a decision to allow restaurants to open based on its own risk assessment, the state was pressured by the Centre to cancel such permit.

However, it is India's elastic federal structural that has made the pandemic fight more stronger, with all the states working as a united force under the guidelines of the Centre at apex.

Federalism Spirit during the pandemic
**Unique brand of federalism:** India’s flexible federal structure which has come handy in an emergency situation.

- Unlike the United States, another large federal country where the Washington and states are engaged in a vicious battle to keep their controls, India’s unique band federalism has allowed **for a swift and coordinated response** to tackle the pandemic.

**Sharing Responsibilities:** Health remains a state subject (providing states major responsibilities for health service delivery), **infectious disease control is in the Concurrent List** requiring federal government’s leadership and strategic and resource support.

- The Epidemic Diseases Act (EDA), 1897 and the National Disaster Management Act (NDMA), 2005 which provides broad legal architecture to take a variety of emergency measures to contain the pandemic.

**Empowering the states:** The NDMA is placed in the Entry 23 of the Concurrent List thereby all tiers of government including the third tier institutions such as municipal and rural local bodies are empowered to contribute in disaster management and mitigation activities.

- Thus, NDMA has empowered both the Central and state governments to impose lockdown and regulate the movement of people and goods nationwide
- A number of states including Kerala, Karnataka, Odisha were the first to use epidemic law to impose partial lockdown before the federal government announced full lockdown on 24 March.
- Once full lockdown was announced by the Centre, it directed all the states to invoke Section 2 of the EDA, 1897.

**States are autonomous:** While the Centre and its key ministries such as Home and Health have taken the lead in developing protocols and advisories, states are autonomous enough to act in their own ways.

- For instance, Kerala has developed its own model, so also Odisha and Rajasthan.
- Even district administration in Agra and Bhilwara have done well to contain the infection within the broad federal framework.

**Way-Forward**

To sum up, for a large federal country of a mind-boggling diversity, India’s ability to fight Covid-19 pandemic largely rests on how well it manages its Centre-state relation.

- When compared with other large federal countries such as the US, the country has done very well to minimize the frictions and provide a sense of direction to the states.
- However, tackling Covid-19 as seen from the experience of other countries would require a **differential and agile response across states** and the Centre has at best to play the role of a mentor in providing leadership and resource support.
- The rigid approach as evident in lockdown phase would prove a major hurdle. States must be **cleared their dues** and be given ample **fiscal space to ensure economy is revived**.
States must be allowed to lead in terms of reviving economy, generating income support, jobs while contain the virus at the same time.

The next big change will come when the current Centre-state relationship gets redefined in a way that enables the 28 states to become federal in the true sense – as self-sustaining economic territories in matters of energy, water, food production and waste recycling.

Our economic geography of production, transport and communication has to change – it has to become distributive rather than being focused towards the Centre.

Centrally distributed funds will need to be directed specifically to build the capacities of each state.

- The instruments will enable them to embark on a sustainable economic recovery whose base is widely distributed across the various panchayats and districts of each state.
- Driving distributive recovery will be energy, transport, supply chains, public administration, rule of law, agriculture and rural development.

In short, the real cooperative federalism which the Centre has been espousing for many years is now put on test and the Centre must ensure states are given full cooperation to battle the challenge.

Parliament and State Legislatures – structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

Discuss the rationale of a second chamber- the Rajya Sabha in the Indian Parliament.(250 words)

Reference: The Hindu, The Hindu

Why this question:
The question is based on the series of article that have been narrating the significance and rationale behind the existence of Rajya Sabha in the Indian system of Parliament.

Key demand of the question:
Explain in detail the rationale behind the second chamber of the Parliament, the Rajya Sabha.

Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Present brief history of legislature in India. The central legislature that came into being under the Government of India Act, 1919, was bicameral with a Council of States comprising 60 members and a Legislative Assembly comprising 145 members. The membership and voting norms for the Council of States were very restrictive. The Rajya Sabha came into being in 1952.

Body:
One can start by bringing out key assembly debates related to coming of Rajya Sabha into action. Present Arguments against as well as in favor of Rajya Sabha. Discuss the significance of RS; bring out the importance of Bicameralism; it is a principle that requires the consent of two differently constituted chambers of Parliament for making or changing laws. Present concerns associated if any.

Conclusion:
Conclude with the importance that the role of RS is to represent the interests of the States as a federal chamber; and be a deliberative body holding high-quality debates on important issues.

Introduction:

‘Rajya Sabha’ or the ‘Council of States’ is the second chamber of the Indian parliament and we can trace back its origin to the Montague-Chelmsford Report published in 1918. The Rajya Sabha is a permanent house, but after every two years, one-third of its members retire.

Body:

The Rajya Sabha came into being on April 3, 1952 and held its first session on May 13 the same year. The second chamber underwent severe prenatal scrutiny in the Constituent Assembly. The proposal for a bicameral central legislature for the country was discussed at length, with deep divisions between the proponents and opponents.

An extensive debate was held in the Assembly on the topic whether a second chamber was necessary or not and it was unanimously decided in favour of as a bicameral legislature would be best suited to uphold the federal fabric of the country with diverse cultures and a vast geographical area. The political pundits thought that the challenges posed before the country would be best solved by the mutual functioning of the ‘Lok Sabha’ and the ‘Rajya Sabha’.

Rationale behind setting up of Rajya Sabha:

- It was envisaged to serve as a forum to which seasoned and experienced public men might get access without undergoing the din and bustle of a highly competitive general election which is inevitable to find a seat in the Lok Sabha.
- Since the ‘Lok Sabha’ decisions may go in favour of the populist sentiment and force the members to go contrary to the best judgment, the ‘Rajya Sabha’ keeps a check and balance on it.
- It was also envisaged to serve/act as a debating chamber in which dignified debates are to be held on various issues confronting the country. Simultaneously, it was also contemplated that it would act as a revising chamber over Lok Sabha.
- As in any other federation, so does in India, the creation of an upper chamber was a virtual necessity on account of India’s being constituted as a federation which inevitably required a chamber in which states are to be represented for articulating their interest.
- Unlike the House of Lords in Britain, the ‘Rajya Sabha’ members do not hold the hereditary membership rights.
- Our leaders rejected a similar plea placed by the erstwhile kings and princes and ruled in favour of indirect elections.
- ‘Rajya Sabha’ also provides a platform to the small and regional parties to present their views.
- The rights of the Indian citizens need to be actively protected. Hence, the relevance of the bicameral parliament structure becomes even bigger.
- The ‘Rajya Sabha’, the bureaucracy and the judiciary act as the 3-layered wall that sees to the upkeep of the principles of a democratic republic like India.
- Men and women of prodigious talent and caliber have adorned the benches of the upper house and have contributed significantly towards realizing the vision of the founding fathers of the Constitution.
- A permanent Upper House is also a check against any abrupt changes in the composition of the Lower House. It has continuity.
• Unlike Lok Sabha, it cannot be dissolved by anyone. Thus it has, time and often, carried out some administrative functions even when the lower house is dissolved. It has members with experienced players while there may be new entrants in the Lok Sabha.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, speaking as the first chairman of the Rajya Sabha, said, “There is a general impression that this House cannot make or unmake governments and, therefore, it is a superfluous body. But there are functions, which a revising chamber can fulfil fruitfully. Parliament is not only a legislative but a deliberative body. So far as its deliberative functions are concerned, it will be open to us to make very valuable contributions, and it will depend on our work whether we justify this two chamber system, which is now an integral part of our Constitution.”

However, there are many concerns raised against Rajya Sabha and there are even demands to abolish the second chamber:

• According to various members of Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha has done nothing except stalling legislative works and causing policy paralysis in the country.
• For critics, the Upper House serves no purpose as its members are not directly elected and hence are not accountable to the people.
• Rajya Sabha often has members from the party defeated in various elections, or are from political families, and due to political differences, they do not allow passage of important bills.
• This affects the functioning of the government in power which has a majority in Lok Sabha and which is accountable to the public in next election.
• So many extra members are an added burden on exchequer which can be done away with.
• Politics of boycotting and creating ruckus in the house and toeing on the party-line even on the issue that won’t attract disqualification provisions is a worrying thing.
• At the same time, in terms of working, Rajya Sabha does not have sufficient powers in financial matters to bring any change and they are without any direct public interaction. Hence its purpose in modern democracy seems outdated.

Way forward:

• A useful reform step would be to have members of the Rajya Sabha be directly elected by the citizens of a state. This will reduce cronyism and patronage appointments.
• This step should be combined with equal representation for each state (say, five members) so that large states do not dominate the proceedings in the House.
• This streamlined Rajya Sabha should remain deliberative, but there should be deadlines set for responding to bills initiated in the Lok Sabha.

Conclusion:

The mandate of the Rajya Sabha, as can be gleaned from the Constituent Assembly debates and the experiences of other Parliaments, is legislation — to revise or delay legislation without proving a clog in the wheel of the progress; to represent the interests of the States as a federal chamber; and be a deliberative body holding high-quality debates on important issues.
Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary
Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

Discuss the prospects and possibilities along with the concerns involved in realizing the goal of virtual judiciary in the country.(250 words)

Reference: The Hindu, Indian Express

Why this question:
The article evaluates the advantages of adopting a system of virtual judiciary in tax cases.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the prospects and possibilities along with the concerns involved in realizing the goal of virtual judiciary in the country.

Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Briefly explain what a virtual Judiciary means.

Body:
To start with explain the fact that in the present nationwide lockdown imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19, it has become clear that many activities can be done online. Present detailed Arguments in favour of a virtual judiciary system such as Speedy disposal of cases, Ease of legal access etc. Discuss the associated challenges such as the technology expanse, limitations etc.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction:
The Supreme Court recently passed directions for all courts across the country to extensively use video-conferencing for judicial proceedings saying congregation of lawyers and litigants must be suspended to maintain social distancing amid the coronavirus pandemic. The top court, which has restricted its functioning and is conducting hearing through video conferencing since March 25, exercised its plenary power to direct all high courts to frame a mechanism for use of technology during the pandemic. A bench headed by the Chief Justice stressed that “technology is here to stay”

Body:
e-Courts project as part of virtual judiciary was conceptualized on the basis of the “National Policy and Action Plan for Implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the Indian Judiciary – 2005” submitted by eCommittee, Supreme Court of India with a vision to transform the Indian Judiciary by ICT enablement of Courts.

e-Courts objectives:


- To provide efficient & time-bound citizen centric services delivery as detailed in eCourt Project Litigant’s Charter.
- To develop, install & implement decision support systems in courts.
- To automate the processes to provide transparency in accessibility of information to its stakeholders.
To enhance judicial productivity, both qualitatively & quantitatively, to make the justice delivery system affordable, accessible, cost effective, predictable, reliable and transparent.

Advantages of virtual judiciary:

- The key advantages of establishment of Electronic Courts in India is bringing in a justice serving mechanism that is transparent, efficient, affordable, time saving, protects the interests of witnesses, reduces the backlog of pending cases and most importantly reduces the number of unscrupulous activities.
- Entire information related to a particular case would be available online. It would be available to the attorneys, parties and the general public through the help of internet.
- Registered attorneys can file their case document directly from their home or office. They do not have to worry about postage, traffic congestion or messenger services. They can create a docket sheet and update it immediately, when the documents are filed.
- With the help of internet, the documents of a case can be accessed easily from anywhere at anytime.
- E-courts would help in the computerization of work flow management in courts. Thus, it would help to create a better court and case management. Video conferencing facilities would be installed in every court complex. Evidence of eyewitness, who are unable to attend the court can be recorded through this method.
- The information would not be misplaced as all the information regarding the case would be carefully recorded and stored. Data keeping would include maintaining the records of e-file minute entries, bail orders, warrants etc.
- In many cases, the witnesses are not able to come to the court and make their statement as the other party is too strong and scares them of the consequences. e-Courts can help in dealing with such cases.

Limitations of virtual judiciary:

- E-courts in India is an endless and complicating process. The process of e-filing a document is a difficult process. All the evidence cannot be produced in a digital format.
- Lack of techno legal expertise is the main reason for the poor status of e-courts in India. With the absence of techno legal expertise, electronic courts cannot be established in India. The country requires more techno legal e-court centers so that the project of e-court can achieve success.
- The project of e-court involves a lot of expenditure. It involves the use of a lot of computers and infrastructures. In the long run, e-courts may face the issue of lack of funds.
- Hackers are getting stronger with every passing day. The possibility of e-Courts getting hacked in such a case cannot be denied.

Measures needed:

- It is critical to draw up a well-defined and pre-decided framework as it can help in laying a concrete roadmap and direction to the e-courts scheme of India.
- To achieve this, the government must establish an effective task force consisting of judges, technologists, court administrators, skill developers and system analysts to draw up a blueprint for institutionalizing online access to justice.
- Such a task force must be charged with the responsibility of establishing hardware, software and IT systems for courts; examining application of artificial intelligence benefiting from the data.
base generated through e-courts projects; establishing appropriate e-filing systems and procedures.

- Creating skill training and recognition for paralegals to understand and to help advocates and others to access the system to file their cases and add to their pleadings and documents as the case moves along.
- Once the blueprint is ready, the High Courts across the country may refer the same to the Rule Committee of the High Court to frame appropriate rules to operationalise the e-court system.
- One aspect that needs to be focused on is the deployment of a robust security system that provides secure access to case information for appropriate parties. The security of e-courts infrastructure and system is of paramount importance.
- Also, user friendly e-courts mechanism, which is simple and easily accessible by the common public will encourage litigants to use such facilities in India.
- The government must also make dedicated efforts in the training of personnel to maintain all the e-data.
- Also, conducting training sessions to familiarize the Judges with the e-courts framework and procedure can give a huge impetus to the successful running of e-courts.

**Way forward for Indian litigation and arbitration:**

- In India, a significant amount of time is spent in resolving disputes which has been the real bane of the Indian judiciary system. The e-courts project, if implemented, would go a long way in saving costs and time for the litigants.
- The present government is taking active steps to establish e-courts all over India. All these government efforts will result in providing quick and cost effective solutions to the litigants.
- The judiciary system in India with the help of e-courts can overcome the challenges and make the service delivery mechanism transparent and cost efficient.
- Further, the e-court project also requires the executive and the judiciary to reaffirm their resolve to support a speedy, efficient and quality justice delivery in the country. It is also important to discuss steps required to surmount the various challenges facing the justice system.

**Discuss the need to revamp procedural law in the Indian judiciary to make it more efficient.**

*Reference: Indian polity by Laxmikant*

*Why this question:*
The question is based on the article where the author of the article argues for the need to revamp procedural law in the judiciary to make it more efficient.

*Key demand of the question:*
Explain in detail the need to revamp procedural law in the Indian judiciary to make it more efficient and suggest as to what needs to be done to achieve the same.

*Directive:*
**Discuss** – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

*Structure of the answer:*
**Introduction:**
Briefly explain how the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown have affected the functioning of courts and tribunals.

**Body:**
Firstly to highlight the problems facing the Judiciary one has to explain the existing structure of the entire judicial system and its working. Explain the subordinate courts; 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. Explain the case of supreme court. Give suggestions to improve functioning of the judiciary.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction
It is time to dispassionately examine the functioning of courts and signs of an increasing loss of public faith in the judiciary, despite individual presiding judges setting occasional examples by disposing of even serious criminal cases in mere months. Surely such green-shoots are replicable.

Body
Need to revamp procedural law in the Indian Judiciary : Issues existing

- As of April 2018, there are over three crore cases pending across the Supreme Court, the High Courts, and the subordinate courts (including district courts).

- 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.

- Currently, among the major contributing factors to delays in bringing cases to court and in fact, meting out justice are lack of manpower, transparency and inadequate data on pending cases. These challenges are making it difficult to streamline India’s justice system.

- More often than not, witnesses turn hostile (due to threats) in cases of murder, assault and rape. This is due to non-implementation of witness protection or revealing their identity.

- The government is the biggest litigant.
  - Poorly drafted orders have resulted in contested tax revenues equal to 4.7 per cent of the GDP and it is rising.
  - Crowding out investment: Roughly Rs 50,000 crore are locked up in stalled projects and investments are reducing. Both these complications have arisen because of injunctions and stay orders granted by the courts primarily due to poorly drafted and poorly reasoned orders.

- The collegium method of appointing judges is opaque, and time consuming. The Memorandum of Procedure has not been finalised even today.

- Expansion of Discretionary Jurisdictions: Though economic cases are complex, in some cases increased overload is due to the expansion of discretionary jurisdictions by Courts, without any countervailing measures that either balance the scope of other jurisdictions or improve overall administration and efficiency.
  - The higher judiciary has transformed into Courts of first rather than last resort, and have consistently fused constitutional law and tort law, dissolving traditional distinctions between public and private law.
  - The immediate fallout of this expansion has been the steady de-legitimization of the capacity of lower courts’ private law mechanisms.
Justice denied

- At times, due to the prosecution’s failure to establish the charges beyond reasonable doubt, an alleged criminal of limited means gets acquitted, but only after suffering incarceration for a term that ends up being longer than the maximum punishment under law.
- But, resourceful defendants are seen escaping culpability not necessarily on merit, but due to their ability to quickly manage judicial processes to their advantage. There is something seriously wrong with the country’s judicial eco-system.

Solution for an efficient judiciary

- Scientific Case Listing: 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.
  - The existing infrastructure is enough to enable this. Listing can be done before the court only in cases requiring urgent interim intervention from the court, while the matter is pending procedural completion, after verification of urgency by a judicial officer or a judge upon oral or written application.
  - Circulation of the cases to be listed in advance (say, two weeks before listing) will give advocates enough time to take instructions from clients and prepare for arguments.

- Special Leave Petition: The Supreme Court was never intended to be a court of appeal, barring such appeals which specific statutes provide for.
  - The High Courts are usually meant to be the final courts of appeal. Instead, SLPs are now being treated as the last round of appeal.
  - A simple solution would be to do away with immediate oral hearing of SLPs.
  - The Supreme Court Rules could be amended to provide for a structure of prehearing 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.

- Technology as enabler: Collaboration technology, in particular video conferencing can be the saviour to revamp India’s legal processes.
  - It provides those critical communication links between courtrooms, offices, visitation centres or prisons, while decreasing travel time, security risks, and inmate transportation costs for the judicial system.

- Enable better witness protection services for victims of crimes – those who have been battered or abused or those who have escaped from human trafficking who may be too traumatized or threatened to face the accused in court can use solutions such as video conference to feel safe and secure.
• **Case Study:** Take, for example, the high court of Punjab and Haryana which has jurisdiction over the lower courts of Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh.
  - Almost a decade ago, it set up a **case management system**—i.e. a mechanism to monitor every case from filing to disposal.
  - It also began to **categorize writ petitions based on their urgency.**
  - In addition, it set **annual targets and action plans for judicial officers** to dispose of old cases, and began a **quarterly performance review** to ensure that cases were not disposed of with undue haste.
  - All these measures **ushered in a degree of transparency and accountability** in the system, the results of which are now apparent.

**Conclusion**

Delays in administering justice, a build-up of case files, and overworked legal teams have been long-standing issues in the Indian judicial system. However, fast forward to today, thanks to advancements in network connectivity, technology and the government’s focus on digitization, the country has the opportunity to be one of the most efficient legal systems in the world.

**Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.**

Discuss the role played by and the key objectives of integrated disease surveillance programme (IDSP) of government of India. (250 words)

*Reference: Hindustan Times*

**Introduction:**

The Integrated Disease Surveillance Project was launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, in assistance with the World Bank, in 2004. It continued as the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) during 12th Plan (2012–17) under the National Health Mission with a domestic budget. Under it, a **Central Surveillance Unit (CSU) at Delhi, State Surveillance Units (SSU) at all State/Union Territories (UTs) headquarters and District Surveillance Units (DSU) at all Districts** have been established. Recently, the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme has been activated as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Body:**

The objectives of the Integrated Diseases Surveillance Project (IDSP) are:

- To strengthen/maintain **decentralized laboratory based IT enabled disease surveillance system** for epidemic prone diseases to monitor disease trends
- To **detect and respond to outbreaks in early rising phase** through trained Rapid Response Team (RRTs).
- Prevention of further transmission of disease
- Limiting mortality and morbidity
- Assessment of public health importance
Analysis of trends of a particular disease’s outbreak
Demonstrate the importance of public health interventions
Allocate funds for healthcare
Monitoring of preventive and control measures
Identification of risk factors and developing hypothesis
Identification of high groups and geographical areas

Components of the programme:
Integration and decentralization of surveillance activities through establishment of surveillance units at Centre, State and District level.
Human Resource Development – Training of State Surveillance Officers, District Surveillance Officers, Rapid Response Team and other Medical and Paramedical staff on principles of disease surveillance.
Use of Information Communication Technology for collection, collation, compilation, analysis and dissemination of data.
Strengthening of public health laboratories.
Inter sectoral Co-ordination for zoonotic diseases
Under Integrated Disease Surveillance Project (IDSP), financial and technical assistance is provided to State Governments for implementation of disease surveillance activities.

The achievements and major findings under IDSP include the following:
IDSP has established State Surveillance Units and District Surveillance Units in all the states and District headquarters.
Rapid Response Teams (RRT) for investigation of outbreaks and response thereto have been formed in all district and state headquarters.
Nation-wide IT network has been established for monitoring disease surveillance activities
24X7 call centre (toll free no. 1075) has been established for reporting unusual health events by the community.
Over 82% districts are electronically generating weekly surveillance reports, for early warning signals and effective timely response to disease outbreaks.
799 disease outbreaks have been reported during 2009.

Role played by the IDSP:
Helps in Controlling the Disease Outbreak
Data is collected on epidemic prone diseases on a weekly basis.
The weekly data gives information on the disease trends and seasonality of diseases.
The information is collected on three specified reporting formats, namely “S” (suspected cases), “P” (presumptive cases) and “L” (laboratory confirmed cases) filled by Health Workers, Clinicians and Laboratory staff respectively.
Whenever there is a rising trend of illnesses in any area, it is investigated by the RRT to diagnose and control the outbreak.
Identification of healthcare facilities in affected area will help to estimate their efficiency and enhance them, if needed.
Cluster wise approach can be applied as some of the disease such as one caused by Nipah was limited to an area only.
Real time monitoring will lead to better coordination between different levels of government and different agencies. Health, a subject mentioned in state list is always a matter of bone contention between center and state.

**Conclusion:**

Real-Time monitoring of the disease and victims by the IDSP will help to cease the spread of communicable disease. Identification of area affected by a particular disease along with facilities available to combat that disease will help to contain that disease in that region.

Discuss the lacunae with respect to privacy concerns and transparency in administering the Aarogya Setu app, what should be the ideal way that the govt. should follow to ensure privacy is not infringed?(250 words)

**Reference:** Indian Express

**Why this question:**
The author of the article presents a critical examination of the privacy concerns associated with Aarogya Setu app.

**Key demand of the question:**
Explain lacunae with respect to privacy concerns and transparency in administering the Aarogya Setu app, and suggest what should be the ideal way that the govt. should follow to ensure privacy is not infringed.

**Directive:**
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**
Present briefly the concerns that have been making news around the Aarogya Setu app.

**Body:**
To start with explain the loopholes with the app. It breaches the fundamental right to privacy, it must have legislative sanction. Unclear safeguards against data theft and other breaches. App not open source; raises concerns. Take hints from the article and list down the issues and concerns involved. Suggest solutions to address the problem.

**Conclusion:**
Conclude with way forward.

**Introduction:**
Aarogya Setu is a COVID-19 tracking mobile application developed by the National Informatics Centre that comes under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India. The purpose of this app is to spread the awareness and to connect essential health services to the people of India. It will calculate risk based on the user’s interaction with others, using cutting edge Bluetooth technology, algorithms and artificial intelligence.

**Body:**

**Objectives of Aarogya Setu:**
The Aarogya Setu is developed keeping in mind the following objectives:

- To spread awareness of the novel Coronavirus outbreak among Indian citizens.
To augment the Government of India’s initiatives, particularly the Department of Health, in proactively reaching out to the users and informing them about the risks, best practices and relevant advisories relating to the containment of COVID-19.

To establish a connection between the government and the people of India for health services, facilities and updates from the health ministry nationally and state-wise.

Key Features:

- The application uses Bluetooth and GPS of a smart phone to inform the user if he is in a radius of 6 feet from a COVID-19 infected person.
- The application also provides information about the best practices and advisories regarding containment of the virus.
- The application is available in 11 languages.
- In order to keep the application running, one has to keep their GPS and Bluetooth ON always.
- The application asks for name, gender, profession, travel history and profession.
- The data extracted are to be shared only to Government of India according to the terms and conditions of the application.

Issues posed:

- Legal loopholes:
  - The app exists in the privacy law vacuum that is India.
  - With no legislation that spells out in detail how the online privacy of Indians is to be protected, Aarogya Setu users have little choice but to accept the privacy policy provided by the government.
  - The app’s Terms of Service (TOS) confer blanket limited liability on the government. In cases of data theft, there is no accountability to the users.
  - The policy goes into some detail on where and how long the data will be retained, but it leaves the language around who will have access to it vague. There is no protocol for deletion of data.
  - No specification on the issue of how the government will use data if the data gets shared with the government of India.
  - Ever-changing rules add to the problem. On April 14, the app updated its privacy policy without notifying users, despite the privacy policy explicitly mandating the same. Such actions do not inspire trust.
  - Additionally, there was also a question of proportionality with the app and whether it will be as effective as envisaged in containing the Covid-19 outbreak.
  - India’s situation is different from countries like Singapore, where a good number of people have smartphones.
  - In India compared to its population, smartphone users are very less which means very few people will be able to download the app.

- Technical loopholes:
The unique digital identity in Aarogya Setu is a static number, which increases the probability of identity breaches.

The app allows the government continuous access to an individual’s location and demographic data.

The closed source architecture of the app violates transparency principles and this government’s own policies.

The abundance of data collected is also potentially problematic. Aarogya Setu uses both Bluetooth as well as GPS reference points, which could be seen as an overkill.

The forums such as the Internet Freedom Foundation and the Software Freedom Law Center have raised is that the Aarogya Setu app is something of a black box. There is no documentation publicly available on the app.

Way forward:

- The app privacy policy needs detailed clarification on data collection, its storage and uses. A legislative sanction to this effect will be a great step forward.
- The Government of India must specify how it will deal with the app’s data and how long it will retain the server side data.
- According to the Supreme Court in the Puttaswamy judgement (2017), the right to privacy is a fundamental right and it is necessary to protect personal data as an essential facet of informational privacy.
- Singapore’s TraceTogether app was made open source, thus allowing researchers and experts to test the architecture and suggest measures to correct vulnerabilities.
- A better approach against unique digital identity would be constantly-changing digital identification keys like what Google and Apple deploy in their joint contact tracing technology.
- With the launch of this app, the governments seek to limit the spread of the Covid-19 cases in India via technology and AI as well as, help create self-awareness among the citizens with relevant information on the infection.

What is ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan’? Discuss the significance of self-reliance and self-efficiency in the times of crisis like the COVID pandemic. (250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why this question:
Prime Minister announced a special economic package and gave a clarion call for Atmanirbhar Bharat. He noted that this package, taken together with earlier announcements by the government during COVID crisis and decisions taken by RBI, is to the tune of Rs 20 lakh crore, which is equivalent to almost 10% of India’s GDP. Thus the question.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the key objectives and features of ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan’ and bring out the importance of self-reliance and self-efficiency in current times of the pandemic.

Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Straightaway start by explaining the coming of ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan’.
Body:
To start with explain the fact that the definition of self-reliance has undergone a change in the globalized world and clarified that when the country talks about self-reliance, it is different from being self-centered. Discuss the 5 pillars of self-reliance. Then explain the key features of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan. The package will also focus on land, labour, liquidity and laws, Factors of Production. It will cater to various sections including cottage industry, MSMEs, laborers, middle class, and industries, among others.

Conclusion:
Conclude that self-reliance will prepare the country for tough competition in the global supply chain, and it is important that the country wins this competition. The package will also focus on empowering the poor, laborers, migrants, etc., both from organized and unorganized sectors.

Introduction:
Prime Minister recently announced an economic package totaling Rs 20 lakh crore to tide over the Covid-19 crisis under ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan’. The Rs 20 lakh crore package includes the government’s recent announcements on supporting key sectors and measures by Reserve Bank of India. The economic package would be around the 10 per cent of the GDP. The package is expected to focus on land, labour, liquidity and laws. It will cater to various sections including cottage industry, MSMEs, labourers, middle class, and industries, among others.

Body:

• A self-reliant India will stand on five pillars viz. Economy, which brings in quantum jump and not incremental change; Infrastructure, which should become the identity of India; System, based on 21st century technology driven arrangements; Vibrant Demography, which is our source of
energy for a self-reliant India; and Demand, whereby the strength of our demand and supply chain should be utilized to full capacity.

- The Self-Reliant India Mission aims towards cutting down import dependence by focusing on substitution while improving safety compliance and quality goods to gain global market share.
- The Mission focuses on the importance of promoting “local” products.

**Significance of self-reliance and self-efficiency in the times of crisis like the COVID pandemic:**

- The coronavirus disease pandemic (Covid-19) has offered India a valuable lesson on the importance of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, and the country, each state within it, each district within every state, and each village within every district must aspire to attain the twin goals.
- The definition of self-reliance has undergone a change in the globalized world and clarified that when the country talks about self-reliance, it is different from being self-centered.
- Self-reliance will prepare the country for tough competition in the global supply chain, and it is important that the country wins this competition. It will not only increase efficiency in various sectors but also ensure quality.
- Global supply chains have been disrupted and all nations have become preoccupied with meeting their own challenges.
- The importance of local manufacturing, local market and local supply chains was realized during pandemic time. All our demands during the crisis were met ‘locally’. Now, it’s time to be vocal about the local products and help these local products become global.
- For instance, the supply chain and global manufacturing controlled by Chinese economy got disrupted due to COVID. Thus there is a need to become self-reliant for essential goods and service like N95 masks, ventilators etc.
- Restrictions on travel and mobility have meant tight controls over the flow of goods, services and labour across international, state and district borders.
- The international economic order is changing; the possibility of greater economic cooperation is diminishing. So the emphasis should be on the need to leverage India’s inner potential.
- India has entered in the period of demographic dividend from 2018 and thus working age population has increased which needs to be employed at home. This helps in capitalizing the Demographic dividend of India.
- With India (1.37bn) set to surpass China (1.43bn) in becoming country with largest population by 2027, it also provides for increasing domestic demand which can be catered with locally produced goods.
- The Self-Reliance neither signifies any exclusionary or isolationist strategies but involves creation of a helping hand to the whole world.
- This is not a rejection of globalisation, but a call for a new form of globalisation — from profit-driven to people-centric which takes into account the needs of labors, vulnerable and have nots.

**Means to achieve the self-reliance and self-sufficiency:**

- 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 will promote business, attract investment, and further strengthen Make in India.
• Local Governments should be playing a key role in supporting the government’s outreach in vast belts of rural India to spread awareness about the coronavirus disease.
• Local governments can undertake door-to-door campaigns; stitched masks; made hand sanitisers for local populations; and provided support to the local administrative and security machinery in both providing basic services to residents and enforcing the lockdown.

Conclusion:
The slowing down economy as well as weaker forces of globalization demands a new path for the New India. Atmanirbhar mission is a bridge for transforming into NEW INDIA which need balancing the interest of capital as well as labor to be effective and efficient.

In the times of COVID pandemic, should the right to bail be made a part of an under trial’s right to life? Analyse the statement in the context of crowded Indian prisons and the challenges they are facing in the current times.(250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why this question:
The question is amidst the issues facing the prisons and their ill-management in the country owing to the effects of COVID spread.

Key demand of the question:
One has to examine whether right to bail be made a part of an under trial’s right to life to resolve the issues that are getting aggravated due to prison crowding.

Directive:
Analyze – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Briefly explain that thousands of new inmates enter prisons across India every week, apart from prison officials who come and go each day. Such entrants, together, pose the gravest risk of spreading Covid-19 to the static prison population.

Body:
To start with, quote some data such as – Indian prison inmates fall essentially in two categories – those convicted of offences and serving a sentence, and the presumptively innocent who bide their time awaiting trial. India’s largest such prison is Delhi’s infamous Tihar, which houses an astounding 17,500 such ‘under trials’. Explain in the situations like COVID why does it become important to make right to bail be made a part of an under trial’s right to life. Present arguments for and against the topic.

Conclusion:
Conclude with solutions.

Introduction:
Following infections inside Mumbai Central Jail, Maharashtra has started temporarily releasing half the prisoners in its jails. The Maharashtra government issued a circular that effectively facilitates the release of half the prisoners lodged in the state’s jails, on temporary bail and emergency parole. Until Thursday, around 7,000 of a targeted 17,000-plus prisoners had been released. States including Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi have recorded Covid-19 cases in their prisons.

Body:
Yes, right to bail for prisoners should be made a part of an under trial's right to life:
Bail, in law, means procurement of release from prison of a person awaiting trial or an appeal, by the deposit of security to ensure his submission at the required time to legal authority.

Article 39-A of the Constitution directs the State to ensure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity and shall, in particular, provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or schemes or in any other way, to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities.

Right to free legal aid or free legal service is an essential fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution. It forms the basis of reasonable, fair and just liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution of India, which says, “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law”.

It must be further noted that a person accused of a bailable offense is arrested or detained without warrant he has a right to be released on bail.

In 2017, the Law Commission of India had recommended that undertrials who have completed a third of their maximum sentence for offences attracting up to seven years of imprisonment be released on bail.

As Justice Krishna Iyer puts it with the full authority of the Supreme Court: “Personal liberty is deprived when bail is refused, is too precious a value of our constitutional system, that the crucial power to negate it is a great trust exercisable not casually but judicially with lively concern for the cost to the individual and the community”.

Bail is a fundamental right. Good reasons, with full explanation in writing must exist for denying bail. By following these norms, it can be said that if a person is denied the right to bail due to any reason, it is the infringement of his right to life and liberty.

A right to bail was not inserted as a right in the constitution of India, but it is quite implicit that it has been devolved as a right under Article 21 as a component of personal liberty.

Committees across the country can recommend release of 14 categories of prisoners, including women and those with severe illnesses.

Challenges faced by prisoners in times of pandemic:

Overcrowding:
- Before the lockdown, the state’s jails were accommodating 50% over their capacity.
- This is much higher than the national average occupancy in central prisons, which on an average house 13 prisoners against a capacity of 10.
- The Maharashtra Prison Department’s report said the capacity in state jails is 23,547 while there were 35,239 prisoners before the lockdown. It warned against an outbreak in other prisons if they are not decongested.
- A total of 1,341 prisons were functional in India as on 30th November, 2018. The total population of prisoners in India was 4.68 lakh against total sanctioned strength of 3.83 lakh.

Poor infrastructure:
- These cramped and crowded jails — mostly British-era central prisons in Maharashtra — are a ticking time bomb for the spread of infectious diseases.
- The barracks are very crowded, so are spaces of eating and cleaning.

Highest number of undertrials:
- India’s under-trial population remains among the highest in the world and more than half of all undertrials were detained for less than six months in 2016.

- **Shortage of Prison Staff**
  - The Prison Department has a perennial average vacancy of 30%-40%. This hinders implementation of Model Prison Manual and various jail reforms.
  - Physical production of an accused for a trial in a court remains far below the aspired 100% in several States, mainly because of unavailability of sufficient police guards for escort and transportation.

- **Unhygienic Food**
  - The preparation of food in kitchens is “primitive and arduous”. The kitchens are congested and unhygienic and the diet has remained unchanged for years now.

**Way forward:**

- The *Supreme Court appointed Justice Amitava Roy (retd.) Committee* has given recommendations to reform prisons.
- The Court appointed the Committee in 2018 to examine the various problems plaguing prisons, from overcrowding to lack of legal advice to convicts to issues of remission and parole.
- **Speedy trial:** Speedy trial remains one of the best ways to remedy the unwarranted phenomenon of overcrowding.
- **Lawyer to prisoner ratio:** There should be at least one lawyer for every 30 prisoners, which is not the case at present.
- **Special courts:** Special fast-track courts should be set up to deal exclusively with petty offences which have been pending for more than five years. Further, accused persons who are charged with petty offences and those granted bail, but who are unable to arrange surety should be released on a Personal Recognizance (PR) Bond.
- **Unified prison management system:** There should be a unified prison management system that has records of all inmates so they don’t have to run from pillar to post for copies of documents like court orders. The project has been recommended by NALSA as well. Also, this project has worked well in Delhi’s Tihar jail.
- **Avoid adjournment:** An adjournment should not be granted in cases where witnesses are present and the concept of plea bargaining, in which accused admits guilt for a lesser sentence, should be promoted.
- **Accommodative Transition:** Every new prisoner should be allowed a free phone call a day to his family members to see him through his first week in jail.
- **Legal aid:** Providing effective legal aid to prisoners and taking steps to provide vocational skills and education to prisoners.
- **Use of ICT:** Use of video-conferencing for trial.
- **Alternatives:** The courts may be asked to use their “discretionary powers” and award sentences like “fine and admonition” if possible instead of sending the offenders to jails.
- **Post-release financial security for prisoners:** Wages that are paid to prisoners who are serving sentences should be increased and should be on par with global benchmarks. So that when they come out, they have some better finances.
• **Skill development of the prisoners:** The major role prisons should play is of reformation and making sure that, once out, inmates are properly integrated into society. That is possible when more skill development programs are introduced in the jails to enhance their chances of earning.

**Conclusion:**

India is the champion of human rights causes all across the world, but the dismal condition of Indian prison reflects the paradox that exists in the Indian criminal justice system. So prison reforms need to see the light of the day, but it must be accompanied by the judicial system reforms and police reforms, as trio forms the pillars of the criminal justice system.

“Labour laws are civilizational goals and cannot be trumped on the excuse of a pandemic”, Do you agree? Critically analyse. (250 words)

*Reference: The Hindu*

**Introduction:**

India is witnessing to another massive tragedy of workers being abandoned by their employers and, above all, by the state. The employers now want the state to reintroduce laissez-faire and a system of indenture for the organised workforce too. This will take away the protection conferred on organised labour by Parliament.

Laissez faire refers to the economic policy of letting owners of industry and business set working conditions without interference. This policy favors a free market unregulated by the government. This theory of Free Market or Free economy was defended by Adam Smith in his book *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776. He argued that the economic liberty guaranteed economic progress. He claimed that government need not interfere in the economy. His famous “The Invisible Hand” metaphor supported this idea.

**Body:**

**The issues faced by labourers:**

- Through the public health crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic, workers are being abandoned by their employers and, above all, by the state.
- The workers’ right to go home was curbed using the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- Adequate provisions were not made available for their food, shelter or medical relief.
- Wage payments were not ensured, and the state’s cash and food relief did not cover most workers.
- When the centre issued orders permitting their return to their home States, state governments responded by delaying travel facilities for the workers to ensure uninterrupted supply of labour for employers.
- Employers now want labour laws to be relaxed.
- The Uttar Pradesh government has issued an ordinance keeping in abeyance almost all labour statutes including laws on maternity benefits and gratuity; the Factories Act, 1948; the Minimum Wages Act, 1948; the Industrial Establishments (Standing Orders) Act, 1946; and the Trade Unions Act, 1926.
- Several States have exempted industries from complying with various provisions of laws.
- The Confederation of Indian Industry has suggested 12-hour work shifts and that governments issue directions to make workers join duty failing which the workers would face penal actions.

**Evolution of Labour Laws in India:**

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Telegram: [https://t.me/insightsIAStips](https://t.me/insightsIAStips)

Youtube: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpoccbCX9GEIwaile4HljwA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpoccbCX9GEIwaile4HljwA)

Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/insightsonindia](https://www.facebook.com/insightsonindia)
The labour laws in India have emerged out of workers’ struggles, which were very much part of the freedom movement against oppressive colonial industrialists.

Since the 1920s there were a series of strikes and agitations for better working conditions. Several trade unionists were arrested under the Defence of India Rules.

The workers’ demands were supported by our political leaders.

Britain was forced to appoint the Royal Commission on Labour, which gave a report in 1935.


This resulted in reforms, which are forerunners to the present labour enactments.

The indentured plantation labour saw relief in the form of the Plantations Labour Act, 1951.

By a democratic legislative process, the Parliament stepped in to protect labour.

**Labour laws have protected the workers:**

- By a democratic legislative process, Parliament stepped in to protect labour.
- The **Factories Act** lays down eight-hour work shifts, with overtime wages, weekly offs, leave with wages and measures for health, hygiene and safety.
- The **Industrial Disputes Act** provides for workers’ participation to resolve wage and other disputes through negotiations so that strikes/lockouts, unjust retrenchments and dismissals are avoided.
- The **Minimum Wages Act** ensures wages below which it is not possible to subsist.
- These enactments further the **Directive Principles of State Policy** and protect the right to life and the right against exploitation under Articles 21 and 23.
- **Trade unions** have played critical roles in transforming the life of a worker from that of servitude to one of dignity.
- In the scheme of socio-economic justice, the labour unions cannot be dispensed with.

**Current issues with the labour laws:**

- The orders of the State governments lack statutory support.
- Labour is a concurrent subject in the Constitution and most pieces of labour legislation are Central enactments.
- The U.P. government has said that labour laws will not apply for the next three years.
- laws to protect basic human rights covering migrant workers, minimum wages, maternity benefits, gratuity, etc. have been suspended.
- The Constitution does not envisage approval by the President of a State Ordinance which makes a whole slew of laws enacted by Parliament inoperable in the absence of corresponding legislations on the same subject.
- Almost all labour contracts are now governed by statutes, settlements or adjudicated awards arrived through democratic processes in which labour has been accorded at least procedural equality. Such procedures ensure progress of a nation.
- The orders and ordinances issued by the State governments are undemocratic and unconstitutional. The existing conditions of labour will have to be continued.
- Global corporations had their origins in instruments of colonialism and their legacy was inherited by Indian capital post-Independence.
- The resurgence of such a colonial mindset is a danger to the society and the well-being of millions and puts at risk the health and safety of not only the workforce but their families too.
- In the **Life Insurance Corporation v. D. J. Bahadur & Ors** case, the Supreme Court highlighted that any changes in the conditions of service can be only through a democratic process of negotiations or legislation.
Conclusion:

In the unequal bargaining power between capital and labour, regulatory laws provide a countervailing balance and ensure the dignity of labour. Governments have a constitutional duty to ensure just, humane conditions of work and maternity benefits. The health and strength of the workers cannot be abused by force of economic necessity. Labour laws are thus civilizational goals and cannot be trumped on the excuse of a pandemic.

Account on the issues being faced by the Power DISCOMS and elaborate on how the proposed Electricity Act 2020 will further aggravate their crisis and alter the power of states. (250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why this question:
The article discusses in what way the proposal to reform a power tariff policy and an amendment to the Electricity act-2003 will erode the concurrent status given to the electricity in the constitution.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the DISCOM troubles already present and how the newly proposed Electricity Act 2020 can further aggravate the crisis.

Directive:
Account – Weigh up to what extent something is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant research but also remember to point out any flaws and counter-arguments as well. Conclude by stating clearly how far you are in agreement with the original proposition.

Structure of the answer:

Introduction:
Briefly highlight the troubles that the DISCOMS are facing in the recent past.

Body:
In the last 25 years there is an increasing cost of power purchases by the Discoms, making the costs almost 80% of the total costs of Discoms. List down the issues faced by them in detail. Then, examine the proposals in the Electricity Act 2020. Explain that the amendment to the Electricity Bill and the reforms in power tariff policy by the centre takes the power of the states on a basic necessity “electricity”, and further burden the Discoms.

Conclusion:
Conclude with what should be the way forward.

Introduction:
The power distribution companies (or DISCOMS) have been under financial stress and there have been repeated attempts at improving their condition through various initiatives and schemes from the governments. Part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat package announced by Finance Minister was a Rs 90,000-crore liquidity injection into DISCOMS. The move is aimed at helping the DISCOMS clear their dues with GENCOS (or electricity generation companies), who in turn can clear their outstanding dues with suppliers, such as coal miners, easing some of the working capital woes of Coal India Ltd and contract miners.

Body:
Issues faced by DISCOMs:

- **Poor financial situation of DISCOMs:**
  - The key issue with the power sector currently is the continuing problem of the poor financial situation of state DISCOMS.
  - This has been affecting their ability to buy power for supply, and the ability to invest in improving the distribution infrastructure. Consequently, this impacts the quality of electricity that consumers receive.

- **High costs of Power purchase:**
  - The cost of power purchase has risen to 80% of the total costs of State DISCOMs. The two-part tariff policy has been mandated by the Ministry of Power since the 1990s.
  - DISCOMS essentially purchase power from generation companies through power purchase agreements (PPAs), and then supply it to their consumers in their area of distribution.
  - As more private developers came forward to invest in generation, DISCOMs were required to sign long-term power purchase agreements (PPA), committing to pay a fixed cost to the power generator, irrespective of whether the State draws the power or not, and a variable charge for fuel when it does.

- **Over-optimistic projections:**
  - The PPAs signed by DISCOMs were based on over-optimistic projection of power demand estimated by the Central Electricity Authority (CEA).
  - Due to this, DISCOMs locked into long-term contracts end up servicing perpetual fixed costs for power not drawn.
Due to the CEA’s overestimates, the all-India plant load factor of coal power plants is only 56%. This leads to underutilization of available capacity and increases the operating cost of the generation plants which invariably leads to higher costs for the electricity.

**Shortfall of cash collection:**
- Due to the perennial cash collection shortfall, often due to payment delays from consumers, DISCOMs are unable to make timely payments for their energy purchases from the generators. This gap/shortfall is met by borrowings (debt), government subsidies, and possibly, through reduced expenditure.
- This increases the DISCOMS cost of borrowing (interest), which is inevitably borne by the consumer.

**Renewable energy factor:**
- From 2010, solar and wind power plants were declared as “must-run”, requiring DISCOMs to absorb all renewable power, even in excess of mandatory renewable purchase obligations. The decrease in thermal generation to accommodate all available green power, entailed further idle fixed costs payable on account of two-part tariff PPAs.
- DISCOMs are having to integrate large volumes of solar and wind energy power at relatively high tariffs (5 Rs./kwh in Karnataka and 6 Rs./kwh in Tamil Nadu for solar power).
- In 2015 the Centre announced an ambitious target of 175 gigawatts of renewable power by 2022, offering a slew of concessions to renewable energy developers, and aggravating the burden of DISCOMs.

**Significant changes proposed in the Electricity Act, 2020 are:**

- **Sub-franchisees under the DISCOM service areas:**
  - This in an attempt to usher in markets in the sector which the government hopes will be more efficient and accountable.

- **Greater concessions to renewable power developers:**
  - This is in line with India’s climate action initiatives and to increase India’s energy security by making use of the renewable energy potential of India.

- **Eliminate the cross-subsidies in retail power tariff:**
  - It means that each consumer category would be charged what it costs to service that category.
  - This would help reduce the steep cross-subsidies in electricity being borne by the industries which make their goods and services costly in the global market.
  - The elimination of cross subsidy would entail more efficient usage of electricity.
  - The provision for direct transfer of subsidies would reduce leakage losses.

- **Appointment by a central selection committee:**
  - State regulators will henceforth be appointed by a central selection committee.
• This is meant to ensure uniformity in appointment processes across states and also ensure the availability of a larger talent pool from across the country for appointments.

**Establishment of a centralised Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority:**
• This would help ensure faster resolution of disputes and entail lower pendency and associated costs.

**Measures needed:**

- Discom business needs to be fundamentally restructured.
- Governance needs to be improved with greater resilience to political influence.
- Robust mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure tariff rationalization and follow-through on subsequent increases.
- Market-friendly electricity reforms need to be introduced and enforced. This includes expanding the role of short-term markets, as well as strict enforcement of PPAs to assure investors and developers of the legal sanctity of contracts signed with discos.
- Streamlining the open access process, with the fair application of additional surcharges will boost the demand for renewable energy from the commercial and industrial sectors.
- Discos will have to be pushed harder to invest in technical solutions and infrastructure upgrade such as feeder separation, installing smart meters and undertaking detailed data collection and analysis.
- Strict Actions to curb Electricity theft and other actions those lead to Losses to DISCOMs.
- Integrating UDAY scheme with Make in India and Startup India to ensure overall Development.
- Integrating UDAY with KUSUM to increase amount of electricity to DISCOMS.

**Conclusion:**
The Centre should also look at altering the incentive structures of states in order to ensure compliance. Stiff penalties need to be imposed for not meeting the targets laid out in the new scheme. DISCOMS must therefore, buy cost-efficient power for consumers, ensure supply reliability with quality by minimizing losses/leakages, accurately meter, bill, and collect payments from the consumers, and thereby, enable timely payments to the generators. Measures for improving viability of distribution companies, including tariff rationalization and timely release of subsidies along with improved governance should also be looked into.

**Development processes and the development industry —the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.**

“Civil society, and voluntary and non-government organisations constitute the backbone of the collective articulation of citizen interest in a democracy”, Analyse the statement applied to the current COVID times.(250 words)

Reference: [Indian Express](https://www.indiantelevision.com)

**Why this question:**
The article brings to us the importance of Civil society, and voluntary and non-government organisations in preserving the interests of citizens in a democracy.

**Key demand of the question:**
One has to account for the present Covid situation and the role of Civil society, and voluntary and non-government organisations amidst it.

**Directive:**

Analyze – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**

Briefly explain the current situation facing the entire country and the world.

**Body:**

To start with, explain that the biggest source of strength now is the partnerships amidst nature and scale of the crisis which the COVID-19 pandemic has led us to. Then talk about the role being played by NGOs in the country. An outstanding contribution of NGOs was in developing communication strategies in different vernaculars which went a long way in taking awareness measures to the community level. Explain that the crisis has brought out the best in the start-up space. Many of them have risen to the occasion and accelerated the development of low cost, scalable, and quick solutions.

**Conclusion:**

Conclude that civil society, and voluntary and non-government organisations constitute the backbone of the collective articulation of citizen interest in a democracy. As facilitators, mediators, and advocates of this interest, they have put people before everything else during this crisis.

**Introduction:**

Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant has written to over 92,000 NGOs appealing them to assist the government in identifying Covid-19 hotspots and delivering services to vulnerable groups. Kant, who is heading the Empowered Group (EG 6) on coordinating with private sector NGOs and international organizations, has also written to all chief secretaries urging them to instruct the local administration at the district level to utilize the physical and human resources made available by NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs).

**Body:**

**Importance of the NGOs, CSOs during these crisis times:**

- The fight against COVID-19 needed as many hands as were available.
- The job was too big for the government to handle alone.
- The strategy was to leverage vertical and horizontal partnerships: Vertical partnerships, which the stakeholders have built within their organizations and horizontal partnerships, which the government has institutionalised with stakeholders.
- The NGOs, given their deep connect with spatial and sectoral issues, were a natural partner in this endeavour.
- There is nobody better placed than the NGOs to understand the pulse at the grassroots and engage closely with communities.
- The approach was to leverage the strength and reach of the local NGOs in identifying priority areas for action and avoid duplicity of efforts.
- The NGO leaderships created momentum throughout their networks and delivered the much needed response.
They also brought to the attention of the group the problems from the grassroots.

Multiple agencies of international development organizations designed and executed joint response initiatives, leveraging their presence across the country.

Some of the good deeds done by CSOs, NGOs during the COVID-19:

They have been actively setting up community kitchens, creating awareness about prevention, and physical distancing, providing shelter to the homeless, the daily wage workers, supporting government efforts in setting up health camps and in deputing volunteers to deliver services to the elderly, persons with disabilities, children, and others.

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They have been actively setting up community kitchens, creating awareness about prevention, and physical distancing, providing shelter to the homeless, the daily wage workers, supporting government efforts in setting up health camps and in deputing volunteers to deliver services to the elderly, persons with disabilities, children, and others.

An outstanding contribution of NGOs was in developing communication strategies in different vernaculars which went a long way in taking awareness measures to the community level.

Akshaya Patra, Rama Krishna Mission, Tata Trusts, Piramal Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Action Aid, International Red Cross Society, Prayas, Help-age India, SEWA, Sulabh International, Charities Aid Foundation of India, Gaudia Math, Bachpan Bachao Andolan, the Salvation Army, and Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India are some partners who have embodied the whole-of-society approach in COVID-19 response management.

Apart from volunteers, who are also disseminating information and awareness along with distribution of food, nearly 1,000 “expert” volunteers have been deployed for activities that are commensurate with their skill sets, qualifications, and experience.

While some are working directly with beneficiaries, many are working with government departments that are involved in relief work that include distribution of dry rations and prepared food.

So far, they have accounted for about 2.8 lakh cooked meals and about 1.69 lakh dry ration kits.

While the Tata Group is helping convert C.V. Raman Nagar Hospital in Bengaluru into a COVID-19 isolation hospital, the University of Trans disciplinary Health Sciences and Technology and Bosch are providing a 100-bed hospital for COVID-19.

The Azim Premji Foundation is involved in relief work in 10 districts in Karnataka.

Among other relief materials that the State has received include, 50,000 bed sheets and pillow covers, 50,000 units of insulins, 64,000 biscuit packets, 11,000 litres of sanitisers, 15 lakh soaps, 5.65 lakh N-95 masks, 1.5 lakh 3-ply masks, 67,000 strips of peridol tablets, thermometers, air beds, wheel chairs, X ray viewer box, PPE kits, safety protection spectacles and hand gloves among many others.

Start-ups have also pitched in with various efforts:

- Many of them have risen to the occasion and accelerated the development of low cost, scalable, and quick solutions. The results have been promising.
- AgVa accelerated the development of ventilators which are low-cost, mobile, low on power consumption and require minimal training for operators.
- Biodesign has developed a robotic product called ResperAid, which enables mechanised use of manual ventilators.
- Kaenaat has developed highly portable ventilators which can be used to serve two patients simultaneously and has a built-in battery, oxygen concentrator, and steriliser cabinet. The
products of a few non-ventilator start-ups too came to the aid of the COVID-19 fighting machinery.

- The AI-enabled analysis of chest X-Rays developed by Qure.ai enables large-scale screening to identify potential cases.
- GIS and geo-fencing technologies by Dronamaps enabled information cluster strategies for hotspots.
- AI-powered online doctor consultation and telemedicine platform by Mfine connects diagnostics labs and pharmacies with doctors and patients.
- The AI-enabled thermal imaging camera developed by Staqu facilitated large-scale screening at low cost.
- These developments strengthen the argument that low-cost and scalable solutions designed and developed domestically must drive our country’s transformation.

**Conclusion:**

Civil society, and voluntary and non-government organizations constitute the backbone of the collective articulation of citizen interest in a democracy. As facilitators, mediators, and advocates of this interest, they have put people before everything else during this crisis. Their resource limitations did not slow them down in reaching to those in vulnerable situations. The support provided by NGOs to government initiatives has been timely and invaluable, and their commitment unshaken. They also have worked hand-in-hand with the private sector. We are certain that the vertical and horizontal partnerships built over the decades and strengthened during the joint fight against this pandemic will deliver greater results in times to come.

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

Discuss the importance of protection of basic civil rights amidst the present lockdown scenario and also comment upon the need for a comprehensive law on epidemics in post Covid-19 situation. (250 words)

**Reference:** Hindustan Times

**Introduction:**

Covid-19 pandemic has raised a number of challenges across the globe; practically in different spheres of administration, border crossings, health services, civic behaviour, technology’ diplomacy and so on. Country after country is struggling with the tough choice between saving lives vs saving livelihoods. In a large and diverse country such as India, the challenges are even more complicated, particularly when public health is not a central or even a concurrent subject but purely a state subject.

**Body:**

India declared a complete nationwide lockdown for a month becoming one of the first democracies in the world to opt for this stringent measure. There was a string of criticism and concerns related to it.
Importance of protection of basic civil rights amidst the present lockdown scenario:

- The post covid-19 world will not be same again.
- Further evidences show that due to increased climate change effects, epidemics and pandemics through various means like Zoonotic diseases is a reality.
- The lockdown, however, does not come without a fair share of problems of its own, the most pertinent is centered around the protection of basic civil rights in this lockdown.
- People at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid, especially migrant workers have been the worst hit by the lockdown.
- India, with its vast territory, large but extremely diverse population, and low literacy levels, poses a special kind of challenge to a government trying to develop a nationwide solution to tackle the epidemic.
- The reckless disregard to the lockdown by some people and the numerous instances of rumour mongering have been extremely problematic for the administration to maintain law and order across the country.
- This presents an extremely peculiar position where the government, on the one hand, has to ensure the basic civil rights of people, and on the other, has to curb the outbreak of the disease.
- Though it might be too early to call, but from the data available, one can easily deduce that countries which have opted for ‘slightly authoritarian measures’, like Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, despite their proximity to China have prevailed, while countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy either due to their lax or vacillated approach have succumbed to the virus.
- A cursory inference of this data easily invokes the dogma of whether “desperate times require desperate measures”, meaning whether and to what extent should the government impose restrictions on civil rights to curb the pandemic.
- In such testing times, where the entire scenario can be narrowed down to the equation of liberties vs lives, a hybrid approach that encompasses the spirit of both sides should be applied.
- Drawing the line in such cases, however, becomes an arduous task.
- This implies that while certain fundamental rights, such as the right to religion or the right to expression can be restricted, the restriction in all such cases shall be reasonable and open to judicial scrutiny.
- The recent case of T. Ganesh Kumar vs Union of India captures the essence of this quandary, where the Madras High Court rightly dismissed a petition that sought a ban on newspapers.
- The current law governing during epidemics is the colonial-era Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, which leaves much to be desired. The four-page long law is dotted with ambiguous and open-ended wording.

The need for a comprehensive law on epidemics arises from the deficiencies in the current laws governing during epidemics:

- The biggest deficiency of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 is its failure to provide an outline of the basic civil rights which the government needs to ensure during the epidemic.
- The act is neither successful in laying out the course of action, nor in describing the rights of the citizens in such a situation.
- That combined with its excessive reliance on Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (where the maximum punishment is six months’ imprisonment or a thousand rupees) for penal punishment in cases of violation, presents an extremely haphazard state of affairs.
The effect of these shortcomings in the statute is also indicated in several states invoking the National Security Act (NSA) against people who violated the lockdown norms and potentially, put others in harm’s way.

However, maintaining the charges of NSA, within the courtroom can be extremely challenging. The Supreme Court in the case of Vikram Singh vs Union of India has held that the punishment must be proportionate to the offence committed, and conviction under an act like NSA requires an exceptionally high level of threshold.

Way forward:

The best remedy to successfully tackle the current epidemic and prepare for the future lies in modifying or rather creating a comprehensive legislation that specializes in dealing with such cases.

A law that provides a detailed road map of the course of action and a clear demarcation between rights and liberties; the ones that may be restricted by the State and the ones that cannot be restricted.

Swiss law model:

- Quite like the recent Ordinance on Measures to Combat the Coronavirus (Covid-19 Ordinance 2) promulgated by The Swiss Federal Council that has been enacted to take steps to contain spread of the disease.
- It helps mobilize the capacities required to manage the epidemic, particularly to maintain the conditions required to provide the population with adequate care and a sufficient supply of therapeutic products.
- The Ordinance has specific provisions for border crossings, export controls for protective equipment, provisions for health care and also measures that apply to population, organizations and institutions.
- The Swiss Federal Council Ordinance also provides for a three-year jail term for violators.

It would do India well to have a comprehensive health epidemic legislation for the country.

Mental health is not a priority area for policy makers even today, in this context account for the economic aspects of mental health.(250 words)

Reference: Hindustan Times

Why this question:
The author talks about the need to recognise mental health as a key determinant in controlling the aspects of economy in the near future and the need for urgently recognising it.

Key demand of the question:
Explain why the policy makers often tend to ignore Mental health as a key parameter in determining the overall health of the nation. Bring out the economic aspects of mental health in detail.

Directive:
Account – Weigh up to what extent something is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant research but also remember to point out any flaws and counter-arguments as well. Conclude by stating clearly how far you are in agreement with the original proposition.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Present briefly importance of mental health in general.

Body:

Explain the current situation; the effect of Corona pandemic on the mental health of the entire country. Despite it being a proven point that, there are definite gains by investing in mental health and we can make a measurable difference, unfortunately the investment on mental health continues to be substantially low worldwide. One must discuss the burden due to mental illness, costs of mental illness, and consequences of mental illness on the labour market, with emphasis on current scenario in India.

Conclusion:

Conclude with solutions to address the situation. The negative economic consequences of mental illness greatly exceed the costs of treatment. Thus it is important to treat mental illness.

Introduction:

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. (WHO) With over 18% of India’s population aged 10-17, the future of the country will be driven by this segment.

The isolation and fear in this lockdown era is driving an escalating nervousness among many people. Not just those with pre-existing conditions like anxiety, depression and OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder), but also the elderly who are struggling with new levels of loneliness and helplessness.

Body:

Status of Mental health in India

- According to an estimate by the World Health Organization (WHO), mental illness makes about 15% of the total disease conditions around the world.
- The same estimate also suggests that India has one of the largest populations affected from mental illness.
- As a result, WHO has labelled India as the world’s ‘most depressing country’.
- Moreover, between 1990 to 2017, one in seven people from India have suffered from mental illness ranging from depression, anxiety to severe conditions such as schizophrenia, according to a study. It is no exaggeration to suggest that the country is under a mental health epidemic.
- More than 450 million people suffer from mental disorders. According to WHO, by the year 2020, depression will constitute the second largest disease burden worldwide (Murray & Lopez, 1996).

Economic aspects of mental health:

- After the stock market crash of 1929, the suicide rate in the United States (US) rose 50%; to 18.1 per 100,000 from the 12.1 per 100,000 from 1920 to 1928 and stayed at 15.4 per 100,000 between 1930 and 1940.
- In 2008, researchers from the University of Oxford and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine noted an extra 10,000 “economic suicides” across the US, Canada and Europe, due to the financial crisis
- The social and economic fissures exposed by the pandemic will result in mass unemployment, depleted social safety nets, starvation, increase in gender-based violence, homelessness, alcoholism, loan defaults and millions slipping into poverty.
This post-Covid landscape will be a fertile breeding ground for an increase in chronic stress, anxiety, depression, alcohol dependence, and self-harm.

It could lead to an overall rise in morbidity, suicides and the number of disability-adjusted life years linked to mental health.

Other than human suffering, suicide has an economic dimension, each death costs Rs 265,000 in the first year alone, says a study by Gopala Sarma Poduri in the Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine.

Short-term costs include hospital expenses for the act leading to death, autopsy expenses, police investigations, funeral expenses, etc.

Long-term costs include the lost income that could have been earned by the person till retirement, tax that the government lost from that income, among other things.

At-risk populations include the 150 million with pre-existing mental health issues, Covid-19 survivors, frontline medical workers, young people, differently abled people, women, workers in the unorganised sector, and the elderly.

**Way Forward:**

First, India can appoint a minister with a Cabinet rank as head of mental health and well-being, and create an emergency task force of public health experts in creating and executing evidence-based interventions.

Second, work on a war footing to push to implement the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, (MHCA) that promises mental health care to all and introduce a suicide prevention policy. Many countries, including China, have been able to significantly reduce suicides after they implemented a suicide prevention policy.

India’s investment in mental health — the last Union Budget slashed it by 20% from Rs 50 crore to Rs 40 crore — will need a boost.

According to estimates, Rs 93,000 crore will be needed to implement MHCA, 2017. This could come from the PM Cares Fund, corporate social responsibility initiatives, private equity, and perhaps, a new national lottery.

Rural India may be particularly susceptible to suicide due to the influx of migrant workers, and also because it is home to the at-risk farmer community.

The central storage of pesticides in the farming community, decreasing the lethality of pesticides, and interventions to dissipate suicide contagions might be key.

At the centre of this should be a large public engagement campaign to increase help-seeking. This must be centrally driven, supported by state governments, and endorsed by influential people.

Mental health and suicide should be treated as a public health crisis that needs immediate fixing.

Mainstream media and social media giants can be roped in to create and spread awareness.

There is a good chance that alcohol addiction will rise after Covid-19. It will be beneficial to provide rehabilitation services that address both physical and psychological aspects.

Community-based interventions such as Atmiyata’s community-based volunteers in Maharashtra and Gujarat, SCARF’s mental health mobile vans in Tamil Nadu, and Sangath’s VISHRAM, that used community health workers for the first line of treatment (depression fell by 22% and prevalence of suicidal thoughts fell by 51%), can be scaled.

Training millions in suicide prevention techniques and combining crisis intervention by providing psychological first-aid will help save lives and reduce emotional distress, preventing long-term trauma.
- Digitally-mediated therapy and telepsychiatry (NIMHANS runs a successful telepsychiatry intervention in Karnataka) should be scaled up.
- A mental health startup incubator (funded by the Startup India programme) should provide the necessary impetus to spawn innovations that tap technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning and chatbots.
- Use of low-tech like text messages can be highly effective in increasing awareness, decreasing stigma and inducing help-seeking behaviour.

Conclusion:

Timely intervention, awareness about the issue, availability of professional help and appropriate policies is the only way to improve the situation. It is thus imperative to believe and propagate that people with mental illness deserve to live their lives with dignity and confidence. It requires a collaborative public-private-social partnership to change things considerably.

Tribals constitute major proportion in the total number of inter-state and intra state migrants in the country. In the light of the statement, discuss on the effects inflicted by the pandemic on their lives and livelihoods.(250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why this question:
A migrant Adivasi girl died of hunger and dehydration in Chhattisgarh. Thus the context of the question.

Key demand of the question:
One must bring out issues associated with migrant tribals and the effect of the COVID pandemic on their lives and livelihoods.

Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Firstly present the gist of the question.

Body:
The government’s declared war on the novel coronavirus is turning out to be an undeclared war against the workers of India. Among them are workers from Adivasi communities. State some key facts justifying the stand of the question – The last National Sample Survey Office migration survey, which was published more than two Decades ago, showed that between 1992-93 to 2007–08, the proportion of migrant households among Scheduled Tribes (STs) was higher than among all other communities. The same data showed that STs were the single largest group among female migrants. With 45.5% of rural Adivasis below the poverty line, Adivasis usually do multiple kinds of work through the year. State the reason for increasing number of migrant workers. Explain the effects inflicted by the pandemic on their lives and livelihoods.

Conclusion:
Conclude with solutions to address the problems.

Introduction:
Tribal people constitute 8.6% of the nation’s total population, over 104 million people according to the 2011 census. The forest occupies a central position in tribal culture and economy. The lockdown has brought about unprecedented hardships for the tribal people and drastically threatened their
livelihoods in the absence of a concrete action plan that addresses their financial and health insecurities amid the pandemic.

Body:

Current crisis faced by tribal migrants:

- The government gave a tentative estimate of there being 10 crore migrant workers in India but admitted to many being largely undocumented and unregistered as workers.
- The last National Sample Survey Office migration survey, which was published more than 20 years ago, showed that between 1992-93 to 2007–08, the proportion of migrant households among Scheduled Tribes (STs) was higher than among all other communities.
- The same data showed that STs were the single largest group among female migrants.
- During the lockdown, unable to get assistance and despairing of any free travel home, Adivasi migrants across India have started the long and painful march back often avoiding highways, travelling through forests and side roads to avoid the police.

Effects inflicted by pandemic on tribals:

- The number of Adivasis dependent on wage labour has increased in comparison to those dependent on cultivation.
- With 45.5% of rural Adivasis below the poverty line, Adivasis usually do multiple kinds of work through the year, including migrating in search of work.
- Adivasi migration is mainly for seasonal agricultural and construction work, work in brick kilns or as manual workers in urban areas.
- In the name of ease of business, the last several years have seen an accelerated process of displacement and dispossession of Adivasi communities and a takeover of their land and forest-based resources, increasing the numbers of migrant workers from Adivasi communities.
- Adivasis are more vulnerable to the general hostility towards the poor displayed by state agencies, particularly the police.

Problems faced:

- The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979, the only law for migrant workers, is inadequate since it deals only with those migrant workers in the contractor system and excludes workers who migrate on their own, for Adivasi migrant workers employed through contractors, its implementation would have ensured payment as well as free travel back home.
- The functioning of Public Distribution System in Adivasi areas, particularly in the hilly regions, is generally irregular.
- At present, there are hardly any MGNREGA works in Adivasi areas, except to some extent in Chhattisgarh.
- The health infrastructure in the Adivasi areas is extremely poor.
- The annual report from the Tribal Affairs Ministry has data on the shortfall in Adivasi areas as:
  - 20.7% for sub-centers,
  - 26% for primary health centers,
  - 23% for community health centers, and
  - 27% for the number of doctors.

Measures needed:

- The High-Level Committee (Virginius Xaxa committee) has made numerous recommendations such as exclusive mining rights for tribals, greater freedom for tribals to make decisions on land...
acquisition and other common property resources and, strict implementation of the new land law, Forest Rights Act and strengthening of the PESA.

- It has also proposed a complete overhaul of the legal constitutional regime by recommending that laws and policies enacted by the Parliament and state legislatures shouldn’t be applied automatically in the Fifth Schedule areas.
- State government should be made to obtain permissions from owners and occupiers of land for major minerals, and consult with gram Sabha in 5th and 6th schedule areas for minor minerals.
- It should be mandated that all clearances (forest and environment) under forest conservation act and wildlife protection act should be taken before a lease was given.
- Tribal cooperatives should be made eligible for grant of license of minor minerals in 5th and 6th schedule areas.

**Conclusion:**

There is a need for the Ministry of Tribal Affairs construct a special mechanism to address COVID-19 in the tribal belts and issues necessary guidelines or advisories to the states on measures to deal with the pandemic and help forest dwellers to deal with the hardships that they are facing in the lockdown. It is high time that the ministry, the state and the Central governments joined hands to take quality healthcare, food security, wage employment and strengthens MFP productivity and makes sure that the Forest Rights Act (FRA) is implemented in full spirit!

**Elaborate upon “One Nation, One Ration Card” scheme. Discuss the benefits emanating from the scheme and bring out the associated challenges.** (250 words)

**Reference:** Indian Express

**Introduction:**

One Nation One Ration Card Scheme which will allow portability of food security benefits. This means poor migrant workers will be able to buy subsidized rice and wheat from any ration shop in the country. Recently the Supreme Court (SC), asked the Union government to examine the feasibility of implementing the “one nation one ration card” (ONORC) scheme during the national lockdown. Consequently, Finance Minister announced the national rollout of a ‘One Nation, One Ration Card’ system in all states and Union Territories by March 2021. As of now, about 20 states have come on board to implement the inter-state ration card portability.

**Body:**
Highlights of the scheme:

- The poor migrant workers will be able to buy subsidised rice and wheat from any ration shop in the country but for that their ration cards must be linked to Aadhaar.
- Migrants would only be eligible for the subsidies supported by the Centre, which include rice sold at Rs. 3/kg and wheat at Rs. 2/kg. It would not include subsidies given by their respective state government in some other state.
- This scheme will ensure that no poor person is deprived of subsidised grains.
- The scheme can be implemented as already 77% of the ration shops across the country have PoS machines and more than 85% of people covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) have their cards linked to Aadhaar.
- For remaining beneficiaries, all the States have been given one more year to use point of sale (PoS) machines in the ration shops and implement the scheme.
- The new system, based on a technological solution, will identify a beneficiary through biometric authentication on electronic Point of Sale (ePoS) devices installed at the FPSs, and enable that person to purchase the quantity of foodgrains to which she is entitled under the NFSA.
- The Annavitrans portal enables a migrant worker or his family to avail the benefits of PDS outside their district but within their state.
- While a person can buy her share of foodgrains as per her entitlement under the NFSA, wherever she is based, the rest of her family members can purchase subsidised foodgrains from their ration dealer back home.

Significance of Scheme:

- For migrant labourers:
- India has had food security benefit schemes which have domicile based access.
- 36 crore people or 37% of the population is that of migrant labourers. The scheme is therefore important for anyone who is going to move from one place to the other.
- It happens that when one moves from one place to the other (for e.g. a government employee being transferred from one place to another), it takes about two to three months to get a ration card at that next place and then further more time to start getting commodities against the same.
- After the implementation of the scheme, it would be ensured that a migrant is able to access the benefits which are due to him in any part of the country.
- This would be ensured on the basis of Aadhaar authentication and a validated data.

- For Women:
  - ONORC will be particularly beneficial for women and other disadvantaged groups, given how social identity (caste, class and gender) and other contextual factors (including power relations) provide a strong backdrop in accessing PDS.

- Provides Choice:
  - ONORC will give the beneficiaries the opportunity to opt for the dealer of their choice. If any dealer misbehaves or misallocates, the beneficiary can switch to another FPS shop instantly.
  - ONORC lets the beneficiaries choose the PDS shop that best delivers on the attributes.

- Curbing corruption:
  - In ONORC Scheme, the fundamental prerequisite is de-duplication so that it is ensured that the same person does not figure as a beneficiary in two different locations of the country.
  - With the help of the scheme, the government would be able to rightly target the beneficiaries to provide them with the foodgrains under the PDS. The scheme is linked with Aadhaar and biometrics, this removes most possibilities of corruption.
  - The government is creating a central data repository to get all the details of ration card which are being maintained by states so that the repository acts as a clearing house or a server to do the cross checking on the basis of Aadhaar authentication.
  - This ensures that there is no corruption or duplication of the benefits that are being passed on to the beneficiaries. The government will ensure all these things with the help of technology.

Challenges:
- Since the scheme is based on technology, the government may face some technical challenges during the implementation of the scheme.
- The scheme will increase the woes of the common man and, the middlemen and corrupt PDS shop owners will exploit them.
Tamil Nadu has opposed the proposal of the Centre, saying it would result in undesirable consequences and is against federalism.

Within some states issue of intra state portability.

Different states have different rates and these mismatching rates will be a big challenge.

Few regional parties have expressed apprehensions on bearing the cost of additional ration cards. This is a matter which is to be settled between the states and the Government of India.

One of the apprehensions mentioned by few states is the cost of additional food grain to be supplied to the migrant workers.

However, the whole system is based on the entitlements mandated under the NFSA and this prevents the charges of additional cost. Beneficiaries will continue to pay the same issue prices that are fixed under the NFSA.

The quality of services is markedly inferior for the subaltern groups with latent methods of discrimination such as lack of information, mixing of inferior grains, longer waiting time and, at times, even verbal abuse.

**Way Forward:**

- The current migrant crisis should be seen as an opportunity to develop a national migration policy addressing the challenges faced by migrant workers’ productivity, living conditions and social security.
- While this must be done, the government must also fast-track the ONORC scheme because India’s present rights-based regime is based on the assumption that people are sedentary.
- The food security scheme under the NFSA costs more than Rs 1 lakh crore per year. It is very expensive but is highly needed. There is a need to ensure that subsidized food grains ultimately go to the person or the family that is entitled to.
- The ONORC should also include access to health and other things.
- At the principal level, within the government, there is broad consensus on having a unified kind of service delivery system based on technology and identity.
- A unified service platform combining all the citizen centric services on the basis of few parameters of identity and other indicators of technology, is the need of the hour.
- ONORC combined with a rating system based on the experiences akin to the Uber/Ola system, the government can improve PDS by closer monitoring and control. Those PDS dealers who perform better could be rewarded.

**Conclusion:**

While ONORC has the potential to improve outcomes particularly for the subaltern groups, like any delivery mechanism, the entire value chain of making the system work needs to be closely monitored and backed by infrastructure. The availability of point of sale (PoS) systems at PDS shops, and its functioning needs to be ensured to check compromises in the entitlements. Even after the coronavirus pandemic is over, this will be useful. Migration is bound to restart because of unemployment. When migrant workers again start boarding trains and buses for the destination cities, they must have their PDS cards that are valid across India with them.

Discuss the possible role that MGNREGA and other policy initiatives could play to help revive the economy in such times of crisis. (250 words)

*Reference: The Hindu*

**Introduction:**

Telegram: [https://t.me/insightsIAStips](https://t.me/insightsIAStips)

Youtube: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpoccbCX9GEIwaile4HIjwA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpoccbCX9GEIwaile4HIjwA)

Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/insightsonindia](https://www.facebook.com/insightsonindia)
With rural distress deepening across India and private consumption growing anaemically, calls for ramping up the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), are growing louder ahead of the upcoming budget. Proponents of MGNREGS believe that it may be the only ammunition in the government’s arsenal to fight rural poverty. Critics, though, have labelled the scheme as leaky, wasteful and simply ineffective.

Body:

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):

The MGNREGA was launched in 2006 in order to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed employment to rural households. It is the largest scheme run by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD).

Challenges faced by MGNREGA:

- Aadhar has been hastily implemented for the MGNREGA. Several MGNREGA payments have been rejected, diverted, or frozen as a consequence.
- The delay in the payment of wages which is captured in the system is intentionally suppressed to avoid paying delay compensation.
- There are numerous cases of MGNREGS payments getting diverted to Airtel wallets and ICICI bank accounts.
- In a recently concluded survey on common service centres in Jharkhand for Aadhar-based payments, it was found that 42% of the biometric authentications failed in the first attempt, compelling them to come later.
- The MGNREGA wage rates in 18 States have been kept lower than the States’ minimum agricultural wage rates.
- In the last five years, the average person days of work generated per household under MGNREGA remained less than 50 across years.
- The scheme is running out of funds due to increased demand for work.
- Droughts and floods in several States have led to an increased demand for work.
- Data show disparity in MGNREGA wages across States.
- Agricultural minimum wages exceed MGNREGA wages in almost all states.
- The total MGNREGA expenditure reported by States has risen, but the year-on-year growth has fallen below 5%.
- The act continues to fight widespread corruption and administrative negligence.
- In some areas of certain states, MGNREGA work opens only during specific seasons and time.
- Since April 2014, the work completion rate has been declining.
- Jharkhand being one of the poorest states and having huge dependence on MGNREGA, has the lowest wage rates.

Measures needed to strengthen MGNREGA:

- Millions of migrant workers have gone back home, and are unlikely to return to towns in the foreseeable future.
- Employment has to be provided to them where they are, for which the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) must be expanded greatly and revamped with wage arrears paid immediately.
- The 100-day limit per household has to go. Work has to be provided on demand without any limit to all adults.
And permissible work must include not just agricultural and construction work, but work in rural enterprises and in care activities too.

The revamped MGNREGS could cover wage bills of rural enterprises started by panchayats, along with those of existing rural enterprises, until they can stand on their own feet.

This can be an alternative strategy of development, recalling the successful experience of China’s Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs).

Public banks could provide credit to such panchayat-owned enterprises and also assume a nurturing role vis-à-vis them.

Pandemic highlighted unsustainability of the earlier globalisation.

Which means that growth in India in the coming days will have to be sustained by the home market.

Since the most important determinant of growth of the home market is agricultural growth, this must be urgently boosted.

The MGNREGS can be used for this, paying wages for land development and farm work for small and medium farmers.

Also the government support through remunerative procurement prices, subsidised institutional credit, other input subsidies, and redistribution of unused land with plantations is possible.

Agricultural growth in turn can promote rural enterprises, both by creating a demand for their products and by providing inputs for them to process.

Both these activities would generate substantial rural employment.

Other immediate measures to be taken by the government in fiscal terms for reviving the economy and supporting livelihoods are:

Food and cash transfers:

- The immediate need is to provide free food and cash transfers to those rendered incomeless.
- Providing every household with ₹7,000 per month for a period of three months and every individual with 10 kg of free food grains per month for a period of six months is likely to cost around 3% of our GDP (assuming 20% voluntary dropout).
- This could be financed immediately through larger borrowing by the Centre from the Reserve Bank of India.
- The required cash and food have to be handed over to State governments to make the actual transfers, along with outstanding Goods and Services Tax compensation.
- This is doable, as, foodgrains are plentiful, as the Food Corporation of India had 77 million tonnes, and Rabi procurement could add 40 million tonnes.
- Putting money in the hands of the poor is the best stimulus to economic revival, as it creates effective demand and in local markets. Hence, an immediate programme of food and cash transfers must command the highest priority.

Focus on Urban areas:

- In urban areas, it is absolutely essential to revive the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- Simultaneously, the vast numbers of workers who have stayed on in towns have to be provided with employment and income after our proposed cash transfers run out.
- The best way to overcome both problems would be to introduce an Urban Employment Guarantee Programme, to serve diverse groups of the urban unemployed, including the educated unemployed.
- Urban local bodies must take charge of this programme, and would need to be revamped for this purpose.
- “Permissible” work under this programme should include, for the present, work in the MSMEs.
- It should imaginatively also include care work, including of old, disabled and ailing persons, educational activities, and ensuring public services in slums.

**Strengthening the ‘care’ economy:**
- The pandemic has underscored the extreme importance of a public health-care system, and the folly of privatization of essential services.
- The post-pandemic period must see significant increases in public expenditure on education and health, especially primary and secondary health including for the urban and rural poor.
- The “care economy” provides immense scope for increasing employment.
- Vacancies in public employment, especially in such activities, must be immediately filled.
- The status of healthcare workers such as anganwadi workers must be improved to treat them as regular government employees. They must be given proper remuneration and associated benefits.

**Measures to increase the public revenue:**
- A combination of wealth and inheritance taxation and getting multinational companies to pay the same effective rate as local companies through a system of unitary taxation will garner substantial public revenue.
- They will also reduce wealth and income inequalities which have become horrendous.
- A 2% wealth tax on the top 1% of the population, together with a 33% inheritance tax on the wealth they bequeath every year to their progeny, could finance an increase in government expenditure to the tune of 10% of GDP.
- It would be argued that this might cause large financial outflows, which the country can ill-afford.
- Contrarily, even foreign capital is more likely to be attracted to a growing economy than one in sharp decline because of a lack of stimulus.
- Also, a fresh issue of special drawing rights by the International Monetary Fund which India has surprisingly opposed along with the United States would provide additional external resources.

**Conclusion:**

The additional resources gained through above means should be used to finance the institution of five universal, justiciable, fundamental economic rights: the right to food, the right to employment, the right to free public health care, the right to free public education and the right to a living old-age pension and disability benefits. The broken economy must be rebuilt in ways to ensure a life of dignity to the most disadvantaged citizen.

**Evaluate the idea of merging state and central income support schemes as a comprehensive approach that can cover landless laborers, farmers, and poor consumers.**

**Reference:** Financial Express

**Why this question:**
The question is based on the article authored by Ashok Gulati, who discusses the idea of merging state and central income support schemes as a comprehensive approach to solve the current crisis facing the agrarian sector.
Key demand of the question:
Explain the benefits of the comprehensive approach as suggested by the author in the article, discuss how it can benefit the landless laborers, farmers, and poor consumers.

Directive:
Evaluate – When you are asked to evaluate, you have to pass a sound judgement about the truth of the given statement in the question or the topic based on evidences. You have to appraise the worth of the statement in question. There is scope for forming a personal opinion here.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
One can start by bringing out the inherent issues facing the sector, issues with realizing the goal of effective cash transfers.

Body:
Highlight the present challenges with the income packages that have been offered by the centre and the state governments differently. Explain why there is a need to unify the two and come up with a comprehensive package. Discuss the possibilities of merging income support schemes like PM-KISAN at the Centre and at state levels, as well as MGNREGA, on one hand, and price-subsidy schemes like food and fertilizer subsidies at the Centre and power subsidy at the state level.

Conclusion:
Conclude with importance of such idea.

Introduction:
Prime minister recently announced that his government’s relief-cum-stimulus package is Rs 20 lakh crore, almost 10% of India’s GDP. Most experts hailed this as a bold move. But, when the finance minister unraveled the package, sector by sector, many wondered where the “new cash” was. The worst affected migrant workers have not got much cash support. Farmers, too, have suffered losses due to fall in their farm prices, especially that of perishables. Both States and Center have income support schemes for the farmers. Coincidentally, they both suffer from common problems such as the exclusion of tiller from the benefit and identifying the landless labourers.

Body:
Some of the state’s efforts to alleviate farmers’ woes:

- The Chhattisgarh government deserves compliments for launching the Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana (RGKNY), an income transfer scheme at Rs 10,000/acre for paddy farmers and Rs 13,000/acre for sugarcane farmers.
- Earlier, the Telangana government announced a cash transfer scheme – Rythu Bandhu – of Rs 4,000/acre, per season – this was raised to Rs 5,000/acre per season in kharif 2019-20.
- The Odisha government launched the KALIA scheme (Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation) on a somewhat similar pattern.
- West Bengal’s Krishak Bandhu and Jharkhand’s Mukhya Mantri Krishi Aashirwad Yojana are the other income support schemes worth mentioning.
- The central government has announced – PM Kisan Yojana – to provide income support to farmers.

Need to merge or refine these schemes:

- Absentee landlordism:
  - Ideally, the money from these cash transfer schemes 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 percent tenancy in the country while several micro-level studies indicate that it could be anywhere between 25-30 per cent.

**High numbers of landless labourers:**
- Majority of them are temporary and seasonal workers, and leaving the task of identification to panchayats and patwaris can open doors for large leakages and corruption.

**Huge losses incurred by farmers:**
- Onions and tomatoes, for example, are selling at around Rs 6/kg in India’s largest mandis like Lasalgaon, Chittoor and Kolar — this when the cost of production is about Rs 10/kg. Farmers growing flowers and grapes and milk producers face the same predicament.

**State’s fiscal deficits:**
- States like WB, Jharkand and even Central Government has started the implementation of direct income scheme. This can lead to increased burden on states which are already deviating from FRBM targets.

**Targeting Issues:**
- Poor land record maintenance, exclusion of tenant farmers in some states, no women-farmer friendly provisions can lead to targeting issues. This can lead to status quo despite huge spending.

**Not a panacea:**
- Until India reforms its agri-marketing laws and frees agri-markets, it is time to atone through a structured and stable income policy for farmers for at least the next five years.

**Benefits of merging the schemes:**
- The time has come to think seriously about merging income support schemes.
- There have been talks in the past for synchronizing MGNREGA with farm operations.
- The synchronizing will have two benefits-
  - It will contain the cost of farming.
  - It will ensure that those engaged in this employment guarantee scheme do useful and productive work.
- The legal framework of the MGNREGA scheme does allow this on farms owned by people of SC/ST communities, and on the lands of marginal farmers.
- The merger will include the PM KISAN and state-level schemes, with the MGNREGA and price-subsidy schemes — food and fertilizer subsidies given by Centre and power subsidies given by state government.
- These schemes amount to Rs 5 lakh crore — that’s a good sum of money to start a basic income cover for poor households.
- Markets could then be left to operate freely.
This approach can cover landless labourers, farmers, and poor consumers — these categories overlap.

Let there be an expert group to look closely into the functioning of each one of these schemes and create an umbrella scheme to take care of the poor and the needy.

Conclusion:

Other supporting measures would be to change the tenancy laws, open up land lease markets, identifying the landless labourers working on farms, Information and persuasion campaigns in radio and newspapers. These would assure that the benefits of the government reach the true beneficiaries and alleviate their woes.

Do you think an inclusion model for migrants that draws upon data based from Aadhaar can change the social and economic story of migrants in independent India?

Comment. (250 words)

Reference: Live Mint

Why this question:
The author highlights the dismal picture of migrants and the crisis they are undergoing owing to the Covid situation in the country.

Key demand of the question:
Evaluate the need to identify an Aadhaar based system that would enable policy makers to design an inclusionary model and thus enable a change in the social and economic story of migrants in independent India.

Directive:
Comment—here we have to express our knowledge and understanding of the issue and form an overall opinion thereupon.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Briefly explain the issue of Migrants in the country.

Body:
To start with, explain that the social and economic story of independent India has been intertwined with migration. India has the world’s largest emigrant population, several hundred million domestic migrants, and a large immigrant population. Explain the idea of applying Aadhaar to manage the issue, discuss the possibilities of designing policies focusing on migrants through right data, technology for services etc.

Conclusion:
Conclude by suggesting solutions and emphasize that migrant issues should be urgently looked into in the country.

Introduction:
India has the world’s largest emigrant population, several hundred million domestic migrants, and a large immigrant population. Thousands of migrant labourers have headed home on foot after national lockdown, which has created an acute shortage of labourers in major agrarian states. The inter-State migrant worker community, thousands of these migrant labourers have been leaving cities, even on foot, for their towns in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and elsewhere. Cleaved from their livelihood, bereft of money and devoid of adequate nutrition, these exhausted walkers have held a mirror to the soul of an upwardly mobile nation and marred its claim of inclusive growth.

Body:
Reasons for the migration problems:

- **Lack of clear data:**
  - The data on migration is fuzzy. India’s decennial census tracks international emigrants, intra-district, intra-state and inter-state migrants.
  - The estimate for total domestic migrants from the 2011 census extrapolated to now is about 500 million people.

- **High number of dependents:**
  - The vast bulk of these migrations, nearly 340 million, are female migrations related to marriage.
  - Inter-state migrations for employment-related reasons was about 13 million in 2011, but has dramatically increased to about 25 or 30 million now.

- **Migration began for both push and pull reasons:**
  - The push factors relate to climate change (agrarian distress, flooding, drought, cyclones, etc.), social-structure rigidity, indignities related to the rural/feudal caste system, and lack of employment opportunities.
  - The pull factors relate mostly to income opportunity, relative freedom from caste discrimination, and the ability to build a nest-egg using remittances.

- **Circular migration:**
  - Most of these migrations are “circular”, meaning that migrant’s intent is to return to his or her place of origin, or at the very least live with one foot there and the other in the work destination.

- **No Social security:**
  - The lack of social security among the poor makes it difficult for them to practice social distancing. They are mostly dependent upon daily and even hourly wage earnings. The lockdown would lead to an income security challenge to them.

**Aadhar as a solution:**

- Aadhaar is becoming India’s default ID. Those who have Aadhaar use it regularly and across multiple services. 80% of respondents felt that Aadhaar had improved the reliability of government-funded welfare services.
- 95% of adults have Aadhaar and 75% of children have Aadhaar.
- 8% of people do not have Aadhaar– or an estimated 102 million people.
- 80% of beneficiaries feel Aadhaar has made PDS rations, MGNREGS and social pensions more reliable.

**Other measures needed to tackle:**

- The country needs policy thinking on both inter-state and intra-state labour migrants.
- This is a job that requires collaboration between the Centre and the states, as well as between states.
• **Data:**
  - A non-political agency reporting to Parliament should be created to track all labour-related data in India with a focus on migrants.
  - It has become clear in recent months that India’s data collection with respect to its labour market is abysmal.
  - This agency should work with civil service organisations and academics in building longitudinal, cross-sectional and high-frequency data sets for policy formulation purposes.

• **Technology for services:**
  - There is widespread agreement among sociologists that the household is at the centre of any migration decision.
  - Policy for migrant workers must, therefore, be focused on the household and its multi-locational presence.
  - It is unrealistic to build upon the Centre’s “one nation one ration card” idea from scratch.
  - The most effective way to deliver services would be to use the Aadhaar-based technology stack, after obtaining legislative sanction for this specific purpose.
  - Since the stack stays off individual bio-metric identification, it will have to be adapted to add household clusters.

• **Employment structure:**
  - So long as certain social security benefits are accessible to migrant workers, both circular migrant workers and employers appear to prefer a flexible work format.
  - Employers and governments should, thus, focus on creating the enabling urban infrastructure—affordable flexible rental housing, clean hygienic communities, portable affordable healthcare access and technology stack for delivery of in-kind and cash transfers—rather than on formalizing contracts between employers and migrant workers.

**Way forward for Aadhar as a solution:**

• Every decision to make Aadhaar mandatory for service provision should be carefully considered as making Aadhaar mandatory can lead to exclusion from welfare and other services.
• Improvements in on-the-ground processes related to Aadhaar should be done by designing efficient systems keeping the most vulnerable sections of society in mind.
• As more services are linked to Aadhaar, easy access as well as seamless updating and authentication will become only more critical.
• Different states implement Aadhaar in very distinct ways, which represents an opportunity to innovate and learn from each other’s successful practices.
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- Aniket K
  AIR 8, CSE 2014
- Nishtha Kumar
  AIR 11, CSE 2014

2015
- Archana Shukla
  AIR 16, CSE 2015
- Rishikesh
  AIR 14, CSE 2015

2016
- Manvendra Singh
  AIR 1, CSE 2016
- Digvijay Pandey
  AIR 2, CSE 2016
- Sundeep Yapa
  AIR 10, CSE 2016
- Pravin Garg
  AIR 3, CSE 2016
- Sumeet Shrivastava
  AIR 7, CSE 2016
- Arun Gupta
  AIR 30, CSE 2016

2017
- Pranjal Tiwari
  AIR 2, CSE 2017
- Pranav Kumar
  AIR 1, CSE 2017
- Akshay Tiwari
  AIR 2, CSE 2017
- Anshul Garg
  AIR 27, CSE 2017
- Sameer Sharma
  AIR 1, CSE 2017
- Pranav Tiwari
  AIR 10, CSE 2017
- Yash Gupta
  AIR 10, CSE 2017
- Lalit Kumar
  AIR 10, CSE 2017

2018
- Bhavishya
  AIR 17, CSE 2018
- Akshay Tiwari
  AIR 2, CSE 2018
- Anshul Garg
  AIR 30, CSE 2018
- Pranav Tiwari
  AIR 10, CSE 2018
- Lalit Kumar
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Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Can e-learning replace conventional classroom learning and guarantee greater access and success in education? Critically analyse.(250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why this question:
With India under lockdown in its desperate attempt to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, there is anxiety with respect to academics particularly among the graduating batches of students. This editorial analyses whether digital forms of learning are effective for Higher Educational Institutions and courses.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the nuances associated with online learning and compare it with the conventional learning methods, present both advantages and disadvantages and provide for a detailed analysis.

Directive:
Critically analyze – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary. When ‘critically’ is suffixed or prefixed to a directive, one needs to look at the good and bad of the topic and give a fair judgment.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
In short, start by explaining the sudden rise in the demand for e-learning amidst the present lockdown conditions.

Body:
To start with explain first the transition to virtual modes of learning from the conventional modes. Explain the difference between the two; compare and contrast. Highlight the specific concerns. List down the Limitations of online learning with respect to Education system.

Conclusion:
Conclude that before making decisive inferences it is necessary to think deeply and gather research-based evidence on the extent to which online education can be deployed to help enhance the access and success rates.

Introduction:
The coronavirus pandemic has shuttered educational institutions across the globe. Closure of schools, colleges and universities, shutdown of routine life of students and teachers, disruptions in education and the education ministry remaining incommunicado, have created an unprecedented situation and thrown many unexpected challenges to administrators, educators, teachers, parents and students.

Body:
Impacts on education due to COVID-19 pandemic:

- school and university closures will not only have a short-term impact on the continuity of learning for more than 285 million young learners in India but also engender far-reaching economic and societal consequences.
- The pandemic has significantly disrupted the higher education sector as well, which is a critical determinant of a country’s economic future.
- A large number of Indian students—second only to China—enroll in universities abroad, especially in countries worst affected by the pandemic, the US, UK, Australia and China.
Many such students have now been barred from leaving these countries. If the situation persists, in the long run, a decline in the demand for international higher education is expected.

The bigger concern, however, on everybody’s mind is the effect of the disease on the employment rate. Recent graduates in India are fearing withdrawal of job offers from corporates because of the current situation.

The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy’s estimates on unemployment shot up from 8.4% in mid-March to 23% in early April and the urban unemployment rate to 30.9%.

**Digital Education and its potential:**

- This is an ideal time to experiment and deploy new tools to make education delivery meaningful to students who can’t go to campuses.
- It’s a chance to be more efficient and productive while developing new and improved professional skills/knowledge through online learning and assessment.
- The use of technology in education is resulting in different concepts in the system, for instance the move from teacher-centric education to student-centric education.
- Virtual classrooms and various online tools today allow us to make the engagement between the teacher and students as close to a real, in classroom type experience, as possible.
- These tools can also make the teachers and parent meetings as well as staff/management meetings more time and cost saving while providing the necessary interactivity.
- It is also a fact that technology-based education is more transparent and does not make difference in front vs back benchers or girls vs boys.
- State governments and private players have regularly been publishing information on various initiatives undertaken by ministries like MHRD, Department of Technical Education, NCERT and others to support and benefit youth/students.

**Challenges:**

- India is far behind some developing countries where digital education is getting increased attention.
- In countries where e-learning is popular, students have access to various online resources such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) which help students, teachers and professionals upgrade their skills.
- The major challenge in EDTech reforms at the national level is the seamless integration of technology in the present Indian education system, which is the most diverse and largest in the world with more than 15 lakh schools and 50,000 higher education institutions.
- Further, it is also important to establish quality assurance mechanisms and quality benchmark for online learning developed and offered by India HEIs as well as e-learning platforms (growing rapidly).
- Many e-learning players offer multiple courses on the same subjects with different levels of certifications, methodology and assessment parameters. So, the quality of courses may differ across different e-learning platforms.
- Democratization of technology is now an important issue, comprising internet connectivity, telecom infrastructure, affordability of online system, availability of laptop/desktop, software, educational tools, online assessment tools, etc.
- Since our education system has not trained our teachers and students to think creatively and manage in a crisis situation, and has underplayed the importance of e-learning, they are unprepared for the transition from the classroom to online.
Going forward, the use of technology in teaching or recruitment will lead to a new era wherein the best of faculty will be available from across the globe to students. Education quality will be gauged not just by the quality of faculty but will also have quality of IT infrastructure and familiarization of the faculty will digital teaching technologies as important parameters.

**Conclusion:**

To summarize, education must continue. Students should keep learning. The lockdown period should be productive. Educators should think creatively and introduce innovative ways of learning. In a country where access to the Internet and high-speed connectivity is a problem, and the digital divide is an issue, it is important to address the challenges. Those who are involved in education planning and administration should give a serious thought to reducing the digital divide in the country and popularize digital learning.

“A realisation of complete human beings is essential on part of government to deal with migrant workers”, in this context, analyse the issues being faced by migrants and suggest solutions to address them.(250 words)

**Reference:** *The Hindu*

**Why this question:**
The question is based on the issues being faced by the migrant workers and the need for a sturdy social policy design dedicated for them.

**Key demand of the question:**
Explain first the issues being faced by the migrant workers and then suggest solutions to address the same.

**Directive:**

*Analyse* – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**

Explain the shades of the question context.

**Body:**

To start with explain the role played by the invisible hands; migrants workers in the economy. Discuss on the challenges being faced by migrants in Normal and pandemic times. Explain the need for a social policy designed that provides socioeconomic Rights and complete humanly treatment to the migrant workers.

**Conclusion:**

Conclude with way forward.

**Introduction:**

Thousands of migrant labourers have headed home on foot after national lockdown, which has created an acute shortage of labourers in major agrarian states. The inter-State migrant worker community, thousands of these migrant labourers have been leaving cities, even on foot, for their towns in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and elsewhere.

**Body:**

**Hardship faced by migrant labourers:**

- Between 100 million to 125 million people leave their villages, families and homes to find work far away wherever they can find it; their invisible hands harvest the crops and feed us, clean streets, run factories, build roads, and construct our houses.
The migrant workers are largely dependent upon casual and daily wage labour and unorganized retail.

The lockdown would severely affect their livelihood opportunities.

Citing the uncertainty of employment, and therefore of money and resources, these migrant labourers sought the comfort of the social net in their towns and wanted to return back.

Most of the migrant workers live in cramped spaces where it would be difficult to maintain physical distancing.

The lack of hygiene and sanitation facilities makes this section highly vulnerable to such epidemics.

An analysis of the migration trend shows that a major portion of the rural-urban migration constitutes the migration of men to cities in search of better employment opportunities.

They are generally the primary breadwinners, and the survival of their families back home is entirely dependent on these migrant labourers. The anxiety of being affected by the virus drove many to return to their families.

**Issues faced by migrant lockdown due to Government lockdown:**

- The Central government announced the lockdown with just a four-hour notice, making it even harder for the migrant labourers to figure out ways to face the challenge of a lockdown.
- The lockdown has a disproportionate impact on the socioeconomic conditions of the poor and unorganized sector.
- The lack of social security among the poor makes it difficult for them to practice social distancing. They are mostly dependent upon daily and even hourly wage earnings. The lockdown would lead to an income security challenge to them.
- There have been suggestions that given the prior warnings of COVID-19, the situation could have been handled much better. There have been concerns that the decision was arbitrary, unplanned and ill-prepared.
- The lockdown was not accompanied by practical and necessary relief measures.
- The movement of the labourers towards their hometowns was not aided by the government.
- There have been some sections which have argued that if the government was willing to evacuate Indians from other countries, why similar intent is not being shown to make sure that the poor migrant labourers reach their hometown.

**However, the Government’s measures were necessary:**

- The need for a very short notice before lockdown was considered essential given the fact that a larger time lag would lead to large scale movement of people and make it difficult to contain the spread of the epidemic.
- The decision for a lockdown at the earliest was considered necessary given the examples of other countries like Italy and Spain where a delay in lockdown had substantially increased the number of cases. The intention was to announce the lockdown and then taken necessary actions for easing the pressure on the citizenry.
- The first priority during such a crisis has to be tackling the health challenge, which can be followed by other measures. The economic package by the government in the form of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana was directed at easing the pressure on the vulnerable.
- Given the daunting scale of tracking that would be required if the migration was allowed, the government chose not to allow migration of the labourers to their hometowns. The possible spread of the virus in the rural hinterlands would be beyond the carrying capacity of the Indian health system.
Measures needed:

- The proposed quarantine camps must be well equipped with sufficient supplies of essential items for all.
- Governments must use schools and college hostels for the migrants to stay and also utilize the Public Distribution System to provide food.
- Governments must show resolve, commitment, and compassion to deal with the migrant crisis.
- Civil society must come forward and support the most vulnerable.
- For the migrants already enroute to their places, there should be proper screening en route and they should be informed of the practical health protocols to be practiced during the first 14 days.
- These migrants need to be put under observation, further screening, isolation, testing, and quarantine where required.
- The affected families also have to be given minimum guarantees of food, health, and some income by the government during the lockdown.

Way forward:

What are the key problems faced by migrant workers? Critically analyze measures taken by government for solving these problems.(250 words)

Reference: Live Mint, The Hindu

Introduction:

Thousands of migrant labourers have headed home on foot after national lockdown, which has created an acute shortage of labourers in major agrarian states. The inter-State migrant worker
community, thousands of these migrant labourers have been leaving cities, even on foot, for their towns in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and elsewhere.

After days of uncertainty following the lockdown, nearly 1,200 migrant workers from Odisha, stranded in Kerala will undertake a journey to return home

Body:

Hardship faced by migrant labourers:

- Between 100 million to 125 million people leave their villages, families and homes to find work far away wherever they can find it; their invisible hands harvest the crops and feed us, clean streets, run factories, build roads, and construct our houses.
- The migrant workers are largely dependent upon casual and daily wage labour and unorganized retail.
- The lockdown would severely affect their livelihood opportunities.
- Citing the uncertainty of employment, and therefore of money and resources, these migrant labourers sought the comfort of the social net in their towns and wanted to return back.
- Most of the migrant workers live in cramped spaces where it would be difficult to maintain physical distancing.
- The lack of hygiene and sanitation facilities makes this section highly vulnerable to such epidemics.
- An analysis of the migration trend shows that a major portion of the rural-urban migration constitutes the migration of men to cities in search of better employment opportunities.
- They are generally the primary breadwinners, and the survival of their families back home is entirely dependent on these migrant labourers. The anxiety of being affected by the virus drove many to return to their families.

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The decision for a lockdown at the earliest was considered necessary given the examples of other countries like Italy and Spain where a delay in lockdown had substantially increased the number of cases. The intention was to announce the lockdown and then taken necessary actions for easing the pressure on the citizenry.

The first priority during such a crisis has to be tackling the health challenge, which can be followed by other measures. The economic package by the government in the form of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana was directed at easing the pressure on the vulnerable.

Given the daunting scale of tracking that would be required if the migration was allowed, the government chose not to allow migration of the labourers to their hometowns. The possible spread of the virus in the rural hinterlands would be beyond the carrying capacity of the Indian health system.

Measures needed:

- The proposed quarantine camps must be well equipped with sufficient supplies of essential items for all.
- Governments must use schools and college hostels for the migrants to stay and also utilize the Public Distribution System to provide food.
- Governments must show resolve, commitment, and compassion to deal with the migrant crisis.
- Civil society must come forward and support the most vulnerable.
- For the migrants already enroute to their places, there should be proper screening en route and they should be informed of the practical health protocols to be practiced during the first 14 days.
- These migrants need to be put under observation, further screening, isolation, testing, and quarantine where required.
- The affected families also have to be given minimum guarantees of food, health, and some income by the government during the lockdown.

Discuss the importance of mental health and explain the various reasons for degenerating mental health of-late.(250 words)

Reference: pib.gov.in

Why this question:
The question is amidst the efforts to introduce new and cheap drugs for the Alzheimer’s disease, the component called Berberine of traditional medicine, have been modified necessarily for introduction to for commercial purpose.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the importance of sound mental health and explain the various reasons for degenerating mental health of-late.

Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Briefly explain the context of the question by presenting key facts that justify it.

Body:
To start with explain what you understand by sound mental health; “a state of physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Then explain why it is important – Physical health and mental health are closely associated and it is proved beyond
doubt that depression leads to heart and vascular diseases, Mental disorders also affect persons health behavior like eating sensibly, regular exercise, adequate sleep, engaging in safe sexual practices, alcohol and tobacco use, adhering to medical therapies thus increasing the risk of physical illness etc. Discuss the different issues and concerns that challenge mental health in general. Highlight the difficulties in implementation of mental health programmers. Discuss the efforts being made by the GOI in this direction.

**Conclusion:**
Conclude with way ahead.

**Introduction:**
Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. (WHO) With over 18% of India’s population aged 10-17, the future of the country will be driven by this segment.

The isolation and fear in this lockdown era is driving an escalating nervousness among many people. Not just those with pre-existing conditions like anxiety, depression and OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder), but also the elderly who are struggling with new levels of loneliness and helplessness.

**Body:**

**Status of Mental health in India**
- According to an estimate by the World Health Organization (WHO), mental illness makes about 15% of the total disease conditions around the world.
- The same estimate also suggests that India has one of the largest populations affected from mental illness.
- As a result, WHO has labelled India as the world’s ‘most depressing country’.
- Moreover, between 1990 to 2017, one in seven people from India have suffered from mental illness ranging from depression, anxiety to severe conditions such as schizophrenia, according to a study. It is no exaggeration to suggest that the country is under a mental health epidemic.
- More than 450 million people suffer from mental disorders. According to WHO, by the year 2020, depression will constitute the second largest disease burden worldwide (Murray & Lopez, 1996).

**Importance of mental health:**
- Emotional and mental health is important because it’s a vital part of your life and impacts your thoughts, behaviors and emotions.
- Being healthy emotionally can promote productivity and effectiveness in activities like work, school or caregiving.
- It plays an important part in the health of your relationships, and allows you to adapt to changes in your life and cope with adversity.
- Our mental health encompasses our psychological, emotional and social well-being. This means it impacts how we feel, think and behave each day.
- Our mental health also contributes to our decision making process, how we cope with stress and how we relate to others in our lives.
- Global burden of mental health will be well beyond the treatment capacities of developed and developing countries.
• The social and economic costs associated with growing burden of mental ill health focused the possibilities for promoting mental health as well as preventing and treating mental illness.

Reasons for degenerating mental health of late:
• The first and foremost reason for India to lose its mental health is the lack of awareness and sensitivity about the issue.
• There is a big stigma around people suffering from any kind of mental health issues.
• They are often tagged as ‘lunatics’ by the society. This leads to a vicious cycle of shame, suffering and isolation of the patients.

• Issues with Mental Healthcare Act, 2017:
  ▪ The Act neglects the prevention and promotion of mental well-being and recognizes mental illness as a clinical issue which can only be treated by medicines and clinical procedures.
  ▪ The Act does not provide a clear procedure for preparing the Advance Directive. Further, doctors are of the opinion that they are in the best position to take decisions on aspects of treatment since patients or their nominated representatives may have limited knowledge on mental health and mental illness.
  ▪ The Act provides a narrow and restricted definition of mental health professionals and does not include psychotherapists, counsellors and psychoanalysts.
  ▪ Further, given the infrastructural and human resource constraints, the implementation of the Act poses a huge challenge.

• Also, there is a serious shortage of mental healthcare workforce in India.

• According to WHO, in 2011, there were 0.301 psychiatrists and 0.047 psychologists for every 100,000 patients suffering from a mental health disorder in India.

• Treatment gap: According to estimates nearly 92% of the people who need mental health care and treatment do not have access to any form of mental health care.

• The economic burden of mental illness contributes significantly to the treatment gap in India. There are both direct (cost of long-term treatment) and indirect costs (the inability of the patient and caregiver to work, social isolation, psychological stress) contribute significantly to the economic burden.

• Violations of human rights have been reported in mental asylums and also at homes and places of traditional healing. In India, mental hospitals still practice certain obscure practices that violate human rights. Further poor infrastructure such as closed structures, a lack of maintenance, unclean toilets and sleeping areas etc clearly violate the basic human right to a life with dignity.

Way Forward:
• Mental health situation in India demands active policy interventions and resource allocation by the government.
• To reduce the stigma around mental health, we need measure to train and sensitize the community/society.
This can happen only when we have persistent nationwide effort to educate the society about mental diseases.

We also need steps to connect the patients with each other by forming a peer network, so that they could listen and support each other.

Moreover, people experiencing mental health problems should get the same access to safe and effective care as those with physical health problems.

Additionally, mental illness must mandatorily be put under the ambit of life insurance. This will help people to see mental illness with the same lens as they use for physical diseases.

When it comes to providing the right care to patients with mental illness, we need mental healthcare intervention to the patients, we need innovative models to deepen the penetration of services and staff. One such model is accredited social health activist (ASHA) by the ministry of health and family welfare, Government of India. Under this model, community health workers not only educate and sensitize women and children about mental diseases but also guide them to reach the right expert in their locality.

We need a constant stream of funds for educating and creating awareness about mental health and chronic issues around it.

The need of the hour is to provoke masses to learn about mental health through campaigns like Swachh Mansikta Abhiyan. This will help them address mental issues in a timely and effective manner and live a stress-free life.

The campaign will also encourage people to talk about their mental well-being and reach out to a therapist or psychiatrist, in case they need to do so.

**Conclusion:**

Timely intervention, awareness about the issue, availability of professional help and appropriate policies is the only way to improve the situation. It is thus imperative to believe and propagate that people with mental illness deserve to live their lives with dignity and confidence. It requires a collaborative public-private-social partnership to change things considerably.

Discuss the technological, sociocultural, regulatory, legal and ethical issues involved in leveraging AI in the healthcare industry of the country. (250 words)

**Reference:** Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare- Yojana May edition 2020

**Why this question:**

The question is from the May edition of the magazine – Yojana.

**Key demand of the question:**

The question is straightforward and aims to discuss the technological, sociocultural, regulatory, legal and ethical issues involved in leveraging AI in the healthcare industry of the country.

**Directive:**

Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**

Briefly explain AI, its components.

**Body:**

One must outlines the opportunities for Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology within the Indian Healthcare sector. Then move on to illustrate some of the many challenges from the wider adoption of AI based solutions. Elucidate the use of AI for the current COVID-19 situation and potential exponential spread amongst the population.
Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction:

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines. These are programmed to think like humans and mimic their actions. Artificial intelligence has a lot of potential applications especially in the healthcare sector. It can be used in diagnosis, treatment design, imaging diagnosis, early detections of disease outbreaks, robot assisted surgeries, virtual nurse assistants etc.

Body:

AI potential for healthcare in India:

- According to an Accenture report published in December 2017, key clinical healthcare AI apps can create $150 billion in annual savings for the United States healthcare economy by 2026.
- “Growth in the AI health market is expected to reach $6.6 billion by 2021—that’s a compound annual growth rate of 40%,” says the report.
- Another report by the CIS India published earlier this year, AI could help add $957 billion to the Indian economy by 2035. “…investment in AI in the Indian healthcare industry appears to be growing.
- For example, of the $5.5 billion raised by global digital healthcare companies in the July-September 2017 quarter, at least 16 Indian healthcare IT companies received funding,” the report said.
- State governments are also providing support to AI startups – with reports quoting the Karnataka government mobilising 2,000 crore by 2020 towards supporting the same.
- The Karnataka government also has a Startup Policy and Karnataka Information Technology Venture Capital Fund that can support AI startups.
- A Transparency Market Research (TMR) report published in May 2017 suggests that the global healthcare automation market is growing at a CAGR of 8.8% and will touch $58.98 billion by the end of 2025, up from $28.31 billion in 2016.
- Microsoft also has a partnership with Apollo Hospitals to use AI for early detection of cardiac diseases.
- Some of the initiatives of Microsoft India in healthcare include a Microsoft Intelligent Network for Eyecare (MINE) project where the company is working the government of Telangana for its Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram. The state government has adopted the MINE an AI platform to reduce avoidable blindness.
- Healthi is a four-year-old Bengaluru-based digital health and wellness startup. The company uses predictive analytics, personalisation algorithms and machine learning to deliver personalised health suggestions.

Potential application of artificial intelligence in the healthcare system:

- Diagnosis:
  - One of the biggest advantages of AI is going to be diagnosis. The technology can help industry stakeholders collate the massive health data that is available. It is estimated that more than 80% of the health data is unstructured, making it invisible to current systems, according to a PWC report.
Fortunately, technology firms like IBM and Google have already come up with solutions. Google’s DeepMind Health platform is working with clinics and health institutes across the world to implement Artificial Intelligence.

IBM’s popular AI, Watson, is using cognitive technology to process and analyse the vast data.

- **Monitoring of Chronic Conditions**
  - Conditions like diabetes, cholesterol, fertility issues and cardiac health are managed by regular monitoring and lifestyle changes. Chronic conditions are the single-largest burden on healthcare systems globally.
  - Connected POC devices help generate a lot of data about the user’s body parameters.
  - This can be combined with lifestyle information like food habits, exercise, etc, by an AI algorithm to help manage the conditions and adjust dosage of medication.

- **AI assisted Robotic Surgery**:
  - AI assisted robotics can guide the surgeon’s instrument during a procedure, cutting down the time required to do the surgery and reducing complications.

- **Image Analysis**:
  - A lot of pathological evaluations like microscopy for infections like malaria, differential counts, etc, depend on image analysis.
  - Similarly, finding out abnormalities in an MRI scan is done through manual analysis by a radiologist.
  - In both the cases, AI can help by screening the image analysis to help the pathologist or the radiologist give a faster and more accurate diagnosis.

- **Using the fitness wearables**:
  - From Fitbit, Xiaomi Mi Band to Apple Watch, there are a number of smart fitness-focused wearables available. These fitness devices are coupled with applications that provide a deeper insight on the individual’s health on a daily basis.

- **Drug discovery**:
  - The AI has the potential to help researchers create drugs as well. One of the popular names in this field is Atomwise, which uses deep learning process to reduce the time taken to discover new drugs.
  - The six-year-old company raised more than $51 million in funding earlier this year. The company also said that it is offering over 50 molecular discovery programmes.
  - Even IBM is utilising its Watson AI to help accelerate drug research.

- **Managing medical records and other Data**:
The first step in health care is compiling and analysing information (like medical records and other past history), data management is the most widely used application of artificial intelligence and digital automation.

Robots collect, store, format, and trace data to provide faster, more consistent access.

- **Virtual nurses:**
  - The AI has been used to develop a digital nurse to help people monitor patient’s condition and follow up with treatments, between doctor visits.
  - In 2016, Boston Children’s Hospital developed an app Alexa that gives basic health information and advice for parents of ill children.

- **Precision medicine:**
  - Genetics and genomics look for mutations and links to disease from the information in DNA. With the help of AI, body scans can spot cancer and vascular diseases early and predict the health issues people might face based on their genetics.

**Issues with AI in healthcare:**

- **Technological issues:**
  - Data: The obstacle to AI implementation in healthcare is not technological but access to data. Research is hampered by difficulties in accessing large medical datasets, for legal or other reasons. It’s particularly tough for startups in the field as larger players already have access to such data.
  - Development: The lack of robust medical open data sets in India can also hinder the development of AI, as developers must rely on data sets from other countries for their prototypes.
  - Digitization issues: In many Indian health centers, medical records are still paper, and radiology still uses films.
  - Scaling up and distributing technology in India is challenging.
  - Infrastructure: Though India is working to develop and improve national infrastructure necessary for AI to take off in the country remains ignored by policy makers. Cloud-computing infrastructure, for example, is mostly concentrated in servers outside India. Delays in investing in native infrastructure have resulted in many Indian start-ups incorporating themselves outside India due to easier access to infrastructure and technology.

- **Regulatory issues:**
  - At present, India lacks a Regulating Authority for AI in healthcare. There is also a regulatory gap around medical devices, which has sought to be addressed by the recent Indian Medical Devices Rules, 2017.
  - Investment: Investment, though growing, in health related AI in India appears to be currently limited and research is under-funded and explored, especially by the government.
- Information Asymmetries and Perceptions: AI-based healthcare solutions often face the issue of information asymmetry between the doctors who use the system and the coders who built it.

- Legal issues:
  - One of the biggest issues with the adoption of AI in healthcare in India is acceptability of results, which include direct results arrived at using AI technologies as well as opinions provided by medical practitioners that are influenced/aided by AI technologies.
  - The lack of government spending on healthcare means that public health programmes are still largely funded from outside the country. This sometimes results in importing technology rather than fostering the development of indigenously developed locally appropriate inventions.
  - Medical education in India does not place enough emphasis on research and on keeping up with new developments. Combined with an overburdened system, this results in generations of practicing clinicians with little motivation to innovate or to understand and adopt technology.

- Ethical issues:
  - Clinical practice often involves complex judgments and abilities that AI currently is unable to replicate, such as contextual knowledge and the ability to read social cues.
  - Reliability and safety: Reliability and safety are key issues where AI is used to control equipment, deliver treatment, or make decisions in healthcare. AI could make errors and, if an error is difficult to detect or has knock-on effects, this could have serious implications.
  - Transparency and accountability: It can be difficult or impossible to determine the underlying logic that generates the outputs produced by AI. Machine learning technologies can be particularly opaque because of the way they continuously tweak their own parameters and rules as they learn. This creates problems for validating the outputs of AI systems, and identifying errors or biases in the data.
  - Data bias, fairness, and equity: Concerns have been raised about the potential of AI to lead to discrimination in ways that may be hidden or which may not align with legally protected characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, disability, and age.
  - Effects on patients: Concerns have been raised about a loss of human contact and increased social isolation if AI technologies are used to replace staff or family time with patients.
  - Effects on healthcare professionals: Healthcare professionals may feel that their autonomy and authority is threatened if their expertise is challenged by AI. The ethical obligations of healthcare professionals towards individual patients might be affected by the use of AI decision support systems.
  - Malicious use of AI: While AI has the potential to be used for good, it could also be used for malicious purposes. For example, there are fears that AI could be used for covert surveillance or screening. The question of who is responsible when AI is used to support decision-making; difficulties in validating the outputs of AI systems, securing public trust in the development and use of AI technologies etc. are other ethical issues.
Way forward:

- AI research in India is still in its infancy and requires largescale concerted and collaborative interventions.
- Skilling and reskilling of workforce forms an integral part of adopting AI.
- Adoption of decentralised teaching mechanisms, working in collaboration with the private sector and educational institutions.
- Adoption of AI across the value chain viz. startups, private sector, PSUs and government entities, will truly unlock the potential by creating a virtuous cycle of supply and demand.
- Data is one of the primary drivers of AI solutions, and thus appropriate handling of data, ensuring privacy and security is of prime importance.
- Establishing data protection frameworks and adoption of international standards.
- In order for India to ride the AI innovation wave, a robust intellectual property framework is required.

Conclusion:

The significant need for technology to bridge resource gaps in India, and the potential of AI to offer affordable solutions at scale means that India may soon be poised to realise the benefits of these technologies on health outcomes.

Critically analyse the gaps in the occupational health and safety that have led to failure in catering for the amount of industrial development that has occurred in India. (250 words)

Reference: Hindustan Times

Why this question:

In an incident that echoes with the Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984), an accident of gas leakage took place in a plastic factory located in Andhra Pradesh’s Vizag in the wee hours of Thursday. Thus the context of the question.

Key demand of the question:

Present a critical examination of the gaps in the occupational health and safety that have led to failure in catering for the amount of industrial development that has occurred in India.

Directive:

Critically analyze – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary. When ‘critically’ is suffixed or prefixed to a directive, one needs to look at the good and bad of the topic and give a fair judgment.

Structure of the answer:

Introduction:

In short highlight the context of the question.

Body:

Start by explaining what you understand by occupational health and safety. An occupational hazard is a hazard experienced in the workplace. Occupational hazards can encompass many types of hazards, including chemical hazards, biological hazards (biohazards), psychosocial hazards, and physical hazards. Chemical hazards are a subtype of occupational hazards that involve dangerous chemicals. Exposure to chemicals in the workplace can cause acute or long-term detrimental health effects. There are many classifications of hazardous chemicals, including neurotoxins, immune agents, dermatologic agents, carcinogens, reproductive toxins, systemic toxins, asthmagens, pneumoconiotic agents, and sensitizers. Then discuss the gaps in the existing policies dedicated to handle these hazards.
Conclusion:
Conclude with suggestions and solutions

Introduction:
Occupational health and safety (OHS) relates to health, safety, and welfare issues in the workplace. OHS includes the laws, standards, and programs that are aimed at making the workplace better for workers, along with co-workers, family members, customers, and other stakeholders.

A major leak from a polymer plant LG Polymers near Visakhapatnam impacted villages in a five-km radius, leaving at least 9 people dead and thousands of citizens suffering from breathlessness and other problems in an early morning mishap that raised fears of a serious industrial disaster.

Body:
Occupational health and safety is concerned with addressing many types of workplace hazards, such as:

- Chemicals
- Physical hazards
- Biological agents
- Psychological fallout
- Ergonomic issues
- Accidents

Gaps in the occupational health and safety that have led to failure:

- Thirty-six years after the Bhopal disaster, it is distressing to see accidents from hazardous industries. The fields of occupational and environmental medicine, toxicology, and epidemiology which study and prevent industrial accidents have still not been developed adequately to cater for the amount of industrial development that has occurred in India.
- The common reasons for accidents in chemical plants occur is from improper maintenance of equipment. A piece of equipment can ultimately fail and malfunction if it is not properly maintained. This can be very hazardous for the workers who are operating and working around the machine.
- Regular maintenance at scheduled intervals and the manufacturer’s recommendations is important to ensure that the equipment runs smoothly and safely.
- A majority of accidents that occur in refineries are the result of human error. Often times a worker fails to follow the safety procedures that have been put into place by the company.
- An accident can occur when a worker uses improper equipment. Furthermore, injuries occur when a worker uses improper tools to work on the equipment. This can damage the machines and create a safety hazard on the workers.
- Oftentimes an accident occurs due to a manufacturing defect. These defects can sometimes be present in the materials used or in a piece of equipment.
- An inspector may miss a defect in the equipment during the manufacturing process. A problem like this is not recognized until a worker is injured by the defective equipment.
- Whenever personnel is not adequately or properly trained, chemical plant and refinery accidents are more likely to occur.
- Employees should be properly taught on how to operate the equipment in the way it was designed to be used. They should also learn to employ safety procedures when they are
operating a piece of equipment. Also, employees should be well versed in what to do if something goes wrong so that they can fix it before it gets out of control.

Measures undertaken in India:

- **Civil Nuclear Liability Act, 2010** deals with instituting civil liability for nuclear damage and granting prompt compensation to victims of a nuclear incident.
- **The Environment Relief Fund (ERF),** a central fund under the **Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991,** was set up to provide immediate relief to victims of accidents in chemical industries. In March, a study found that a corpus of Rs 810 crore with ERF has remained unutilised for nearly three decades.
- India follows the highest standard of liability for an incident like this, when a hazardous or dangerous substance used for industrial purposes leaks and causes harm to people.
- **Environment Protection Act, 1987,** brought in the aftermath of Bhopal Gas Tragedy. Under this, the Centre has notified **Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemicals Rules, 1989** and the **Hazardous Wastes (Management, Handling and Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2008** for regulating hazardous substances.
- The principle of ‘absolute and strict liability’ was formulated by the Supreme Court in a crucial judgment in **MC Mehta vs Union of India in 1986,** when the court was dealing with the leak of oleum gas at the Shriram Foods and Fertiliser Industries plant in Delhi.
- **The National Environment Appellate Authority Act, 1997:** Under this Act, the National Environment Appellate Authority can hear appeals regarding the restriction of areas in which any industries, operations or processes or class of industries shall not be carried out or shall be carried out subject to certain safeguards under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- **National Green Tribunal, 2010** provided for the establishment of the National Green Tribunal for effective and expeditious disposal of cases related to environmental protection and conservation of forests.
- This means that if there is an accident at a plant like LG Polymers in Visakhapatnam, which involves the manufacture or use of a hazardous substance (like styrene gas here, or oleum gas in the Delhi case) the company which runs the plant has to make sure that it compensates everyone who suffers any sort of harm as a result.

Way forward:

- **The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2019,** which unfortunately, successive governments have not felt it necessary to ratify should be taken up and put into place immediately.
- With the ultimate aim of extending the safety and healthy working conditions to all workforce of the country, the Code enhances the ambit of provisions of safety, health, welfare and working conditions from existing about 9 major sectors to all establishments having 10 or more employees.
- It is evident that the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions has some unique new initiatives for both workers and employers.
- It promotes health, safety, welfare and better working conditions of workforce by enhancing the ambit of a dynamic legislation as compared to the existing sectoral approach limited to few sectors.
- Besides, it also drastically rationalises the compliance mechanism with one license, one registration and one return for the establishments under the ambit of the Code thereby saving resources and efforts of the employers.
Thus, there is a need to balance the requirements of worker and employer and is beneficial to both the constituents of the world of work.

Several States across India are ignoring the welfare laws for workers in the name of boosting economic activity, What are the issues with such changes in the laws? Elucidate.(250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why this question:
With the need for revival of business and economic activity after weeks of forced closure, interests of laborers and workers are being sacrificed. Several States across India are ignoring the welfare laws for workers in the name of boosting economic activity. Thus the question.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the effect of change in labor laws being made by several States in the country and their ill impact on the welfare of them, discuss the issues associated and suggest solutions.

Directive:
Elucidate – Give a detailed account as to how and why it occurred, or what is the particular context. You must be defining key terms where ever appropriate, and substantiate with relevant associated facts.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Briefly narrate the issue at hand.

Body:
To start with, explain the actions taken by different states; Uttar Pradesh, last week, introduced an ordinance that has scrapped most labour laws for three years — ostensibly for creating jobs and for attracting factories exiting China following the outbreak of the novel coronavirus. Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have quickly followed suit. Punjab has already allowed 12-hour shifts per day (72 hours per week) in factories without overtime payment to overcome worker shortage after the migrants have left in the wake of the national lockdown. Then move on to discuss the concerns associated with it in detail. Suggest what can be done to address those concerns.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction:
Recently several State governments made changes in their labour laws and removed or expanded limits on working hours and changed several other provisions. This is done with the need for revival of business and economic activity after weeks of forced closure, interests of labourers and workers are being sacrificed.

Body:
Some of the changed laws:

- Uttar Pradesh introduced an ordinance that has scrapped most labour law for three years.
- This was done ostensibly for two reasons viz. creating jobs and for attracting factories exiting China.
- These laws deal with -the occupational safety, health and working conditions of workers, regulation of hours of work, wages and settlement of industrial disputes.
- They apply mostly to the economy’s organized or formal sector, that is, registered factories and companies, and large establishments in general.
• Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have quickly followed suit.
• Punjab has already allowed 12-hour shifts per day (72 hours per week) in factories without overtime payment to overcome worker shortage after the migrants have left in the wake of the national lockdown.

**Impacts of such measures:**

• Scrapping labour laws to save on labour costs would reduce wages, lower earnings, particularly of low wage workers and reduce consumer demand.
• Further, it will lead to an increase of low paid work that offers no security of tenure or income stability.
• It will increase informal employment in the formal sector instead of encouraging the growth of formal work.
• Depriving workers of fundamental rights such as freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, and a set of primary working conditions (such as adequate living wages, limits on hours of work and safe and healthy workplaces), will create a fertile ground for the exploitation of the working class.
• The rationale for scrapping labour laws to attract investment and boost manufacturing growth poses two additional questions.
  o If the laws were in fact so strongly pro-worker, they would have raised wages and reduced business profitability.
    ▪ But the real wage growth (net of inflation) of directly employed workers in the factory sector has been flat (2000-01 to 2015-16) as firms have increasingly resorted to casualization and informalisation of the workforce to suppress workers’ bargaining power, evidence suggests.
  o Industrial performance is not just a function of the labour laws but of the size of the market, fixed investment growth, credit availability, infrastructure, and government policies.
    ▪ There is little evidence to suggest that amendment of key labour laws by Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in 2014 took them any closer to their goal of creating more jobs or industrial growth.

**Concerns posed by the changes in laws:**

• In the wake of the lockdown, India has witnessed unheard of human distress as lakhs of migrant workers continue to desperately trudge to their villages after losing their jobs, livelihoods, and toeholds in cities.
• Despite overflowing food grain stocks, governments have been miserly in providing adequate food security.
• Income support to workers to retain them in their places of work has also been lacking.
• Significantly, migrant labour will be critical to restore production once the lockdown is lifted. In fact, factories and shops are already staring at worker shortages.
• Instead of encouraging workers to stay back or return to cities by ensuring livelihood support and safety nets, State governments have sought to strip workers of their fundamental rights.
• Employers’ associations have urged the central government to do away with most labour rights to address temporary labour shortages.

Way forward:
• India’s complex web of labour laws, with around 47 central laws and 200 State laws, needs to be rationalized.
• There is need for reforms to maintain a delicate balance between the need for firms to adapt to ever-changing market conditions and workers’ employment security.
• As India battles the economic and social consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, many State governments have seized the opportunity to scrap labour laws on the pretext of encouraging employment.
• Such a decision makes little economic sense, as it will reduce share of wages in output, thereby reducing growth in domestic demand and hurting output expansion.
• It is amoral on the part of the States to address the need of revival of economic activity by granting sweeping exemptions from legal provisions aimed at protecting labourers in factories and industries. Such ordinances or measures must be revoked.

Conclusion:
The slowdown is due to lack of demand, not of supply, as widely suggested. With massive job and income losses after the lockdown, aggregate demand has totally slumped, with practically no growth. Therefore, the way to restart the economy is to provide income support and restore jobs. This will not only address the humanitarian crisis but also help revive consumer demand by augmenting incomes.

“It’s not trade reliance that makes Indian economy susceptible but lack of its human capital”, Do you agree with the statement? Give reasons in support of your arguments.

(250 words)
Reference: Indian Express

Why this question:
The question is based on the article that hints on focusing upon the human capital to make the Indian economy more susceptible.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the importance of human capital and highlight how trade dependence is not the major contributor for the Indian economy but human capital is.

Directive:
Give Reasons – Weigh up to what extent something is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant research but also remember to point out any flaws and counter-arguments as well. Conclude by stating clearly how far you are in agreement with the original proposition.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Briefly explain the importance of trade and human capital to the economy in general.

Body:
To start with, explain the fact that for India to be truly self-reliant and self-confident, public investment in education, human capability and research and development has to increase. Discuss the policy measures taken by the govt. to make Indian economy self-reliant. Highlight other aspects that are necessary for the growth of the economy.

Conclusion:
Conclude that human capability and research and development have to increase. It is not trade dependence that makes India vulnerable but the inadequacy of its human capital.

Introduction:

Human capital refers to the intangible collection of knowledge, training, skills, wisdom, and other cognitive abilities of any individual, which cumulates as a resource to the nation or organization the individuals belongs. Human capital determines the path and pace of development of an organisation or a nation. In the 21st century, India aspires to be one of the manufacturing hub of world.

Prime Minister presented a big picture vision statement on making India a more self-reliant and self-confident nation in a changing and challenging post-COVID world. For India to be truly self-reliant and self-confident, public investment in education, human capability and research and development has to increase. It is not trade dependence that makes India vulnerable but the inadequacy of its human capital.

Body:

Significance of human capital:

- Human capital is central to sustainable growth and poverty reduction.
- Development of human capital enables people to be more productive, flexible, and innovative.
- With rapid technological development, development of human capital has become prerequisite to cater to the changing needs of work.
- With rapid globalization and industrialization, markets demand workforce with higher levels of human capital, especially advanced cognitive and socio-behavioural skills.

Reasons for low Human Capital Development in India:

- **Health:**
  - Healthcare provisions in India is grossly inadequate and access to healthcare is highly inequitable. Lack of efficient public healthcare and burden of out of pocket health expenditures reduces people’s capacity or disables them from investing in the human capital of their children.
  - ineffective functioning (corruption and leakages) of the public distribution system (PDS), growing economic inequalities and lack of nutritional awareness pose challenges in combating malnutrition
- **Education:**
  - Basic literacy (the ability to read and write) in the overall population has progressed modestly. However, there is persistent gender differentials, and major differentials by caste and religion.
  - The state of functional literacy and professional skills is poor. Indian graduates have low employability and does not meet changing economic structure or support global competitiveness.
- **Rising Inequality:**
  - In India, a large portion of the population is below the poverty line, therefore, they do not have easy access to primary health and education.
There is growing inequality across social groups and income groups which translates itself into poor socio-economic mobility.

Lack of socioeconomic mobility hinders human capital development and traps a large section of population to be in the vicious circle of poverty.

- **Lack of Skilling:**
  - According to the National Sample Survey, out of the 470 million people of working age in India, only 10% receive any kind of training or access to skilled employment opportunities.
  - There’s a huge mismatch between demand and supply when it comes to skilled workforce and employment opportunities, which could place a strain on the economy in the long run

- **Inadequate use of knowledge bases from technology developments:**
  - There is a disconnect between India’s rate of technological growth and ability to distribute the gains from it by adequately focusing on skilling and health.
  - The use of technical advancements has been concentrated in few sectors and benefits accrued by a few elitist sections of the society.

**Way forward:**

- To engineer an inclusive and sustainable growth for India, the social infrastructure like education, health and social protection are being given utmost priority by the Government.
- The Government has been enhancing the expenditure on human capital along with adopting measures to improve the efficiency of expenditure by a convergence of schemes.
- Several labour reform measures including legislative ones are being implemented for the creation of employment opportunities and for providing sustainable livelihoods for the population who are largely engaged in the informal economy.
- Bridging the gender gaps in education, skill development, employment, earnings and reducing social inequalities prevalent in the society have been the underlying goals of the development strategy to enhance human capabilities.
- In essence, developing and empowering human capital to be able to shift to the new technology world seamlessly, should be the top priority of governments.
- Integration of higher education with skills and vocational education. Attracting the most credible talent to the teaching profession. Building global recognition to the education system.
- Streamlining regulation to attract credible private sector entities to education are some structural changes which are needed for transforming education.
- Access to high speed internet, multidisciplinary learning, design thinking, data science and information filtration capabilities are typical for making a future ready workforce.

**Conclusion:**

As the future grows more uncertain, the only way forward is to strengthen the core of the country and predictably India’s core opportunity is its human capital. For a country like India, with a one-time huge opportunity of demographic dividend, its high time to focus on human capital. Unless, we give adequate stress to education, health and skills – we will lose this golden opportunity. As of now, our rank in various indices – human capital and human resource – is not encouraging. Both government and private entities should give better focus on the same.
“A stronger health system in a country can lead to better outcomes on the economic growth front.”, comment.

Reference: The Hindu

Why this question:
The article talks about the need for a strong health system and in what way it can lead to economic growth front.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the dimension that Investment in public health yields returns for Economic development.

Directive:
Comment– here we have to express our knowledge and understanding of the issue and form an overall opinion thereupon.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Briefly explain the importance of better health system.

Body:
Explain that the ₹20 lakh crore packages recently announced includes proposals to prevent and respond to future pandemics. Explain the need for identifying importance of strong health system; discuss how it leads to better outcomes on the economic growth. One can present the case of COVID 19.

Conclusion:
Conclude by suggesting methods and policies through which it can be achieved.

Introduction:
It is often said when that public health sneezes, the economy catches cold. Dire predictions for the post-COVID-19 global economy have come from the International Monetary Fund, which called the present crisis the worst downturn since the Great Depression. Grim forebodings for the Indian economy have been sounded by many distinguished economists and the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India. IMF has also said that the reduction in public health negatively affects the national economy. Therefore, it becomes necessary to observe the relation of Indian economy and public health. The ₹20-lakh-crore package recently announced includes proposals to prevent and respond to future pandemics.

Body:
Current scenario of Public healthcare in India:
- Over 1,01,000 Indians have so far become infected by the novel coronavirus.
- We are not yet fully able to test and isolate efficiently, we are yet to find a protocol for cure and the vaccine is still in the distant future.
- Indian hospitals and 60,000 nursing homes in the private sector have looked after 68% of Indian healthcare needs.
- In the process, they have evolved into delivering world-class care and continue to attract patients from 145 countries.
- Even more remarkably — they do it at 1/10th of international costs.
- While we are fighting for survival, the economic impact of this virus is $8 trillion and growing as fast as the virus — which is why we need to desperately focus on a cure for the economy and a vaccine that protects the Indian healthcare system.

Plans to spend the money in package:
• Medical aid of 15000 crores.
• strengthening of health and wellness centres,
• establishment of infectious diseases hospital blocks in all districts,
• increasing the viability gap funding from 20% to 30%
• expansion of the laboratory network and
• ‘One Health’ research on zoonotic diseases under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)
• 50 lakh insurance cover for doctors and frontline workers

Importance of public health for India:
• There is robust evidence that investments in public health and primary care pay rich economic dividends.
• A UN High Level Commission, headed by the Presidents of France and South Africa, reported in 2016 that investments for augmenting the size and skills of the health workforce yields economic growth through
  ▪ improved population health and productivity,
  ▪ reduced healthcare costs and
  ▪ job creation even in a gloomy global scenario of job loss
• Productivity boost promised by a demographically young population can be protected.
• Education and skilling of a diversified health workforce can uplift health services for health protection at both population and individual levels.
• When domestic needs are met, this expanded health workforce can also meet global health needs, both as a rapid action force for health emergency response and as a unit taking care of the chronic care needs of aged societies.
• Innovative health technologies and inexpensive pharmaceutical products can be created at scale, for domestic use and global export.
• Hence Government has made some provisions for healthcare under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

Challenges in Indian Public healthcare system:
• India’s public expenditure on health now stands at 1.28 per cent of the GDP but even then, it is way lower than the average expenditure by the South-East Asian countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Indonesia, Thailand and the tiny island country of Timor-Leste.
• Many public health specialists have expressed disappointment over the Centre’s declared pledge to invest 2.5 percent of its GDP into healthcare by 2025, when the global average will be about 6 per cent.
• According to the latest National Health Accounts (NHA) estimates released on Wednesday, patients bear a big chunk of health expenses, as high as 61 per cent of the total health expenditure, by themselves.
• There is a massive shortage of medical staff, infrastructure and last mile connectivity in rural areas. **Eg: Doctor: Population 1:1800** and 78% doctors cater to urban India (population of 30%).

• Massive shortages in the supply of services (human resources, hospitals and diagnostic centres in the private/public sector) which are made worse by grossly inequitable availability between and within States.
  ▪ For example, even a well-placed State such as Tamil Nadu has an over 30% shortage of medical and non-medical professionals in government facilities.

• **Health budget:** The health budget has neither increased nor is there any policy to strengthen the public/private sector in deficit areas. While the **Ayushman Bharat provides portability**, one must not forget that it will take time for hospitals to be established in deficit areas.
  ▪ This in turn could cause patients to gravitate toward the southern States that have a comparatively better health infrastructure than the rest of India.

• **Infrastructure constraints:** There are doubts on the capacity of India’s infrastructure to take on the additional load of patients during **pandemics like Covid-19** as seen recently.
  ▪ There is a growing medical tourism (foreign tourists/patients) as a policy being promoted by the government, and also domestic patients, both insured and uninsured.

• **Absence of primary care:** In the northern States there are hardly any sub-centres and primary health centres are practically non-existent. First mile connectivity to a primary healthcare centre is broken. **For eg, in Uttar Pradesh there is one PHC for every 28 villages.**

• **Out of pocket expenditure high:** Even the poor are forced to opt for private healthcare, and, hence, pay from their own pockets. As a result, an estimated 63 million people fall into poverty due to health expenditure, annually.
  ▪ Inequities in the health sector exist due to many factors like geography, socio-economic status and income groups among others. Compared with countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand and China, which started at almost similar levels, India lags behind peers on healthcare outcomes.

• Rural medical practitioners (RMPs), who provide 80% of outpatient care, have no formal qualifications for it. People fall prey for quacks, often leading to grave disabilities and loss of life.

• **Numerous Schemes:** The Government has launched many policies and health programmes but success has been partial at best. The National Health Policy (NHP) 2002 proposed to increase Government spending on health by two to three per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) by 2010 which has not happened yet. Now, the NHP 2017, has proposed to take it to 2.5 per cent of the GDP by 2025.

• **Healthcare without holistic approach:** There are a lot of determinants for better health like improved drinking water supply and sanitation; better nutritional outcomes, health and education for women and girls; improved air quality and safer roads which are **outside the purview of the Health Ministry.**

• While private sector healthcare providers play an important role in the overall delivery of health services, any engagement of Government hospitals with private sector is seen with suspicion.
A number of health institutions, established since independence, seem to have outlived their utility, for instance institutions solely focus on family welfare.

Finally, universal health coverage (UHC) is a widely accepted and agreed health goal at the global level and has been included in the broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda as well.

**Way forward:**

- There is a need for adequate investment in creating a health system that can withstand any kind of public health emergencies, deliver universal health coverage and other targets of the Sustainable Development Goals
- Create mutually beneficial synergies between health and the economy.
- There is need to strengthen the Indian supply chain, which can help continue to import and use the best because every patient is worth it.
- Need to uncomplicate the cost structure by zero-rating GST or exempt all services and goods that are supplied to the hospital so as to establish synergy between services/goods used by the hospital and rendered by it.
- The essential support system for COVID-19, hospitals need liquidity.
- Beyond bank borrowings, the government should set up a three-year fund that will enable sustainability of the sector and fortify the system from any such future outbreak and offer subvention of interest.
- Incentivize rather than penalize the healthcare institutions that have invested in the future, in Tier II hospitals and technology by allowing companies to retain MAT (Minimum Alternate Tax) credit as they continue to pay 25% corporate tax.
- Moreover, to augment the sector in real sense -Right to Health must be made a fundamental right for every citizen, the launch of Ayushman Bharat scheme is a positive step in this regard.
- Along with Ayushman Bharat (PMJAY), focus must be laid on strengthening the primary health centres with basic diagnostics and services, with district hospitals equipped with multi-specialty capabilities and services to people. Especially for the poor who cannot afford quality health care in private hospitals.
- Access to medicines through Jan Aushadi Kendra Scheme. It is mandated to offer 2000 medicines and 300 surgicals in all districts by 2024.

The current Covid situation brings to us the point that Smart Cities Mission must now pivot towards health. Comment.(250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

**Why this question:**
The question is based on the article that highlights the concerns associated with smart cities and lack of due importance to health infrastructure in it.

**Key demand of the question:**
Explain why Smart cities mission must at least now have pivot towards Health as one of the primary pillars in the mission.

**Directive:**
**Comment**– here we have to express our knowledge and understanding of the issue and form an overall opinion thereupon.

**Structure of the answer:**
**Introduction:**
Briefly explain the smart cities mission and its objectives.

Telegram: https://t.me/insightsIAStips
Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpocbcX9GEIwaile4HljwA
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/insightsonindia
Body:
To start with, explain first in what way Smart Cities Mission, which was to approach urban planning creatively, perpetuates the traditional neglect of health. Explain the need for the mission to acknowledge the importance of health as the substrate of productivity. Suggest reasons as to why health should be made one of the primary pillars of the mission.

Conclusion:
Conclude with reforms and suggestions for the policy.

Introduction:
A smart city is a designation given to a city that incorporates information and communication technologies (ICT) to develop city infrastructure and enhance the quality and performance of urban services such as energy, transportation and utilities in order to reduce resource consumption, wastage and overall costs. The overarching aim of a smart city is to enhance the quality of living for its citizens through smart technology.

The government launched the Smart Cities Mission in 2015 for a five-year period, selecting 100 cities in four rounds. “Health and education” form one of 10 “core infrastructure elements” of a smart city as envisioned by the Centre. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that the Smart Cities Mission, hasn’t understood the foundational importance of health.

Body:
Smart cities mission and healthcare:
- Health is mentioned only in one point, which discusses urban identity conferred through local economic activities like making sports goods and hosiery, and providing medical facilities.
- Health is not acknowledged as the substrate of productivity.
- Only 1.18 per cent of the 5,861 projects okayed since 2015 are for augmenting infrastructure and capability in health.
- These 69 projects, located in 55 of the 100 smart cities being developed, will cost an estimated Rs 2112.06 crore — about 1 per cent of the total Mission investment of Rs 205,018 crore.
- In the importance accorded to health, this is even lower than the shamefully inadequate 1.6 per cent of GDP which the states and the Centre together set aside for health in 2019-20.
- For comparison, the total health expenditure in the US in 2017 was 17.9 per cent of GDP, of which the state contributed over 8.5 per cent.
- Of the 30 municipal jurisdictions which account for 79 per cent of cases, 17 are smart cities — and, of them, only seven have invested Mission funds directly in health.
- Hotspots like Jaipur and Surat have no health projects at all under the Mission.

Need for increasing importance of healthcare in Indian Smart cities mission:
- One of the purposes of the Smart Cities Mission is to improve quality of life, especially of the poor, in order to make Smart Cities inclusive in nature.
- At present, private out of pocket expenses (OOPE) on health comprises 64% of total health spending in India.
- Generally, health related expenditure consists of — medicines, diagnostics and consultation.
- Compared to a rural household, an urban household spends 8 times more on diagnostics, 2.6 times more on medicines and 2.4 times more on doctors’ fees.
- Therefore, reducing high OOPE incurred by urban residents, especially the slum dwellers, leads to more inclusive cities.
Way forward:

- The strategy of Smart Health is based on the providing cheaper doctor consultation, reasonably priced medicines and affordable diagnostics.
- **Consultation through IT Platforms:** For instituting round-the-clock doctor consultations, a unique version of telemedicine can be designed by establishing an IT platform to match patients and doctors, bringing convenience to patient doorstep.
- **Delivering affordable quality medicines:** Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadi Yojana (PMJAY) scheme of Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers can be used to provide affordable, quality generic medicines. Many States have their own schemes for giving free medicines also.
- **Delivering affordable Diagnostics:** Complementing the free medicine scheme, free diagnostic services can also be made available under a hub-and-spoke model, floated by the Ministry of Health under the Free Diagnostics Service Initiative (FDSI). Under this scheme, a set of essential diagnostic services at each facility level has been identified. Diagnostic tests are allowed to be conducted by private providers (PPP model), empaneled by the Government.
- In the hub-and-spoke model, samples are collected at peripheral facilities/collection centers (including Mobile Medical Units) and safely transported to a central laboratory which will act as the Hub, which can be a District Hospital Lab/Medical College/or a public or private laboratory set up for the purpose.

Conclusion:

Integrated healthcare solutions can be of great benefit when implemented on a large scale in smart cities. A holistic view of cities’ health data like disease profiles, disease patterns and trends, seasonal disease cycles etc. are available to the Government, through which the authorities can plan their health care initiatives, programs and allocate funding. An integrated health management roadmap is critical in tying the various pieces together into a nationwide health technology and information backbone. This will decrease unit cost, standardize the basics, and set Indian healthcare on a slower but comprehensive transformation journey. A holistic population health solution, leveraging the information backbone with innovative analytics, can also form the basis for optimal deployment of meagre resources for maximum impact.

Examine the legal landscape of the response to the COVID-19 threat in India with a specific focus on the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897. (250 words)

Reference: *Indian Express*

**Why this question:**
The article discusses in detail the flaws associated with the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 that has been put in action to deal with the pandemic situation in the country.

**Key demand of the question:**
Students must examine the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, its legal landscape, relevance in today’s times.

**Directive:**
Examine – When asked to ‘Examine’, we must look into the topic (content words) in detail, inspect it, investigate it and establish the key facts and issues related to the topic in question. While doing so we should explain why these facts and issues are important and their implications.

**Structure of the answer:**
Introduction:
Recently, there have been calls to update this colonial law as it does not provide guidelines to the states to act to prevent and mitigate epidemics. On the other hand, experts with experience of working within the government seem to believe that the law is appropriate and does not require any changes.

Body:
Discuss here in detail the role of the Act within the legal framework of COVID-19 response. Explain the elements of the COVID-19 response examine the framework that the Epidemic Diseases Act provides, point out the lacunae. Discuss the pros and cons; suggest what needs to be done.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction
The Epidemic Diseases Act came into force on February 4, 1897 as a response to the plague epidemic in Bombay. This act confined plague to Bombay by a series of tough measures which prevented crowds from gathering.

It confers special powers upon local authorities to implement measures necessary to control epidemics. After COVID-19 outbreak in India the Cabinet Secretary on 11th March 2020 announced that all states and Union territories should invoke provisions of Section 2 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.

Body

Key Provisions of EDA

- **Power to take special measures and prescribe regulations**: When at any time the State Government is satisfied that the State is threatened with an outbreak of any dangerous epidemic disease, it may take such measures and by public notice prescribe temporary regulations to be observed by the public or by any person or class of persons as it deems necessary.
  - This is to prevent the outbreak of the disease or the spread thereof.
  - State will determine in what manner and by whom any expenses incurred (including compensation if any shall be defrayed.
  - States can conduct the inspection of persons travelling by railway or otherwise.
  - People can be segregated in hospital or in temporary accommodation suspected by the inspecting officer of being infected with any such disease.

- **Powers of Central Government (Section 2A)**: It has concurrent powers as state and in addition it can do the following.
  - Inspection of any ship or vessel leaving or arriving at any port
  - Detention of any ship or vessel
  - Detention of any person intending to sail or arriving as may be necessary.

- **Section 3**: Any person disobeying any regulation or order made under this Act shall be deemed to have committed an offence punishable under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code.
The fourth and the last section deals with legal protection to implementing officers acting under the Act.

Limitations

This essential Act has failed to address some of the crucial issues. Epidemic Act 1897 is an archaic framework, that is 123-year-old. The century old Act over the years has accumulated quite a number of flaws which can be attributed to the changing priorities in public health emergency management.

• Primarily, this Act merely talks about giving powers to the government when they are ‘satisfied’ that the ordinary laws are insufficient.
  ▪ This is a power which will be difficult to challenge because the threshold set is very subjective and vague.

• Secondly, the Act refers to Section 188 of the IPC for punishment which can give a maximum punishment of six months imprisonment or a thousand rupees.
  ▪ Breaking of such laws can be fatal and might increase the spreading of the diseases as we have seen in the COVID-19 case.
  ▪ In such demanding circumstances, the maximum punishment is at such a low standard that it might not act as a deterrent.

• Apart from the isolation or quarantine measure the act is mum on the legal framework of availability and distribution of vaccine and drugs and implementation of response measures.
  ▪ Earlier, the issues of vaccination were not that prominent, but in this era, these issues are significant.
  ▪ During COVID-19 there was a shortage of medicines, masks, sanitizers, etc.
  ▪ If a provision existed for the availability of the same, then such shortages and hoarding of essential material could have been restricted.

• Epidemic Act 1897 is silent on the definition of dangerous epidemic disease.

• Moreover, it being a century old act, the territorial boundaries of the act needs a relook.

• There is no explicit reference pertaining to the ethical aspects or human rights principles during a response to an epidemic.

Need of the hour

• Although India has a number of legal mechanisms to support public health measures in an epidemic situation, they are not being addressed under a single legislation.

• There is an urgent need to assemble all the provisions in one over-arching public health legislation, so that the implementation of the responses to an epidemic can be effectively monitored.

• The Act needs to form a proper Epidemic Body which constitutes medical professionals, legal professionals and government officials.
This Body can combine all the various legislations and projects for such epidemics like the Act, Disaster Management Act of 2005, the Integrated Disease Surveillance Project, etc.

After this, they can form a single legislation addressing all the issues and measures together. They can act as a governing body in future epidemics.

- The Act needs to be amended as per the current circumstances, technology and need.

**Conclusion**

A life-threatening epidemic like COVID-19 is an eye-opener for us. It tells us that in tough situations, time-worn laws cannot help us. Undeniably, the role of public health specialists in this regard cannot be ruled out. The lawmakers can draw a leaf out of the National Disaster Management Act 2005 (deals with public emergency) as it clearly defines all the terms and has an explicit description of all the implementing measures and agencies to be instituted in the event of any emergency.

**Do you agree with the fact that online education must supplement, not replace, physical sites of learning, Explain. (250 words)**

**Reference:** Indian Express

**Why this question:**
The author talks about the current situation; that is in what way Pandemic is being used to push online education.

**Key demand of the question:**
One has to evaluate whether online education must supplement, not replace, physical sites of learning and justify viewpoint suitably.

**Directive:**
**Explain** – Clarify the topic by giving a detailed account as to how and why it occurred, or what is the particular context. You must be defining key terms where ever appropriate, and substantiate with relevant associated facts.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**
Briefly explain how the pandemic situation has changed the education scenario across the world.

**Body:**
Student has to analyse in detail in the answer if online education is being force-fed to Indian education as a miracle cure — at all levels (school, college, university) and for all tasks (lectures, exams, admissions) — not only for pandemic conditions but for the future. Analyse if online educations is a viable alternative to traditional educational institutions in our country. Present points in favour and against.

**Conclusion:**
Conclude with a balanced and fair opinion.

**Introduction:**
The coronavirus pandemic has shuttered educational institutions across the globe. Closure of schools, colleges and universities, shutdown of routine life of students and teachers, disruptions in education and the education ministry remaining incommunicado, have created an unprecedented situation and thrown many unexpected challenges to administrators, educators, teachers, parents and students.

**Body:**

**Impacts on education due to COVID-19 pandemic:**
school and university closures will not only have a short-term impact on the continuity of learning for more than 285 million young learners in India but also engender far-reaching economic and societal consequences.

The pandemic has significantly disrupted the higher education sector as well, which is a critical determinant of a country’s economic future.

A large number of Indian students—second only to China—enroll in universities abroad, especially in countries worst affected by the pandemic, the US, UK, Australia and China.

Many such students have now been barred from leaving these countries. If the situation persists, in the long run, a decline in the demand for international higher education is expected.

The bigger concern, however, on everybody’s mind is the effect of the disease on the employment rate. Recent graduates in India are fearing withdrawal of job offers from corporates because of the current situation.

The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy’s estimates on unemployment shot up from 8.4% in mid-March to 23% in early April and the urban unemployment rate to 30.9%.

Challenges posed by Online Education:

- India is far behind some developing countries where digital education is getting increased attention.
- Democratization of technology is now an important issue, comprising internet connectivity, telecom infrastructure, affordability of online system, availability of laptop/desktop, software, educational tools, online assessment tools, etc.
- **Census 2011** tells us that **71 per cent of households** with three or more members have dwellings with two rooms or less (74 per cent in rural and 64 per cent in urban areas).
- According to **National Sample Survey data** for 2017-18, **only 42 per cent of urban and 15 per cent of rural households had internet access**, and only **34 per cent of urban and 11 per cent of rural persons had used the internet in the past 30 days**.
- It is true that many traditional educational institutions (TEIs) (both public and private) have substandard infrastructure. But these data suggest that the majority (roughly two-thirds) of students are likely to be worse off at home compared to any campus.
- The impact of smartphone capabilities and stability of net connectivity on OE pedagogy also needs to be examined.
- But it is as a social rather than physical space that the college or university campus plays a critical role. We have long ignored the vital role public educational institutions play as exemplary sites of social inclusion and relative equality. In Indian conditions, this role is arguably even more important than the scholastic role.
- the public educational institution is still the only space where people of all genders, classes, castes, and communities can meet without one group being forced to bow to others.
- Women students, in particular, will be much worse off if confined to their homes by OE.
- Poor are disconnected and irrespective of background, some children cannot relate to the online classroom, and many more are losing out on midday meals.

Online education as a supplement to Traditional Educational Institutes:

- OE can play as a supplement to on-site education.
- It can use content and methods that are hard to include in the normal curriculum. It can put pressure on lazy or incompetent teachers.
- It can provide hands-on experience in many technical fields where simulations are possible.
- And it can, of course, be a powerful accessory for affluent students able to afford expensive aids.
But it is fraudulent to suggest that OE can replace public education, the only kind that the majority can access.

Conclusion:

To summarize, education must continue. Students should keep learning. The lockdown period should be productive. Educators should think creatively and introduce innovative ways of learning. In a country where access to the Internet and high-speed connectivity is a problem, and the digital divide is an issue, it is important to address the challenges. Those who are involved in education planning and administration should give a serious thought to reducing the digital divide in the country and popularize digital learning along with traditional education.

Issues relating to poverty and hunger.
The great strides made by the developing countries in reducing poverty in the last two decades will be affected badly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. comment.(250 words)

Reference: Economic Times

Why this question:
The question is based on the impact of the present COVID crisis on the poverty aspects of the entire world.

Key demand of the question:
One must discuss in detail the effects of pandemic on Global poverty.

Directive:

Comment – here we have to express our knowledge and understanding of the issue and form an overall opinion thereupon.

Structure of the answer:

Introduction:
Start by quoting World Bank; It says, that the gains achieved in the last two decades in fighting poverty across the world, especially in developing countries are now at grave risk due to pandemic.

Body:
Explain the impact across the countries – developed, developing etc. The progress made by South Asian countries, especially India and Bangladesh will be reversed and funding for anti-poverty programmes may be cut as governments struggle with low economic growth rates. Discuss the impact across the sector and highlight the concerns.

Conclusion:
Conclude by suggesting both long term and short term measures to address the issue at hand.

Introduction:
The coronavirus (COVID-19) is a crisis like no other the world has faced in recent decades in terms of its potential economic and social impacts. The world bank estimates that the pandemic could push about 49 million people into extreme poverty in 2020. It also reports that for the first time since 1998, global poverty rates are forecast to rise. According to the United Nations estimates, by the end of the year, 8% of the world’s population, a half-billion people, may be pushed into destitution largely because of the pandemic.

Body:

Previous efforts across to globe to fight poverty:
In 1990, 36% of the world’s population, or 1.9 billion people, lived on less than $1.90 a day. By 2016, that number had dropped to 734 million people, or 10% of the world’s population, largely because of progress in South Asia and China.

Some of the biggest gains were made in India, where 210 million people were lifted out of poverty from 2006 to 2016, according to the U.N.

Since 2000, Bangladesh brought 33 million people — 20% of its population — out of poverty while funding programs that provided education to girls, increased life expectancy and improved literacy.

Famines that once plagued South Asia are now vanishingly rare, and the population is less susceptible to disease and starvation.

Impacts across globe:

- It is feared that this progress may be reversed, experts worry, and funding for anti-poverty programs may be cut as governments struggle with stagnant growth rates or economic contractions as the world heads for a recession.
- While everyone will suffer, the developing world will be hardest hit.
- The World Bank estimates that sub-Saharan Africa will see its first recession in 25 years, with nearly half of all jobs lost across the continent. South Asia will most likely experience its worst economic performance in 40 years.
- Most at risk are people working in the informal sector, which employs 2 billion people who have no access to benefits like unemployment assistance or health care.
- In Bangladesh, 1 million garment workers — 7% of the country’s workforce, many of them informally employed — lost their jobs because of the lockdown.
- Countries like India, Bangladesh, which spent heavily on programs to improve education and provide health care, may no longer be able to fund them.
- There will be groups of people who climbed up the ladder and will now fall back into vicious cycle of poverty.
- In India, millions of migrant laborers were left unemployed and homeless overnight after the government there announced a lockdown. In parts of Africa, millions may go hungry after losing their jobs and as lockdowns snarl food aid distribution networks.
- In Mexico and the Philippines, remittances that families relied on have dried up as primary breadwinners lose their jobs and can no longer send money home.
- A resolution that committed the U.N. to eliminating poverty and hunger and providing access to education for all by 2030 may now be a pipe dream.

Measures needed: Policies needed to mitigate poverty and distributional impacts will have to respond to each country’s context and circumstances. Having said that, the numbers above suggest that across affected countries:

- **Multilateral global institutions must support the developing nations:**
  - Oxfam is calling on world leaders to agree on an Emergency Rescue Package of 2.5 trillion USD paid for through the immediate cancellation or postponement of 1 trillion in debt repayments, a 1 trillion increase in IMF Special Drawing Rights (international financial reserves), and an additional 500 billion in aid.

- **An effective response in support of poor and vulnerable households will require significant additional fiscal resources.**

Telegram: https://t.me/insightsIAStips
Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpoccbCX9GEIwaile4HlJwA
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/insightsonindia
Providing all the existing and new extreme poor with a cash transfer of $1/day (about half the value of the international extreme poverty line) for a month would amount to $20 billion—or $665 million per day over 30 days.

Given that impacts are likely to be felt by many non-poor households as well and that many households are likely to need support for much longer than a month, the sum needed for effective protection could be far higher.

- Any support package will need to quickly reach both the existing and new poor.
  - While existing safety net programs can be mobilized to get cash into the pockets of some of the existing poor relatively quickly, this is not the case for the new poor.
  - In fact, the new poor are likely to look different from the existing poor, particularly in their location (mostly urban) and employment (mostly informal services, construction, and manufacturing).

- Decision-makers need timely and policy-relevant information on impacts and the effectiveness of policy responses.
  - This can be done using existing, publicly available data to monitor the unfolding economic and social impacts of the crisis, including prices, service delivery, and economic activity, as well as social sentiment and behaviors.
  - In addition, governments can use mobile technology to safely gather information from a representative sample of households or individuals.
  - Phone surveys can collect information on health and employment status, food security, coping strategies, access to basic services and safety nets and other outcomes closely related to the risk of falling (further) into poverty.

Conclusion:
This pandemic is as much a social and economic crisis as it is a humanitarian one. Considering the uncertain path that lies ahead, helping the country’s poor become self-sufficient and better prepared can prove to be the best weapon against the deadly virus, and such a DBT can go a long way in that.

India and its neighborhood relations.
The changing geopolitical situation in Afghanistan holds significant implications for India in terms of economy, security and geostrategy. In this context propose the future course of action for India to regain its position in Afghanistan (250 words).

Reference: The Hindu.

Introduction:
The United Nations Secretariat held a meeting of what it calls the “6+2+1” group on regional efforts to support peace in Afghanistan recently. India was conspicuous by its absence from the meeting, given its historical and strategic ties with Afghanistan. As India seeks to fight back its exclusion there are certain issues that need to be addressed. India’s reluctance to enter into talks with the Taliban in one such issue, which needs a rethink.
Body:

Changing geopolitical situation in Afghanistan:

- Recently, the United Nations Secretariat held a meeting of what it calls the “6+2+1” group on regional efforts to support peace in Afghanistan, a group that includes six neighbouring countries: China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; global players, the United States and Russia, and Afghanistan itself.
- India was conspicuous by its absence from the meeting, given its historical and strategic ties with Afghanistan, but not for the first time.
- India was left out from talks similarly in 2001 and 2010.
- In both 2001 and 2010, however, India fought back its exclusion.
- At the Bonn agreement of 2010, India played a major role in Northern Alliance accepting Hamid Karzai as the Chairman of the interim arrangement that replaced the Taliban regime.
- After the 2010 conference, New Delhi redoubled its efforts with Kabul, and in 2011 India signed the historic Strategic Partnership Agreement, which was Afghanistan’s first such agreement with any country.

India’s position on Afghan-led peace process and reality

- India’s resistance to publicly talking to the Taliban has made it an awkward interlocutor at any table.
- Its position that only an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled process can be allowed is a principled one but has no takers.
- The Ashraf Ghani government does not lead, own or control the reconciliation process today, comprising the U.S.-Taliban negotiation for an American troops withdrawal, and intra-Afghan talks on power-sharing.
- The U.S.-Taliban peace deal means that the Taliban, will become more potent as the U.S. withdraws soldiers from the country.
- Taliban will hold more sway in the inter-Afghan process as well, as the U.S. withdraws funding for the government in Kabul.

Implications for India:

- New Delhi’s decision to find grounds for Ashraf Ghani government has had a two-fold effect:
  - India’s voice in the reconciliation process has been limited
  - It has weakened its position with other leaders of the deeply divided democratic setup in Kabul such as the former chief executive Abdullah Abdullah.
- Meanwhile, India’s presence inside Afghanistan, painstakingly built up since 2001, is being threatened anew by terror groups.
- These include the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), believed to be backed by Pakistan’s establishment.
- The recent brutal attack that killed 25 at a gurudwara in Kabul was meant for the embassy in Kabul.
- Intelligence agencies had also warned of suicide car bomb threats to the consulates in Jalalabad and Herat in December 2019.
The government has said that the novel coronavirus pandemic prompted its decision to clear out both consulates in April 2020.

But the truth is that a full security reassessment is under way for them.

Either way, India’s diplomatic strength in Afghanistan should not appear to be in retreat just when it is needed the most.

**Importance of Afghanistan for India:**

- Afghanistan serves India’s security and economic interests.
- Afghanistan is tied to India’s vision of being a regional leader and a great power, coupled with its competition with China over resources and its need to counter Pakistani influence.
- India’s ability to mentor a nascent democracy will go a long way to demonstrate to the world that India is indeed a major power, especially a responsible one.
- The pipeline project TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India), which seeks to connect an energy-rich Central to South Asia, will only see the light of the day if stability is established in Afghanistan.
- India’s interest in Afghanistan relates to its need to reduce Pakistani influence in the region.
- New Delhi needs Kabul to get a better view of Islamabad and hence it is pertinent that it fosters positive relations.
- For access to the landlocked Central Asian countries that border Afghanistan.
- The country is home to resource deposits worth one trillion dollars, according to the US Geological Survey.

**Possible future course for India:**

- New Delhi must move swiftly to regain the upper hand in the narrative in Afghanistan.
- The following should assure India a leading position in Afghanistan’s regional formulation:
  - India’s assistance of more than $3 billion in projects
  - A trade of about $1 billion
  - A $20 billion projected development expenditure of an alternate route through Chahbahar
- India’s support to the Afghan National Army, bureaucrats, doctors and other professionals for training
- Three major projects include the Afghan Parliament, the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, and the Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam (Salma dam).
- These and other hundreds of small development projects have cemented India’s position there, regardless of Pakistan’s attempts to undermine it.
- So, it would be a mistake, at this point, if India’s support is only to Kabul or the Ghani government.
- The Indian government must strive to ensure that its aid and assistance is broad-based, to centres outside the capital (Kabul) as well.
- This should be the case even if some lie in areas held by the Taliban.
India must also pursue opportunities to fulfil its role in the peace efforts in Afghanistan, starting with efforts to bridge the Ghani-Abdullah divide.

An understanding between Iran and the U.S. on Afghanistan is necessary for lasting peace as well, and India could play a mediatory part.

India should also use the UN’s call for a pause in conflicts during the novel coronavirus pandemic, to ensure a hold on hostilities with Pakistan.

Above all, New Delhi must consider the appointment of a special envoy, as it has been done in the past, to deal with its efforts in Afghanistan.

With respect to Indian foreign policy, Do you think it’s time for India to strengthen its national security structures and introduce flexibility? Examine.(250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why this question:
The author discusses the changing dimensions of foreign policy amidst changing equations in the world.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the need to revisit Indian foreign policy and strengthen its national security structures and introduce flexibility.

Directive:
Examine – When asked to ‘Examine’, we must look into the topic (content words) in detail, inspect it, investigate it and establish the key facts and issues related to the topic in question. While doing so we should explain why these facts and issues are important and their implications.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Present briefly the context of the question.

Body:
To start with explain the fact that we are living in a time when there is a deep sense of strategic confusion. In India’s case, that confusion extends to it being not just about the ultimate goal India’s foreign policy should pursue but also over the best means to achieve them. Explain that it has a moment of double opportunity if it changes its ways. Tactically, China-U.S. contention — which is structural and, therefore, likely to continue for some time with a paradigm shift away from cooperation to increasing contention.

Conclusion:
Conclude with need to revisit Indian foreign policy and strengthen its national security structures and introduce flexibility.

Introduction:
National interest has been the governing principle of India’ foreign policy even at the time, of Nehru who was inspired by the ideal of world peace, toleration and mutual respect among nations. Foreign policy is not a fixed concept as it keeps on changing according to changing domestic and international conditions. In operational terms, the idea of national interest takes the form of concrete objectives of foreign policy. The secondary national interest may change with time but the primary national interest endures.

Body:

India’s core foreign policy objectives are:
The geopolitical scenario of the world is changing, and this has brought up new global issues for India to deal with. Therefore, various aspects of India’s foreign policy also are required to be changed to fit the changing geopolitics of the world.

Changing geopolitics of the world:

South Asian concerns and realities to India:

- In this backdrop, India needs to rework many of its policies in the coming five years.
- South Asia, in particular, and the region of our highest priority, needs close attention.
- The region is one of the most disturbed in the world and India has little or no say in any of the outcomes taking place.
- India-Pakistan relations are perhaps at their lowest point. Tarring Pakistan with the terror brush is hardly policy, and stable relations continue to be elusive.
- India has no role in Afghan affairs and is also excluded from current talks involving the Taliban, the Afghan government, Pakistan, the U.S. and even Russia and China.
- India might have recouped its position more recently in the Maldives, but its position in Nepal and Sri Lanka remains tenuous. In West Asia again, India is no longer a player to reckon with.

China, US, Eurasia Challenges:

- China is the major challenge that India has to contend with. Smaller countries in the region are being inveigled to participate in China’s programmes such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- India and Bhutan are the only two countries in this region that have opted out of the BRI, and they seem like the odd men out.
- Deepening India-U.S. relations today again carry the danger of India becoming involved in a new kind of Cold War.
• India must ensure that it does not become a party to the conflicts and rivalries between the U.S. and a rising China, the heightened tensions between the U.S. and Russia, and also avoid becoming a pawn in the U.S.-Iran conflict.
• Closer relations with the U.S. also carries the risk of aggravating tensions between India and China, even as China and the U.S.
• The U.S.-China-Russia conflict has another dimension which could affect India.
• The strategic axis forged between the Mr. Putin’s Russia and Mr. Xi’s China will impact not only the U.S. but also India’s position in both Asia and Eurasia, with India being seen as increasingly aligned to the U.S.
• Hence, India needs to devise a policy that does not leave it isolated in the region.
• The challenge in the coming years for India is to check the slide, especially in Asia, and try and restore India to the position it held previously. India cannot afford to wait too long to rectify the situation.

Increasing Chinese influence in South Asian region:

• **Defence outreach**: Back in 1980s and 1990s there was a Sino-Pak military axis; today even the defence forces of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives have Chinese equipment.
• **Friendlier approach**: China is off late changing its hostile relationships with some neighbours to becoming friendlier. For example, with Philippines, Myanmar, Singapore, Japan and South Korea.
• **Soft loans**: China has been extending soft-loans to neighbouring nations to help them develop state of infrastructure. The downside of this has been countries being caught in a debt-trap, like in Sri Lanka and Maldives.
• **Concerns about China involvement**: China has only two real friends in the world: Pakistan and North Korea. Big and small nations are increasingly wary about Chinese intentions.
• Even in The Arctic Circle council, Greenland (Denmark) expressed deep distrust towards China’s investment in its aviation sector.
• **Reorienting diplomacy**: China’s ‘major power diplomacy’ consists of four aspects: economic expansion, political penetration, “friendship” creation, and core interest protection.

Need to focus on newer threats as well:

• As India intensifies its search for state-of-the-art military equipment from different sources, it may be worthwhile for India to step back and reconsider some of its options.
• Military power is but one aspect of the conflicts that rage today. Experts point out that outright war, insurgencies and terror attacks are fast becoming passé.
• Nations confront many other and newer threats at present. Today, disruptive technologies have tremendous danger potential and nations that possess these technologies have the ability to become the dominant powers in the 21st and 22nd Centuries.
• A major challenge for India will hence be how to overcome our current inadequacies in the realm of disruptive technologies rather than remaining confined to the purely military domain.
• The U.S., China, Russia, Israel and few other countries dominate these spheres as also cyberspace and cyber methodologies.

Measures needed in the neighborhood:

• India must regain its role as a prime mover of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the organisation it abandoned.
Indian government must promote the alternate regional groupings such as South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC), BIMSTEC, the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) Initiative and Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).

India must recognise that doing better with its neighbours is not about investing more or undue favours. It is about following a policy of mutual interests and of respect.

India is more culturally attuned to than China is. Each of India’s neighbours shares more than a geographical context with India. They share history, language, tradition and even cuisine.

With the exception of Pakistan, none of them sees itself as a rival to India, or India as inimical to its sovereignty.

When dealing with Beijing bilaterally, New Delhi must match China’s aggression, and counter its moves with its own.

When dealing with China in South Asia, however, India must do exactly the opposite, and not allow itself to be outpaced.

Maintaining regional peace is the responsibility of all the countries. India needs to rekindle the SAARC process in order to secure historical affinity with its neighbours.

Indian policymakers must take the long view and pursue an approach of peaceful competition in the neighbourhood.

Way forward:

Despite a plethora of official statements, the state of the economy remains a matter of increasing concern. India needs to pay greater heed to its economy.

Notwithstanding India’s ambition to become a $5-trillion economy by 2024-25, the reality today is that the economy appears to be in a state of decline.

New policy parameters will need to be drawn up by India, and our capabilities enhanced in areas such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology and cyber methodology, all of which constitute critical elements of the disruptive technology matrix.

Neither the Economic Survey nor the Budget contain useful pointers to a more robust economy, one that is capable of providing a higher rate of growth, more opportunities for skilled labour, and greater potential for investments.

The looming challenge for India in the coming five years, therefore, would be how to build a strong economic foundation, one that is capable of providing the kind of power structure needed for an emerging power, and also one possessing the best liberal credentials.

Conclusion:

In international community every country has to interact with other countries. This interaction is not haphazard but takes place with definite orientations and objectives. These orientations and objectives form the core of foreign policy. National security is an example of primary interest. No country can compromise with her national security for the sake of most beloved principles of foreign policy. Thus, the foreign policy is the instrument to realize the national interest of a country. A foreign policy bereft of national interest is a purposeless exercise.

India’s transformed commitment with Non-Alignment movement remains a critical forum for pursuing India’s global interest. Analyse.(250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why this question:
The article brings to us the changing role of India’s foreign policy amidst the changing times being witnessed by the world.
Key demand of the question:
Explain the importance of NAM and India’s crucial role in it to pursue its own interests as well as the interests of the world at large.

Directive:
Analyze – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Present briefly the current context.

Body:
To start with explain that video address by our Indian prime minister to a summit of the non-aligned nations was held recently. NAM is a relic of the Cold War, but we must also acknowledge that a new Cold War is beginning to unfold, this time between the US and China. Talk briefly about the importance of NAM in current times. Explain why India’s renewed engagement on Non-Alignment movement remains a critical forum.

Conclusion:
Conclude that India’s diplomacy during the ongoing pandemic suggests that it has been quick to recognize the changing global dynamics. It will be imperative for India’s foreign policy to remain consistent with its renewed approach in the times to come.

Introduction:
Non-Aligned Movement is an idea that emerged in 1950. NAM is the second-largest platform globally in terms of country membership after the UN. It currently has more than 120 members. Azerbaijan is the president of the grouping from 2019-2022 and the meet is being organized under the leadership of President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. The title of the summit is “We stand together against COVID-19”. Indian Prime minister Narendra Modi participated in a video conference meeting of non-alignment movement (NAM) on COVID crisis.

The new interest is not a throwback to seeing the NAM as an anti-Western ideological crusade. Nor is it a pretence of valuing the movement but treating it as a ritual to be performed every three years. It is based on the bet that the NAM remains a critical diplomatic forum for the pursuit of India’s international interests.

Body:
Significance:

- This is the first time PM Modi is taking part in a NAM meeting since taking 2014 when he first became the Prime Minister. The last time any Indian PM participated at Tehran NAM meet was 2012 with the then PM Manmohan Singh was present.
- Both in 2016, 2018 summits of NAM, India was represented at Vice President level.
- The last NAM Summit happened in 2019 in Azerbaijan, before that it was 2016 in Venezuela

India’s past experience with the policy of non-alignment:

- NAM played an important role during the Cold War years in furthering many of the causes that India advocated: Decolonisation, end to apartheid, global nuclear disarmament, ushering in of new international economic and information orders.
- NAM enabled India and many newly born countries in 1950’s and 1960’s their sovereignty and alleviated the fears of neo-colonialism.
South-South Co-operation: NAM together with the Group of 77 (G77–largely made up of NAM members) succeeded to keep Third World issues on the agenda in most UN forums, effectively supported independence movements in third world country.

Soft-Power Leadership: NAM made India a leader for many countries who didn’t want to ally with the then global powers USA or USSR. India became a soft-power leader which still holds good till date.

Balanced friendship: India’s non-alignment gave her the opportunity to get the best of both the global superpowers of the time in terms of aid, military support etc. This was in line with her objectives of national development.

However, NAM’s authority has slowly eroded in recent past:

The end of cold war lead to unipolar world and now tending towards multi-polarity. The NAM is now reached irrelevance.

NAM could not push for reforms in the global bodies like UN, IMF, WTO. Thus, it has dissuaded many developing countries from pursuing it.

Disputes within the Global South countries. Example: India-Pak, Iran-Iraq. This has paved way for the blocs to enter.

Inability to find solution to the West-Asian crisis. Withdrawal of one of the founder members-Egypt, after the Arab Spring.

Most of the members are economically weak; hence they have no say in world politics or economy.

Rationale behind India’s renewed interest in the NAM:

A new Cold War is beginning to unfold, this time between the US and China.

As the conflict between the world’s two most important powers envelops all dimensions of international society, India has every reason to try and preserve some political space in between the two.

In the last few years, Delhi paid lip-service to the NAM but devoted a lot of diplomatic energy to forums like BRICS.

Given the Russian and Chinese leadership of BRICS, Delhi inevitably began to tamely echo the international positions of Moscow and Beijing rather than represent voices of the Global South.

As a nation seeking to become an independent pole in global affairs, India could do more with forums like the NAM in mobilizing support on issues of interest to Delhi.

An independent Indian line backed by strong support within the NAM can make a big difference to the outcomes of the impending contentions at the World Health Assembly later this month on reviewing the WHO’s performance during the COVID crisis.

Way forward:

There are now new kinds of alignments, more likely to be defined by economics and geography than by ideology. To be aligned is now a virtue, a sign of good leadership. Countries, especially small ones, can and should aim for multiple alignments of their interests. There is now no country in the world that can claim to be non-aligned.

Conclusion:

India is a large and globalized economy with “big stakes in all parts of the world”. Its foreign policy must focus on a pragmatic assessment of India’s interests and the best means to secure them —
including partnerships and coalitions — against current and potential threats. A newer, reformed NAM 2.0 can be looked at to continue NAM as our foreign policy.

Kalapani and Lipulekh pass have emerged as the latest and ugly flashpoints between India and Nepal. Explain and Trace the border dispute between India and Nepal.(250 words)

Reference: thediplomat.com

Why this question:
An official map of Nepal claiming Kalapani, Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh, and susta as part of their sovereign territory is termed as “Artificial” and unacceptable by India.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the border disputes between India and Nepal highlight the recent flashpoints, analyse and explain.

Directive:

Explain – Clarify the topic by giving a detailed account as to how and why it occurred, or what is the particular context. You must be defining key terms where ever appropriate, and substantiate with relevant associated facts.

Structure of the answer:

Introduction:
Briefly explain the recent flashpoints between India and Nepal.

Body:
To start with, discuss the background of India-Nepal border issues from past to present. Both India and Nepal claim Kalapani as an integral part of their territory – India as part of Uttarakhand’s Pithoragarh district and Nepal as part of Dharchula district. The Lipulekh pass is a far western point near Kalapani, a disputed border area between Nepal and India. Nepali diplomatic sources maintain that the region of Kalapani and the contiguous areas to the east of the river Kali and Susta on the Uttar Pradesh-Bihar border are the only parts of the nearly 1,800-km boundary that remain unresolved. The area of Susta near Gorakhpur can also be noted in the new map. Kathmandu says India has encroached upon this area and wants New Delhi to evacuate its population from the location.

Conclusion:
Conclude by suggesting solutions to address the problem.

Introduction:
Nepal recently published a new, authoritative political map showing the areas of Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura as part of its territory, toughening its stance on a recently flared up territorial dispute with India. India strongly condemned the new Nepal Map stating it as unjustified cartographic assertion. The new map was drawn on the basis of the Sugauli Treaty of 1816 signed between Nepal and then the British India government and other relevant documents, which suggests Limpiyadhura, from where the Kali river originated, is Nepal’s border with India.

Body:
Reasons behind the Nepal Government’s move:

- India and Nepal are at a row after the Indian side issued a new political map incorporating Kalapani and Lipulekh on its side of the border in October last year.
- The tensions between the two neighbors deepened further when India inaugurated a road linking Dharchula in Uttarakhand state to Lipulekh, as part of the Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimage route.
- India recently inaugurated a road connecting Lipulekh and the government has the road lies completely within Indian territory in the Pithoragarh district in Uttarakhand.
- The Lipulekh pass is a far western point near Kalapani, a disputed border area between Nepal and India.
- Both India and Nepal claim Kalapani as an integral part of their territory – India as part of Uttarakhand’s Pithoragarh district and Nepal as part of Dharchula district.
- New Delhi rejected Kathmandu’s unilateral act, saying it wasn’t based on historical facts and evidence.
- New Delhi also stated that this act was contrary to bilateral understandings on the resolution of the territorial issue through dialogue.

Reason for dispute between India & Nepal:

Over Lipulekh pass:

- Lipulekh pass is located atop the Kalapani at a tri-junction between India, China and Nepal.
- Lipulekh pass is an ancient route made for trade and pilgrimage purposes by Bhutiya people. The route was closed by India following the Indo-China war of 1962.
- The Indo-Nepal border dispute over Lipulekh dates back to 1997 when for the first time Nepal raise objections against the decision of India and China to open Lipulekh pass for travelling to Mansarovar.
- However, lately in the beginning of May 2020, India reopened the route for Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage after constructing 22 km long road on the pass.
• Lipulekh pass opens from Gunji village.
• Nepal claims that the village and the road is its territory.
• On the other hand, India and China signed a trade treaty in 1954 declaring Lipulekh pass as the Indian gateway.
• Moreover, both the countries signed another treaty in 2015 for trading through Lipulekh Pass.
• However, this time Nepal protested against the move staking claim over Kalapani area.

Over Kalapani:
• India’s Indo-Tibetan Border Police has been controlling the Kalapani and nearby areas since the Indo-China war of 1962.
• Though treaty of Sugauli clearly mentions about the Kali River and its location in Nepal, there were a few subsequent maps drawn by British surveyors which show the origin of Kali river from different places.
• This digression from the treaty led to territorial disputes between India and Nepal.
• Even the size of Kalapani is different in various sources
• Indian Government claims that a ridgeline located towards the east of Kalapani territory is a part of the Indian Union. The treaty of Sugauli mentions nothing about this ridgeline.
• Nepali Government claims that towards the west of Kalapani flows the main Kali river which falls in its territory. As per the Treaty of Sugauli, the Kali River is located in Nepal’s western border that it shares with India. The treaty was signed between Nepal and British East India Company in 1816.

Way forward:
• The two countries have managed to settle about 98% of the common border.
• More than 8,500 boundary pillars have been installed reflecting the agreed alignment.
• As both countries are laying claim to the same piece of land, the time has come for both countries to sit for talks to solve this issue.
• The bilateral understandings on the resolution of the territorial issue through dialogue should be pursued which has been a time-tested tool for India-Nepal bilateral relations.
• India and Nepal are bound to settle all the boundary disputes including Kalapani through bilateral talks under an agreement signed in 1998.
• There are possibly two ways to deal with the current challenge:
  o to accept a shifting border as the river itself shifts (or)
  o to agree on a boundary which remains fixed despite changes in the course of the river
• The latter is usually the more rational choice.
• India should also try to convey to Nepal’s leadership about the congenial and friendly environment that 6 to 8 million Nepali citizens living in India enjoys. Therefore, any thoughtless erosion of this centuries old togetherness may prove difficult for both countries.

Conclusion:
Due to political instability in Nepal and India’s strong influence in domestic politics, Nepal’s leaders were reluctant to discuss this issue seriously. This move has opened up more avenues for bilateral talks. Nepal should be ready to face India and India should be ready to hold serious bilateral dialogues to resolve this issue.

India finds itself on the margins of international diplomacy on Afghanistan despite having stood by the country economically and historically. Critically examine the need for changed Afghan policy and corrective diplomatic action for better neighborhood. (250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why this question:
The question is about the India’s need to relook at its Afghan policy and need for corrective diplomatic action for better neighborhood.

Key demand of the question:
Explain in detail the factors that are forcing India to relook at its Afghan policy and correct its diplomatic actions.

Directive:
Critically examine – When asked to ‘Examine’, we have to look into the topic (content words) in detail, inspect it, investigate it and establish the key facts and issues related to the topic in question. While doing so we should explain why these facts and issues are important and their implications. When ‘critically’ is suffixed or prefixed to a directive, one needs to look at the good and bad of the topic and give a fair judgment.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Recently, in a major development in Afghanistan politics the two opposite rivals Ashraf Ghani and Abdulah have joined hand to form the government. This development has happened amid US-Taliban peace talks. This makes it inevitable for India to revisit its Afghan policy.

Body:
To start with, explain that India has always emphasized on policy of Afghan Led-Afghan. Highlight the historical and economic relations of the past to present. India wants a form of government in the Afghanistan which respects religious minorities and women rights. Taliban is infamous for its treatment of minorities and killings. But continuous changing dynamics in Kabul makes it important for India to keep all its options open. Discuss the Indian interests in Afghan and the region. Explain why there is need to change its existing afghan policy and relook at it.

Conclusion:
Conclude with what should be the way ahead.

Introduction
India and Afghanistan have a strong relationship based on historical and cultural links. In recent past, Indo-Afghan relations have been further strengthened by the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed between the two countries in 2011.

Body
India-Afghanistan steadfast relations
- In 1999, India became one of the key supporters of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance.
- India’s support and collaboration extends to rebuilding of air links, power plants and investing in health and education sectors as well as helping to train Afghan civil servants, diplomats and police.
Major Indian projects in Afghanistan nearing completion include Salma Dam, new Afghan Parliament building among others.

A significant addition to India’s development portfolio in Afghanistan is the Small Development Projects (SDP) scheme, in the fields of agriculture, rural development, education, health, vocational training, etc.

Government of India also grants ICCR scholarships to 1000 Afghans every year to pursue under graduate courses in various Indian universities in major cities across India.

India’s extensive developmental assistance programme, which now stands at around US 2 billion, is a strong signal of its abiding commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan during this critical period of security and governance transition.

A Preferential Trade Agreement was signed with Afghanistan in March 2003, under which India allowed substantial duty concessions [ranging from 50% to 100%] to 38 dry fruit products.

In November 2011, India removed basic customs duties for all Afghan products [except alcohol and tobacco products], giving those duty free access to the Indian market.

With the operation of Chabahar port in Iran, Afghan exports would receive a major boost, as a new transit route would be available for the country to trade with India and the rest of the world.

India’s Afghan Policy: Challenges

- **Terrorism in Afghanistan** and violence by Taliban is in a state of turmoil and moving closer to becoming a failed state. There can be no military solution for the Afghanistan problem unless it has a political objective.

- India has reiterated its support to “Afghan-owned, Afghan-led” policy and stayed out of multi-party talks with Taliban and other nations.
  - There is a glaring gap between the claim that the peace process in Afghanistan should be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led, repeated in the joint India-US statement during Trump’s visit, and direct negotiations between the US and the Taliban culminating in an agreement.

- **No troops**: India has steadfastly refused to send troops to fight the war there. Its focus, instead, is infrastructure and capacity building. The Indian stamp is visible all around the country, whether in the form of big ticket government initiatives or soft power.

- **US-Taliban Peace Deal**
  - The point of the U.S.-Taliban deal was not peace rather it was to try and cover up an ignominious exit for the U.S., driven by an election-bound president who feels no responsibility toward that country or to the broader region.
  - In the long run, if the Taliban are back in Kabul, India’s infrastructure investments in Afghanistan will be at the risk of being seized.
  - Besides, New Delhi will lose a friendly government in Kabul. Worse, Islamabad’s close partners may be in office once again.
  - More importantly, groups like the LeT and JeM, which are UN designated terrorist organisations, are not mentioned, which leaves India exposed.
If combating terrorism is a shared responsibility of the international community, as is now
accepted in umpteen declarations, why the Taliban has not been asked to forswear all violence
outside Afghanistan is unfortunate

Indian Dilemma:
- Should India reconsider its current policy that a lasting political settlement in Afghanistan
  must come through an “Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan controlled
  process” (considering that the elected Afghan Government is hardly in control of the
  peace process).
- Should India, consider the option of entering into direct talks with the Taliban. But, if
  India does so, it would constitute a major departure from its consistent policy of dealing
  only with recognised governments.

Need for corrective diplomatic action
- India has been excluded from the Afghanistan peace process many times including the recent
  meeting (6+2+1 grouping).
- As per foreign policy specialists, India must play a role in the Intra-Afghan talks. It is common
  knowledge that the bloody Taliban regime in Afghanistan is backed up by Pakistan.
  - Any decrease in democratic strength of Afghanistan and increase in Taliban influence
    will not bode well for India.
- A Taliban government in Kabul does not augur well for India’s security in the Kashmir region. It
  may become a launch pad for violent attacks on India.
- IC-814 hijacking should be a reminder for India that corrective actions are needed and to open
diplomatic channels with Taliban, as it is getting powerful in the region. Else, India will find itself
isolated and pushed to the margins in West Asia.
- India’s Strategic interests converges with Afghanistan, especially economic and geostrategic
  interests. Trade through Chahbahar and further Zarenj Delaram would provide more market for
Indian goods and vice versa.
- Geostrategically India must prevent Afghanistan from becoming a second front for Pakistan in
  future skirmishes or an eventuality of a war.

Conclusion
The key to a lasting peace depends largely on the outcome of talks between the Taliban and the
Afghan government, rather than between the insurgents and Washington. India being one of the
trusted neighbours for Afghanistan, should take a greater role in bringing peace to the region, before
a Pakistan friendly government is installed in Kabul.

In the backdrop of recent border conflicts between India and China, examine the
contributing factors for the border stand-offs. Evaluate the ongoing boundary
negotiations and the outlook of a resolution for the same.(250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why this question:
The question is amidst the rising tensions on the India-China border.

Key demand of the question:
One has to examine the causative factors for the border standoffs between India and China and present a detailed evaluation of the ongoing boundary negotiations and the resolution that lies ahead.

**Directive:**
Examine – When asked to ‘Examine’, we must look into the topic (content words) in detail, inspect it, investigate it and establish the key facts and issues related to the topic in question. While doing so we should explain why these facts and issues are important and their implications.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**
Briefly explain the current situation between India and China at the borders.

**Body:**
Start with a brief backgrounder – Border skirmishes have been reported in at least four different locations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Pangong lake in Ladakh, Naku La in Sikkim, the Galwan valley in Ladakh and in Demchok. Then explain what the causes for the standoff have been. Highlight the recent boundary negotiations. Discuss the associated concerns, take hint from the article.

**Conclusion:**
Conclude that there is a need to follow the principles agreed to in the previous agreements between the two countries which call for “mutual and equal security” in border negotiations. The most realistic solution will involve only minor adjustments along the LAC.

**Introduction:**

The India-China border has been witnessing tensions over the past month, with incidents reported in at least four different locations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). These include the Pangong lake in Ladakh, the Galwan valley and Demchok.

**Body:**

![Territorial Dispute Map](image-url)

Telegram: https://t.me/insightsIASTips
Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpoccbCX9GEIwaile4HljwA
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/insightsonindia
Contributing factors for the border stand-offs:

- **Non-demarcated borders:**
  - The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is the disputed boundary between India and China.
  - The LAC is divided into three sectors: western, middle and eastern.
  - The countries disagree on the exact location of the LAC in various areas, India claims that the LAC is 3,488 km long, while China believes it to be around 2,000 km long.
  - The two armies try and dominate by patrol to the areas up to their respective perceptions of the LAC. This often brings them into conflict.
  - The LAC mostly passes on the land, but Pangong Tso is a unique case where the LAC passes through the water as well.

- **Strengthening of infrastructure by India:**
  - China, along the LAC, has enjoyed an advantage in infrastructure as well as terrain that is more favourable to mobilisation of troops and resources.
  - The broader context for the tensions appears to be a changing dynamic along the LAC, wherein India seems to be catching up with China by improving its border infrastructure.

- **Increasing assertiveness of China:**
The latest skirmishes at the Galwan Valley and Sikkim are somewhat unexpected as the contours of the LAC are broadly agreed to in these sectors.

The Galwan Valley incident was triggered by China moving in troops and equipment to stop construction activity by India. India is claiming that the construction activity was well within India’s side of the LAC.

**Failed negotiations:**

- India has long proposed an exercise to clarify differing perceptions of the LAC to prevent border stand-offs.
- India has argued that such an exercise could help both countries understand the claims of the other, paving the way to regulate activities in contested areas until a final settlement of the boundary dispute is arrived at.
- 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.

**The state of boundary negotiations:**

- A three-stage boundary negotiation was proposed between India and China.
  - Agreement on political parameters and guiding principles
  - Evolving a framework to resolve the dispute
  - Delineating and demarcating of the boundary

- The 22nd round of talks between the Special Representatives, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and China’s State Councillor Wang Yi, was held in Delhi in December 2019.

- Both “agreed that an early settlement of the boundary question serves the fundamental interests of both countries” and “resolved to intensify their efforts to achieve a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution”.

- In 2005, an agreement on political parameters and guiding principles completed the first of three stages of the talks. The 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.

**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.
- A swap was hinted at by China in 1960 and in the early 1980s, which would have essentially formalized 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.

Way forward:
• Protocols agreed to in 2005 and 2013, detailing the rules of engagement to prevent border incidents, must be adhered to.
• There is a need to follow the principles agreed to in the previous agreements between the two countries which call for “mutual and equal security” in border negotiations.
• The most realistic solution will involve only minor adjustments along the LAC.
• Need for a renewed effort to resolve the boundary dispute to maintain peace and tranquillity in border areas.
• India and China should “reinforce communication and coordination in international affairs and make the international order more just and equitable”.
• Maintain regular contact and advance the development of bilateral relations in all areas.
• Seeking mutually acceptable resolutions on the differences with due respect for each other’s sensitivities, concerns and aspirations
• Need to respect each other’s Sovereignty and sincere adherence to Panchsheel (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence).
• A strong India-China relationship is important not only for the mutual benefit of the people of India and China, but also for the region and the world.

Present a detailed analysis as to how Pakistan is both possibly the leading perpetrator of terrorism and also a victim of terrorism.(250 words)

Reference: The Hindu

Why this question:
The author of the article analyses how Pakistan is both possibly the leading perpetrator of terrorism and also a victim of terrorism. Thus the question.

Key demand of the question:
Present a detailed analysis as to how Pakistan is both possibly the leading perpetrator of terrorism and also a victim of terrorism; support your answer with suitable facts.

Directive:
Analyze – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Briefly explain the issue of Terrorism in the region and the world over.

Body:
Many of the current terrorist groups were deliberately created by the Pakistani state to serve its purposes. The Pakistani state has involved itself in a deliberate policy of creating and fostering terrorist groups in order to engage in low intensity warfare with its neighbors. Discuss the recent cases that are evident and signify the perpetration of Terrorism in Pakistan. Explain then the threats of terrorism to Pakistan itself. Discuss what needs to be done.

Conclusion:
Conclude that the terrorist threat emanating from Pakistan poses risks not only for its immediate neighborhood and the Pakistani state itself, but the whole world at large.

Introduction
The recent terrorist encounter at Handwara (Kashmir) has once again brought to the fore the terrorist threat emanating from Pakistan. Analysts of terrorism are well aware of the irony that Pakistan is both possibly the leading perpetrator and a major victim of terrorism.

Body

Pakistan’s strategy of state sponsored terrorism

- **Pakistan’s strategy** - The ISI and Pakistan Army pursued the deliberate policy of the Pakistani state to create and foster terrorist groups in order to engage in low intensity warfare with its neighbours, especially India.
  - The intention was to keep India busy in Kashmir and deliberately foment violence through terror cells helped by the Pak army.

- **Course of Action:**
  - Pakistan first operationalized this strategy about Afghanistan following the overthrow of Zahir Shah by his cousin Daud Khan in 1973.
  - It intensified this strategy with the cooperation of the U.S. and Saudi Arabia after the Marxist coup of 1978.

- **Lacunae post Soviet withdrawal**
  - The Soviet withdrawal in 1989 left the Pakistani military with a large surplus of Islamist fighters that it had trained and armed.
  - Islamabad decided to use this “asset” to intensify the insurgency in the Kashmir Valley.

- **Ideologically radicalized:** Decade-long Afghan “jihad” had also radicalised a substantial segment of the Pakistani population as well as augmented sectarian divisions only between Sunnis and Shias and also among various Sunni sects.

- In the process, a number of homegrown terrorist groups emerged that the Pakistan Army co-opted for its use in Kashmir and the rest of India. However, soon it became clear that Pakistan had created Frankenstein monsters that soon turned against its own creator.

How Pakistan became a victim of its own plan?

- Some of Pakistan’s home-grown terrorist groups turned against it especially after the Musharraf government. Eg JeM
- Musharraf’s government, under American pressure, decided to collaborate with the latter in the overthrow of Afghan Taliban regime. This was not acceptable to certain groups.
- Both the LeT and the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) have been engaged in attacks on Indian targets identified by Pakistan’s ISI.
- The **JeM has not hesitated to launch terrorist attacks on targets within Pakistan** as well, especially against the Shias and Sufi shrines.
  - This is because, JeM is highly ideological and sectarian.
• **Deobandi Puritanism:** JeM draws its ideological inspiration from extreme form of Deobandi Puritanism.
  
  - Deobandi Puritanism considers all those who do not believe in its philosophy beyond the pale of Islam.
  - Therefore, legitimate targets of attack for JeM include not only Shias and Barelvis but also the Pakistani state and the Pakistani military.

**Conclusion**

Many of the terrorist groups were deliberately created by the Pakistani state to serve its purposes. However, its ability to control the various terrorist outfits is uneven and some of them have turned against their creator. It establishes the fact that using terrorist outfits for state objectives can have very negative consequences for the stability of the state itself.

**Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.**

Analyse the significance of organisations like World Bank, ADB and NDB, in the developmental process of countries like India.(250 words)

*Reference: Economic Times*

*Why this question:*

The **Asian Development Bank** unveiled a $1.5 billion Covid-19 package for India recently, thus the context of the question.

*Key demand of the question:*

On has to analyse the role of organisations like World Bank, ADB and NDB, in the developmental process of countries like India.

*Directive:*

**Analyse –** When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary.

*Structure of the answer:

**Introduction:**

Start by highlighting significance of global financial institutions in general.

**Body:**

Briefly explain the coming of and the proliferation of multilateral development banks across the world. Since 1945 the number of multilateral development banks (MDBs) has increased at a linear rate, with approximately one new MDB created every three years. Explain the causative factors responsible for creation of these institutions. Discuss the benefits and advantages they bring to the developing countries like that of India. Highlight the challenges associated.

**Conclusion:**

Conclude with importance of these multilateral development banks (MDBs).

**Introduction:**

International Financial Institutions (IFIs) are established by more than one country and subject to international law. Owners and shareholders are generally governments or other international institutions. IFIs can refer to members of the World Bank Group such as International Finance Corporation (IFC); regional development banks such as Asian Development Bank (ADB) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD); and export credit agencies of individual country governments, such as US Export Import Bank (EXIM).

**Body:**
The Asian Development Bank unveiled a $1.5 billion Covid-19 package for India on Tuesday and is in discussions with the government on further aid for specific sectors. It’s also in discussions with the country’s private sector to provide support where needed.

The multilateral lender has begun consultations with India on providing support for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and infrastructure projects through credit guarantees.

IFIs share the following goals and objectives:

- to reduce global poverty and improve people’s living conditions and standards;
- to support sustainable economic, social and institutional development; and
- to promote regional cooperation and integration.

Significance of International financial institutions:

- IFIs achieve these objectives through loans, credits and grants to national governments. Such funding is usually tied to specific projects that focus on economic and socially sustainable development.
- IFIs also provide technical and advisory assistance to their borrowers and conduct extensive research on development issues.
- In addition to these public procurement opportunities, in which multilateral financing is delivered to a national government for the implementation of a project or program, IFIs are increasingly lending directly to non-sovereign guaranteed (NSG) actors.
- These include sub-national government entities, as well as the private sector.
- IFIs are important in project finance because they play a significant role in supporting large scale infrastructure projects in emerging markets.
- They can provide critical capital and catalyze the participation of other players.
- IFIs take a long-term view with respect to an investment and have a stronger appetite for risk. They are prepared to finance projects which commercial lenders are not.
- IFIs have been set up for different reasons compared to commercial lenders. Although certain IFIs are mandated to lend based on “sound banking principles”, other considerations are relevant. EBRD and IFC invest only where it can provide “added value”, by investing in projects that could not otherwise attract private capital on similar or reasonable terms.
- Lastly, International financial institutions measure risk by the government or company’s ability to repay, its level of debt and what the group can offer as collateral in case of default.

Conclusion:

All international financial institutions have the same central goals: to promote economic and social progress in poor or developing countries by helping raise standards of living and productivity to the point at which development becomes self-sustaining.

The IFIs remain central to the functioning of the global financial system through their provision of policy advice, financing for development, global public goods, financial safety nets and rules-based framework for international economic activity.

Do you think the recently amended FDI regulation by the Government of India challenges the scope of World Trade Organization? Analyse.(250 words)

Reference: Financial Express

Why this question:
India recently amended its FDI policy by subjecting investments from countries with which it shares a land border to screening under the approval route and making them ineligible under the automatic route. Thus the question.

**Key demand of the question:**
Explain the scope of recent FDI policy amendments and analyse if these changes challenge the scope of WTO.

**Directive:**
**Analyze** – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary.

**Structure of the answer:**
**Introduction:**
Present brief background to the context.

**Body:**
Bring out the concerns brought to fore by the recent FDI policy amendments. Although none of the WTO agreements directly seek to regulate it, some contain provisions that may have implications for foreign investment. One such agreement is the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Talk about the GATS, concept of most favored nation (MFN) treatment etc. Bring out the challenges.

**Conclusion:**
Conclude with way forward.

**Introduction:**
A Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is an investment in by foreign investors in the foreign based company. In a decision fraught with geopolitical and economic ramifications, the Indian government amended its foreign direct investment (FDI) policy to put a blanket ban on investments through the automatic route by entities from countries that share a border with India.

**Body:**
The move is seen as an attempt to ward off the threat of “opportunistic” Chinese takeover of Indian companies, whose valuations have been badly hit by the coronavirus pandemic. The curbs, which were already in force for investments from Pakistan and Bangladesh, will extend to entities where Chinese citizens have “beneficial ownership” to ensure that the restrictions are not circumvented by routing investments via Hong Kong, Singapore or other countries.

**FDI restrictions and WTO norms:**
- One of the general disciplines is the most favoured nation (MFN) treatment, which requires members to ensure all other members equality of opportunity to supply like services in sectors where foreign competition is allowed.
- A WTO member cannot adopt a regulation affecting trade in services in a manner that affords less favourable treatment to service suppliers of a particular member than that accorded to those of any other country in respect of similar services.
- However, it doesn’t require “identity of treatment” amongst different service suppliers. It only requires that the treatment provided by a country does not prejudicially alter the “conditions of competition” between different service suppliers.
- Notably, in sectors like audio-visual, banking services, etc., the MFN obligation is subject to a number of exceptions specifically made by India in Annex II.
Outside these sectors, China can arguably claim a violation of the MFN obligation, contending that subjecting service suppliers from some countries to a different procedure competitively disadvantages their service suppliers.

While India might seek to justify the regulation under the general exceptions or essential security interest provisions of GATS, it may be difficult to explain why the regulation has been applied for select countries, given that threat of acquisition of domestic industries is the same from all foreign countries.

Unlike international practice, by selectively applying the regulation to certain countries and not to others, India makes itself vulnerable to Chinese claims in respect of certain service sectors under the GATS.

Concerns raised against the move:

- China has objected to these changes, arguing that it violates the WTO principle of non-discrimination.
- The additional barriers set by Indian side for investors from specific countries violate WTO’s principle of non-discrimination, and go against the general trend of liberalisation and facilitation of trade and investment.
- The Chinese embassy not only cited its investments but also the “donations” made by Chinese companies to help fight the Covid-19 pandemic.
- As of December 2019, China’s cumulative investment in India has exceeded 8 billion US dollars, far more than the total investments of India’s other border-sharing countries. The impact of the policy on Chinese investors is clear.
- Chinese investment has driven the development of India’s industries, such as mobile phone, household electrical appliances, infrastructure and automobile, creating a large number of jobs in India, and promoting mutual beneficial and win-win cooperation.
- Chinese enterprises actively made donations to help India fight COVID-19 epidemic.
- China also accused India of not conforming “to the consensus of G20 leaders and trade ministers to realize a free, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent, predictable and stable trade and investment environment, and to keep our markets open.”
- Therefore, Without the appropriate legal and regulatory sanction, India might experience reciprocal measures.
- In order to protect India’s unicorn, there is need to devise a scheme of preferential or special shares which a unicorn can issue to foreign investor.
- These shares will preserve the decision making by Indian innovators, while also providing them access to foreign capital.

Way forward:

- There is a need for India to develop new legal and institutional tools. As the ones employed by US and EU member states such as data protection laws or revised mergers and acquisitions rules, and institutional bodies.
- The Chinese have already restarted manufacturing when the rest of the world still grappling with coronavirus.
- China has several months’ advantage over all other major economies and can therefore secure significant benefits.
- After each crisis in recent years, China has consolidated itself. Indian government is trying to preempt acquisitions.
- Countries need to strengthen their domestic capabilities to meet the Chinese challenge.
It may be advisable for the Indian government to adopt a more facially neutral regulation that does not de jure discriminate on the basis of origin of the investment and applies equally to all countries.

Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has downgraded India to the lowest ranking, “countries of particular concern” (CPC) in its 2020 Report. How effective can these recommendations be? Suggest the measures to protect freedom of religion in the country.(250 words)

**Reference:** The Hindu

**Why this question:**
The US Commission of International Religious Freedom’s (USCIRF) latest report places India in the “Countries of Particular Concern” list.

**Key demand of the question:**
Explain the impact of these recommendations and their effectiveness; also suggest measures to protect freedom of religion in the country.

**Structure of the answer:**

**Introduction:**
Briefly set the context of the question.

**Body:**
To start with explain the concerns posed by the report. Highlight the reasons responsible for this downgrade; Concerns about the Citizenship Amendment Act, the proposed National Register for Citizens, anti-conversion laws and the situation in Jammu and Kashmir etc. Explain how effective can these recommendations be. Highlight the response meted out by the Indian government.

**Conclusion:**
Conclude with way forward while suggesting measures as to what needs to be done to address the issues.

**Introduction:**
India is a pluralist and diverse nation. The groups and communities with their diverse religious or cultural practices need to be protected, given that they have played an important role in society. The Constitution of India in an effort to protect the diverse practices recognizes both the freedom of religion as an individual right (Article 25), as well as the right of religious denominations to manage their own affairs in matters of religion (Article 26).

The characterization by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) of India as a country of particular concern, in its annual report, is not entirely surprising, considering its dim and known views about sectarian violence and aggravating governmental measures over the last year.

**Body:**

**Concerns posed by the findings of the report:**

- The government has unequivocally dismissed the US Commission of International Religious Freedom’s latest report citing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the proposed National Register for Citizens, both of which were announced by the government in the past year.
The bigger worry this year is the fact that the USCIRF has recommended that India be put on the CPC list by the State Department, which is due to publish its annual report on religious freedom in a few weeks, most likely in May or June.

There is a reputational issue involved, for India, as the world’s largest democracy that draws strength from the protection of diversity, as cited by a former diplomat.

It is also a matter of concern as the report could not be “ignored outright”.

Further, to be clubbed with China and Burma, Pakistan and North Korea as a country of particular concern is unfortunate.

The decision before U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (who will act on behalf of President Donald Trump) on whether to designate India as a CPC is significant, as it could bring other punitive actions.

According to the US IRF Act, the President is obligated to take one of 15 possible actions, ranging from a demarche to cancellation of bilateral exchanges, to travel sanctions against specified officials, within 3-6 months.

It was under this determination that the U.S. had banned travel visas for PM Narendra Modi (then Gujarat Chief Minister) in 2005.

Diplomats point out the State department hasn’t always followed the USCIRF’s recommendations.

India’s stand on the report findings:

- The External Affairs Ministry hit back at the USCIRF directly, calling it an “Organization of Particular Concern”, with no “locus standi” or official standing.
- The government’s stand is consistent with its policy on the USCIRF, which it has refused to cooperate with, and has disallowed its officials to visit India since 2009.

Measures needed to protect the freedom of religion in India:

**Economic:**
- Poverty is one of the major factors for communal violence. Poverty alleviation measures are thus important for promoting communal harmony.
- **Eradicating the problem of unemployment** among the youths, illiteracy and poverty and that too with honesty and without any discrimination.
- Reducing educational and economic backwardness of minorities like Muslims.
- This can uplift their socio economic status and reduce their deprivation compared to Hindus

**Social:**
- The religious leaders and preachers should promote rational and practical things through religion promoting peace and security.
- Children in schools must be taught through textbooks and pamphlets to maintain brotherhood and respect for all religions
- Creating awareness in the society about the ill effects of communism through mass media

**Political:**
- Political communism should be avoided recent Supreme court’s directives
- Identification and mapping of riot prone areas. For Example, Delhi police used drones to monitor to maintain vigil during communal festivals
- **Media, movies and other cultural platforms** can be influential in promoting peace and harmony.
• Social Media should be monitored for violent and repulsive content and taken off immediately.

- Recommendations of Committee on National Integration
  - Joint celebration of community festivals
  - Observing restraint by Hindus while taking processions before the mosques
  - Formation of peace and brotherhood communities at local level to prevent anti-social elements from engaging in communal riots
  - Respect for religious customs, rituals and practices

Way forward:

Utmost care and attention requires to be given to the planning and implementation of a range of measures to alleviate the sufferings of those affected by any incidents of communal violence, including the provision of relief and rehabilitation assistance to the victims of such violence.

Deliberate upon the possible concerns associated with India’s Diaspora and its effect amidst the COVID-19 crisis. Suggest measures to address the same. (250 words)

Reference: Live Mint

Why this question:
The question is based on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic upon the Indian diaspora.

Key demand of the question:
Explain possible concerns associated with India’s Diaspora and its effect amidst the COVID-19 crisis also suggest solutions to address the same.

Directive:
Deliberate – Weigh up to what extent something is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant research but also remember to point out any flaws and counter-arguments as well. Conclude by stating clearly how far you agree with the original proposition.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Present brief overview of the Indian diaspora.

Body:
Explain the impact of COVID-19 on the Indian diaspora on various fronts. Discuss the unprecedented situation that the country is witnessing; explain specific issues and concerns Indian diaspora is facing away from homeland. Also highlight the positive side that an opportunity for the Indian diaspora to make a collective impact toward helping marginalized communities which have been disproportionately affected by the ongoing crisis.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way ahead.

Introduction:
“Diaspora” is an omnibus phrase which brackets people of Indian origin who have emigrated since the 19th century to all corners of the world. The Indian diaspora has been a source of remittances, technology and intellectual power. Ever since the Indian economy was liberalized and began to grow at a rapid pace, the prosperous diaspora in the developed countries and the massive number of migrant workers in the Gulf became the back bone of the Indian economy.

Today, the India-diaspora relations are on the verge of an unprecedented crisis because of the Coronavirus, which threatens the world, particularly the very countries where the people of Indian origin have worked and prospered.

Body:
Possible concerns associated with India’s Diaspora:

- There are around 30 million Indian citizens abroad. As a matter of policy, India had decided not to bring back the stranded Indians from abroad till the nation-wide lockdown ends.
- In the Gulf countries alone, 300,000 Indians have registered to return, and an estimated 10,000 have contracted the virus. This poses an unprecedented challenge, one that no other country has faced so far.
- India naturally will have to move mountains to bring them back from the Middle East and the United States, where the situation is deteriorating. One shudders to think of the great humanitarian crisis it will create if all Indians were to come back from the far corners of the globe.
- Some Indian workers in Middle East might face job losses, which will dent the annual remittances that India receives from them.
- The real danger of loss of lives among the diaspora, resulting in cases of deprivation and misery. Unless the spread of Coronavirus is halted and the world economy recovers, India will have a gigantic burden on its hands.
- Further immigration restrictions could have particularly acute consequences for India, which sends thousands of highly skilled workers to the United States every year and counts a four million strong diaspora in the country, representing one of the largest contingents of immigrants to the United States.
- The Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom has emerged as being among the worst affected minority groups in the coronavirus pandemic, according to official data on the deaths in hospitals across England.
- With the growth of nationalism in different parts of the world and diminishing international cooperation, India cannot count much on external help. The United Nations itself remains paralysed on account of the arrogant approach of China.
- Kerala will be particularly affected as many of the people who are likely to be affected will be from the state.
- A reversal of roles is likely if the majority of the 30 million people scattered all over the world turn to India for support, instead of giving generously to India.

Measures needed:

- Indian prime minister personally requested the leaders of nations to ensure wellbeing of the Indian community there
- It is necessary to request the nations to extend the validity of visa of Indian nationals who are stranded in the other countries on a quid-pro-quo basis.
- The Indian missions in the regions have to extend all possible assistance to the Indians in distress in the wake of the pandemic.
- The Indian mission could engage with some of the bigger companies to ascertain the condition of Indian employees working for such firms, who are living in labour camps.
- The mission should provide food and medicines from the Indian Community Welfare Fund for the “destitute Indians” living there.
- In a struggling Indian economy, the authorities will also have to ensure that returnees are able to reintegrate with minimum disruption.
- The economy may lose a significant amount of critical remittances, around 2% of GDP, but the return of skilled migrants may also be leveraged as an opportunity for several sectors.
Financial instruments like diaspora bonds could generate about $50 billion a year in total for developing countries, potentially helping to offset a sharp drop in foreign direct investment that is slated to fall by 37% this year.

The Vande Bharat Mission, coordinated by the ministry of external affairs (MEA), is likely to be the largest and most complex repatriation mission ever conducted by India, and possibly worldwide. The efforts of Indian diplomats on the ground, serving at the forefront in over 100 countries, which will determine the success of the mission.

Conclusion:

While India can take advantage of the drop in oil prices, New Delhi and the state governments will need to work closely to ensure the longer-term safety and well-being of workers. For long, the remittances of such workers have benefitted India; they cannot now be ignored. Unlike the diaspora in other countries that offer citizenship and are reasonably secure, workers in the Gulf do not have those facilities.

NAM provides India a platform to be the torchbearer for smaller countries at multilateral platforms. Do you agree? Comment. (250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why this question:
The article provides for a detailed examination of NAM as a platform and the significant position that it provides for India.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the significance of NAM and the role of India in the NAM platform; explain how it can be the torchbearer for smaller countries at multilateral platforms.

Directive:
Comment– here we have to express our knowledge and understanding of the issue and form an overall opinion thereupon.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Present briefly the importance of NAM.

Body:
Explain the role of NAM as an essential global grouping. Discuss the positives that the platform brings for smaller countries and explain the role that India can play to aid these countries. One can quote the current example of ongoing corona crisis.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction:
Non-Aligned Movement is an idea that emerged in 1950. NAM is the second-largest platform globally in terms of country membership after the UN. It currently has more than 120 members. Azerbaijan is the president of the grouping from 2019-2022 and the meet is being organised under the leadership of President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. The title of the summit is “We stand together against COVID-19”. Indian Prime minister Narendra Modi will participate in a video conference meeting of non-alignment movement (NAM) on COVID crisis.

Body:

Significance:
This is the first time PM Modi is taking part in a NAM meeting since taking 2014 when he first became the Prime Minister. The last time any Indian PM participated at Tehran NAM meet was 2012 with the then PM Manmohan Singh was present.

Both in 2016, 2018 summits of NAM, India was represented at Vice President level.

The last NAM Summit happened in 2019 in Azerbaijan, before that it was 2016 in Venezuela.

**Importance of NAM for the countries:**

- NAM would help call upon the international community and the WHO to focus on building health-capacity in developing countries.
- It could also ensure equitable, affordable and timely access to health products and technologies for all.
- The NAM leaders announced creation of a task force to identify requirements of member countries through a common database reflecting their basic medical, social and humanitarian needs in the fight against COVID-19.
- NAM can help promote global solidarity. NAM has often been the world’s moral voice. To retain this role, NAM must remain inclusive.
- COVID-19 has shown limitations of the existing international system. In the post-COVID world, a new template of globalisation, based on fairness, equality, and humanity is needed.
- NAM can help bring about the much needed international institutions that are more representative of today’s world

**NAM’s authority is slowly eroding:**

- The end of cold war lead to unipolar world and now tending towards multi-polarity. The NAM is now reached irrelevance.
- NAM could not push for reforms in the global bodies like UN, IMF, WTO. Thus, it has dissuaded many developing countries from pursuing it.
- Disputes within the Global South countries. Example: India-Pak, Iran-Iraq. This has paved way for the blocs to enter.
- Inability to find solution to the West-Asian crisis. Withdrawal of one of the founder members-Egypt, after the Arab Spring.
- Most of the members are economically weak; hence they have no say in world politics or economy.

**Other challenges faced by NAM:**

- NAM today has grown into a forum where developing nations could blame all their problems on the big powers.
- It has become a platform for some of the world’s most despicable leaders to preen and posture.
- NAM’s reason to exist ended in 1989, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the end of the Cold War. The world was left with a single superpower, the US, but quickly became multipolar, with China and India emerging as strong magnetic forces in their own right.

**Way forward:**

There are now new kinds of alignments, more likely to be defined by economics and geography than by ideology. To be aligned is now a virtue, a sign of good leadership. Countries, especially small ones, can and should aim for multiple alignments of their interests. There is now no country in the world that can claim to be non-aligned.
Conclusion:

India is a large and globalised economy with “big stakes in all parts of the world”. Its foreign policy must focus on a pragmatic assessment of India’s interests and the best means to secure them — including partnerships and coalitions — against current and potential threats. A newer, reformed NAM 2.0 can be looked at to continue NAM as our foreign policy.

The COVID-19 crisis has made virtual diplomacy- a new way of conducting international affairs. Elaborate on the benefits and disadvantages.(250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why this question:
The article explains in what way Covid crisis can be turned into an opportunity to conduct diplomatic engagement online.

Key demand of the question:
Explain what the concept of virtual diplomacy is, its prospects for India in the present times and the coming future.

Directive:
Elaborate – Give a detailed account as to how and why it occurred, or what is the particular context. You must be defining key terms where ever appropriate, and substantiate with relevant associated facts.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Firstly, define what you understand by virtual diplomacy.

Body:
To start with explain the fact that the international community has been witnessing a drastic reduction in the diplomatic representation of governments and international organizations around the world. Explain that IT enabled diplomacy provides great opportunities for countries, especially the ones in transition. By using innovative ICT tools such as social media, e-services and open data platforms, foreign services can leapfrog and play a greater role on the international stage and thus enabling smaller countries to “punch above their weight” and earn a space at the same table with other strong international stakeholders. Discuss the concerns associated if any.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction:
Virtual diplomacy refers to diplomacy carried out in a virtual fashion through the use of technology and the Internet, other than traditional face-to-face technology. At its broadest, the term ‘virtual diplomacy’ signifies the altered diplomacy associated with the emergence of a networked globe. At its narrowest, the term encompasses the decision-making, coordination, communication, and practice of international relations as they are conducted with the aid of information and communications technologies.

Body:
The development of social media tools has changed the way diplomats interact with people, communities, non-governmental organizations and even foreign governments. Diplomats have quickly understood that Facebook, Twitter and other similar social media tools provide an opportunity to spread important information in a very fast manner and at almost no cost. The rise of social media has basically opened a new area for competition on the international stage. Foreign services are now competing for virtual influence on top of geopolitical influence, and one can
imagine a scenario where virtual supremacy could someday be more important than geopolitical supremacy. Social media has diplomatic clients all over the world and on all continents.

Advantages:

- IT enabled diplomacy provides great opportunities for countries, especially the ones in transition.
- By using innovative ICT tools such as social media, e-services and open data platforms, foreign services can leapfrog and play a greater role on the international stage.
- Smaller states during the realization of their foreign policy face many challenges. The main challenge which limits the foreign policy execution of these states is the financial capacity. Digital diplomacy favors all kinds of states, but mostly small states.
- It enables smaller countries to “punch above their weight” and earn a space at the same table with other strong international stakeholders.
- e-diplomacy is an easy and cheap tool for other purposes, too: responding to disasters, gathering information and managing relationships. Some diplomats also use Twitter to communicate among themselves.
- International practice shows that competent use of digital diplomacy tools can bring big dividends to those who invest in it. Moreover, digital diplomacy does not always require financial investments. On the contrary, it is often aimed at reducing costs.
- Social media enable diplomats to observe events, gather information, and identify key influencers. They also provide channels to influence beyond the traditional audience. They can help in consultation process, policy formulation and help to share ideas.

Disadvantages:

- Implementation of virtual diplomacy has its risks. Data protection and security, infrastructure set-up and institutional frameworks are issues countries should think about very carefully.
- The international diplomatic community has already had a negative experience with the leaking of US State Department cables, which endangered the cooperation between different international players. Nevertheless, modern technology offers possibilities which could mitigate the risks.
- Obviously, we should not expect virtual diplomacy to totally replace traditional diplomacy.
- Mutual trust, which is probably the most important concept in international cooperation, can be built only by personal interaction.
- Diplomatic missions play an important role in promoting economic and trade ties and people-to-people contact. Public diplomacy is critical in strengthening cultural and educational exchanges.

Conclusion:

Virtual diplomacy is being embraced in different forms, by an increasing number of countries and international organizations and it is gaining more and more ground with respect to traditional diplomacy. Nevertheless, it’s without any doubt that virtual and traditional diplomacy could be compliment goods, economically speaking.

Case study: One of the best examples of IT replacing some aspects of the traditional diplomacy is the Virtual Embassy of the United States to Teheran, Iran. It is a website that was developed by the US State Department after the closure of the US Embassy in Tehran. The Virtual US Embassy is no different than any other US embassy website. The significance of this project is that it opens up a new diplomatic space – the virtual one. For the first time in diplomatic history, a country is using the
Internet to establish a virtual presence in a particular part of the world. The concept of a “virtual embassy” has great potential and that such an online presence can serve as much more than a source of information about politics, economy, trade or cultural affairs between countries. A virtual embassy can serve as a platform to provide e-services to people from the sending and receiving states. This innovative approach inevitably does not have the full functionality of a traditional embassy or consulate but it is the next best thing when such an embassy or consulate does not exist.

The new multilateralism in the coming future must place the common interests of humanity at the forefront. Discuss, also highlight the role that India can play amidst such circumstances.(250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why this question:
The article talks about the need for having “interests of humanity” at the centre of the agenda of newer multilateral world. Prime minister of India in the recent G-20 summit said that human beings were needed to put in the centre of global prosperity and cooperation. He also called on the leaders to help usher in a new globalization, for the collective well-being of the humanity. Thus the question.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the coming of new multilateralism and the need to recognise that the interests of humanity to be put at the forefront.

Directive:
Discuss – This is an all-encompassing directive – you have to debate on paper by going through the details of the issues concerned by examining each one of them. You have to give reasons for both for and against arguments.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Present brief context of the question.

Body:
To start with one can highlight India’s view towards collective effort and its strong desire to unify the nations. Discuss the prospects of new multilateralism. Highlight the need to have interests of humanity at the forefront. Explain challenges if any. Present the possible role that India can play amidst these scenarios.

Conclusion:
Conclude that India can take lead in bringing the world together.

Introduction:
The COVID-19 pandemic has effectively exposed flaws in multilateral structures and highlighted the lacunae in national capacities, particularly in healthcare. Multilateralism has suffered retrenchment. Given its scale and unpredictable impact, it has the potential to shake the trust in Multilateralism and its institutions, but that shall be a devastating mistake.

Body:
Current challenges/concerns associated with the multilateral institutions:

- The UN Security Council (UNSC) must be faulted for its egregious lack of action in March 2020 when China held the rotating post of the president.
- The withdrawal of nearly $500 million worth of annual voluntary funding by the USA to the World Health Organization (WHO) is a debatable move, notwithstanding the global consensus on the WHO’s China-bias.
- The major institutions such as UNSC, G20, G7 and the EU were inert
The possible role that multilevel governance and multilateralism would play in post COVID-19 world:

- to enhance coordination on macro-economic policies, and take well-focused fiscal and monetary measures on both sides of supply and demand in an effort to curb recession, create jobs, protect livelihoods and stabilize the global economy.
- to sustain coordination in the UN, the G20 and other multilateral frameworks to keep up secure and smooth functioning of global industrial and supply chains, and defend the multilateral trading regime with the WTO as the cornerstone.
- to work for making development the centrepiece of the global macro policy agenda, and expedite the delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- to champion the approach of consultation and cooperation for shared benefits in governance, take the lead in advancing global governance reform along the right direction.
- to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests and space for development not just for ourselves but also for all other emerging market and developing countries.
- The multilateral organizations should offer trade unions and social partners in general the space and impetus necessary to participate in democratic and transparent multilateral decision-making processes.
- It must also offer them the space to demand enhanced policy coherence, improved enforcement and better accountability.

Role that India can play amidst such circumstances:

- India enjoys good relations with multiple powers and is well-regarded across the developing world.
- With excellent long-term economic prospects in the decades ahead, a confident India appears fully capable of absorbing the shocks of the pandemic and striding forth to engage a world riven by trade wars and ideological contestation.
- 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.
- As the world’s largest producer and exporter of cost-effective generic drugs, India’s readiness to ship the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine to fight COVID-19 to others is a “Good Samaritan” act in consonance with the ethos of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”.
- India is also in the race to produce a vaccine. If China is a “factory to the world”, India has the potential to be a “pharmacy to the world”.
- It can even take on a new and well-deserved moniker, that of vishwa vaidya (global physician). This provides an opportunity to promote ayurveda, which complements yoga.

Immediate measures needed:

- There is still a chance for a coordinated push under the auspices of the G20 or the International Monetary Fund.
- Jointly orchestrated monetary and fiscal policies would provide not just immediate stimulus but also a boost in confidence, as would an agreement to reverse the protectionist policies of the past few years.
- A mutual ceasefire in the trade war and a return to multilateral trade negotiations would directly boost economic activity by restoring confidence and spurring investment.
It would show that the international community is still capable of coming together in meaningful ways to fight a global crisis.

Conclusion:
Taken together, joint action to tackle the pandemic, manage multiple economic shocks, and end the trade war would both limit the severity of the downturn and accelerate the pace of the subsequent recovery. Until recently, restoring multilateral cooperation and rebuilding confidence in the institutions that USA has torn down was a noble objective. Now, it is an urgent and near-existent one.

Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian Diaspora.
Lessons learnt from the SARS epidemic have helped shape East Asian countries’ response to the Covid-19 outbreak. What lessons do you think can India learn from these countries? Elucidate.(250 words)
Reference: Indian Express

Introduction:
SARS infected only slightly over 8,000 people in 29 countries, with 774 deaths. Nonetheless, it shook the people and governments in East Asia out of their slumber and many of them indeed did not let this crisis go to waste. Considered a major public health crisis at the time, SARS pales in comparison to the current Covid-19 crisis in terms of both spread and impact.

Body:
Reforms undertaken during previous pandemics:
- China recognised the weakness of its health system and adopted a two-pronged approach of strengthening its government health facilities and expanding health coverage through social health insurance.
- Government health expenditure tripled in a few years’ time and almost entire population received health assurance.
- Other countries, even smaller countries like Laos and Cambodia, also invested heavily in their public health systems, improved their surveillance and reporting capacities, and significantly increased their health sector budgets.
- A healthy demand for large loan projects in the health sector ensued.
- For example, Vietnam borrowed heavily to establish a strong and interlinked laboratory system covering the entire country.
- SARS, and subsequently H1N1, also prompted East Asian countries to deepen their regional cooperation on pandemic preparedness and response.
- Coordinated by the Association of South-East Asian Nations and other international development agencies, systems and agreements were put in place to identify emerging health emergencies and share information.
- SARS also provided a major push to the World Health Organization’s effort to revise the International Health Regulations (IHR) to make them more effective.
The revisions allowed WHO to seek information from member states and mandated sharing of any epidemic information with neighbours.

**Lessons learnt by East Asian countries from SARS epidemic:**

- These countries, despite being closely connected with China through trade, tourism, culture and the diaspora and having ageing populations, have seen a relatively modest impact of the pandemic.
- While further research will tell us more, anecdotal evidence suggests that the widespread hygienic and face-covering practices and strong public health systems have helped in this process.
- Many of these practices and systems developed as a response to SARS, H1N1 and MERS.
- These reforms have definitely helped East Asian countries in effectively dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Behavioural changes:**

- In East Asia, most people now press elevator buttons with a finger knuckle, avoiding direct contact with their fingertips.
- People are also more careful and use more hygienic sense in using public restrooms. Frequent handwashing is a norm.
- In places like China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Korea, the use of face coverings in public places became the norm.
- The practice was continued even after the outbreak was over. People with coughs and colds attend office with face coverings.
- SARS also prompted some introspection about working and travel arrangements.
- Faced with temporary travel restrictions during the epidemic, the Asian Development Bank experimented with undertaking loan negotiations through videoconferencing. This turned out to be as efficient as face-to-face meetings and has now become the norm.
- A realisation set in that much of business travel could be severally rationalised.

**Lessons that India can learn from these countries:**

- Lives, social practices, working arrangements and the health sector will surely irreversibly change with the Covid-19 crisis in our country as well.
- The extent to which handwashing and other hygienic and physical distancing practices become part of our lifestyles
- our work arrangements change, with greater reliance on technology-enabled conferencing and supervision and reduced travel.
- access to healthcare increase through enhanced use of telemedicine.
- our disease reporting and surveillance systems must become stronger.
- Our expenditure on health comped to our peer nations should be increased.

**Conclusion:**
These reforms have definitely helped East Asian countries in effectively dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. India with its high population density must adapt the behavioural changes to curb the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. India must also undertake immediate reforms to strengthen the much needed medical infrastructure to tackle the fragile healthcare system of India.

What are “Travel Bubbles”? With the pandemic throwing both international and domestic trade and travel out of gear how can the concept help parts of the global economy afloat? Explain.(250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why this question:
The Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania on Friday started what is being referred to as a ‘travel bubble’ to help put their economies back on track post-Covid lockdowns. Thus the question.

Key demand of the question:
Explain the concept of travel Bubbles and then discuss how it would help the global economies.

Directive:
Explain – Clarify the topic by giving a detailed account as to how and why it occurred, or what is the particular context. You must be defining key terms where ever appropriate, and substantiate with relevant associated facts.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Briefly define what Travel Bubbles are.

Body:
Creating a travel bubble involves reconnecting countries or states that have shown a good level of success in containing the novel coronavirus pandemic domestically. Such a bubble would allow the members of the group to rekindle trade ties with each other, and kickstart sectors such as travel and tourism. In the Estonia-Latvia-Lithuania travel bubble, residents would be able to travel freely by rail, air, and sea without quarantine measures. Explain that to keep some parts of the global economy afloat amid the coronavirus pandemic, travel bubbles are now being recommended. Discuss the pros and cons of such a concept. Discuss its significance to India.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction:
A travel bubble involves reconnecting countries or states that have shown a good level of success in containing the novel coronavirus pandemic domestically. Such a bubble would allow the members of the group to rekindle trade ties with each other, and kickstart sectors such as travel and tourism. The Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania on Friday started what is being referred to as a ‘travel bubble’ to help put their economies back on track post-Covid lockdowns. To keep some parts of the global economy afloat amid the coronavirus pandemic, travel bubbles are now being recommended.

Body:
Challenges posed to travel and tourism industry by pandemic:

- The virtual halt to travel has exacerbated the global economy’s woes, complicating trade ties, upending business and devastating the tourism industry.
- The global travel and tourism industry was estimated to be worth over $700 billion in 2020 – and it’s now forecast to be $447 billion as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Potential of travel bubbles:
With the pandemic throwing both international and domestic trade and travel out of gear since earlier this year, such ‘travel bubbles’ are now being recommended to keep at least parts of the global economy afloat.

In countries that are at a similar stage of pandemic recovery, governments are fast adopting travel bubbles – allowing intra-regional travel even as they remain closed to the rest of the world.

Analysts say country-to-country bubbles would jumpstart aviation, tourism and conferencing, all of which have taken hits since the global pandemic started.

It would help to speed the recovery of economic activity.

According to a report in The Economist, potential travel bubbles among better-performing countries around the world would account for around 35 per cent of the global GDP.

Such arrangements are especially being favoured by smaller countries, who are likely to benefit after being able to trade again with larger partners.

In the Estonia-Latvia-Lithuania travel bubble, residents would be able to travel freely by rail, air, and sea without quarantine measures. All three are sparsely populated (Lithuania- 28 lakh, Latvia- 19.2 lakh, Estonia- 13.3 lakh people) and have been fairly successful at managing the outbreak.

Australia and New Zealand reached an agreement to form a travel bubble between the two countries once it becomes safe to operate flights between them.

China and South Korea, who have also enjoyed success in containing the outbreak, have launched a fast track channel for business travelers.

In the US, travel bubbles are being suggested to group states who are faring well against the pandemic, but constitutional challenges are also being cited as a possible roadblock for such plans.

Potential for India:

The raging Covid-19 pandemic and the idea of travel bubbles have provided India with a unique opportunity to fulfill its long-held dream of becoming South Asia’s benevolent hegemon.

If India were to initiate such a travel bubble, it would affirm its position as a regional elder, patroller of the seas and borders, and an economy ready to trade during desperate times.

The travel bubble will be India’s moment to make a political statement that unleashes its drive to reimagine South Asian integration.

Although, a South Asian bubble as proposed by New Delhi is just the first in a series of steps required to imagine the new South Asian regional order.

Potential pitfalls:

Safe zones might fray if one or more members push to open travel with a third country whose virus risk is higher — especially China, whose vast market exerts a powerful pull.

Creating “bubbles” of rich countries risks exacerbating inequalities with poorer countries that are excluded.

The sooner wealthier nations can restore economies to health, however, including by re-establishing trade links, the faster they can help the emerging world.

Measures needed:
The success of travel bubble will depend much on how the governments handle themselves with the information they share, how much clarity there is, and the structure they create for visitors and the industry.

Restrictions on travel should first be lifted in areas with a comparable epidemiological situation and where sufficient capabilities are in place in terms of hospitals, testing, surveillance and contact tracing capacities.

Conclusion:

A travel bubble would be “mutually beneficial, assisting our trade and economic recovery, helping kick-start the tourism and transport sectors, enhancing sporting contacts, and reuniting families and friends”. With most economies frozen due to coronavirus pandemic, India not only has a chance to reignite animal spirits but also make South Asia genuinely integrated.

What do you understand by Open Skies Treaty? Explain What US departure could mean for it?(250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why this question:

Recently, the United States of America (USA) has announced that it will exit the Open Skies Treaty (OST) due to continuous violation of the treaty by Russia and changes in the security environment. Thus the question.

Key demand of the question:

Explain the open skies treaty in detail and bring out the possible consequences of US departing from it.

Directive:

Explain – Clarify the topic by giving a detailed account as to how and why it occurred, or what is the particular context. You must be defining key terms where ever appropriate, and substantiate with relevant associated facts.

Structure of the answer:

Introduction:

Briefly explain the open skies treaty.

Body:

To start with, explain that it is an agreement that allows its 34 signatories countries to monitor arm development by conducting unarmed surveillance flights (unarmed) over each other’s territories. It was signed in 1992 and came into effect in 2002. Therefore, the treaty established an aerial surveillance system for its participants. Discuss the possible outcomes of US’s withdrawal and its impact on other countries.

Conclusion:

Conclude with way forward.

Introduction:

Open Skies Treaty (OST) is an agreement that allows its 34 signatories countries to monitor arm development by conducting unarmed surveillance flights over each other’s territories. The treaty was designed to “enhance mutual understanding and confidence by giving all participants, regardless of size, a direct role in gathering information through aerial imaging on military forces and activities of concern to them.” Therefore, Under the treaty, a member state can “spy” on any part of the host nation, with the latter’s consent.

Recently, the United States of America has announced that it will exit the Open Skies Treaty due to continuous violation of the treaty by Russia and changes in the security environment.
Body:

**Evolution of Open Skies treaty:**
- It was agreed just after the Cold War to allow signatories to avoid nasty surprises by monitoring rival militaries.
- It was first proposed in 1955 by former US President Dwight Eisenhower as a means to deescalate tensions during the Cold War.
- The landmark treaty was eventually signed in 1992 between NATO members and former Warsaw Pact countries following the demise of the Soviet Union.
- It went into effect in 2002 and currently has 35 signatories along with one non-ratifying member (Kyrgyzstan).
- Both US and Russia are signatories of the treaty.
- India is not a member of this treaty.

**Importance of Open Skies treaty:**
- The OST aims at building confidence among members through mutual openness, thus reducing the chances of accidental war.
- Under the treaty, a member state can “spy” on any part of the host nation, with the latter’s consent.
- A country can undertake aerial imaging over the host state after giving notice 72 hours before, and sharing its exact flight path 24 hours before.
- The information gathered, such as on troop movements, military exercises and missile deployments, has to be shared with all member states.
- Only approved imaging equipment is permitted on the surveillance flights, and officials from the host state can also stay on board throughout the planned journey.

**Reasons for US Departure from OST:**
- While it was envisaged as a key arms control agreement, many in US had for over a decade accused Russia of non-compliance with OST protocols.
- Russia was blamed for obstructing surveillance flights on its territory, while misusing its own missions for gathering key tactical data.
- The U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accused Russia of violating the Treaty openly and continuously in various ways for years.
- So the U.S. President Trump’s administration has now chosen to withdraw from the pact.
- Russia has denied the allegations, and has called U.S.’s exit as very regrettable.

**Implications of US Departure from OST:**
- The exit from the Open Skies Treaty is the most recent example of important pacts Washington has stepped away from during the Trump presidency, including the Paris Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal.
- Pompeo said that the US would reconsider its decision to withdraw if Russia demonstrates a return to full compliance.
- This approach is reminiscent from last year when Trump had suspended US participation in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.
- Then too, the USA had said that it would re-engage with Russia if it sought a new treaty – a possibility that never materialised.
Experts believe that the same could happen with the OST, with Russia using USA’s exit as a pretext for leaving the treaty itself.
Russia’s departure could adversely impact USA’s European allies that rely on OST data to track Russian troop movements in the Baltic region.
Pulling out of the OST, an important multilateral arms control agreement would be yet another gift from the US to Russia.

Conclusion:
Experts are now contemplating the fate of the US-Russia ‘New START’ nuclear arms control agreement, which will expire in February 2021. Trump has already said that his administration would not renew the treaty unless China joins. Many see this as improbable, given the already heightened tensions between USA and China over the pandemic.

Analyse the trends in the domain of technology and data, and evaluate the interdependence between technology and geopolitics in a post-COVID phase. (250 words)
Reference: The Hindu
Why this question:
The author of the article analyzes the trends in the domain of technology and data, and evaluates the scenario in a post-COVID phase.
Key demand of the question:
One has to analyse in detail the trends in the domain of technology and data, and evaluate the interdependence between technology and geopolitics in a post-COVID phase.
Directive:
Analyse – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary.
Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Briefly start by explaining the significance of technology and data in the current times.
Body:
To start with, highlight that National governments, policymakers and healthcare researchers are using technology and data to plan and improve economic activities, social development and treat deadly diseases. Then move onto explain the interdependence between technology and geopolitics in detail. Bring out concerns associated with it and propose solutions to address the same.
Conclusion:
Conclude with way ahead.
Introduction:
National governments, policymakers and healthcare researchers are using technology and data to plan and improve economic activities, social development and treat deadly diseases more effectively than ever before. This is because deeper issues arising due to the pandemic are slowly emerging as the world relaxes lockdown measures.
Body:
Recent trends in the domain of technology and data:

• Issues relating to technologies such as biotechnology, genetic engineering and information technology will have a long-term impact on geopolitics.
• Technology and data are becoming inherently geopolitical.
Proper data related to the COVID-19 outbreak were not shared in time, and that is why there is so much anger towards the World Health Organization and China.

The nature of technology and data has placed tech giants such as Google, Facebook and Amazon in a commanding position. Given their global reach, governments are becoming increasingly dependent on them.

Tech giants are taking a leading role in geopolitics, at times playing on their own and sometimes as proxies of nation states to influence policymaking and national regulations.

The U.S.-China trade war, the position of governments on Huawei 5G technology, and Facebook’s attempt to implement internet.org are a few examples.

**Changing idea of privacy:**
- The pandemic has brought a change in perception on issues like privacy.
- During the current pandemic, people across the globe have accepted the idea of their live locations being traced and shared with governments.
- Currently in India, more than 90 million people have downloaded Aarogya Setu despite concerns raised with respect to the right to privacy.

However, there are concerns regarding this domain of technology and data:
- Restrictions on the flow of data have increased significantly in the recent past.
- World over, data protection laws, requirements of data localisation, laws related to weakening of encryption keys and data retention requirements are increasing.
- The proposed frameworks on data are not interoperable between different jurisdictions and only focus on protection of personal data and privacy and give little thought to the broader impact of data on mobility and social aspects.
- Data protection frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation of the EU and the CLOUD Act of the U.S. are aimed at putting users in control of their data. But they have issues relating to data localisation, cross-border flow of information and issue of data sharing.
- The global body, UN has also not succeeded in bringing consensus in the preparation of an acceptable framework.

**Way forward:**
- Digital equity will require frameworks relating to governance of technology and data that look beyond geopolitical considerations.
- There is a need to distinguish individual data from large global data sets.
- We cannot extrapolate the current human rights framework to human rights in the digital and biological domain.
- The current concept of privacy and cross-border flow of information may require significant change.
- There is a dire need to impose obligations for data flow on countries and tech giants in the larger interest of mankind.
- We need to establish a baseline of global norms of data governance that go beyond privacy and geopolitical considerations.
- These norms must focus on mechanisms to leverage data to solve problems and ensure consistency, interoperability, privacy and security.
It is the right time for a Parliament select committee to look at the data protection framework.

At the same time, we need to identify an international body to evolve global norms on data governance.

Do you agree that the COVID-19 situation across the world has opened up pressures and Opportunities for Quad plus in the African continent? Analyse. (250 words)

Reference: Indian Express

Why this question:
The question is based on the article that discusses the opportunities that the present Covid situation throws at the Quad-Plus in harnessing the potential of the African content.

Key demand of the question:
Students have to discuss in detail the possible pressures and Opportunities for Quad plus in the African continent.

Directive:
Analyze – When asked to analyse, you have to examine methodically the structure or nature of the topic by separating it into component parts and present them as a whole in a summary.

Structure of the answer:
Introduction:
Brief upon the current situation across the world in a line or two.

Body:
Start by explaining how the pandemic is a colossal challenge but it may create opportunities to deepen India’s engagement with Africa. Discuss the India’s engagement with Africa, elucidate upon the Quad plus and its role currently in the African continent. Take hints from the article and draw positives as well as the possible challenges.

Conclusion:
Conclude with way forward.

Introduction
India has been closely associated with Africa on account of its shared colonial past and rich contemporary ties. With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, it has become all the more significant to engage with the most vulnerable continent to mitigate human suffering and crisis. A Quad plus arrangement with Africa can help India emerge as a global leader and a steadfast development partner.

Body
India-Africa bilateral relations in recent years
- 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 per cent of the total) spread over 100 projects in 41 countries.
- Ties were boosted at the India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) in 2015.
- Forty per cent 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.

• Bilateral cooperation includes solar energy development, information technology, cyber security, maritime security, disaster relief, counter-terrorism and military training.

• India has also launched several initiatives to develop closer relations, including 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. The huge Indian diaspora is a major asset.

Considering the robust ties with Africa, India must now engage with the continent more pro-actively especially during the times of pandemic that can ravage human security and livelihoods in Africa.

**Opportune moment for Quad plus arrangement with Africa**

• India has already despatched **medical assistance to 25 African countries**. Health is an important area of cooperation, as there is shortfall of healthcare workers and infrastructure in Africa.

• India could consider structuring a **series of virtual summits** in zonal groups with African leaders across the continent over the next few months that could both provide a platform for a cooperative response to the pandemic and also serve as a precursor to the actual summit in the future.

• India is a development partner unlike China. **China’s engagement of Africa**, as elsewhere, is huge but increasingly regarded as predatory and exploitative.

• The Ministry of External Affairs has already extended the **e-ITEC course on “COVID-19 Pandemic: Prevention and Management Guidelines for Healthcare Professionals”** to healthcare workers in Africa.

• **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**.

• Agriculture and food security can also be a fulcrum for deepening ties. **With the locust scourge devastating the Horn of Africa** and the pandemic worsening the food crisis, India could ramp up its collaboration in this sector.

• India could also create a new **fund for Africa and adapt its grant-in-aid assistance** to reflect the current priorities.
  • This could include support for new investment projects by Indian entrepreneurs especially in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors in Africa.

• **India’s engagement with Africa during pandemic**: The Prime Minister has had a telephonic talk with President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa who is the current chairperson of the African Union, and separately others such as the presidents of Uganda and Ethiopia.
Minister of External Affairs has also reached out to counterparts in Africa to reiterate India’s support in the fight against the coronavirus.

Conclusion

Both India and Japan share a common interest in forging a partnership for Africa’s development. The COVID-19 crisis has nudged many countries to engage in new formats. It is time for the Quad Plus, in which the US, India, Japan and Australia have recently engaged other countries such as the ROK, Vietnam, New Zealand, Israel and Brazil, to exchange views and propose cooperation with select African countries abutting the Indian Ocean. After all, the Indo-Pacific straddles the entire maritime space of the Indian Ocean. The pandemic is a colossal challenge but it may create fresh opportunities to bring India and Africa closer together.
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2014
- Vidita Dixit
  AIR 8, CSE 2014
- Nishu Kumar
  AIR 16, CSE 2014
- Arthi Murali
  AIR 28, CSE 2014
- Arvind Choudhary
  AIR 1, CSE 2014

2015
- Anjali Joshi
  AIR 1, CSE 2015
- Sudarshan
  AIR 2, CSE 2015
- Bhoomika
  AIR 10, CSE 2015
- Nishtha
  AIR 30, CSE 2015

2016
- Ravi
  AIR 1, CSE 2016
- Sneha
  AIR 2, CSE 2016
- Nidhi
  AIR 9, CSE 2016
- Jyothsna
  AIR 10, CSE 2016

2017
- Bhumi
  AIR 1, CSE 2017
- Vinita
  AIR 3, CSE 2017
- Pragya
  AIR 4, CSE 2017
- Ketki
  AIR 6, CSE 2017

2018
- Nivedita
  AIR 1, CSE 2018
- Lavanya
  AIR 2, CSE 2018
- Pooja
  AIR 3, CSE 2018
- Smita
  AIR 4, CSE 2018
- Anjali
  AIR 5, CSE 2018

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