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1. NMC Act is not a matter of choice, but an imperative in the national interest

Introduction:
- The National Medical Commission (NMC) Act, 2019 enacted by Parliament is a landmark act.
- The act has generated a lot of debate and strong reactions—both for and against it.
- Medical interventions and health technology are in a phase of rapid metamorphosis globally.
- The benefits of rapid scientific developments, technological advancements, and improved and targeted interventions in the health sector have changed the lives of millions.
- The simultaneous improvement in education, income, and other social determinants has also contributed to this phenomenal rise in life expectancy.
- Life expectancy in India improved from below 50 years in the 1950s to 76 years in the recent years (World Bank 2019).
- Medical education needs in the 21st century are vastly different from those in the previous century.
- In this article, the relevance, provisions and the implications of this act for the future of medical education and health practice in the country are examined.

Accessing Medical Education:
- Equity in accessing medical education is of vital importance. While public institutions substantially subsidise medical education, the NMC will determine fees for a percentage of the seats in private medical colleges and deemed universities.
- This move will broaden the opportunity for students from all sections of the society to undertake medical education.
- This democratisation of medical education is important since it is growing more expensive with every passing year. The rising fees, expensive books and equipment become a barrier for several deserving students.
- Social responsibility and empathy for fellow humans are vital traits for any doctor. The presence (or absence) of a paying capacity should not be a determinant for enrolling in an educational programme.
- The NMC’s authority to determine a percentage of fees in private medical colleges and deemed universities can open doors for those who want to pursue a career in medicine, but do not have the financial means to do so.
NMC bill have to provide the statutory force to the reforms:
- As per the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), this is an inclusive step with wide ramifications.
- The provision of this clause and the percentage can be tweaked in the future to adjust with evolving needs and social realities of the country in the coming decades.
- There is no question of NMC bill making medical education a preserve of the rich.
- On the contrary, it is common knowledge that before the reforms of NEET and common counselling were introduced by our government, rich students who could afford to pay huge and unrecorded capitation fees were able to secure admission to private medical colleges.
- Our reforms have eliminated the role of black money in medical education and the NMC bill will provide statutory force to the reforms which have been carried out.

Reforming Medical Education:
- Continued engagement and reforms, possibly at varying levels of intensity, might be necessary to align all the councils that are charged with managing the education and practice of different medical professions.
- The emphasis on limited licence to practise at the mid-level as community health provider has been extensively debated.
- The interpretation is that this move is not intended to create “medical doctors” through crosspathy, but help support the creation of 1,50,000 mid-level providers within the next few years to provide comprehensive primary and preventive care at Health and Wellness Centres.
- Mid-level community health providers are expected to be the human resource thrust that will help supplement the health system in delivering quality care, particularly to rural populations.
- A limited and successful experience of the states of Chhattisgarh and Assam demonstrate such cadres’ positive impact on primary healthcare indicators.
- Currently, we do not have an allied health professional’s council (AHPC) in the country.

Need to address the overall shortfall in the number of medical doctors:
- The thrust on medical education is an essential part of the act. But, other pieces are also necessary to complete the picture.
- The availability of adequately trained medical professionals can provide quality care in a dignified manner and in sync with the national health goals.
- The undergraduate medical education board and the postgraduate medical education board will have to take cognisance of the overall shortfall in the number of medical doctors, particularly post-graduates across the country.
- Their shortfall, particularly at the district and the sub-district levels will need remedial action.
- Active planning for addressing the human resources needs of the future will have to be carried out.
- The reactive approach has to be gradually replaced by a proactive approach to plug gaps in numbers and their availability and distribution.

India’s progress towards Development Goals:
- The ideas of equity and strengthening of the primary healthcare through mid-level community health providers are also important in the context of India’s progression towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Good health is interconnected with development (WHO 2019a). The achievement of the third SDG in India will need well-functioning health systems that work towards assuring universal health coverage.
- In this context, the NMC Act is consciously contributing to medical education to channelize the supply-side to meet the future requirements.
The governance reforms at the heart of the act can also be interpreted to be supportive of the country’s intentions in achieving the SDGs.

Conclusion:
❖ The future of medical education and practice rests within the frameworks of the NMC Act.
❖ The commission will have to broaden the horizon, engage in proactive dialogue with all stakeholders and take decisions with agility.
❖ The act has been written in the right spirit, addressing the concerns of the present while preparing for the future.
❖ Appropriate structures specified by the act will have to interpret the act, implement its provisions, and monitor the impacts.
❖ The aspirations of an emergent India introduce an urgency to manage medical systems optimally.
❖ Medical education has to keep pace with these rapid developments. The NMC Act is not a matter of choice, but an imperative in the national interest.

2. Making the private sector care for public health

Context: Present healthcare system:
❖ As India enters the second week of a national lockdown imposed in response to COVID-19, it is still unclear how well prepared the healthcare system is in dealing with the pandemic. Given the resource constraints of both the Central and State governments, it is clear that government hospitals alone will not be able to manage the fallout. Moreover, even within the government system, tertiary care and public health are the weakest links.

Necessity: Universal Health Services free of charge:
❖ At present, the government has put a cap on the cost at Rs.4,500 per test, which is a burden for even a middle-class patient. The poor will clearly have no access to this and the government itself does not have adequate facilities to meet the increasing demand. It is here that the government needs to ensure that there is no cost to the patient.
❖ The governments at the Centre and in States have to take responsibility for providing universal health services free of charge and accessible to all. This will require governments to not just expand the capacity within the public sector, but also to tap into the available capacity in the private sector. Faced with a serious health emergency, the silence of the government on the expected role of the private sector is intriguing.

Recommendation by National Health Authority:
1. The National Health Authority has recommended that the testing and treatment of COVID-19 be included in the PM-Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) but this proposal is still awaiting clearance.
2. The governance of the health service system is clearly fragmented and has created anxiety among the public.
3. There is lack of a visible central command, which should be created under the supervision of the Union Health Minister, aided by a team of experts.
4. They should be tasked to make policies as and when required and communicate them to State governments, taking into account an evolving situation.
5. There have been some tentative measures taken by States to allow individuals seeking testing for COVID-19 to access private laboratories at subsidised rates.
6. At this point, and certainly before the lockdown is lifted, it is absolutely essential that adequate testing and quarantine facilities are created.

Comprehensive National Policy to ensure that Private Healthcare Capacity:
1. A preparedness plan has to address all levels of care in terms of infrastructure, equipment, testing facilities and human resources in both the public and private sectors.
2. However, so far, the Central and State governments have given little indication of bringing an increase in public expenditure on health.
3. So, an already overburdened public health system will be unable to meet the increase in moderate and severe cases of COVID-19 that would require hospitalisation.
4. While some individual private sector companies have come forward with offers of creating capacity and making it available to COVID-19 patients, there is a need for a comprehensive national policy to ensure that private healthcare capacity is made available to the public.
5. Some States like Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh have already roped in the private sector to provide free treatment.

NITI Aayog’s ‘Model Concession Agreement for Setting Up Medical Colleges Under the Public Private Partnership’ guideline document: To address shortage of qualified doctors and bridge gap in medical education, the NITI Aayog has come out with the public-private partnership model to link new or existing private medical colleges with functional district hospital to augment medical seats.

Example: Private corporate sector hospitals under public control : The Spanish parallel
1. Consider the experience in Spain. The Spanish government issued an order bringing hospitals in the large private corporate sector under public control for a limited period.
2. This tough decision was taken with the understanding that existing public healthcare facilities would not be able to cope with the sudden, if short-term, rise in COVID-19 cases.
3. In Britain, given the rise in the number of COVID-19 cases, the health workforce in the National Health Service has been under a lot of pressure.
4. British trade unions have demanded that the government make the 8,000 beds in 570 private hospitals in the country available.
5. They have argued that while beds in private hospitals are lying empty, there is severe shortage of beds in the public hospitals.
6. The unions have also been critical of the U.K. government decision to rent these beds at an exorbitant cost to the exchequer.

Can the Spanish practise is necessary for India?
• The government may argue that treatment for COVID-19 has been included under Ayushman Bharat, and this will take care of the poor.
• But, what about the large, differentiated middle class, many of whom are employees in the services sector?
• They do not have secure employment, nor do they have insurance cover. Crisis situations help reveal deeper realities to societies.

Road Ahead:
• The Central government has already taken over some private hotels to accommodate persons quarantined for COVID-19. One way of expanding such facilities would be for the government to ‘take over’ private corporate laboratories and hospitals for a limited period.
• A graduated approach to this is possible by asking tertiary private hospitals to create ICU facilities and isolation wards to care for the moderate and severe cases under the supervision of the government.
• The political directive for such a move needs to come from the Central government while ensuring that the Ministry of Health provides standard treatment protocols for health personnel.

Conclusion:
• In India, private corporate hospitals have, in the past, received government subsidies in various forms and it is now time to seek repayment from them.
• They are also well poised to provide specialised care and have the expertise and infrastructure to do so.
• Universal public healthcare is essential not only to curb outbreaks, but also to ensure crisis preparedness and the realisation of the promise of right to health.

3. Helping Hand for the Stranded migrant workers

Context:
• The Centre asked state governments to arrange food and shelter for migrant workers who are facing difficulties due to the 21-day lockdown announced to check the spread of coronavirus.
• Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs said students, who are in hostels, should continue to stay there for their own safety.
• Centre asked the state governments to arrange food and shelter for the migrant workers. Governments are sensitising everyone that wherever they are, they should remain there. Students should continue to remain in hostels.
• The idea that we’re fighting just one virus, and all will be fine once we’re on top of it – is dangerous. Sure, we need to fight COVID-19 desperately – this could be the worst pandemic ever since 1918 and the misnamed ‘Spanish Flu.’

Irreversible systemic shock: COVID-19 pandemic:
• In a world where disruptions had become the new normal, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an irreversible systemic shock, creating new geo-political fault-lines and opportunities.
• There are no winners in tragedies but stories of survival, hope and empathy that are retold and remembered in the aftermath.
• Even as we struggle to fortify responses to the unprecedented crises that the COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed globally, attempts are being made to reframe and deflect attention as to the causes and effects of this global pandemic.

Here’s the tragedy:
1. India lost between 16-21 million lives to that between 1918-21. In fact, the 1921 Census remains the only one ever to record a net reduction in the rural population.
2. We have the largest population that is least equipped to cope with a crisis like COVID-19.
3. There will be COVIDS by other names in coming years. Since the late ’90s we have seen SARS and MERS (both also from coronaviruses) and other global-spread diseases.
4. In India in 1994, we had the plague in Surat. All signals of what was to come, of the kind of world we’d built and entered.
5. With the mid-1990s came the globalisation of communicable diseases. But instead of building universal health systems to meet this deadly challenge, many nations further privatised their health sectors.
6. In India, it was always private dominance. We have one of the lowest health expenditures – barely 1.2 per cent (as share of GDP) – in the world.
7. From the 1990s, the public health system, never terribly strong, was further weakened by deliberate policy-driven measures.
8. The present government is inviting private management takeover of even district-level hospitals.
9. Health expenditures across India today are possibly the fastest growing component of rural family debt.
10. In June 2018, the Public Health Foundation of India, analysing diverse data sets on health, concluded that 55 million people had been pushed into poverty in the single year of 2011-12, because of having to fund their own health issues – it also said 38 million of these had fallen below the poverty line due to spending on medicines alone.

Accepting as inspirational, some of the measures announced by the Kerala government:
1. The very first thing that needs doing: preparing for emergency distribution of our close to 60 million tons of ‘surplus’ food grain stocks.
2. And reaching out at once to the millions of migrant workers and other poor devastated by this crisis.
3. Declare all presently shut community spaces (schools, colleges, community halls and buildings) to be shelters for stranded migrants and the homeless.
4. The second – equally important – is to get all farmers to grow food crops in the kharif season.
5. If the present trend persists, a terrible food situation looms. They will not be able to sell cash crops they harvest this season. Going in for more cash crops could prove fatal.
6. A vaccine/cure for the coronavirus seems many months away. **Meanwhile food stocks will dwindle.**

7. Governments must **help, pick up and buy big time**, the produce of farmers. Many have been unable to complete the rabi harvest – social distancing and lockdowns being in force. Those who have, can’t transport or sell it anywhere.

8. Even for food crop production in the kharif, farmers will **need an ecosystem of inputs, support services and marketing assistance.**

9. The government must be **prepared to nationalise private medical facilities** across the country.

10. Advising hospitals to have a ‘**corona corner**’, so to speak within themselves, simply won’t cut it.

   - Spain last week **nationalised all its hospitals and healthcare providers** recognising that a **profit-driven system** can’t meet this crisis.

11. **Sanitation workers** – **safai karamcharis** – must be **immediately regularised** as fulltime employees of the governments / municipalities employing them, with Rs. 5,000 a month added to their existing salaries, and with full medical benefits they have always been denied.

12. And **supplied protective gear** that they’ve never been given. We spent three decades further devastating millions of already vulnerable sanitation workers, shutting them out of public service, outsourcing their jobs to private entities – who then re-employed the same workers on contract, at lower wages and with no benefits.

13. Declare and rush free rations for three months to the poor.

14. Immediately regularise ASHA, anganwadi and mid-day meal workers – already on the frontlines of the battle – as government employees. The health and lives of India’s children are in their hands.

15. They too must be made full employees, provided proper wages, given protective gear.

16. Give MGNREGA wages daily to farmers and labourers till the crisis tides over. Urban daily wagers to get Rs. 6,000 a month in the same period.

✓ We need to get down to these measures right now. The government’s ‘package’ is a curious blend of callousness and cluelessness.

✓ It’s not just one virus we’re fighting – pandemics are also a ‘**package.**’ Of which **economic distress** can be a self-inflicted or self-aggravated part – driving us from calamity to catastrophe.

✓ If the virus trend persists for the next two weeks, **urging farmers to grow food crops for the kharif season** becomes the single most important thing to do.

✓ A junction from where we decide which way to go. A moment to renew and pursue debates on Inequality and Health Justice.

**Conclusion:**

- The world is facing this crisis and it is our duty, to contribute in whatever ways possible.
- Currently, we are facing a situation in our city, where thousands are rendered homeless with no access to basic necessities.
- It is our **social responsibility and moral duty** to provide a helping hand. We have provided our halls as temporary shelter and basic requirements while we battle COVID-19. State and District governments have to be **coordinated with the local authorities** to use our halls for this purpose.

**4. The criticality of community engagement**

**Context: Ground reality**

- The **recent attack on an ASHA worker conducting a COVID-19 survey**, due to an alleged suspicion that she was a government National Register of Citizens agent betrays the faltering of our community health worker programmes in a way.
Over time, they have become de-facto public health employees rather than being community representatives enjoying the unswerving confidence of people as originally envisaged.

Background:
- A highly significant observation arising out of a pioneering health-care initiative led by a doctor couple in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra in the 1970s greatly inspired primary health-care delivery, both within and outside the country.
- This observation was that a significant cultural gap existed between health-care personnel such as auxiliary nurse midwives and rural and tribal beneficiaries, significantly impeding delivery of preventive and promotive health care.

How community health worker schemes begin to play an important role:
- It was realised that a cadre of health workers recruited by and from within the community, and also accountable to the community, would have greater affinity with people, thus ensuring greater community participation in care delivery.
- Soon, a series of community health worker schemes followed, the latest being the accredited social health activist (ASHA) programme.

Sporadic incidents of Non-cooperation:
- Two things remain common to the sporadic incidents of non-cooperation with our anti-coronavirus campaign, from the Tablighi Jamaat fiasco to migrants escaping quarantine and allegedly unleashing violence against the police.
First, that a strong felt need for coronavirus control remains absent due to deficient threat perception.
Second, that deficient threat perception has resulted in strict control measures such as quarantine to be perceived as high-handed government instruments.

Key strategy is Community Engagement to the lower levels of De-centralisation:
1. **Community engagement is a pre-requisite for risk communication**, which entails effectively communicating the threat due to the virus, instilling the right practices and etiquette, and combating rumours and stigma.
2. Till date, the government’s machinery to communicate risk has served a thin upper- and middle-class segment quite well.
3. However, with COVID-19 moving briskly towards slums and rural hinterlands, one should not be surprised if such incidents of non-cooperation start surfacing at a brisk pace too.
4. **Rural awareness generation and community engagement** has unto now comprised mainly of engaging with local panchayats, disseminating publicity material in local vernacular, and calling on the participation of civil society organisations.
5. For our anti-coronavirus campaign to be a success, community engagement has to **ensue on a war-footing**, much akin to the production of ventilators and masks.
6. Like the Antyodaya approach, it has to **embrace the remotest community stalwart** who enjoys the community’s confidence and is perceived as an impartial non-state agent.
7. One may say that we are too far into the pandemic to focus on risk communication.
8. But community engagement is more than just risk communication. It is the **bedrock of community participation**, the need for which will only be felt even more acutely as the epidemic worsens.
9. Contact tracing activities will have to pick up as COVID-19 increasingly percolates to rural areas.
10. **Enhancing testing for SARS-CoV-2** and concomitant expansion of quarantine, isolation, and treatment activities along vast expanses will tremendously strain our thin public health machinery. This will not be possible without community participation at every step.

**Crucial factors of Community Engagement:**
The criticality of community engagement on a war-footing is underscored by a set of factors.
1. First, a **concoction of local culture, values and beliefs** can lead to blithe disregard of the coronavirus threat and gravely endanger containment and mitigation efforts.
2. Second, **threatened livelihoods** due to lockdowns and a resultant downplaying of the coronavirus risk can instil indignation and non-cooperation, as witnessed in the case of many migrants.
3. With our weak social support system, we cannot afford quarantine allowances like in Sweden and Singapore; even the entitled modest relief could get delayed.
4. Third, there is increased likelihood of repeat lockdowns due to the virus likely to bounce back, which will greatly test public patience and co-operation.
5. Lastly, we also need to remember the trust deficit between health workers and the public that has lingered on since decades, given our unsatisfactory public and profiteering private health care.

- Further, mitigation activities in case of considerable rural penetration of COVID-19 will require efforts of dreadful, phenomenal proportions.
- Imagine a primary health centre equipped with one doctor and a nurse catering to 20-odd villages spread across miles of difficult terrain.
- Even attending to the mildest cases and referring severe ones will not just be infeasible but highly risk-laden too.
Way Ahead:

- Strongly involving the nearly 2.5 million informal health-care providers would become crucial for a range of activities.
- Makeshift arrangements for transportation and care, such as motorcycle ambulances and mobile medical units, will need to be made.
- Further, initiatives such as community kitchens of Kerala will assume tremendous importance in cases of a stringent and prolonged lockdown.
- These, along with simply a strict adherence to social distancing throughout the pandemic, cannot be conceived without full community participation.

Conclusion:

❖ One may say that these challenges are not completely mitigable through community engagement, but that is undoubtedly the best shot we have.
❖ What this signifies is that government messaging of the coronavirus threat will alone not suffice, and that a willingness to cooperate can only be engendered from deep within the community.
❖ Urgent reinforcing and galvanising of community engagement activities will largely decide the trajectory COVID-19 undertakes in India.
❖ Recruiting a medical workforce, augmenting infrastructure, and manufacturing personal protective equipment on a war footing unless these go hand-in-hand with the former, will result in undermining of both.

5. Lift the lockdown only with a sound strategy

India’s lockdown:

- It is good to see India taking early action, even though there is no denying that we should have anticipated the hardship caused to poor workers and migrant labour, and taken preventive steps.
- But these early actions have to be carefully managed if we do not want the virus to be dwarfed by an economic collapse.
- We have to take lessons from countries that have managed to control the epidemic with nuanced action. Once the three weeks are over, it is important to take steps to unwind the all-India lockdown in a measured way and have more targeted lockdowns.

With only a week to go for the 21-day curfew to end:

1. Like other countries battling the scourge of covid-19, India faces the daunting question of when and how the current lockdown is best lifted.
2. Neither can the pathogen be given a free run, nor can the economy be kept closed beyond a point.
3. The spread of covid-19 has resulted in countries deciding to announce “lockdowns” to stop or at least slow the mass spread of the disease. The precise nature of the shutdown is not identical in every country, though.
4. India has announced a temporary countrywide lockdown, with only “essential commodities/services” and their supply chains exempt.
5. This is based on the advice of the medical establishment, which is reported to believe that this it is the best or only way to “flatten the curve” of transmission, given that we are a relatively poor country with limited health infrastructure compared to rich countries.
6. Plans seem afoot to shift from an all-India closure to a strategy of “aggressive containment” of infections within clusters marked out on the country’s map, with people only in these kept under strict isolation (and buffer zones around them).
7. Just 64 districts are reported to account for over four-fifths of officially recorded cases, and so such an idea seems to make sense.
8. Yet, any hasty action or planning failure could undo past measures and expose us to worse. Caution should guide any relaxation of restrictions.

After 21-day Lockdown:
Phased Lockdown Exit:
- A senior government official stated that the idea is to slow down the opening. The plan could involve opening some areas and operating the hotspot areas under some restrictions. Also, since the senior citizens are more vulnerable, they may have to stay put until further notice.

Identify the Hotspot and Minimize the Spread: PM Modi expressed his gratitude to the state governments for supporting the lockdown and limiting the spread.
- However, the situation is still worrisome and hence the entire nation needs to work together on this. The states asked the PM for financial assistance and provide testing kits.
- Also, Modi stated that the states must work on a war footing and ensure minimum loss of life by identifying the hotspots and containing the spread.

Separate Hospitals for COVID-19: Further, the PM Modi highlighted the need for dedicating separate hospitals for COVID-19.
- Also, centre mentioned the importance of the availability of medical products, inputs for the manufacture of medicines and medical equipment in the states.
- Besides, advised the states to come up with alternatives for APMC for procuring grains and suggested creating pooling platforms for rural areas for the same.
- PM Modi asked the states to contact social welfare organizations to battle against the pandemic. In all, he focused on gradually ending the lockdown.

Moving from Social to Selective Isolation:
1. A selective isolation strategy thus proposed would only be effective if it is accompanied by supportive measures for the young.
2. These include tracking through smartphone apps and compensating employees for the risk undertaken by offering wage support.
3. Once a minimum set of employees return to work and firms resume operations, older employees can resume work from their homes.
4. As more countries pick up this strategy globally, with the help of task forces facilitating it domestically, health and economic damage would be minimised.
5. Rapid-spread localities may need speedy tests, while buffer zones could have a few swabs taken of local residents picked randomly, just to see if a hotspot has expanded.

6. Supreme levels of hygiene would need to be maintained for all such exercises. For this, India must assure an adequate supply of masks and other personal protection gear to all risky areas.

7. Orders have reportedly been placed and shipments are on their way. So also, for ventilators, needed to help the severely ill breathe.

8. Reassuring as this is, sufficient equipment needs to reach the frontlines before the country switches tack in its fight against covid-19.

An alternative safety regime for India after we lift the lockdown:

- The security measures instituted in India are meant to protect us against a viral threat.
- This threat is compounded by irresponsible foreign tourists and citizens who refuse to take the risk of person-to-person transmission seriously enough, and do not take precautionary measures such as home quarantining themselves.
- A lockdown also has social costs which have not been accounted for at all here.
- Therefore, we must take stringent measures and all of us must practise socio-spatial distancing to ensure that the curve is indeed flattened convincingly enough for all restrictions to finally be removed.

Steps need to take in coming days:

- Random sample checks need to be done widely across India so that we are not in for shock eruptions later.
- Should the overall picture grant India the confidence to lift the nationwide lockdown, what happens next would depend on how well the new strategy works. Strict safety norms would still need to be observed by all in any case.
- As for the hotspots kept locked down, not only must they be identified accurately, the tracking and treatment of patients within these would have to be combined with a well-optimized use of test kits.
- An early announcement to shift to the alternative we propose could help ensure the adequate production and distribution of masks, thermal scanners, test kits, ventilators and protective gear for health workers.
- Following South Korea, we need to locate regions and pockets which have to be kept under close watch and locked down, with others being opened up with rules of behaviour in place—masks, social distancing, quarantining those unwell—so that the rest of India can get back to producing goods and services, and help the locked-down areas.

Conclusion:

- The Centre has complex operations to plan and coordinate. Its need to work with various states adds to the task’s complexity. But we must leave no scope whatsoever for mishaps.
- Nor for an overzealous use of strictures and surveillance, both of which need to have their expiry dates defined by some public criterion.
- People who must endure containment need special care not, say, the scare of police drones summoning batons. Hotspots must not begin to feel like open-air prisons.
- India has done well so far in its fight against covid-19. However, as Prime Minister said, it will indeed be a long fight.

Context:
- Indians live on the principles of equality, democracy, liberty, fraternity and socialism, taught to us by our Indian Constitution. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s lockdown extension announcement coincided with Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar’s 129th birth anniversary.
- Dr Ambedkar is rightly recognised as the modern Buddha of his age. This title was given to him by Mahant Veer Chandramani, the great Buddhist monk who initiated Babasaheb to Buddhism. PM Modi invoked the dreams and legacy of the “architect of the Indian constitution”, saying, “I am well aware of the problems you have faced – some for food, some for movement from place to place, and others for staying away from homes and families.
- However, for the sake of your country, you are fulfilling your duties like a disciplined soldier. This is the power of ‘We, the People of India’ that our Constitution talks about.”

The Poona Pact and a coercive fast by Mahatma Gandhi:
1. Three Roundtable Conferences were held between 1930 and 1932 by the British Government to discuss constitutional reforms in India, with the ever-growing demands of self-rule.
2. Dr Ambedkar had proposed the idea for a separate electorate for Dalits and untouchables in the first conference, which the Congress boycotted. After the Gandhi-Irwin pact, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was appointed the only representative of the Congress at the second conference. He vehemently opposed the idea of a separate electorate.
3. It is important at this point to make the distinction between separate electorate and reserved constituency clear.
4. The Award of 1932 was built on the notion of separate electorates that the British government had already put in place through the Morley-Minto Reforms (1909) and the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (1919).
5. Separate Electorate: The community to which the electorate belongs would choose their own leaders via an election in which the candidates of only their community would be allowed to contest and only their community members would vote.
6. This would mean that the elections for choosing the leaders of that particular community would be held separately and would not come under general elections.
7. In 1932, the British announced the **formation of separate electorates for the ‘Depressed Classes’ in the Communal Award**. Gandhi was in for a toss. He decided to fast unto death to overturn the decision.

**How Poona Pact helped to conjure the Constitution:**

- In late September 1932, B.R. Ambedkar negotiated the **Poona Pact with Mahatma Gandhi**. The background to the Poona Pact was the **Communal Award of August 1932**, which, among other things, reserved 71 seats in the central legislature for the depressed classes. Gandhi, who was opposed to the Communal Award, saw it as a British attempt to split Hindus, and began a fast unto death to have it repealed.

**Fair representation in the form of a Joint Electorate:**

1. According to **Ambedkar**, the caste question is a **political issue** and wanted a political solution for upliftment of depressed classes.
2. Ambedkar insisted that a **political democracy** was meaningless if the so-called depressed classes were not equal participants in it.
3. According to Gandhi caste issue is a social one. He wanted to reform it by changing the hearts and minds of people.
4. Ambedkar was in favour of **annihilation of the caste system** as it was beyond reforms.
5. Gandhi did not support the abolition of the caste system or Varnashrama order. He was in favour of **bringing behavioural change in the society** regarding the ills of the caste system.
6. In a settlement negotiated with Gandhi, Ambedkar agreed for depressed class candidates to be **elected by a joint electorate**.
7. However, on his insistence, slightly over twice as many seats (147) were reserved for the depressed classes in the legislature than what had been allotted under the Communal Award.
8. In addition, the Poona Pact assured a fair **representation of the depressed classes in the public services** while earmarking a portion of the educational grant for their uplift.

**Positive outcomes of the Poona Pact:**

- The Poona Pact was an **emphatic acceptance** by upper-class Hindus that the depressed classes constituted the **most discriminated sections of Hindu society**.
- It was also conceded that something concrete had to be done to give them a **political voice** as well as a leg-up to lift them from a backwardness they could not otherwise overcome. The concessions agreed to in the Poona Pact were precursors to the **world’s largest affirmative programme** launched much later in independent India.
- A slew of measures were initiated later to uplift Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Despite what Ambedkar had achieved for the depressed classes through the Poona Pact, there were carpers. The Poona Pact had several positive outcomes for Ambedkar. It emphatically sealed his leadership of the depressed classes across India. He made the entire country, **morally responsible** for the uplift of the depressed classes. Most of all he succeeded in making the depressed classes a formidable political force for the first time in history.
- In the Draft Constitution Dr. Ambedkar prescribed **single citizenship, a single judiciary and uniformity in fundamental Laws** to integrate Indian society which was not only divided into caste and class, but also into regions, religions, languages, traditions and cultures. Therefore, a **strong Centre was indispensable to maintain territorial integrity and administrative discipline**.

**Conclusion:**

❖ The Poona Pact has changed the **Indian Political history** and the **destiny of millions of Dalits** across the country. On the 129th year of his birth on April 14 this year, we would do well
to remember Ambedkar as much for the Poona Pact as we do for the Constitution he helped conjure. Without the former, the latter would never have been.

❖ However, social stigma attached to the caste system still remains in the Indian society. Therefore, in order to establish an egalitarian society in true sense, Gandhian Philosophy and Ambedkar’s notion of Social Democracy is much more relevant than ever before.

❖ One hopes that those in power, those who embody the nation state, stop providing lip service to this dalit intellectual by trying to co-opt him in status quoist narratives. And yes, he is not just the “Architect of the Indian constitution”.

7. Enabling local government systems to combat COVID-19 in India

Context:
- The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is not the first pandemic faced by the world.
- The earliest recorded one was Athen’s Plague in 430 BC and the deadliest one that came just before COVID-19 was the H1N1 virus (Swine Flu) in 2009-10, that killed more than 500,000 people worldwide.

Crisis at times make some things as pre-requisite:
- A few things common to all pandemics are poor healthcare facilities, lack of awareness and dearth of basic necessities and public services to marginal societies.
- The Millennium Development Goals launched in 2000, in fact, primarily focused on these three pillars through its first six goals.

In past, Indian Government measures to achieve Millennium Development Goals:
- Governments in India play an important role in bridging the access gap that save millions at the bottom of the pyramids.
- This is done through the public distribution system (PDS) which takes care of food security, the National Health Mission and the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare that provide for village-level healthcare facilities.
- The Ministry of Human Resource Development that looks after inclusive development through education from elementary level to higher education and skills development.
- In addition to doctors and local authorities, front line workers (FLWs) from all the departments play an integral role in containing the pandemic.
- To build a comprehensive resilience of these pillars, FLWs become the first line of defence for the nation under any crisis.
At the Local level: Strengthening PDS: Distribution of ration:

- State and district authorities **struggle to feed** the **poorest sections** and while there are civil society organisations (CSOs) that help, unorganised arrangements led to more burden than solving the problem.
- Some volunteers working to deliver food were themselves found infected and had become carriers. Surat and Delhi have experienced this very phenomenon.
- One example here although not perfect is the ‘Amma Canteen’, run by the state government of Tamil Nadu.
- It shows how **integrating the distribution of ration can be altered to deliver a daily cooked meal for people** who cannot afford meals by themselves.
- Many other state governments are initiating community kitchens for the poor, but proper monitoring of hygiene and physical distancing is essential in providing such a facility, as the kitchen itself can become a hotspot.

Immediate step to be Empowering Front Line Workers (FLWs):

- India’s last-mile healthcare delivery mechanism is carried out by the auxiliary nurse midwife, **accredited social health activist**, anganwadi workers, and CRPs.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) is extensively focussing on raising awareness on COVID-19, demystifying myths and stigma in maintaining safety standards.

It is essential that a clear distinction is provided in each of these roles while **constantly supporting each other**, for this purpose.

1. First, **extensive awareness has to be created** for hand washing, maintaining physical distancing, behavioural practices for coughing or sneezing in elbows or handkerchiefs and safe disposal of used tissues or masks.
2. Governments and the WHO have released **several dos and don’ts** as well as other information material to be **followed by FLWs** while interacting with communities that ensure **standard information** is being disseminated and well understood among the public.
3. Second, there is a **need to identify high risk groups** and carry on healthcare delivery accordingly.
4. Older individuals across the globe are more prone to the disease. In India, however, people aged between 40-60 are at high risk of infection.
5. India already has a severe burden of **hypertensive and diabetic populations** in this age group.
6. Third, there should be **focus on pregnant and lactating women**. While there is no evidence that pregnant women are at high risk from COVID-19, complications during pregnancy can make them more susceptible.
7. India has a higher number of **hypertensive pregnancies** and it is important that pregnant / lactating women and children are **closely monitored for nutrition needs in rural areas**.
8. Finally, a **strict administration of health and hygiene** should be conducted for FLWs themselves.

Leveraging Educational Forces: As a tool to create Awareness:

- Educational institutes are temporarily closed. Also, given the lack of access to internet and cellular networks, online classes are not viable for children from marginalised communities at large.
- The expertise of teachers, facilitators and educational networks, however, can be leveraged for **spreading impactful awareness**, assess on-ground grievances and ensure education in whatever form possible.
- **Education facilitators are better trained** to know how some information can be reached out to certain sections of the society and how to trigger their emotion that will ensure proper compliance to hygiene and social distancing practices.
• For areas that have internet accessibility, innovative and engaging learning videos or simple quizzes can be designed that can be viewed and completed through phones, using either internet or SMS.
• This will eliminate the need for children to own laptops and would ensure continuity in learning.

Solutions that can give best yields:
1. **Community resource persons (CRPs)** are appointed by the authorities to monitor overall development work and assist in proper implementation of policies. They can also be assigned to ensure physical distancing among beneficiaries.
2. Symptomatic people can be **immediately taken to healthcare facilities** and isolated from crowd and hygiene and precautions are met in the kitchen and for the staff.
3. Another short-term solution is to make the **district administration a regulator of CSOs** and allocate areas and activities to different organisations willing to donate. This solution is already working in several cities, bridging the demand-supply gap.
4. In addition to ration, the public also needs other necessities such as spices, vegetables, basic hygiene and health material.
5. The lockdown will not be effective if marginalised communities are not provided with essential goods and have to step out to fetch them.
6. This challenge can be solved to an extent if civic bodies can provide these necessities in a **centralised way by limited and monitored supply channels**.
7. In many cities, municipal councils have taken an initiative to sell ‘vegetables on wheels’ to its citizens, so that they do not have to step out of the house to procure them, limiting their contact as far as possible.
8. **PDS channels and information can be leveraged** in estimating the number of households in the remotest areas and provide them with the basic vegetables along with staple grains.
9. Piloting this scheme will also give an insight if the country can include vegetables and fruits in the scope of the PDS.

Conclusion:
• The challenges posed by COVID-19 are not limited to the spread of the infection. The solutions, therefore, **shouldn’t be limited to treatment for the disease either**.
• **Food security, health and education for all** are some services that cannot be halted even during a pandemic.
• It is, thus, essential that these three pillars are strengthened through **right innovations**, rethinking systems and encouraging collaborations.

ECONOMY

1. Farmers may not be infected but are certainly affected

Introduction:
• The agriculture labour market has already been massively impacted. Not allowed to work in groups, **30 million agricultural labourers, who survive on their daily income, are without work**.
• The situation has been aggravated in many parts of the country where there are specialized farm practices which are usually done by the manual labourers, who are migrant workers.
• The lockdown and the resultant return of these migrant labourers to their native villages are certainly going to affect agriculture adversely in the coming months. **India lacks farm mechanization and about 60% of farm activities are still manually executed.**
Covid-19: Agriculture sector:

- The Covid-19 pandemic is probably the biggest threat to health that people across the globe are facing. More than the threat to health is the challenge it poses to the global economy.
- The chief of International Monetary Fund said, “The global economy has now entered a recession that could be as bad or worse than the 2009 downturn”.
- Several countries are working tirelessly to save their citizens through announcing the economic packages to keep their economies afloat.
- The panic from the outbreak is so intense that the supply chains of even the agriculture sector that provides food— the most fundamental need of every human being have been curbed.
- The lockdown imposed in several countries is essential to maintain social distancing and help flatten the curve. While imposing these policies, overlooking the agriculture sector could turn out to be the biggest blunder.

The Impact of Coronavirus on Agriculture: In India mainly Wheat and Maize:

1. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) food price index, which records monthly changes in the international prices of commonly-traded food commodities, averaged 180.5 points in February, 1% lower than in January.
2. It is worth noting that the fall in food prices in February is the first recorded incidence in the last four months.
3. The outbreak is likely to lead to worse news in the coming months for India’s major staple crop wheat.
4. According to FAO, wheat prices were already fetching lower prices, partly due to the continued well-supplied markets.
5. However, the negative impact on demand resulting from the spread of the coronavirus (which causes the Covid-19 disease) has further contributed to the decline in prices.
6. This is bad news for the Indian farmers when wheat production in the country this year is likely to have gone up to a record 106.21 million tonnes.
7. The report suggests that the price of maize has also slumped primarily because of expectations of less demand from the feed sector.
8. The prices in the Indian maize market are likely to further plummet.
9. Reports of Bird Flu in some locations and the wrongly-held belief that eating non-vegetarian food can cause coronavirus further reduced the demand for maize for feed.

Lockdown of Mandis: Post-harvest losses increase:

1. Historically, in times of crisis, the agriculture market becomes particularly volatile and a site of public protest and anger.
2. Although the retail prices of perishable vegetables have gone up, the wholesale prices have fallen by 15-20% because of reduction in demand.
3. The panic-buying and hoarding which resulted from the announcement of lockdown have pushed the prices of vegetables up by 20-30%. This increase in price is attributed to logistics management.
4. Price rise is not immediately alarming but the prices of perishable agri-products can increase after a fortnight or a month due to limited availability.
5. **Transactions at large mandis** have been severely impacted due to the lockdown. The products are no longer being unloaded and redistributed to various places with the usual speed which is normally required to reach the vendors.

6. For example, Azadpur Mandi in New Delhi, Asia’s largest mandi for fruit and vegetables, which receives 5,000-8,000 trucks daily and does about 23,000 transactions per day, is not able to execute even 25% of its capacity.

7. On the one hand, this creates a scarcity of fruit and vegetables in cities that depend on mandis for their supplies.

8. On the other hand, the post-harvest losses increase significantly because of delayed handling and transaction.

9. One can imagine the extent of loss now, when one knows that the total post-harvest loss in normal circumstances in India for fruits and vegetable is to the tune of 30%.

10. Unfortunately, farmers, hundreds of kilometres away from the mandis, are unaware of what is going on in the mandis and they are bearing the brunt of the coronavirus outbreak.

**Agriculture produce in various states:**

1. The pandemic and the subsequent lockdown imposed are breaking the functional sequence of agricultural produce movement, that is, production, distribution, consumption. The impact of trucks stranded with agricultural products is now being felt.

2. However, this experience would be felt more widely during the next cycle when these trucks will not reach the stipulated farms where they are expected to transport the succeeding cycle of harvest.

3. Reports from Madhya Pradesh are harrowing; farmers are ready to harvest wheat but there are no buyers.

4. The situation is similar in Punjab where farmers have harvested and packed their produce, but arhatiyas (commission agents) are not ready to accept the produce and they are advising farmers to store their produce with themselves.

5. Farmers in Bihar are ready with matured banana, but no transporter is ready to take their produce. The situation is likely to worsen in the coming days.

**Constraints in Supply chain management system:**

- We do not foresee an improvement in the status of mandis, farmers, and their products during the forthcoming procurement season of wheat in the post-lockdown situation.
- There is uncertainty of the market closure and continuation of public procurement.
- Supply chain management, procurement, and distribution of agri-produce, to which farmers are generally not related, are affecting farmers the most.
- Although other players too are getting affected, the economic loss that the farmers must bear far outweighs the rest in the supply chain.
- Farmers may not have been infected by Covid-19 but have certainly been affected through the disruption of the supply chain.

**Conclusion:**

- Post-pandemic and once the lockdown is lifted, farmers still won’t have much respite.
- The outbreak of Covid-19 is to be blamed for the ongoing situation, but if we continue to undermine agriculture and Indian farmers, the government will certainly be judged for their harrowing situation in due course of time.
- However, considering the losses to the farmers, it’s a paltry amount. We need to make arrangements to ensure the continuance of agricultural operations, to prevent the danger of food and nutrition insecurity.
We need to take immediate measures to support the farmers for the continuity of uninterrupted agricultural movement. We cannot afford to wait for the lockdown to lift before initiating relief efforts.

2. Centre sanctions Rs.15,000-crore Covid-19 emergency package for states, UTs

The Central Government has provisioned Rs. 15,000 crore for treating Coronavirus patients and strengthening the medical infrastructure of the country. This will allow for rapidly ramping up the number of Corona testing facilities, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Isolation Beds, ICU beds, ventilators and other essential equipment. Simultaneously, training of medical and paramedical manpower will also be undertaken.

PM Shri Narendra Modi
24th March

MODI GOVERNMENT SANCTIONS RS 15,000 CRORE FOR
INDIA COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND HEALTH SYSTEM PREPAREDNESS PACKAGE

- Emergency response to contain COVID-19
- Development of diagnostics
- COVID-19 dedicated treatment facilities
- Centralized procurement of essential medical equipment and drugs
- Building resilient health systems to prevent and prepare for future outbreaks
- Setting up of laboratories surveillance activities, bio-security preparedness and pandemic research

Context:
- The government rolled out an India Covid-19 Emergency Response and Health system preparedness package for states with an outlay of Rs.15,000 crore.
- While Rs.7,774 crore sanctioned so far will be utilized for immediate Covid-19 Emergency Response, rest of the money will be used for medium-term support (1-4 years) under a mission mode approach.
- The project will be implemented in three phases between January 2020 to March 2024. Phase - 1 will span from January 2020 to June 2021, Phase-2 from July 2020 to March 2021, and Phase-3 from April 2021 to March 2024.
- The government had earlier announced a relief package of Rs 1.7 lakh crore to help citizens most affected by the novel coronavirus outbreak. Meanwhile, India has also started rigorous testing and a total of 223 labs are engaged in the process.
- The union health ministry is authorized to re-appropriate resources among components of the package and among the various implementation agencies which are National Health Mission, Central Procurement, Railways, department of Health Research, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), National Centre for Disease Control on the basis of the evolving emergent situations.
Motive of emergency Covid-19 response fund:
1. **Strengthening national and state health systems** to support prevention and preparedness,
2. Procurement of **essential medical equipment, consumables and drugs**.
3. **Strengthening of surveillance activities** including setting up of laboratories and bio-security preparedness.

The key activities to be implemented under Phase 1 include support to states and UTs for development of dedicated Covid-19 hospitals, isolation blocks, ICUs with ventilators oxygen supply in hospitals, strengthening of laboratories, hiring of additional human resources and incentives to human resource and community health volunteers

**ADB working on $2.2 billion package to support India’s emergency needs:**
- Asian Development Bank (ADB) is putting together a $2.2 billion package to support India’s COVID-19 response.
- This **multilateral development bank** is also willing to further increase it’s assistance for India if needed.
- ADB is committed to supporting India’s emergency needs. ADB has now preparing $2.2 billion in immediate assistance to the health sector and to help alleviate the economic impact of the pandemic on the poor; informal workers; micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises; and the financial sector.
- ADB assistance for India will be further increased if needed. This multilateral development bank will consider all financing options available with us to meet India’s needs, including emergency assistance, policy-based loans, and budget support to facilitate swift disbursement of ADB funds.
- In fact, in this global fight against an unknown enemy, India is helping other countries wage their own battles by working in close coordination with SAARC nations, and providing hydrochloroquine to neighboring countries, Brazil and USA, after catering to its own domestic demand.

**Key objectives of the package fully funded by the central government:**
1. Mounting emergency response to slow and limit covid-19 in India through the **development of diagnostics** and covid-19 dedicated treatment facilities.
2. **Centralized procurement of essential medical equipment and drugs** required for treatment of infected patients, ministry of health and family welfare adding that the funds will also be used to strengthen and build **resilient National and State health systems** to support **prevention and preparedness** for future disease outbreaks.
3. Setting up of laboratories and **bolster surveillance activities**, bio-security preparedness.
4. **Pandemic research** and proactively engage communities and conduct risk communication activities.
5. In response to the containment of the coronavirus, in India, as on date, a total of 223 laboratories comprising a network of 157 government and 66 private laboratories are conducting rigorous screening process.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address to the Nation on 24 March 2020 highlighted that the Central Government has provisioned Rs.15,000 crore for **treating coronavirus patients and strengthening the medical infrastructure** of the country.
- This will allow for rapidly ramping up the number of Corona testing facilities, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Isolation Beds, ICU beds, ventilators and other essential equipment.
- Simultaneously, training of medical and paramedical manpower will also be undertaken.
- Centre had requested the State Governments to ensure that only healthcare is treated as their first and topmost priority now.
The Health ministry has also asked states and UTs to use the funds for the procurement of personal protective equipment, N-95 masks and ventilators over and above what is being procured and supplied by the central government.

The activities to be undertaken also include disinfection of hospitals, government offices, public utilities and ambulances.

**Conclusion:**
- **Weakening global economic growth is causing disruptions** in India’s trade and manufacturing supply chains, along with the slowdown in tourism and other economic activities.
- This is straining the large number of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, and the livelihood of formal and informal laborers across the country.
- The policy measures announced by the Government in way forward will provide **much-needed relief and stimulus** to the most vulnerable people as well as businesses and become a basis for faster recovery.

### 3. Why emergency basic income a must now for India

**Introduction:**
- The prime minister’s appeal for a nation-wide ‘self-imposed Janata curfew’ has been a success.
- It has demonstrated that people can go beyond their political leanings and cooperate with the government to face the challenge posed by the coronavirus pandemic. But **extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures**.
- India’s informal economy has about **50 crore working persons** and would be among the most affected by the COVID-19 related shutdowns.

**Government has little space in the budget to fund a UBI scheme**

As % of GDP (2019-20)

- UBI cost
- Food subsidy (PDS)
- Fertilizer subsidy
- Other Union government subsidies
- MGNREGA
- Rationalization of expenditure**

**Proposed UBI schemes**

- Poverty line equivalent (2011-12): 9.8
- Economic Survey (2016-17): 5.5
- IMF (2017): 2.6
- Ghatak, Muralidharan (2019): 0.9
- Felman, Subramanian (2019): 2.5
- NYAY: 10.1

**Sources of funding:**
- Possible savings from union budget
Need of relief to millions in the informal economy:

- Explaining the rationale for the amount sought as EBI (emergency basic income), Experts argued that it should be linked to the International Poverty Line of daily per capita expenditure of $1.90 rather than the Indian poverty line that had not been revised in more than a decade and was estimated on the basis of per capita consumer expenditure.
- Similarly, crossing all political boundaries, a broad consensus is emerging about how to provide relief to millions in the informal economy who are staring at an uncertain future without their daily wage.
- Even as the central government is preparing a strategic plan, which includes cash transfers, opposition parties have made an appeal to the government to provide a basic income to people.
- Confederation of Indian Industry has joined this view and announced that a one-time cash transfer should be given. They went a step ahead by pointing out where the money should come from the savings from the global crude oil price fall.

Packages for the lower trodden people by various countries:

- IMF economist Gita Gopinath has argued for a preservation of the economic system while the Great Lockdown lasts.
- Singapore and Japan, which contained the disease spread initially, have re-introduced harsh lockdown measures to deal with a second wave of infections.
- The US announced a $2.2 trillion stimulus on a $20 trillion GDP base.
- Malaysia, whose per capita income is four times that of India, has announced a package that is 16 times bigger.
- Even poorer neighbour Pakistan has a much larger covid-19 response package (as share of its GDP) compared to India.
- Thailand, whose per capita income (PPP) is a little more than two times that of India, has announced a package that is 10 times bigger (as a share of GDP) than India.

Need of much consistent support for Informal and Unorganised people:

1. We need to focus on immediate and urgent support through cash transfers, and discard plans that are difficult to implement at the pace that is required now.
2. Some states have announced enhancement of rations under the Food Security Act. While providing additional food grains is useful, with broken supply chains and crumbling logistics, this may be difficult to implement.
3. Small and medium enterprises that are at the forefront of this tsunami will immediately start laying off their workforce.
4. Mild moral appeals to them not to do so, or to give paid leave to their workers is unlikely to work since during a crisis like this, it is difficult to monitor.
5. Employment arrangements in these enterprises are mostly invisible to the public eye, and are impossible to effectively track.
6. Apart from the government, there are two other key actors that should join this rescue operation—the corporates (CSR), and the local community.
7. The challenge before us now is to design how these transfers have to be made—fool-proof, and leak-proof.

How does India launch a relief programme at scale without compromising macroeconomic fundamentals?

1. One approach could be to have a generous, but provisional aid programme, which is unconditional and universal. We can call this an EBI (emergency basic income).
2. However, without resorting to some off-budget borrowings, it may not be possible for the Union government to fund such a programme.
3. Even if the government cuts back on some non-essential expenditures (establishment costs, for instance) and pools funds for certain welfare schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for an EBI, it may still not be enough to fund a generous EBI, suggests an analysis of budget documents.

4. Implementing EBI will be the harder challenge compared to funding it. Although almost everybody has a unique ID by now (Aadhaar), not everyone has a functional bank account or access to mobile or internet (for e-transfers).

5. The latest district-wise data on these parameters come from the National Family Health Survey for 2015-16.

6. It showed that despite gains in access to bank accounts and mobile phones, there were still significant disparities across districts. Internet access was limited across most districts.

7. Hence, EBI must also include an in-kind transfer component. The ratio of cash to in-kind transfers is something that is best left for states to decide.

8. The Centre’s role should be to enable funding for this programme so that states can focus on fixing implementation glitches rather than having to worry about finances at a time when their resources are already stretched.

Conclusion:
- Experts advocate that an emergency basic income be provided through the direct cash transfer mechanism that Government of India has implemented.
- This will not only arrest potential social unrest but also ensure that there is continued aggregate demand to sustain our economy.
- We cannot be caught flat-footed. This is the political imperative which will be a crucial test for many a public representative.
- They will face the brunt of people’s problems and frustration as they grapple with the situation on the ground. It is already happening as state governments start addressing a situation way out of their control.
- The political imperative has just become that much greater for unleashing the power of the universal basic income.
- Like other countries, India too could explore unconventional options, such as a special purpose vehicle, to fund this programme as long as the Great Lockdown lasts.

4. Reserve Bank of India is easing Financial Stress amidst the COVID-19 Lockdown

Context:
- RBI has announced a slew of measures to boost the economy towards recovery.
- The RBI address comes a day after Prime Minister Modi met Finance Minister to discuss the economic situation in the country following the prolonged lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic.
- The announcements made by the Reserve Bank will help in infusing liquidity and facilitating bank credit flow to traders and industry at a time when both are battling the lockdown due to coronavirus outbreak, according to exporters.
- Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI) Chairman said that steps announced by RBI will help in to infuse liquidity, facilitate bank credit flow and ease financial stress will surely help industry and economy fight this deadly pandemic.
RBI recent second phase of measures:
1. A 25 basis point reverse repo cut, TLTRO (Targeted Long Term Refinancing Options) of Rs 50,000 targeted at NBFCs;
2. Relaxation of asset classification norms;
3. More funds for states – the RBI has increased the limit under Ways and Means Advances for states to avail short term funds to 60 per cent of the existing limit.
4. A special refinance facility of Rs 50,000 crores was announced to meet sectoral credit requirements – this is to specifically boost liquidity of financial institutions like NABARD, SIDBI and National Housing Bank.
5. NPA (Non-performing Assets) norms of 90 days have been relaxed. The period of moratorium will be excluded from the 90-day classification norms of NPAs for those accounts, which would avail the moratorium facility. The NBFCs (Non-Banking Financial Companies) have been given flexibility to give such relief to their borrowers.

Financial institutions continue to be wary of lending-businesses across sectors have complained that even as the RBI has brought down lending rates and has been urging banks to lend, their experience with lending institutions continues to be difficult.

Highlights from the RBI Governor’s address to the media:
1. RBI monitoring situation developing out of Covid-19 outbreak
2. The mission is to do whatever it takes to prevent the epidemiological curve from steepening further
3. IMF projection of 1.9% GDP growth for India is highest in G20
4. IMF expects Indian economy to post sharp turnaround in 2021-22
5. Impact of Covid-19 not captured in IIP data for February
6. Contraction in exports in March at 34.6% much more severe than global financial crisis of 2008-09
7. LTRO-2.0 to involve Rs 50,000 crore to begin with

RBI measures will expand bank credit, boost liquidity: NITI Aayog
1. Viewed by the NITI Aayog vice chairman, RBI measures will revive credit flow by commercial banks and targeted long-term repo operation (LTRO) would further activate the corporate bond market and also provide much needed liquidity to NBFCs.
2. The targeted LTRO will further activate the corporate bond market and also provide much needed liquidity to NBFCs.
3. The government true to his word on doing what it takes to address the crisis brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.
4. LTRO is a tool which central bank uses to offer money to banks for a period of one to three years at the prevailing repo rate.
5. The banks in turn offer government securities with same or higher tenure as a collateral to the central bank.

6. The NITI Aayog vice chairman also pointed out that forward guidance by the government and RBI indicates a softening inflationary outlook that will provide needed space for monetary policy to act in case further action is needed to bring the economy back on track.

7. Accurate assessment of conditions and immediate prognosis by RBI. Right-sized help to pain points and will help improve liquidity in economy.

Infuse liquidity will mitigate financial stress: Formal sector:

- Describing the new RBI measures as a “life-saving dose” for millions of businesses, Assocham said the partial re-opening of the lockdown, further regulatory forbearances, infusion of additional liquidity and nudging banks to do real lending would provide a much-needed shield both to Corporate India as also the most vulnerable informal sectors of the economy against the coronavirus onslaught.

- Relief measures unveiled by the RBI should help NBFCs, housing finance companies, small businesses and above all considerably avert the risk of further NPAs.

- The allotment of Rs 10,000 crore to the National Housing Bank is a big move for the real estate sector reeling under the liquidity crisis. It will help provide capital to the Housing Finance Corporations and eventually provide major relief to developers battling liquidity issues during Covid-19 pandemic.

Ways and Means Advances for States:

- On April 1, 2020 the RBI had announced an increase in the ways and means advances (WMA) limit of states by 30 per cent.

- It has now been decided to increase the WMA limit of states by 60 per cent over and above the level as on March 31, 2020 to provide greater comfort to the states for undertaking COVID-19 containment and mitigation efforts, and to plan their market borrowing programmes better. The increased limit will be available till September 30, 2020.

- Recent experience suggests that a financial restructuring package without insistence on structural reforms leads to temporary alleviation of the problem in the sector followed by eventual recurrence of the core problems of liquidity.

- We therefore propose that the post COVID-era is the right time to undertake an ambitious overhaul of the major sectors in the economy.

Conclusion:

- Recent developments relating to inflation and the outlook without infringing in any way on the mandate of the monetary policy committee (MPC).

- The RBI will monitor the evolving situation continuously and use all its instruments to address the daunting challenges posed by the pandemic.

- The overarching objective is to keep the financial system and financial markets sound, liquid and smoothly functioning so that finance keeps flowing to all stakeholders, especially those that are disadvantaged and vulnerable.

- Regulatory measures that have been announced so far – including those made today – are dovetailed into the objective of preserving financial stability. Although social distancing separates us, we stand united and resolute. Eventually, we shall cure; and we shall endure.
5. The key strategy is fiscal empowerment of States

Introduction: Importance of health and spending on health-care services:

- The scale of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has never been seen before.
- Even as we are in the midst of the second phase of the national lockdown, there is no clarity on the time it will take to come out of the crisis, the extent of damage it will inflict, and the cost of relief and rehabilitation required.
- At a time when governments, both at the Centre and in the States, are **fiscally stressed**, the pandemic has forced them to **undertake huge expenditures** to save lives, livelihoods and reduce distresses and even more, to **create a stimulus to revive the economy** as we map the exit strategy.
- Being closer to the people, the **States have a much larger responsibility** in fighting this war.
- **Public health as well as public order are State subjects in the Constitution.**
- In fact, some States were proactive in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak by involving the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, even before the Government of India declared a universal lockdown invoking the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

![PRADHAN MANTRI GARIB KALYAN PACKAGE (PMGKP) MNREGA](image)

Focus on health and economy is the need of the hour:

- The pandemic has underlined the **historical neglect of the health-care sector in the country.**
- The total public expenditures of Centre and States works out to a mere 1.3% of GDP.
- The acute shortage of protective gear, testing kits, ventilators and hospital beds has been a major handicap and the immediate task of States is to ramp up their availability and supply.
- In addition, the disruption caused by the lockdown has caused untold misery, and **providing relief and rehabilitation** to migrant labourers and informal sector workers had to the focus.
- In 2017-18, in per capita terms, the public expenditure on medical and public health varied from an abysmal ₹690 in Bihar and ₹814 in Uttar Pradesh to the highest of ₹2,092 in Kerala.
- The centrally sponsored scheme, the National Health Mission, is inadequately funded, micromanaged with grants given under more than 2,000 heads and poorly targeted. The focus of “Ayushman Bharat” has been to advocate insurance rather than building wellness centres.
However, on the other side, extensive revenue losses for states:

1. While the requirement of States for immediate expenditures is large, they are severely crippled in their resources.
2. In the lockdown period, there has virtually been no economic activity and they have not been able to generate any revenue from State excise duty, stamp duties and registration fees, motor vehicles tax or sales tax on high speed diesel and motor spirit.
3. The revenue from Goods and Services Tax is stagnant and compensation on time for the loss of revenue has not been forthcoming.
   1. In Karnataka for example, it is reported that as against the estimated Rs.12,000 crore every month, the State may not be able to generate even Rs.300 crore in April.
   2. As the recovery process will be staggered, it is doubtful whether tax revenues will register any positive growth in 2020-21.
   3. Not surprisingly, the State has decided to monetise land through auctions to get money besides regularising unauthorised constructions by paying high fees.

Tax devolution from the Centre is even more precarious:

- To begin with, the tax devolution in the Union Budget estimate is lower than the Commission’s estimate by Rs.70,995 crore.
- In fact, the Budget estimate for 2020-21 itself is a huge overestimate when seen against the 11-month actual collections in 2019-20.
- The required growth to achieve the Budget estimate is 33.3% over the annualised actual collection.
- The projections are that the growth of nominal GDP in 2020-21 will be just about 4% and if the tax revenue increases by the same rate, devolution to the States would be lower by ₹2.2-lakh crore than the Finance Commission’s estimate.
- This results in a loss of ₹9,173 crore for Tamil Nadu, ₹9,000 crore for Andhra Pradesh, ₹8,000 crore for Karnataka, ₹4,671 crore for Telangana, and ₹4,255 crore for Kerala. There is a strong case for the States to go back to the Finance Commission with a request to make and give a supplementary report.
- Faced with an acute fund crunch, Kerala floated 15-year bonds but was faced with a huge upsurge in the yield to 8.96%.

Need for fiscal consolidation process relief:

1. The speed of economic revival will depend on how long it will take to revive economic activities and the volume of stimulus through public spending the government is able to provide.
2. It now appears that the lockdown will be lifted in stages and the recovery process will be prolonged.
3. The country is literally placed in financing a war-like situation and the government will have to postpone the fiscal consolidation process for the present, loosen its purse strings and finance its deficits substantially through monetisation.
4. This is also the time for the government to announce relaxation in the States’ fiscal deficit limit to make them effective participants in the struggle. It is also important for the States to realise the importance of health and prioritise spending on health-care services.
5. While Central intervention was done to enable, “consistency in the application and implementation of various measures across the country”, the actual implementation on the ground level will have to be done at the State level.
6. Furthermore, States are better informed to decide the areas and activities where relaxations should be done as the coronavirus curve is flattened.
7. Hopefully, there will be **better coordination** between the Union and State governments instead of claiming credit and apportioning blame.

- Besides protecting lives and livelihoods, States will have to **initiate and facilitate economic revival**, and that too would require **substantial additional spending**.
- **Hand holding small and medium enterprises** which have completely ceased production, providing relief to farmers who have lost their perishable crops and preparing them for sowing in the kharif season are other tasks that require spending.
- In fact, States have been proactive. Kerala came out with a **comprehensive package allocating ₹20,000 crore** to fight the pandemic.
- Almost all States have taken measures to provide food to the needy besides ramping up health-care requirements.

**Conclusion:**
- The war on COVID-19 can be effectively won **only when the States are armed with enough resources to meet the crisis**.
- But as mentioned earlier, they are **faced with stagnant revenues** while their expenditure commitments are huge.
- There is only limited scope for expenditure switching and reprioritisation now. Their **borrowing space too is limited** by the fiscal responsibility and budget management limit of **3% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP)**.
- The announcement by the Reserve Bank of India on the **increase in the limit of ways and means advances by 60% of the levels** prescribed in March 31 could help States to plan their borrowing better; but that is too little to provide much relief.
- Therefore, it is important for the Central government to provide **additional borrowing space by 2% of GSDP** from the prevailing 3% of GSDP.
- This is the time to **fiscally empower States to wage the COVID-19 war** and trust them to spend on protecting lives, livelihoods and initiate an economic recovery.

6. A big deal

**Context:**
- Reliance Industries and Facebook announced that the California-based social media giant will acquire a **9.99 per cent stake** in Jio Platforms limited, the holding company of Reliance Jio, for $5.7 billion (Rs 43,574 crore).
- The coming together of two giant companies like Facebook and Reliance is completely going to change the **internet ecosystem in India forever**.
- India is the **single-largest market** with **about 330 million monthly users**, and also one of the fastest-growing markets for Facebook. WhatsApp’s messaging app also has the largest user base in India, with about 400 million users.

**Why bought of a 9.9% stake: Foreign Portfolio Investment:**
- Foreign portfolio investment (FPI) refers to investing in the financial assets of a foreign country, such as stocks or bonds available on an exchange for less than 10% of the total value.
- This type of investment is at times **viewed less favourably** than direct investment because portfolio investments can be sold off quickly and are at times seen as short-term attempts to make money, rather than a long-term investment in the economy.
• Portfolio investment typically has a shorter time frame for investment return than direct investment. As with any equity investment, foreign portfolio investors usually expect to quickly realize a profit on their investments.

Providing seamless online transaction experience:
• At its core, the idea is to create an ecosystem around JioMart, enabling customers to access the local kirana stores using WhatsApp, combining both offline and online retail.
• This ability to connect millions of local businesses with end consumers, and provide them a seamless online transaction experience could radically alter the country’s retail landscape.
• Both firms have stressed on the new opportunities for businesses of all sizes, and especially for the millions of small businesses across the country.
• With the ongoing lockdown in the country only reaffirming the importance of the local kirana store — major online delivery channels have struggled to reach consumers during this period — integration is bound to be an enticing proposition.

Deal Provide opportunities for cross selling:
1. A scaling up of this model will also provide opportunities for cross-selling — significantly increasing the upside for firms and increasing the valuation of its retail arms.
2. At present, though, the reach of WhatsApp Pay is limited — just over a million Indians are reported to currently have access to the pay feature.
3. But this sort of model is popular in other Asian economies such as China, Korea and Japan where apps like WeChat have a wide range of product offerings, which induces consumer stickiness.
4. This arrangement also allows Jio to greatly expand its product offering to its more than 370 million-odd subscriber base.
5. The deal may also open up the entire WhatsApp consumer base — the near ubiquitous chatting app has a consumer base of around 400 million — to Reliance, including those on other telecom platforms such as Airtel and Vodafone.

Future technological plays will be more near:
• This strategic partnership with India’s one of the largest telecom operators will be key to India’s future technological plays, particularly in virtual reality (VR) and Internet of Things (IoT), and 5G network.
• India’s internet framework may get a technological boost, and that too reaching citizens in a short time.
• This deal may help in deepening financial inclusion as 400 million users of WhatsApp, may leverage Facebook’s Whatsapp pay-UPI platform.
• Also, because of Facebook’s Libra cryptocurrency service, this deal could be a step further for experimenting crypto-based payments and blockchain technology on a large scale in India.
Yet there are concerns regarding this arrangement:

1. For one, given the **dominant market position** of the players, concerns over the **market structure and its implications** for consumer welfare are bound to arise.
2. Second, the tie-up also raises questions on **net neutrality** with the possibility of preferential treatment being granted.
3. **Facebook’s Free Basics platform** was shut down by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) due to net neutrality concerns.
4. In 2015, it experimented with Free Basics, which provided free access to basic Internet services as a partnership with service providers.
5. Also, **violation of principles of net neutrality** is difficult to prove, owing to technical issues like low bandwidth, the difference in network capacity in different areas.
6. Third, given the **data privacy issues** highlighted in the past by the Cambridge Analytica episode, for instance, there are apprehensions over the enormous amounts of data that will be collected by these entities, especially when India still does not have a personal data protection law.
7. Data is also referred to by many experts as **the new oil or new currency** of the 21st century.
8. This is due to the fact that the **vast quantities of data generated by users of online services** can be processed into valuable information for commercial and strategic gains by technological giants like Amazon, Google etc.

**Conclusion:**

- The deal, it said, will allow both Facebook and Jio to monetise their digital platforms, engage customers online, and provide direct connectivity between users and merchants.
- Usage of digital platforms is likely to grow significantly in the medium term amid severe disruptions caused by lockdowns and social distancing measures.
- This mega-deal will have **major implications on India’s retail and internet landscape**.
- However, in the context, the **role of regulatory bodies** such as the Competition Commission of India and Telecom Regulatory Authority of India assumes much importance.
- The nature of such regulation will decide the overall fate of India’s market, whether it will turn into digital Sarvodaya or will deepen the digital divide.

**7. COVID-19 presents an opportunity for India**

**Introduction:**

- The government deserves to be complimented for **efficiently managing** so far the fallout of the **dreaded Covid-19 outbreak**, that is devastating many countries in the world.
- The clamping of the lockdown was timely, as were the announcements of **steps by the Reserve Bank of India** to facilitate increased lending by the financial institutions.
- It is difficult to predict the likely **impact of this virus on the economy** as a whole, though there are estimates being made by a number of experts.
- There is absolutely no doubt that world over, **GDPs will be adversely impacted**, and India too will suffer.
- The issue now is of limiting the damage and making use of the few opportunities that may come our way.

**Are we preparing ourselves when the world does come out of the crisis?**

- The **IMF World Economic Outlook growth** projections present a grim reality in terms of the annual percentage change in the real GDP.
• The Eurozone leading the projected de-growth estimates in the year 2020 at minus 7.5 per cent and modest projected growth of 4.7 per cent next year, assuming that global recovery starts in the second half of the year 2020.
• In India’s context, there is some light at the end of the tunnel with growth projected at 1.9 per cent in 2020 and 7.4 per cent in 2021, as against a contraction of the global economy projected at least minus 3 per cent in 2020 and 5.8 per cent growth in 2021.
• Yes, there is bound to be greater focus on healthcare. It has been long overdue in India. It is a wake-up call.
• The biggest sufferers of the lockdown have been the poor unorganised workers, most of whom are daily-wage earners.
• There were horrid stories about those who attempted to migrate back to their villages to be with their families.
• The country will have to think seriously in terms of social security for such workers, another long over-due intervention.

Few opportunities: Investment opportunity:
• There are, however, opportunities that appears to be emerging.
• While there is hope for a quick recovery in India, we have to make concerted efforts to realise this including an integrated multi-pronged approach through public policy support, private sector participation and citizens’ support.
• This presents a huge opportunity for India as many Companies plan to shift out of China. Let us prepare the ground forthwith to welcome such investment into India. Let us try and make life easy for investors. It can be done”.
• The world will keep debating about the “role” of China in the emergence and spread of this virus, but it is clear that a large number of countries have already started thinking in terms of shifting their investments out of China.

Can India seize this opportunity?
• The steps recently announced by the Reserve Bank of India have the potential to impact investors within the country, even though they are limited to creating additional liquidity that need not necessarily lead to investments.
• There is an argument that liquidity was not the major factor even before the arrival of Covid. It was more on account of the “fear” factor and the lack of demand.
• Covid-19 will only aggravate the problem of lack of demand. However, the “fear” factor can and should be tackled.

India needs to step up as a viable alternative. For manufacturing a strong infrastructure base is crucial. The government should consider:
1. A task force to provide single clearance window as a point of approval, common application and approval forms for licenses, warehousing and easy compliances.
2. Easy availability of land and power through land acquisition reforms and impetus to renewable energy capacity building.
3. **Fiscal incentives** could be **linked to job creation** like income tax relief to companies employing more than 1,000 labourers in the manufacturing sector.

4. Robust **dispute resolution mechanism** that exhibits a strong commitment to align with international arbitration decisions.

**Way Forward: Revive clearance mechanism:**

- The government will have to consider the following steps forthwith to **attract international investment.**

These steps will also help revive the sentiments for domestic investors:

First, **revive the Project Monitoring Group (PMG) in letter and spirit.**

1. The PMG came into existence during UPA-II and managed to do what was unthinkable during that time, when scams were breaking out every other day.
2. Enforcement agencies were hounding civil servants and decision-making had come to a grinding halt. Clearances of various projects were stuck.
3. By putting in place a transparent web-based mechanism for clearances and by engaging intensively with the State governments to expedite clearances, projects worth more than ₹5 lakh crore were cleared in a period of 15 months.
4. Both the premier chambers of commerce and industry (CII and FICCI) had written to the Prime Minister: “the PMG has been playing an exemplary role in getting the necessary approvals and clearances for projects that have been stalled”.
5. There was also a request from these chambers to expand the mandate of PMG.

Second, **Make all clearances time-bound and process transparent.**

- This is already being attempted by the Samagra Foundation in Haryana in close co-ordination with the State government.

Third, **streamline all the processes of clearances.**

1. With the data getting generated at the PMG, the bottlenecks can be clearly identified.
2. All the three steps mentioned above are **inter-linked**. These steps will provide comfort to the investors. They do not require any legislation or any amendment to an existing legislation. This can be done forthwith.
3. The investor will have at his disposal an **institutional mechanism** which he can approach in case he runs into a problem.
4. Over a period of time, as the processes become **streamlined and digitalised**, the role of PMG will also undergo a change.

**Relaxation of Fiscal and Monetary Measures:**

1. Apart from the above, other fiscal and monetary measures can be put in place to put more money in the hands of the consumer.
2. The FRBM Act may have to be amended to **enable larger deficit financing.**
3. Steps will have to be taken to **revive construction activities.** The precipitous fall in petroleum prices and the consequent reduction in the bitumen price can be leveraged.
4. The government will be well advised to make all the payments due expeditiously.
5. It can also consider measures such as **imposing a moratorium** on subscription to the provident fund and asking the employers to give in cash to the employee his contribution to the PF, as well as that of the employer.
Conclusion:
❖ The world will certainly undergo a change, but it is difficult to predict what will finally emerge. As of now the end to this scourge does not appear to be in sight, but one day it will.
❖ The government would already be working on a package to revive the economy, but the key really is the sentiment that will help private investor (both domestic and international) feel “comfortable”.
❖ Roadshows did not help in that past. They will not help now. What will help is action on the ground. It can and should be done in the interest of the country and its people.

SCIENCE & TECH

1. A drug in need

India in Pharma sector:
- India enjoys an important position in the global pharmaceuticals sector, as India is the largest provider of generic drugs globally.
- The Indian pharmaceutical industry meets over 50% of global demand for various vaccines, 40% of generic demand in the U.S. and 25% of all medicine in the U.K.
- Presently, over 80% of the antiretroviral drugs used globally to combat AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) are supplied by Indian pharmaceutical firms.
- The Indian pharmaceuticals market is the world’s third-largest in terms of volume and thirteenth-largest in terms of value. It has established itself as a global manufacturing and research hub.

Context:
- US President Donald Trump has said he has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to relax India’s ban on hydroxychloroquine tablets so that the drug can be used to treat America’s COVID-19 patients.
- A day earlier, India’s Directorate General of Foreign Trade had prohibited export of the anti-malarial drug, which the US has described as a game-changer in the battle against the novel coronavirus.
- The US president’s request is reportedly on the table of the high-level Group of Ministers (GoM) that reviews, monitors and evaluates the country’s COVID-19 response activities.
• Brazil has joined the US in urging India to lift the ban on hydroxychloroquine — India is one of the global leaders in the production of the drug.
• The GoM headed by Union Minister of Defence must take into account the interests of all stakeholders in the country before arriving at a decision on relaxing the export ban.

Hydroxy-chloroquine against COVID-19:
• The drug shows antiviral activity in vitro against coronaviruses, and specifically, SARS-CoV-2 [the virus that causes COVID-19].
• Further, the study suggests that prophylaxis (treatment given to prevent disease) with hydroxychloroquine at approved doses could prevent SARS-CoV-2 infection and may help to improve viral shedding.
• Clinical trials are under way in China to know whether the drug can be used for treatment.

About Hydroxy-chloroquine:
1. Hydroxy-chloroquine is an oral drug used in the treatment of autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis. Autoimmune diseases are in which the body’s immune system attacks healthy cells.
2. The popular anti-parasitic medication has been available since the 1940s. It’s been used to treat malaria.
3. HCQ is a derivative of chloroquine, and has fewer side-effects.
4. Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic inflammatory disorder affecting many joints, including those in the hands and feet.
5. Chloroquine works by increasing the levels of haem or heme, a substance toxic to the malarial parasite in the blood. This kills the parasite and stops the infection from spreading.

ICMR Recommends Use of Hydroxy-Chloroquine:
• Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is the apex body in India for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research.
• Its mandate is to conduct, coordinate and implement medical research for the benefit of the Society, translating medical innovations into products/processes and introducing them into the public health system.
• The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) recommends the use of hydroxychloroquine as a prophylactic for asymptomatic healthcare workers and contacts of people who have been infected by the virus.
• The ICMR’s decision on wider use of the drug will, reportedly, depend on further research.

Use of Hydroxy-Chloroquine yielded better results:
1. At the same time, research in other parts of the world has sparked interest in a more expansive use of the anti-malarial medicine.
2. A study by Chinese researchers, for instance, showed that the drug speeded up the recovery of COVID-19 patients who had suffered pneumonia.
3. Experiments on the drug have also yielded promising results in France. Some experts have called for more tests before hydroxychloroquine is held up as a cure for COVID-19.
4. But some of the early naysayers of the drug, including the US Food and Drug Administration, have now come around to recommending its use in emergency situations.
5. Hydroxychloroquine as a COVID-19 palliative, by all accounts, seems to be a work in progress.
6. However, in a world embroiled in a grim struggle against COVID-19, reports of the early success of the drug have generated hope especially in the US, the country hit hardest by the pandemic.
7. In such a situation, it is critical that India’s decision on the US request be an informed and considered one.
Conclusion:
❖ India has one of the lowest manufacturing costs in the world – lower than that of the U.S. and almost half of the cost in Europe.
❖ As the country plans to intensify the battle against the novel coronavirus in hotspots, the GoM’s decision must be based on consultations with a wide range of experts — scientists, public health and foreign policy experts and representatives of the pharma industry.
❖ India should look up to and invest in biotechnology. India’s biotechnology industry, comprising biopharmaceuticals, bio-services, bio agriculture, bio-industry and bioinformatics is expected to grow at an average rate of around 30% a year and reach $100 billion by 2025.
❖ To ensure health security of Indian people, revival of R&D and public sector API manufacturers is necessary. For example, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) should be promoted to invest in R&D.

2. Virtual reality: On telemedicine

Introduction:
• The world has very few devices left to fight COVID-19 with, but technology remains one of them.
• Whether it is the employ of state-of-the-art technology in the discovery of cures or vaccines, or traditional technology services to enhance health care and consultations, or even tools that keep people at home occupied/productive, it is clear that technology will serve humanity at one of its darkest moments.

Importance of Telemedicine:
• As digital innovation revolutionizes the worlds of retail, travel, communication and many other industries, the delivery of health care has largely continued in traditional fashion.
• Your devices and record-keeping have gone digital, but basic face-to-face interactions between provider and patient have not been much affected by technological changes.
• In today’s flowering of virtual reality, assumptions about the nature of health care are being reconsidered from the ground up.
• The pandemic has contributed, to the understanding of the myriad ways in which available technologies have not been put to better use, and presented people with multiple opportunities to harness these devices, techniques and methods to get on with life in the time of lockdown.
• Among the primary uses is telemedicine, rendered inexorable now, by the temporary paralysis brought on by a freeze on movement.
Borderless, Continuous Care:

- The use of virtual reality in medicine and healthcare has the power to enable patients to gain access to care in ways that were not possible in the past.
- It’s been said that the average wait time for most doctor visits in the India is 45-50 days, with many parts of the world requiring up to months before patients can see physicians.
- Virtual doctor visits could someday help ease the burden on medical resources, enabling medical professionals to see and treat patients remotely – cutting demand and need for in-office visits.
- VR may also aid in bringing more healthcare to more people. In many areas of the world, and even in the India developed regions, geographical location prevents access to doctors, particularly those with specific specialties. Virtual office visits and other care could help fill the need.

Telemedicine benefits for India:

- India only has one government doctor for every 1,139 people, whereas the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a ratio of 1:1,000.
- The shortage of doctors is limiting face-to-face consultations among patients. Secondly, India also has a shortage of hospital beds, which makes hospitalization tricky.
- Telemedicine will reduce the time of consultations and improve the quality of healthcare services in urban as well as rural areas, removing many of infrastructural challenges.
- Telemedicine is a sector that bridges the healthcare gap between rural India and urban India.
- In rural India, where the access to medical facilities, specialists opinion and advance healthcare amenities are limited, telemedicine acts as a healthcare provider bringing access to the specialist doctors to these areas.

Telemedicine adoption in India:

- It was way back in 2000 that telemedicine was first employed in India, but the progress has been excruciatingly slow, until the pandemic. However, it does seem as if the medical community was only held back by the lack of legislation to enable tele consultations.
- India is one of the top 10 countries in the telemedicine market in the world. The early adoption of a regulatory framework will help the segment grow rapidly.
- India has seen considerable growth in the telemedicine sector but the growth was not rapid due to the lack of proper guidelines and regulations.
- Though the Government is now starting to take a keen interest in developing telemedicine practices resulting in a slow but steady rise in its utilization in public health.

Telemedicine Society of India and government recent guidelines:

- The Centre’s recent guidelines allowing for widespread use of telemedicine services came as a shot in the arm for telehealth crusaders in the country, among them the Telemedicine Society of...
India that has long been battling to use the technology in its complete arc to reach remote areas in India.

- This move finds consonance with the rest of the world where several nations, also deeply impacted by the pandemic, have deployed telemedicine to reach people who have been unable to come to hospital, to reduce footfalls in hospitals, and to even provide medical and mental health counselling to countless people.
- For no sooner was the policy announced, than hospitals and clinicians hurried to jump onto the bandwagon, advertising contact information for patients.

Huge and timely benefits of Telemedicine:

- The advantages are peculiar in the current context, when putting distance between people is paramount, as tele consultations are not barred even when health care professionals and patients may have to be quarantined.
- The advancement of telecommunication capabilities over the years has made the transmission of images and sound files (heart and lung sounds, coughs) faster and simpler.
- Pilot telemedicine experiments in ophthalmology and psychiatry have proven to be of immense benefit to the communities. Telemedicine’s time is here, finally.
- Telemedicine has advantages like: Reduced travel expenses of patients, Time saving, Easy access to specialized doctors, Decreases the load of missed appointments and cancellations for healthcare providers, Increasing patient load and revenue for hospitals, Improving follow up and health outcome, Increased reach to inaccessible areas.

Conclusion:

- Technology plays a crucial role in fight against COVID-19.
- The pandemic has contributed to the understanding of various ways in which available technologies can be put to better use and presented people with multiple opportunities to harness these devices, techniques and methods to get on with life in the time of lockdown.
- Among the primary uses is telemedicine that can help reach patients where access to medical care is difficult.
- While unleashing the full potential of telemedicine to help people, experts and government agencies must be mindful of the possible inadequacies of the medium, and securing sensitive medical information; such cognisance should guide the use of the technology.

3. How coronavirus cases doubled in India, elsewhere

Context:

- The Health Ministry circulated a chart comparing India’s doubling rate for COVID-19 with those of seven other countries, including the six that had the highest number of cases as of that date. Doubling rate here refers to how many days it takes for a country’s case count to double.
- While the doubling rate of India’s cases has been largely slower compared to the rates in the seven countries showcased by the Health Ministry, there are 12 other countries that have had a higher number of cases than India, that one can compare with.
- The countries with a higher case count than India’s were, from highest to lowest: the United States, Spain, Italy, Germany, France, United Kingdom, China, Iran, Turkey, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Netherlands, Switzerland, Russia, Portugal, Austria, Ireland and Israel.
Coronavirus cases: Phase by phase:
1. For the first phase of doubling (from 750 to 1,500), the case count in India took five days, according to numbers from database.
2. This was longer than in any other country. Comparatively, countries such as Iran, Spain, and Turkey took only one day to double in this range.
3. By the second phase of growth (1,500 to 3,000), India had jumped to the middle of the pack, with cases in seven countries growing slower than in India, and those in 12 countries growing either faster or in the same number of days (three).
4. The countries where the doubling rates in this phase were longer than India’s are: UK, Russia, Portugal, Austria, Netherlands, Brazil, and Ireland which witnessed the slowest growth, with the rise from 1,500 to 3,000 cases taking six days.
5. In the third phase of growth, India appears to have contained the outbreak well, with cases taking five days to jump from 3,000 to 6,000.
6. Apart from Ireland, where doubling took eight days, all other countries saw this phase of doubling taking either less time than, or the same time as, in India. In Spain, it took only one day.
7. In the final phase of growth, cases in India took six days to double from 6,000 to 12,000.
8. Only in four countries was this growth slower than in India. In Israel, growth seems to have significantly slowed, with this doubling phase taking 13 days. This phase took 10 days in Austria, eight in Portugal, and seven in Ireland.
9. Among countries where this phase of growth was faster than in India, the US, Germany and China each saw it happen in the shortest time: two days.
Immunocompromised people in any country are at high risk:

- The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued guidelines for people who are at *increased risk of getting severely ill from Covid-19*.
- These include those who are 65 years or older, *people with chronic lung disease* or *moderate to severe asthma*, those with *heart disease* and immunocompromised people.
- A person from any age group can become immunocompromised either due to certain medical treatments or due to diseases such as auto-immune diseases.
- Conversely, reports have indicated that in some Covid-19 patients, even seemingly healthy ones, death has occurred probably due to a cytokine storm, which is when the immune system goes into overdrive, thereby damaging even healthy tissue, leading to multiple organ failure, sepsis and potentially, even death.
- Essentially this means that the *immune system needs to be working in a controlled manner to be efficient in fighting off infection*.

**What does it mean to be immunocompromised?**

1. Research indicates that age, people with *certain comorbidities* and those with *weakened immune systems* may be at higher risk of developing severe illness and therefore, should be more cautious.
2. A person’s immune system helps the body to fight off infections. Therefore, it is important that the immune system is working efficiently to fight infection such as that given by the SARS-CoV-2.
3. Ideally, once the immune system is triggered into action, it will deploy white blood cells to the site of infection, thereby aiding the recovery of the infected individual.
4. But in some people, the immune system is weakened, which means that their immune systems cannot function efficiently and therefore, make it difficult to recover or in some cases, may lead to more severe outcomes.
5. Such people are said to be *immunocompromised* and there can be various reasons for this, such as cancer treatment, existing comorbidities, age and genetics among others.
6. Further, some medications called *immuno-suppressants* can also lead to a weakened immune system.
7. These medications dial down the response of an *overactive immune system* among people with certain auto-immune disorders. However, people on such medication should not stop taking them without consulting their healthcare provider.

**Arogya Setu: A COVID-19 tracking mobile application:**

- It is 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 uses smartphone’s GPS and Bluetooth features to track the coronavirus infection.
- It is an updated version of an earlier app called Corona Kavach (now discontinued).

**Arogya Setu has four sections:**

1. Your Status: tells the risk of getting COVID-19 for the user.
2. Self-Assess: lets the user know the risk of being infected.
3. COVID-19 Update: gives update on the local and national COVID-19 cases.
4. E-pass: yet to go active.

A human society that is sympathetic to and in harmony with our environment, and where human beings listen to and nurture their selves, may be an enduring recipe for a safer future.
India has a long heritage of nurturing one’s inner self — yoga and meditation have been adopted globally as secular exercises for a more robust constitution.

Conclusion:
❖ The greatest challenge that the world faces today is in prediction of the imminent disasters that can be catastrophic. The Covid-19 pandemic is one such; others may include severe climate shocks.
❖ Empanelling additional health facilities under PM-JAY to provide emergency care and treatment for other serious illnesses to all citizens, particularly the poor and vulnerable.
❖ Direct support from banks to private sector to keep production and supply chains running.
❖ India also has a long tradition of dealing with frugality as a virtue and can easily relate to what in ancient Greece was revered as gaia, dealing with the earth as our mother. These can be timeless lessons as human society seeks closer harmony with nature, to take us on to a safer trajectory in a post COVID-19 world.
❖ With growing environmental and health stress, such disastrous events are likely to occur more often. This can only be tackled through collective actions.

ENVIRONMENT

Rice-fish farming system in India is in urgent need of conservation and promotion

Introduction:
• Rapid human population growth poses many challenges, especially food shortages, malnutrition, limited means of irrigation and shrinking land resources besides deteriorating environmental quality.
• Asia is the largest producer of rice in the world, with India, China, Taiwan, Indonesia and Bangladesh being among the top producers. Rice plays an important role in Indian agriculture, occupying close to 45 million hectares and yielding 111.52 million tonnes in 2017-18.
• Sustainable intensification of agricultural production systems is needed today to address the ever-increasing pressure on food and the environment.

Time to revive traditional rice varieties:
• Rice, an important food grain, roughly feeds 50 per cent of the world population. It has been identified as a major crop consuming vast chunks of available water resources while at the same time paddy fields emit large amount of the greenhouse gas, methane.
• In India, agriculture is the lifeline of the Indian economy and contributes nearly one-fourth of total gross domestic product and sustains two-thirds of the population.
• Thus, solutions need to be sought to improve the management of rice production systems.
• Rice-fish farming constitutes a unique agro-landscape across the world, especially in tropical and sub-tropical Asia.

Co-culture of rice and aquatic creatures:
• Today, the impact of rice cultivation on the environment, including its effect on greenhouse gases (GHGs) emission, is a matter of concern for all of us. Global climate change is closely linked to agricultural production.
• Two major GHGs from agricultural sectors are methane (CH4) and nitrous oxide. Methane emission depends on anaerobic degradation of organic complexes such as plant residues, organic matter and organic fertilisers under submerged conditions where there is a lack of oxygen.
• A total of **10-20 per cent of methane in the atmosphere** comes from paddy fields. This is significant as the Global Warming Potential (GWP) of methane is 25 times more than that of carbon dioxide.

• It is no longer an agro-production practice but an **agro-culture pattern**. Co-culture of rice and aquatic creatures combining animal production (for example fish, shellfish, crab, shrimp and ducks) in paddy rice systems has been proposed as a technique to maximise the use of land and water resources to provide both grain and animal protein.

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**Fish as pest control in paddy fields in Asia:**

1. Research has shown that the **rice-fish cultivation system** is capable of lowering the emission of methane and other GHGs.
2. Aquatic creatures especially bottom feeders (crabs and carps) disturb the soil layers by their movement or sometimes searching for food, and thus they **influence the CH4 production processes**.
3. Potentially, aquatic creatures **increase diluted oxygen** in field water and in soil, which shifts anaerobic digestion to aerobic digestion and helps to reduce CH4 emissions.
4. Recently, it has been estimated that methane emission from rice-fish cultivation system is 34.6 per cent less than that from a rice monoculture cultivation system.
5. The method of rice-fish is also beneficial to **restore soil fertility and avoid soil degradation**, which is a major global environmental issue.
6. The rice-fish system requires only a small amount of pesticide and fertiliser as it is a low input system.
7. The economic aspect of this system indicates that its adoption has led to an **increase in economic efficiency of farmers**. According to a report, in Bangladesh, the net income return from rice-fish culture was over 50 per cent greater than that from rice monoculture.
8. **Rice yields from the rice-fish system** were 10-26 per cent higher, labour input 19-22 per cent lower and material inputs were seven per cent lower.
9. Additionally, fish production increased net income. Indonesian figures show that the rice-fish system yielded a 27 per cent higher net return with fish, as compared to a single crop of rice.

10. This method ties the aquaculture industry to the agricultural industry in a social way, which is not possible in the case of monoculture.

11. The total area of land available for rice cultivation in India is 43.5 million hectares (ha), out of which, an estimated 20 million ha is suitable for adoption of the rice-fish integration system mainly in rain-fed medium lands, waterlogged lands etc.

However, in present only 0.23 million ha is currently under rice-fish culture:

1. This low degree of adoption, exploitation and yield is primarily due to the introduction of high yielding rice varieties involving the use of pesticides that has really impeded the culture of rice-fish farming.

2. Rice yield is higher from co-culture system than monoculture, various studies have shown. Thus, achieving higher productivity from this underutilised high potential area is an immediate need.

3. The method of raising fish from the rice fields probably began with the beginning of rice cultivation itself in the North East, because the waterlogged rice fields create a natural habitat for fish. It is assumed that it was only the basic capture tool that emerged first.

4. Rice-fish farming in the region has an excellent future. Studies in Assam have shown that rice-fish cultivation is a viable, environmentally friendly, low-cost, low-risk additional economic activity with multiple benefits including increased income and increased fish availability for the rural farming community.

5. The North East region of India is recognised as the most suitable zone for organic farming due to its negligible usage of chemical fertilisers, pesticides, and other chemicals.

6. This present scenario presents an excellent opportunity to utilise vast tracts of rice fields to culture a variety of fishes to augment fish production in the region.

- A co-culture program provides a platform for farmers to find new ideas and share their knowledge and experience to develop the farming and aquaculture industries.

- With these benefits, farmers are willing to adopt the technology of co-culture as it improves their economic status and is encouraged to increase contacts among various stakeholders that provide or share useful skills and technical knowledge.

- This method of Rice-fish co-culture would definitely enhance farm production, reduce environmental degradation and improve the quality of life of farmers.

Way Forward:

- Rice-fish system in India is in urgent need of conservation and promotion. A full recognition of its multi-ecological functions must be achieved, such as its role in preserving biodiversity, protecting food security, enriching the soil and lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

- In light of the present situation of rice-fish farming in India, basic research on the rice-fish ecosystem should be emphasised, including research on basic techniques of rice-fish farming and technology required for engineering intervention.

- The policymakers should consider the problems of initial investment for poor rural communities and compensate them with farmer-friendly policies, easy loan schemes etc.

Conclusion:

- India’s rich traditional primitive farming is as old as this dual-farming culture and fish and rice both are the staple food of India.

- As the above discussions clearly suggest, the agri-aqua co-culture system will be very helpful for the farming community and also safe for the environment.
So with the next sowing season within sight, it’s high time that the Indian central and state governments recognise the importance of this system.

Along with reducing the emission of greenhouse gases, co-culture systems have beneficial effects on farm income and improving the livelihood of poor rural people and progressive farmers.

Further development in this method in the agricultural sector is potentially profitable and environment-friendly.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The deep void in global leadership

Introduction: Spread of Covid-19:

- The coronavirus’s flight across the world at lightning speed, has exposed the total void in collective leadership at the global level.
- Three months into the catastrophic war declared by an invisible, almost invincible virus, that is rapidly gobbling up human lives, regardless of citizenship and race, and contemptuously ravaging economies across continents, there is as yet no comprehensive, concerted plan of action, orchestrated by global leaders, to combat this terror.
- Does India have the power to awaken the conscience of the Superpowers and catalyse collective global action?

Good war, bad enemy:

1. A good war against a bad enemy, and a common enemy, that respects no borders. If this global challenge is not a battle to be fought by a collective global leadership, nothing else is.
2. And yet, the typical response by all affected nations, has been to impose ‘National distancing’ by closing borders.
3. World leaders are obviously overwhelmed with their own national challenges and do not appear inclined to view the pandemic as a common enemy against mankind, which it is.
4. China delayed reporting the virus to the World Health Organisation (WHO), and perhaps, in the process, contributed to the exacerbation of the spread of the virus across the globe.
5. It was reported that the Trump administration did not even inform the European Union before it shut off flights from Europe.
6. It must be acknowledged that the initiative taken by PM Mr. Modi in the early days to convene a meeting of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation countries stands out in contrast to the pusillanimous leadership around the world.

7. Epidemiologists point out that unless herd immunity develops which will take long and come at the cost of at least half the population being infected the virus will remain alive and strike whenever there is a lowering of guard.

Lack of Inadequate Collective Actions: Seeds of indifference:

- Two developments in the global polity in the last few years have contributed to the indifference towards collective global action:

One, the swing towards right-wing nationalism, as a guiding political ideology, in large swathes of the world, particularly in the U.S.

1. This ideology posits ‘global good’ being in conflict with and inimical to national interests.
2. The dramatic announcement by U.S. President Trump, in June 2017, that the U.S. will cease involvement from the Paris Accord on climate change, preparatory to full withdrawal after the mandatory period, on the ground that the accord will ‘undermine U.S. economic interest’ is a classic demonstration of narrow nationalism trumping global interests.
3. There is no issue more global than climate change, and yet the U.S. Administration chose to look at it from the prism of national, short-term economic interest.

Two, Decline of multilateral institutions:

- The United Nations was the outcome of the shared vision of the world leaders after World War II, that collective action is the only way forward to prevent the occurrence of another war.
- That institution has notoriously failed to live up to its expectations to maintain peace among nations in the nearly 80 years since its formation. Its affiliate organisations have, in several ways, failed to deliver on their lofty missions.
- In particular, WHO, which has as its objective ‘to be the directing and coordinating authority among member countries in health emergencies’, has proven to be too lethargic in reacting to pandemics in the past.
- Its responses to COVID-19, has come under the scanner, not merely for incompetence, but also for lack of intellectual integrity.

G20 offers hope:

- It is encouraging to learn that the G20 leaders have agreed to inject $5-trillion into the world economy to partially counter the devastating economic impact of the pandemic.
- If the world leaders realise the relevance and critical importance of collective global action in the context of the present pandemic, it is not difficult to contrive an appropriate mechanism quickly to get into war.
- A nimble outfit, not burdened with bureaucracy, is required to manage a global crisis of the nature that we are confronted with, today.
- What is important is for the global leaders to acknowledge what every foot soldier knows: winning a war would require the right strategy, rapid mobilisation of relevant resources and, most importantly, timely action.

The following actions should come out of such a collective to face the present challenge:

First, the collective should ensure that shortages of drugs, medical equipment and protective gear do not come in the way of any nation’s capacity to contain or fight the pandemic.

1. It is very likely that some nations that have succeeded in bringing the pandemic under control, such as China, Japan or South Korea, might have the capability to step up production at short notice to meet the increasing demand from other countries which are behind the curve.
2. This would typically involve **urgent development of an information exchange on global production capacity**, present and potential, demand and supply.
3. This is not to mean that there should be **centralised management**, which is not only infeasible, but counterproductive, as the **attendant bureaucracy will impede quick action**.
4. A **common information exchange** could restrain the richer countries from predatory contracting of global capacities.

**Eliminate all kinds of tariff and non-tariff barriers making easy supply chain:**

1. Second, **protocols might need to be put in place** among participating countries to **ensure seamless logistics for the supply chain** for essential goods and services to function efficiently.
2. This might be particularly necessary in the context of controls on international traffic and national shutdowns. There would need to be **concomitant accord** to eliminate all kinds of tariff and non-tariff barriers.

**Information exchange is vital:**

1. Third, there needs to be **instantaneous exchange of authenticated information** on what clinical solutions have succeeded and what has not.
2. A classic example is the issue relating to hydroxychloroquine, which is being used experimentally, bypassing the rigours of randomised clinical trials.
3. While there is **no substitute to classic clinical proof**, the more field-level information is shared within the medical community, the better will be the success rates of such experimentation.

**Encourage and Incentivises private research:**

1. Fourth, this is a **time to have cross-country collaboration on laboratory trials and clinical validation** for vaccines and anti-viral drugs.
2. It must be acknowledged that WHO has already moved on this issue, although, perhaps, belatedly. The world can ill-afford delays, as the pandemic is predicted to stage a comeback once the shutdowns are gradually relaxed.
3. The best way to **ensure speedy research is to pool global resources**. Any effort at reinventing the wheel will only delay the outcomes.
4. This attempt to collaborate might also bring in its wake an acceptable commercial solution that **adequately incentivises private research**, while ensuring benefits being available to the entire world at affordable costs.
5. Such a framework might be necessary for **sustained collaborations for future challenges**.

1. Fifth, there is a need to facilitate **easy movement of trained health professionals** across the world to train others and augment resources wherever there are shortages.
2. In other words, nations should **come together to organise a global army to fight the pandemic**, equipped with the best weapons and tools.

**Food watch:**

1. Sixth, we must **anticipate food shortages** occurring sooner or later, in some part of the world, consequent to the national shutdowns.
2. Ironically, while we might have saved lives from the assault of the novel coronavirus, we might run the **risk of losing lives to starvation and malnutrition**, somewhere in the world if we do not take adequate precautions.
3. This requires not only **coordinated global action**; it would also turn out to be the **test of global concern for mankind in general**.

**Conclusion:**

- **Injecting $5-trillion** into the world economy indeed good news. But taking **collective ownership to fight a global war against the virus will require a lot more than writing cheques**.
- Eventually, there is no doubt that **human talent will triumph** over the microscopic virus. It may be some months before we declare our win.
❖ But the economic devastation, that would have been caused as a result will be no less than the aftermath of a world war. Economies of the world are inexorably intertwined.
❖ An orderly reconstruction of the global economy, which is equitable and inclusive, will eventually involve renegotiating terms of trade among key trading blocs, concerted action among central bankers to stabilise currencies, and a responsible way to regulate and manage global commodity markets.
❖ Remember, historically, it is always the weakling or the oppressed, who have caused transformational changes in the world order.

2. USA threatens to stop money to WHO. How is it funded currently?

**Context:**
- US President Donald Trump threatened to freeze US funding to the World Health Organization (WHO), saying the international group had "missed the call" on the coronavirus pandemic.
- Trump said the body had "called it wrong" on COVID-19 and that it was very "China centric" in its approach, suggesting that the WHO had gone along with Beijing's efforts months ago to under-represent the severity of the outbreak.
- The American President declared he would cut off US funding for the organisation, then backtracked and said he would strongly consider such a move.

**Key Facts about World Health Organization (WHO):**
- The World Health Organization (WHO), founded in 1948, is a specialized agency of the United Nations with a broad mandate to act as a coordinating authority on international health issues.
- The U.S. government (U.S.) has long been actively engaged with WHO, providing financial and technical support as well as participating in its governance structure.
- The U.S. is currently the largest contributor to WHO.

**How is the WHO funded?**
There are four kinds of contributions that make up funding for the WHO.
1. These are assessed contributions, specified voluntary contributions, core voluntary contributions, and PIP contributions.
2. According to the WHO website, assessed contributions are the dues countries pay in order to be a member of the Organization.
3. **Assessed contributions** (set amounts expected to be paid by member-state governments, scaled by income and population)
4. The amount each Member State must pay is calculated relative to the country’s wealth and population.
5. Voluntary contributions come from Member States (in addition to their assessed contribution) or from other partners. They can range from flexible to highly earmarked.

6. **Voluntary contributions** (other funds provided by member states, plus contributions from private organizations and individuals).

7. Core voluntary contributions allow less well-funded activities to benefit from a better flow of resources and ease implementation bottlenecks that arise when immediate financing is lacking.

8. **Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP) Contributions** were started in 2011 to improve and strengthen the sharing of influenza viruses with human pandemic potential, and to increase the access of developing countries to vaccines and other pandemic related supplies.

9. In recent years, assessed contributions to the WHO have declined, and now account for less than one-fourth of its funding.

10. These funds are important for the WHO, because they provide a level of predictability and minimise dependence on a narrow donor base.

11. Voluntary contributions make up for most of the remaining funding.

**The current funding pattern:**

1. The **United States** is currently the WHO's biggest contributor, making up 14.67 per cent of total funding by providing USD 553.1 million.

2. The US is followed by the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation** forming 9.76 per cent or USD 367.7 million.

3. The third biggest contributor is the **GAVI Vaccine Alliance** at 8.39 per cent, with the UK (7.79 per cent) and Germany (5.68 per cent) coming fourth and fifth respectively.

4. The four next biggest donors are international bodies: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (5.09 per cent), World Bank (3.42 per cent), Rotary International (3.3 per cent), and the European Commission (3.3 per cent). India makes up 0.48 per cent of total contributions, and China 0.21 per cent.

5. Out of the total funds, USD 1.2 billion is allotted for the **Africa region**, USD 1.02 billion for the **Eastern Mediterranean region**, USD 963.9 million for the WHO headquarters, followed by **South East Asia** (USD 198.7 million), **Europe** (USD 200.4 million), **Western Pacific** (USD 152.1 million), and Americas (39.2 million) regions respectively. India is part of the South East Asia region.

6. The biggest programme area where the money is allocated is **polio eradication (26.51 per cent)**, followed by increasing access to **essential health and nutrition services (12.04 per cent)**, and **preventable diseases vaccines (8.89 per cent)**.

**Key Issues for the U.S. with WHO:**

- The U.S. government has long supported WHO and continues to be its largest donor at a moment when WHO is undergoing major reforms.

- Going forward, there are several key questions regarding U.S. engagement with the WHO, including:
  - The extent to which the U.S. will continue its financial and other support of WHO and what role it will play in WHO's governance and helping it enact needed reforms;
  - The progress made by WHO under the leadership of its new Director-General in improving the effectiveness of the organization and addressing its challenges; and
  - The quality of technical and governance partnerships between the U.S. and WHO, especially in the event of a new public health emergency or outbreak in the future.

**WHO faces a number of institutional challenges:**

- The WHO faces a number of challenges including a broad mandate with limited, inflexible funding, bureaucratic complexity, and a track record of poor responses to recent health emergencies; reforms have been initiated to address some of these challenges.
• A scope of responsibility that has grown over time while its budget has remained flat or been reduced;
• A budget that has become less flexible with greater reliance on voluntary contributions often earmarked for specific activities;
• A cumbersome, decentralized, and bureaucratic governance structure; and
• A dual mandate of being both a technical agency with health expertise and a political body where states debate and negotiate on sometimes divisive health issues.

Way Forward: Reforming the World Health Organization:
❖ As an intergovernmental body, WHO is not immune to global power-play as is being witnessed by reports of the director-general having shied away from naming the virus after the country where it originated China and delaying the declaration of a pandemic.
❖ Moreover, only a quarter of its budget comes from contributions from UN member-states, and the real money to power its work is from voluntary funding by countries and organisations.
❖ WHO, as a global convener, plays a key role in standard-setting in public health. This is a matter of much importance to the “haves” of the global economy, especially those with a vibrant pharmaceutical industry.
❖ The United States is the largest contributor, but the Chinese have also recognised WHO’s importance.
❖ The main decision-making body at WHO is the annual World Health Assembly (WHA), attended by all member-states.
❖ With demands for a better, real-time response from WHO, the Executive Board (EB) should be made a standing body with the elected countries having Geneva-based permanent representatives on it. The EB should meet when required and direct action by WHO.

3. Trade in tatters: On the global slump

Global slump: Decline in Trade all over the world:
• As IMF Managing Director observed, the global economy is set to contract sharply in 2020, with “the lockdown needed to fight” the pandemic affecting billions worldwide.
• The only certainty right now in a pandemic-gripped world is the all-enveloping uncertainty.
• And the WTO acknowledged as much when it released its outlook for global trade last week.
• The WTO expects all regions, save Africa, West Asia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, to suffer double-digit declines in exports and imports this year even under its “optimistic scenario”, which postulates a recovery starting in the second half.
• Projecting merchandise trade to plummet by anywhere between 13% and 32% in 2020, it added a categoric caveat: at the moment, it is only able to posit a wide range of possible trajectories for the predicted decline in trade given the unprecedented nature of the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 outbreak and the uncertainty around its precise economic impact.
• Economists at the WTO, however, appear more certain that the disruption and resultant blow to trade will in all likelihood be far worse than the slump brought on by the global financial crisis of 2008.
• The tight restrictions on movement and social distancing norms across geographies have led to severe curbs on labour supply, transport and travel and the shuttering of whole sectors from hotels and non-essential retail to tourism and significant parts of manufacturing.
How does this compare to the 2008 global financial crisis?

- It is comparable in terms of global growth impact over the year.
- However, this recession operates at an elevated speed, being twice as fast as the economic downturn brought on by the 2008 financial crisis. Furthermore, the growth shock impact for the quarter is at least twice as strong compared to the Great Financial Crisis.
- The time axis adds an additional element of uncertainty. Where previous crises have come as a sudden shock, the COVID-19 pandemic is a slowly growing and evolving shock to the global system, making it all the harder to evaluate scenarios.
- We’re months away from even starting on the road to recovery and, at this time, we expect the macro and market impact to last about two quarters, possibly three.

Global trade will plunge by up to a third in 2020 amid pandemic: WTO:

1. The WTO and the IMF chief have pointed to the fact that unlike the recession that accompanied the global financial crisis just over a decade ago, the current downturn is unique.
2. Global supply chains have increased in complexity, especially in industries such as electronics and automotive products, making them particularly vulnerable to the current disruptions, with countries that are a part of these value linkages set to find trade more severely impacted.
3. Global trade growth is expected to plummet by up to a third in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, the World Trade Organisation, warning that the numbers would be “ugly”.
4. “World trade is expected to fall by between 13% and 32% in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts normal economic activity and life around the world.
5. There were a wide range of possibilities for how trade would be hit by the “unprecedented” health crisis.
6. Also, services trade in which India has a higher global share as an exporter ($214 billion, or 3.5%, in 2019) than in merchandise exports may be significantly affected by the transport and travel curbs.
7. A small sliver of silver in this bleak outlook for services trade is the role that the WTO sees for information technology services as companies try to enable employees to work from home and people order essentials and drugs online and socialise remotely.
8. India’s IT exporters have been busy supporting their overseas clients’ business continuity plans in the face of the pandemic and may find this hand-holding at a time of dire need earning them loyalty-linked business when economic activity revives.
9. Still, as the WTO chief, crucially observes, a **rebound in global economic activity will require trade to flow freely across borders** as vitally as any fiscal or monetary stimulus.

10. The world will be best served if nations do not turn insular and erect new barriers to the movement of goods, services and people in the aftermath of the pandemic.

- Both the **organised and informal sectors of the economy** could see heavy attrition of employees and workers.
- Major employment generating sectors such as construction, real estate, hospitality, tourism have cut down on their services **leading to unemployment**.
- The worst hit are the **small firms and their employees**. Many migrant workers were seen thronging railway stations to go back to their home towns as they face job losses.
- Even in the organised sector, while the government has issued advisory to enterprises not to cut salaries and lay-off workers, given difficult conditions they may have to lay-off their employees.

**Steps to be taken in way forward:**

1. In the harvest season, **farmers need logistical support** for moving their produce to markets.
2. Lenders, including NBFCs, should be granted freedom to **reschedule their loan** accounts so that borrowers are not under pressure to repay for fear of turning delinquent.
3. **A credit guarantee fund** that will support non-delinquent borrowers for the next six months will be a good option. Such a fund can be financed through a domestic bond offering.
4. **The bankruptcy code** should be suspended for the next six months, at least for MSMEs.
5. And why not a GST holiday for the next three months? The loss of revenue will be ₹3-lakh crore at worst, but in reality will be much lower than that because economic activity is at a standstill now.
6. Such a move will **ease cash flows for business** and also obviate the need for statutory compliances at a time when the focus will have to be on getting businesses back on track.
7. The crisis now is without precedent and the solutions cannot be conservative. Generous support from the government, and quickly delivered, is the need of the hour.

**Conclusion:**

- The global disruption caused by the current crisis needs global support on both monetary and fiscal front. This may require a major comeback of the roles of the public authorities, the scope of sovereign powers and the call for better regulations.
- Within India too, there could be a trend towards discrimination, with ‘social distancing’ producing undesirable social practices.
- The more the virus persists, the deeper such practices would get. We already know what these practices feel like; it can only get worse from here.
- Also, as the WTO observes, a **rebound in global economic activity will require trade to flow freely** across borders as vitally as any fiscal or monetary stimulus.
- In this context, the world will be best served if nations do not turn inwards and install new barriers to the movement of goods, services and people in the aftermath of the pandemic.

**4. How covid-19 is transforming global manufacturing**

**Brief Background:**

- Firms began relocating production to low-wage countries in the early 1990s, aided by the fall of the Iron Curtain, China’s global integration and eventual accession to the World Trade Organization, and the rise of containerization.
- The period **between 1990 and the 2008 global financial crisis** has been called an era of hyper-globalization in which **global value chains accounted for about 60% of global trade**.
The 2008 global financial and economic crisis marked the beginning of the end of this era of hyper-globalization. In 2011, global value chains stopped expanding. They have not grown again since.

This reversal was driven by uncertainty:

- From 2008 to 2011, the World Uncertainty Index increased by 200%.
- To compare, during the 2002-03 outbreak of the Severe acute respiratory syndrome, or Sars, the World Uncertainty Index rose by 70%.
- After the United Kingdom voted in 2016 to leave the European Union, the World Uncertainty Index surged by 250%.
- When uncertainty rises, global value chains suffer. Based on past data, one can predict that a 300% increase in uncertainty—as the covid-19 pandemic seems likely to produce—would reduce global supply-chain activity by 35.4%.
- Firms no longer consider the cost savings of offshoring to be worth the risk.

Shifting the medium of Labour force by manufacturing companies: Robots:

- As the covid-19 pandemic escalates, the risks inherent in global supply chains are more apparent than ever.
- Rather than await a return to business as usual, with manufacturing activities concentrated in countries where labour is cheap and plentiful, advanced-economy companies are shifting their focus to the lowest-wage workers of all: robots.

Robots are minimizing the importance of Labour costs in Production:

1. At a time when adopting robots is cheaper than ever, the incentive to reshore production is even stronger. The arithmetic is simple.
2. A company in, say, the United States of America would have to pay an American worker a lot more than, say, a Vietnamese or Bangladeshi one.
3. But a United-States-of-America-based robot would not demand wages at all, let alone benefits like health insurance or sick leave.
4. Investment in robots is not new. Advanced-economy firms have been pursuing it since the mid-1990s, led by the automotive industry, which can account for 50-60% of a country’s robot stock.
6. Only South Korea (with 710 robots per 10,000 workers) and Singapore (with 658 robots per 10,000 workers) have a higher ratio. The United States of America has 200 robots per 10,000 workers.
7. In fact, when the 2008 crisis struck, some countries, such as Germany, already had enough robots to minimize the importance of labour costs in production.
8. Many others, aided by the sharp post-2008 decline in interest rates relative to wages, boosted robot adoption and reshored a larger share of production.

**Reshoring activities adopting by the developed countries in near future:**

1. The same is likely to happen today. Based on monetary policy so far, a **30% drop in interest rates can be expected**, as central banks try to offset the damage of the covid-19 pandemic.

2. Past data indicate that this could bring a **7% acceleration in robot adoption**. (It will not bring an unbridled boom in robot adoption, because rising uncertainty also deters investment.)

3. This trend will be concentrated in the sectors that are **most exposed to global value chains**.

4. In Germany, that means autos and transport equipment, electronics, and textiles—industries that import around 12% of their inputs from low-wage countries. (Overall, the German economy imports 6.5% of the inputs it uses.)

5. Globally, the industries where the **most reshoring activity** is taking place are chemicals, metal products, and electrical products and electronics. The chemical industry stands out as the top reshorer in France, Germany, Italy and the United States of America.

6. This trend poses a **major threat to many developing countries’ growth models**, which depend on low-cost manufacturing and exports of intermediate inputs.

7. In Central and Eastern Europe, some countries have responded to this challenge by investing in robots themselves. The Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Slovenia (which have large foreign-owned auto sectors) now have more robots per 10,000 workers than the United States of America or France.

8. And the strategy seems to be working: they remain an attractive offshoring destination for rich countries.

**How to respond to COVID-19 implications in manufacturing and supply chains and increase resilience:**

- Global Value Chains are undergoing profound changes, with important implications for the **manufacturing and production ecosystem**.

- In 2019, WEF developed a framework to anticipate the ongoing reconfiguration of Global Value Chains and derive key imperatives for businesses and policy makers.

- The emergence of COVID-19 is accelerating the change of global value delivery models, with unprecedented consequences for manufactures and supply chains.

- Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on manufacturers and supply chains requires **both new approaches and new forms of collaboration** to increase overall resilience.

- Therefore, there is a need of **proposing a new framework** to help governments and companies think through the implications of the ongoing transformations of Global Value Chains for their industrial development and investment strategies.

- Thinking of new opportunities for multi-stakeholder collaboration for national economies in order to advance their **levels of readiness, built resilience and have a role to play in next-generation Global Value Chains**.

**Conclusion:**

- **Low-cost manufacturing hubs in Asia** may have a harder time in economic terms, especially in the wake of the pandemic.

- China, which secured its economic rise by establishing itself at the centre of many global value chains, will face particularly serious challenges, despite its plans to shift to **higher-value-added activities and boost domestic consumption**.

- Between rising protectionism (especially in the United States) and the covid-19 pandemic, the advanced economies seem to be **geared up for a manufacturing renaissance**.
• But while this may reduce risks for large firms, it probably will not benefit very many advanced-economy workers, let alone the developing countries from which production is being shifted. For that, governments will need to implement policies suited to this new economic order.

5. Resetting balance

Context: Ban on automatic route:
• 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.
• 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.

Why Automatic route of FDI flows restricted:
1. The Indian government’s move, cleared by the Union Cabinet, comes days after it emerged that the People’s Bank of China has increased its stake in HDFC Bank, the country’s largest private lender, to over 1%.
2. But while the PBOC investment came through the portfolio investment route, the FDI move is more strategic and is aimed at blocking any attempt to restrict entities from across the border to acquire a significant beneficial interest.
3. Stock market regulator SEBI is separately keeping tabs on investments from China and some other countries.
4. The latest move by the department for promotion of industry and internal trade, the agency responsible for FDI policy, will not just impact new investments but also equity infusion in existing companies in India, where Chinese entities have equity stakes.
5. Most FDI flows into India are under the automatic route, which means companies only need to inform authorities after the investment is made.
6. The latest move signals a growing worry within government that China might seek to acquire Indian companies by exploiting their financial vulnerability.
7. The stunning move is in stark contrast to the restraint the Indian government has exercised in not joining the global chorus of indignation over China’s attempt to conceal the outbreak of the
pandemic in Wuhan — a lapse that has been widely adjudged to have been a major contributor to the enormity of the public health emergency that has already claimed over 1.5 lakh lives globally and crippled economies and markets.

**Significance of restricting Investments:**
- Sources said the government had explored the option of putting a general ban on foreign investment through the automatic route, but decided against it due to wariness of being seen as having turned protectionist and insular.
- Putting FDI from all countries under the approval route would have also slowed down inflows, which are critical at this time.
- With the threat of Chinese capital moving in appearing serious, the authorities decided to be specific in a turn away from the cautiousness that has defined New Delhi’s approach towards Beijing.
- Sources said that during the deliberations one school of thought had favoured a more nuanced approach, arguing that greenfield investments should be let in, but the leadership decided to go the whole hog.

**Counter argument from China to revised FDI norms:**
1. 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.
2. The Chinese embassy not only cited its investments but also the “donations” made by Chinese companies to help fight the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Chinese enterprises actively made donations to help India fight COVID-19 epidemic.
6. 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.”
7. Therefore, Without the appropriate legal and regulatory sanction, India might experience reciprocal measures.
8. 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.
9. These shares will preserve the decision making by Indian innovators, while also providing them access to foreign capital.

**Need to find a strong separation between Commerce and National Security:**
1. Beyond the question of accountability for the spread of the coronavirus, many countries are rethinking the very nature of their commercial engagement with China.
2. On a host of issues ranging from trade and investment to intellectual property protection, there is an inescapable sense that China has gamed the global system for unilateral gains. India certainly has had a longer learning curve than the West in recognising the relationship between commerce and national security.
3. Since the early 1990s, India bet that expanding economic cooperation with China will help mitigate political disputes. But the differences have only become intractable even as China became stronger economically.
4. India gave China an easy pass into the WTO. It let cheap imports from China undermine India’s manufacturing sector and run up a massive trade surplus. India allowed massive Chinese penetration of its telecom, digital and other advanced sectors only to discover the multiple negative consequences.

5. The last few years have seen a new approach that has seen India oppose China’s Belt and Road Initiative and walk out of the RCEP negotiations citing the trade imbalance with China.

6. The decision on Chinese FDI can be seen as one of that piece. But the puzzle of dealing with a rising China’s strategic economic onslaught will test India for a long time.

Conclusion:
❖ 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.

SECURITY ISSUES

At the edge of a new nuclear arms race

Context:
• In mid-April, a report issued by the United States State Department on “Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Non-proliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments (Compliance Report)” raised concerns that China might be conducting nuclear tests with low yields at its Lop Nur test site, in violation of its Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) undertakings.
• The U.S. report also claims that Russia has conducted nuclear weapons experiments that produced a nuclear yield and were inconsistent with ‘zero yield’ understanding underlying the CTBT, though it was uncertain about how many such experiments had been conducted.
• Russia and China have rejected the U.S.’s claims, but with growing rivalry among major powers the report is a likely harbinger of a new nuclear arms race.

What is Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)?
• It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 September 1996, but has not entered into force.
• Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is a legally binding global ban on nuclear explosive testing.
• It is a multilateral treaty that bans all nuclear explosions, for both civilian and military purposes, in all environments.
• Since the time it was opened for signature, India did not support the treaty based on its discriminatory nature.
• For decades, a ban on nuclear testing was seen as the necessary first step towards curbing the nuclear arms race but Cold War politics made it impossible.
By the time the CTBT negotiations began in Geneva in 1994, global politics had changed. The Cold War had ended and the nuclear arms race was over.

Of the 44 listed countries, to date only 36 have ratified the treaty. China, Egypt, Iran, Israel and the U.S. have signed but not ratified.

North Korea, India and Pakistan are the three who have not signed.

The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) Preparatory Commission is based in Vienna.

The organization promotes the ratification of the treaty, and implements the verification regime so that it is fully operational when the treaty enters into force.

**Drawbacks regarding CTBT:**
1. S. came up with the idea of defining the “comprehensive test ban” as a “zero yield” test ban that would prohibit supercritical hydro-nuclear tests but not sub-critical hydrodynamic nuclear tests.
2. However, US announced a *science-based nuclear Stockpile Stewardship* and Management Program to keep the nuclear laboratories in business and the US happy.
3. Accordingly, the CTBT prohibits all parties from carrying out “any nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion”; these terms are neither defined nor elaborated.
4. Another controversy arose regarding the entry-into-force provisions (Article 14) of the treaty.
5. After India’s proposals for anchoring the CTBT in a disarmament framework did not find acceptance, in June 1996, India announced its decision to withdraw from the negotiations.
6. Unhappy at this turn, the U.K., China and Pakistan took the lead in revising the entry-into-force provisions.
7. The new provisions listed 44 countries by name whose ratification was necessary for the treaty to enter into force and included India.
8. India protested that this attempt at arm-twisting violated a country’s sovereign right to decide if it wanted to join a treaty but was ignored. The CTBT was adopted by a majority vote and opened for signature.
9. **CTBT has therefore not entered into force and lacks legal authority.**

In order to operationalize this treaty, some measures have been taken to build trust among the states, such as:

- The Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)- Established in 1997, it has been working towards bringing the Treaty into force, making preparations for effective implementation, in particular by establishing its verification regime and also operate the IMS in it.

**The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO):**
1. The supporting organisation of the treaty, i.e. CTBTO has been trying to build trust with India and address its concerns which have restricted India from joining it.
2. In this direction, the CTBTO has invited India to join as an observer, which will let India know what is going on this front and obtain benefits from its information without actually binding itself.
3. Nevertheless, an international organisation to verify the CTBT was established in Vienna and an annual budget of $130 million.
4. Ironically, the U.S. is the largest contributor with a share of $17 million. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO) runs an elaborate verification system built around a network of over 325 seismic, radionuclide, infrasound and hydroacoustic (underwater) monitoring stations.
5. The CTBTO has refrained from backing the U.S.’s allegations.
6. Russia and China have been concerned about the S.’s growing technological lead particularly in missile defence and conventional global precision-strike capabilities.
7. Russia has responded by **exploring hypersonic delivery systems** and theatre systems while China has embarked on a **modernisation programme** to enhance the survivability of its arsenal which is considerably smaller.

8. In addition, both countries are also investing heavily in offensive cyber capabilities.

9. The new U.S. report stops short of accusing China for a violation but refers to “a high level of activity at the Lop Nur test site throughout 2019” and concludes that together with its **lack of transparency**, China provokes concerns about its intent to **observe the zero-yield moratorium on testing**.

10. The **New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START)** limits U.S. and Russian arsenals but will **expire in 2021** and U.S. has already indicated that it does not plan to extend it.

11. Instead, US would like to bring China into some kind of nuclear arms control talks, something China has avoided by pointing to the fact that the **S. and Russia still account for over 90% of global nuclear arsenals**.

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### A history of nuclear tests and disarmament treaties

Since the first nuclear explosion in July 16, 1945, there have been a total of 2,056 tests conducted by eight nuclear-armed states.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>USSR/Russia</td>
<td>715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>North Korea</td>
<td>6</td>
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</table>

**Conclusion:**

- Both China and Russia have **dismissed the U.S.‘s allegations**, pointing to the US administration’s backtracking from other negotiated agreements such as the Iran nuclear deal or the U.S.-Russia Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.
❖ Tensions with China are already high with trade and technology disputes, militarisation in the South China Sea and most recently, with the novel coronavirus pandemic. The U.S. could also be preparing the ground for resuming testing at Nevada.

❖ The Cold War rivalry was already visible when the nuclear arms race began in the 1950s. New rivalries have already emerged.

❖ Resumption of nuclear testing may signal the demise of the ill-fated CTBT, marking the beginnings of a new nuclear arms race.

❖ It is “high time” to bring the treaty into force and countries should take the last steps to finish one of the longest sought international instruments in the area of non-proliferation and disarmament.
1. Virtual Courts and way forward

Introduction:
The Supreme Court on Monday 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”.

1. Virtual Court is a concept aimed at eliminating presence of litigant or lawyer in the court and adjudication of the case online.
2. An e-court or Electronic Court means a location in which matters of law are adjudicated upon, in the presence of qualified Judge(s) and which has a well-developed technical infrastructure. An e-court is, however, different from a computerised court.
3. In the case of e-court, everything is done in an “online environment” through the use of Internet and other Information and Communication Technology (ICT), whereas a computerised court is nothing more than a court having computers and basic level hardware and software.
4. The e-courts project is about providing ICT so as to enable courts to make justice delivery system affordable and cost-effective. This would be beneficial for both improving the court processes and rendering citizen-centric services.
5. E-courts are aimed to make legal processes easier and more user friendly. In an e-court, the entire work is executed digitally, wherein, the information that is shared and generated is stored as a database and synched to a particular software. This software can be accessed by litigants, judges and advocates. The primary intention of e-courts is to make the justice delivery system affordable, transparent, speedy and accountable by limiting the paper filings.

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

Advantages of e-courts:
1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. With the help of internet, the documents of a case can be accessed easily from anywhere at anytime.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

Demerits of e-courts:

- 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 can not be denied.

Solutions to address the challenges:

- 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.
- Another solution to address e-court related challenges would be to upgrade the present state of infrastructure. The present judicial infrastructure does not support establishing the e-court project. The government needs to identify and develop the infrastructure that would be required to support the e-court project.
- One aspect that needs to be focussed 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 familiarise the Judges with the e-courts framework and procedure can give a huge impetus to the successful running of e-courts.
The 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.

Link: [https://youtu.be/hxAajGWQgL8](https://youtu.be/hxAajGWQgL8)

2. Pandemic & Public health system

Introduction:

- India currently has over 2301 confirmed cases of COVID-19. The government has been quick to adopt a multipronged strategy, including issuance of clear guidelines to ministries for coordinated action, imposition of travel restrictions, suspension of visas, large-scale screening and contact tracing as well as regular dissemination of information to the public. Mounting a swift response involving all stakeholders in a country of India’s scale and diversity is undoubtedly commendable. With these measures in place we can be confident that India will be able to successfully limit the spread of the disease.
- Meanwhile in Italy, the number of coronavirus cases and deaths continue to surge. Doctors and nurses are under increasing pressure and are calling out for help while medical supplies run out rapidly. In the US, dozens of health-care workers have fallen ill with covid-19, and more are quarantined after exposure to the virus, an expected but worrisome development as the U.S. health system braces for a surge in infections. The need of the hour is to build a resilient public health system that can prevent diseases, promote good health and respond quickly to minimise loss of life when faced with an outbreak of this magnitude.

Is COVID 19 threatening our public health system?

1. COVID 19 is a new strain of coronavirus and knowledge regarding it is very limited.
2. The entire world is undertaking research to what kind of vaccine will work against this virus.
3. The government was fast enough to take rapid actions to limit travel by suspending visas and quarantining all incoming travellers has helped. All international passengers entering India undergo Universal Health Screening.
4. According to health officials, more than 1 million passengers have been screened at airports, limiting the entry of coronavirus.
5. The response also mirrors India’s reaction to previous disease outbreaks, including Ebola in 2014 and Nipah in 2018, when people were quickly put into quarantine or under surveillance. Indian citizens have been advised to avoid all travel abroad, and citizens have been evacuated from Iran, Italy, China and Japan.
6. Since the outbreak of the virus in China in late December last year, India has had an advance warning of almost three months to help prepare the country for this public health emergency. India can “flatten the curve” to handle the shock of overwhelming cases (Sharon Begley, 2020) only through social distancing and maintaining hand hygiene by the common populace.
7. India has implemented screening at airports as per directions from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Government of India (GoI) which has been taking effective strides to control the spread of pandemic.
8. The pandemic has not only stirred India’s humongous healthcare network into action but also sharply brought into focus its shortcomings.
9. Our expenditure on health is low, the facilities and infrastructure in public health hospitals is extremely strain.
10. According to the National Health Profile-2019, released by the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence, India has 7,13,986 beds spread across 25,778 government hospitals. The Railways run 122 hospitals across the country with a cumulative 13,355 beds, while the Employees State Insurance Corporation has 155 hospitals with 21,931 beds.
11. The government placed an order of 40,000 ventilators with public sector undertakings, asking them to ensure supplies by June.
12. On the health infrastructure front, Prime Minister Narendra Modi set aside Rs 15,000 crore as an immediate measure with directions to the state governments to make upgrading healthcare system their topmost priority for the next few months.

**Third Stage of COVID 19?**
1. India has begun preparing for Stage-3 of the outbreak following recommendation from members of the COVID-19 task force, even as Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) continues to maintain that there is no evidence of community transmission in the country yet.
2. The preparations have already begun in Delhi, where the government has started scaling up its health infrastructure to handle the evolving situation.
3. According to scientists, three stages for the transmission of covid-19 are being discussed. These can be explained as Stage 1 which is when the country receives imported cases, stage 2 is local transmission when persons can get the infection from known sources.
4. **Stage 3 is community transmission**, when the source of infection is not known for majority of the infected population and new positive cases can no longer be traced to diagnosed cases. This would mean, the scale of the outbreak increases.
5. According to the government, currently India is largely reporting cases either having a travel history to the virus hit countries or contact history with an infected person.
6. When cases with no travel history or direct contact to diagnosed cases start coming in large numbers, then we take it as a beginning of community spread. Though in that sense, India is not in Stage 3, but it would be better that we do our preparations as if we are in phase-3. In case of community rise, numbers start rising exponentially.
7. According to Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), India still remains at Stage 2 (local transmission) and is yet to enter Stage-3 of the disease cycle.
8. India also looks to expand its testing capacity over the next few days, as more private laboratories come on board. Private hospitals, too have begun gearing up to help when there is likely surge in infected cases by creating adequate number of isolation wards.

**Public Health System scenario:**
1. We have a very strong surveillance system in our country which is called Integrated Surveillance system which has spread out to 700 districts.
2. Our detection system is very good.
3. **Rapid Response Team** is active in all 700 districts.
4. India’s Public health infrastructure of epidemic front has been very strong because we have repeatedly faced such infection like recent one was swine flu epidemic.
5. ICMR, has immediately acted to create a testing capacity in India which is currently underutilized.
6. The National Health Policy (NHP) 2017 advocated allocating resources of up to two-thirds or more to primary care as it enunciated the goal of achieving “the highest possible level of good health and well-being, through a preventive and promotive healthcare orientation”.
7. The government’s recent steps to incentivise the private sector to open hospitals and testing centers.
8. Individual states are adopting technology to support health-insurance schemes.
9. There is an immediate need to increase the public spending to 2.5% of GDP, despite that being lower than global average of 5.4%.
10. The achievement of a distress-free and comprehensive wellness system for all hinges on the performance of health and wellness centres as they will be instrumental in reducing the greater burden of out-of-pocket expenditure on health.
11. There is a need to depart from the current trend of erratic and insufficient increases in health spending and make substantial and sustained investments in public health over the next decade.
12. Increase the Public-Private Partnerships to increase the last-mile reach of healthcare.
13. India should take cue from other developing countries like Thailand to work towards providing Universal Health Coverage. UHC includes three components: Population coverage, disease coverage and cost coverage.

Conclusion:
- India needs a holistic approach to tackle problem of his coronavirus pandemic. This includes the active collaboration of all stakeholders public, private sectors, and individuals. A more dynamic and pro-active approach is needed to handle the dual disease burden.
- We need to adhere to social distancing which is the best remedy now.
- This phase requires transforming from government preparedness to community preparedness.

3. Medical devices under drugs law

Introduction:
- To ensure that all medical devices meet certain standards of quality and efficacy, the Union Health Ministry notified medical equipment used on humans or animals as “drugs” under Section 3 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, with effect from April 1, 2020. The ministry, through a gazette notification, also released the Medical Devices Amendment Rules, 2020, for mandatory registration of medical devices.
- The aim is to regulate all medical devices so that they meet certain standards of quality. Besides it will also make medical device companies accountable for quality and safety of their products.
- Once notified, the manufacture, import and sale of all medical devices will need to be certified by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO). At present, only 23 categories of medical devices are regulated under the law.

Why there is a need to revise medical device policies?
1. In spite of India’s global dominance with pharmaceuticals and vaccines, India continues to lag far behind in the medical devices sector. India imports over 70 percent of its domestic medical device requirements.
2. Indian domestic manufacturing focusses on low cost segment of medical consumables lagging behind in mid tech segment.
3. Indian domestic manufacturing is dominant mainly in high-volume and low-cost segment of medical consumables such as disposable syringes and gloves, which contribute to a large chunk of the country’s medical device exports.
4. Success stories from Israel and Ireland should guide the governments at both the Centre and States in order to really spur the growth of the domestic industry.
5. The implications of multiple labelling requirements under various new rules and the unclear influence under the GST regime seems to be adding up to the complexity of business.
6. **Without legislative backing**, the regulator Central Drug Standard Control Organization was helpless to curb both the flood of substandard imports as well as the production of poor quality medical devices in the country.
7. **Lack of distinct identity** for the medical device industry has acted as a substantial deterrent to the expansion of the sector.

**Significance and implications of this move:**
1. Majority of medical devices are completely unregulated in India. With this move, all devices will be brought into the regulatory framework which is important from a patient safety perspective.
2. Apart from expanding the scope of regulation to ensure safety and efficacy, the move may pave the way for regulation of prices under **the Drugs Price Control Order (DPCO)**.
3. It will also make companies, in case of violations, **liable to be penalised in a court of law**.
4. Companies will now have to seek **approval from the drug controller** to manufacture, import and sell any medical device in the country.
5. The Drug Controller-General of India (DCGI) would **regulate** the import, manufacture and sale of these devices from January 1, 2020.
6. All these devices will have to be registered under the quality parameters prescribed under Medical Devices Rules 2017 and other standards set by the Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS) certification.
7. Also, companies which are engaged in the manufacture and import of these equipment, will have **to seek the necessary permission or license** from the Drug Controller-General of India.
8. Medical devices shall be registered with **the Central Licensing Authority** through an identified online portal established by **the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)**. Such registration is voluntary for a period of 18 months, after which it will be mandatory.
9. The manufacturer of a medical device shall upload the information relating to that medical device for registration on the **“Online System for Medical Devices”** established by the CDSCO. Importers too will be required to do the same.

**Laws governing MDI in India:**
1. Earlier, only notified medical devices were regulated in India.
2. In India, medical devices continue to be regulated as “drugs” via the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, and that newly introduced Medical Device Rules, 2017, which came into effect on January 1, 2018.
3. New rules classify medical devices based on risk, as is done by the Global Harmonization Task Force.

**Way forward:**
- ✓ The medical device industry is a unique blend of engineering and medicine. It involves the creation of machines that are then used to support life within the human body. Given this, it needs not only careful regulation but also the highest ethical standards.
- ✓ The notification issued has innumerable benefits, starting with settings qualitative standard of devices and to ensure the safety of patients.
- ✓ It will attract FDI and increase our export.
- ✓ The new medical device rules were framed with the intention of making the domestic industry on par with global manufacturing practices. While the policy has the right intent for addressing multiple aspects of this paradigm shift encouraging domestic manufacturers, boosting
innovation and R&D (research and development), the industry is looking for an assurance on follow-through at the basic level.

✓ Streamline the licensing process to ensure that manufacturers who already possess reputed international certifications can obtain the Indian mark easily. Currently, a domestic manufacturer with a CE mark must undergo nearly the same regulatory grind as a new manufacturer, a rather discouraging measure.

✓ The healthcare startups have gained tremendous private equity and venture capital attention over the past year and this trend is expected to intensify in the coming years. The state governments should set-up schemes to fund the medical device startups.

✓ It is vital for India to increase research funding for better execution through innovative, dedicated platforms.

Link: [https://youtu.be/C8piBawuLX8](https://youtu.be/C8piBawuLX8)

4. Recognition of national parties

Introduction:

- The Election Commission is reviewed the status of political parties. Based on their performance in the last two elections, the poll panel issued notices to three political parties – the CPI, the NCP and the TMC.
- All three had been asked them to explain why their national party status should not be revoked. According to The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968, a political party can be recognised as a national party if it fulfills certain conditions.

Election Commission (EC) has amended rules, whereby it will now review the national and state party status of political parties every ten years instead of the present five.

1. Recognition as a national or a State party ensures that the election symbol is not used by any other political entity in polls across India.
2. The commission has amended paragraph 6C of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 to affect the change. It was last amended in 2011.
3. This change in rules will ensure that ruling parties do not lose their status due to anti-incumbency factor after every election.
4. However, the criteria of being recognised as a national and state party will remain unchanged.

EC’s powers in a dispute over the election symbol in case a party splits:

1. Para 15 of the Symbols Order, 1968, states “when rival sections or groups of a recognised political party each of whom claims to be that party, the commission after taking into account all the facts and circumstances of the case decides that
   a. one such rival section or group is recognised
   b. none such section or group is recognised
   c. decision of the Commission shall be binding on all such rival sections or groups
2. This applies to disputes in recognised national and state parties.
3. For splits in registered but unrecognised parties, the EC usually advises the warring factions to resolve their differences internally or to approach the court.
4. In case of disagreement the EC asks the party to prove its strength through its elected representatives (MPs and MLAs).
5. The party claiming the particular symbol if proves its majority through its elected representatives claims the symbol.
6. So far there hasn’t been any court case with respect to allocation of symbols.
7. In cases like the split of CPI in 1968 a breakaway group approached the ECI urging it to recognise them as CPI(Marxist).
8. The ECI recognised the faction as CPI(M) after it found that the votes secured by the MPs and MLAs supporting the breakaway group.

9. In case of split in AIADMK in 1987 the issue was resolved before EC was forced to make a decision on which group should retain the symbol.

10. In 1997 ECI introduced a new rule in which the splinter group had to register itself as separate party and could claim national or state party on the basis of its performance in state or central elections after registration.

Registration of political parties:
- Registration of Political parties is governed by the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- A party seeking registration under the said Section with the Commission has to submit an application to the Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation as per guidelines prescribed by the Election Commission of India in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 324 of the Commission of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

To be eligible for a ‘National Political Party of India:"
- It secures at least six percent of the valid votes polled in any four or more states, at a general election to the House of the People or, to the State Legislative Assembly.
- In addition, it wins at least four seats in the House of the People from any State or States.
- It wins at least two percent seats in the House of the People (i.e., 11 seats in the existing House having 543 members), and these members are elected from at least three different States.

To be eligible for a ‘State Political Party:
- It secures at least six percent of the valid votes polled in the State at a general election, either to the House of the People or to the Legislative Assembly of the State concerned.
- In addition, it wins at least two seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State concerned.
- It wins at least three percent (3%) of the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State, or at least three seats in the Assembly, whichever is more.

Benefits:
- If a party is recognised as a State Party, it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it in the State in which it is so recognised, and if a party is recognised as a ‘National Party’ it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it throughout India.
- Recognised ‘State’ and ‘National’ parties need only one proposer for filing the nomination and are also entitled for two sets of electoral rolls free of cost at the time of revision of rolls and their candidates get one copy of electoral roll free of cost during General Elections.
- They also get broadcast/telecast facilities over Akashvani/Doordarshan during general elections.
- Political parties are entitled to nominate “Star Campaigners” during General Elections. A recognized National or State party can have a maximum of 40 “Star campaigners” and a registered un-recognised party can nominate a maximum of 20 ‘Star Campaigners”.
- The travel expenses of star campaigners are not to be accounted for in the election expense accounts of candidates of their party.

Link: https://youtu.be/Cj96-8wr6Eg
5. Human Rights Day 2019

Introduction:
10 December, 2019 marked the 71st anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration that proclaims the inalienable rights of all people. Available in more than 500 languages, today it is the most translated document in the world. This year on Human Rights Day, the United Nations is highlighting the role of young people in leading the way to a better future for all people. The theme is Youth Standing Up for Human Rights.

1. Human Rights Day is observed every year on 10 December — the day the United Nations General Assembly adopted, in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): a milestone document proclaiming the inalienable rights which everyone is inherently entitled to as a human being regardless of race, colour, religion, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.
2. **2019 Theme: Youth Standing Up for Human Rights**
3. After a year marked by the 30th anniversary celebrations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which culminated on 20 November, 2019, our plan is to capitalise on the current momentum and spotlight the leadership role of youth in collective movements as a source of inspiration for a better future.
4. Under our universal call to action “Stand Up for Human rights,” we aim to celebrate the potential of youth as constructive agents of change, amplify their voices, and engage a broad range of global audiences in the promotion and protection of rights.
5. The campaign, led by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), is designed to encourage, galvanise, and showcase how youth all over the world stand up for rights and against racism, hate speech, bullying, discrimination, and climate change, to name a few.

Why Youth?
1. **Youth participation is essential to achieve sustainable development for all** - Participation in public life is a fundamental principle of human rights. Young people are seeking to participate in all decisions that have a direct and indirect impact upon their wellbeing. They need to be heard to inform more effective decision-making and achieve sustainable development for all.
2. **Youth can play a crucial role in positive change** - Young people have always been major drivers of political, economic and social transformation. They are at the forefront of grassroots mobilizations for positive change and bring fresh ideas and solutions for a better world.
3. **Empowering youth to better know and claim their rights will generate benefits globally.** Young people are often marginalized and encounter difficulties in accessing and enjoying their rights because of their age. Upholding their rights and empowering them to better know and claim them will generate benefits globally.

Human Rights and SDG’s:
- All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. This simple yet radical idea is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Human rights are at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as in the absence of human dignity we cannot drive sustainable development.
- A human right is clean water and food (SDG 6, SDG 2), it is health (SDG 3) and the opportunity to lead a peaceful life (SDG 16); It is life on land (SDG 15) and walking the Earth among its many beings (SDG 13, SDG 14).
- Human Rights are driven by progress on all SDGs, and the SDGs are driven by Advancements of human rights. The human rights movement has made great strides in the past seven decades, but abuses still occur with saddening regularity.
• The anniversary of the Declaration is an opportunity to celebrate successes and recommit ourselves to the principles outlined in the Declaration’s 30 Articles.
• As stated in the preamble, “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” The Declaration empowers all of us to stand up for our own human rights and those of others.

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC):
1. It is an autonomous public body constituted on 12 October 1993 under the Protection of Human Rights Ordinance of 28 September 1993.
2. It was given a statutory basis by the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 (TPHRA).
3. The NHRC is the National Human Rights Commission of India, responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights, defined by the Act as “rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants”.
4. In February 2019, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), a UN body based in Geneva, re-accredited India’s apex rights watchdog with the ‘A’ status, a perfect score.
5. The Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Bill 2019 passed in Lok Sabha. The bill aims to accelerate the process of appointment of chairperson and members of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). It amends the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 and intends to make the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) more inclusive and efficient.
6. Major issues tackled by NHRC are as follows:
   ➢ Custodial Torture
   ➢ Right to Work and Labour Rights
   ➢ Extrajudicial Killings
   ➢ Arbitrary Arrest and Detention
   ➢ Excessive Powers of the Armed Forces and the Police
   ➢ Sexual Violence
   ➢ Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement
   ➢ Child Labour
   ➢ Manual Scavenging
   ➢ Violence and discrimination against Women, Children
   ➢ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Rights
   ➢ Problems faced by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Religious Minorities, Persons with Disabilities

Link: https://youtu.be/mvUOAK6j3XY

6. Impact of lockdown on women & children

Introduction:
• The COVID-19 crisis has a potentially far-reaching, long-term negative impact on women and children around the world. The impact is likely to be devastating especially for children, even though they appear to have less severe symptoms and lower mortality rates than other age groups.
• More than 1.5 billion students are out of school. Widespread job and income loss and economic insecurity among families are likely to increase rates of child labor, sexual exploitation and child marriage. Stresses on families, particularly those living under quarantines and lockdowns, are increasing the incidence of domestic violence.
Impact on Children:

1. **Falling into poverty:**
   a. An estimated 42-66 million children could fall into extreme poverty as a result of the crisis this year, adding to the estimated 386 million children already in extreme poverty in 2019.

2. **Exacerbating the learning crisis:**
   a. 188 countries have imposed countrywide school closures, affecting more than 1.5 billion children and youth.
   b. The potential losses that may accrue in learning for today’s young generation, and for the development of their human capital, are hard to fathom. More than two-thirds of countries have introduced a national distance learning platform, but among low-income countries the share is only 30 percent.
   c. Before this crisis, almost one third of the world’s young people were already digitally excluded.

3. **Threats to child survival and health:**
   a. Economic hardship experienced by families as a result of the global economic downturn could result in hundreds of thousands of additional child deaths in 2020, reversing the last 2 to 3 years of progress in reducing infant mortality within a single year.
   b. And this alarming figure does not even take into account services disrupted due to the crisis – it only reflects the current relationship between economies and mortality, so is likely an under-estimate of the impact. Rising malnutrition is expected as 368.5 million children across 143 countries who normally rely on school meals for a reliable source of daily nutrition must now look to other sources.
   c. The risks to child mental health and well being are also considerable. Refugee and internally displaced children as well as those living in detention and situations of active conflict are especially vulnerable.

4. **Risks for child safety:**
   a. Lockdowns and shelter in place measures come with heightened risk of children witnessing or suffering violence and abuse.
   b. Children in conflict settings, as well as those living in unsanitary and crowded conditions such as refugee and IDP settlements, are also at considerable risk. Children’s reliance on online platforms for distance learning has also increased their risk of exposure to inappropriate content and online predators.

Impact on girls and women:

Disease outbreaks increase girls’ and young women’s duties caring for elderly and ill family members, as well as for siblings who are out of school. Girls, especially those from marginalised communities and with disabilities, may be particularly affected by the secondary impacts of the outbreak.

1. **Gender-based violence and coronavirus:**
   a. Quarantine measures imposed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic are putting girls and women at heightened risk of violence in the home and cutting them off from essential protection services and social networks.
   b. Economic stress on families due to the outbreak can put children, and in particular girls, at greater risk of exploitation, child labour and gender-based violence. Quarantine measures should be accompanied by support for affected households.
   c. Global lockdowns also lock down girls’ autonomy, reinforcing the attitudes and practices that regard girls as second class and hold them back. Rigorous protection and safeguarding of all children, and of girls and women from gender-based violence must be emphasised and prioritised in all policies, information, guidance at all stages of the response.
2. **Health services:**
   a. Evidence from past epidemics indicates healthcare resources are often diverted from routine health services. This further reduces the already limited access of many girls and young women to sexual and reproductive health services, as well as maternal, new-born and child health services.
   b. Challenges in accessing sexual and reproductive health information services – including contraception, safe abortion and HIV medications- will exacerbate the risks to girls’ and women’s health and lives.

3. **Economic well-being:**
   a. Economic challenges during the outbreak pose a serious threat to young women’s work and business activity and expose them to increased risk of exploitation or abuse.
   b. Girls and young women facing severe economic shocks are more likely to take on high-risk work for their economic survival.
   c. Responses to the outbreak must protect and support young women’s economic empowerment.

**Conclusion:**
- This is an unprecedented crisis and it presents unprecedented risks to the rights and safety and development of the children and women. Those risks can only be mitigated through unprecedented international solidarity.
- The need is to work together to make progress on these three fronts—**information, solidarity and action**. It is chance to not only defeat this pandemic, but to transform the way we nurture and invest in the young generation and women.
- But we have to act now, we have to act decisively, and at very large scale. This is not a gradual issue, it is a clarion call for the world’s children, the world’s future.

**Link:** [https://youtu.be/-bZMNqgewbM](https://youtu.be/-bZMNqgewbM)

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**7. UN report on ODF**

**Introduction:**
- On October 2nd, 2014, the Swachh Bharat Mission was launched to make India open defecation free in five years.
- The target to achieve universal sanitation coverage was set for 2019 – the year that marks the 150th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, who wanted to make sanitation a priority for India more than a century ago. Between 2000 to 2017, the South Asian region, including India, accounted for almost three-fourths of the population who stopped defecating in the open.

**UN Report Study:**
1. Groundwater contamination is 12.7 times more likely in villages practising open-defecation as compared to those declared open-defecation free (ODF) under the Swachh Bharat Mission.
2. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) report analysed 752 samples from 12 ODF and an equal number of non-ODF villages across West Bengal, Bihar and Odisha.
3. According to the study, soil and food in the non-ODF villages were 1.1 and 2.16 times respectively more likely to be contaminated with human faeces in comparison to ODF villages.
4. It also revealed that in non-ODF villages, piped water was 2.40 times and household water was 2.48 times more likely at risk of faecal contamination.
5. In Bihar, the groundwater in the non-ODF villages was 35.7 times more likely to get contaminated. Similarly, in West Bengal and Odisha, the groundwater was 6.5 and 5.3 times respectively more likely at risk of faecal contamination.
6. Piped water in non-ODF villages in Bihar (1.33 times), West Bengal (2.73 times) and Odisha (1.5 times) too was more likely to get contaminated as compared to ODF villages.

7. Similarly, the household water in non-ODF villages in Bihar (2.74 times), West Bengal (4.14 times) and Odisha (1.44 times) was more likely to be contaminated in comparison to the ODF villages.

8. Soil in non-ODF villages in Bihar (1.21 times), West Bengal (1.39 times) and West Bengal (0.89 times) was also at risk of contamination.

Under the Swachh Bharat Mission, the Centre undertook a byzantine initiative to make villages ODF and even gave monetary help to build toilet. The mission received appreciation from various quarters. Nearly 5,61,940 villages have been declared ODF. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Andaman and Nicobar, Andhra Pradesh and Chandigarh are 100 per cent ODF. It is lowest in Goa, Odisha, Telangana, Bihar and West Bengal. Rural sanitation coverage in the country has 99 per cent and the mission was in its final stages.

SDG 6:

1. By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.

2. By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.

3. By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimising release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally.

4. By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity.

5. By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary co-operation as appropriate.

6. By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.

7. By 2030, expand international co-operation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, waste water treatment, recycling and reuse technologies.

8. Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management.

Concerns:

1. There are serious problems, like disposal of faecal matter, quality and maintenance of toilets, and inappropriate technology.

2. In Uttarakhand more than 70 per cent of the toilets were built without any expert’s guidance and in several areas, they were unusable owing to either lack of water connection or that they were not built within household premises.

3. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) done in 2016-17 too found that open defecation remained fairly high in the rural areas of the BIMARU states.

4. The adoption of the twin pit model is still very low in rural India.

5. Another issue is the poor nature of construction and low quality of raw materials used under SBM (G).

6. City drains are still cleaned by manual scavengers despite the rule banning them.

Way Forward:

✓ Policy makers, planners, the private sector, innovators, researchers and others need to create a sustainable ecosystem for sanitation.
✓ The Government of India should consider taking additional actions such as
   - Adopting the new international standard for non-sewered sanitation systems
   - Helping to de-risk new technologies through supported pilot projects
   - Rolling out policy incentives for creating useful byproducts from human waste
   - Developing policies to regularise waste collection and transport
   - Doing so will usher in a new era of sanitation solutions in India.

✓ To sustain ODF status, the durability and quality of construction of toilets must be due care of, shows the 51st report by the Standing Committee of Parliament.

Link: https://youtu.be/P-eXZ20KGkE

**ECONOMY**

1. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2020

**Introduction:**
- Parliament passed amendments to the insolvency law that will help safeguard successful bidders of insolvent companies from the risk of criminal proceedings for offences committed by previous promoters. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2020 was passed by voice vote in Rajya Sabha. It was approved by Lok Sabha on March 6.
- The Bill replaces an ordinance. Replying to a short debate on the bill, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said amendments are in sync with the time and also adhere to a Supreme Court order in “letter and spirit”. The bill seeks to remove bottlenecks and streamline the corporate insolvency resolution process. It aims to provide protection to new owners of a loan defaulter company against prosecution for misdeeds of previous owners. The latest changes pertain to various sections of the IBC as well as the introduction of a new section.

**Highlights and analysis:**
1. The amendment brings the much awaited changes needed in the insolvency sector.
2. Finance Minister said amendments are sync with time and also adhere to a Supreme Court order in “letter and spirit”.
3. It allows creditors to initiate an insolvency resolution process, if a company defaults on its payments. It introduces an additional threshold for certain classes of financial creditors, including allottees of real estate projects, for initiating the resolution process. At least 10% of them or 100 such persons have to jointly initiate the process.
4. It empowers the resolution professional to require suppliers to continue providing goods and services. This provision will not apply if the debtor has unpaid dues arising from such supplies during the moratorium period.
5. It provides that the company will not be liable for any offence committed prior to the insolvency resolution process, if there is a change in the management or control of the company.
6. Under it, the insolvency resolution process commences when the Insolvency Resolution Professional (IRP) is appointed. It states that the IRP must be appointed on the date of admission of the application by NCLT, which will be considered as the insolvency commencement date.
7. In case of defaults by real estate developers, the insolvency resolution application should be filed jointly by at least 100 homebuyers or 10% of their total number. The rationale for adding such a threshold only for certain creditors is unclear. Further, a homebuyer wishing to initiate the process may not have details of other allottees. The FM clarified that requirement of minimum number of home buyers in the IBC has been included to avoid “frivolous litigations”.
8. The bill seeks to remove bottlenecks and streamline the corporate insolvency resolution process. It aims to provide protection to new owners of a loan defaulter company against prosecution for misdeeds of previous owners.

9. It empowers the resolution professional to require suppliers to continue providing goods and services during the moratorium period. This provision overrides the agency of suppliers to negotiate and decide whether to continue a contractual arrangement. It may also force supply of goods and services even if the supplier finds it risky or unviable.

10. In order to balance the rights of the suppliers, it provides that suppliers have to continue supplying only if their current dues are paid. In other countries, additional safeguards are available. These include the right to seek a payment guarantee, and court-granted permission to terminate contract in cases where the supplier demonstrates that continuation will cause hardship.

11. However, even after anticipation, cross border insolvency framework has not been included in the amendment.

Success of IBC:
1. The interest of all parties lenders, borrowers and even operational creditors is now addressed under a unified law under the IBC.
2. RBI report says that gross NPA has come down from 11.2% to 9.2% from 2017-18 to 2018-19.
3. The IBC has given more teeth to lenders and has changed the credit behavior of borrowers. Now, there is a heartening trend of defaulters paying up dues before the case is admitted for insolvency under IBC.
4. IBC proposes a paradigm shift from the existing ‘Debtor in possession’ to a ‘Creditor In Control’ regime, as now the Board of Directors is suspended in case of default and and the IP manages the enterprise in the best interest of all its stakeholders.
5. IBC has made possible for struggling companies to ‘exit’ easily allowing creditors to take the company to the NCLT for winding up.
6. IBC has reduced crony capitalism, under and over invoicing, serial defaulters and lead to better allocation of capital by limiting the escape routes for defaulters and water tight frame for disposal of cases.
7. The success of the act lies in the fact that many cases have been resolved even before it was referred to NCLT.
8. 4452 cases were dismissed at the pre-admission stage. Hence, it shows the effectiveness of IBC.
9. Presently, there are 1332 cases before NCLT.
10. Realization by creditors around Rs 80,000cr in resolution cases.
11. Banks recovered Rs 5.28 lakh crore in 2017-18, compared to just Rs 38500 cr in 2016-17.
12. The maximum amount recovered was Rs 4, 92,500 cr from 21 companies.
13. 12 big cases are likely to be resolved this year, and the realization in these cases is expected to be around Rs 70000 Cr

Conclusion:
❖ By the IBC process, we are trying to use legal instruments to address problems which are of essentially business and economic nature.
❖ IBC as a structural reform has demonstrable impact, which is reflected in behavioural change among debtors, creditors and other stakeholders.
❖ There is a requirement of enhanced IU infrastructure.
❖ A constant monitoring of resolution which is happening right now should be continued and then it should feedback into legislature framework.
❖ The strict timelines for resolution of insolvency and liquidation proceedings would definitely be an incentive and provide the requisite impetus for economic growth.
When implemented in letter and spirit, provide a major boost to the India economy, especially on account of timely resolution and certainty in recovery.

Link: https://youtu.be/YTOxzITaPU4

2. Major Ports Authority Bill, 2020

Introduction:
- Union Cabinet has been introduced in the Lok Sabha. It seeks to provide greater autonomy and flexibility to major ports. The Bill seeks to **repeal the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963**. The bill was first tabled in parliament in 2016, but members then sought a review from the Parliamentary Standing Committee before enactment. India has 12 major ports. The total coastal cargo traffic handled by Indian Ports in 2018-19 was 262.56 million tonnes which was 12.68% more than the coastal cargo traffic of 233.02 million tonnes in Fiscal year 2017-18.

With a view to promote the expansion of port infrastructure and facilitate trade and commerce, the Major Port Authorities Bill 2020 bill aims at decentralizing decision making and to infuse professionalism in governance of major ports. Key features of the Bill include:

1. **Application**: The Bill will apply to the major ports of Chennai, Cochin, Jawaharlal Nehru Port, Kandla, Kolkata, Mumbai, New Mangalore, Mormugao, Paradip, V.O. Chidambaranar, and Vishakhapatnam.

2. **Major Port Authorities Board**: Under the 1963 Act, all major ports are managed by the respective Board of Port Trusts that have members appointed by the central government. The Bill provides for the creation of a Board of Major Port Authority for each major port. These Boards will replace the existing Port Trusts.

3. **Composition of Board**: The Board will comprise of a Chairperson and a deputy Chairperson, both of whom will be appointed by the central government on the recommendation of a selection committee. Further, it will include one member each from (i) the respective state governments, (ii) the Railways Ministry, (iii) the Defence Ministry, and (iv) the Customs Department. The Board will also include two to four independent members, and two members representing the interests of the employees of the Major Port Authority.

4. **Powers of the Board**: The Bill allows the Board to use its property, assets and funds as deemed fit for the development of the major port. The Board can also make rules on: (i) declaring availability of port assets for port related activities and services, (ii) developing infrastructure facilities such as setting up new ports, jetties, and (iii) providing exemption or remission from payment of any charges on any goods or vessels.

5. **Fixing of rates**: Currently, the Tariff Authority for Major Ports, established under the 1963 Act, fixes the scale of rates for assets and services available at ports. Under the Bill, the Board or committees appointed by the Board will determine these rates. They may determine rates for: (i) services that will be performed at ports, (ii) the access to and usage of the port assets, and (iii) different classes of goods and vessels, among others. Such fixing of rates will not be with retrospective effect and must be consistent with the provisions of the Competition Act, 2002, or any other laws in force, subject to certain conditions.

6. **Financial powers of the Board**: Under the 1963 Act, the Board has to seek prior sanction of the central government to raise any loan. Under the Bill, to meet its capital and working expenditure requirements, the Board may raise loans from any: (i) scheduled bank or financial institution within India, or (ii) any financial institution outside India that is compliant with all the laws. However, for loans above 50% of its capital reserves, the Board will require prior sanction of the central government.

7. **Corporate Social Responsibility**: The Bill provides that the Board may use its funds for providing social benefits. This includes development of infrastructure in areas such as education, health,
housing, and skill development. These benefits could be provided for the Board’s employees, customers, business partners, local communities, environment and the society at large.

8. **Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects**: The Bill defines PPP projects as projects taken up through a concession contract by the Board. For such projects, the Board may fix the tariff for the initial bidding purposes. The appointed concessionaire will be free to fix the actual tariffs based on market conditions, and other conditions as may be notified. The revenue share in such projects will be on the basis of the specific concession agreement.

9. **Adjudicatory Board**: The Bill provides for the constitution of an Adjudicatory Board by the central government. This Board will replace the existing Tariff Authority for Major Ports constituted under the 1963 Act. It will consist of a Presiding Officer and two members, as appointed by the central government. Functions of the Adjudicatory Board will include: (i) certain functions being carried out by the Tariff Authority for Major Ports, (ii) adjudicating on disputes or claims related to rights and obligations of major ports and PPP concessionaires, and (iii) reviewing stressed PPP projects.

10. **Penalties**: Under the 1963 Act, there are various penalties for contravening provisions of the Act. For example, (i) the penalty for setting up any structures on the harbours without permission may extend up to Rs 10,000, and (ii) the penalty for evading rates may extend up to 10 times the rates. Under the Bill, any person contravening any provision of the Bill or any rules or regulations will be punished with a fine of up to one lakh rupees.

**Landlord model:**

1. In the landlord port model, the publicly governed port authority acts as a regulatory body and as landlord while private companies carry out port operations—mainly cargo-handling activities.
2. Here, the port authority maintains ownership of the port while the infrastructure is leased to private firms that provide and maintain their own superstructure and install own equipment to handle cargo.
3. In return, the landlord port gets a share of the revenue from the private entity.
4. The role of the landlord port authority would be to carry out all public sector services and operations such as the award of bids for cargo terminals and dredging.

**Need:**

1. Currently, most major port trusts in India carry out terminal operations as well, resulting in a hybrid model of port governance.
2. The involvement of the port authorities in terminal operations leads to a conflict of interest and works against objectivity.
3. The neutrality of the landlord port authority is a basic requirement for fair competition between port service providers, particularly the terminal operators.

**Standing committee backing:**

1. The Unions stand was backed by the Parliamentary Standing Committee that vetted the Bill.
2. Retaining Section 111 of the MPT Act in the new Bill may be intentional to use it at the appropriate time by the government and may endanger the very interest of the major ports, particularly when the ongoing policy of privatisation is aggressively pursued by the central government.
3. The power given to the central government under clause 50 (as per the earlier version of the Bill) to issue directions to the directors of the board may lead to converting the port authorities into companies through an executive order of the central government. The committee recommends that the government should not misuse the provision given under this clause for any such activities.
4. There are some clauses which give the impression that the proposed Bill provides the Government more teeth to allow private players in the port sector, which may, in future, take full control over the port activities. The Committee recommends that the Ministry in the first instance, should remove the fears of the stakeholders on the issue of ‘privatization of ports’ and ensure that the administrative, managerial and financial control of the Port will remain with the port managements.

Link: https://youtu.be/0TDukjx9-MU?list=PL5A1EFF827E94624E

3. The Code on Social Security, 2019

Introduction:
- Social security refers to protection measures given to employees to ensure healthcare access and income security in cases such as old age, unemployment, work injury, maternity etc.
- The Code on Social Security, 2019 replaces nine labour laws related to the employee provident fund, maternity benefit, social security for unorganized workers and widens the coverage of benefits to include platform and informal workers.

Organized and Unorganized Sectors in India:
1. The organized sector includes primarily those establishments which are covered by the Employees State Insurance Act, 1948, Factories Act, 1948, the Shops and Commercial Establishments Acts of State Governments, the Industrial Employment Standing Orders Act, 1946 etc.
2. This sector already has a structure through which social security benefits are extended to workers covered under these legislations.
3. The unorganized sector on the other hand, is characterized by the lack of labour law coverage, seasonal and temporary nature of occupations, high labour mobility, dispersed functioning of operations, casualization of labour, lack of organizational support, low bargaining power, etc. all of which make it vulnerable to socio-economic hardships.
4. The nature of work in the unorganized sector varies between regions and also between the rural areas and the urban areas, which may include the remote rural areas as well as sometimes the most inhospitable urban concentrations.
5. In the rural areas it comprises of landless agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers, share croppers, persons engaged in animal husbandry, fishing, horticulture, beekeeping, toddy tapping, forest workers, rural artisans, etc. where as in the urban areas, it comprises mainly of manual labourers in construction, carpentry, trade, transport, communication etc. and also includes street vendors, hawkers, head load workers, cobblers, tin smiths, garment makers, etc.

The Code on Social Security, 2019:
1. Social security schemes: Under the Code, the central government may notify various social security schemes for the benefit of workers. These include an Employees’ Provident Fund (EPF) Scheme, an Employees’ Pension Scheme (EPS), and an Employees’ Deposit Linked Insurance (EDLI) Scheme. These may provide for a provident fund, a pension fund, and an insurance scheme, respectively. The government may also notify: (i) an Employees’ State Insurance (ESI) Scheme to provide sickness, maternity, and other benefits, (ii) gratuity to workers on completing five years of employment (or lesser than five years in certain cases such as death), (iii) maternity benefits to women employees, (iv) cess for welfare of building and construction workers, and (v) compensation to employees and their dependants in the case of occupational injury or disease.
2. In addition, the central or state government may notify specific schemes for gig workers, platform workers, and unorganised workers to provide various benefits, such as life and disability cover. Gig workers refer to workers outside of the traditional employer-employee
relationship (e.g., freelancers). Platform workers are workers who access other organisations or individuals using online platforms and earn money by providing them with specific services. Unorganised workers include home-based and self-employed workers.

3. **Coverage and registration**: The Code specifies different applicability thresholds for the schemes. For example, the EPF Scheme will apply to establishments with 20 or more employees. The ESI Scheme will apply to certain establishments with 10 or more employees, and to all establishments which carry out hazardous or life-threatening work notified by the central government. These thresholds may be amended by the central government. All eligible establishments are required to register under the Code, unless they are already registered under any other labour law.

4. **Contributions**: The EPF, EPS, EDLI, and ESI Schemes will be financed through a combination of contributions from the employer and employee. For example, in the case of the EPF Scheme, the employer and employee will each make matching contributions of 10% of wages, or such other rate as notified by the government. All contributions towards payment of gratuity, maternity benefit, cess for building workers, and employee compensation will be borne by the employer. Schemes for gig workers, platform workers, and unorganised workers may be financed through a combination of contributions from the employer, employee, and the appropriate government.

5. **Social security organisations**: The Code provides for the establishment of several bodies to administer the social security schemes. These include: (i) a Central Board of Trustees, headed by the Central Provident Fund Commissioner, to administer the EPF, EPS and EDLI Schemes, (ii) an Employees State Insurance Corporation, headed by a Chairperson appointed by the central government, to administer the ESI Scheme, (iii) national and state-level Social Security Boards, headed by the central and state Ministers for Labour and Employment, respectively, to administer schemes for unorganised workers, and (iv) state-level Building Workers’ Welfare Boards, headed by a Chairperson nominated by the state government, to administer schemes for building workers.

6. **Inspections and appeals**: The appropriate government may appoint Inspector-cum-facilitators to inspect establishments covered by the Code, and advise employers and employees on compliance with the Code. Administrative authorities may be appointed under the various schemes to hear appeals under the Code. For instance, the appropriate government may notify an appellate authority to hear appeals against the order of the Inspector-cum-facilitator for non-payment of maternity benefits. The Code also specifies judicial bodies which may hear appeals from the orders of the administrative authorities. For example, industrial tribunals (constituted under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947) will hear disputes under the EPF Scheme.

7. **Offences and penalties**: The Code specifies penalties for various offences, such as: (i) the failure by an employer to pay contributions under the Code after deducting the employee’s share, punishable with imprisonment between one and three years, and fine of one lakh rupees, and (ii) falsification of reports, punishable with imprisonment of up to six months.

**The Provisions of Constitution of India on Social Security:**

The Constitution of India has affirmed social and economic justice to all its citizens. The Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy, enshrined in our Constitution, need a special mention in view of their supreme importance and influencing the social security legislations, which provide sufficient guarantee against exploitation.

- Article 21 - Right to life and liberty
- Article 24 – Prohibition of employment of children in factories, etc –
- Article 38 – State to secure a social order for the promotion of welfare of the people –
- Article 39 – Certain principles of policy to be followed by the State – The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing
- Article 41 – Right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases
• Article 42 – Provision for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief
• Article 43 – Living wage, etc, for workers
• Article 43A – Participation of workers in management of industries

Why is there a need for such a code?
1. To amalgamate a clutch of existing laws and proposes several new initiatives including universal social security for unorganized sector workers and, insurance and health benefits for gig workers.
2. To Corporatize of existing organizations like EPFO and ESIC headed by people other than the labour minister.

From economic point of view:
1. The labour markets both geographically and employment wise is fragmented.
2. But the code still leaves some of the fragmentation intact.
3. It has 2 different version for organized and unorganized workers separately.
4. There is high level of distinction intact because of which informalization they persist more.

Link: https://youtu.be/aybTSbXDFsY

4. Road ahead for tourism & hospitality industry

Introduction:
• The cascading effect of the global coronavirus pandemic is crippling the tourism and hospitality industry at an “astonishing pace”. Media reports suggest Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) in India have come down by about 67 per cent annually in the January-March quarter, while for domestic tourists, the figure is lower by nearly 40 per cent. The travel and tourism sector alone accounted for 9.2 per cent of India’s GDP in 2018, and generated 26.7 million jobs in that year.

Present Sector of Tourism sector:
1. India is the most digitally advanced traveller nation in terms of digital tools being used for planning, booking and experiencing a journey, India’s rising middle class and increasing disposable incomes has continued to support the growth of domestic and outbound tourism.
2. During 2018, foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) in India stood at 10.56 million, achieving a growth rate of 5.20 per cent year-on-year During January-November 2019, Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) were 96,69,633 with the growth of 3.2 per cent.
3. During January-November 2019, a total of 25,51,211 tourist arrived on e-Tourist Visa registering a growth of 23.8 per cent.
4. The travel & tourism sector in India accounted for 8 per cent of the total employment opportunities generated in the country in 2017, providing employment to around 41.6 million people during the same year. The number is expected to rise by 2 per cent annum to 52.3 million jobs by 2028.
5. International hotel chains are increasing their presence in the country, as it will account for around 47 per cent share in the Tourism & Hospitality sector of India by 2020 & 50 per cent by 2022

Coronavirus impact:
1. Tourism creates a large number of semi-skilled jobs for the local population in not only local hotels and catering trades but also in other fields like transport, retailing, heritage interpretation etc. It is believed that around 70 per cent out of a total 5.5 crore workforce could get unemployed, which is around 3.8 crore people. This effect of job losses and layoffs has already begun throughout the country.
2. The Indian hospitality sector is staring at a loss of $4.2 billion to $4.7 billion in revenues due to coronavirus outbreak.
3. The loss to the organised market, which is about 5 per cent of the total lodging sector in the country, is estimated to range between $1.3 billion and $1.55 billion. This amounts to an erosion of 27-32 per cent of the overall revenues as compared to the previous financial year.
4. The hospitality sector is entirely dependent on travel, trade, and tourism for its sustenance. The massive spate of cancellations in recent weeks has largely eroded the ability of hotels across India to operate without piling up worrisome losses.
5. The devastating impact of coronavirus could result in 18-20 per cent erosion of nationwide occupancy across the sector, and 12-14 per cent drop in average daily rates (ADRs) for the entire 2020.
6. At present, about 15-25 per cent of the employees in the branded hotel chains are either contracted or casual staff. Under the current circumstances, these people would be first to be laid off by the hotel companies.
7. Early signs of reduced travel became evident in the middle of February but the biggest shock was felt in March when large-scale cancellations across the corporate, MICE and leisure segments happened.
8. The situation is likely to remain grim over the next two-three months with companies adopting “work from home” and “no travel” policies.
9. Impact of the virus to begin waning by June-July, and business to pick up in the second half of the year. “It is also our assumption that as the last few months of 2020 come by, it is likely that inbound travel may still be a fraction of what India gets in typical years.
10. With the current crisis in the tourism sector, which contributes roughly 10 per cent to India’s GDP (about $275 billion), the impact on the macro-economy is expected to be huge.

Way Forward:
✓ India’s travel and tourism industry has huge growth potential. The tourism industry is also looking forward to the expansion of E-visa scheme which is expected to double the tourist inflow to India. India’s travel and tourism industry has the potential to expand by 2.5 per cent on the back of higher budgetary allocation and low-cost healthcare facility. The next step is where all the action is.
✓ Once the outbreak of the virus is contained and the world is set to travel again, any plan of reopening must be done keeping long-term benefits and safety compliances in mind.
✓ It is imperative that hospitality companies reach out to deferred and cancelled bookings and give due attention to domestic travellers.
✓ The report insists that hotels and airlines must slowly roll out their services rather than starting everything instantly and to not get caught up in spending.

Link: https://youtu.be/tSOnWfKrRPU

5. Aviation: Challenges & next course of action

Introduction:
• The coronavirus pandemic has caused probably the most significant impact to the aviation sector. With the world going into a lockdown and airlines being grounded internationally, the sector has come to a standstill.

Aviation Sector:
1. The crucial aviation sector that connects nations across the world is witnessing a flurry of layoffs and pay cuts. Some workers have been asked to go on forced unpaid leaves by aviation companies.
2. Each day, there are reports of global airlines announcing furloughs or layoffs as operational strains deepen in the wake of the lockdown.
4. In India, the decline in aircraft movements has been even more dramatic. With the exception of a handful of cargo and repatriation charter flights.
5. Since the report was prepared before the lockdown 2.0 was announced, the effects on the sector may have amplified.
6. It fears that the situation in the post-virus setup would remain pretty much the same for the aviation sector.
7. From a point of complete suspension of travel, recovery is likely to be slow. Demand will be suppressed due to economic dislocation; slow or even negative GDP growth; broken supply chains; low consumer confidence; and concerns about lingering outbreaks of COVID-19.
8. The sector, is also in urgent need of financial help to support employees.

How severe is the lockdown impact on airlines?
1. Aviation is among the worst-affected sectors amidst the Covid-19 crisis that has taken the scale of a pandemic. According to the International Air Transport Association, airlines globally can lose in passenger revenues of up to $113 billion due to this crisis.
2. Domestic traffic growth is also gradually being affected with domestic travellers postponing or cancelling their travel plans.
3. Cash reserves of airline companies are running low and many are almost at the brink of bankruptcy. Moreover, the crisis could lead to loss of jobs and pay cuts. Some airlines have asked many of their employees to go on leave without pay.

Changes in cargo operations:
1. Reduced passenger traffic may mean stakeholders could set aside more funds for the development of drones and autonomous vehicles to better serve its whole ecosystem.
2. The sector is already well accustomed to using them

Link: https://youtu.be/isMfubsZmn0

SCIENCE & TECH

Ban on cryptocurrency

Introduction:
- In recent years, cryptocurrencies have taken the financial world by storm. Spearheaded predominantly by Bitcoin, there’s been a phenomenal rise in the price of cryptocurrencies. Today, there are over a thousand cryptocurrencies in existence.
- Not just individuals, big firms and businesses are also getting into the cryptocurrency business. Tech giant Facebook proposed to launch a new global cryptocurrency called Libra. However, the rapid growth and use of cryptocurrencies does not come without risk

Recommendations:
Inter-Ministerial Committee on Virtual Currencies headed by finance secretary Subhash Chandra Garg has submitted its report to the government.
1. Ban on all forms of private cryptocurrencies.
2. Impose a fine of up to Rs 25 crore and imprisonment of as much as 10 years for anyone dealing in them.
3. RBI and the government may look at the introduction of an official digital currency in the country.
4. Establish a **specific group by the department of economic affairs with participation by the RBI, department of financial services and the ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY)** for examining and developing an appropriate **model of digital currency in India**.

5. The panel backed use of **distributed ledger technology (DLT) or blockchain for selected areas**. It has asked the department of economic affairs to take the necessary measures to facilitate the use of DLT in the financial field after identifying its uses.

6. It has also suggested the **use of DLT to reduce compliance costs for know-your-customer (KYC) requirements**.

7. **Data localisation requirements proposed in the draft Data Protection Bill may need to be applied carefully**, including with respect to the storage of critical personal data so as to ensure that there is no adverse impact on Indian firms and Indian consumers who may stand to benefit from DLT-based services.

**Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC):**

- The IMC’s view is that it “would be advisable to have an open mind regarding the introduction of an **official digital currency in India**”.
- It noted that **the RBI Act of 1934** has the enabling provisions to permit the central government to approve a “**Central Bank Digital Currency**” (CBDC) as legal tender in India.

**Blockchain technology**

- It is a specific kind of DLT that came to prominence after Bitcoin, a cryptocurrency that used it, became popular.
- Cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin use codes to encrypt transactions and stack them up in blocks, creating Blockchains. It is the use of codes that differentiates cryptocurrencies from other virtual currencies.

**Cryptocurrency:**

- It is a digital or virtual currency that uses cryptography for security.
- Cryptocurrencies use decentralized technology to let users make secure payments and store money without the need to use their name or go through a bank.
- They run on a distributed public ledger called blockchain, which is a record of all transactions updated and held by currency holders. The most common cryptocurrencies are Bitcoin, Ethereum, Ripple, and Litecoin.
- **Facebook** has announced a digital currency called **Libra** that will roll out for use in 2020 and allow the platform’s billions of users across the globe to make financial transactions online.

**However, challenges remain:**

1. The government is wary that regulation will provide legitimacy to “what is currently ambiguous,” and may lead to further rise in its valuation and end up contributing “to the investment bubble.”
2. A currency that is not based on any real economic activity, unlike a sovereign currency whose value is based on the relative value of a tradeable basket of goods and services, cannot prima facie inspire much comfort.
3. Bitcoin’s value, astronomical even now at about $8,300 but much below January 2018’s stratospheric levels, is based on demand for a fixed supply of Bitcoins in the future it cannot exceed 21 million in number, of which 18 million has already been mined.
4. Cryptos are feared not just for their sheer speculative propensities, but also for their capacity to undermine sovereign currencies (the latter is an exaggerated apprehension).
5. **Virtual currency is being traded anonymously over the Internet and used for a host of anti-national and illegal activities, from terror funding to illicit trade of arms and drugs and so on.**
6. The online use of this currency, was without any border restrictions or geographical constraints, resulting in danger to the integrity and sovereignty of the nation.

7. However, it does not make sense to go overboard and criminalise merely adventurous crypto speculators. There are no official or other data available that point towards misuse of cryptocurrencies for illegal ends.

Link: https://youtu.be/p0WGamSfDKw

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. SAARC: Fighting corona together

Introduction:
- Pakistan participated in a video conference of SAARC member countries proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to combat the fast-spreading coronavirus. Pakistan responded positively to PM Modi’s proposal, saying it was ready to participate in the conference, acknowledging that coordinated efforts were needed to minimise the threat posed by the deadly coronavirus.

India showing Leadership:
1. In the spirit of collaboration, Prime Minister Modi proposed creation of a COVID-19 Emergency Fund based on voluntary contributions from all the countries, with India making an initial offer of US $10 million for the fund. The fund can be used by any of the partner countries to meet the cost of immediate actions.
2. He informed that India is assembling a Rapid Response Team of doctors and specialists, along with testing kits and other equipment, which will be on stand-by, to be placed at the disposal of the countries, if required.
3. Prime Minister also offered arranging for online training capsules for the emergency response teams of the neighbouring countries and sharing of software behind India’s Integrated Disease Surveillance Portal to help trace possible virus carriers and the people they contacted. He suggested that existing mechanisms like SAARC Disaster Management Centre can be used to pool in best practises.
4. He also suggested creation of a common Research Platform to coordinate research on controlling epidemic diseases within the South Asian region. He suggested further brainstorming by experts on the long-term economic consequences of COVID-19, and how best to insulate internal trade and local value chains from its impact.
5. Prime Minister said the guiding mantra for India has been “prepare, but don’t panic”. He laid down the proactive steps taken, including a graded response mechanism, screening those entering the country, public awareness campaigns on TV, print and social media, special efforts to reach out to the vulnerable groups, ramping up of diagnostic facilities and developing protocols for each stage of managing the pandemic.
6. He said that India has not only successfully evacuated almost 1400 Indians from different countries but also evacuated some of the citizens of the neighbouring countries in accordance with the ‘neighbourhood first policy’.
7. He urged the seven nations to fight the scourge jointly.
8. President Ashraf Ghani said that the greatest vulnerability of Afghanistan is an open border with Iran. He proposed modelling diffusion patterns, creation of common framework for telemedicine and greater cooperation amongst the neighbouring countries.
9. President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih thanked the Indian government for the medical assistance from India to deal with COVID-19 cases and for evacuating nine Maldivians from Wuhan. He
highlighted the negative impact of COVID-19 on tourism in the country and its impact on the nation’s economy. He proposed closer cooperation between the health emergency agencies of the countries, formulation of economic relief package and long term recovery plan for the region.

10. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa recommended that SAARC leaders work together to help economy tide over the difficult period. He also recommended establishment of a SAARC Ministerial level group to share best practises and coordinate regional matters on combating COVID-19.

11. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina thanked Prime Minister Modi for bringing 23 Bangladeshi students back from Wuhan along with Indian students during the quarantine period. She proposed continuance of the dialogue at technical level through video conference between Health Ministers and Secretaries of the region.

12. Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli apprised the SAARC leaders of the steps taken by Nepal to combat COVID-19. He said that the collective wisdom and efforts of all the SAARC nations could help in devising a robust and effective strategy to deal with the pandemic.

13. Prime Minister Doctor Lotay Tshering said the pandemic does not follow geographical boundaries, hence it is all the more important for the nations to work together. He said the pandemic will affect the smaller and vulnerable economies disproportionately, talking about the economic impact of COVID-19.

14. Doctor Zafar Mirza proposed that SAARC Secretariat be mandated to establish a working group of national authorities for health Information, data exchange and coordination in real time. He proposed hosting SAARC Health Ministers’ conference and development of regional mechanisms to share disease surveillance data in real time.

SAARC:
1. SAARC refers to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation – which groups together Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives. Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka besides India.

2. Born in the mid 1980s, the grouping has little to show for itself given that progress on issues like regional integration and connectivity has been slow mainly due to infighting between India and Pakistan.

3. Pakistan was to host a summit of SAARC leaders in 2016 but India, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Bangladesh pulled out citing Pakistan’s support to terrorism as not conducive for regional cooperation.

4. No summit of SAARC has been held since

Opportunity for revival of SAARC:
1. The meet was important from quite a few perspectives.

2. First, it is a crisis turned opportunity by bringing together countries of the region for the first high-level SAARC meet since 2014 by providing directional leadership with health diplomacy as it core objective – an agenda which none can refuse.

3. Moreover, this was the organisation’s first meeting in four years after India had declined to meet in Islamabad in 2016 citing cross-border terrorism (Uri Attack) as the basis. Then, other countries of SAARC like Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Bhutan had also pulled out leaving SAARC directionless.

4. Second, India’s decision to hold the conference despite its open reservations against talking to Pakistan reflects a befitting attitude of a leader-nation that has risen above bilateral animosity to engage all nations to think of the larger regional good.

5. It shows its mature understanding that global challenges require coordinated response. This was evident when India chose to ignore Pakistan’s use of the SAARC forum to rake up the Kashmir issue, even though the meet had a different and a much more pressing agenda.
6. Major countries of the world including the US and Russia have lauded India’s efforts towards preparing South Asia for a collective response.

**Conclusion:**
- India is **culturally and civilizationally** Indo-Centric region. Measures that India takes to combat the disease could be compromised if all countries in South Asia are not on the same page.
- India should take forward **humanitarian measures**. As members of this region, **we must come together in such times**. Smaller economies are hit harder, **so we must coordinate**.
- With Indian leadership, there will be no doubt we will see immediate and impactful outcome.
- At various levels, governments and people are trying their best to combat it. South Asia, which is home to a significant number of the global population should leave **no stone unturned to ensure our people are healthy**.
- Perhaps for the first time, “most disconnected region in the world” is seen as a respite in the light of the searing contagion that has brought the world to a screeching halt. But that very same crisis presents the region with an **opportunity like never before**. Even when a global crisis looms large, India has depicted that the SAARC spirit should be sustained and the organisational platform can be used to foster regional cooperation.

Link: [https://youtu.be/DD2T30XCBBQ](https://youtu.be/DD2T30XCBBQ)

**2. WTO- Impact & Relevance**

**Introduction:**
January 1st 2020 marked the silver jubilee of the World Trade Organisation. The world trade body was established on 1st of January, 1995. It was the **biggest reform in international trade** since the end of the Second World War. Ever since its inception, the world body has presided over international trade ensuring that it proceeds with a semblance of order. But in its 25th year, confidence in the global body has sunk to an unprecedented low.

For just a few weeks ago, the WTO lost its power to resolve trade disputes. This was after the U.S. blocked the functioning of the Appellate Body – the WTO’s highest adjudicating body.

1. **World Trade Organization**, as an institution was established in 1995. It replaced General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) which was in place since 1946.
2. In pursuance of World War II, western countries came out with their version of development, which is moored in promotion of free trade and homogenization of world economy on western lines.
3. This version claims that development will take place only if there is seamless trade among all the countries and there are minimal tariff and non-tariff barriers. That time along with two Bretton wood institutions – IMF and World Bank, an International Trade Organization (ITO) was conceived.
4. ITO was successfully negotiated and agreed upon by almost all countries. It was supposed to work as a specialized arm of United Nation, towards promotion of free trade. However, United States along with many other major countries failed to get this treaty ratified in their respective legislatures and hence it became a dead letter.
5. Consequently, GATT became de-facto platform for issues related to international trade. It has to its credit some major successes in reduction of tariffs (custom duty) among the member countries.
6. Measures against dumping of goods like imposition of Anti-Dumping Duty in victim countries, had also been agreed upon. It was signed in Geneva by only 23 countries and by 1986, when Uruguay round started (which was concluded in 1995 and led to creation of WTO in Marrakesh, Morocco), 123 countries were already its member. India has been member of GATT since 1948; hence it was party to Uruguay Round and a founding member of WTO.
7. China joined WTO only in 2001 and Russia had to wait till 2012.
8. While WTO came in existence in 1995, GATT didn’t cease to exist. It continues as WTO’s umbrella treaty for trade in goods.
9. Limitations of GATT
   a. It lacked institutional structure. GATT by itself was only the set of rules and multilateral agreements.
   b. It didn’t cover trade in services, Intellectual Property Rights etc. It’s main focus was on Textiles and agriculture sector.
   c. A strong Dispute Resolution Mechanism was absent.
   d. By developing countries it was seen as a body meant for promoting interests of wests. This was because Geneva Treaty of 1946, where GATT was signed had no representation from newly independent states and socialist states.
   e. Under GATT countries failed to curb quantitative restrictions on trade. (Non-Tariff barriers)

WTO’s Appellate Body:
- The Appellate Body, set up in 1995, is a standing committee of seven members that presides over appeals against judgments passed in trade-related disputes brought by WTO members.
- Countries involved in a dispute over measures purported to break a WTO agreement or obligation can approach the Appellate Body if they feel the report of the panel set up to examine the issue needs to be reviewed on points of law. Existing evidence is not re-examined; legal interpretations are reviewed.
- The Appellate Body can uphold, modify, or reverse the legal findings of the panel that heard the dispute. Countries on either or both sides of the dispute can appeal.
- The WTO’s dispute settlement procedure is seen as being vital to ensuring smooth international trade flows.
- The Appellate Body has so far issued 152 reports. The reports, once adopted by the WTO’s disputes settlement body, are final and binding on the parties.

WTO Appellate Body on Shaky Ground:
- Over the last two years, the membership of the body has dwindled to just three persons instead of the required seven.
- The understaffed appeals body has been unable to stick to its 2-3 month deadline for appeals filed in the last few years, and the backlog of cases has prevented it from initiating proceedings in appeals that have been filed in the last year.
- With the Appellate Body unable to review new applications, there is already great uncertainty over the WTO’s dispute settlement process.
- If the body is declared non-functional, countries may be compelled to implement rulings by the panel even if they feel that gross errors have been committed.
- Should such a country refuse to comply with the order of the panel on the ground that it has no avenue for appeal, it will run the risk of facing arbitration proceedings initiated by the other party in the dispute.

USA has crippled functioning the WTO:
- The smooth and effective functioning of the Appellate Body, which is regarded as the jewel in the crown, has posed hurdles to the U.S. for adopting unilateral measures.
- Several U.S. provisions for imposing countervailing and anti-dumping measures were found to be inconsistent with core provisions of the WTO agreements.
- Finally, the U.S. chose to spike the Appellate Body by resorting to starving funds for its functioning as well as blocking the selection process for filling six vacancies.
• Consequently, the Appellate Body is left with only one member, who will not be able to deliver any rulings on the pending trade disputes.
• A minimum of three members are required to adjudicate any dispute.

India’s Role:
• As the U.S. loses interest in multilateralism in trade, India should actively try to arrest the organisation’s slide
• India should be more actively engaged to make the WTO a more equitable organisation.
• India needs to work on persuading all members of the WTO to return to the table and negotiate on issues like agriculture, industrial tariffs, and services.
• India’s positions have much in common with the African nations’ stand; we have to build bridges with Africa.
• India needed to quickly forge a larger alliance to counter the moves that are against India’s interests.
• India’s journey towards achieving 5 trillion dollar economy is not possible without expansion of our basket of global trade.

Link: https://youtu.be/glZDtKjU8os

3. Oil price war & implications

Introduction:
• OPEC and its allies led by Russia agreed on to cut their oil output 10m barrels per day, or 10% of global supplies. They expected the United States and other producers to join in their effort to prop up prices hammered in the coronavirus crisis. Reductions of 5m bpd are expected to come from other nations to help navigate the deepest oil crisis in decades.

Russia- Saudi Arabia oil price war:
• Saudi Arabia initiated a price war with Russia, facilitating a 65% quarterly fall in the price of oil.
• Over a few weeks, US oil prices fell by 34%, crude oil fell by 26%, and Brent oil fell by 24%.
• The price war was triggered by a breakup in dialogue between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and Russia over proposed oil-production cuts in the midst of the 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic.
• Russia walked out of the agreement, leading to the fall of the OPEC+ alliance. Oil prices had already fallen 30% since the start of the year due to a drop in demand. The price war is one of the major causes and effects of the currently ongoing global stock-market crash.

Impact on India:
• This has positive implications for India’s economy and policymaking, as it comes at a time when it has embarked on an uncertain and hesitant recovery.
• Due to falling oil prices India’s macro-economic indicators such as inflation, current account deficit (CAD), and trade balance improved.
• A direct casualty is the ability of the government to spend or meet its fiscal commitments in the form of budgetary transfers to states, payment of dues and compensation for revenue shortfalls to state governments under the goods and services tax (GST) framework.
• India imports more than 83% of its oil needs, the price crash offers a breather on the macroeconomic front. According to estimates, a one-dollar decrease in crude oil price reduces the oil bill by around $1.6 billion per year.
• The collapse in oil prices will cut the country’s import bill, and soften its current account deficit.
• **Budgetary constraints** combined with the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act** have held the government back from fully offsetting a private sector demand slowdown with its own spending.
• Low oil prices offer an opportunity to **raise some revenue and improve its fiscal balance**.
• Second, the **additional tax revenue thus generated** through higher excise duty should be used to **clear all dues of the central government**, whether to private companies, state governments, or others awaiting tax refunds.
• **Putting cash back** in the hands of households and small businesses will go a long way in **maintaining the growth of domestic demand**, besides improving the credibility of the Union government as a trustworthy counter-party.
• Third, the **potential excise duty windfall from oil prices** could come in handy for the government to provide relief to beleaguered telecom companies.
• The government will have **fiscal leeway to allow a staggered and a longer schedule for the payments** they have to make, arising out of the Supreme Court ruling on adjusted gross revenues.
• The fall in crude prices will also **help ease inflationary pressures** that have been building up over the past few months. This will increase the space for the monetary policy committee to ease rates further.

**On other producers:**
• In response to the drop in price, multiple oil producers in North America cut the drilling of new wells.
• Shale oil producers in North America generally require oil prices above $40 per barrel to sustain operations, and the cuts in new oilfields is expected to nullify the expected growth in US oil production.
• At $35 per barrel of crude oil, only 16 shale producers could operate new wells profitably, and most producers had expected a per barrel price of $55–65 in 2020. 10% of oil production globally would not be able to cover its base operating cost, particularly heavy crude oil producers such as Venezuela, Mexico and oil sands in Canada, where the price dipped below $5 per barrel.
• The U.S. Energy Information Administration forecasts show that U.S. crude oil production would fall from 13.2 million bpd in May 2020 to 12.8 million bpd in December 2020 due to the price war, and would then fall to 12.7 million bpd in 2021.

**Conclusion:**
❖ The Indian economy is **affected by demand slowdown, and industrial growth has been the lowest** for the last couple of years. On top of that, the **coronavirus has affected** production supply chains.
❖ In this context, the fall in crude oil prices is a relief for the Indian economy on fiscal, external and monetary fronts.
❖ There will be some negative fallout on India’s petroleum exports—which form one of the **top exports—and remittances** (a large number of Indians work in oil-exporting countries like Saudi Arabia, and India is one of the biggest recipient of remittances from oil-exporting countries).
❖ The price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia and the falling demand of oil from major oil-importing countries like China and India will keep oil prices from rising.
❖ It’s a blessing in disguise for the Indian economy, which is currently grappling with severe slowdown and seeks a quick turnaround.

Link: [https://youtu.be/oXxDV7j42qg](https://youtu.be/oXxDV7j42qg)
4. NATO

Introduction:
NATO leaders met in London to mark the 70th anniversary of the military alliance. The summit that was expected to cover issues like cyber-attacks and strategic challenges posed by China, was overshadowed by differences among the member countries themselves. These included Turkey’s recent military action in northern Syria, the varying levels of military spending by members as well as the future of the 29-member bloc. More significantly, the summit saw a highly publicised sparring between U.S. President Donald Trump and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron on issues ranging from terrorism to trade. What was meant to be a show of unity on the 70th year of the world’s most powerful defence alliance, turned out to be a display disagreement on the world stage.

- The North Atlantic Treaty Organization also called the North Atlantic Alliance, is an intergovernmental military alliance between 30 North American and European countries.
- The organization implements the North Atlantic Treaty that was signed on 4 April 1949.
- NATO constitutes a system of collective defence whereby its independent member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party.
- NATO’s Headquarters are located in Brussels, Belgium.
- Since its founding, the admission of new member states has increased the alliance from the original 12 countries to 30. The most recent member state to be added to NATO was North Macedonia on 27 March 2020. NATO currently recognizes Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine as aspiring members. An additional 20 countries participate in NATO’s Partnership for Peace program, with 15 other countries involved in institutionalized dialogue programs.
- The combined military spending of all NATO members constitutes over 70% of the global total.
- Members agreed that their aim is to reach or maintain the target defense spending of at least 2% of GDP by 2024.
- NATO membership is open to “any other European state in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area.”
- NATO also has what it calls the Membership Action Plan. It helps aspiring members prepare for membership and meet key requirements by providing practical advice and targeted assistance.

A political and military Alliance:
Security in our daily lives is key to our well-being. NATO’s purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means.

- Political – NATO promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defence and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict.
- Military – NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations. These are carried out under the collective defence clause of NATO’s founding treaty – Article 5 of the Washington Treaty or under a United Nations mandate, alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organisations.

Decisions:
- Every day, member countries consult and take decisions on security issues at all levels and in a variety of fields.
- A “NATO decision” is the expression of the collective will of all 30 member countries since all decisions are taken by consensus.
- Hundreds of officials, as well as civilian and military experts, come to NATO Headquarters each day to exchange information, share ideas and help prepare decisions when needed, in cooperation with national delegations and the staff at NATO Headquarters.
Challenges for NATO:
❖ Maintaining a united stance on the INF.
❖ Managing NATO’s role in the Western Balkans.
❖ Navigating political tensions in NATO operations.
❖ Balancing European ambitions for strategic autonomy.
❖ A nervous sort of celebration
Link: https://youtu.be/tUdX220k1xk

5. COVID-19 Crisis: Role of World Health Organisation

Introduction:
• The World Health Organisation has hit back at criticism from US president Donald Trump, after he threatened to stop funding the agency over its handling of the coronavirus pandemic.
• Trump said he was looking into putting “a hold on money sent to the WHO”, accusing the UN agency of being “very China-centric”. WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus asked not to politicise this virus.

What does the World Health Organization do?
• Founded after World War II as part of the United Nations, the Geneva-based organization, which has about 7,000 workers spread over 150 offices worldwide, has no direct authority over member nations.
• Instead, it is intended to be an international leader in public health by alerting the world to threats, fighting diseases, developing policy and improving access to care.
• During emergencies like the coronavirus, the W.H.O. is meant to serve as a central coordinating body — guiding containment, declaring emergencies and making recommendations — with countries sharing information to help scientists address outbreaks.
• The agency plays an advisory role in any major public health crisis, especially one with international dimensions. As in past outbreaks, it is helping coordinate research worldwide — this time, into drugs that can be used to treat COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, and into a potential vaccine. And it issues alerts and assessments of emerging and growing health threats, such as its designation, on March 11, of COVID-19 a pandemic.
• But although the W.H.O. is broadly influential, it lacks meaningful enforcement authority and is under budgetary and political pressures, especially from powerful nations like the United States and China and private funders like the Gates Foundation.

Was WHO slow in alerting the world about COVID-19?
• It took till about the middle of January for WHO to suggest human-to-human transmission of the virus, toeing the China line for the first few weeks of the year, as per reports.
• The U.S. was formally notified by China on January 3 of the coronavirus outbreak. Additionally, as early as January 10 and 11, WHO had put out guidance notes on the virus.
• China locked down the city of Wuhan on January 23. On January 23, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that while the emergency was for China and not for the world, it had the potential to become global in scale.
• The body’s experts were divided on whether or not there was a global emergency at the time, as per reports, and it took until January 30 for them to conclude deliberations and declare a global emergency.
How much does the U.S. give WHO?

- The U.S. is the WHO’s largest contributor. The organisation’s funding is of two types — assessments or member dues and voluntary contributions. The total funds for the 2020-2021 biennium included $957 million in assessments and $4.9 billion in voluntary contributions.
- Over the last decade, the U.S.’s assessed contributions have been in the $107-$119 million range while voluntary contributions have been in the $102-$402 million range.
- For the 2018 and 2019 biennium, the U.S. contributed about 20% of WHO’s budget.
- This money went as assessment fees ($237 million) or pledges towards programmes (over $656 million) from voluntary contributions. The major share of the U.S. programmatic funding went towards polio eradication ($158 million), increasing access to essential health and human services ($100 million) and vaccine-preventable disease ($44 million).

Will the U.S. stand affect WHO’s functioning?

- Funding freeze is highly likely to negatively impact WHO’s functioning for a short while at least, given the significant contribution the U.S. makes.
- Additionally, it is unclear if Mr. Trump has the authority to withhold funding that has already been committed.
- Tedros has asked countries to stop politicising the virus. He also said WHO regrets the U.S. decision and is reviewing the impact of American funds being withdrawn.

Link: https://youtu.be/X3OGSND4rCo

6. Indo Pak Water Treaty

Introduction:

- The Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan in 1960 has taken centre stage again. In line with its plan to fully use its share of water without violating the long standing treaty, India has started work to re-channel the water into Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan instead of letting it flow unused to Pakistan.
- Available data shows that India uses nearly 93-94 per cent of its share under the Indus Water Treaty. The rest is unutilised and flows to Pakistan. This is the water that the government is working on diverting to states for domestic use.

Indus Water Treaty:

1. It is a Water-Distribution Treaty, signed in Karachi on 1960, between India (Pm Jawaharlal Nehru) and Pakistan (President Ayub Khan), brokered by the World Bank (an international financial institution formed in 1945).
2. China is not a part of the treaty.
3. Control over the water flowing in 3 “eastern” rivers of India (Beas, Ravi and Sutlej) with mean flow of 33 million acre feet (MAF) was given to India, while in 3 “western” rivers of India (Indus, Chenab and Jhelum) with mean flow of 80 MAF was given to Pakistan.
4. India can use (excluding domestic, industrial and non consumptive uses from western rivers) nearly 20% of the total water carried by the Indus System of Rivers. Pakistan can use the remaining 80%.
5. India is allowed to use western rivers for limited irrigation use and unrestricted use for power generation (by run-of-river hydro power plants), industrial and non consumptive uses (navigation, fish culture, etc). But, precise regulations are laid down for India to build projects.
6. Run-of-river hydroelectricity (ror): It is a type of hydroelectric generation plant in which little or no water storage is provided. The normal course of the river is not materially altered. Examples: Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam Ltd, Satluj River, Shimla (1500 MW), Ghazi-Barotha
Hydropower project on River Indus in Pakistan (1,450 MW), Baglihar Hydroelectric Power Projection on Chenab River in India (900 MW), etc.

7. Treaty created a “Permanent Indus Commission” as it was agreed to exchange data and co-operate in matters related to the treaty.

8. Permanent Court Of Arbitration (an intergovernmental organization located in The Hague, Netherlands) or a Neutral Technical Expert is called in cases of disagreement.

9. The Treaty is considered to be very successful as most of the disagreements and disputes have been settled via legal procedures. India and Pakistan have not engaged in any water wars since the Treaty’s ratification in 1960.

**Status of the Indus river system presently:**

1. Historically, India has never made full use of its rights, neither on the Eastern nor on the Western rivers.

2. With a large proportion of farmers in Jammu and Kashmir having moved to horticulture from traditional crops, the demand for irrigation has gone down over the years.

3. After the devastating floods of 2014, it was argued that storage infrastructure could have been built on these rivers as a flood-control measure.

4. As a result of India’s under-utilisation of its share of waters, Pakistan has over the years benefited more than it is entitled to under the Treaty.

5. More than 95% of Pakistan’s irrigation infrastructure is in the Indus basin — about 15 million hectares of land. It has now become the world’s largest contiguous irrigation system, comprising over 60,000 km of canals.

6. Three of Pakistan’s biggest dams, including Mangla, which is one of the largest in the world, is built on the Jhelum river. These dams produce a substantial proportion of Pakistan’s electricity.

**Can India walk out of the pact unilaterally?**

1. The treaty has no provision for either country unilaterally walking out of the pact.

2. Article XII of the treaty says “The provisions of this Treaty, or, the provisions of this Treaty as modified under the provisions of Paragraph (3), shall continue in force until terminated by a duly ratified treaty concluded for that purpose between the two governments.”

3. Still if India wants to go about abrogating it, the country should abide by the 1969 Vienna convention on the law of treaties.

**Challenges and concerns:**
The IWT has survived various wars and other hostilities between the two countries, and as such it is largely considered a success. Today, however, the treaty is increasingly faced with challenges it wasn’t designed to deal with.

- For instance, India recently fast-tracked approval for several major dams along the Chenab, a 900km-long tributary of the Indus that was originally allotted to Pakistan under the IWT. This follows several other contentious dams already being built on shared rivers including Kishanganga, on the Jhelum River, which was also allotted to Pakistan.

- Under the IWT, India does indeed have a right to “limited hydropower generation” upstream on the western tributaries allotted to Pakistan, including the Chenab and the Jhelum. However, many in Pakistan worry that even though these proposed dams may individually abide by the technical letter of the treaty, their effects will add up downstream.

- Because the treaty does not provide a definitive solution, the two countries have frequently sought time-consuming and expensive international arbitration. From time to time, Pakistan has raised concerns and asked for intervention on the storage capacity of Indian dams planned on shared rivers allotted to Pakistan under the IWT.
• Basin countries have also not been forthcoming in sharing data and announcing planned hydropower projects ahead of time.

Link: https://youtu.be/Zsn-Q0uAxog

ENVIRONMENT

1. Melting Antarctica

Introduction:
• The Antarctic region has registered its highest-ever temperature on record as mercury soared over 20 degrees Celsius. Researchers logged 20.75 degrees Celsius on an island off the coast of the continent on 9th February – a record high temperature never seen before in the region. The latest reading follows another temperature record logged on 6 February, when an Argentinian research station at Esperanza had measured 18.3 degrees Celsius – the highest reading on mainland Antarctica.
• The previous record for the entire Antarctic region – which includes the continent, islands and ocean that are in the Antarctic climatic zone – was 19.8C, logged in January 1982. Although the new temperature reading was not part of a wider study, scientists warn it is enough to indicate how fast Antarctica is warming.

Causes of Melting Ice Glaciers:
1. Burning of fossil fuels
   o The burning of fossil fuels has resulted in the buildup of greenhouse gases in the environment thus influencing the warming trend because they trap heat in the atmosphere. The increase in temperatures is causing more and more glaciers to melt, consequently, this ends up exposing the earth underneath.

2. Oil and gas drilling
   a. The oil and gas extraction process also emit Methane, which is the main constituent in natural gas. Plus, the gas is more damaging to the environment than carbon dioxide, locking in heat more efficiently and escalating global warming. 21% of the greenhouse gas emissions including methane in the United States come from oil, gas, and coal that have been removed from government lands.
   b. Avoidable seeping out and flawed infrastructure in natural gas manufacturing are so frequent that they add considerably to methane pollution in and around the regions. Oil and gas companies also time and again intentionally release methane into the atmosphere through emitting, the restricted discharge of natural gas, and burning some of it in the air.

3. Deforestation
   a. Trees play a very important function in balancing the ecosystem and the overall cooling of the planer. Perhaps, that is why they are called the planet’s “natural fans”. So, cutting down trees to create more space for human activities is actually proving detrimental to the environmental balance.
   b. Deforestation has a lot of negative effects such as the rising in the sea levels. Also, there is an increase in the release of carbon dioxide while less of it is being absorbed by trees because they are constantly reduced in number owing to deforestation. As a result, it hastens global warming and an increase in sea levels.

4. Ice breaking ships
   a. During the months of summer, icebreaking ships head to the north into the Arctic Ocean, breaking through the ice at sea, the ships end up leaving trails of open waters. The Arctic
sea ice is able to reflect most of the heat thus aiding in keeping the Arctic and the rest of the Northern Hemisphere cool.

b. Nonetheless, open water has a lesser ability to reflect back sun rays than ice does, thus the water takes in more of the heat. This ends up heating the water and in consequence melting more ice.

**Extreme Changes Needed- UNEP 2019 Emission Gap report:**

1. The world will fail to meet the 1.5°C temperature goal of the Paris Agreement unless global greenhouse gas emissions fall by 7.6 per cent each year.
2. Global temperatures are set to rise about 3.2 degrees C by 2100, the report says, bringing catastrophic weather including hotter, deadlier heatwaves and more frequent floods and drought.
3. The top four emitters (China, USA, EU and India) contributed to over 55% of the total emissions over the last decade, excluding emissions from land-use change such as deforestation.
4. The rankings would change if land-use change emissions were included, with Brazil likely to be the largest emitter.
5. India is the fourth-largest emitter of Green House Gases (GHGs).
6. It is among a small group of countries that are on their way to achieve their self-declared climate targets under the Paris Agreement.
7. Solutions:
   a. A full decarbonization of the energy sector is necessary and possible.
   b. Renewables and energy efficiency are critical to the energy transition.
   c. The potential emission reduction thanks to renewable energy electricity totals 12.1 gigatonnes by 2050.
   d. Electrification of transport could reduce the sector’s CO2 emissions by a huge 72 per cent by 2050.
   e. Each sector and each country has unique opportunities to harness renewable energy, protect natural resources, lives and livelihoods, and transition to a decarbonization pathway.

**Consequences of melting glaciers:**

1. A lot of places all over the world depend exclusively on the constantly flowing water from glaciers that are melting in producing electricity. Reducing or stopping the flowing of water will mean stopping the production of electricity. The modern world cannot do without electricity, in which case people will resort to other forms of producing electricity, some of which will end up polluting the environment and further increase global warming
2. It has ramifications for the global climate. This region is a heat source in summer and a heat sink in winter.
3. It could trigger a multitude of biophysical and socio-economic impacts, such as biodiversity loss, increased glacial melting, and less predictable water availability—all of which will impact livelihoods and well-being in the HKH.
4. Faster snow and glacier melting due to warming is already manifesting in formation of glacial lakes. Glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF) are becoming frequent and causing huge casualties and loss to local infrastructures.
5. Glaciers in HKH have been retreating faster, and consistently causing greater water flows in rivers. In Tibetan Plateau, river run off has increased by 5.5 per cent.
6. Most of the lakes in high altitudes have also reported water level rise by 0.2 m/year besides their surface areas expanding.
7. ICIMOD report paints a bleak picture for the future of a region that is the source of Asia’s 10 major rivers and provides water, food, energy and carbon storage for almost two billion people.

8. **Biodiversity is in steep decline** driven by human development, pollution, overexploitation of resources and climate change. Example: Urbanization is on rise in many of the HKH countries.

9. With the **growing impacts of climate change**, along with new infrastructure development, trade routes and hydropower dams planned for the fragile region, the effects on the biodiversity is set to worsen further.

10. Along with species loss this will mean the **loss of the key environmental services** the region provides – such as water and carbon storage – to the rest of Asia.

11. Many of these areas are remote and authorities have **little control over border regions** sometimes plagued with ongoing conflict. Example: Indo-Burma hotspot.

Link: https://youtu.be/7rsKWXzRGXI

2. **Global Climate Risk Index**

**Introduction:**

- More and more countries are now being impacted by climate change, with devastating consequences being felt in both rich and poor countries across the globe. As per a report released by international environment think tank Germanwatch, around 60 million people were affected by extreme weather in 2018.
- **India recorded the highest number of fatalities** due to climate change and the second highest monetary losses from its impact last year. In the **Climate Risk Index 2020**, India’s rank has worsened from the 14th spot in 2017 to 5th in 2018 in the global vulnerability ladder.

**Key Highlights:**

- **Countries Most Affected in 2018** Japan, the Philippines and Germany were the most affected countries in 2018 followed by Madagascar, India and Sri Lanka.
- Between 1999 and 2018, Puerto Rico, Myanmar and Haiti were the countries most affected by extreme weather events.
- Altogether, about 495 000 people died as a direct result of extreme weather events globally and losses between 1999 and 2018 amounted to around US$ 3.54 trillion (in purchasing power parities).
- **Heatwaves** were one major cause of damage in 2018. Of the ten most affected countries in 2018, Germany, Japan and India were suffering from extended periods of heat.
- In many cases (e.g. Puerto Rico), single exceptional disasters have such a strong impact that the countries and territories concerned also have a high ranking in the long-term index.
- Over the last few years, another category of countries has been gaining relevance: Countries like Haiti, the Philippines and Pakistan that are recurrently affected by catastrophes continuously rank among the most affected countries both in the long-term index and in the index for the respective year.
- Of the ten most affected countries and territories in the period 1999 to 2018, seven were developing countries in the low income or lower-middle income country group, two were classified as upper-middle income countries (Thailand and Dominica) and one was an advanced economy generating high income (Puerto Rico).

**Key Highlights (India):**

- The yearly monsoon season, lasting from June to September, severely affected India in 2018.
- India is the fifth most vulnerable country to climate change.
• In 2020, India’s rank has worsened from the 14th spot in 2017 to 5th in 2018 in the global vulnerability
• The state of Kerala was especially impacted – 324 people died because of drowning or being buried in the landslides set off by the flooding, 30 the worst in one hundred years.
• Over 220,000 people had to leave their homes, 20,000 houses and 80 dams were destroyed.
• The damage amounted to EUR 2.4 billion (US$ 2.8 billion).
• Furthermore, India’s east coast was hit by the cyclones Titli and Gaja in October and November 2018. With wind speeds of up to 150 kilometres per hour, cyclone Titli killed at least eight people and left around 450,000 without electricity.

Heatwaves - a Global Threat:
• The occurrence of heatwaves is a global problem, both for countries in the global South and in the global North.
• The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concludes that it is likely that [due to climate change] the frequency of heatwaves has increased in large parts of Europe, Asia and Australia.
• According to the IPCC’s special report on 1.5 degrees “the number of highly unusual hot days is projected to increase the most in the tropics”.
• Indian Heatwaves
  o India suffered from one of the longest ever recorded heatwaves in 2018, with hundreds of deaths, when temperatures climbed to up to 48°C.
  o Prolonged drought and resultant widespread crop failures, compounded by a water shortage, brought about violent riots and increased migration.
  o India is among those countries that were particularly affected by extreme heat in both 2018 and 2019.
  o Since 2004, India has experienced 11 of its 15 warmest recorded years. Since 1992, an estimated 25,000 Indians have died as a result of heatwaves.
  o Contributing factors include increasing temperatures, an irregular El Nino in which the Central Pacific Ocean is warmer than the East Pacific, and the loss of tree cover, reducing shade as well as the moisture in the soil.
  o India is particularly vulnerable to extreme heat due to low per capita income, social inequality and a heavy reliance on agriculture.
  o The worst hit regions have also been among India’s poorest. Additionally, a high number of people are working in areas such as agriculture and construction. A study by the International Labour Organization concludes that by 2030, India would lose 5.8% of its working hours due to heat stress, which is equivalent to 34 million full-time jobs out of a total of 80 million worldwide.

Initiatives of the Government towards combating climate change:
• India is the only G20 country who’s pledge is considered sufficient by an independent regulator called Carbon Tracker Initiative.
• We have doubled our targets for renewable energy.
• We are 18% of the world’s population but consuming only 6% of the energy.
• National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)
• International Solar Alliance (ISA)
• State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC)
• FAME Scheme for E-mobility
• Atal Mission for Rejuvenation & Urban Transformation (AMRUT) for Smart Cities
• Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana
• UJALA scheme
SECURITY ISSUES

1. Deportation rules in India & across the world

Introduction:
- India confirmed that British lawmaker Debbie Abrahams, who was denied entry into the country, did not hold a valid visa. This was after various media organisations claimed that Abrahams was deported. Government sources stated that the e-Business visa of Abrahams was revoked on February 14th.
- They further said the cancellation was conveyed to her the same day. Sources in the Ministry of External Affairs also responded to the concerns raised by Abrahams as to why she was not allowed to visit her family and friends in India.

Deportation:
- It is the expulsion of a person or group of people from a place or country.
- The term expulsion is often used as a synonym for deportation, though expulsion is more often used in the context of international law, while deportation is more used in national law.
- Forced displacement or forced migration of an individual or a group may be caused by deportation, for example ethnic cleansing, and other reasons.

Entry, Stay, Exit of Foreigners in India:
- The first enactment made for dealing with foreigners was the **Foreigners Act, 1864**, which provided for the expulsion of foreigners and their arrest, detention pending removal, and for a ban on their entry into India after removal.
- **The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920**, empowered the government to make rules requiring persons entering India to be in possession of passports. This rule also granted the government the power to remove from India any person who entered without a passport.
- During the Second World War, the Imperial Legislative Assembly enacted the **Foreigners Act, 1940**, under which the concept of “burden of proof” was introduced. Section 7 of the Act provided that whenever a question arose with regard to the nationality of a person, the onus of proving that he was not a foreigner lay upon the person.

Foreigners Act, 1946:
- The legislature enacted the above act by repealing the 1940 Act, conferring wide powers to deal with all foreigners.
- Apart from defining a ‘foreigner’ as a person who is not a citizen of India, it empowered the government to make provisions for prohibiting, regulating or restricting the entry of foreigners into India.
- It also restricted the rights enjoyed by foreigners in terms of their stay in the country if any such orders are passed by the authority.
- The 1946 Act empowered the government to take such steps as are necessary, including the use of force for securing compliance with such directions.
- The most important provision of the 1946 law, which is still applicable in all States and Union Territories, was that the ‘burden of proof’ lies with the person, and not with the authorities.
- This has been upheld by a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court.
The Foreigners (Tribunals) Order:

- In 1964, the government brought in the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order.
- The tribunal has the authority to decide whether a person is a foreigner within the ambit of the Foreigners Act, 1946.
- The tribunal, which has powers similar to those of a civil court, gives reasonable opportunity to the person alleged to be a foreigner to produce evidence in support of his case, before passing its order.
- In June this year, the Home Ministry made certain amendments in the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964. It was to empower district magistrates in all States and Union Territories to set up tribunals to decide whether a person staying illegally in India is a foreigner or not.

Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983:

- This act was unsuccessful — it was also referred to as the IMDT Act — was introduced for the detection and deportation of illegal migrants who had entered India on or after March 25, 1971.
- One factor for its failure was that it did not contain any provision on ‘burden of proof’ similar to the Foreigners Act, 1946.

Requirements during arrival of Foreigners in India:

- Immigration check is carried out for all passengers at the port of arrival in India. The Foreigners arriving in India are required to furnish true particulars in the Arrival Card as to his name and nationality, his age, sex, place of birth and address or intended address in India.
- Immigration check includes checking of Passport, Visa, Disembarkation Card, entering foreigner’s particulars in computer, retention of Arrival Card and stamping of Passport of the foreigner.
- Pakistan nationals other than those on Diplomatic Visa (On Assignment), Non-Diplomatic Visa, SAARC Visa Exemption Sticker and SAU Visa or those who have been exempted from carrying visa application are required to carry a Visa application form (duplicate copies) which will be issued in addition to regular Visa on their passport by the Indian Mission concerned.
- On presentation at Immigration check post, they are issued Regular Residential Permit and are required to report to the FRRO/FRO or concerned Police Station in their places of stay within 24 hours unless and until they are officially Exempted from Police Reporting.

Requirements during Stay In India:

- Foreigners are required to comply with the purpose for which a visa was initially applied, and also to abide by conditions endorsed on the visa.
- If the visa is valid for more than 180 days and the foreigner intends to stay in India continuously for more than 180 days, then every such foreigner entering India or resident in India shall present in person or along with an authorized representative to the satisfaction of the appropriate Registration Officer at the place of his stay within the specified period mentioned on visa except certain visa categories requiring registration within the specified time.
- Such registration shall not be necessary in the case of a foreigner entering India on a visa valid for a period of not more than 180 days and who does not remain in India beyond the said period, unless, specific endorsement/observation is made on the visa by the Indian Mission.
- At the time of Registration every foreigner shall furnish accurate information, to the satisfaction of the Registration Officer and shall, sign the Registration Report, in the presence of the said officer. The foreigner shall also be provided a copy of Certificate of Registration.
- Foreigners may go through the instructions given on Registration Certificates for their guidance concerning stay and future reporting.
- Every foreigner shall within twenty hours of the demand being made by a Registration Officer, magistrate or police officer, not below the rank of a head constable, produce, at such place as may be specified in his passport or such other proof of his identity and/or Registration Certificate
as may be required for any purpose connected with the enforcement of Foreigners Act/Registration of Foreigners Rules.

Link: https://youtu.be/Uj0nJrNJqWU

2. End of Bodo militancy

Introduction:
• In a major breakthrough on the insurgency front in the North East around 50 cadres of the anti-talk Sao-rai-gwra faction of the National Democratic Front of Boroland or NDFB-S returned to India from Myanmar and held peace process with the Centre. The cadres was led by the faction’s chairman B. Sao-rai-gwra who expressed willingness to give up the group’s armed struggle.
• Bodos are the single largest tribal community in Assam, making up over 5-6 per cent of the state’s population. They have controlled large parts of Assam in the past. They have had a long history of separatist demands, marked by armed struggle. In October 1986, the prominent group Bodo Security Force was formed by Ranjan Daimary demanding a separate Bodo state. The BDSF subsequently renamed itself as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland.

Bodos:
• **Bodos are the single largest tribal community in Assam**, making up over 5-6 per cent of the state’s population. They have controlled large parts of Assam in the past.
• The four districts in Assam- Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang — that constitute the Bodo Territorial Area District (BTAD), are home to several ethnic groups.

NDFB:
• Alongside political movements, armed groups have also sought to create a separate Bodo state.
• In October 1986, the prominent group **Bodo Security Force (BdSF)** was formed by Ranjan Daimary. The BdSF subsequently renamed itself as the **National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)**, an organisation that is known to be involved in attacks, killings, and extortions.

Bodo language:
• Estimated to have 1.5 million speakers (Census 2011), Bodo is listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
• It is spoken in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and West Bengal.
• While Bodo is **officially written in the Devanagari script**, the language has a history of having been written in at least three different scripts — until **1974, the Government recognised Devanagari as its official script**. In the first decade of the 20th century, Bodos started writing in the Assamese/Bangla script. Then they also used Roman Script.
• In the pre-13th century era, it was called Deodhai.

History Bodoland dispute:
• In 1966-67, the demand for a separate state called Bodoland was raised under the banner of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA), a political outfit.
• In 1987, the **All Bodo Students Union (ABSU)** renewed the demand. “**Divide Assam fifty-fifty**”, was a call given by the ABSU’s then leader, Upendra Nath Brahma.
• The unrest was a fallout of the Assam Movement (1979-85), whose culmination — the **Assam Accord** — addressed the demands of protection and safeguards for the “Assamese people”, leading the Bodos to launch a movement to protect their own identity.
• For centuries, they survived sanskritisation without giving up their original ethnic identity. However in the 20th century, they had to tackle a series of issues such as illegal immigration, encroachment of their lands, forced assimilation, loss of language and culture. The 20th century
also witnessed the emergence of Bodos as a leading tribe in Assam which pioneered the movements for safeguarding the rights of the tribal communities in the area.

- From then on, they have been consistently deprived of the political and socio-economic rights by successive state and central governments. The Bodos have not only become an ethnic minority in their own ancestral land but have also been struggling for their existence and status as an ethnic community.

**Agreement signed:**

- The Ministry of Home Affairs, Assam government and Bodo groups including the All Bodo Students’ Union and militant outfits signed an agreement on January 27, New Delhi’s third attempt at conflict resolution after the 1993 and 2003 accords. The agreement involves clauses to redraw and rename the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) as the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), in Assam.
- The BTAD and other areas mentioned under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution have been exempted from the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019.
- As per the agreement, **villages dominated by Bodos that were presently outside the BTAD would be included and those with non-Bodo population would be excluded.**
- The memorandum of settlement says that **the criminal cases registered against members of the NDFB factions for “non-heinous” crimes shall be withdrawn** by the Assam government and in cases of heinous crimes it will be reviewed.
- The families of those killed during the Bodo movement would get Rs. 5 lakh each.
- A Special Development Package of Rs. 1500 Crore would be given by the Centre to undertake specific projects for the development of Bodo areas.
- A committee will decide the exclusion and inclusion of new areas in the BTAD. Subsequent to this alteration, the total number of Assembly seats will go up to 60, from the existing 40.

**Promises in the accord regarding Bodo language:**

- It was only in 2003, under the then Bodo Accord, that the language was listed in the Eighth Schedule. And it was the first tribal language to be included in the Eight Schedule.
- In **Assam, it has enjoyed the status of official associate language** in undivided Goalpara district since 1986.
- Now the 2020 Accord makes Bodo the **associate official language throughout Assam.**
- The new Accord also promises to establish a **separate directorate for Bodo medium schools**, **provincialisate schools and colleges in the BTAD** (Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District) and establish a **Cultural Complex-cum-Centre of Excellence** in Kokrajhar for protection and promotion of the language.

Link: [https://youtu.be/xkJAxsr6blk](https://youtu.be/xkJAxsr6blk)

**3. Online predators putting children at risk**

**Introduction:**

- Millions of children around the world are at increased risk of online sexual exploitation, violence and cyberbullying as they spend more time on virtual platforms due to the closing of schools amid COVID-19 lockdowns.
- More than 1.5 billion children and young people have been affected by the closing of schools worldwide. Spending more time on virtual platforms can leave children vulnerable to online sexual exploitation and grooming, as predators look to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic.
Keeping kids safe online amid Lockdown:
- School closures and strict containment measures mean more and more families are relying on technology and digital solutions to keep children learning, entertained and connected to the outside world, but not all children have the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to keep themselves safe online.
- More than 5 billion children and young people have been affected by school closures worldwide. Many are online now taking classes and socializing.
- Under the shadow of COVID-19, the lives of millions of children have temporarily shrunk to just their homes and their screens.
- Spending more time on virtual platforms can leave children vulnerable to online sexual exploitation as predators capitalize on the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The UN agency maintained that a lack of face-to-face contact with friends and partners may lead to heightened risk-taking, such as sending sexualized images. At the same time, increased and unstructured time online may also expose children to potentially harmful content as well as a greater risk of cyberbullying.

Digital dangers:
- ICTs have amplified traditional dangers (bullying, for example) and created new forms of child abuse and exploitation, such as made-to-order child sexual abuse material, self-generated content and the broadcasting of live sex abuse.
- Children are disproportionately affected by online dangers, including loss of privacy. They are less likely to understand the risks and more likely to suffer the harms. This particular vulnerability sheds light on when risk turns into actual harm for children.
- Since 2012, an estimated 100 million children, most from Africa and South-East Asia, have connected to the internet for the first time. Without proper safeguards, the world’s most disadvantaged children will face even greater risk when exposed to the online risk of harm.

Effects of exposure:
- In the absence of other information, pornography can be the main source of a child’s sex education.
- The use of pornography by adolescents is associated with stronger permissive sexual attitudes (e.g., premarital sex, casual sex). There is some evidence that exposure to pornography can increase the likelihood of earlier first-time sexual experience, particularly for those adolescents who consume pornography more frequently.
- Pornography can influence a young person’s expectations about sex, for example what young men expect their partners to do and vice versa.
- Pornography is also associated with unsafe sexual health practices such as not using condoms and unsafe anal and vaginal sex.
- Gaps between expectations and reality can produce “sexual uncertainty” about sexual beliefs and values and may also be related to sexual dissatisfaction, anxiety and fear. The content of pornography may reinforce double standards of an active male sexuality and passive female receptacle.
- Both male and female consumers of pornography had increased levels of self-objectification and body surveillance.
- Adolescent pornography use is associated with stronger beliefs in gender stereotypes, particularly for males. Male adolescents who view pornography frequently are more likely to view women as sex objects and to hold sexist attitudes such as women “leading men on”.
- Pornography may strengthen attitudes supportive of sexual violence and violence against women. There is evidence of an association between consuming pornography and perpetrating sexual harassment for boys.
• Sexual preoccupation, compulsive consumption and “addiction” can be associated with the frequency of viewing pornography and also the purposes of using pornography

**Way Forward:**
- Governments should keep **child protection services** open and active during the pandemic and to train health, education and social service workers on the impacts that COVID-19 may have on their well-being, including increased online risks. Moreover, they are requested to step up awareness raising and educational initiatives on cyber safety and to provide local helplines and hotlines.
- Meanwhile, the information technology industry, including social networking platforms, should **enhance online platforms with more safety measures**, especially while using virtual learning tools. They should promote and facilitate child safety referral services and helplines as well as help connect disadvantaged children in low-income households.
- Schools should update current safeguarding policies to reflect the new realities for children learning from home and ensure that they have continued access to school-based counselling services.
- Parents can help their children develop a critical eye when viewing media.
- Parents should make sure that their children’s devices have the latest software updates and antivirus programmes. They are also encouraged to speak to their children on how and with whom they are communicating online and to set new internet rules.
- Multipronged approach to handle cases: Need to handle this cases through multipronged approach such as counselling through Psychiatrist, approaching police, etc.

Link: [https://youtu.be/jsICN1u6Ruw](https://youtu.be/jsICN1u6Ruw)
UPSC IAS ESSAY WRITING CHALLENGES

Write an essay on the following topics in not more than 1000-1200 words:

1. “Education must also train one for quick, resolute and effective thinking”
   Essay perspectives: [https://youtu.be/Xz3SO6SQbc8](https://youtu.be/Xz3SO6SQbc8)

2. “It is our choices, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities”

3. “Social Harmony, not Social Distancing, is the final solution to all our problems”
   Essay perspectives: [https://youtu.be/ujL8lwCgunI](https://youtu.be/ujL8lwCgunI)

4. “The fool doth think he is wise but the wise man knows himself to be a fool”
   Essay perspectives: [https://youtu.be/Y5vpLrnRk-8](https://youtu.be/Y5vpLrnRk-8)