INSIGHTS into EDITORIAL

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1. A BLOW AGAINST SOCIAL JUSTICE

Context:
- In a judgment delivered recently, the Supreme Court ruled that states are not legally bound to provide quotas to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in government jobs and held that individuals have no fundamental right to claim reservations in promotions.
- According to a report, the court gave the verdict during a case regarding the validity of a 2012 notification by the Uttarakhand government to fill up vacancies in government jobs without giving reservation to the SC/ST communities. The Uttarakhand High Court had struck down the notification and asked the government to provide representation to the specified categories.

What did the Supreme Court say on reservation?

1. The Supreme Court decision came against pleas regarding Uttarakhand government’s September 5, 2012 decision to fill up all posts in public services in the state without providing reservations to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
2. The government’s decision was challenged in the Uttarakhand High Court, which struck it down.
3. A Supreme Court bench of justices ruled that states are not bound to make reservations, nor is reservation in promotions a fundamental right.
4. The top court said that it cannot order state governments to provide reservations.
5. In view of the law laid down by this court, there is no doubt that the state government is not bound to make reservations.
6. There is no fundamental right which inheres in an individual to claim reservation in promotions.
7. No mandamus can be issued by the court directing the state government to provide reservations.
8. The state governments can grant reservation to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes at their own discretion, but will have to collect quantifiable data which shows their inadequate representation in public services.
9. The Supreme Court has said that states can grant reservation to certain classes, but “there must be some material on the basis of which the opinion is formed.”

What does the Constitution say?

1. Article 16 of the Constitution pertains to matters of equality of opportunity in matters of public employment, while sub-sections 4 and 4A pertain to reservations to SCs/STs in appointments and reservations in promotions respectively.
2. The Supreme Court referred to Article 16 and its clauses 4 and 4A while delivering its judgement in the matter.
3. Article 16 in the Constitution of India refers to equality of opportunity in government jobs.
4. **Article 16 (4) states**: “Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State.”

5. **Article 16 (4A), which was introduced in 1995, states**: “Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for reservation in matters of promotion to any class or classes of posts in the services under the State in favour of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes which, in the opinion of the State, are not adequately represented in the services under the State.”

6. To summarise, the Constitution of India grants state government the power to reserve vacancies for backward sections, and even grant reservation in matters of promotion for posts under it.

7. This can be done if the state believes that the reserved categories are inadequately represented in public services under it.

**Really Administrative efficiency will be affected?**

- More importantly, this judgment has raised a new point — that the decision of the State government to provide reservation for SC/STs should not affect the efficiency of administration. This implies that the entry of SC/STs in the job market can reduce the quality of administration; this by itself is discriminatory. There is no evidence that performance in administration is affected on account of caste. There have been many attempts to dilute reservation in the past. But, this judgment appears to be debatable in the larger context and should be challenged in a constitutional bench.

**Counter arguments:**

1. The object of reservation is to do away with sociocultural discrimination that SC/ST communities have faced for the past thousands of years.

2. Even today, we see that many students from SC/ST communities who are not in financially disadvantaged position face systemic discrimination in prestigious public educational institutions.

3. According to critics, it is unfortunate that the top court in the case of Mukesh Kumar & Anr. Vs The State of Uttarakhand & Ors has not even referred to this important judgement which recognised the criticality of reservation in promotions as a social necessity to arrive at the inclusive citizenship and participatory governance.

**Conclusion:**

- In a country of parliamentary democracy, even the Constitution of India can be amended. The judgment says that the state will also have to justify its decision to provide reservations if challenged in a court of law. However, the state government also need to collect data when making provisions for reservation and not when the government decides not to provide quotas. If the government at the Centre has genuine concern for SC/STs, it can amend the Constitution using its political majority.

- If the argument is that it is not binding on the state to give reservation, it must be noted that when reservation rights are in Part III as Fundamental Rights, it is the obligation of the state to ensure reservation to the underprivileged. This judgment has interpreted Articles 16 (4) and 16(4A) only as enabling provisions. Enabling provisions mean that these provisions empower the state to intervene; it does not mean the state is not bound to provide it. **Interpreting the Constitution by paraphrasing and selective reading is dangerous.**

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2. ‘STREE SHAKTI’ IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR ‘RASHTRA SHAKTI’

**Introduction:**

- **Women empowerment** has become one of the biggest movements in India nowadays and many Indian women have proven to be the building blocks of the movement.

- With their pure passion for their work and their good deeds, they are very well a true inspiration for everyone.
• Since times immemorial, women in India have been regarded with the **utmost respect and accorded prestige**. For a nation to progress, it is essential to empower women.

**Context:**

• **International Women’s Day** is celebrated across the globe on **March 8** every year to recognise the **achievements of women**, across divides, national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political.

• It provides an opportunity to reflect on the progress made, to call for change and celebrate **acts of courage and determination** by those women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and with regard to communities.

• The theme of International Women’s Day 2020 is, “**I am Generation Equality: Realising Women’s Rights**”.

**Women Position and Empowerment in India’s culture:**

1. We are a nation in which **women’s empowerment** has been imbibed in **our culture for centuries**.
2. In the modern day context, it demands strengthening women’s positions in the social, economic, political and security architectures.
3. The targeted outcome of such empowerment is the creation of an atmosphere where women feel safe and secure to pursue a profession or vocation of their choice.
4. Women should play **decisive roles in the family and society equally**, so that any question of discrimination or deprivation does not arise.
5. When it comes to women, **security** is typically conceived of in terms of **physical safety and security** and not beyond.

**However, government has added many new dimensions:**

For our government, **women’s empowerment** is a **comprehensive programme** that deals with **five components of security**:

1. Health security of mother and child, social security, financial security, security of the future through educational and financial programmes in growing-up years, and last but not least, the physical safety of women.
2. **Security and defence** have been considered as male bastions but in recent government is **committed to changing this perception**.
3. Recently, government promoted and made special efforts to increase the number of women in **our police and paramilitary forces**.
4. The MHA had issued an advisory to all state governments to **reserve 33 per cent posts in their respective police forces**.
5. The ministry of defence has taken initiatives to increase women’s participation in various departments and field operations.

**Induction of women in armed forces and permanent commission:**

1. Many people may wonder what role the “**weaker**” section can play in the armed forces. A resounding response was given by **thousands of women officers** by their **unique contribution** in various **services and arms of our forces**.
2. Empowerment of women in the armed forces has been a major focus area of the government over the past five years and many interventions are first-time initiatives.
3. In 2019, 3.89 per cent of the Army personnel comprised women, while 6.7 per cent of the Navy and 13.28 per cent of the Air Force personnel respectively were women.
4. The proposal for induction of women in the corps of military police in the Indian Army as soldiers was approved last year to recruit a total of 1,700 women military personnel.
5. Steps like increasing the tenure of women officers in SSC from 10 to 14 years and improving their promotional prospects in the Army have been taken.
6. Around 68.12 lakh women in India have been trained under the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikaas Yojana 2.0.
7. Under the Jan Shikshan Sansthan Scheme, around 4.08 lakh women have been trained in the 2018-2020 period, while 38.72 lakh women have been trained in Industrial Training Institutes (ITI).
8. At present, there are 18 National Skill Training Institutes across the country to train women. Special batches are being conducted to provide basic, theoretical and advanced training to women.

Exemplifying recent examples on women empowerment:

1. International Women’s Day gives us an opportunity to celebrate the shining examples of individual officers who have proved that women officers are second to none.
2. Squadron Leader Minty Agarwal was the eyes behind the Balakot airstrikes as fighter controller. She was conferred with the Yudh Seva Medal for her stellar performance during the operation that taught an unforgettable lesson to the enemy.
3. In May 2019, Flight Lieutenant Bhawana Kanth became the first woman pilot of the Indian Air Force to qualify to undertake combat missions on a fighter jet.
4. She completed her operational syllabus for carrying out combat missions on Mig-21 Bison aircraft during day time. She is from the first batch of women fighter pilots of the IAF.
5. This year, Army Officer Tania Shergill led an all-male contingent of the Corps of Signals in the 71st Republic Day Parade. She also led all-men contingents during the Army Day function for the first time, creating history.

Conclusion:

❖ Achieving gender equality and empowering girls and women is a global health, development, and business imperative. Every country and every sector benefits when women are healthy, educated, empowered, and can participate fully and equally in all aspects of life.

❖ What’s really required is far more awareness and creation of new opportunities.

❖ Programmes like “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao” have not only helped improve the sex ratio but also created awareness among the people.

❖ We need to keep reminding ourselves about the contributions of women, about their strengths. India has come a long way in empowering women but many milestones are yet to be crossed.

❖ “Stree Shakti” is an integral part of our “Rashtra Shakti” and without strengthening our “Shakti” we cannot aspire to be “Shaktishali Bharat”.

3. GOVT TO ESTABLISH CENTRAL CONSUMER PROTECTION AUTHORITY (CCPA)

Context:

Last week, Union Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution announced that a Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) will be established by the first week of April.

This was after the Minister held consultations with industry representatives about the role and functioning of a proposed CCPA.
➢ The authority is being constituted under Section 10(1) of The Consumer Protection Act, 2019.
➢ The Act replaced The Consumer Protection Act, 1986, and seeks to widen its scope in addressing consumer concerns.
➢ The new Act recognises offences such as providing false information regarding the quality or quantity of a good or service, and misleading advertisements.
➢ It also specifies action to be taken if goods and services are found “dangerous, hazardous or unsafe”.
➢ The CCPA will have the powers to inquire or investigate into matters relating to violations of consumer rights or unfair trade practices suo motu, or on a complaint received, or on a direction from the central government.
➢ Sources said the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution is in the process of finalising the rules relating to the composition and functioning of the CCPA, and these are expected to be notified by April.

What is the Central Consumer Protection Authority?
➢ The authority is being constituted under Section 10(1) of The Consumer Protection Act, 2019.
➢ The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 aim is to protect the rights of the consumer by cracking down on unfair trade practices, and false and misleading advertisements that are detrimental to the interests of the public and consumers.
➢ It will be headquartered in the National Capital Region of Delhi but the central government may set up regional offices in other parts of the country.
The possible structure of CCPA

➢ The proposed authority will be a lean body with a Chief Commissioner as head, and only two other commissioners as members one of whom will deal with matters relating to goods while the other will look into cases relating to services.

➢ The CCPA will have an Investigation Wing that will be headed by a Director General.

➢ District Collectors too, will have the power to investigate complaints of violations of consumer rights, unfair trade practices, and false or misleading advertisements.

What kind of goods, and food items in particular, can be classified as “dangerous, hazardous or unsafe”?

❖ This is not specified in the notification of the Act. Regarding food, an official said the CCPA will ensure that all standards on packaged food items set by regulators such as the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) are being followed.

What will the CCPA do if any goods or services are found not meeting these standards?

1. Under Section 20 of The Consumer Protection Act, the proposed authority will have powers to recall goods or withdrawal of services that are dangerous, hazardous or unsafe; pass an order for refund the prices of goods or services so recalled to purchasers of such goods or services.
2. Discontinuation of practices which are unfair and prejudicial to consumer’s interest.
3. For manufacture, selling, storage, distribution, or import of adulterated products, the penalties are:
4. If injury is not caused to a consumer, fine up to Rs 1 lakh with imprisonment up to six months;
5. If injury is caused, fine up to Rs 3 lakh with imprisonment up to one year;
6. If grievous hurt is caused, fine up to Rs 5 lakh with imprisonment up to 7 years;
7. In case of death, fine of Rs 10 lakh or more with a minimum imprisonment of 7 years, extendable to imprisonment for life.

How will it deal with false or misleading advertisements?

1. Section 21 of the new Act defines the powers given to the CCPA to crack down on false or misleading advertisements.
2. According to these provisions, if the CCPA is satisfied after investigation that any advertisement is false or misleading and is harmful to the interest of any consumer.
3. It is in contravention of consumer rights, the CCPA may issue directions to the trader, manufacturer, endorser, advertiser, or publisher to discontinue such an advertisement, or modify it in a manner specified by the authority, within a given time.
4. The authority may also impose a penalty up to Rs 10 lakh, with imprisonment up to two years, on the manufacturer or endorser of false and misleading advertisements.
5. The penalty may go up to Rs 50 lakh, with imprisonment up to five years, for every subsequent offence committed by the same manufacturer or endorser.
6. CCPA may ban the endorser of a false or misleading advertisement from making endorsement of any products or services in the future, for a period that may extend to one year. The ban may extend up to three years in every subsequent violation of the Act.

Separate regulator: Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA):

• The Act proposes establishment of a central regulator, Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), to address issues related to consumer rights, unfair trade practices, misleading advertisements and impose penalties for selling faulty and fake products.

• Broadly, regulatory moves of CCPA will be directed towards the manufacturers, sellers and service providers and will not address customers’ grievances and disputes directly.

• Nevertheless, the overall purpose of CCPA is to strengthen the existing consumer rights.
Jurisdiction under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019:

- The act has defined the criteria of Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (CDRCs).
- The National CDRC will hear complaints worth more than Rs. 10 crores. The State CDRC will hear complaints when the value is more than Rs 1 crore but less than Rs 10 crore.
- While the District CDRC will entertain complaints when the value of goods or service is up to Rs 1 crore.

What other powers will the CCPA have?

- While conducting an investigation after preliminary inquiry, officers of the CCPA’s Investigation Wing will have the powers to enter any premise and search for any document or article, and to seize these.
- For search and seizure, the CCPA will have similar powers given under the provisions of The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.
- The CCPA can file complaints of violation of consumer rights or unfair trade practices before the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, and the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission.
- It will issue safety notices to alert consumers against dangerous or hazardous or unsafe goods or services.

Conclusion:

- The Commissions are intended to be quasi-judicial bodies, while the government is part of the executive.
- There may be instances where the government is a party to a dispute relating to deficiency in service provided by a government enterprise, for e.g., the Railways. In such a case, there would be a conflict of interest as the government would be a party to the dispute before the Commissions and will also have the power to appoint members to the Commission.
- Similarly, if a consumer is subjected to grievous hurt due to adulteration the manufacturer of such a product can be punished with imprisonment of seven years and with fine which may extend to five lakh rupees.
- This serves as an effective deterrent against producers or manufacturers adopting unfair practices for furthering their profit.

4. HAVING AN EAR TO ADIVASI GROUND

Context:

- In November 2018, the Adivasis of Jhargram, West Bengal, died in large number while preparing for the Bandhna festival.
- The cause of deaths could not be medically verified. Some were of the view that tuberculosis was the cause of the death. The opinion State government was – “It was not undernourishment. They died of tuberculosis and excessive drinking”.
- Their lifespan is approximately 26 years less than the average Indian’s life expectancy. Their lives are full of uncertainties, and death is considered the most normal of happenings.
- Administration failed to detect anything about the catastrophe until a few surviving inhabitants of the village made a plea to rescue them from hunger and diseases.

Failure of Administrative Authorities in that region:

- Despite the village’s proximity to several public offices such as the panchayat, block and district headquarters, being surrounded by other ethnic groups with better access to information, and even economically connected with relatively advantaged neighbours, the real reasons that caused the deaths hardly drew any public attention.
➢ Surveillance by the administrative authorities over the population in all other matters of their lives had failed to detect anything about the catastrophe until a few surviving inhabitants of the village made a plea to rescue them from hunger and diseases.

Study finds a knowledge gap resulted in Democratic Denial for the Adivasis:

1. We were part of a study conducted by the Asiatic Society and the Pratichi Institute among 1,000 households across West Bengal (“Living World of the Adivasis of West Bengal: An Ethnographic Exploration”).
2. The study found that there exists, both in the public and academic domains, a wide gap in knowledge about this selectively forgotten and pragmatically remembered population.
3. Who they are, where they live, what they do, what their socio-economic status is, what their cultural and linguistic practices are, are all questions to which the prevailing answers are fragmented and vague.

For example, in West Bengal, there are 40 Adivasi groups notified by the government as Scheduled Tribes (STs), but most people use the terms Adivasi and Santal interchangeably.
1. Santal in fact, is but one of the 40 notified tribes forming 47% of the total ST population.
2. This knowledge gap leads to democratic denial for the Adivasis. The imposed superiority of the outside world has resulted in the Adivasis considering themselves as inferior, primitive and even taking a fatalistic view of their subjugated life.

4. This pushes them to the margins, even making them abandon some of their socially unifying customs and cultural practices particularly democratic norms and human values that have evolved through a protracted journey of collective living and struggles for existence.

Negative sides of adopt assimilation policy:

- One outcome of this is the erosion of their great linguistic heritage (in some sections).
- Due to contact with other cultures, the tribal culture is undergoing a revolutionary change.
- Due to influence of Christian missionaries the problem of bilingualism has developed which led to indifference towards tribal language.
- The tribal people are imitating western culture in different aspects of their social life and leaving their own culture.
- It has led to degeneration of tribal life and tribal arts such as dance, music and different types of craft.
- However, Adivasi acceptance of the ‘imposed modern’ does not guarantee their inclusion in the apparent mainstream. Rather, the opposite happens.
- They are often reminded of their primitive roots and kept alienated.
- Again, pushed to the side by exploitation and oppression, marginalisation and subjugation, Adivasis, in many cases, cling to oppressive behaviours such as witchcraft which only make the label of them being primitive even more indelible.
- The vicious cycle of political-economic deprivation and social alienation continues to keep them subjugated to the ruling modern.
- A situation where they are a source of cheap labour and live lives where they are half-fed with no opportunities to flourish and develop their human capabilities seems unalterable.

Need of the hour: following Tribal Panchsheel policy in Letter and Spirit:

1. People should develop along the lines of their own genius, and the imposition of alien values should be avoided.
2. Tribal rights in land and forest should be respected.
3. Teams of tribals should be trained in the work of administration and development.
4. Tribal areas should not be over-administered or overwhelmed with a multiplicity of schemes.
5. Results should be judged not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the human character that is evolved.

Way Ahead:

✓ Rather, policy framing requires mandatory recognition of their wide diversity so as to address the different problems faced by different groups by community as well as by region.
✓ It is also important to abide by the general constitutional rules which are often violated by the state.
✓ In other words, the very common instances of violations of the Forest Rights Act, the Right to Education Act, and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act which affect them have to be eliminated.
✓ The possibility of fair implementation of public programmes, however, is contingent to an agentic involvement of the communities concerned.

Conclusion:

❖ Therefore, it is important to go beyond the administrative convention of bracketing Adivasis into a single category.
❖ Instead of being considered to be mere passive recipients, Adivasis must be respected as **active agents of change and involved in all spheres of policy, from planning to implementation.**

❖ It is imperative that the entire outlook on the Adivasi question is reversed. Instead of considering Adivasis to be a problem, the entire country can benefit a great deal by considering them as **co-citizens and sharing their historically constructed cultural values** which often manifest the **best forms of democracy** and uphold the notions of **higher levels of justice, fairness, and equality** better than those prevalent in seemingly mainstream societies.

❖ By ensuring their right to live their own lives, the **country can in fact guarantee itself a flourishing democracy.**

## 5. MISSING AT BIRTH: ON SEX SELECTIVE ABORTION AND INFANTICIDE

### Context:

- **Female foeticide and infanticide** are still alive in certain pockets of Tamil Nadu despite officials saying **cases have declined considerably.**

- The **State’s sex ratio**, which is the number of females born for every 1,000 males, has been improving slowly in the last few years.

- **TN’s sex ratio is 996 females to every 1,000 males.** The State’s child sex ratio is 943 girls to every 1,000 boys. But Tamil Nadu has a long way to go in protecting its girls.

- Doctors and officials are coming across suspicious deaths of otherwise healthy baby girls in certain parts of the State.

- In Vellore district during death audits, one or two cases of deaths due to milk aspiration involving **female babies are reported every month.**

- In Tiruvannamalai district at least one suspected case of female infanticide is reported every three months.

- Indicators to point out the prevalence of female foeticide and infanticide in a particular district are **low sex ratio at birth, high newborn mortality within 28 days of birth and high second trimester abortions.**

### Female foeticide and infanticide:

- Years after it was believed that **awareness generation and targeted behaviour change communication** had led to people giving up the inhuman practice of feeding female infants with the toxic milk of a local herb, the news that a couple had reportedly used the same method to kill their second girl child, just a month old, had child rights activists wringing their hands in frustration.

- **Data on sex ratio at birth (SRB)** culled from the Civil Registration System, show an alarming fall over the years. From 903 girls for every 1,000 boys in 2007, it dropped to 877 in 2016.

- **Dowries are now often 50% of a family’s disposable income**; killing girls has become more common with India’s quickly developing economy.

- The treatment of girls varies based on the region; in Kerala, girls are educated and a more liberal mindset is taken- daughters are unharmed; meanwhile in the North and Northwest, many daughters are murdered.
Missing Millions: A National Shame:

- According to NITI Aayog, the sex ratio at birth in India has worsened from 906 in 2012-2014 to 900 in 2013-2015.
- Further the Child Sex Ratio (0-6 years) was at an all-time low of 914 girls to 1000 boys as per the 2011 census.
- This led the Economic Survey of 2017-2018 to identify 63 million ‘Missing girls’ in India until 2014.
- The main reasons for the prevalence of ‘Missing Girls’ and decline Child Sex Ratio are sex selection biased in favour of male child, neglect of girl children, inadequate nutrition and discriminatory practices.
- Further the son-meta preference has exasperated the national shame of daughter deficits in India.
- Four States have an SRB equal to or below 840: Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan (806), Bihar (837), Uttarakhand (825) and Tamil Nadu (840).
- Activists point out that while infanticide may have come down, sex selective abortion at scan centres continues as the preferred vehicle for parents (and grandparents) obsessed with son preference.
- This despite the fact that the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act was enacted and amended to arm the state to wage a war against this pernicious practice.
- The Centre’s ‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’ campaign aimed at saving girl children has a huge unfinished task in front of it.
- Tamil Nadu, at one stage, effectively employed the Cradle Baby Scheme to counter infanticide, along with effective awareness campaigns.
- The cradles are still there, and the babies are coming too, but the SRB has been steadily dropping since 2011.

The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT Act):

- Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 (PNDT), was amended in 2003 to The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT Act) to improve the regulation of the technology used in sex selection.
- The Act was amended to bring the technique of pre conception sex selection and ultrasound technique within the ambit of the act.
- The amendment also empowered the central supervisory board and state level supervisory board was constituted.

Main provisions in the act are:

- The Act provides for the prohibition of sex selection, before or after conception.
- It regulates the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques, like ultrasound and amniocentesis by allowing them their use only to detect few cases.
- No laboratory or centre or clinic will conduct any test including ultrasonography for the purpose of determining the sex of the foetus.
- No person, including the one who is conducting the procedure as per the law, will communicate the sex of the foetus to the pregnant woman or her relatives by words, signs or any other method.
- Any person who puts an advertisement for pre-natal and pre-conception sex determination facilities in the form of a notice, circular, label, wrapper or any document, or advertises through interior or other media in electronic or print form or engages in any visible representation made by means of hoarding, wall painting, signal, light, sound, smoke or gas, can be imprisoned for up to three years and fined Rs. 10,000.
- The Act mandates compulsory registration of all diagnostic laboratories, all genetic counselling centres, genetic laboratories, genetic clinics and ultrasound clinics.

Failure of PCPNDT Act?

- In order to arrest the problem of sex-selection and female foeticide, the government in 1994 introduced the Prenatal Diagnostics Techniques Act.
• In 2003, PDT act was amended to become the Prenatal Conception and Prenatal Determination Act (PCPNDT) which regulates sex selection before or after conception.

• However, the PCPNDT Act is a failure in India with around 2300 cases of infanticide and 2000 cases of abortion registered under the act between 1994 and 2014. Today’s trend is that the number of abortions has outnumbered infanticides.

Conclusion:

❖ To choose on the basis of gender and eliminate new life if the gender is not ‘favourable’ can easily be among humanity’s worst moments.

❖ It is time again for the government to ramp up awareness building exercises, and this time use technology to monitor every single pregnant woman right down to taluk levels until at least one year after birth.

❖ While punitive aspects might offer a measure of deterrence, true change can only be brought about by a change in attitude.

❖ As Amartya Sen argued: while at birth boys outnumber girls, ‘after conception, biology seems on the whole to favour women’.

❖ The weapon that the government needs to use now is one that will be powerful enough to eliminate the perversion of son preference from people’s minds.

Way Forward:

✓ What is needed is a radical shift in the approach moving from protection of girl child to promotion of women as a category.

✓ This is done not just by improving the image of the girl child but increasing the value of the girl child.

✓ A rights-based lifecycle approach with focus on nutrition, health, education, equal entitlements in property rights, employment and income generation is the need of the day.

✓ Finally, only an over-arching gender sensitization programme focusing at the individual level through education, at the institutional level, public and private, at societal level through professional behavioural campaign is the only way to not add more to the shameless inventory of ‘Missing Millions’.

6. TEMPLES OF CRITICAL THINKING AND DEBATE

Context:

• In the recent subject-wise ranking of world universities by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), Indian institutions improved with 26 departments or schools placed in the top 100 of their respective disciplines.

• Science, technology and business studies were the fields in which our universities showed their mettle.

Indian universities ranking in overall parameters:

1. While this is a reason to celebrate, not even a single Indian university features in the QS ranking of the world’s top 150 in overall parameters.

2. The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) of Bombay and Delhi are at the 152nd and 182nd places in the overall rankings, while IISc Bangalore appears at the 184th position.

3. QS’s top 10 in overall terms include five American universities (MIT, Stanford, Harvard, Caltech and Chicago), four British universities (Oxford, Cambridge, UCL and Imperial College) and one Swiss university (ETH Zurich).

4. All the five American names in this list are private universities, while the British and Swiss institutions are public universities which have nonetheless enjoyed significant autonomy from governmental control over decades.
5. One common factor behind the success of the topmost universities is the **freedom with which they operate**.
6. They have been **major centres of innovation in teaching and research** thanks to independence from bureaucratic or corporate meddling and political intervention by parties of the day.
7. They could remain **centres of extraordinary excellence** in a sustained way by according **primacy to matters of the mind**, i.e. intellectual ideas and solutions to problems, and avoiding becoming hostage to dogmatic thought.

**Reasons for their Excellence: Pluralistic centres:**

1. All the great universities of the world are **ideologically pluralistic**, with **a mix of right, left and centre** among their faculty and students.
2. There is **no institutional line or official position** on any issue. Professors and students are free to choose whatever opinion they prefer.
3. No one is penalised for holding a pro- or anti-view on social, economic, political, cultural or scientific matters.
4. The top universities are also **excellent at attracting and retaining talent**. They hire professors very selectively, based on outstanding scholarly abilities. They reject a large number of candidates for admission as students, and admit only the brightest and the most meritorious.
5. This ruthless streak comes at **the expense of social inclusion and access considerations**, but some institutions must be allowed to generate knowledge as an end in itself so that they reach the **summit of intellectual endeavour**.
6. Top universities **incentivise publication and citation of research** in an unforgivingly rigorous way.
   1. If an Assistant Professor does not produce brilliant publications in the most reputed journals of her field, she may lose her job and not get tenured as an Associate Professor.
   2. By **insisting on tough standards** which are never lowered or relaxed, these universities **promote a meritocratic culture** as a habit.
7. By 2019, the total endowment of Harvard was worth $40 billion, which is made up of over 13,000 individual funds. Harvard invests this money in a variety of financial instruments and generates phenomenal income from it.
8. Since the **top Anglo-American universities** go back centuries, it is arguable whether such type of elite institutions can be **quickly and easily replicated** outside the U.S. and the U.K.
9. These big universities are products of historical circumstances which relied on **private philanthropy, colonial plunder or governmental subsidies** to reach the level they are at today.

**Reasons for poor performance of Indian Universities:**

1. **Avoiding politicisation, ideological rigidity and nepotism**, and freeing our universities from excessive interference and over-regulation, are prerequisites for success.
2. **Insularity and self-congratulatory frog-in-the-well attitudes** have held us back for long.
3. Most importantly, our universities **must have the drive to excel and compete** with Chinese or Western universities.
4. **Ingrained mediocrity and laid-back culture** which result in inadequate training of students in theories and methodologies have to be overcome.

**Taking examples from successfully performed Universities:**

- Big universities also **inculcate critical thinking, debating and writing abilities in their students.**
- They encourage students to look at issues through interdisciplinary lenses and to challenge their own professors.
- They award grades to students who are argumentative and who question conventional wisdom in the classroom and in assignments.
- Top global universities are also **super-smart financial managers.** Many of them, especially the U.S. universities, have sophisticated alumni offices through which they raise funding, which can exceed the revenue from student tuition fees.
- This type of interactive pedagogy produces **champion graduates** who have a reputation for **cutting-edge skills and knowledge in the job market** compared to peers from second- or third-tier universities.
- The world’s best universities are known for **involving their own alumni in governance and reforms.**

**Indian situation is different from China: Therefore, Need of Private Funding:**

- In India, as the government is **cash-strapped and lacks the kind of resources** which the Chinese state deployed to pump-prime Chinese universities.
- Our only viable path to world class universities is in the form of **enlightened private philanthropy and borrowing best practices** from established iconic universities.
- A **nationalistic passion for India** to be recognised as a top educational hub must underpin the strategies and activities of our universities.

**Initiative in the right direction:**

**Revitalising Infrastructure and Systems in Education (RISE) by 2022:**

- It aims to qualitatively upgrade the research and academic infrastructure in India to global best standards by 2022. This will help in making **India an education hub.**
- To allow access of HEFA funding to institutions like Central Universities, AIIMS, IISERs and newly created Institutes of National Importance, without creating any additional burden to the students.
- Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) has been tasked to mobilize Rs. 1,00,000 crores for this initiative.
- **Institutes of Eminence (IOEs):** The government’s decision to identify 20 Institutes of Eminence (IOEs) which will get maximum autonomy from bureaucracy in order to climb up the world rankings is a step in the right direction.
- The selected IOEs must innovate with new degree programmes, expanded variety of faculty members and digital learning platforms.

**Education Quality Upgradation and Inclusion Programme (EQUIP):**

1. A five-year vision plan to **improve the quality and accessibility** of higher education over the next five years (2019-2024).
2. **It aims to double the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education** and resolve the geographically and socially skewed access to higher education institutions in India.
3. To bring **at least 50 Indian institutions** among the top-1000 global universities.
Way Forward:

✓ There is much for India to learn from those who are miles ahead of us.

✓ The government’s decision to identify 20 Institutes of Eminence (IOEs) which will get maximum autonomy from bureaucracy in order to climb up the world rankings is a step in the right direction.

✓ The selected IOEs must innovate with new degree programmes, expanded variety of faculty members and digital learning platforms.

✓ India has miles to go in higher education. Unlike in authoritarian and top-down China, there is little likelihood of a meteoric breakout of multiple Indian universities into the top 100 of the world at a rapid clip.

✓ India’s democratic and contested character renders change evolutionary and cumulative. Still, with long-term vision and selfless leadership, our universities can eventually make it.

7. WE NEED MORE POLICEWOMEN

Introduction:

• At least since 2009, when the Home Ministry set 33% as the target for women’s representation in the police, increasing women’s recruitment in the police force has been the goal of the Central and State governments.

• Yet, India persists with a male-dominated police force.

In 2019, women comprised less than 10% of police personnel:

1. Only seven States (Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujarat and Sikkim) had more than 10% policewomen.

2. In fact, there has been only a 5% increase in the number of policewomen in a decade (3.65% in 2009 to 8.98% in 2019).

3. Reservation has been the primary tool to increase women’s representation.

4. Yet, no government has developed an action plan with clear timelines to meet the quota within a specified time period.

5. Thus, it is not surprising that the annual change in the share of women in the police force from 2012 to 2016 was found to be less than 1% across States, according to the India Justice Report, 2019.

6. At this rate, most States will take over 50 years to achieve the 33% target.

Selective implementation:

• While States adopt the reservation policy, they are very selective about its implementation.

• Very few States apply reservation for women at all the entry points (constable, sub-inspector, and deputy superintendent of police levels) or to all posts at each level.

• Some States (Kerala and Karnataka) have reservation for women only at the constable rank. Some (Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu) extend it to the constable and sub-inspector ranks.

• But here too there are restrictions: reservation is limited to specific cadre posts within each rank.

• This has resulted in huge disparity in the representation of women across ranks.

• There are far fewer women at the gazetted ranks at the State level (assistant sub-inspector to deputy superintendent of police) than those at the constabulary level.

• This means that women are most prominent in the most junior ranks. While this is not a negative in itself, in the absence of institutional support, women remain in large numbers at the bottom of the ladder without moving up.
• Restricting women’s quotas to entry levels or select posts not only shrinks the potential pool of women recruits in a given year but also reduces the proportion of women likely to get promoted to leadership and supervisory positions.

• As a consequence, there are not enough women personnel to perform exclusive functions when gender-based crimes are reported.

• For instance, in 2013, the Home Ministry said that at least three women sub-inspectors should be available in a police station as investigating officers.

• Tamil Nadu, which has the highest percentage of women personnel (17.46%), requires 6,057 women sub-inspectors to meet this standard across its 2,019 police stations. At present, it has barely one-fourth of that requirement.
The figure for policewomen in Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh has stayed at around 12% for the past four years. Some places like Chandigarh have even recorded a decline.

**Challenges that hinder women’s growth:**

1. It is time to look beyond numbers to **institutional barriers** that hinder women’s growth within the service.
2. Frequent **inter-district transfers** and disallowing postings in home districts for specified periods of time coupled with **poor childcare support systems** and lack of adequate facilities and infrastructure present distinct difficulties for women.
3. Taken together, these and other barriers limit the avenues for women’s promotion.
4. **Sexual harassment at the workplace** that policewomen suffer is not adequately acknowledged.
5. There is even less recognition of the impact that the policing sub-culture, with its association with “masculinity” and coercive force, has on the participation of women.
6. No wonder it is common to hear the police being described as policemen as if women in the police don’t exist at all.
7. The underlying assumption seems to be that an increase in numbers will automatically make the **organisational culture more egalitarian**. This is far from the truth.
8. Women are typecast for example, they are asked to deal with crimes against women, while they are kept outside the mainstream of varied experiences.
9. As a result, new recruits will become increasingly ghettoised in the absence of a framework to guide their career path.
10. Increasing the number of recruits alone will not be enough; institutional changes embedded in **principles of diversity, inclusion and equality of opportunities** are as important.
11. Otherwise, discrimination and exclusion will continue to persist even as the numbers of women increase.

**Way Forward: Need to develop model policies:**

1. One way to mainstream women in the police is to **develop a model policy** that will challenge the deep-rooted patriarchy in the institution.
2. Unfortunately, till now, not a single State police department has attempted to even draft such a policy.
3. A **model policy**, while laying the foundation for equal opportunities for women in every aspect of policing, should also strive to create a safe and enabling work environment. Without this, all other efforts will remain piecemeal.
4. One of the first steps to ensure a level playing field for women in the police is to **increase their numbers**.
5. Merely providing reservation is not enough; police departments should **develop an action plan to achieve the target of 30% or more in a time-bound manner**.
6. This also applies to States that have not provided a quota as yet. Departments should also undertake special recruitment drives in every district to **ensure geographical diversity**.
7. To achieve the target, the police should reach out to the media and educational institutions to spread awareness about **opportunities for women in the police**.
8. Current data reveal that most women in the police are concentrated in the lower ranks. Efforts should be made to change this. The **impulse to create women-only battalions** for the sake of augmenting numbers should be eliminated.
9. Second, the model policy should strive to ensure that decisions on deployment of women are **free of gender stereotyping** to facilitate bringing women into **leading operational positions**.
10. Women police officers should be encouraged to take on **public order and investigative crimes of all types**, and should be given duties beyond the minimum mandated by special laws. Desk work too must be allocated evenly among men and women.
11. A **major burden of family and childcare responsibilities** falls on women. Yet, police departments still lack **proper internal childcare support systems**.
12. Departments need to be mindful of this social reality and exercise sensitivity in making decisions on transfers and posting of women personnel.
13. As far as possible, women should be posted in their home districts in consultation with supervising officers.
Most State police departments have received funds under the Modernisation of State Police Forces Scheme for providing separate toilets and changing rooms for women, and for constructing separate accommodation for women with attached toilets in all police stations and units. Police departments must ensure the best use of this fund.

8. GIVING HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS MORE TEETH

Introduction:

- In 1993, the Indian Parliament enacted the Protection of Human Rights Act.
- The purpose of the Act was to establish an institutional framework that could effectively protect, promote and fulfil the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution.
- To this end, the Act created a National Human Rights Commission, and also, Human Rights Commissions at the levels of the various States.
- The Protection of Human Rights Act defines Human Rights as the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants and enforceable by courts in India.

Context:

- A pending case before the High Court of Madras has assumed great significance.
- A Full Bench of the High Court will be deciding upon whether “recommendations” made by the Human Rights Commissions are binding upon their respective State (or Central) governments, or whether the government is entitled to reject or take no action upon them.
- Under the Protection of Human Rights Act, the Human Rights Commissions are empowered to inquire into the violations of human rights committed by state authorities, either upon petitions presented to them, or upon their own initiative.
- While conducting these inquiries, the Commissions are granted identical powers to that of civil courts, such as the examining witnesses, ordering for documents, receiving evidence, and so on.
- These proceedings are deemed to be judicial proceedings, and they require that any person, who may be prejudicially affected by their outcome, has a right to be heard.

Fourth Branch Institutions:

1. According to the classical account, democracy is sustained through a distribution of power between three “branches”: the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary, with each branch acting as a check and a balance upon the others.
2. However, the complexity of governance and administration in the modern world has necessitated the existence of a set of independent bodies, which are charged with performing vital functions of oversight.
3. Some of these bodies are constitutional bodies established by the Constitution itself.
4. These include, for instance, the Election Commission and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.
5. Others have been established under law: for example, the Information Commission under the Right to Information Act, and Human Rights Commissions under the Protection of Human Rights Act.
6. The National and State Human Rights Commissions are examples of what we now call “fourth branch institutions.”

Human Rights Commissions: Powers and Autonomy:

➢ In the two-and-a-half decades of their existence, however, the functioning of the Human Rights Commissions has come under scrutiny and criticism.
➢ There have been the usual critiques of the politicisation of autonomous bodies, and selectiveness.
➢ Even more than that, however, it has been alleged that for all intents and purposes, the Human Rights Commissions are toothless: at the highest, they play an advisory role, with the government left free to disobey or even disregard their findings.
➢ Human rights commissions should be provided with their independent cadre of staff with appropriate experience, so that they can function autonomously.

Meaning of the word “recommend” by the Human Rights Commission:

1. The controversy before the Madras High Court stems from the issue of what is to be done after the Human Rights Commission completes its enquiry, and reaches a conclusion that human rights have been violated.
2. Section 18 of the Protection of Human Rights Act empowers the Human Rights Commission to “recommend” to the concerned government to grant compensation to the victim, to initiate prosecution against the erring state authorities, to grant interim relief, and to take various other steps.
3. The key question revolves around the meaning of the word “recommend.”
4. According to one set of judgments, this word needs to be taken in its ordinary sense. To “recommend” means to “put forward” or to “suggest” something or someone as being suitable for some purpose.
5. Ordinarily, a mere “suggestion” is not binding. Furthermore, Section 18 of the Human Rights Act also obligates the concerned government to “forward its comments on the report, including the action taken or proposed to be taken thereon, to the Commission”, within a period of one month.

Constitutional commitment:

1. As indicated above, the Human Rights Act exists to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights.
2. To fulfil this purpose, the Act creates an institutional infrastructure, via the Human Rights Commissions.
3. The Human Rights Commissions, thus, are bodies that stand between the individual and the state, and whose task is to ensure the adequate realisation of constitutional commitment to protecting human rights.
4. Indeed, in the past, courts have invoked constitutional purpose to determine the powers of various fourth branch institutions in cases of ambiguity.
   1. For example, the Supreme Court laid down detailed guidelines to ensure the independence of the Central Bureau of Investigation;
   2. various judgments have endorsed and strengthened the powers of the Election Commission to compulsorily obtain relevant details of candidates, despite having no express power to do so.

Conclusion:

❖ In this context, the Human Rights Commissions aims to ensure the full realisation of the constitutional commitment to protecting human rights and act as protector for citizens against arbitrary state action.
❖ It is therefore clear that in determining the powers of autonomous bodies such as the Human Rights Commission, the role that fourth branch institutions are expected to play in the constitutional scheme is significant.

❖ And lastly, the Human Rights Commission has the powers of a civil court, and proceedings before it are deemed to be judicial proceedings.

❖ This provides strong reasons for its findings to be treated at the very least as quasi-judicial, and binding upon the state (unless challenged).

❖ In sum, the crucial role played by a Human Rights Commission and the requirement of state accountability in a democracy committed to a ‘culture of justification’ strongly indicates that the Commission’s recommendations should be binding upon the state.

ECONOMY

1. BANKING ON BAILOUTS: ON YES BANK CRISIS

Context:

- One of the major private player Yes Bank (India’s fifth largest private sector bank) has also come under the RBI action for mounting bad loans.

- In order to save Yes Bank from collapsing and to preserve people’s trust in the Indian banking system, RBI has taken several measures.

- It placed the financially troubled Yes Bank under a moratorium, the Reserve Bank of India announced a draft ‘Scheme of Reconstruction’ that entails the State Bank of India (SBI) investing capital to acquire a 49% stake in the restructured private lender.

Reasons for Yes Bank Crisis:

1. The alacrity with which the bailout has been proposed is commendable, given that Yes Bank’s stock tumbled 56% on the BSE, eroding shareholders’ holdings and dragging the 10-bank S&P BSE Bankex down with it, an indicator of the contagion risk that a sudden bank resolution can pose to the financial system.

2. However, the decision to suspend normal business operations raises several worrying questions, both about the health of the banking sector, and the adequacy of the oversight role that regulators essay.
3. **Domino effect of IL&FS crisis:** Yes Bank illustrates the widening damage from India’s shadow banking crisis, which has left the Bank with a growing pile of bad loans.  
4. Yes Bank’s total exposure to Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL&FS) and Dewan Housing Finance Corp (DHFL) was 11.5% as of September 2019.

**Deteriorating Financial Position:**

1. The financial condition Deteriorated due to its inability to raise capital to address potential loan losses. The bank was experiencing losses and inadequate profits in the last four quarters.
2. It will also have adverse impacts on the Banking sector. People will gravitate towards public sector banks which are already reluctant to provide credit.
3. Private banks will be forced to offer higher deposit rates, keeping the cost of credit higher.
4. Thereby banks will not be able to cater the credit requirement which is a prerequisite to realise the dream of becoming a $5 trillion economy by 2024-2025.

**Governance Issues:**

1. The bank had serious governance issues. That is the reason former Deputy Governor of RBI Mr. R Gandhi was included in the BOD of the yes bank. Ultimately the bank reported NPA of Rs 3,277 crore in 2018-19.
2. Yes Bank’s troubles are not exactly new or unique and its problems with mounting bad and dodgy loans reflect the underlying woes in the borrower industries, ranging from real estate to power and non-banking financial companies.
3. The continued inability of several corporates to repay their loans resulting in many landing up in insolvency proceedings has meant that lenders have been the hardest hit.
4. Yes Bank, which is yet to report third-quarter financials, suffered a dramatic doubling in gross non-performing assets over the April-September six-month period to 17,134 crore, even as it scrambled to raise capital to shore up its balance sheet.

**Huge Liabilities:**

1. The Yes Bank has a total liability of 24 thousand crore dollars. The bank has a balance sheet of about $40 billion (2.85 lakh crore rupees). The Yes Bank has to pay $2 billion to increase the capital base.
2. With the economy in the throes of a persistent slowdown, the prospects of banks’ burden of bad loans easing soon are limited.
3. The fact that the lender ended up at the resolution stage, without ever being placed under the central bank’s Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework, also raises a question mark over how and why Yes Bank eluded the specifically tailor-made solution to address weakness at banks.

**What is Prompt Corrective Action (PCA)?**

1. PCA is a framework under which banks with weak financial metrics are put under watch by the RBI.
2. The RBI introduced the PCA framework in 2002 as a structured early-intervention mechanism for banks that become undercapitalised due to poor asset quality, or vulnerable due to loss of profitability.
3. It aims to check the problem of Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) in the Indian banking sector.
4. The framework was reviewed in 2017 based on the recommendations of the working group of the Financial Stability and Development Council on Resolution Regimes for Financial Institutions in India and the Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission.
5. PCA is intended to help alert the regulator as well as investors and depositors if a bank is heading for trouble. The idea is to head off problems before they attain crisis proportions.
6. Essentially PCA helps RBI monitor key performance indicators of banks, and taking corrective measures, to restore the financial health of a bank.
Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) Measures:

1. RBI can place restrictions on dividend distribution, branch expansion, and management compensation.
2. Only in an extreme situation, would a bank be a likely candidate for resolution through amalgamation, reconstruction or winding up.
3. RBI may place restrictions on credit by PCA banks to unrated borrowers or those with high risks, but it doesn’t invoke a complete ban on their lending.
4. RBI may also impose restrictions on the bank on borrowings from interbank market.
5. Banks may also not be allowed to enter into new lines of business.

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) mechanism needs to be strengthened to meet global standards with active involvement of the government, regulators, lenders, borrowers and the judiciary.

Conclusion:

❖ With several other public sector banks currently engaged in merging with weaker peers as part of the Centre’s plan, it has fallen on the country’s largest bank to play the role of a white knight to a private rival.

❖ While Yes Bank’s depositors are sure to heave a huge sigh of relief, India’s banking sector is still far from out of the woods. Clearly, the RBI and Centre have their task cut out in ensuring that the need for such bailouts is obviated.

❖ The central bank had in recent years flagged several concerns, including a distinct divergence between the reported and RBI’s own findings on the bank’s financials.

❖ This could then be a good opportunity for the RBI to review its PCA guideposts and revise them to ensure that such a slipping under the radar does not recur. The choice of SBI as the investor to effect the bailout reflects the paucity of options the government has.

2. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPING A KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

Introduction:

• A rapidly growing India requires a highly skilled technical workforce that is crucial for developing a knowledge economy.

• Unfortunately, half the scientific potential of India, women in science—is squandered.

• Women make up only 14% of the 280,000 scientists, engineers, and technologists in research and development institutions across the country, according to a recent study.

• Today, fewer women apply for or hold key scientific positions as several barriers prevent them from progressing in their careers, in comparison with their male counterparts.

• There is widespread frustration experienced by women, who find it difficult if not impossible to fulfil their scientific potential.
Several factors that disadvantage women are not acknowledged widely enough:

1. **Peer-reviewed research reports** have indicated that women scientists earn less, have less prestige within departments, have less lab space, are offered inadequate jobs on graduating with science degrees and have more teaching responsibilities.
2. They also face greater difficulty in receiving grants, and therefore apply for fewer grants in the first place.
3. It is imperative to tackle these issues with vigour if India is to take its rightful place among developed nations.
4. **Women tend to lack access to informal networks** that provide opportunities to work in high-profile projects, which include attending conferences abroad or on-the-job opportunities.
5. Therefore, they **lack the work experience** that would enable them to rise up the ranks and provide access to the wide range of developmental models that could **build the credibility they need to advance**.
6. **Performance assessment** is now an **integral part** of an organization’s performance management systems, implemented as companies move away from the age-old concepts of training and skill development.
7. Mentors often **help build confidence** as well as **professional identity** in protégés and offer access to developmental opportunities, allowing individuals to demonstrate their ability and gain trust.
8. Mentors keep information channels **open and provide feedback on performance** in crucial times. It has been noted that almost every successful woman has had a mentor at some time.

**Only 7% of female employees: 73% reported leaving because they saw limited opportunities:**

1. Organizations often define success by the willingness of their employee to work for long hours and prioritize work over everything else a “**live to work**” ideal, generally regarded as more masculine.
2. When women feel selected or assessed on the basis of group membership rather than their work record and abilities, they experience gender discrimination.
3. Women feel that an **unempathetic culture** is one of the **most significant barriers to their advancement**.
4. A study highlighted that only **3% of women** surveyed regarded **family responsibilities** as their most serious career obstacle, while 50% cited gender bias.
5. **Only 7% of female employees** surveyed reported leaving the organization for family reasons, whereas 73% reported leaving because they saw limited opportunities.
6. The quit rates for women were significantly lower in organizations that provided better training and promotion opportunities.
7. Almost a **third of women’s employment** globally is in **agriculture**, including forestry and fishing, but this may exclude self-employed and unpaid family workers.
8. Yet, differences across countries and regions are striking. The share of women workers in agriculture is only **9.5 per cent** in upper-middle-income countries and 2.6 per cent in high-income countries.

9. While agriculture remains the most important employment sector for **women in low-income and lower-middle-income countries**.

**Benefits of Economic Empowerment:**

Women’s economic empowerment is central to realizing **women’s rights and gender equality**.

1. Women’s economic empowerment includes women’s ability to participate equally in existing markets;
2. Their access to and control over productive resources, access to decent work, control over their own time, lives and bodies; and
3. Increased voice, agency and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions.

Empowering women in the economy and closing gender gaps in the world of work are key to achieving the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals**.

1. Particularly **Goal 5**, to achieve gender equality, and **Goal 8**, to promote full and productive employment and decent work for all; also **Goal 1** on ending poverty, **Goal 2** on food security, **Goal 3** on ensuring health and **Goal 10** on reducing inequalities.
2. When more women work, economies grow. Women’s economic empowerment boosts productivity, **increases economic diversification** and **income equality** in addition to other positive development outcomes.
3. For example, increasing the female employment rates in OECD countries to match that of Sweden, could **boost GDP by over USD 6 trillion**, recognizing, however, that growth does not automatically lead to a **reduction in gender-based inequality**.

Conversely, it is estimated that **gender gaps cost** the economy **some 15 percent of GDP**.

1. Increasing women’s and girls’ educational attainment contributes to women’s economic empowerment and more inclusive economic growth.
2. **Education, upskilling and re-skilling** over the life course especially to keep pace with rapid technological and digital transformations affecting jobs are critical for **women’s and girl’s health and wellbeing**, as well as their income-generation **opportunities and participation** in the formal labour market.
3. **Increased educational attainment** accounts for about 50 per cent of the economic growth in OECD countries over the past 50 years.
4. But, for the majority of women, significant gains in education have not translated into **better labour market outcomes**.
5. **Women’s economic equality** is good for business. Companies greatly benefit from increasing employment and leadership opportunities for women, which is shown to increase organizational effectiveness and growth.
6. It is estimated that companies with three or more **women in senior management functions** score higher in all dimensions of organizational performance.

In recent years, we have witnessed an **increase in the number of women** with children who participate in the country’s paid workforce.

1. An organization’s culture has a significant impact on those who work within it.
2. Unfortunately, not many organizations have revised their work policies or employee expectations to enable women to **strike a balance between their work and family responsibilities**.
3. For instance, the internet and telecom revolutions have enabled organizations to introduce **employee-friendly policies** such as **flexi-work hours and work-from-home** that have significantly transformed workplace practices.
4. Women often take on part-time roles that pay less, or are seen as less important, in order to accommodate work and family.

5. **Family commitments** can influence the way co-workers, including managers, perceive them.

6. Even when organizations address these concerns with employee-centric policies, women fear a personal disadvantage or a possible career penalty if they avail them.

7. The difficulty women have combining paid work with the **primary responsibility for dependent care** is interpreted by some as a lack of women’s commitment to paid work.

We must **mobilize all our resources**, if India aims to be a $5 trillion economy.

The **gender imbalance in science and technology** is a looming challenge and threatens to weaken our country’s competitive economic position.

**Conclusion:**

- Science needs the **best scientists**, and a knowledge economy needs a **gender-balanced workforce**.
- This can only be attained by realizing the full potential of women. Apart from being wasteful and unjust, the under-representation of women in science threatens the goal of achieving excellence in the field.
- To tackle this, we must set an **ambitious target of reaching out to 1 million young girls each year**, and encourage them to take up science and make a difference.
- A national convention of women in science must be held annually, with a specific focus on discussing and building general awareness around the major challenges that women face.
- By addressing these concerns, we can **empower and motivate more women to join scientific fields**, unlock India’s full potential, and develop the country to become a knowledge economy.

### 3. HOW THE COUNTRY SHOULD MAKE THE MOST OF A SECOND OIL WINDFALL

**Context:**

- **Crude oil**, caught in a spiral of demand destruction due to the coronavirus spread and oversupply worries from the unravelling of the OPEC-plus arrangement, has faced a major rout.
- From about $65 a barrel in end-December, Brent oil has crashed to about **$35 now** a level last seen in early 2016.
- The impact of Covid-19 will be felt on the global demand for oil, too, as a dramatic increase in Covid-19 cases has put further downward pressure on demand for commodities, including oil.
- Thus, both supply and demand shocks have coalesced to roil the crude oil market. Since the start of the year, oil prices have fallen by about a third. Prices may drop further under the weight of the twin assault of higher supply and lower demand.

**Price war for market share gains between Russia and Saudi Arabia:**

- The last two trading sessions have been particularly brutal for the fuel with Saudi Arabia and Russia, the prime players in the OPEC-plus group, refusing to extend their output cuts to stabilise already weak prices.
- This has heralded a price war for market share gains, with the Saudis firing the first salvo and the Russians expected to retaliate.
- The race to the bottom could result in many casualties among **global oil producers**, including the US shale oil industry.

**Why India Need Strategic Petroleum Reserves?**

- India still needs to import 83% crude oil of its requirement which increase import bill of India which further widens the **Current Account Deficit (CAD)** of the country.
• The fluctuations in the price of the crude oil in the international market create an *atmosphere of uncertainty* in the country.

• So, in this way the economic condition of the country is dependent on the oil importing countries i.e. Gulf countries which does not suit to a sovereign country like India.

• It is known that the current petroleum reserves of India are sufficient to fulfil just **13 days oil requirement of the country**.

• But this is not sufficient to tackle any unpredicted event occurs in the international crude market. So India want to have petroleum reserves of 90 days.

• In order to **ensure energy security for 90 days, India needs to build up additional petroleum reserves of 13.32 metric ton**.

**Declining of Oil prices: Impact on India:**

1. It is, therefore, not a stretch to expect oil prices over the coming financial year to be lower than they were in the previous two.
2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. The collapse in oil prices will cut the country’s import bill, and soften its current account deficit.

6. 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.

7. Low oil prices offer an opportunity to raise some revenue and improve its fiscal balance.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. Third, the potential excise duty windfall from oil prices could come in handy for the government to provide relief to beleaguered telecom companies.

11. 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.

12. 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.

Government has to get its act together to reap the benefits in the long term:

- Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd is responsible for building buffers. Currently, it has 5.33 million tonnes of underground strategic reserve facility in Visakapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur (Karnataka), while another 6.5 mt facility is coming up at Padur and Chandikhole (Odisha).

- Work on two more facilities — at Bikaner in Rajasthan and Rajkot in Gujarat.

What works for India:

- It is the age of globalization where the price of a product is determined by the demand-supply chain.

- The interconnected nature of international oil markets makes disruptions in any given area likely to affect prices in much wider geography.

- But does the price offer any comfort? Energy expert says, “Neither ultra-low nor ultra-high prices are good for India.

- Prices that encourage growth in both the exporting Gulf countries and India are good for us; after all, nearly 10 million Indians work in the GCC countries, who send over $40 billion in remittances.”

- Ultra-low prices may help India in the short run but can hurt in the medium to long run.

- The opposition has urged the government to pass on the benefits of the low crude prices to the common man, by reducing the retail rates of petrol, diesel and cooking gas.

Conclusion:

❖ As a summary, it can be said that construction of strategic petroleum reserves by India is a great way to secure country’s energy security.

❖ These reserves would act like piggy bank for India in the event of war like situation in the gulf countries or other oil importers of India.
❖ India wants to develop a transparent market for natural gas where the price is determined on an exchange. The aim is to increase the use of natural gas in India’s total energy mix from 6.5 percent to 15 percent between 2028 and 2030.

❖ India must safeguard its renewable energy sector and redouble its efforts to gasify its economy.

❖ These continue to be the best bets to power India into a more secure and green future. The present instability in the global oil market further underlines the need to move away from the energy sources of yesterday.

4. FIGHT FOR THE FINITE: ON BUDGETARY ALLOCATION FOR HEALTH

Context:

In India: SARS-CoV-2: Lowest Testing Rates:

- It is an incontrovertible truth that material resources are finite.
- Demand in most sectors will continue to exceed supply in times of a pandemic.
- With the number of SARS-CoV-2 positive cases on the rise, and the number of deaths going up as well, the question is whether national and state health systems will be able to cope with ever-rising demands — for testing kits, for hospital beds, ventilators, why, even masks and hand sanitisers.
- While most of China’s neighbours have been able to contain the spread of COVID-19, countries far from it are seeing an exponential surge in cases.
- Early testing and wider coverage distinguish such Asian countries from Western countries.
- However, India is dangerously placed as it has among the lowest testing rates.

More tests meant better results:

1. The number of virus tests per million population as of March 9 against the number of COVID-19 cases as of March 13 for nations that have provided this data.
2. Hong Kong, S. Korea and Taiwan scaled up their test rates and contained the spread, whereas the S. and U.K. have not done so and have seen an exponential rise in cases. India too has not scaled up the rate of testing.
3. This extraordinary demand has traditional production and systems of delivery choking and most often, unable to match supply to demand.

4. Health-care resources, limited to begin with, are even more so when under stress.

5. In India, though the testing rates are abysmal. But the exponential rise of cases in Western nations, which have similarly low rates of testing, should set the alarm bells ringing.

India is in stage 2 of the pandemic, characterized by local transmission among families, for instance.

To ascertain if it has reached stage 3 of broader community transmission, ICMR has initiated surveillance for cases of influenza-like illness among people who have no history of travel to an outbreak country or being in contact with an infected individual.

COVID-19: Masks and sanitisers are now essential commodities:

1. The Centre can include new commodities as and when the need arises, and take them off the list once the situation improves.

2. For instance, masks and hand sanitisers were declared as essential commodities on March 13, 2020.

3. This is due to a shortage of these commodities in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. 2 ply and 3 ply surgical masks, N95 masks and hand sanitisers have also been included in the list of items under ECA till June 30, 2020.

5. The State has also issued an advisory under the Legal Metrology Act to ensure these items are not sold for more than their MRP.

6. The ECA gives consumers protection against irrational spikes in prices of essential commodities.

7. Under ECA, the States and Union Territories can ask manufacturers to enhance their production capacity. This is to make these products more widely available to consumers.

8. An offender under the Essential Commodities Act can be punished with imprisonment up to seven years, or a fine, or both.

9. Consumers can also register complaints in this regard with the National Consumer Helpline 1800-11-4000 or at consumerhelpline.gov.in.

Now, there is an chance to increase in Public sector health infrastructure:

1. A WHO bulletin of 2018 records that out-of-pocket payments remain common in India, which in 2014, was estimated at 62% of total health expenditure.

2. While questioning whether these incremental efforts are sufficient, one needs to factor in the substantial skew in different States in terms of public sector health infrastructure and wherewithal.

3. At a time when the disease did not have a name, and much less by way of character, in mainland China, the rapidly climbing numbers went far beyond the capacity of the country’s renowned industry (where a hospital was built in record time), and the health systems struggled to cope.

4. Reports indicate that in Italy, which has emerged the hub of the epidemic outside of China, the strain on health systems is massive.

5. With India crossing 100 positive cases, it is impossible to ignore the question about whether the health system is robust enough to meet this emergency. What is known, however, does not inspire confidence.

6. For years, India’s health expenditure as a percentage of GDP has been abysmal at about 1%.

7. As per the National Health Profile, 2019, collated by the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence unit of the Directorate General of Health Services, there has been no significant change in health-care expenditure since 2009-2010.

8. The highest it has been in the decade is 28 % of the GDP, and hit the nadir at 0.98 % in 2014-2015.

9. The report does record that per capita public expenditure on health in nominal terms went up from Rs.621 in 2009-10 to Rs.1,112 in 2015-16.

Conclusion:

❖ There is evidence to show that increased public spending on health care has resulted in less financial hardship for communities and better health outcomes.

❖ Prime Minister Modi made a promise to increase public health spending to 2.5 % of GDP by 2025.
❖ The government would do well to treat this epidemic as an opportunity to **drastically scale up budgetary allocations** for health to facilitate expansion of capacity.

❖ Epidemics are known to change the course of history; India must steer this one to **harness finite resources optimally for the benefit of all.**

## 5. THE PERILS OF AN ALL-OUT LOCKDOWN

### Context:

- Nations across the world have **sprung into action to contain the impact of this epidemic.**
- China is walling off major cities and public places. Italy is shutting down schools. America has embarked aggressively both to quarantine people as well as hasten research efforts to find a cure.
- Many other nations have announced various measures to address this issue. India too must act swiftly and **announce a mission critical team** that will be tasked with addressing the issue.
- As the **novel coronavirus spreads**, a double crisis looms over India: a **health crisis and an economic crisis.**
- In terms of casualties, the health crisis is still very confined (seven deaths in a country where eight million people die every year), but the numbers are growing fast.
- Meanwhile, the **economic crisis is hitting with full force**, throwing millions out of work by the day. Unlike the health crisis, it is not class-neutral, but **hurts poor people the most.**

**Economic crisis: India slows down hurts poor the most:**

- Migrant workers, street vendors, contract workers, almost everyone in the informal sector the bulk of the workforce — is being hit by this economic tsunami.
- For instance, In Maharashtra, mass lay-offs have forced migrant workers to rush home, some without being paid.
Many of them are now stranded between Maharashtra and their homes as trains have been cancelled.

The economic standstill in Maharashtra is spreading fast to other States as factories, shops, offices and worksites close with little hope of an early return to normalcy.

With transport routes dislocated, even the coming wheat harvest, a critical source of survival for millions of labouring families in north India, may not bring much relief.

We are dealing not only with a health crisis but also with an economic crisis:

1. There is a danger of people’s hardships being aggravated by a tendency to shut down essential services.
   - Public transport, administrative offices, court hearings, MGNREGA projects and even immunisation drives have already been suspended to varying degrees in many States.

2. Some of these interruptions are certainly justified, but others are likely to be counter-productive.
3. Even if discontinuing public services helps to contain the health crisis, the economic consequences need to be considered.
4. To assess the case for various precautionary measures, we must bear in mind the dual motive for taking precautions.
5. When you decide to stay at home, there are two possible motives for it: a self-protection motive and a public-purpose motive.
6. In the first case, you act out of fear of being infected. In the second, you participate in collective efforts to stop the spread of the virus.
7. Some people think about precautions as a matter of self-protection. What they may not realise is that the individual risk of getting infected is still tiny — so small that it is hardly worth any self-protection efforts (except for special groups such as health workers and the elderly).
8. Four hundred thousand people die of tuberculosis in India every year, yet we take no special precautions against it. So why do we take precautions when seven people have died of COVID-19?
9. The enlightened reason is not to protect ourselves, but to contribute to collective efforts to halt the epidemic.

Keeping public services going in this situation is likely to require some initiative and creativity:

1. A similar reasoning applies to the case for shutting down public services as a precautionary measure.
2. Self-protection of public employees is not a major issue (for the time being), the main consideration is public purpose.
3. Further, public purpose must include the possible economic consequences of a shutdown.
4. If a service creates a major health hazard, public purpose may certainly call for it to be discontinued (this is the reason for closing schools and colleges).
5. On the other hand, services that help poor people in their hour of need without creating a major health hazard should continue to function as far as possible.
6. That would apply not only to health services or the Public Distribution System, but also to many other public services including administrative offices at the district and local levels.
7. Poor people depend on these services in multiple ways, closing them across the board at this time would worsen the economic crisis without doing much to stem the health crisis.
8. An explicit list of essential services (already available in some States) and official guidelines on coronavirus readiness at the workplace would be a good start.
9. Many public premises are crying for better distancing arrangements. Some services can even be reinvented for now.
10. For instance, anganwadis could play a vital role of public-health outreach at this time, even if children have to be kept away. Many public spaces could also be used, with due safeguards, to disseminate information or to impart good habits such as distancing and washing hands.
11. The urgent need for effective social security measures makes it all the more important to avoid a loss of nerve.
12. The way things are going today, it will soon be very difficult for some State governments to run the Public Distribution System or take good care of drinking water.

13. That would push even more people to the wall, worsening not only the economic crisis but possibly the health crisis as well. This is not the time to let India’s frail safety net unravel.

**Tap social schemes should be the need of the hour:**

- Since time is of the essence, the first step is to make good use of existing social-security schemes to support poor people — pensions, the Public Distribution System (PDS), midday meals, and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), among others.
- Initial measures could include advance payment of pensions, enhanced PDS rations, immediate payment of MGNREGA wage arrears, and expanded distribution of take-home rations at schools and anganwadis.
- Some States have already taken useful steps of this sort, but the scale of relief measures needs radical expansion.
- That, in turn, requires big money from the Central government. It also requires the government to avoid squandering its resources on corporate bailouts: most crisis-affected sectors of the economy will soon be lobbying for rescue packages.

**Conclusion:**

- This economic crisis calls for urgent, massive relief measures. Lockdowns may be needed to slow down the epidemic, but poor people cannot afford to stay idle at home.
- If they are asked to stay home, they will need help. There is a critical difference, in this respect, between India and affluent countries with a good social security system.
- The average household in, say, Canada or Italy can take a lockdown in its stride (for some time at least), but the staying power of the Indian poor is virtually nil.
- It is time to confront the harsh reality of the grave risks we face as a nation and address them squarely and sufficiently. There could be some best practices we can adopt from other nations.

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**6. WHY GOVT HAS RAISED EXCISE DUTY CAP ON FUEL AMID CORONAVIRUS SCARE**

**Context:**

- The government increased the caps on special additional excise duty by Rs 8 per litre on both petrol and diesel, taking the cap to Rs 18 per litre on petrol and Rs 12 per litre on diesel.
- The decision took place in the amendment to the Finance Bill, 2020, which passed in Lok Sabha. Finance Minister today presented the amendment, which passed without the debate.
- However, experts say that the move to give headroom to the government to shore up its falling revenues may still not be enough to compensate for the fall in demand due to the COVID-19 outbreak.
The government doesn’t have too many levers as on the one side healthcare costs could be rising and on the other side your overall revenues may fall because of the slowdown.

**Excise duty on petro products contribution:**

- Historical trend in Brent crude oil prices and its relationship with excise duty collection and retail prices, suggests post-GST, excise duty on petro products now contributes 85-90 per cent of overall excise duty collection of Centre.
- In 2019-20 (April-December), total excise collection on petro products for nine months is close to ₹1.5 lakh crore.
- The SBI Ecowrap report said that if the same run rate (on excise collection) continues for FY20, then there could be shortfall of at least ₹14,000 crore to the exchequer making case for further increase in the duty.

**Pressure on Fiscal deficit as a percentage of GDP:**

1. The SBI Ecowrap report has also highlighted the tough situation government faces in terms of managing fiscal deficit amidst rising demand for fresh expenditure to tackle the novel coronavirus spread.
2. It said that based on current tax revenue trends, additional expenditure rationalization of ₹1.2 lakh crores might be required in the current fiscal, if India has to stick to mandated 3.8 per cent fiscal deficit.
3. Even COVID-19 will have an impact on GDP through Trade, Hotels, Transport, Communication & Services sub-segment and this will have pressures on fiscal deficit as a percentage of GDP.
4. In FY21, nominal GDP growth is at 10 per cent and every 10 bps slippage in nominal GDP numbers in FY21 will push up fiscal deficit by roughly one basis point.
5. We are already estimating that the impact of a 5 per cent inoperability shock could be 90 basis point on GDP from Trade, Hotel and Transport and Transport, Storage and Communication segment, that could be spread over FY20 and FY21, with a larger impact in FY21.
6. The report, however, said it will be completely foolhardy to stick to any mandated fiscal rules in times of current crisis that is now threatening to rip apart the entire global financial ecosystem.

**Precarious fiscal situation:**

- Government is increasing duties on petrol and diesel to raise revenues in view of a tight fiscal situation.
- Slump in global crude oil prices, alongside possibility of a global economic recession, has forced the government to look for avenues to raise revenues to support growth.
- With major companies going for production shut downs, industry players have suggested the government to boost fiscal stimulus in the wake of demand collapse triggered by the coronavirus.
- Earlier, Saudi Arabia had triggered the crash in prices by announcing a sharp increase in oil production after Russia declined to reduce oil supply to contain a fall in oil prices due to declining demand in a meeting of petroleum exporting countries.

**What about stuff like milk, sugar and edible oils?**

1. These, again, are produce not brought to be sold in mandis. Dairies procure milk directly from farmers or through bulk vendors. The sugar that mills produce similarly comes from cane sourced straight from growers.
2. Two-thirds of the edible oil consumed by India is imported. There, too, the problem of the crop having to first come to an APMC (agricultural produce market committee) mandi does not arise.
3. In the current lockdown situation, there are actually mitigating factors on the supply requirement front, particularly for the three food items.
4. The most important of them is the demand destruction due to shutting down of HORECA (hotels, restaurants and catering) businesses.
5. With hardly any business-to-business (B2B) sales happening, the demand for milk products, sugar and edible oil is now only in the business-to-consumer segment.
6. The Prime Minister mentioned that all necessary steps would be taken to ensure “no shortage of essential items like milk”.

Conclusion:

❖ At present, the total central excise duty on petrol stands at Rs 22.98 per litre and on diesel, at Rs 18.83 per litre.
❖ With Rs 8 per litre increase, these would increase substantially to Rs 30.98 per litre on petrol and Rs 26.83 on diesel. In addition, states also levy VAT on the two products. Petrol and diesel have not been so far included under GST.
❖ The increased excise revenue from oil should not be used for bridging the fiscal gap and pleasing the markets.
❖ Rather sound economics demands it must be used as a fiscal package for income support to the people working in the unorganised sector who are already facing the brunt of loss of jobs.

7. THE PROMOTION OF COMPETITION IS VITAL TO THE INDIAN ECONOMY

The Competition Act:

❖ The Competition Act, 2002, as amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007, prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and M&A), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

Background:

❖ The Ministry of Corporate Affairs in October 2018 had set up the Competition Law Review Committee (CLRC) under chairman of Mr. Injeti Srinivas to comprehensively review the Competition Act and suggest substantive and procedural amendments for a robust competition regime.
• The CLRC submitted its report in July 2019, and its recommendations were closely reflected in the recent Draft Competition (Amendment) Bill, 2020.

• The Draft Bill proposes several amendments to the Act based on the recommendations of the Committee.

**Competition Commission of India (CCI):**

• *Competition Commission of India (CCI) is a statutory body* of the Government of India responsible for enforcing the Competition Act, 2002, it was duly constituted in March 2009.

• *Competition Commission of India aims to establish a robust competitive environment.*

• The Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969 (MRTP Act) was repealed and replaced by the Competition Act, 2002, on the recommendations of Raghavan committee.

• Through proactive engagement with all stakeholders, including consumers, industry, government and international jurisdictions.

• By being a knowledge intensive organization with high competence level. Through *professionalism, transparency, resolve and wisdom* in enforcement.

**Necessity of Competition Commission of India:**

• Competition laws have been described as the *Magna Carta of free enterprise.* Competition is important for the *preservation of economic freedom and our free enterprise system.*

• The need for competition law arises because market can suffer from failures and distortions, and various players can resort to anti-competitive activities such as cartels, abuse of dominance etc. which adversely impact economic efficiency and consumer welfare.

• Thus, there is a need for competition law to *provide a regulative force* which establishes effective control over economic activities.

• During the era in which the economies are moving from closed economies to open economies, an effective competition commission is essential to ensure the continued viability of domestic industries, carefully balanced with attaining the benefits of foreign investment increased competition.

**Need for review:**

• During the past nine years the size of the Indian Economy has grown immensely and India is today *amongst the top five Economies in the World* and poised to forge ahead further.

• In this context, it is essential that *Competition Law is strengthened,* and re-calibrated to promote best practices which result in the citizens of this country achieving their aspirations and value for money.

**The key recommendations of the Competition Law Review Committee are:**

1. **Introduction of a ‘Green Channel’** for combination notifications to enable fast-paced regulatory approvals for vast majority of mergers and acquisitions that may have no major concerns regarding appreciable adverse effects on competition.

2. **The aim is to move towards disclosure-based regime** with strict consequences for not providing accurate or complete information.

3. **Combinations arising out of the insolvency resolution process** under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code will also be eligible for “Green Channel” approvals.

4. **Introducing a dedicated bench in NCLAT** for hearing appeals under the Competition Act.

5. **Introduction of express provisions to identify ‘hub and spoke’ agreements** as well as agreements that do not fit within typical horizontal or vertical anti-competitive structures to cover agreements related to business structures and models synonymous with new age markets.

6. **Additional enforcement mechanism of ‘Settlement & Commitments’** in the interests of speedier resolution of cases of anti-competitive conduct.

7. **Enabling provisions to prescribe necessary thresholds,** inter alia, deal-value threshold for merger notifications.
8. CCI to issue guidelines on imposition of penalty to ensure more transparency and faster decision making which will encourage compliance by businesses.

9. Strengthening the governance structure of CCI with the introduction of a Governing Board to oversee advocacy and quasi-legislative functions, leaving adjudicatory functions to the Whole-time Members.

10. Merging DG’s Office with CCI as an ‘Investigation Division’ as it aids CCI in discharging an inquisitorial rather than adversarial mandate. However, functional autonomy must be protected.

11. Opening of CCI offices at regional level to carry out non-adjudicatory functions such as research, advocacy etc. and interaction with State Governments and State regulators.

Consider the CCI’s independence:

1. The draft bill proposes an overarching governing board that would have general superintendence, direction and management powers over the CCI.

2. As envisioned, this board would comprise not just commission members, but also secretaries from the Union finance and corporate affairs ministries as ex-officio members, and also four part-time members appointed by the Centre.

3. The rationale: to enable better coordination between the CCI and the government, enable expert external assistance to the commission in undertaking key functions, and have structural consistency with other regulators like the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) and Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

4. The Union government has been requested to formulate new thresholds for combinations based on certain factors that should ideally be stated in the Act.

5. An attractive proposition is the contemplation of a new index, similar to the Ease of Doing Business, for states to rank them on the competitiveness of their laws and policies, and an amendment in Section 49 to make a cyclic review of their laws and references to the CCI for the same as something to be done with proclivity.

Conclusion:

❖ Prime Minister Narendra Modi inter alia spoke about working on fair competition as one of the four pillars to achieve India’s target of a $5 trillion economy.

❖ In order to attain such an ambitious goal, it is clear that the government needs to design and adopt laws and policies that deliver economic democracy and competitiveness.

❖ In terms of laws, the government proposed far-reaching amendments to the Competition Act, including critical changes to the scope and functioning of the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

❖ It is hoped that with these proposed changes, the Act will prove to be an effective tool of realising the dream of making India a $5-trillion economy, and protecting the interest of the consumers at large by ensuring healthy competition in the economy, leading to efficiency and sustainable economic growth.

8. CENTRE ROLLS OUT ₹1.7-LAKH-CRORE LOCKDOWN PACKAGE

Context:

• The Union government announced a Rs.1.7 lakh crore package in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and countrywide lockdown, providing free food and cash transfers to support the poorest citizens who are most vulnerable during the crisis.

• The food grain ration for 80 crore poor people would be doubled for the next three months, supplemented by a kg of local pulses as well.

• The Centre would provide Rs.50 lakh medical insurance cover for the next three months for about 22 lakh health workers in government hospitals fighting the spread of the virus at personal risk, including ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers, medical sanitary workers in government hospitals, paramedics, nurses and doctors.
• In the interim, the **lockdown or quarantine** also creates **some breathing space** to convince people of the seriousness of the situation and build positive public opinion, carry out disinfection of all buildings, vehicles and surfaces, and allows hospitals to prepare themselves for the next phase of operations.

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**Boosters dose**

Main features of the economic relief package announced by the Finance Minister on Thursday

- **Insurance cover of Rs. 50 lakh per person for doctors and medical workers fighting COVID-19.**
- **80 crore poor people will receive 5 kg wheat or rice and 1 kg of preferred pulses for free every month for the next three months. Free grains can be availed of in two installments.**
- **8.3 crore below the poverty line families to receive free cylinders for the next three months.**
- **Wage-earners below Rs. 15,000 per month in businesses having less than 100 workers to receive 24% of their monthly wages into their PF accounts for the next three months.**
- **Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announcing the measures in New Delhi on Thursday. • PTI**

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**Highlights from Finance Minister announcement:**

The Finance Minister announced Rs.1.70 lakh crore package **Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Yojana**, targeting 80 crore people.

1. **Under the scheme, for next three months**, each person will get **additional 5 kg wheat or rice for free**, in addition to 5 kg per month already given under PDS. One kg of pulses will be provided per household, according to regional preferences.

2. **Cash transfers, based on direct benefit transfer**, will be given to farmers, MGNREGA workers, poor widows, pensioners and disabled people, women with Jan Dhan Yojana accounts, women beneficiaries under Ujjwala scheme, women self-help groups, organised sector workers, construction workers, district mineral fund.

3. **The first instalment of PM-KISAN for 2020-21**, which is Rs.2,000, will be given in April itself. As many as 69 crore farmers are likely to get immediate benefit.

4. The wages of MGNREGA workers has been increased from Rs. 182 to Rs. 202 per day. This will benefit 5 crore families, and will result in an additional Rs.2,000 given per worker. Social distancing norms must be followed at MGNREGA worksites during this period.

5. For poor pensioners, widows and disabled, govt will give ex-gratia, one time amount of Rs.1,000 in two instalments over next three months. Expected to benefit 3 crore poor people above 60 years, widows and disabled people.

6. For 20 crore women with Jan Dhan Yojana accounts, an ex-gratia amount of Rs.500 per month for next three months will be given, so they can run the affairs of their households.
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For the beneficiaries of Ujjwala scheme who were given free gas connections, govt will give free gas cylinders for three months. It will benefit 8.3 crore BPL families.

There are 63 lakh Women self help groups which benefit seven crore households. Under the National Rural Livelihood Mission, they get up to ₹10 lakh collateral free loans. It will now be doubled to ₹20 lakh, so that they will have money in hand without worry about collateral.

For organised sector workers, Centre will pay EPF contribution of both employer and employee (total of 24%) for next three months. This is for establishments up to 100 employees, of which 90% earn less than ₹15,000 per month.

The Employees Provident Fund scheme regulations will be amended to allow non-refundable advance of 75% of the amount standing to credit of the member, or 3 months’ worth of wages, whichever is lower. This will benefit 4.8 crore organised sector workers registered with EPFO. This will benefit 80 lakh employees, and incentivise 4 lakh establishments.

There is a welfare fund of ₹31,000 for building and other construction workers, which has 3.5 crore registered workers.

Centre will direct State governments to provide assistance and support to the registered construction workers facing economic disruption due to the lockdown.

The Finance Minister said she will ask State governments to use money available under district mineral funds to use for medical screening, testing and treatment.

These announcements come into effect immediately. We have immediately responded, within 36 hours of the lockdown, providing support first to the poorest of the poor.

We are conscious of the impact this will have on banks, as people will need to access their cash transfers. Banks and bank branches, ATMs, banking correspondents are all essential services and will continue to work during the lockdown.

WHO busts myths and fake messages on coronavirus:

- Busting the myths and fake messages circulating on social media, the Public Health department of Maharashtra said consuming more garlic, curry leaves or cow’s urine would neither treat nor prevent one from the novel coronavirus (nCoV) infection.

- The officials urged people to instead follow good hand hygiene, have coughing and sneezing etiquette and eat nutritious and well-cooked food.

- We cannot stay at home indefinitely, but we must make our sacrifice count, so people need to follow these instructions strictly, as if their life depended on it.

Is India equipped to battle Coronavirus?

- We have started late. There are two steps in case of a viral outbreak — preparedness and containment.
- If you cannot contain, you delay and if you cannot delay, you research and mitigate the circumstances. Preparedness phased cannot be considered now when there already is infection.
- After 43 cases, now we are going through preparedness. It is a bit of a delayed response. You need both preparedness and containment tactics at the moment. At least, in India, community spread has not happened so far.
- We must change the focus of our battle to personal hygiene.
- For example, during the Ebola outbreak in Africa, the Governments there was able to contain not because of drugs and treatment but by improving personal hygiene.
- They mandated hand-washing frequently at schools and industries, which helped bring down the cases.
- For COVID-19, the management is only by handling patients with travel history. They need to be isolated for the incubation period and kept under observation.
Home remedies and treatment other than allopathy is not proven science. The best thing is precaution only. You must keep away from a patient who coughs and sneezes.

If you are coughing, you need to cover your face with a mask and not spread the droplets around. COVID-19 spreads through droplets.

**Conclusion:**

- The Pradhan Mantri Gharib Kalyan Yojana had been announced within 36 hours of the lockdown and it would take care of the needs of poor and migrant workers, farmers, women, pensioners, widows and the disabled.
- The government do not want anyone to remain hungry, so we will be giving enough to take care of their food grain requirement, protein requirement in terms of pulses.
- On the other hand, they should also not remain without money in hand, so several measures through DBT are being taken so that money reaches them.

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**9. SHIFT TO UPSCALING FOOD RATIONING NOW**

**Context: package regarding Food Security:**

- The Finance Minister announced a Rs.1.7-lakh crore package of social security measures to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic in the period of the 21-day lockdown. In respect of food security, the package falls far short of what is needed. Finance Minister argue that we need to immediately ensure universal rationing with an expanded food basket, and special measures for cooked food in urban areas for the vulnerable population.

**Most affected group of people during the period of Lockdown:**

1. The burden of the current lockdown is borne disproportionately by the large unorganised workforce, comprising hundreds of millions of casual daily wage-workers and self-employed workers.
2. India already holds the record for the largest number of malnourished persons in the world.
3. As their ability to purchase food diminishes, a growing population of working people and their families will soon enter a phase of hunger and undernourishment.
4. The answer to this looming and very real scenario of food insecurity lies in a massive programme of food rationing, far greater than what the Finance Minister has promised.

Food security brings together diverse issues such as inequality, food diversity, indigenous rights and environmental justice.

**Lessons from history: Experience of other countries in using rationing in times of scarcity:**

1. To ensure that all people have access to adequate food in the midst of this unprecedented health and economic crisis with potentially high levels of mortality, we must immediately expand our food security system.
2. In the United Kingdom in the 1940s, rationing or a policy of “fair shares” was introduced in a period of war and scarcity.
3. Starting in 1939, each and every person was issued a ration book, with a weekly entitlement that could be collected at a local grocery store.
4. Rationing encompassed many commodities, starting with butter, bacon and sugar, and later augmented by eggs, biscuits, tinned food, meat, cereals, etc.
5. A remarkable outcome of the war years was, as Amartya Sen has demonstrated, a significant improvement in vital statistics including a rise in life expectancy and a decline in the mortality rate.
6. Despite heavy war casualties and a decline in consumer expenditure per capita, life expectancy actually improved.
7. In the first six decades of the 20th century, the decade from 1941 to 1950 saw the largest increase in life expectancy in England and Wales.

China’s strategy during the period of Lockdown and Pandemic:

1. In China, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), a planning body, was the **key coordinator** along with the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) in **ensuring supplies of basic foods and price stability to the poor**, especially in Wuhan province, the epicentre of the current pandemic, which was under lockdown since January 23, 2020.
2. The Chinese strategy had **multiple components**, which included public corporations and ministries, 300 large private companies, 200,000 private stores, and local government institutions.
   a. To illustrate, State-owned companies such as COFCO or the China National Cereals, Oils and Foodstuffs Corporation, and Sinograin (China Grain Reserves Corporation) supplied **key commodities to Wuhan**.
   b. This included 200 tonnes of rice, 50 tonnes of flour and noodles, and 300 tonnes of edible oils each day during the peak of the pandemic in February 2020.
   c. The National Grain Trade Centre has to date supplied 155,000 tonnes of corn and 154,000 tonnes of soyabean to Wuhan.
   d. Special delivery trucks for transport of vegetables were arranged, and the local government organised open-air markets.
3. **Kerala was the first State in India to announce a package with income support measures** and in-kind measures including **free rations of 15 kg (grain)** and provision of cheap meals.
4. The government of Tamil Nadu announced free rations of rice, sugar, cooking oil and dal to all ration card holders. The **supply of rations for unorganised workers** is to be through Amma canteens.
5. The Delhi government will give 1.5 times existing entitlements at no cost to all ration card holders.

**Key points of a plan: In India a system of expanded rations must have the following components:**

First, for all rural households, **free rations of rice and wheat at double the normal entitlement must be distributed**.

1. The current entitlement is about half the quantity of daily cereal intake recommended by the Indian Council of Medical Research: the new quantities should be the actual minimum requirement per person per day. The government of India has now doubled rations (rice or wheat) to all priority households, from 5 kg to 10 kg per person per month.
2. However, this falls short, as the rations are not to all households but only priority households; the rations are not free (only the additional 5 kg is free).
3. The **provision of rations must be universal**: this is not the time to demarcate households by type of ration card or whether they have a ration card or by any form of biometrics.
4. The system of identification of priority households is **not error-proof**, and no household wrongly excluded should be outside the ambit of rationing today.
5. This **upscaling is feasible** as the country has stocks of 58 million tonnes of rice and wheat; and the wheat harvest is currently underway in north India.

Second, for **all rural households**, additional rations of cooking oil, sugar, salt and lentils should be provided on a regular basis.

1. **Soap must also be included** in this list. As supplies have to be arranged, the distribution could be weekly or fortnightly in order to ensure smooth availability.
2. It is good to see that the government of India has announced **one kg of dal per household**, but it needs to provide more commodities quickly.

Third, if milk, eggs and vegetables (or one or more of them) can be supplied, we can **not only ensure basic food security** at the time of a major health crisis, but **actually address our burden of malnutrition**.
1. For urban areas, we need a combination of provision of dry goods and of cooked food.
2. All households with ration cards can be given the same entitlements as proposed for rural households.
3. For the vast numbers of workers and migrants in towns and cities, however, we must set up arrangements for preparation and delivery of cooked food.
4. The large numbers of closed community kitchens (schools and colleges, company and office canteens, for example) and restaurant workers now sitting idle or laid off can be brought together to undertake a massive programme of provision of cooked meals at subsidised rates. Kerala has taken the lead here.

Need for third generation right to food legislation:

- To address failings in food security. To recognise and mainstream issues including increasing natural disasters and climate adaptation.
- To address the challenges facing the country’s food security across all four dimensions of access, availability, utilisation and stability.
- Given the current crises in India, it is time we prepare a third generation right to food legislation that recognises that a climate-as-usual scenario no longer exists.

Climate-smart agriculture:

- Agriculture that sustainably increases productivity, resilience, reduces GHGs and enhances achievement of national food security.
- The Climate-smart practices include soil and nutrient management, water harvesting, pest and disease control, resilient eco systems etc.
- Enabling farmers to adopt climate-smart practices that could lead to rural economic growth and ensure food security.

Conclusion:

- All the above mentioned will require careful planning and technology to distribute food while ensuring physical distancing.
- All the measures proposed must continue for at least three months, and be reviewed afterwards.
- Given the current crises in India, it is time we prepare a third generation right to food legislation that recognises that a climate-as-usual scenario no longer exists.
- Such a legislation would ideally be rooted in the principle of a right to food security in its true spirit and not merely as a sound bite.
- An imaginative massive exercise of expanded rations could not only provide succour in this pandemic but also bring in a policy shift that will help sustain a nourished and healthy population.

10. RBI’S REGULATORY CHANGES ARE CRUCIAL IN THE CURRENT ECONOMIC SCENARIO

Context:

- The Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) convened for an emergency meeting, ahead of schedule, to discuss its response to the economic challenges posed by the Covid-19 outbreak.

RBI Policy interest rate by 75 basis points:

1. The rate is now lower than it was in April 2009, when the central bank had taken it down to 4.75%, responding to the global financial crisis.
2. In 2008, just four days ahead of a scheduled policy review, RBI had cut the policy repo rate by 1 percentage point, sending an extraordinarily strong signal.
3. The nature of the current economic challenge is a lot different, though. The shock back then had depressed demand, but the economy had not been brought to standstill as it has now, with **resources, including labour and capacities idling**.

4. When all economic activity has halted, and **uncertainty about the future is soaring**, there’s no way a rate cut—no matter how steep—can kickstart the economy. Businesses cannot plan for the future and will not borrow.

5. The **biggest beneficiary of RBI’s rate cut**—which was bigger than market expectations—would be the government.

6. In one stroke, the MPC has **altered the fiscal deficit calculation by reducing the government’s borrowing cost**.

7. There will be savings on its outgo on interest payments for new and rollover borrowings.

8. RBI also permitted banks and non-bank financial institutions to **grant a three-month moratorium on loan repayments** and reclassification of stressed loans as non-performing assets (NPAs).

9. This will provide relief by cushioning cash flow pressures for firms and individuals when incomes and revenues have dropped sharply due to the lockdown.

10. The forbearance on downgrading these loans will prevent a sharp spike in NPA levels for banks and NBFCs.

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**Impact of cut in rates in coming Economic cycle for the country:**

1. When the repo rate is high, banks find it costly to borrow and in turn raise the price of loans to their borrowers. A **low repo rate has the overall effect of reducing interest rates for the system**.

2. Lower rates make it easier for entrepreneurs to take loans for working capital and for households for homes, vehicles and so on.

3. Cut in Reverse Repo has been done to make it unattractive for banks to passively deposit funds with the RBI and instead lend it to the productive sectors.

4. Bank lending provides the needed oxygen to businesses for their working capital and longer-term loans.

5. There is another 18.25% of deposits that is also not used for lending under the Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR), further reducing the money banks have to lend.

6. **RBI has reduced the CRR to 3%**, freeing up ₹1.37 trillion for banks to lend. CRR has been chosen rather than SLR because this increases ‘primary liquidity’ with the banks a bit better.

7. Not only is there CRR rate down, banks now **needs to maintain 80% of the limit on a daily basis** instead of 90% till June 26, 2020.

8. **Reducing volatility in the exchange rate** is a measure to reduce the volatility of the price of the rupee in international markets by allowing banks to deal in off-shore non-deliverable rupee derivative markets.

9. It looks like reform using the crisis to bring about this long-awaited change.
RBI’s regulatory changes are crucial in the current economic scenario:

- The measures had a bit of everything that the **real economy and the financial markets** were crying out for—reduction in rates, provision of liquidity, aiding transmission of lower rates, freeing up the financial markets and easing financial stress by forbearance.

- **Effective borrowing costs in the G-sec repo market** is now likely to fall substantially with the **surplus liquidity**, and with non-bank participants likely to drive the rate lower than even 4%.

- This will help **reduce interest rates across the spectrum and make loans cheaper**, going forward.

The RBI has provided liquidity on multiple fronts for the banking system:

1. The **first step of cash reserve ratio (CRR)** cut will not only help infuse ₹1.37 trillion liquidity, but will also increase profitability.
2. The reduction in daily CRR maintenance to **80% increases the operating flexibility for banks**, just when liquidity is most needed due to the volatile nature of corporate cash flows.
3. In addition to all of this, was the **provision of an additional ₹1 trillion** in the form of targeted longer-term refinancing operations (TLTROs) to banks to buy corporate bonds and CPs in both primary and secondary markets, and an additional dispensation to classify them as hold to maturity.
4. This has the effect of aiding transmission by **bringing corporate bond spreads lower**.
5. The move to allow Indian banks to **participate in non-deliverable forward (NDF) markets** is ground-breaking.
6. It will potentially enable the RBI to **intervene offshore** through the banking system to check undue volatility, as well as help Indian banks to quote to clients for their forex requirements round-the-clock.
7. **Sweeping regulatory changes** announced in terms of moratoriums and deferments are crucial in the context of the current economic scenario.
8. We expect Q1 FY21 growth to contract as most businesses, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), will see revenue loss while facing a cash crunch.

**Way Forward: Two more measures could have been considered:**

- First, the RBI could consider **participating in primary auctions of bonds** of the government of India, or to subscribe to a private placement of bonds.
- This is much needed to ensure that the borrowing programme goes through smoothly.
- It could consider this and communicate it proactively to ensure that **long bond yields do not militate against the transmission of lower rates**, especially when the borrowing calendar starts.
- Second, **creation of a SPV (special purpose vehicle) funded by the RBI** could be considered, which could directly purchase corporate bonds in primary and secondary markets.
- Both these measures are much needed to ensure companies do not find the availability and cost of money an issue.

**Conclusion:**

- While prioritising financial stability is fine, the MPC’s inflation projection is puzzling.
- While refraining from providing estimates on growth and inflation, given that the spread, intensity and duration of Covid-19 remain uncertain, RBI said it expects food price pressures to soften going ahead on account of a blow to demand during the lockdown.
- The projection seems unreasonable when there are unprecedented supply-side bottlenecks.
1. WHY IS COVID-19 NOT A PANDEMIC YET?

Context:

- The **coronavirus outbreak** came to light when on December 31, 2019, China informed the World Health Organisation of a **cluster of cases of pneumonia** of an unknown cause in Wuhan City in Hubei province. On January 9, 2020, WHO issued a statement saying Chinese researchers have made “**preliminary determination**” of the virus as a **novel coronavirus**. Since then the thousands of cases of the novel coronavirus have been reported from all the 31 provinces in China. The number of deaths due to the novel coronavirus now stands at 170. Cases have been reported from 15 countries, including India. The novel coronavirus has acquired the **ability to spread among humans**, with cases of **human-to-human transmissions** being reported first in Vietnam and Germany.

**Symptoms of Corona Virus:**

1. Coronaviruses are a **family of viruses** that can cause illnesses such as the common cold, **severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)** and **Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS)**.
2. In 2019, a new coronavirus was identified as the cause of a disease outbreak in China.
3. Coronavirus symptoms can include **fever, cough and shortness of breath**.
4. The illness also causes lung lesions and pneumonia. Milder cases may resemble the flu or a bad cold, making detection difficult.
5. Chinese researchers have shared the **whole genome sequence of the novel coronavirus**, however apart from some basic details, not much is known about the virus in terms of its source, precise duration of incubation, severity, and what makes it quite easily transmissible.
6. The severity of COVID-19 symptoms can **range from very mild to severe**.
7. People who are older or have existing medical conditions, such as heart disease, may be at higher risk of serious illness. This is similar to what is seen with other respiratory illnesses, such as influenza.

When was the last time a pandemic was declared?

➢ A pandemic is defined as the worldwide spread of a new disease. The last pandemic reported was the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic, which killed hundreds of thousands globally. Unless it is influenza, WHO generally avoids declaring diseases as pandemics. This change came about after the lessons learned from the 2009 H1N1 experience. According to 2017 pandemic influenza risk management guidelines, the WHO uses pandemic influenza phases — interpandemic, alert, pandemic and transition — to "reflect its risk assessment of the global situation regarding each influenza virus with pandemic potential infecting humans".

Have some countries contained the spread?

➢ There are nine countries — Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman and UAE — in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region that have reported novel coronavirus infections. Only five countries — Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Taiwan — in the WHO South-East Asia region have reported SARS-CoV-2 infections. In the Americas, cases have been reported from only Canada, the U.S. and Brazil. All countries that have reported even one case should primarily focus on containing the spread of the virus, the WHO chief said. Fourteen countries have managed to contain the spread of the virus and no new case has been reported for more than a week. And nine countries, including India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, have not reported any additional cases in the last two weeks. This highlights that the virus can be stopped in its track if countries take appropriate and timely actions.

Since the virus has spread globally, will WHO declare COVID-19 as pandemic?

1. WHO Director-General made it abundantly clear that WHO will not declare COVID-19 a pandemic at this moment.
2. According to WHO, “We should not be too eager to declare a pandemic without a careful and clear-minded analysis of the facts.
3. Using the word pandemic carelessly has no tangible benefit, but it does have significant risk in terms of amplifying unnecessary and unjustified fear and stigma, and paralyzing systems.”
4. It may also signal that we can no longer contain the virus, which is not true.
5. We are in a fight that can be won if we do the right things. Of course, we will not hesitate to use the word pandemic if it is an accurate description of the situation.
6. WHO not downplaying the seriousness of the situation, or the potential for this to become a pandemic, because it has that potential.
7. On the contrary, we are saying that this virus has pandemic potential and WHO is providing the tools for every country to prepare accordingly.

What steps should countries take to stop the virus from spreading?

1. The priority should be to detect cases early and isolate people who test positive for the virus.
2. Once a case is detected, the focus should be to trace the contacts and treat them if already infected.
3. Since the molecular test is not highly sensitive and can return false negatives, people who have returned to India or have come in contact with people who have tested positive should be made aware to seek immediate medical care once symptoms show up.
4. Though the average incubation period is five-seven days, a few have shown up symptoms at the end of 24 days.
5. Efforts should also be focussed on preventing outbreaks in hospitals and spread in the community. One way to stop the spread in the community is to avoid mass gathering in enclosed spaces.
6. The Ministry of Health has advised people to avoid all non-essential travel to countries where community spread of the virus is reported, particularly Singapore, South Korea, Iran and Italy.
7. According to February 13 release, the Health Ministry has been following up passengers travelling from China, Singapore, Thailand, South Korea and Japan for a period of 28 days.
Conclusion: Looking ahead:

❖ Ultimately, the decision to declare a pandemic rest with the WHO’s Director General. That decision will be based on a range of factors including how fast the disease is spreading, which groups of people are most at risk and the effectiveness of treatments. That caution could stem, in part, from WHO’s handling of the H1N1 swine fever outbreak in 2009. Using criteria since abandoned, the WHO declared a pandemic. Later, when the disease proved less deadly than first feared, some accused the WHO of overreacting. Preventing unnecessary panic, of course, is key. The word pandemic “may also signal that we can no longer contain the virus, which is not true,” said the Director General. “We are in a fight that can be won if we do the right things.” WHO would not hesitate to use the word pandemic if it becomes “an accurate description of the situation”.

2. STATE LETHARGY AMIDST COUGH SYRUP POISONING

Context:

• A few days ago, 12 children died in Udhampur district of Jammu due to poisoned cough syrup (Coldbest-PC).
• More are fighting for their life in a hospital. A team of doctors at the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education & Research, Chandigarh, attributed the deaths to the presence of diethylene glycol in the cough syrup which was consumed by all the dead children. Propylene glycol is a food additive. It is also used as a drug solubilizer, an excipient. It carries flavours in food and beverages, helps retain taste. Diethylene glycol is a chemical used to make polymers and antifreeze.

Diethylene glycol drug:

1. Diethylene glycol is an anti-freezing agent that causes acute renal failure in the human body followed by paralysis, breathing difficulties and ultimately death.
2. This is the fourth mass glycol poisoning event in India that has been caused due to a pharmaceutical drug.
3. In 1973, there was a similar incident at the Children’s Hospital, Egmore in Chennai that caused the deaths of 14 children.
4. In 1986, similar poisoning at Mumbai’s J.J. Hospital caused the deaths of 14 patients who were otherwise on the path to recovery.
5. In 1998, 33 children died in two hospitals located in New Delhi due to similar poisoning.
6. In all three cases, the manufacturer of the suspect cough syrup, due to negligence or human error, failed to detect and contain the level of diethylene glycol in the syrup, thereby causing poisoning of the patients who consumed it.

Tracking the sold bottles:

• There will be plenty of time later to ascertain the cause and prosecute the guilty but the immediate concern for doctors, pharmacists and the drug regulators should be to prevent any more deaths. The only way to do so is to account for each and every bottle of the poisoned syrup that has ever been sold in the
Indian market and stop patients from consuming this drug any further. Any patient who has consumed even a spoon of the syrup should then immediately be referred to a hospital for treatment.

Experience from United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA):

1. According to the information available on the website of the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA), in 1937, when the United States faced a similar situation with glycol poisoning, its entire field force of 239 inspectors and chemists were assigned to the task of tracking down every single bottle of the drug.  
2. Even if a patient claimed to have thrown out the bottle, the investigators scoured the street until they found the discarded bottle.  
3. This effort was accompanied by a publicity blitz over radio and television.  
4. We do not see such public health measures being undertaken here; authorities are simply not communicating the seriousness of the issue to the general public.  
5. At most, the authorities in Himachal Pradesh (H.P.), who are responsible for oversight of the manufacturer of this syrup, have made general statements that they have ordered the withdrawal of the drug from all the other States where it was marketed.  
6. However, there is no transparency in the recall process and information about recalls and batch numbers is not being communicated through authoritative channels.  
7. There is no public announcement by the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI), which is responsible for overall regulation of the entire Indian market. The suspect product, although manufactured in H.P., has been sold across the country.  
8. The website of the DCGI, which is supposed to communicate drug alerts and product recalls, has no mention of Coldbest-PC as being dangerous as of this writing.

About Central Drugs Standard Control Organization:

1. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) under Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, is the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) of India.  
2. Under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, CDSCO is responsible for approval of Drugs, Conduct of Clinical Trials, laying down the standards for Drugs, control over the quality of imported Drugs in the country.  
3. It also does the coordination of the activities of State Drug Control Organizations by providing expert advice with a view of bring about the uniformity in the enforcement of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.  
4. Further CDSCO along with state regulators, is jointly responsible for grant of licenses of certain specialized categories of critical Drugs such as blood and blood products, I. V. Fluids, Vaccine and Sera.  
5. Within the CDSCO, the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) regulates pharmaceutical and medical devices, under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.  
6. The DCGI is advised by the Drug Technical Advisory Board (DTAB) and the Drug Consultative Committee (DCC).

A grim reminder of drug regulation laxity: Need for a recall policy:

1. One of the key reasons why the DCGI and state drug authorities have been so sloppy is because unlike other countries, India has not notified any binding guidelines or rules on recalling dangerous drugs from the market.  
2. The 59th report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health as well as the World Health Organization (in its national regulatory assessment) had warned the DCGI on the lack of a national recall framework in India.  
3. A set of recall guidelines was drafted in 2012 but never notified into law.  
4. In 2016, in a report submitted by me to the Ministry of Health suggesting measures to reform the drug regulatory framework, had pointed out to the Ministry that a national drug recall framework was in urgent need.  
5. While a national recall of this adulterated medicine is the immediate need, the administration also needs to quickly identify which other pharmaceutical companies have received the spurious ingredient that was supplied to the manufacturer in H.P. from a trader in Chennai.
6. It is very likely that the trader in question marketed the same ingredient to other pharmaceutical companies, who, like the manufacturer at the centre of the present scandal, may have failed to test it for its identity and purity.

**Situations are worse in developed countries:**

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that one in ten medical products in low-and-middle-income countries is **substandard or falsified**.
- A **substandard drug** may contain **no active ingredient**, the wrong active ingredient or the wrong amount of correct active ingredient. They are also laden with impurities, much higher than the acceptable range. The **substandard drugs** are out there in the market, because the companies producing them, do **not follow current good manufacturing practices** and take short cuts for profits, and regulators’ poor oversight, in some cases it could be just a case of deliberate overlook.

**Conclusion:**

- Himachal Pradesh has become a **major pharmaceutical formulation hub** in North India due to tax incentives given to manufacturers under special category status accorded to the state. But, the incident after incident from manufacturers operating in that state, points to **inadequacies in oversight of regulatory authorities there**.
- It is important for **regulatory enforcement to raid and seize** the records of the trader in Chennai and verify its sales. As of today, we have little to no information on whether any of this is happening. The **lackadaisical response of drug regulators in India** is not surprising. It is the result of a larger lethargy and arrogance that is emblematic of the babudom which is responsible for keeping us safe from **unethical practices of pharmaceutical companies**.

### 3. UAHS DEVELOPS NEW PADDY VARIETY RESISTANT TO BLAST DISEASE

**Context:**

- As part of its initiative **to prevent decline in the area under paddy cultivation**, the University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shivamogga, has developed ‘**Sahyadri Megha’, a new red variety of paddy** that is resistant to blast disease and rich in nutrients.
- The new variety has been approved by the State-level Seed Sub-Committee and it will be **available for farmers** from the coming kharif season.
Reasons for developing new hybridised variety:

➢ Previously the ‘Jyothi’ variety, which was widely cultivated in the command areas of the Bhadra and the Tunga reservoirs and in semi-arid areas in Sorab, Shikaripur, Hanagal and Sirsi taluks, had become vulnerable to blast disease and other infestations.

➢ There was a demand for a new paddy variety that is resistant to the infestations.

➢ Another objective of developing the new variety was to cater to the strong demand for red rice, rich in fibre and protein, by health-savvy consumers in urban areas. The research work commenced in 2009.

How ‘Sahyadri Megha’ variety has been developed:

1. ‘Sahyadri Megha’ is developed under the hybridization breeding method by cross-breeding the best among the ‘Jyothi’ variety with that of ‘Akkalu’, a native disease-resistant and protein-rich paddy variety.

2. The results of the field trials conducted have proved that the new variety has a high-level of resistance to blast disease.

3. Optimistic that the rice from the new variety can be sold for a premium by showcasing it as a protein-rich red rice.

4. The protein content in it is 12.48%, higher than the other red rice varieties grown. The yield per hectare from ‘Sahyadri Megha’ is around 65 quintals, substantially higher than other red paddy varieties.

5. Also, as the new variety can be harvested after 120 days of sowing, it is a medium-term paddy that can be grown when there is a delay in the onset of monsoon.

6. The aroma and taste of the rice from the new variety was also praised by farmers.

7. The new variety will be notified under the Indian Seed Act 1966 shortly after which it will become part of the seed chain.

8. It may be mentioned here that the area under paddy that was around 1.5 lakh hectares in Shivamogga district in 1990, has come down to around 1.05 lakh hectares now.

9. Paddy growers are switching over to commercial crops like arecanut, ginger and rubber for lucrative returns.

Hybridization is not genetic modification

1. Unintentionally, humans have been hybridizing plants for 11,000 years or so.

2. With the advent of domesticated agriculture, our ancestors began mixing the genomes of different plant varieties to create new varieties never found in nature. That changed what’s called the gene pool.

3. Through artificial, human-guided selection, our ancestors created novel crops from old plants, just as they created dogs from wolves.

4. Hybridisation is the act of mixing different species or varieties of animals or plants and thus to produce hybrids.

5. Genetic modification, on the other hand is the technology of preparing recombinant DNA in vitro by cutting up DNA molecules and splicing together fragments from more than one organism.

6. In a sense genetic modification and hybridization both accomplish the same thing – they both result in new genetic types.

7. The difference is in how they accomplish this. Hybrids come from seeds that are developed by cross-pollinating specific parental types so that the next generation will be a very uniform crop with hybrid vigor. The hybrid gets half of its genes from each parent.

8. Genetic engineering usually refers to biotechnological methods that can be used to insert a very small piece of genetic material (DNA) so that the resulting plants can be nearly identical to the parent, except for the gene or genes that were inserted.

9. Nowadays, some hybrids may have genes that are artificially inserted, using high tech biotechnology methods.

10. But, generally speaking, hybrids are not genetically engineered, that is, not using high-tech or biotechnology.
‘Sahyadri Megha’ variety: protein-rich red rice:

- **A Core Macronutrient:** Like carbohydrates and fat, protein is a “macronutrient,” meaning that you need relatively large amounts of it to stay healthy. (Vitamins and minerals, which you only need in small quantities, are called “micronutrients.”)

- Unlike carbohydrates and fat, your **body does not store protein**, so it has no reservoir to draw from when you’re running low.

- **Protein bars and shakes** are a great way to supplement your diet to ensure you’re getting the right amount of protein.

- The new paddy variety is called as **KPR (Karnataka Ponnampet Rice)-1**.

- The yield of paddy has come down drastically in recent times in Malnad and central Karnataka regions owing to blast disease, which is caused by a fungus called Magnaporthe grisea.

**Conclusion:**

- The ‘Sahyadri Megha’ variety will fetch a good price if its nutrition values, aroma, and taste is properly showcased. As it is disease-resistant, the cultivation cost will be low.

- As per the **Economic Survey (2018-19)**, India needs to take **big initiatives to improve its food security** as it faces supply constraints, water scarcity, small landholdings, low per capita GDP and inadequate irrigation.

- The government policy needs to **adopt an integrated policy framework** to facilitate agriculture productivity.

- The measures should focus mainly on **rationale distribution of cultivable land**, improving the size of the farms and providing security to the tenant cultivators apart from providing the farmers with **improved technology for cultivation** and **improved inputs** like irrigation facilities, availability of **better-quality seeds, fertilizers and credits at lower interest rates**.

### 4. PICKING UP THE QUANTUM TECHNOLOGY BATON

**Context:**

- In the Budget 2020 speech, Finance Minister made a welcome announcement for Indian science over the next five years, proposed spending Rs.8,000 crore (~ $1.2 billion) on a **National Mission on Quantum Technologies and Applications**.

- This promises to catapult India into the midst of the **second quantum revolution**, a major scientific effort that is being pursued by the United States, Europe, China and others.

**About Quantum Computing:**

1. Quantum mechanics developed in the early 20th century. However, even after a century of its development, it still remains mysterious.

2. A **second revolution** is underway in the **quantum field** by harnessing the power of quantum properties of matter. One of the most striking of these is the **tremendous computing power of quantum computers**, whose actual experimental realisation is one of the great challenges of our times.

3. Quantum technologies are expected to be one of the major technology disruptions that will change the entire paradigm of computation, communication and encryption.

4. Quantum technology is based on principles of quantum theory, which explains the **nature of energy and matter on atomic and sub atomic level**.

5. Quantum computers **store and process information using quantum two level systems (quantum bits or qubits)** which unlike classical bits, can be prepared in superposition states.
6. Conventional computers process information in ‘bits’ or 1s and 0s, following classical physics under which our computers can process a ‘1’ or a ‘0’ at a time.
7. Quantum computers compute in ‘qubits’ (or quantum bits). They exploit the properties of quantum mechanics, the science that governs how matter behaves on the atomic scale.
8. In this scheme of things, processors can be a 1 and a 0 simultaneously, a state called quantum superposition.
9. Because of quantum superposition, a quantum computer, if it works to plan, can mimic several classical computers working in parallel.
10. This key ability makes quantum computers extremely powerful compared to conventional computers when solving certain kinds of problems like finding prime factors of large numbers and searching large databases.
11. The prime factorization quantum algorithm has important implications for security as it can be used to break RSA encryption, a popular method for secure communication.

Where India stands: What are the constraints on Indian progress in this field?

- Globally, research in this area is about two decades old, but in India, serious experimental work has been under way for only about five years, and in a handful of locations.
- So far, we have been plagued by a lack of sufficient resources, high quality manpower, timeliness and flexibility.
- The new announcement in the Budget would greatly help fix the resource problem but high quality manpower is in global demand.
- In a fast-moving field like this, timeliness is everything delayed funding by even one year is an enormous hit.
Challenges Associated with Quantum Computing:

1. The dark side of quantum computing is the disruptive effect that it can have on cryptographic encryption, which secures communications and computers.
2. It might pose a challenge for the government also because if this technology goes into wrong hands, all the government’s official and confidential data will be at a risk of being hacked and misused.
3. The challenge lies in harnessing the properties of quantum superposition in a highly controlled manner. The qubits tend to be very fragile and lose their “quantumness” if not controlled properly.
4. Also, a careful choice of materials, design and engineering is required to get them to work.
5. Warfare and conflict strategists will have new challenges to face. In such scenarios India’s current plans may have to be reworked to develop integrated war-theatre strategies factoring in quantum technologies.
6. Challenges in Funds part: There are some limits that come from how the government must do business with public funds.
7. Here, private funding, both via industry and philanthropy, can play an outsized role even with much smaller amounts.
8. For example, unrestricted funds that can be used to attract and retain high quality manpower and to build international networks — all at short notice — can and will make an enormous difference to the success of this enterprise.
9. This is the most effective way (as China and Singapore discovered) to catch up scientifically with the international community, while quickly creating a vibrant intellectual environment to help attract top researchers.

Steps required for India to take lead in Quantum technologies:

- Both private funding and philanthropic funding should be attracted towards quantum computing. For example, Funds can be used to attract and retain high quality manpower and to build international networks.
- Connections with Indian industry from the start would help quantum technologies to become commercially successful.
- Investing manpower and retaining them as quality human resource is very mobile.
- Participate in development of global standards and requirements for quantum computers.

Conclusion:

❖ It would be prudent to develop a regulatory framework for quantum computing before it becomes widely available.
❖ It will be better to regulate it or define the limits of its legitimate use, nationally and internationally before the problem gets out of hand like nuclear technology.
❖ Further, connections with Indian industry from the start would also help quantum technologies become commercialised successfully, allowing Indian industry to benefit from the quantum revolution.
❖ We must encourage industrial houses and strategic philanthropists to take an interest and reach out to Indian institutions with an existing presence in this emerging field.
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. CORONAVIRUS: PM MODI CALLS FOR SAARC NATIONS’ CONFERENCE TO BUILD STRATEGY

Context:

“Timely Action for Healthier Planet”: PM Modi On Coronavirus SAARC Video Call:

- In the wake of the rapid spread of Coronavirus infections across countries including South Asia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a conference of the leaders of South Asian nations to discuss coordination and strategy to combat the advance of the disease.
- PM Modi’s call for collective action came on a day India announced it was closing 18 of 37 border check points to ensure people from neighbouring countries were properly screened before they came into India.
- India also announced the suspension of passenger trains and buses between India and Bangladesh and closure of border markets between the two countries. Indian officials however said that visa free entry for Nepalese and Bhutanese nationals will continue.
- Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka welcomed Modi’s offer given that all South Asian countries have reported SARS-COV2 infection cases.

About SAARC:

- SAARC refers to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation – which groups together Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka besides India.
- 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.
- 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. No summit of SAARC has been held since.

Basic Preventive measures:

1. SAARC collective wisdom, efforts will help us devise robust strategy against COVID-19.
2. Even the World Health Organization (WHO) says wearing a medical mask is “one of the prevention measures to limit spread of certain respiratory diseases, including novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), in affected areas”.

3. PM Modi announced that India had set up an Integrated Disease Surveillance Portal to better trace possible virus carriers and the people they contacted.

4. We could share this Disease Surveillance software with SAARC partners, and training on using this.

5. India had made special efforts to reach out to vulnerable groups. We have worked to quickly ramp up capacity in our system including through training our medical staff across the country.

6. Transmission through droplets from coughing and sneezing is one of the major routes of virus spread. When worn correctly, a mask can reduce the risk of inhaling droplets containing the virus.

7. With many studies showing that people infected with novel coronavirus transmit the virus even before symptoms show up, it may be prudent to wear a mask especially when the virus is spreading in the community.

8. In a country like India, maintaining at least one metre distance can be a challenge, especially when there is no way of knowing who is infected till such time the person starts showing visible symptoms.

How do alcohol-based hand sanitisers help get rid of coronavirus?

1. Like soap, the alcohol present in hand sanitisers dissolve the lipid envelop, thus inactivating the virus.

2. In addition, the alcohol also tends to change the shape or denature the mushroom-shaped protein structures that stick out of the lipid envelop.

3. The mushroom-shaped protein structures help the virus to bind to special structures found on human cells and enter the cells. To be effective, the sanitisers should contain at least 60% alcohol.

4. Unlike soap lather, the alcohol does not come in contact with all parts of the hand.

5. So, care needs to be taken to use sufficient amount of sanitisers to increase the coverage. Unlike water, alcohol run does not remove the dead viruses from the hand.

6. While a sanitisers can quickly reduce the number of microbes, it does not get rid of all types of germs, and is “not as effective when hands are visibly dirty or greasy”.

What other precautions should be taken when a mask is used?

1. WHO cautions that using a mask alone will be insufficient to provide an “adequate level of protection”.

2. It should be combined with hand hygiene to prevent human-to-human transmission.

3. Wearing medical masks can give a person a “false sense of security that can lead to neglecting other essential measures such as hand hygiene practices”.

4. So if an individual decides to wear a mask, care must be taken to regularly wash hands with soap or alcohol rub, and avoid touching the face with hands.

5. Incorrect mask wearing might otherwise reduce the effectiveness in cutting the risk of transmission.

6. It should be discarded once it gets wet or dirty, and care should be taken to safely dispose of used masks. The same mask should not used for more than a couple of hours.

Conclusion:

❖ Our planet is battling the COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus.

❖ Measures that India takes to combat the disease could be compromised if all countries in South Asia are not on the same page.

❖ 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.
2. A DAM OF CONTENTION IN AFRICA

Context:

- Egypt and Ethiopia have once again locked horns over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile.
- On Feb. 26, Ethiopia temporarily suspended its participation in the U.S.-mediated negotiations over the filling and operation of the GERD, requesting more time to deliberate on the draft agreement.
- With the dam 70 percent complete and its reservoir expected to start being filled in July, the time for reaching an agreement is ticking away.
- While the parties have sought international mediation from the U.S. and South Africa, that is no substitute for regional cooperation among the parties.

About Nile River:

1. The longest river in the world, the Nile stretches across 11 countries in its journey of 4,000 miles from the equatorial rivers that feed Lake Victoria to its final destination in the Mediterranean Sea.
2. Among the countries that share the Nile, two have the most at stake. Egypt, a desert nation of 100 million people, is literally the creation of the Nile, relying on the river for 90 percent of its freshwater needs.
3. Ethiopia, an East African country of 112 million, contributes the lion’s share of the Nile waters, with its three tributaries—the Blue Nile, Sobat, and Atbara—carrying about 84 percent of the total runoff in the Nile.
4. With a growing but otherwise resource-poor economy, Ethiopia is keen to develop its vast potential for hydroelectricity generation.
5. Disagreements over the Nile River have been the source of conflict between upper and downstream countries because life in both sides of the Nile highly depends on the waters of the Nile River.
6. Historically, there have been many treaties over the Nile River that were negotiated between different stakeholders in different places in 1902, 1906, 1925, 1929 and in 1959.
7. During the colonial era, Great Britain, France and Italy [specially Great Britain] either negotiated in the behalf of their colonies, or they controlled the Nile through their military presence in Africa.

About Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD):

1. The GERD, a $5 billion project that will be the largest hydroelectric dam in Africa, is a part of that ambition.
2. The dam is located on Ethiopia’s flank of the Blue Nile, just 12 miles from its border with Sudan. It will have paramount economic value to Ethiopia, doubling the country’s electricity generation capacity and earning as much as a billion dollars annually from energy exports to Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya, and potentially Egypt.
3. The GERD’s massive reservoir will store 74 billion cubic meters (BCM) of water, roughly equal to a year-and-half’s worth of the Blue Nile’s flow, which will be gradually filled upon the dam’s completion.
4. As the July deadline draws closer for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the river Nile to become functional, the dispute between Ethiopia and Egypt, with Sudan caught in between, has escalated into a diplomatic stand-off.
5. Differences were laid bare recently when Ethiopia skipped the latest round of tripartite negotiations with Egypt and Sudan in Washington, being mediated by the U.S. and the World Bank.

Uganda President calls for urgent African summit on GERD:

- Uganda President said that African presidents must hold frank discussions regarding the Nile River dilemma during this summit, and stressed the importance of ensuring equitable and sustainable usage of the river’s waters.
- Kenyan president emphasized the importance of properly utilizing natural resources and sustainably addressing the needs of increasing populations.
- Meanwhile, the Egyptian community in New York and New Jersey is gearing up to organize demonstrations in front of the White House, pressuring the US administration to protect Egypt’s water rights and support the negotiations.
- The challenges for the fair utilisation of waters among the riparian states have only been compounded by the pressures of population growth and the effects of global warming.

Challenges Ahead that need to address:

1. Impact regional & International Trade: An escalated tension between Ethiopia & Egypt would threaten the vital international trade route through the Suez Canal and along the Horn of Africa.
2. Ethiopia has stated that the dispute over the dam project is only a trilateral issue involving Egypt and Sudan.
3. Ethiopia asserts its rights for an equitable share of the Blue Nile flows from the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) signed by some of the 10 Nile Basin Initiative nations.
4. The establishment of the Nile River Basin Commission mandated by the CFA has not materialised so far.
5. Ethiopia is concerned that a long delay in filling the reservoir would jeopardise returns on its investments and hamper the prospects for overall growth.
6. The mediation role played by US highlights the significance of the issue and the potential conflict it holds if unresolved. However, the mediation has not been able to progress substantially due to lack of true intentions from both sides.

Conclusion:

❖ Ethiopia and Egypt should be ready to make significant concessions to avoid a catastrophic escalation in this seemingly intractable dispute.
❖ An agreement involving Egypt, Ethiopia and others river basin countries for equitable sharing of water.
❖ Sustainable use of river water given the ever-increasing problem of pollution and climate change.
❖ **Consistent with the principles** set out in the declaration of principles, in particular the principles of not causing significant harm to downstream countries, final testing and filling should not take place without an agreement.

❖ These countries can take inspiration from **Indus Water Treaty** signed between India and Pakistan brokered by World Bank in 1960. The treaty has been functioning smoothly and has endured three wars over nearly six decades.

**MISCELLANEOUS**

**DANGER AHEAD: ON INDIA’S ROAD SAFETY RECORD**

**Recent Motor Vehicles Act, 2019:**

- Union Transport Minister has expressed **optimism** that the significant amendments made to the **Motor Vehicles Act** have **begun reducing the terrible death toll due to accidents on India’s roads**.
- Road accidents can affect people’s livelihood and push them into poverty. Studies show that poor households go into **debt by borrowing money** to cope with the **additional medical expenses**, in addition to losing income after an accident.
- Containing road accidents needs to be a **multi-sectoral effort** that involves law enforcement, governance, (the issue of driving licenses and vehicle registration), engineering (appropriate road design) awareness raising and post-accident trauma care and management.

**Grave situation in India before 2019 in road accidents:**

1. While India has **less than 3 percent of the world’s vehicles**, it accounts for about **12 percent of the world’s road deaths**.
2. In 2018 alone, World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that **almost 300,000 people died due to road accidents** in the country.
3. This number remains disproportionately high compared to countries with much higher levels of motorization, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Netherlands.
4. **Poor enforcement**: India’s traffic laws are stricter than those of other countries but these laws are not enforced.
5. In many other countries, such as the UK, Australia, New Zealand, where they have better enforcement, the alcohol is limit is 0.08 mg/l, higher than the 0.05 mg/l in India, in many countries crashes due to alcohol have been **reduced due to enforcement of their laws and education**.
6. **When it comes to enforcement**, we know human behaviour is **affected by enforcement** and in India, enforcement is **largely driven by human beings and is prone to corruption**.
7. **City planning**: On many roads there are **no traffic-calming measures** such as speed humps before intersections or median barriers.
8. Roads should be made not just for use by four-wheelers but also for two-wheelers and pedestrians, and towns should be planned not just for expressways and commercial areas but also for hawkers and vendors.
9. For instance, **safer highways should be created** by adding **underpasses for pedestrians**, especially those that are vulnerable, such as pregnant women and the elderly.
10. A World Bank ‘Delivering Road Safety in India’ report is apprehensive that rapid motorisation and more high-speed road infrastructure have raised the risks for road users.

Results of the amendments made to the Motor Vehicles Act:

1. As the prime mover of these changes, he finds the reported reduction in crashes, notably in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Manipur, Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra, proof of the law’s beneficial impact.
2. Establishing and maintaining a data management system that monitors and analyses road accidents will help identify accident hot spots and enable the authorities to pin point what needs to be done to make these patches safer.
3. Although road safety data in India is collected by the police departments of all states, this information needs to be analysed, with targets and policies set accordingly.
4. However, any reduction in road safety incidents in a rapidly motorising country is encouraging, but the cold reality is that data on those who lose their lives or are incapacitated do not reflect a marked decline.
5. In fact, they underscore the culture of indifference among States. Unlike acute crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has sent governments scrambling to save lives and stop economic derailment, a chronic malaise such as deadly road accidents begets only token measures.
6. The new Motor Vehicles law does have more muscle in being able to levy stringent penalties for road rule violations some States are using it but that is not the same as saying that India has moved to a scientific road system marked by good engineering, sound enforcement, appropriate technology use and respect for all road users.

Way Ahead measures need to be adopted:

1. The transition to a professional road environment requires implementation of first-tier reforms that deal with quality of road infrastructure, facilities for vulnerable users and zero-tolerance enforcement of rules by a trained, professional and empowered machinery.
2. A key mechanism of change are District Road Safety Committees, which were enabled even by the 1988 Act, but remain obscure.
3. A mandatory monthly public hearing of such committees involving local communities can highlight safety concerns, and their follow-up action can then be supervised by the Members of Parliaments’ Road Safety Committees, created last year.
4. It is essential to make the Collector, local body and police accountable.
5. Making dashboard cameras mandatory, with the video evidence accepted in investigation, would protect rule-abiding motorists and aid enforcement.
6. To save lives on highways, quality trauma care at the district level holds the key.

Conclusion:

❖ In the absence of good hospitals and cashless free treatment, no significant improvement is possible in the quest to save life and limb.
❖ Establishing a clear national goal and pursuing it in mission mode through an appropriately resourced lead agency is something India should focus on as a priority.
❖ The amended Motor Vehicle Act, in fact, makes a provision for exactly such an agency—the National Road Safety Board. States are being encouraged to create independent lead agencies as well.
❖ The human cost in this is enormous, and so is the impact on the economy.
❖ A World Bank study has found that if India were to successfully halve road deaths and injuries between 2014 and 2038, it could potentially add 14 percent to its GDP per capita.
❖ The National Road Safety Strategy, also envisages halving the number of road accident fatalities by 2025.
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1. RAJYA SABHA BIENNIAL ELECTION 2020

Introduction:

- The Election Commission of India has announced the schedule for biennial elections to Rajya Sabha for the seats that are going to fall vacant in April. The term of office of 55 members of the Rajya Sabha elected from 17 States is due to expire on their retirement in April, 2020. According to Article 80 of the Constitution, the maximum strength of Rajya Sabha is laid down to be 250, out of which 238 are representatives of the States and Union Territories, while 12 members are nominated by the President. Rajya Sabha, at present, has 245 seats. Of these, 233 members represent the States and the Union Territories. The notification for the Rajya Sabha elections was be issued on March 6th.

Composition of Rajya Sabha:

The maximum strength of the Rajya Sabha is fixed at 250, out of which, 238 are to be the representatives of the states and union territories (elected indirectly) and 12 are nominated by the president. At present, the Rajya Sabha has 245 members. Of these, 229 members represent the states, 4 members represent the union territories and 12 members are nominated by the president. The Fourth Schedule of the Constitution deals with the allocation of seats in the Rajya Sabha to the states and union territories.

- Representation of States: The representatives of states in the Rajya Sabha are elected by the elected members of state legislative assemblies. The election is held in accordance with the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote. The seats are allotted to the states in the Rajya Sabha on the basis of population. Hence, the number of representatives varies from state to state. For example, Uttar Pradesh has 31 members while Tripura has 1 member only. However, in USA, all states are given equal representation in the Senate irrespective of their population. USA has 50 states and the Senate has 100 members—2 from each state.

- Representation of Union Territories: The representatives of each union territory in the Rajya Sabha are indirectly elected by members of an electoral college specially constituted for the purpose. This election is also held in accordance with the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote. Out of the seven union territories, only two (Delhi and Puducherry) have representation in Rajya Sabha. The populations of other five union territories are too small to have any representative in the Rajya Sabha.

- Nominated Members: The president nominates 12 members to the Rajya Sabha from people who have special knowledge or practical experience in art, literature, science and social service. The rationale behind this principle of nomination is to provide eminent persons a place in the Rajya Sabha without going through the process of election. It should be noted here that the American Senate has no nominated members.

Provisions where Rajya Sabha holds equal position with Lok Sabha:

Legislative Powers:

- In the sphere of ordinary law-making the Rajya Sabha enjoys equal powers with the Lok Sabha. An ordinary bill can be introduced in the Rajya Sabha and it cannot become a law unless passed by it.
- In case of a deadlock between the two Houses of Parliament over an ordinary bill and if it remains unresolved for six months, the President can convene a joint sitting of the two Houses for resolving the deadlock.
This joint sitting is presided over by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. If the bill is passed in the joint sitting, it is sent to the President for his signatures. But if the deadlock is not resolved, the bill is deemed to have been killed.

Executive Powers:

- “The Union Council of Ministers is collectively responsible before the Lok Sabha and not the Rajya Sabha.”
- Lok Sabha alone can cause the fall of the Council of Ministers by passing a vote of no-confidence.
- Although the Rajya Sabha cannot remove the Ministry from its office yet the members of the Rajya Sabha can exercise some control over the ministers by criticising their policies, by asking questions and supplementary questions, and by moving adjournment motions. Some of the ministers are also taken from the Rajya Sabha. Now the Prime Minister can also be from Rajya Sabha if the majority party in the Lok Sabha may elect/adopt him as its leader.

Amendment Powers:

- Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha can together amend the constitution by passing an amendment bill with 2/3 majority in each House.

Judicial Powers:

- The Rajya Sabha acting along with the Lok Sabha can impeach the President on charges of violation of the Constitution.
- The Rajya Sabha can also pass a special address for causing the removal of a judge of the Supreme Court or of any High Court.
- The charges against the Vice-President can be levelled only in the Rajya Sabha.
- The Rajya Sabha can pass a resolution for the removal of some high officers like the Attorney General of India, Comptroller and Auditor General and Chief Election Commissioner.

The Rajya Sabha enjoys two exclusive powers:

- **The Power to declare a subject of State List as a subject of National Importance:** The Rajya Sabha can pass a resolution by 2/3rd majority of its members for declaring a State List subject as a subject of national importance. Such a resolution empowers the Union Parliament to legislate on such a state subject for a period of one year. Such resolutions can be repeatedly passed by the Rajya Sabha.
- **Power in respect of Creation or Abolition of an All India Service:** The Rajya Sabha has the power to create one or more new All India Services. It can do so by passing a resolution supported by 2/3rd majority on the plea of national interest. In a similar way, the Rajya Sabha can disband an existing All India Service.

Need for Rajya Sabha:

- The Upper House of the Indian Parliament traces its direct history to the first bicameral legislature introduced in British India in 1919 as a consequence of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms.
- Unlike the US Senate which ensures equal representation for all federal units (each state having two representatives), India’s *Rajya Sabha does have more members from populous states.*
- Even though Indian states are ‘mere administrative units’ which don’t enjoy a constitutionally-assured permanence, their continued existence over all these years and the constitutional separation of power has given them the nature of autonomous units in their own spheres. Therefore, the ‘state-wise’ identity cannot be ruled out completely.
- India’s *Rajya Sabha has equal powers to the Lok Sabha* except for money bills, where it has no jurisdiction.
Is the Rajya Sabha essential?

The contemporary argument against it comes from two primary angles:

- The first one suggests that a Lok Sabha that has representation from several regional parties more than adequately represents a federal country.
- The second argument charges that the Rajya Sabha has become a haven for losers in elections, crony capitalists, compromised journalists and party fundraisers.

What can be done?

- It is virtually impossible to abolish the Rajya Sabha without adopting a new Indian Constitution. The bicameral nature of the Indian Parliament is likely to be interpreted as a “basic structure” of the Indian Constitution, rendering it incapable of being amended.
- Even if this were to be tested, it would be ensnared in a judicial process for a very long time. It is much more practical to try and reform the Rajya Sabha than seeking to abolish it.

Reforms needed:

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

Link: [https://youtu.be/0qWc458THUU](https://youtu.be/0qWc458THUU)

2. LOKPAL COMPLAINT RULES

Introduction:

- Almost a year after the country’s first Lokpal was appointed the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions has notified the Lokpal rules. A notable feature pertains to complaints against a sitting or former prime minister which the rules state that a full bench will decide if an inquiry should be ordered. Also under the rules, if a bench decides to dismiss the complaint at the stage of the admission the records will not be made public. The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, commonly known as The Lokpal Act, is an anti-corruption Act of Indian Parliament in India that sets up the institution of Lokpal to inquire into allegations of corruption against certain important public functionaries. They would include the Prime Minister, cabinet ministers, members of parliament, Group A officials of the Central Government.

Lokpal (Complaint) Rules, 2020:

1. The notification, under Section 59 of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, lays down the rules called the Lokpal (Complaint) Rules, 2020.
2. According to the complaint forms, published as part of the notification, a complainant has to give a valid proof of identity, as specified therein.
3. Foreign nationals can also lodge complaints. Only a copy of their passports will be accepted as proof of identity.
4. The complaint can be filed electronically, by post or in person. In case the complaint is filed electronically, its hard copy has to be submitted to the Lokpal within 15 days.
5. No complaints can be filed against a public servant under the Army Act, Navy Act, Air Force Act and the Coast Guard Act.
6. A complaint may ordinarily be made in English, provided that the Lokpal may also entertain a complaint in any of the languages referred to in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution.
7. Apart from the details of the accused official(s), allegation and the evidence relied upon, the complainant or the authorised signatory will also have to submit an affidavit.
8. Registration/incorporation certificate of the organisation, on whose behalf the complaint is made and copy of authorisation certificate in favour of the signatory, if the complaint is on behalf of a board, body, corporation, company, limited liability partnership, authority, society, association of persons or trusts, has to be furnished.
9. The Lokpal bench will decide the complaint in the first instance at the admission stage. The Lokpal may seek other details or affidavit, if necessary.
10. **The identity of the complainant or the accused official will be protected** by the Lokpal till the conclusion of inquiry or investigation. However, the protection will not be applicable in cases where the complainant herself reveals her identity to any other office or authority while making the complaint to Lokpal.
11. The complaints, whose contents are illegible, vague or ambiguous, which are trivial or frivolous, do not contain any allegation, are not filed within the limitation period of seven years, or are pending before any other court, tribunal or authority, will have to be disposed of within 30 days.

The idea of creating an anti corruption ombudsman, in the form of a Lokpal, was first *conceptualized in 1968* in the fourth Lok Sabha. Thereafter in 1971, 1977, 1985, 1989, 1996, 1998 and 2001 efforts were made to enact legislation to create the institution of Lokpal, but these efforts remained unsuccessful. Over the last few years the issue of enacting a law to create Lokpal has seen active citizen engagement. Continued civic engagement with the issue resonated with the government and the legislature and led to the passing of the Lokpal Bill in the recently concluded winter session of Parliament. The bill has received parliament’s assent on 01 Jan 2013.

**Lokpal Act of 2013:**

1. The Act allows setting up of anti-corruption ombudsman called Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayukta at the State-level.
2. **Composition:** The Lokpal will consist of a chairperson and a maximum of eight members.
3. **Applicability:** The Lokpal will cover all categories of public servants, including the Prime Minister. But the armed forces do not come under the ambit of Lokpal.
4. **The Act also incorporates provisions for attachment and confiscation of property acquired by corrupt means,** even while the prosecution is pending.
5. **The States will have to institute Lokayukta** within one year of the commencement of the Act.
6. The Act also ensures that public servants who *act as whistleblowers are protected.*
7. **Who can become the Chairperson?**
   - The person who is to be appointed as the chairperson of the Lokpal should be either of the following: Either the former Chief Justice of India Or the former Judge of Supreme Court Or an eminent person with impeccable integrity and outstanding ability, having special knowledge and expertise of minimum 25 years in the matters relating to anti-corruption policy, public administration, vigilance, finance including insurance and banking, law and management.
   a. **Who can become a member?**
      - Out of the maximum eight members, half will be judicial members. Minimum fifty per cent of the Members will be from SC / ST / OBC / Minorities and women. The judicial member of the Lokpal should be either a former Judge of the Supreme Court or a former Chief Justice of a High Court. The non-judicial member should be an eminent person with impeccable integrity and outstanding ability, having special knowledge and expertise of minimum 25 years in the matters relating to anti-corruption policy, public administration, vigilance, finance including insurance and banking, law and management.
   b. **Who cannot become the chairperson?**
      - The following persons cannot become chairperson of Lokpal: MPs and MLAs Persons convicted of any offense involving moral turpitude Less than 45 years of age, Members of Panchayats or Municipality, A person who was removed or dismissed from the public service, A person who holds any office of trust / profit; if so, he would need to resign from Lokpal. A person who is affiliated to a political party Carries on some business / profession; if so, he would need to quit some business.
c. **Term of Office:**
   - The term of office for Lokpal Chairman and Members is 5 years or till attaining age of 70 years.
   - The salary, allowances and other conditions of service of chairperson are equivalent to Chief Justice of India and members is equivalent to Judge of Supreme Court. If the person is already getting the pension (for being a former judge), the equivalent pension amount will be deducted from the salary.
   - The source of salary for Lokpal and Members is Consolidated Fund of India.
   - If the chairperson dies in office or has resigned from the post, President can authorise the senior-most Member to act as the Chairperson until new chairperson is appointed. If chairperson is not available for certain functions due to leave, his job will be done by senior most member.

**Jurisdiction and Powers:**

- The Lokpal will have the power of superintendence and direction over any investigation agency including CBI for cases referred to them by the ombudsman.
- As per the Act, the Lokpal can summon or question any public servant if there exists a prima facie case against the person, even before an investigation agency (such as vigilance or CBI) has begun the probe. Any officer of the CBI investigating a case referred to it by the Lokpal, shall not be transferred without the approval of the Lokpal.
- An investigation must be completed within six months. However, the Lokpal or Lokayukta may allow extensions of six months at a time provided the reasons for the need of such extensions are given in writing.
- Special courts will be instituted to conduct trials on cases referred by Lokpal.

**Ambit:**

- For a wide range of public servants from the PM, ministers and MPs, to groups A, B, C and D employees of the central government various rules are in place.
- If a complaint is filed against the PM, the Act says, “Lokpal shall inquire or cause an inquiry to be conducted into any matter involved in, or arising from, or connected with, any allegation of corruption made in a complaint”.
- However, certain conditions will apply. The Act does not allow a Lokpal inquiry if the allegation against the PM relates to international relations, external and internal security, public order, atomic energy and space.
- Also, complaints against the PM are not to be probed unless the full Lokpal bench considers the initiation of an inquiry and at least two-thirds of the members approve it.
- Such an inquiry against the Prime Minister (if conducted) is to be held in camera and if the Lokpal comes to the conclusion that the complaint deserves to be dismissed, the records of the inquiry are not to be published or made available to anyone.

**Lokpal itself is also subjected to the Law:**

1. The Act also includes the Lokpal's own members under the definition of “public servant”.
2. The Chairperson, Members, officers and other employees of the Lokpal shall be deemed, when acting or purporting to act in pursuance of any of the provisions of this Act to be public servants.
3. It shall apply to public servants in and outside India.
4. It clarifies that a complaint under this Act shall only relate to a period during which the public servant was holding or serving in that capacity.

Link: [https://youtu.be/PpP0A203cdU](https://youtu.be/PpP0A203cdU)
3. THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CODE, 2019

Introduction:

- The Bill replaces three labour laws related to trade unions and industrial disputes. The Bill provides for registration of trade unions, institutes a notice period for strikes and lockouts and constitutes Industrial Tribunals and National Industrial Tribunals for the settlement of industrial disputes.

Highlights:

1. **Trade unions**: Under the Code, seven or more members of a trade union can apply to register it. Trade unions that have a membership of at least 10% of the workers or 100 workers, whichever is less, will be registered. Further, a registered trade union must always have at least seven workers who are employed in the establishment or the connected industry, as its members. The central or state government may recognise a trade union or a federation of trade unions as Central or State Trade Unions respectively.

2. **Negotiating unions**: The Code provides for a negotiation union in an industrial establishment for negotiating with the employer. If there is only one trade union in an industrial establishment, then the employer is required to recognise such trade union as the sole negotiating union of the workers. In case of multiple trade unions, the trade union with support of at least 75% of workers will be recognised as the negotiating union by the central or state government.

3. **Unfair labour practices**: The Code prohibits employers, workers, and trade unions from committing any unfair labour practices listed in a Schedule to the Code. These include:
   1) restricting workers from forming trade unions,
   2) establishing employer sponsored trade union of workers,
   3) coercing workers to join trade unions.

4. **Standing orders**: All industrial establishments with at least 100 workers must prepare standing orders on matters listed in a Schedule to the Code. The central government will prepare model standing orders on such matters, based on which industrial establishments are required to prepare their standing orders. These matters relate to: (i) classification of workers, (ii) manner of informing workers about hours of work, holidays, paydays, and wage rates, (iii) termination of employment, (iv) suspension for misconduct, and (v) grievance redressal mechanisms for workers.

4. **Notice of change**: Employers who propose changes in the conditions of service are required to give a notice to the workers. The conditions of service for which a notice is required to be given are listed in a Schedule to the Code and include wages, contribution, and leave.

5. **Lay-off and retrenchment**: The Code defines lay-off as the inability of an employer, due to shortage of coal, power, or breakdown of machinery, from giving employment to a worker. It also provides for employers to terminate the services of a worker, i.e., retrenchment. Employers of industrial establishments such as mines, factories and plantations with at least 100 workers are required to take prior permission of the central or state government before lay-off, retrenchment or closure. The central or state government can modify this threshold number of workers by notification. Any person who contravenes this provision is punishable with a fine between one lakh rupees and Rs 10 lakh.

6. Industrial establishments in which 50 to 100 workers are employed, are required to:
   1. pay 50% of basic wages and dearness allowance to a worker who has been laid off,
   2. give one month’s notice and wages for such period to a worker who has been retrenched. Any person who contravenes this provision is punishable with a fine between Rs 50,000 and two lakh rupees. Further, if an employer proposes to re-employ retrenched workers, such workers will have preference over other persons.

7. **Voluntary arbitration**: The Code allows for industrial disputes to be voluntarily referred to arbitration by the employer and workers. The parties to the dispute must sign a written agreement referring the dispute to an arbitrator. After investigating the dispute, the arbitrator will submit the arbitration award to the government.

8. **Resolution of industrial disputes**: The central or state governments may appoint conciliation officers to mediate and promote settlement of industrial disputes. These officers will investigate the dispute and
hold conciliation proceedings to arrive at a fair and amicable settlement of the dispute. If no settlement is arrived at, then any party to the dispute can make an application to the Industrial Tribunal.

9. **Industrial Tribunals**: The Code provides for the constitution of Industrial Tribunals for the settlement of industrial disputes. An Industrial Tribunal will consist of two members: (i) a Judicial Member, who is a High Court Judge or has served as a District Judge or an Additional District Judge for a minimum of three years; and (ii) an Administrative Member, who has over 20 years of experience in the fields of economics, business, law, and labour relations.

10. The central government may also constitute National Industrial Tribunals for settlement of industrial disputes which: (i) involve questions of national importance, or (ii) could impact industrial establishments situated in more than one state. Members of the National Industrial Tribunal will include: (i) a Judicial Member, who has been a High Court Judge, and (ii) an Administrative Member, who has been a Secretary in the central government.

**Provisions in our constitution:**

1. **Article 23** forbids forced labour
2. **Article 24** forbids child labour (in factories, mines and other hazardous occupations) below the age of 14 years.
3. **Article 43A** inserted by 42nd amendment – directing the state to take steps to ensure worker’s participation in the management of industries. (Gandhiji said that employers are trustees of interests of workers and they must ensure their welfare.)
4. **Labour laws are under concurrent list.**

**Need:**

- The Indian economy grew at 4.7% in this quarter, while the country’s factory output shrank for the second straight month at 4.3% in September, recording its worst show since the present series was launched in April 2012.
- The ease of compliance of labour laws will promote the setting up of more enterprises, thus catalysing the creation of employment opportunities in the country.

**Importance of the bill:**

- The most important aspect of the Bill is that it presents the legal framework for ushering in the concept of ‘fixed-term employment’ through contract workers on a Pan-India basis.
- It offers some degree of flexibility on government permissions for retrenchment.
- With the introduction of fixed-term employment, they will be able to hire workers directly under a fixed-term contract, with the flexibility to tweak the length of the contract based on the seasonality of industry. These workers will be treated on a par with regular workers during the tenure of the contract.
- The move to include it in a central law will help in wider reach, and states are expected to follow similar applicability. The Bill now ensures a pan-India impact of this move.

**Changes made to the bill:**

1. The government had previously included the category of ‘Fixed Term Employment Workman’ for all sectors in the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946. This was only applicable to ‘central sphere’ establishments, and the states did not follow suit.
2. The threshold required for government permission for retrenchment has been kept unchanged at 100 employees, as against the proposal for 300 employees in an earlier draft of the Bill, which was opposed by trade unions.
3. Instead, the government has now provided flexibility for changing the threshold through notification.
4. The rigidity of labour laws about laying off labour has often been cited by industry as the main reason limiting scalability and employment generation.
5. At present, any company having 100 workers or more has to seek government approval for retrenchment.
6. The provision of fixed-term employment, which helps in the flow of social security benefits to all workers along with making it easier for companies to hire and fire, in The Industrial Relations Code Bill.

Criticism:

1. Some critics have the concern that the unclear provision regarding retrenchment would lead to uncertainty, and discretionary behaviour during implementation by the central or state government.
2. The moment the law will provide flexibility for the applicability, it leaves the matter to the discretion to the appropriate government (states or Centre). Then the clause can be misused.
3. Any discretion in law leads to uncertainty, lack of clarity, discriminatory implementation, and provides scope for unnecessary usage.
4. Fixed-term employment needs to be introduced with adequate safeguards, otherwise it runs the risk of encouraging conversion of permanent employment into fixed-term employment.

Link: https://youtu.be/Wsk-fb4idgE

4. MEDICAL TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2020

Introduction:

The law in India provides a time period of 12 weeks in which pregnancies can be terminated. This period can be extended to 20 weeks in certain cases. This has resulted in women resorting to unsafe abortions, which can lead to complications and sometimes, even death. With advances in medical technology for safe abortions the Bill amends the 1971 abortion to increase the upper limit for terminating pregnancies

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 was introduced in Lok Sabha by the Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Dr. Harsh Vardhan on March 2, 2020. The Bill amends the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 which provides for the termination of certain pregnancies by registered medical practitioners. The Bill adds the definition of termination of pregnancy to mean a procedure undertaken to terminate a pregnancy by using medical or surgical methods.

- **Termination of pregnancy:** Under the Act, a pregnancy may be terminated within 12 weeks, if a registered medical practitioner is of the opinion that:
  - continuation of the pregnancy may risk the life of the mother, or cause grave injury to her health,
  - there is a substantial risk that the child, if born, would suffer physical or mental abnormalities. For termination of a pregnancy between 12 to 20 weeks, two medical practitioners are required to give their opinion.
- The Bill amends this provision to state that a pregnancy may be terminated within 20 weeks, with the opinion of a registered medical practitioner. Approval of two registered medical practitioners will be required for termination of pregnancies between 20 to 24 weeks. The termination of pregnancies up to 24 weeks will only apply to specific categories of women, as may be prescribed by the central government. Further, the central government will notify the norms for the medical practitioner whose opinion is required for termination of the pregnancy.
- Under the Act, if any pregnancy occurs as a result of failure of any device or method used by a married woman or her husband to limit the number of children, such an unwanted pregnancy may constitute a grave injury to the mental health of the pregnant woman. The Bill amends this provision to replace ‘married woman or her husband’ with ‘woman or her partner’.
- **Constitution of a Medical Board:** The Bill states that the upper limit of termination of pregnancy will not apply in cases where such termination is necessary due to the diagnosis of substantial foetal abnormalities. These abnormalities will be diagnosed by a Medical Board. Under the Bill, every state government is required to constitute a Medical Board. These Medical Boards will consist of the following members: (i) a gynaecologist, (ii) a paediatrician, (iii) a radiologist or sonologist, and (iv) any other number of members, as may be notified by the state government. Note that, the central government will notify the powers and functions of these Medical Boards.
• **Protection of privacy of a woman:** The Bill states that no registered medical practitioner will be allowed to reveal the name and other particulars of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated, except to a person authorised by any law. Anyone who contravenes this provision, will be punishable with imprisonment of up to one year, or with a fine, or both.

**Need for overhaul:**

• The present abortion law, which is about five decades old, permits abortion up to a maximum foetal gestation period of 20 weeks.
• In recent years, there have been strong demands to raise the foetal gestation period for abortion beyond 20 weeks.
• If there is a delay in doing this scan, and it reveals a lethal anomaly in the foetus, 20 weeks is limiting.
• The extension of limit would ease the process for the distressed pregnant women, allowing the mainstream system itself to take care of them, delivering quality medical attention.

**Significance:**

• The move to amend the MTP Act, 1971 is a progressive step towards empowerment of women.
• It will provide greater reproductive rights to women as abortion is considered an important aspect of the reproductive health of women.
• Deaths and injuries from unsafe abortions are largely preventable provided services are performed legally by trained practitioners.

**Abortion laws and facts:**

Abortion laws vary across the world. It is learnt that around 60 countries prescribe gestational limits.

• 52% including France, the UK, Austria, Ethiopia, Italy, Spain, Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland and even Nepal, allow for termination beyond 20 weeks on the diagnosis of foetal abnormalities.
• Some countries go beyond even these limits with laws in 23 countries-Canada, Germany, Vietnam, Denmark, Ghana, and Zambia allowing for abortion at any time during the pregnancy on the request of the mother.
• In UK, abortions are allowed at up to 24 weeks, with abortion guidelines formulated by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists including procedures for termination of pregnancies older than 20 weeks. It also states that, in pregnancy older than 21 weeks and 6 days, an injection to cause foetal death is given before the foetus is evacuated.
• Despite a sustained government push over years, contraceptive use in India is not very popular.
• According to a 2018 study by the Guttmacher Institute, 50% of pregnancies in six of the larger Indian states — Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh — are unintended.
• Data from the National Family Health Survey 4 show that just 8% of couples in the country use modern contraceptive methods; only 53% use any method at all.
• It found that 55% pregnancies in Assam, 48% in Bihar, 53% in Gujarat, 50% in Madhya Pradesh, 43% in Tamil Nadu and 49% in Uttar Pradesh are unintended.
• According to a 2016 study published in The Lancet by the Guttmacher Institute and the World Health Organization, an estimated 56 million abortions took place globally each year between 2010 and 2014.
• In 2015, a study in The Lancet Global Health, also by Guttmacher Institute and IIPS, estimated that 15.6 million abortions were performed in India in 2015.
• This translates to an abortion rate of 47 per 1,000 women aged 15-49, which is similar to the abortion rate in neighbouring countries.
• The number of pregnancies ranged from 1,430,000 in Assam to 10,026,000 in Uttar Pradesh.
• Estimation of unintended pregnancies is important because many of them result in abortions and the availability of cheap and safe abortion services is one of the indicators of a robust health system.
Conclusion:

❖ The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 is for expanding access of women to safe and legal abortion services on therapeutic, eugenic, humanitarian or social grounds.
❖ It is a step towards the safety and well-being of the women and many women will be benefitted from this.
❖ Recently several petitions were received by the Courts seeking permission for aborting pregnancies at a gestational age beyond the present permissible limit on grounds of foetal abnormalities or pregnancies due to sexual violence faced by women.
❖ The proposed increase in gestational age will ensure dignity, autonomy, confidentiality and justice for women who need to terminate the pregnancy.

5. DRAFT COMPETITION COMMISSION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020

Introduction:

• With a view to update the Competition Act, 2002 and associated regulations, the Indian Government constituted the Competition Law Review Committee in October 2018. The Committee submitted its report to the Government on 14 August 2019. Based on the recommendations made in the Report, the MCA has introduced a draft Competition Bill, 2020 to overhaul the Act. The Draft Bill proposes certain significant amendments to the Act, including: imprisonment for non-compliance with directions of the Director General; commitment and settlement procedure in non-cartel cases; more expeditious combination review process; and constitution of a Governing Board for non-adjudicatory functions.

Competition Commission of India:

• It is a statutory body of the Government of India, responsible for enforcing the Competition Act, 2002 throughout India and to prevent activities that have an adverse effect on competition.

 Objectives of the Commission:

 o To prevent practices having adverse effect on competition.
 o To promote and sustain competition in markets.
 o To protect the interests of consumers.
 o To ensure freedom of trade.

• The Competition Act:

 o The Competition Act, 2002, as amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007, prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and M&A), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

What are the functions Competition Commission of India?

• Make the markets work for the benefit and welfare of consumers.
• Ensure fair and healthy competition in economic activities in the country for faster and inclusive growth and development of the economy.
• Implement competition policies with an aim to effectuate the most efficient utilization of economic resources.
• Develop and nurture effective relations and interactions with sectoral regulators to ensure smooth alignment of sectoral regulatory laws in tandem with the competition law.
• Effectively carry out competition advocacy and spread the information on benefits of competition among all stakeholders to establish and nurture competition culture in Indian economy.
Key Amendments and Analysis:

- **Change in the regulatory structure of the CCI**: The CCI has been wearing many hats since its inception. It had been vested with adjudicatory, advisory, investigative, quasi-legislative, and advocacy functions. Recognizing this, the CLRC recommended a change in the regulatory structure to make it more robust and effective to deal with the new age issues.

- The Bill provides for the **constitution of a Governing Body**. The Governing Body would comprise:
  - the Chairperson of the CCI,
  - its six whole time members,
  - the Secretary of the Department of Economic Affairs,
  - Ministry of Finance or his nominee,
  - Secretary of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs and his nominee, and
  - four (4) other part-time members to be nominated by the Central Government.

- They will be vested with the power to make regulations, take measures to promote awareness and create a **National Competition Policy**, the Governing Board will exercise general superintendence, direction and management of the affairs of the CCI.

- The CCI will now discharge **only the adjudicatory functions**.

- **Statutory provision to invite public comments**: In a very welcome move, the Bill creates an obligation on the Governing Board to seek public comments on all regulations.
  - With a limited exception of urgency in public interests, and regulations pertaining to internal working of the CCI, this provision will bring elements transparency and democratic rule making to the system.

- **Issuing the penalty guidance**: The Bill requires the CCI to issue the much-awaited penalty guidelines. The penalty guidance is expected to give recognition to the relevant turnover principles and lay down the manner of determination of the percentage of the penalty and application of aggravating and mitigating factors.

- **Streamlining procedure for regulation of combinations**: The Bill makes a large number of changes to regulation of combinations. Some of these, such as, reducing the time-limit for deemed approval from two hundred and ten days (210) days to one hundred and fifty days (150) days, make substantive changes.

- **Amendments to streamline the procedure for inquiry into combinations**: Currently the sections in the Act leave a lot of glaring gaps in the inquiry procedure. Despite this, the CCI through regulations, notifications and practice has been conducting inquiries into combinations. The Bill seeks to fill some of these gaps, giving statutory sanctity to the practices followed by the CCI. This will also reduce the possibility of appeals against combination orders which have been in the past on account of insufficiency of the statutory provisions.

- **New thresholds for merger control**: The Bill empowers the CCI and Central Government to define new thresholds for merger notification by introducing a proviso to Section 5.

- Given the dynamic nature of the digital markets, application of this power requires exercise of caution. This may result in increasing compliance costs for businesses and impact the ease of doing business. It is necessary that the introduction of objective thresholds or criterion is preceded by a detailed economic and legal assessment of the necessity of such thresholds, the basis of the thresholds and the value of the thresholds.

- **Expansion of definition of a cartel**: The Bill expands the definition of a cartel to include a buyer’s cartel as well. This implies that even in cases of buyer’s cartel, the presumption of appreciable adverse effect on competition (AAEC) will apply to buyer’s cartel as well.

- **Extending protection to holders of intellectual property rights**: In line with the recommendations of the CLRC, the Bill seeks to widen protection offered to holders of IPR. The exemption for IPR holders is currently restricted to anti-competitive agreements. This brings the much-needed parity between the treatment of anti-competitive agreements and abuse of dominant position.

- **The regime of settlements and commitments**: In a very significant development, the Bill introduces a system for settlements and commitments permitting the CCI to close the investigation on basis of an application for settlement or commitment moved by the investigated party.
Who will be benefiting the most by the amendments?

- It would benefit the public at large
- The new startups business would be benefitted a lot
- The digital economy

Conclusion:

❖ The Bill is a positive step in the direction of an efficient CCI 2.0. While there are somethings which remain desired, one can hope that the consultation process leads to beneficial outcomes and most concerns raised by the stakeholders are appropriately addressed

6. WOMEN IN WORKFORCE

Introduction:

- Women workforce in the country fell to **18 per cent in 2019** from 37 per cent in 2006, non- government organisation Azad Foundation said on the International Women’s Day. The **World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report this year ranks India at 149th position out of 153 countries** on economic participation and opportunity. According to the Foundation, the Global Gender Gap Report estimates that **raising women's participation in the labour force can increase India’s GDP significantly**. The declining women’s labour force participation, gender pay gap, high rates of informal work with lack of social security are seen as impediments to the goal of gender equality and empowerment of women in India. Over the last few years more women have taken up Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics courses and are aspiring to enter the workforce. However dropout rates among women is also high, particularly around marriage, maternity and motherhood. There are options like working from home, creches and so on, yet a lot more needs to be done.

Key findings:

1. **79% of all PhDs scholars in India are women** and it is a good sign which was not seen in previous decades.
2. Irrespective of employment category (casual and regular/salaried), organised or unorganised sector, and location (urban and rural), women workers in India are paid **a lower wage rate**.
3. Percentage of UG degrees that women hold is about 56% and PhDs is 42%.
4. **The gender pay gap** was 34 per cent in India, that is, women get 34 per cent less compared to men for performing the same job with same qualifications.
5. **In the organised sector**, women professionals even in the highest ranks of labour (legislators, senior officials, and managers) are also paid less compared to their male counterparts. However, these women constitute only one per cent of the total female work force and the gap is lowest as they are aware of their rights.
6. **The wage difference** is lesser for more skilled workers and more for semi-skilled or unskilled workers. Across enterprise type, wage difference is less for government/public sector and public/private limited company.
7. **Large pay gaps** in terms of average daily wages exist in male and female wage rates of casual and regular workers in rural and urban areas and the gap is narrower for regular workers in urban areas. On the other hand, for casual workers, wage gap is narrower in rural areas.
8. While **inequality in jobs has increased**, inequality in education has decreased between boys and girls. But this situation further exacerbates the crisis in jobs when it comes to women. Even as girls frequently outperform boys in school examinations, they are not finding suitable jobs for the skills that they have.
9. While **both men and women are diversifying out of agriculture, almost 75 per cent of rural women are still engaged in it**. A patriarchal ideology and local socio-cultural traditions confine women to the village where agriculture continues to be their most important (but insufficient) source of food and income. Male outmigration has also pushed women into taking on more responsibility of own cultivation and to perform wage labour to ensure households’ daily survival.
Reasons for Declining Participation of Women in Employment:

1. It appears that there are some non-economic, social and cultural factors. When increase in family incomes are there, due to the cultural factors, women leave the work to take care of the family.
2. The major pulldown is among the rural women as per Ministry reports where agriculture is shrinking and we donot have a robust manufacturing sector yet, we are investing it now and it will take time to reap benefits.
3. There are a lot of crimes against children inside and outside house so parents feel atleast one parent should stay at home and being a patriarchal society the burden comes to the women
4. One big factor is maternity. Many women who join the workforce are unable to re-join after having a child.
5. The landmark legislation, which entitles a woman to 26 weeks of paid maternity leave is becoming a big hurdle.
6. As per a study this increased cost for companies and this may discourage them from hiring women.
7. The safety in metropolitan, tier 1 and tier 2 cities is the major issue.
8. 11 lakh to 18 lakh women are likely to face difficulty in finding new jobs across 10 sectors this year. Because of ICT, part-time jobs from home are not giving the real picture.
9. Concerns about safety and harassment at work site, both explicit and implicit.
10. Higher Education levels of women also allow them to pursue leisure and other non-work activities, all of which reduce female labour force participation.
11. Structural transformation of Indian agriculture due to farm mechanization results in a lower demand for female agricultural labourers.
12. When income increases, men allows Indian women to withdraw from the labour force, thereby avoiding the stigma of working (cultural factors).
13. Insufficient availability of the type of jobs that women say they would like to do, such as regular part-time jobs that provide steady income and allow women to reconcile household duties with work.
14. Social norms about household work are against women's mobility and participation in paid work. Childbirth and taking care of elderly parents or in-laws account for the subsequent points where women drop off the employment pipeline.
15. The cultural baggage about women working outside the home is so strong that in most traditional Indian families, quitting work is a necessary precondition to the wedding itself.

Empowering women in the economy and closing gender gaps in the world of work are key to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

1. Particularly Goal 5, to achieve gender equality, and Goal 8, to promote full and productive employment and decent work for all; also Goal 1 on ending poverty, Goal 2 on food security, Goal 3 on ensuring health and Goal 10 on reducing inequalities.
2. When more women work, economies grow. Women’s economic empowerment boosts productivity, increases economic diversification and income equality in addition to other positive development outcomes.
3. For example, increasing the female employment rates in OECD countries to match that of Sweden, could boost GDP by over USD 6 trillion, recognizing, however, that growth does not automatically lead to a reduction in gender-based inequality.

Advantages:

1. Women have a different way of looking at things and this important
2. If more women did paid work, India’s national income would rise dramatically.
3. Money gets circulated as more people are employed for cooking, cleaning at home
4. One estimate is that GDP would go up by 20% if women matched men in workforce participation.
5. In the family qualities like independence, interdependence, tolerance, disciple, time management, multi-tasking etc all this qualities she can learn and teach to her family better incase she works.
6. Enhances a woman’s control over household decision-making.
7. Providing greater impetus to women entrepreneurs would be critical for India’s growth.
8. Women entrepreneurs help drive innovation and job creation, besides assisting in addressing the world’s most critical challenges.

Way Forward:

✓ Science needs the best scientists, and a knowledge economy needs a gender-balanced workforce.
✓ Women need the 3C’s Confidence, Capabilities, access to Capital. Men need to understand that women are their equals.
✓ One key ingredient of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s economic revival strategies was to increase female LFPR. Abe made it a priority to build almost half a million government-funded crèches to help young mothers rejoin the workforce.
✓ Government policies should focus on behavioural changes that make female employment more acceptable in the society.
✓ Government schemes must target the fundamental cultural and social forces that shape patriarchy.
✓ Communication programmes on gender equality in secondary education to help students imbibe equitable gender norms.
✓ Acknowledging child care as the responsibility of both parents.
✓ As for the workforce, much needs to be done, beyond maternity benefit entitlements and other quotas.
✓ A useful and easily implementable idea would be to give income tax benefits to women. It would be a bold and effective step to increasing India’s female workforce participation.
✓ For political empowerment of women, their representation in Parliament and in decision making roles in public sphere is one of the key indicators of empowerment.
✓ Gig Economy provides women flexible work options to pursue their career while not missing important milestones in their family lives.
✓ Initiatives such as Skill India, Make in India, and new gender-based quotas from corporate boards to the police force can spur a positive change. But we need to invest in skill training and job support.
✓ Drawing more women into the labour force, supplemented by structural reforms that could help create more jobs would be a source of future growth for India. Only then would India be able to reap the benefits of “demographic dividend” from its large and youthful labour force.

Link: https://youtu.be/n6AkDaOc53s

THE MINERAL LAWS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2020

Introduction:

Coal licenses in India are issued to some mining companies today for a specific end use such as steel production and power generation. The Mineral Laws (Amendment) Ordinance, which was promulgated in January, removes this end-use restriction for coal mines. The Ordinance further clarifies that companies do not require any coal mining experience in India to participate in auctions.

The bill amends the Mines and minerals (development and regulation) act, 1957 (MMDR act) and the Coal mines (special provisions) act, 2015 (CMSP act). An ordinance with similar provisions was promulgated on January 10, 2020.

1. The MMDR act regulates the overall mining sector in India. The cmsp act provides for the auction and allocation of mines whose allocation was cancelled by the supreme court in 2014. Schedule i of the act provides a list of all such mines; schedule ii and iii are sub-classes of the mines listed in the schedule i. Schedule ii mines are those where production had already started then, and schedule iii mines are ones that had been earmarked for a specified end-use.
2. Removal of restriction on end-use of coal: Currently, companies acquiring schedule ii and schedule iii coal mines through auctions can use the coal produced only for specified end-uses such as power generation and steel production. The bill removes this restriction on the use of coal mined by such companies. Companies will be allowed to carry on coal mining operation for own consumption, sale or for any other purposes, as may be specified by the central government.
3. **Eligibility for auction of coal and lignite blocks:** the bill clarifies that the companies need not possess any prior coal mining experience in India in order to participate in the auction of coal and lignite blocks. Further, the competitive bidding process for auction of coal and lignite blocks will not apply to mines considered for allotment to: (i) a government company or its joint venture for own consumption, sale or any other specified purpose; and (ii) a company that has been awarded a power project on the basis of a competitive bid for tariff.

4. **Composite license for prospecting and mining:** currently, separate licenses are provided for prospecting and mining of coal and lignite, called prospecting license, and mining lease, respectively. Prospecting includes exploring, locating, or finding mineral deposit. The bill adds a new type of license, called prospecting license-cum-mining lease. This will be a composite license providing for both prospecting and mining activities.

5. **Non-exclusive reconnaissance permit holders to get other licenses:** currently, the holders of non-exclusive reconnaissance permit for exploration of certain specified minerals are not entitled to obtain a prospecting license or mining lease. Reconnaissance means preliminary prospecting of a mineral through certain surveys. The bill provides that the holders of such permits may apply for a prospecting license-cum-mining lease or mining lease. This will apply to certain licensees as prescribed in the bill.

6. **Transfer of statutory clearances to new bidders:** currently, upon expiry, mining leases for specified minerals (minerals other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals) can be transferred to new persons through auction. This new lessee is required to obtain statutory clearances before starting mining operations. The bill provides that the various approvals, licenses, and clearances given to the previous lessee will be extended to the successful bidder for a period of two years. During this period, the new lessee will be allowed to continue mining operations. However, the new lessee must obtain all the required clearances within this two-year period.

7. **Reallocation after termination of the allocations:** the cmsp act provides for the termination of allotment orders of coal mines in certain cases. The bill adds that such mines may be reallocated through auction or allotment as may be determined by the central government. The central government will appoint a designated custodian to manage these mines until they are reallocated.

8. **Prior approval from the central government:** under the mmdr act, state governments require prior approval of the central government for granting reconnaissance permit, prospecting license, or mining lease for coal and lignite. The bill provides that prior approval of the central government will not be required in granting these licenses for coal and lignite, in certain cases. These include cases where: (i) the allocation has been done by the central government, and (ii) the mining block has been reserved to conserve a mineral.

9. **Advance action for auction:** under the mmdr act, mining leases for specified minerals (minerals other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals) are auctioned on the expiry of the lease period. The bill provides that state governments can take advance action for auction of a mining lease before its expiry.

**Categories of minerals:**

As per the available legislations in the country, all minerals have been classified into two categories namely.

1. **Major minerals:** major minerals are minerals like agate, asbestos, barytes, bauxite, cadmium, calcite, china clay, coal. Copper lead, manganese, mica, nickel, rock phosphate, soapstone, tungsten, wollastonite, zinc, etc., as specified in second schedule appended with the mmdr act 1957.

2. **Minor minerals:** the minor mineral are building stone, gravel, ordinary clay, ordinary sand and any other mineral which the central government may by notification in the official gazette declare as minor mineral.

**Permission for mining:**

- The state governments grant permission for mining, known as mineral concessions, for all the minerals located within the boundary of the state, under the provisions of the mines and minerals (development and regulation) act, 1957 and mineral concession rules, 1960.
- However, for minerals specified in the first schedule to the mines and minerals (development and regulation) act, 1957, central government approval is necessary before granting the mineral concession.
• Minerals specified under the first schedule include hydrocarbons, atomic minerals and metallic minerals such as iron ore, bauxite copper ore, lead precious stones, zinc and gold.

Benefits:

1. It might also put an end to Coal India ltd’s monopoly in the sector.
2. This will speed up the process of implementation of projects, ease of doing business, simplification of procedure and benefit all the parties in areas where minerals are located.
3. The bill provides for licensing of coal mining leases (pl-and-ml) which will increase the availability of coal and lignite blocks and provide for an allocation of different grades of coal blocks in wide geographical distribution.
4. Environmental and forest clearances will be automatically transferred to the new owners of the mineral blocks along with other clearances for two years. This will allow the new owners to continue with the hassle-free mining operations. They can apply for new licenses for two years during the period.
5. Now, the auction of the lease of mines can be started before the end of the lease term. This will enable the state government to take advance action for auction of mineral blocks so that the new leaseholder can be decided before the current lease period ends. This will help in the smooth production of minerals in the country.
6. His opens up the sector to players outside steel and power as well as removes end-use restrictions.
7. It will create an efficient energy market and bring in more competition as well as reduce coal imports. India imported 235 million tonnes (mt) of coal last year, of which 135 mt valued at rs.171,000 crore could have been met from domestic reserves.
8. It would also help India gain access to high-end technology for underground mining used by miners across the globe.

Coal sector in India:

• Despite having the world’s fourth largest coal reserves, India imported 235 million tonnes (mt) of coal last year, of which 135mt valued at rs.171,000 crore could have been met from domestic reserves.
• India’s state-run coal giant has been unable to meet growing demand despite abundant resources.
• The south asian nation depends on coal India for more than 80 per cent of its domestic production and the miner has consistently fallen short of production targets in the last few years.
• The government has been progressively liberalizing the coal sector over the last several months to attract new investments, and getting rid of this archaic end-use restriction was a key step.

Link: https://youtu.be/OWvg4hLV9EM

ECONOMY

1. CORONAVIRUS & IMPACT ON ECONOMY

Introduction:

The human cost of the coronavirus outbreak is climbing across China and beyond. The economic cost is also mounting. That damage is, for the most part, not due to the virus itself, but due to efforts to prevent it from spreading. There are strict restrictions on moving out of Wuhan, where the outbreak began, a city with a population of 11 million. The lockdown, also now extended to other parts of Hubei province, prevents business-related travel as well as the movement of goods and workers. The impact is not confined to China. International retailers have closed operations in China. Several overseas airlines have stopped flights to China and international hotel chains have been offering refunds. And beyond that, there is growing concern about integrated international supply chains. Hyundai, of South Korea, has suspended its car production because of problems with the supply of parts from its operation in China – an early warning sign of possible extensive disruption ahead.

Economic Consequences of Covid-19:
• Indirect hit to confidence (wealth effect): A classic transmission of exogenous shocks to the real economy is via financial markets (and more broadly financial conditions) — they become part of the problem. As markets fall and household wealth contracts, household savings rates move up and thus consumption must fall.

• Direct hit to consumer confidence: While financial market performance and consumer confidence correlate strongly, long-run data also shows that consumer confidence can drop even when markets are up. Covid-19 appears to be a potentially potent direct hit on confidence, keeping consumers at home, weary of discretionary spending, and perhaps pessimistic about the longer term.

• Supply-side shock: The above two channels are demand shocks, but there is additional transmission risk via supply disruption. As the virus shuts down production and disables critical components of supply chains, gaps turn into problems, production could halt, furloughs and layoffs could occur. There will be huge variability across economies and industries, but taking the U.S. economy as an example, we think it would take quite a prolonged crisis for this to feed through in a significant way. Relative to the demand impact, we see this as secondary.

Predicted slump

• China is the world’s second-largest economy and leading trading nation, so economic fallout from coronavirus also threatens global growth.

• Economists said they expected China’s economic growth to slump to 4.5% in the first quarter of 2020, down from 6% in the previous quarter – the slowest pace since the financial crisis.

• However, the economists were optimistic China’s economy would recover quickly if the virus could be contained.

• The OECD warned of the dangers facing the global economy. In its latest Interim Economic Outlook, the organization said the virus was the “greatest danger” to the world economy since the financial crisis of more than 10 years ago.

Falling oil demand

• China is the world’s biggest oil importer. With coronavirus hitting manufacturing and travel, the International Energy Agency (IEA) has predicted the first drop in global oil demand in a decade.

• “Global oil demand has been hit hard by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and the widespread shutdown of China’s economy. Demand is now expected to fall by 435,000 barrels year-on-year in the first quarter of 2020, the first quarterly contraction in more than 10 years,” the IEA said in its latest monthly report.

Impact on India’s trade with China:

• With China under lockdown, India is expected to witness a major impact on imports and exports in various industries including pharmaceuticals, electronics, mobiles, and auto parts.

• China is the biggest exporter to India, followed by the US and UAE. In 2018, China exported goods worth $90.4bn to India and accounted for 14.63% of the exports.

• In 2017, telecom instruments, electronics components, computer hardware and peripherals, industrial machinery for dairy, and organic chemicals were the top five items imported by India accounting for 46% of the imports from China.

Impacts of the Indian pharmaceutical industry

• Bulk drugs and drug intermediates accounted for $1.5bn or 3% of India’s imports from China.

• According to the Trade Promotion Council of India, approximately 85% of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) imported by Indian companies are from China.

• India’s overdependence on China for APIs exposes it to raw material supply disruption and price volatility. Another major hindrance to the Indian pharmaceutical industry is its low capacity utilisation, according to a report from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MCI). India has a capacity utilisation between 30% and 40% as against 75% of China.
Opportunities for Indian pharmaceutical manufacturers:

- Although the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak could have a significant impact on the Indian pharmaceutical industry unless it is brought under control over the next few months, it also provides an opportunity to India’s pharmaceutical manufacturers to grab share from their Chinese competitors.
- Indian pharmaceutical companies currently have two months’ stock of APIs and intermediates, quoted the Economic Times. In the absence of a major disruption due to the outbreak, the existing stocks may address the issue of shortage, it added.
- The report from MCI, however, noted that improving the overall capacity utilisation of existing manufacturing plants in India as a short-term solution to such supply disruptions. The report noted the need for assured purchase agreements from the government for the existing manufacturing plants.
- It also noted that the government should absorb the price differential to improve capacity utilisation.

Economic effects of the coronavirus on the Indian Economy:

- The impact on India is felt through supply chain disruptions from China as well as regional players, who in turn are net importers from China.
- India’s annual trade with China is ~$90 billion—India imports goods worth $75 billion and exports goods worth $15 billion.
- These include ‘electrical and telecom machinery,’ ‘organic chemicals,’ ‘nuclear reactors,’ ‘plastics’ and ‘pharmaceuticals.’ The first four of these five groups also make up India’s top imports in 2019 fiscal year.
- On account of factory closures in China, supply chains would get disrupted and this could result in shortages, especially of electronic goods and medicines.
- A key supplier of generic drugs to the global market, Indian companies procure almost 70 percent of their active pharmaceutical ingredients for their medicines from China.
- Trade deficit prints may be lower for the next couple of months. We may see the price of consumer durables inch higher. This would drive core inflation higher, which is showing signs of bottoming out.
- This, in turn, could make it more difficult for the MPC to provide further monetary policy stimulus. January’s core inflation print came in at 4.2 percent compared to December’s 3.8 percent.
- Fall in global crude prices on account of an anticipated slowdown in demand would also result in a lower import bill. The sectors that are likely to be impacted on the export front are diamonds, leather and petrochemicals.
- Imports are likely to contract more than exports and therefore, from a current account perspective, the outbreak could actually be rupee-supportive.
- Offshore fundraising by Indian corporates is also likely to slow down, as raising money onshore has become cheaper after the LTRO announcement by the RBI.
- The retail mobile trade, for instance, is almost entirely dependent upon China. While every month, old models of mobile phones would see a drop in prices as new models are supplied, in the current month, no such drop in prices has taken place and the supply of goods is being rationed by companies.
- The toy market sees nearly 80% of its demand met by products made in China, while only 20% is met by Indian manufacturers.
- Many items, like belt buckles, Christmas lights, specific parts of gas stoves, are only made in China. The prices of most of these goods had already seen an upward correction, and in some cases it is as much as 50%
- The travel and tourism sector will be affected badly. Several overseas airlines have stopped flights to China and international hotel chains have also been offering refunds. Most of the Chinese citizens are avid travellers, hence the tourism in other countries might feel the ripple effect.

Link: https://youtu.be/9_FKRA4lvdQ
2. THE BANKING REGULATION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020

Introduction:

- A bill to provide more powers to the RBI for regulating cooperative banks was introduced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Lok Sabha. The Banking Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2020, which comes in the backdrop of PMC Bank scam, seeks to strengthen cooperative banks by increasing professionalism, enabling access to capital, improving governance and ensuring sound banking through the RBI. Introducing the bill, Sitharaman said it is the “need of the hour” to avoid a PMC Bank-like crisis in the future. The proposed law seeks to enforce banking regulation guidelines of the RBI in cooperative banks, while administrative issues will still be guided by the Registrar of Cooperative Societies. It also proposed to bring cooperative banks on par with developments in the banking sector through better management and proper regulation of cooperative banks with a view to ensure that affairs of cooperative banks are conducted in a manner that protects the interest of depositors.

Cooperative Banks:

1. Co-operative banks are financial entities established on a co-operative basis and belonging to their members. This means that the customers of a co-operative bank are also its owners.
2. Cooperative Banks continue to be important and the ideal organisations even in the changing economic environment, as participation and inclusion are central to poverty reduction.
3. Cooperative organisations in many countries have exhibited greater resilience during global crises, underscoring their importance in macroeconomic and financial stability.
4. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) committee, in 2015, suggested that multi-state urban cooperative banks with a business size of Rs.20,000 crore or more be converted into full-fledged commercial bank, if the lender has no special need to remain a cooperative bank.
5. Co-operative banks in India are registered under the States Cooperative Societies Act. The Co-operative banks are also regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and governed by the Banking Regulations Act 1949 and Banking Laws (Co-operative Societies) Act, 1955.
6. In most countries, they are supervised and controlled by banking authorities and have to respect prudential banking regulations, which put them at a level playing field with stockholder’s banks.
7. Cooperative banks came directly under the RBI’s radar in 1966 but faced the problem of dual regulation.
8. The Registrar of Cooperative Societies (RCS) is in control of management elections and many administrative issues as well as auditing.
9. And the RBI brought them under the Banking Regulation Act as applicable to cooperative societies, which included all the regulatory aspects, namely, the granting of the licence, maintaining cash reserve, statutory liquidity and capital adequacy ratios, and inspection of these banks.
10. So, in a sense, urban cooperative banks have been under the radar of the RBI, but because of dual regulation, one always had a feeling that one did not have as much control over these banks in terms of supercession of boards or removal of directors, as the RBI has over private sector banks.
11. There was a proliferation of licences issued between 1991 and 1998. RBI to deal with the problems of cooperative banks issued a vision document in 2004-05 and stopped all licences of new branches and new bank entities.

Problems with Cooperative Banking in India:

1. Politicians in local as well as in state use them to increase their vote bank and usually get their representatives elected over the board of director in order to gain undue advantages.
2. The cooperatives in northeast states and in states like West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha are not as well developed as the ones in Maharashtra and Gujarat. There is a lot of friction due to competition between different states, this friction affects the working of cooperatives.
3. A serious problem of the cooperative credit is the overdue loans of the cooperative banks which have been continuously increasing over the years.
4. Large amounts of overdues restrict the recycling of the funds and adversely affect the lending and borrowing capacity of the cooperative.
5. The cooperatives have **resource constraints** as their owned funds hardly make a sizeable portfolio of the working capital.
6. **Raising working capital** has been a major hurdle in their effective functioning.

**Structure of co-operative banks in India:**

Broadly, **co-operative banks in India are divided into two categories** – urban and rural.

**Rural cooperative credit institutions** could either be short-term or long-term in nature.

1. **Short-term cooperative credit institutions** are further sub-divided into State Co-operative Banks, District Central Co-operative Banks, Primary Agricultural Credit Societies.
2. **Long-term institutions** are either State Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (SCARDBs) or Primary Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (PCARDBs).

**Urban Co-operative Banks (UBBs)** are either scheduled or non-scheduled. Scheduled and non-scheduled UCBs are again of two kinds- **multi-state and those operating in single state**.

**The Banking Regulation Amendment Bill, 2020:**

- Cooperative banks will be audited according to RBI’s norms.
- RBI can supersede the board, in consultation with the state government, if any cooperative bank is under stress.
- Appointments of chief executives will also require permission from the banking regulator, as is the case for commercial banks.
- It is proposed to bring the co-operative banks on par with the developments in the banking sector through better management and proper regulation of co-operative banks with a view to ensure that the affairs of the co-operative banks are conducted in a manner that protects the interests of the depositors.
- It is further proposed to strengthen the co-operative banks by increasing professionalism, enabling access to capital, improving governance and ensuring sound banking through the Reserve Bank of India.
- audit of such banks will be as per central bank’s guidelines and recruitment for banks’ management will be based on certain qualifications.
- The administrative role will continue to be done by the Registrar of Cooperative Societies. The amendments will apply to all urban co-operative banks and multi-state cooperative banks.

**Why this was necessary?**

- This was felt necessary in the wake of the recent Punjab & Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank crisis.
- Cooperative banks have 8.6 lakh account holders, with a total deposit of about ₹5 lakh crore.
- Besides, **Urban cooperative banks reported nearly 1,000 cases of fraud worth more than ₹220 crore in past five fiscal years.**

Link: [https://youtu.be/a8dByvnerqE](https://youtu.be/a8dByvnerqE)

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**3. EPFO**

**Introduction:**

1st November is observed as the foundation day of the Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation. The day marks the roll out of the Employees’ Provident Fund Scheme on 1st November 1952. This was the first social security scheme under the EPF Act. Beginning its journey with a few lakh beneficiaries, the EPFO now services more than **4.5 crore employees**, who are engaged in around 6 lakh contributing establishments. With over 63 lakh pensioners, the EPFO is the 21st largest pension fund globally. Recent e-governance initiatives of online coverage of establishments, online grievance redressal and online filing of claims backed by Universal Account Number
have all generated a huge trust in public service delivery. It is noteworthy that more than 50% claims in EPFO are preferred through online mode, indicating a wide acceptance in just one year of its rollout.

1. EPFO is one of the World’s largest Social Security Organisations in terms of clientele and the volume of financial transactions undertaken. At present it maintains 19.34 crore accounts (Annual Report 2016-17) pertaining to its members.
2. The Employees’ Provident Fund came into existence with the promulgation of the Employees’ Provident Funds Ordinance on the 15th November, 1951.
3. It was replaced by the Employees’ Provident Funds Act, 1952. The Employees’ Provident Funds Bill was introduced in the Parliament in the year 1952 as a Bill to provide for the institution of provident funds for employees in factories and other establishments.
4. The Act is now referred as the Employees’ Provident Funds & Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 which extends to the whole of India.
5. The Act and Schemes framed there under are administered by a tri-partite Board known as the Central Board of Trustees, Employees’ Provident Fund, consisting of representatives of Government (Both Central and State), Employers, and Employees.
6. The Central Board of Trustees administers a contributory provident fund, pension scheme and an insurance scheme for the workforce engaged in the organized sector in India.
7. The Board is assisted by the Employees’ PF Organization (EPFO), consisting of offices at 135 locations across the country. The Organization has a well equipped training set up where officers and employees of the Organization as well as Representatives of the Employers and Employees attend sessions for trainings and seminars.
8. The EPFO is under the administrative control of Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India

Vision:

• Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation has a vision to reposition itself as a world class Social Security Organisation providing futuristic services meeting the growing requirements of all categories of its stakeholders.
• EPFO Vision 2030 envisages:
  1. Universal Social Security Coverage on mandatory basis by way of Provident Fund, Pension and Life Insurance for all workers of the country
  2. Online Services for all EPFO benefits with State-of-the-Art Technology
  3. Implementation of policies for a benefit structure with adequate support level of social security

EPFO Schemes:

1. EPF Scheme 1952
   a. Accumulation plus interest upon retirement and death
   b. Partial withdrawals allowed for education, marriage, illness and house construction.
   c. Housing Scheme for EPFO Members to achieve Hon’ble Prime Minister’s Vision of housing to all Indians by 2022
2. Pension Scheme 1995 (EPS)
   a. Monthly benefit for superannuation/retirement, disability, survivor, widow(er) and children
   b. Minimum pension on disablement
   c. Past service benefit to participants of erstwhile Family Pension Scheme, 1971
3. Insurance Scheme 1976 (EDLI)
   a. Benefit provided in case of death of an employee who was a member of the scheme at the time of death
   b. Benefit amount 20 times of the wages. Maximum benefit of 6 lakh.
International workers:

- The Government of India through its initiative for the benefit of both the employers and employees has entered into Agreement with several countries to ensure that the employees of home country do not remit contribution in that country, get the benefit of totalisation period for deciding the eligibility for pension, may get the pension in the country where they choose to live, and the employers are saved from making double social security contributions for the same set of employees.
- The Employees Provident Fund Organisation has been authorized to issue the Certificate of Coverage to the employees posted to the countries having signed Agreement with the Government of India.

Link: https://youtu.be/GNEifsQYgak

4. DAIRY SECTOR IN INDIA

Introduction:

- The Union Cabinet has approved 4,458 crore scheme for the dairy sector. The move will benefit as many as 95 lakh milk producers. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, has also given its approval for **upward revision of interest subvention to 2.5% per annum** under the scheme Dairy Processing and Infrastructure Development Fund with the revised outlay of Rs 11,184 Cr.

Milk Production in India:

- India is **the largest producer** of milk.
- The value of milk is more than that of rice and wheat combined.
- So, it is India’s biggest agri-produce.
- It is a source of income to small and landless agri-hou
- 70 per cent of those earning their livelihood from milk are women.
- Small and marginal farmers own 33 percent of land and about 60 percent of female cattle and buffaloes.
- Some 75 percent of rural households own, on average, two to four animals.
- Dairying is a part of the farming system, not a separate enterprise. Feed is mostly residual from crops, whereas cow dung is important for manure.
- Dairying provides a source of regular income, whereas income from agriculture is seasonal. This regular source of income has a huge impact on minimizing risks to income. There is some indication that areas where dairy is well developed have less incidence of farmer suicide.
- About a third of rural incomes are dependent upon dairying.
- Livestock is a security asset to be sold in times of crisis.

Factor conditions

1. Factor conditions for dairying entail the quality of animals, human resources and technical skills, land availability, capital, credit, infrastructure and other inputs relevant to the value chain, as the following explains.
2. The **quality of animals** is critical in determining its milk productivity and hence overall production. Currently, low productivity per animal hinders development of the dairy sector. Despite being the world’s largest milk producer, India’s productivity per animal is very low, at 987 kg per lactation, compared with the global average of 2,038 kg per lactation.
3. The **low productivity** is a result of ineffective cattle and buffalo breeding programmes, limited extension and management on dairy enterprise development, traditional feeding practices that are not based on scientific feeding methods, and limited availability and affordability of quality feed and fodder. In addition, the limited supply of quality animals is exacerbated by policies limiting interstate movement of animals. Indigenous cattle and buffalo make up 45 percent of the country’s total milch population, in contrast to the cross-bred cows at 10 percent.
4. **Animal health and breeding services provision**, veterinary infrastructure development and vaccinations are the responsibility of the state government. These services have traditionally been provided for free or at a very subsidized rate. In the past few years, there has been increasing awareness that the state pays heavily to offer these services, which are easily available to farmers (Ahuja *et al*.). Consequently, many states have instituted partial or full-cost recovery fees for providing the services.

5. Despite these initiatives, the **availability of services** remains limited. Currently, AI services cover only 15 percent of the breedable animals. Cattle and buffalo breeding programmes have been initiated but have not had the desired impact because of a lack of coordination between the different state departments.

6. Crop residues are the single largest bulk **feed material** available to farmers for feeding livestock, specifically ruminants. They include coarse straws, fine straws, leguminous straws, pulses straws and sugarcane tops.

7. Fodder from common property resources is another major source of feed for animals. But lack of efficient management of common property resources is a major constraint in availability of these resources for fodder. The area under cultivated fodder production is limited only to 5 percent of the total cultivable land.

8. Concentrates used for fodder include coarse grains, such as maize, sorghum, bajra and other millets, and other cereal by-products, such as rice bran/polish and various oil meals, including groundnut cake, mustard cake, coconut cake, soybean meal, cotton seed meal and sesame cake.

9. The escalating price of feed ingredients is a major cause for concern. In many states, cooperatives are involved in producing feed concentrate and selling to farmers at subsidized rates.

10. **Scarcity of fodder resources** is likely to be a major constraint in the development of the dairy sector unless adequate measures are undertaken to augment them.

11. Another important issue regarding feed is the lack of regulations to ensure quality. In the absence of a coherent policy, all kinds of substandard feeds are available in the market.

12. **Formal/informal credit**: Lack of access to credit to expand the herd is a critical problem for farmers. There is little access to formal credit through the cooperatives. Informal credit is available from private traders and agents of private companies, but the interest rate is very high. And these loans may or may not be linked to dairy activity. When taking a loan from a trader, the farmer is then tied to selling the milk to that trader, often at a low rate.

13. **Vaccines/medicines**: The Government and the private sector are involved in producing medicines and vaccines. However, quality control is a critical issue. An important policy question is whether the government should be involved in the manufacturing and production of vaccines or should it instead take on a regulatory role to ensure quality and availability at a reasonable price.

**Government initiatives:**
- National Programme for Bovine Breeding
- Rashtriya Gokul Mission
- National Bovine Genetic Centre
- Quality Mark
- National Kamdhenu Breeding Centres
- E-Pashuhaat portal
- National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD)
- Dairy Entrepreneurship Development Scheme (DEDS)
- National Dairy Plan-I (NDP-I)
- Dairy Processing and Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF)
- Supporting Dairy Cooperatives and Farmer Producer Organizations engaged in dairy activities (SDCFPO)

**Challenges faced:**
- Indian cattle and buffaloes have among the **lowest productivity**.
- Similarly there is a **shortage of organized dairy farms** and there is a need of high degree of investment to take dairy industry to global standards.
- Improving productivity of farm animals is one of the major challenges
- Crossbreeding of indigenous species with exotic stocks to enhance genetic potential of different species has been successful only to a limited extent.
➢ The sector will also come under significant adjustment pressure to the emerging market forces. Though globalization will create avenues for increased participation in international trade, stringent food safety and quality norms would be required.

➢ Access to markets is critical to speed up commercialization. Lack of access to markets may act as a disincentive to farmers to adopt improved technologies and quality inputs.

Link: https://youtu.be/sjzPgydnk7s

5. THE COMPANIES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2020

Introduction:

- A bill to amend the Companies Act 2013 and decriminalise various offences under it was introduced in Lok Sabha. Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur introduced the Bill in the lower house, making it clear that the government was not looking to decriminalise non-compoundable offences. The Bill was introduced amid opposition by members of various parties who vehemently opposed the bill, demanding that it be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance. The government says the amendments in the existing Companies Act will help reduce the burden on the National Company Law Tribunal.

The Bill seeks to amend the Companies Act, 2013.

1. Producer companies: Under the 2013 Act, certain provisions from the Companies Act, 1956 continue to apply to producer companies. These include provisions on their membership, conduct of meetings, and maintenance of accounts. Producer companies include companies which are engaged in the production, marketing and sale of agricultural produce, and sale of produce from cottage industries. The Bill removes these provisions and adds a new chapter in the Act with similar provisions on producer companies.

2. Changes to offences: The Bill makes three changes. First, it removes the penalty for certain offences. For example, it removes the penalties which apply for any change in the rights of a class of shareholders made in violation of the Act. Note that where a specific penalty is not mentioned, the Act prescribes a penalty of up to Rs 10,000 which may extend to Rs 1,000 per day for a continuing default. Second, it removes imprisonment in certain offences. For example, it removes the imprisonment of three years applicable to a company for buying back its shares without complying with the Act. Third, it reduces the amount of fine payable in certain offences. For example, it reduces the maximum fine for failure to file annual return with the Registrar of Companies from five lakh rupees to two lakh rupees.

3. Under the Act, one person companies (i.e., companies with only one member) or small companies (i.e., with lower paid-up share capital and turnover thresholds) are only liable to pay up to 50% of the penalty for certain offences (such as failing to file annual return). The Bill: (i) extends this provision to all producer companies and start-up companies, (ii) extends this provision to apply to violation of any provision of the Act, and (iii) limits the maximum penalty to two lakh rupees for the company and one lakh rupees for a defaulting officer.

4. Direct listing in foreign jurisdictions: The Bill empowers the central government to allow certain classes of public companies to list classes of securities (as may be prescribed) in foreign jurisdictions.

5. Exclusion from listed companies: The Bill empowers the central government, in consultation with the Securities and Exchange Board of India, to exclude companies issuing specified classes of securities from the definition of a “listed company”.

6. Remuneration to non-executive directors: The Act makes special provisions for payment of remuneration to executive directors of a company (including managing director and other whole-time directors) if the company has inadequate or no profits in a year. For example, if a company has an effective capital of up to five crore rupees, the annual remuneration to its executive directors cannot exceed 60 lakh rupees. The Bill extends this provision to non-executive directors, including independent directors.

7. Beneficial shareholding: Under the Act, if a person holds beneficial interest of at least 10% shares in a company or exercises significant influence or control over the company, he is required to make a declaration of his interest to the company. The company is required to note the declaration in a separate
register. The Bill empowers the central government to exempt any class of persons from complying with these requirements if considered necessary in public interest.

8. **Exemptions from filing resolutions**: The Act requires companies to file certain resolutions with the Registrar of Companies. These include resolutions of the Board of Directors of the company to borrow money, or grant loans. However, banking companies are exempt from filing resolutions passed to grant loans, or to provide guarantees or security for a loan. This exemption has been extended to registered non-banking financial companies and housing finance companies.

9. **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**: Under the Act, companies with net worth, turnover or profits above a specified amount are required to constitute CSR Committees and spend 2% of their average net profits in the last three financial years, towards its CSR policy. The Bill exempts companies with a CSR liability of up to Rs 50 lakh a year from setting up CSR Committees. Further, companies which spend any amount in excess of their CSR obligation in a financial year can set off the excess amount towards their CSR obligations in subsequent financial years.

10. **Periodic financial results for unlisted companies**: The Bill empowers the central government to require classes of unlisted companies (as may be prescribed) to prepare and file periodical financial results, and to complete the audit or review of such results.

11. **Benches of NCLAT**: The Bill seeks to establish benches of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal. These shall ordinarily sit in New Delhi or such other place as may be notified.

**Companies (Amendment), 2019:**

1. Allows companies to **transfer their unspent CSR funds to a separate account** and the same has to be spent within three financial years. In case, the money remains unspent, then it should be transferred to any fund specified in Schedule VII of the Act.
2. Provides more teeth to the central government to deal with violators and **reducing burden on special courts.**
3. Seeks to enable the **National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA)** to perform its functions through divisions and executive body.
4. Seeks to empower **Registrar of Companies (RoC)** to initiate action for removal of a company’s name if the latter is not carrying out business activities as per the Act.
5. Proposes to **transfer some functions from NCLT to the Central government** such as dealing with applications for change of financial year and conversion from public to private companies.
6. **In order to curb the menace of shell companies**, the Bill proposes making **non-maintenance of registered office and non-reporting of commencement of business grounds** for striking off the name of the company from the register of companies.

**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):**

1. It is **the integration of socially beneficial programs and practices into a corporation’s business model and culture.**
2. India is one of the first countries in the world to make **CSR mandatory for companies following an amendment to the Companies Act, 2013 (Companies Act) in 2014.**
3. Under the **Companies Act**, businesses can invest their profits in areas such as promoting rural development in terms of healthcare, sanitation, education including skill development, environmental sustainability, etc.
4. **Section 135(1) of the Act** prescribes thresholds to identify **companies which are required to constitute a CSR Committee – those, in the immediately preceding financial year of which:**
   a. net worth is Rs 500 Crore or more; or.
   b. turnover is Rs 1000 Crore or more; or.
   c. net profit amounts to Rs 5 Crore or more.
5. **As per the Companies (Amendment) Act, 2019**, **CSR is applicable to companies before completion of 3 financial years.**
6. Companies are required to spend, in every financial year, at least 2% of their average net profits generated during the 3 immediately preceding financial years.
7. For companies that have not completed 3 financial years, average net profits generated in the preceding financial years shall be factored in.

8. Social responsibility has a strategic importance for two reasons:
   a. A healthy business can only succeed in a healthy society. Thus, it is in the best interest of a company to produce only goods and services which strengthen the health of society
   b. If the company wants to succeed in the long term it needs to have the acceptance—or licence to operate—from social actors affected by the company’s’ operations.

Link: [https://youtu.be/Z9_6cVJhDSU](https://youtu.be/Z9_6cVJhDSU)

6. NGOS FOREIGN FUNDING & RISKS

Introduction:

- The Supreme Court ruled that the Centre cannot deprive NGOs of their right to receive foreign money by declaring them as political organisations if they use legitimate means of dissent to support public causes. **Section 5 of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010** gives the Union government “unchecked and unbridled powers” to declare an organisation as being one of political nature and deny it access to funds from sources abroad. The Apex Court observed – “It is clear from the provision itself that bandhs, hartals, rasta rokos, etc. are treated as common methods of political action.” Any organisation that supports the cause of a group of citizens agitating for their rights without a political goal or objective cannot be penalised by being declared an organisation of political nature,” the court observed. The court also made it clear that organisations used for channeling foreign funds by political parties cannot escape the rigour of FCRA.

**FRCA and NGO’s:**

1. NGOs play an important role in the upliftment of the weaker sections of the society and their overall development.
2. This is especially true in the case of India, where a vast majority of its population continues to remain under the poverty line and have little or no access to even basic facilities provided by the government.
3. Every NGO registered or having prior approval under the Act must file an annual report with the Authority in the prescribed form.
4. This report must be accompanied by an income and expenditure statement, receipt and payment account, and balance sheet for the relevant financial year.
5. For financial years where no foreign contribution is received, a ‘NIL’ report must be furnished with the Authority.
6. In case of non-compliance with provisions of the FCRA, the government can penalize an NGO. For example, if these NGOs don’t file annual returns, the government can issue a show-cause notice and subsequently, suspend or cancel their foreign funding licenses.
7. In the last two years, licenses of around 20000 NGOs have been cancelled by the central government after they were found violating various provisions of FCRA act. Hence those NGOs were barred from receiving any foreign funds.

**SC’s Judgement:**

1. The government cannot prevent NGOs and other social outfits from getting foreign funds just because they used political means to mobilise and awaken people.
2. The statute that prevents organisations of a political nature from receiving foreign funds is to ensure that the administration is not influenced by foreign funds.
3. On the other hand, voluntary organisations which have absolutely no connection with either party politics or active politics cannot be denied access to foreign contributions by enlarging the scope of the term ‘political interests’, it said.
4. Any organisation which habitually engages itself in or employs common methods of political action like ‘bandh’ or ‘hartal’, ‘rasta roko’, ‘rail roko’ or ‘jail bharo’ in support of public causes can also be declared as an organisation of political nature, according to rules under the FCRA.
5. The judges, however, said organisations which were not involved in active politics or party politics would not come under these rules.
6. Support to public causes by resorting to legitimate means of dissent such as bandh and hartal cannot deprive an organisation of its legitimate right of receiving foreign contribution, the bench said. It is clear from the provision itself that bandh, hartal, rasta roko etc., are treated as common methods of political action, it added.
7. The rule would, however, apply to organisations used by political parties for channelling foreign funds provided there was concrete material to prove that, the court said.

What is ‘public interest’?

1. The FCRA regulates the receipt of funding from sources outside of India to NGOs working in India.
2. It prohibits receipt of foreign contribution “for any activities detrimental to the national interest”.
3. The Act specifies that NGOs require the government’s permission to receive funding from abroad.
4. The government can refuse permission if it believes that the donation to the NGO will adversely affect “public interest” or the “economic interest of the state”.
5. This condition is manifestly overbroad. There is no clear guidance on what constitutes “public interest”.

Government’s accusation against NGOs:

1. A government could construe any disagreement with, or criticism of, any of its policies as being against public interest.
2. For example, in 2014, several groups including Greenpeace were accused by the Intelligence Bureau of stalling India’s economic development.
3. In the government’s narrow view, public interest is interpreted as being equivalent to its priorities. That is simply not the case.
4. Thus, an environmental or human rights organisation criticising the government can be accused of “acting against public interest”.

Foreign Funding:

1. The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 and rules framed under it (the “FCRA” or “Act”) regulate the receipt and usage of foreign contribution by non-governmental organisations (“NGOs”) in India.
2. The intent of the Act is to prevent use of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activity detrimental to the national interest.
3. It has a very wide scope and is applicable to a natural person, body corporate, all other types of Indian entities (whether incorporated or not) as well as NRIs and overseas branches/subsidiaries of Indian companies and other entities formed or registered in India.
4. It is implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
5. Prohibits acceptance and use of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by a certain specified category of persons such as a candidate for election, judge, journalist, columnist, newspaper publication, cartoonist and others.
6. Regulates the inflow to and usage of foreign contribution by NGOs by prescribing a mechanism to accept, use and report usage of the same.
7. It defines the term ‘foreign contribution’ to include currency, article other than gift for personal use and securities received from foreign source. While foreign hospitality refers to any offer from a foreign source to provide foreign travel, boarding, lodging, transportation or medical treatment cost.
8. The Act permits only NGOs having a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious or social programme to accept foreign contribution, that too after such NGOs either obtain a certificate of registration or prior permission under the Act.
9. In order to be registered under the FCRA, an NGO must be in existence for at least three years and must have undertaken reasonable activity in its field for which the foreign contribution is proposed to be
utilised. Further, it must have spent at least INR 1,000,000 over three years preceding the date of its application on its activities.

10. The registration certificate is valid for a period of five years and must be thereafter renewed in the prescribed manner.

11. NGOs not eligible for registration can seek prior approval from FCRA for receiving foreign funding. This permission is granted only for a specific amount of foreign funding from a specified foreign source for a specific purpose. It remains valid till receipt and full utilisation of such amount.

Way forward:

✓ The SC has sought to draw a distinction between the overtly political activity and normal activity of the NGO.
✓ A National Accreditation Council consisting of academicians, activist, retired bureaucrats should be made to ensure compliance by NGOs.
✓ There should be better coordination between Ministries of Home Affairs and Finance in terms of monitoring and regulating illicit and unaccounted funds.
✓ A regulatory mechanism to keep a watch on the financial activities of NGOs and voluntary organizations is the need of the hour.
✓ Foreign funding will delay our strategic activity so there should be monitoring but there cannot be blanket ban on receiving of foreign funds.
✓ Citizens today are keen to play an active role in processes that shape their lives and it is important that their participation in democracy go beyond the ritual of voting and should include promotion of social justice, gender equity, inclusion etc.

Link: https://youtu.be/A6Cak3mThmk

SCIENCE & TECH

1. PANDEMIC

Introduction:

- The coronavirus outbreak that began late last year in China has now spread to 29 countries, touching every continent except South America and Antarctica. While most of these cases are still in China, the virus is gaining a foothold in other countries, raising fears that the world is on the brink of a pandemic. All pandemics start with an outbreak of a new disease in a specific geographic location. If that outbreak becomes larger, but still remains confined to a specific region, it becomes an epidemic. At that point, the WHO may declare a public health emergency of international concern to raise awareness about it. But once a disease spreads globally, with multiple epidemics across different continents, it truly becomes a pandemic.

What is Pandemic?

1. A pandemic is an epidemic of disease that has spread across a large region; for instance multiple continents, or worldwide.
2. A widespread endemic disease that is stable in terms of how many people are getting sick from it is not a pandemic.
3. Further, flu pandemics generally exclude recurrences of seasonal flu.
4. Throughout history, there have been a number of pandemics, such as smallpox and tuberculosis. One of the most devastating pandemics was the Black Death, which killed an estimated 75–200 million people in the 14th century.
5. The only current pandemic is HIV/AIDS, which started in the 1980s. Other recent pandemics are the 1918 influenza pandemic (Spanish flu) and the 2009 flu pandemic (H1N1).
In the grand scheme of things, a pandemic is the highest possible level of disease, or a measure of how many people have gotten sick from a particular disease and how far it has spread—but before a common illness reaches pandemic proportions, it has to exceed a few other levels, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

1. **Sporadic**: When a disease occurs infrequently and irregularly.
2. **Endemic**: A constant presence and/or usual prevalence of a disease or infection within a geographic area. (Hyperendemic, is a situation in which there are persistent, high levels of disease occurrence.)
3. **Epidemic**: A sudden increase in the number of cases of a disease—more than what’s typically expected for the population in that area.
4. **Pandemic**: An epidemic that has spread over several countries or continents, affecting a large number of people.

**Biggest Pandemics:**

There have been a number of significant epidemics and pandemics recorded in human history, generally zoonoses which came about with the domestication of animals, such as influenza and tuberculosis. There have been a number of particularly significant epidemics that deserve mention above the “mere” destruction of cities:

1. **Plague of Athens**, from 430 to 426 BC. During the Peloponnesian War, typhoid fever killed a quarter of the Athenian troops, and a quarter of the population over four years. This disease fatally weakened the dominance of Athens, but the sheer virulence of the disease prevented its wider spread; i.e. it killed off its hosts at a rate faster than they could spread it. The exact cause of the plague was unknown for many years
2. **Antonine Plague**, from 165 to 180 AD. Possibly smallpox brought to the Italian peninsula by soldiers returning from the Near East; it killed a quarter of those infected, and up to five million in all.
3. **Plague of Justinian**, from 541 to 750, was the first recorded outbreak of the bubonic plague. It started in Egypt, and reached Constantinople the following spring, killing (according to the Byzantine chronicler Procopius) 10,000 a day at its height, and perhaps 40% of the city’s inhabitants.
4. **Black Death**, from 1331 to 1353. The total number of deaths worldwide is estimated at 75 million people. Eight hundred years after the last outbreak, the plague returned to Europe. Starting in Asia, the disease reached Mediterranean and western Europe in 1348 and killed an estimated 20 to 30 million Europeans in six years; a third of the total population, and up to a half in the worst-affected urban areas. It was the first of a cycle of European plague epidemics that continued until the 18th century.
5. **Spanish flu**, from 1918 to 1920. It infected 500 million people around the world, including people on remote Pacific islands and in the Arctic, and resulted in the deaths of 50 to 100 million people. Most influenza outbreaks disproportionately kill the very young and the very old, with higher survival rate for those in between, but the Spanish flu had an unusually high mortality rate for young adults. Spanish flu killed more people than World War I did and it killed more people in 25 weeks than AIDS did in its first 25 years. Mass troop movements and close quarters during World War I caused it to spread and mutate faster; the susceptibility of soldiers to Spanish flu might have been increased due to stress, malnourishment and chemical attacks. Improved transportation systems made it easier for soldiers, sailors, and civilian travelers to spread the disease.

**Phases of Pandemics:**

The World Health Organization (WHO) provides an influenza pandemic alert system, with a scale ranging from Phase 1 (a low risk of a flu pandemic) to Phase 6 (a full-blown pandemic):

1. **Phase 1**: A virus in animals has caused no known infections in humans.
2. **Phase 2**: An animal flu virus has caused infection in humans.
3. **Phase 3**: Sporadic cases or small clusters of disease occur in humans. Human-to-human transmission, if any, is insufficient to cause community-level outbreaks.
4. **Phase 4**: The risk for a pandemic is greatly increased but not certain.
5. **Phase 5**: Spread of disease between humans is occurring in more than one country of one WHO region.
6. Phase 6: Community-level outbreaks are in at least one additional country in a different WHO region from phase 5. A global pandemic is under way.

Prevention tips:

In the event of a pandemic, follow the advice of public health authorities, and the instructions issued in your work environment.

1. Take advantage of the vaccine as soon as it is offered, in order to protect yourself and those close to you, and not contribute to the spread of the disease among the general population.
2. Wash your hands often with soap and water or rub them with an alcohol-based antiseptic gel, foam or liquid. Keep such products out of the reach of children. Also frequently clean your living environment with soap and water or household detergents.
3. Cough and sneeze without contaminating your environment and avoid touching your nose, eyes and mouth, which are the gateways of virus in the body.
4. Avoid contact with sick people and their personal items. If you have to take care of a sick person, protect yourself from the secretions, and do not drink water or eat food that had been in contact with this person.
5. Avoid contact with animals that appear sick, and avoid handling animals that are found dead.

Link: https://youtu.be/BQqEjvOcBOE

2. FACIAL RECOGNITION- USES & CONCERNS

Introduction:

- Facial recognition has become a cause for concern in western democracies.
- The European Commission is considering imposing a five-year moratorium on the use of facial recognition technologies in the European Union (EU). In the United States (US), municipalities have passed, or are considering passing prohibitions, India, however, is rushing to adopt public facial recognition.
- Facial recognition systems have been active at several major Indian airports, including the Delhi airport. These systems at airports have been installed under the DigiYatra initiative. Telangana’s election commission piloted a facial recognition app in its civic elections on January 22, and claimed that it could address the issue of voter impersonation.
- Facial recognition is a biometric technology that uses distinctive features on the face to identify and distinguish an individual. From the first cameras that could recognise faces in the mid-1960s up to now, facial recognition has evolved in many ways- from looking at 3D contours of a face to recognising skin patterns. With machine learning, the technology has become capable of sorting out types of faces.

Automated facial recognition (AFRS):

- AFRS works by maintaining a large database with photos and videos of peoples’ faces. Then, a new image of an unidentified person — often taken from CCTV footage — is compared to the existing database to find a match and identify the person.
- The artificial intelligence technology used for pattern-finding and matching is called “neural networks”.

NCRB’s request call:

1. The NCRB, which manages crime data for police, would like to use automated facial recognition to identify criminals, missing people, and unidentified dead bodies, as well as for “crime prevention”.
2. Its Request for Proposal calls for gathering CCTV footage, as well as photos from newspapers, raids, and sketches.
3. The project is aimed at being compatible with other biometrics such as iris and fingerprints.
4. NCRB has proposed integrating this facial recognition system with multiple existing databases.
5. The most prominent is the NCRB-managed Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS).
6. Facial recognition has been proposed in the CCTNS program since its origin.
7. The new facial recognition system will be integrated with Integrated Criminal Justice System (ICJS), as well as state-specific systems, the Immigration, Visa and Foreigners Registration & Tracking (IVFRT), and the Khoya Paya portal on missing children.

Need for AFRS:

- Automated Facial Recognition System can play a very vital role in improving outcomes in the area of Criminal identification and verification by facilitating easy recording, analysis, retrieval and sharing of Information between different organisations.
- While fingerprints and iris scans provide far more accurate matching results, automatic facial recognition is an easier solution especially for identification amongst crowds.
- The integration of fingerprint database, face recognition software and iris scans will massively boost the police department’s crime investigation capabilities.
- It will also help civilian verification when needed. No one will be able to get away with a fake ID.
- It will also help civilian verification when needed.
- It also plans to offer citizen services, such as passport verification, crime reporting, online tracking of case progress, grievance reporting against police officers etc.

Why EC wants to temporary ban on facial recognition technologies?

- European Commission believes that indiscriminate use of facial recognition technologies is a privacy threat, and some regulations are needed so that this does not easily give way to surveillance.
- During the temporary ban period, “a sound methodology for assessing the impacts of this technology and possible risk management measures could be identified and developed

Concerns:

- Source from where the images will be collected.
- Cyber experts across the world have cautioned against government abuse of facial recognition technology, as it can be used as tool of control and risks inaccurate results.
- Amid NCRB’s controversial step to install an automated facial recognition system, India should take note of the ongoing privacy debate in the US.
- In the absence of data protection law, Indian citizens are more vulnerable to privacy abuses.
- Use of surveillance cameras and facial recognition constrict the rights of particular class of people.
- In the US, the FBI and Department of State operate one of the largest facial recognition systems.
- International organisations have also condemned the Chinese government on its use of surveillance cameras and facial recognition to constrict the rights of Uighurs, a mostly Muslim minority.

How is facial recognition used in today’s world?

- It is increasingly being used for everything: from unlocking your phone to validating your identity, from auto-tagging digital photos to finding missing persons, and from targeted advertising to law enforcement.
- China’s reported use of facial recognition technologies for surveillance in Xinjiang is an example of when this becomes problematic. It also becomes problematic in the absence of privacy and data security laws.

Need of the hour:

- With proper safeguard this technology is much needed for India.
- The pace at which we are using technology which could have bearing on piracy seems to be more than the pace to put in mechanism to protect privacy which has to be addressed.
- The notion that sophisticated technology means greater efficiency needs to be critically analysed.
A deliberative approach will benefit Indian law enforcement, as police departments around the world are currently learning that the technology is not as useful in practice as it seems in theory.

Police departments in London are under pressure to put a complete end to use of facial recognition systems following evidence of discrimination and inefficiency.

San Francisco recently implemented a complete ban on police use of facial recognition. India would do well to learn from their mistakes.

Link: https://youtu.be/bg4Oco0_fIA

3. EPIDEMIC DISEASES ACT

Introduction:

- The number of people infected with the novel coronavirus in India has gone up to 151. States have gone into battle mode to contain the spread of COVID-19. Schools and colleges have been shut down, movie theatres closed, and many public events, including the IPL, postponed. All states and Union Territories have been directed to invoke provisions of Section 2 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, so that Health Ministry advisories are enforceable.

- The Epidemic Diseases Act consists of four sections and aims to provide for better prevention of the spread of Dangerous Epidemic Diseases. It is routinely enforced across the country for dealing with outbreak of diseases such as swine flu, dengue, and cholera.

- The Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 is a law which was first enacted to tackle bubonic plague in Bombay state in former British India. The law is meant for containment of epidemics by providing special powers that are required for the implementation of containment measures to control the spread of the disease.

- The Act has been routinely used to contain various diseases in India such as swine flu, cholera, malaria and dengue. In 2018 the Act was enforced as cholera began to spread in a region of Gujarat. In 2015, it was used to deal with dengue and malaria in Chandigarh and in 2009 it was invoked in Pune to combat swine flu.

Provisions:

1) Section 2 of the Act empowers state governments/UTs to take special measures and formulate regulations to contain any outbreak. The Section says:
   a. When at any time the state government is satisfied that the state or any part thereof is visited by, or threatened with, an outbreak of any dangerous epidemic disease, the state government, if it thinks that the ordinary provisions of the law for the time being in force are insufficient for the purpose, may take, or require or empower any person to take, such measures and, by public notice, prescribe such temporary regulations to be observed by the public or by any person or class of persons as it shall deem necessary to prevent the outbreak of such disease or the spread thereof, and may determine in what manner and by whom any expenses incurred (including compensation if any) shall be defrayed.
   b. In particular and without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing provisions, the state government may take measures and prescribe regulations for the inspection of persons travelling by railway or otherwise, and the segregation, in hospital, temporary accommodation or otherwise, of persons suspected by the inspecting officer of being infected with any such disease.

2) Section 3 is on penalty: “Any person disobeying any regulation or order made under this Act shall be deemed to have committed an offence punishable under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (45 of 1860)

3) Section 4; Protection to persons acting under Act: “No suit or other legal proceeding shall lie against any person for anything done or in good faith intended to be done under this Act (legal protection to implement the Act).
Criticisms:

- Historians have criticised the Act for its **potential for abuse**.
- Using powers conferred by the Act, colonies authorities would search suspected plague cases in homes and among passengers, with forcible segregations, evacuations, and demolitions of infected places.
- In 1897, the year the law was enforced, freedom fighter Bal Gangadhar Tilak was punished with 18 months’ rigorous imprisonment after his newspapers Kesari and Mahratta admonished imperial authorities for their handling of the plague epidemic.

In Support:

- Constitution experts say if the government believes a colonial-era law helps in containing the outbreak, then nothing is wrong in such a decision.
- A decision was taken at a Cabinet Secretary meeting that states and Union Territories should invoke provisions of Section 2 of the Act, which will make the Health Ministry advisories enforceable.
- The Epidemic Diseases Act 1897, which continues to find relevance in the outbreak of modern-day diseases in the country, is routinely enforced to restrain the outbreaks of diseases such as swine flu, dengue, and cholera.
- Constitution experts say many colonial-era laws continue to exist in the statute, as governments over the years have thought they are good enough to enable prevention of the spread of dangerous epidemic diseases.
- Former Secretary General of the Lok Sabha P.D.T. Achary said, “There are many colonial laws which continue to exist, for example the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Census which originated in pre-independence era still continues, and the Famine Act also originated before independence. If the government thinks these laws are good enough to fit in the existing circumstances, then there is nothing wrong. It is for the government to decide on the relevance of the laws.”
- Subhash Kashyap, Constitution expert and former Secretary General of the Lok Sabha, says there is nothing wrong if the government is willing to implement a colonial-era law as it still exists in the statute, and maybe the governments over the time did not see the necessity to amend the Act.
- The Law Commission usually advises the government on amendment to a law and its modern-day relevance. The current government has already repealed many laws, but has also retained some colonial-era laws.

Examples of implementation:

- In 2018, the district collector of Gujarat’s Vadodara issued a notification under the Act declaring the Khedkarmsiya village in Waghodia taluka as cholera-affected after 31 persons complained of symptoms of the disease.
- In 2015, to deal with malaria and dengue in Chandigarh, the Act was implemented and controlling officers were instructed to ensure the issuance of notices and challans of Rs 500 to offenders.
- In 2009, to tackle the swine flu outbreak in Pune, Section 2 powers were used to open screening centres in civic hospitals across the city, and swine flu was declared a notifiable disease.

Link: [https://youtu.be/ViB7D9uKOkU](https://youtu.be/ViB7D9uKOkU)

### 4. CORONAVIRUS- BE SAFE

**Introduction:**

New coronavirus cases are being reported in India as the world scrambles to contain an outbreak that the World Health Organisation has declared a global emergency. So far, there are no vaccines or medicines to treat Covid-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus – only supportive care. But there are a number of steps you can take to protect yourself and those around you. The World Health Organisation says the “most effective” protective measures are – cleaning your hands regularly, properly covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
and social distancing. If you’re feeling under the weather, “even with mild symptoms such as headache and a slight runny nose”, then stay home till you get better. If you have fever, cough and breathing difficulties, go see a doctor. Inform her (or him) about your travel history. Tell her if you’ve come into contact with other travellers who may be at risk. One last thing to keep in mind- don’t fall prey to fake news! There’s plenty of misinformation out there on the coronavirus outbreak, and sharing it is dangerous. Follow trusted sources of information- these include the World Health Organisation and India’s Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

1. **Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses** that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV).
2. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a new strain that was discovered in 2019 and has not been previously identified in humans.
3. Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people. Detailed investigations found that SARS-CoV was transmitted from civet cats to humans and MERS-CoV from dromedary camels to humans. Several known coronaviruses are circulating in animals that have not yet infected humans.
4. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.
5. Standard recommendations to prevent infection spread include regular hand washing, covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, thoroughly cooking meat and eggs. Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.

**Basic protective measures against the new coronavirus:**

**Wash your hands frequently**

Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

**Maintain social distancing**

Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing. When someone coughs or sneezes they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.

**Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth**

Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

**Practice respiratory hygiene**

Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately. Droplets spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

**If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early**

Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health authority. National and local authorities will have the most up to date information on the situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.
Stay informed and follow advice given by your healthcare provider

Stay informed on the latest developments about COVID-19. Follow advice given by your healthcare provider, your national and local public health authority or your employer on how to protect yourself and others from COVID-19. National and local authorities will have the most up to date information on whether COVID-19 is spreading in your area. They are best placed to advise on what people in your area should be doing to protect themselves.

When to use a mask?

1. If you are healthy, you only need to wear a mask if you are taking care of a person with suspected 2019-nCoV infection.
2. Wear a mask if you are coughing or sneezing.
3. Masks are effective only when used in combination with frequent hand-cleaning with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
4. If you wear a mask, then you must know how to use it and dispose of it properly.

Myth busters:

COVID-19 virus can be transmitted in areas with hot and humid climates

From the evidence so far, the COVID-19 virus can be transmitted in ALL AREAS, including areas with hot and humid weather. Regardless of climate, adopt protective measures if you live in, or travel to an area reporting COVID-19. The best way to protect yourself against COVID-19 is by frequently cleaning your hands. By doing this you eliminate viruses that may be on your hands and avoid infection that could occur by then touching your eyes, mouth, and nose.

Cold weather and snow CANNOT kill the new coronavirus.

There is no reason to believe that cold weather can kill the new coronavirus or other diseases. The normal human body temperature remains around 36.5°C to 37°C, regardless of the external temperature or weather. The most effective way to protect yourself against the new coronavirus is by frequently cleaning your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or washing them with soap and water.

Taking a hot bath does not prevent the new coronavirus disease

Taking a hot bath will not prevent you from catching COVID-19. Your normal body temperature remains around 36.5°C to 37°C, regardless of the temperature of your bath or shower. Actually, taking a hot bath with extremely hot water can be harmful, as it can burn you. The best way to protect yourself against COVID-19 is by frequently cleaning your hands. By doing this you eliminate viruses that may be on your hands and avoid infection that could occur by then touching your eyes, mouth, and nose.

The new coronavirus CANNOT be transmitted through mosquito bites.

To date there has been no information or evidence to suggest that the new coronavirus could be transmitted by mosquitoes. The new coronavirus is a respiratory virus which spreads primarily through droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose. To protect yourself, clean your hands frequently with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Also, avoid close contact with anyone who is coughing and sneezing.

Are hand dryers effective in killing the new coronavirus?

No. Hand dryers are not effective in killing the 2019-nCoV. To protect yourself against the new coronavirus, you should frequently clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Once your hands are cleaned, you should dry them thoroughly by using paper towels or a warm air dryer.

Can spraying alcohol or chlorine all over your body kill the new coronavirus?

No. Spraying alcohol or chlorine all over your body will not kill viruses that have already entered your body. Spraying such substances can be harmful to clothes or mucous membranes (i.e. eyes, mouth). Be aware that both alcohol and chlorine can be useful to disinfect surfaces, but they need to be used under appropriate recommendations.
Do vaccines against pneumonia protect you against the new coronavirus?

No. Vaccines against pneumonia, such as pneumococcal vaccine and Haemophilus influenza type B (Hib) vaccine, do not provide protection against the new coronavirus. The virus is so new and different that it needs its own vaccine. Researchers are trying to develop a vaccine against 2019-nCoV, and WHO is supporting their efforts. Although these vaccines are not effective against 2019-nCoV, vaccination against respiratory illnesses is highly recommended to protect your health.

Can regularly rinsing your nose with saline help prevent infection with the new coronavirus?

No. There is no evidence that regularly rinsing the nose with saline has protected people from infection with the new coronavirus. There is some limited evidence that regularly rinsing nose with saline can help people recover more quickly from the common cold. However, regularly rinsing the nose has not been shown to prevent respiratory infections.

Link: https://youtu.be/EubObD0k-5g

5. NATIONAL IMMUNISATION DAY

Introduction:

On March 16th every year, India observes National Vaccination day, also known as Immunization day. It was on this day in 1995 that the first dose of Oral Polio vaccine was given in India. The initiative to eradicate polio from the country came in the form of the Pulse Polio Campaign launched by the government. Under this extensive drive, 2 drops of Oral Polio Vaccine was given to all children younger than 5 years of age. The last reported case of polio in India was in West Bengal in January, 2011. In 2014, India was declared polio-free. Over the years, immunisation has proved to be the most vital tool in controlling and eliminating life-threatening infectious diseases.

1. The day is celebrated on March 16 and unlike the World Immunization Week that is celebrated in the month of April (April 24 to April 30). The idea behind the observance of the day is to spread awareness about the eradication of the polio from India.
2. Even still a major number of kids are immunized on this day with polio vaccine. The main reason vaccines are given to kids is to protect them from infectious disease as it has turned out to be by far the best method to help fight diseases. It has been found out that boosting immunity due to vaccination has also been responsible for control on diseases like small pox, tetanus, measles, polio, etc. not just in India but also all around the world.
3. World Health Organization (WHO) reveals that immunization can work as the best prevention method as licensed vaccines can prevent twenty-five preventable infections.
4. India observes the Pulse Polio Programme since 1995.
5. The last case of polio was reported on 13 January 2011.
6. India was certified as a polio-free country on March 27, 2012 along with 11 other countries of the World Health Organisation (WHO) such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia, Maldives, Myanmar, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Thailand.

Polio:

1. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines polio or poliomyelitis as “a highly infectious viral disease, which mainly affects young children.”
2. Transmission: The virus is transmitted by person-to-person, spread mainly through the faecal-oral route or, less frequently, by a common vehicle (e.g. contaminated water or food) and multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and can cause paralysis.
3. Initial symptoms of polio include fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness in the neck, and pain in the limbs. In a small proportion of cases, the disease causes paralysis, which is often permanent. There is no cure for polio, it can only be prevented by immunization.”
Pulse Polio Programme:

1. India launched the Pulse Polio immunisation programme in 1995, after a resolution for a global initiative of polio eradication was adopted by the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 1988.
2. Children in the age group of 0-5 years are administered polio drops during national and sub-national immunisation rounds (in high-risk areas) every year.
3. The WHO on February 24, 2012, removed India from the list of countries with active endemic wild polio virus transmission.
4. Two years later, the South-East Asia Region of the WHO, of which India is a part, was certified as polio-free.
5. To prevent the virus from coming to India, the government has since March 2014 made the Oral Polio Vaccination (OPV) mandatory for those travelling between India and polio-affected countries, such as Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Syria and Cameroon.

Progress made:

1. India’s Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) is working both to increase immunization coverage and to introduce new vaccines.
2. In the early 90s, India saw over two lakh cases of polio annually, but, after the polio eradication programme was launched in 1994, India attained polio-free status over the course of the next two decade due to concentrated efforts and collaboration of the Government, international partners, civil society, health workers and millions of volunteers.
3. The best practices and the systems established by the Pulse Polio programme have benefitted other health programs, viz. the community mobilization, logistics management, reaching the last mile or setting up a surveillance system.
4. Since 2014, five new vaccines, including against two of the leading causes of deaths in children under five in India — pneumonia and diarrhoea — were introduced under the UIP, one of the largest such programmes in the world.
5. Rotavirus vaccine (RVV), which protects against a severe form of diarrhoea, was scaled up in all states last year.
6. According to internal data collected by the Health Ministry, as of September 2019, almost 1.3 million children has received all three doses of PCV across 159 districts in the six states, with approximately 8.1 million children targeted for 2019-20.

Challenges:

1. In 2010, 0.56 million severe pneumococcal pneumonia episodes and 105 thousand pneumococcal pneumonia deaths had occurred in children younger than 5 years of age in India.
2. The annual incidence of severe pneumococcal pneumonia in India was estimated to be 4.8 episodes per 1,000 children younger than 5 years.
3. Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV), the costliest vaccine in the UIP basket, currently covers only about 50 per cent of the 26 million birth cohort in Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.
4. At present, the vaccine being used in the UIP costs approximately $2.95/dose, which makes PCV costlier than other UIP vaccines such as rotavirus vaccine ($1/dose), pentavalent vaccine ($0.69/dose), and measles vaccine ($0.308-$0.318/dose).

Mission Indradhanush:

1. It was launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India on December 25, 2014.
2. Between 2009-2013 immunization coverage has increased from 61% to 65%, indicating only 1% increase in coverage every year.
3. To accelerate the process of immunization by covering 5% and more children every year, Indradhanush mission has been adopted to achieve target of full coverage by 2020.
4. The Mission Indradhanush aims to cover all those children by 2020 who are either unvaccinated, or are partially vaccinated against vaccine preventable diseases.

5. India’s Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP) provide free vaccines against 12 life threatening diseases, to 26 million children annually.

6. The Universal Immunization Programme provides life-saving vaccines to all children across the country free of cost to protect them against Tuberculosis, Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Polio, Hepatitis B, Pneumonia and Meningitis due to Haemophilus Influenzae type b (Hib), Measles, Rubella, Japanese Encephalitis (JE) and Rotavirus diarrhoea. (Rubella, JE and Rotavirus vaccine in select states and districts).

Mission Indradhanush 2.0:

1. The government’s flagship scheme is aimed at immunizing children under the age of 2 years and pregnant women.

2. The Intensified Mission Indradhanush 2.0 has been launched to focus on 272 districts of 27 states and 652 blocks of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar among hard-to-reach and tribal populations.

3. The program aims to escalate efforts to achieve the goal of attaining 90% national immunization coverage across India.

4. The Intensified Mission Indradhanush immunization drive will consist of four rounds of immunization. The program will be completed by March 2020.

5. The salient features of IMI 2.0 are immunization activity will be in four rounds over seven working days excluding the RI days, Sundays and holidays. Enhanced immunization session with flexible timing, mobile session and mobilization by other departments,” an official statement said.

6. Mission Indradhanush 2.0 Highlights:
   a. Enhanced immunization session with flexible timing, mobile session & mobilization by other departments
   b. Enhanced focus on left outs, dropouts, and resistant families & hard to reach areas
   c. Focus on urban, underserved population and tribal areas
   d. Intensified Mission Indradhanush to be conducted till March 2020

Link: https://youtu.be/DMLkmLMkz8Y

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. INDIA- MYANMAR TIES

Introduction:

India and Myanmar exchanged 10 agreements in a number of fields ranging from infrastructure, energy, communication and health. The agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed and exchanged after talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and visiting Myanmar President at Hyderabad House. The two leaders held discussions on a wide range of bilateral issues. The visiting dignitary arrived in India on a four-day official visit. Earlier in the day, Myanmar’s President was given a ceremonial reception at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. He also visited Rajghat and paid tributes to the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi. India and Myanmar have close religious, linguistic and ethnic ties. Myanmar is the only ASEAN country bordering India which provides a gateway to South East Asia. In line with its Act East and Neighbourhood First policies, India has laid emphasis on boosting its cooperation with Myanmar. India is the fifth largest trading partner of Myanmar and the current bilateral trade stands at US $ 1.7 billion

India and Myanmar to further strengthen bilateral relations; 10 agreements signed in various field:

1) India and Myanmar have agreed to further strengthen the bilateral relations. Both sides signed 10 agreements in various fields including, energy, communication and health.

2) The agreements were exchanged following talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Myanmar President U Win Myint in New Delhi. Both leaders discussed a wide range of bilateral issues.
3) He visited Rajghat and paid tribute to Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi. External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar also called on the visiting dignitary.

4) A joint statement released said, the visit reinforced the tradition of high level interactions, symbolizing the strong friendly relations existing between the two neighbours.

5) Reaffirming India’s ‘Act East’ and ‘Neighbourhood First’ policies and Myanmar’s non-aligned foreign policy both leaders committed to further strengthen the bilateral relations. Both sides agreed to cooperate in countering terrorist groups and their actions.

6) Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed full support for Myanmar’s peace process between Government, Military and Ethnic Armed Groups.

7) Co-operation in defence and security along with matter of enhanced bilateral trade and economic engagements was also discussed. India reiterated its support for peace, stability and development in Rakhine state.

8) Coordinated Bus Service between Imphal and Mandalay is expected to begin from April this year.

9) The Indian side reiterated its commitment for construction of the Integrated Check Post in Tamu, Myanmar.

Economic Relations:

- Bilateral trade between the two countries has, for long, remained at around $107 million.
- Chinese, Singaporean, Korean, Japanese, Thai and Vietnamese businesses have actively seized business opportunities in Myanmar.
- Pulses form the single largest item in Myanmar’s limited export basket.
- Indian businesses could invest in the power, steel, automobiles and even textile sectors in Myanmar.

Defence Relations:

- India and Myanmar have been trying to strengthen their defense ties over the past few years.
- Over 200 Myanmar military officers have been trained in the medical, airforce and navy fields in India.
- Myanmar has acquired rocket launchers, night vision systems, radar and engineering equipment, including $37.9 million worth of torpedoes, from India.

Cultural Relations:

- The 11th-century Ananda Temple in Myanmar was damaged during an earthquake and is being renovated with India’s assistance.
- People to people ties are the strength of India-Myanmar relations.
- No other country has committed as much in grant-in-aid to Myanmar as India. These include:
  - (a) Kaladan multi-modal corridor;
  - (b) Repair of 69 bridges on the Tamu-Kalewa road;
  - (c) Construction of the 120-km Kalewa-Yargyi corridor
  - (d) Rhi-Tiddim road in the Chin state bordering Mizoram.
- Unfortunately, the projects have not been completed in time. As a result, India has not got due credit.

India’s assistance in Capacity Building:

- Capacity building in Myanmar with six centres imparting training in diverse subjects, from English language to industrial skills.
- Myanmar Institute of Information Technology set up in Mandalay with the collaboration of IIIT Bangalore has been a success with all its graduates finding ready employment.
- The Advanced Centre for Agriculture Research and Education set up in collaboration with India’s ICAR is a fine example of pooling research efforts on pulses and oilseeds.
India’s primary interests in Myanmar:

- To build an economic and security relationship that prevent Myanmar from slipping into the orbit of China.
- Ensure the Myanmar military’s cooperation in preventing Northeastern militants, most notably Naga insurgents, from using Myanmar as a safe haven.
- Support the country’s transition into a full-fledged federal democracy.
- Ameliorate the plight of the Rohingyas as well as ensure the tense relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar do not spiral out of control.

Challenges:

1. The Indian government is concerned about Rohingya immigrants in the country
2. Negotiations on the deportation of Rohingya to Myanmar are a point of contention.
3. Lack of basic infrastructure and low trading volume at the Indian border.
4. The India Intelligence Agency stated that the smuggling of light arms, drugs and counterfeit currencies have been spotted along the border.
5. Beijing is investing in projects to improve the Sittwe–Kunming route.
6. Momentum of the Belt and Road Initiative may end India’s East Act Policy like Obama’s pivot to Asia.
7. Both sides share a long maritime boundary and land border, which has led to concerns around transnational issues.

Impact on India due to China- Myanmar closeness:

- The situation around India has taken an adverse turn in the recent months.
- Against the general backdrop of consolidation of China-Pakistan relations, Mr. Xi’s visit to Nepal, his strategic gains in Myanmar, and forthcoming visit of the Sri Lankan President to Beijing form part of a pattern.
- It is one of the setbacks and challenges to India’s diplomacy in South Asia. It calls for deep reflection and comprehensive consultations with the finest minds in the country.

Link: https://youtu.be/se40KgLNUb0

2. INDIA-BANGLADESH TIES

Introduction:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will joined the birth centenary celebration of Bangladesh’s founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman through video conference. The PM had postponed his visit to Dhaka after coronavirus scare had caused Bangladesh to defer public events beginning March 17. The Foreign Secretary told a delegation of 20 Bangladeshi journalists that the PM will also send a video message on the occasion. A two-day-long special session of the Parliament of Bangladesh to mark Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s birth centenary will be held from March 22. President Abdul Hamid will delivered his speech on March 22 and Parliament will be prorogued on March 23 with the passage of a resolution on the colourful political life of Rahman. India had received formal notification from Bangladesh about public events being deferred because of the detection of coronavirus cases and the larger global public health situation. This was PM Modi’s second foreign visit to be called off because of Covid-19-related concerns. Earlier in March, India had put off his visit to Brussels for the India-EU Summit on March 13.

Background:

1. India’s links with Bangladesh are civilizational, cultural, social and economic.
2. India played the great role in emergence of independent Bangladesh and was the first country to recognise Bangladesh as separate state.
3. The historic land boundary agreement signed in 2015 opened a new era in the relations.

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4. Both the countries are the common members of SAARC, BIMSTEC, IORA and the Commonwealth.
5. India has always stood by Bangladesh in its hour of need with aid and economic assistance to help it cope with natural disasters and floods.

**India’s Bilateral Relations post CAA and NRC:**

1. Triggering these concerns are instances of reverse migration of a few hundred people who have been arrested after the crossing of the border into Bangladesh. All these people have reportedly declared that they are ‘Bangladeshi Muslims’ and have returned home because they no longer have any hope of getting Indian citizenship after the CAA came into force.
2. Bangladesh’s dilemma is an acute one because it has a policy of not acknowledging illegal migration from its territory into India. There is little doubt that during 2001-2006, when the BNP-Jamaat government was in power in Bangladesh, there were large scale atrocities against Hindus, resulting in migration into India.
3. The ground reality is that there is always a flow of migrants into India from Bangladesh, though numbers have come down. How the Indian government will deal with illegal Muslim migrants who will become stateless, is the million-dollar question.
4. Reports of large detention centres being built in Assam has spooked Muslim migrants who find their names in the NRC, though there are provision for appeal. This fear is aggravated by the talk of having a country wide NRC. Bilateral ties with Bangladesh are at risk of going downhill, if this issue is not managed with sensitivity.

**Bilateral Relations:**

1. India and Bangladesh today enjoy one of the best periods of their relationship, with positive development in the areas of diplomatic, political, economic and security relations.
2. Bilateral trade was a little over $9 billion in FY 2017-18 and Bangladeshi exports increased by 42.91%, reaching $1.25 billion in FY 2018-2019.
3. The India-Bangladesh border is one of India’s most secured.
4. By signing of the Land Boundary Agreement in 2015, the two neighbours amicably resolved a long outstanding issue.
5. In 2018, in addition to the 660 MW of power imported by Bangladesh, Indian export of electricity increased by another 500 MW.
6. Train services on the Dhaka-Kolkata and Kolkata-Khulna are doing well, while a third, on the Agartala-Akhaura route, is under construction.
7. Today, Bangladesh contributes 50% of India’s health tourism revenue.
8. Relations between the two border guarding forces are at their best right now.

**Concerns:**

1. **Teesta waters issue** remains a big problem due to continuous protest by the Mamata Banerjee led West Bengal government.
2. **National Register of Citizens** has left out 1.9 million people in Assam and they are being labelled as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.
3. But Bangladesh is firm in its stance that **no migrants travelled to Assam** illegally during the 1971 war of independence and NRC may risk the relations.
4. The **Rohingya issue** and India’s remarks in 2017 on the issue have been upsetting for Bangladesh which has been facing the challenge of providing shelter to more than a million Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution
5. Bangladesh is **overwhelmingly dependent on China for military hardware**. China’s economic footprint is growing.
6. Since 2010, India approved **three Lines of Credit to Bangladesh** of $7.362 billion to finance development projects. But, because of bureaucratic red tapism, just $442 million have been disbursed until December 2018.
7. Though Bangladesh is slow in implementation, India’s requirement of the disbursement process to be **approved by Exim Bank** has not helped either.
8. Since the **ban by India on cattle export**, cattle trade has fallen from 23 lakh in 2013 to 75,000 till the end of May this year.

**Way Forward:**

- India’s attempts to equate Bangladesh to fundamentally theocratic Muslim nations such as Pakistan and Afghanistan is something that is unacceptable to Bangladeshis, where religious and racial harmony have always been a priority, unlike in many neighboring countries so we not need to equate it with Pakistan.
- Bangladesh-India relations have **reached a stage of maturity**. Bilateral ties can be expected to grow stronger in the future. It is for India to take the lead to remove these irritants.
- There is scope for India-Bangladesh ties to move to the next level, based on cooperation, coordination and consolidation.
- India’s continued partnership with Bangladesh benefits both countries.
- New Delhi must keep up the partnership that allows for economic growth and improved developmental parameters for both countries.
- It is important to address specific issues like Teesta and to respond to Dhaka’s call for help on the Rohingya issue.
- The two countries share 54 transboundary rivers, and water management is the key to prosperity.
- Effective border management for ensuring a tranquil, stable and crime free border.

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

### 3. US, TALIBAN- DOHA ACCORD

**Introduction:**

- US officials and Taliban representatives have signed a final peace deal after months of negotiations in Qatar’s capital to end the United States’s longest war, fought in Afghanistan. Agreement, signed in Doha in the presence of leaders from Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, will pave the way for the United States to gradually withdraw its troops. The two sides have long wrangled over the US demand for a ceasefire before the final peace agreement was signed. The Taliban ordered all its fighters to halt fighting and “refrain from attacks”. Mohammed Naeem, a Taliban representative in Doha, described the deal as “a step forward”. The US invaded Afghanistan weeks after the September 2001 attacks by the Afghanistan-based al-Qaeda group. More than 2,400 US troops have been killed during the conflict. About 12,000 are still stationed in the country. President Trump has promised to put an end to the conflict.

**Background to the Afghan war:**

1. It began when the US launched air strikes one month following the 11 September 2001 attacks and after the Taliban had refused to hand over the man behind them, Osama bin Laden.
2. The US was joined by an international coalition and the Taliban were quickly removed from power. However, they turned into an insurgent force and continued deadly attacks, destabilising subsequent Afghan governments.
3. The international coalition ended its combat mission in 2014, staying only to train Afghan forces. But the US continued its own, scaled-back combat operation, including air strikes.
4. The Taliban has however continued to gain momentum and in 2018 it was found they were active across 70% of Afghanistan.
5. Nearly 3,500 members of the international coalition forces have died in Afghanistan since the 2001 invasion.
6. The figures for Afghan civilians, militants and government forces are more difficult to quantify. In a February 2019 report, the UN said that more than 32,000 civilians had died.
7. US has been exhausted by its long drawn out involvement in Afghanistan.
8. The financial aspect has been impacting The US.
9. This was seen as a hopeless war.
Highlights of the agreement:

1. **Military troops withdrawal**: It lays out a 14-month timetable for the withdrawal of “all military forces of the United States, its allies, and Coalition partners, including all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel.”

2. **Release of prisoners**: The agreement also calls for the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners and 1,000 “prisoners of the other side” on the first day of intra-Afghan negotiations. The relevant sides have the goal of releasing all the remaining prisoners over the course of the subsequent three months.

3. **Taliban side**
   a. The Taliban will take steps “to prevent any group or individual, including al-Qa’ida, from using the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.”
   b. Those steps include commitments that the Taliban will instruct its members “not to cooperate with groups or individuals threatening the security of the United States and its allies”.
   c. It “will also prevent any group or individual in Afghanistan from threatening the security of the United States and its allies, and will prevent them from recruiting, training, and fundraising and will not host them in accordance with the commitments in this agreement.”

Measures needed for India:

1. The concern for India is the process of the US withdrawal should not leave a vacuum in the region which is filled with extremist and terrorist.
2. There should not be a civil war like situation in Afghanistan because India has been engaged in good developments there.
3. Despite the restricted room for manoeuvre, however, there are several steps New Delhi can and must take in the present scenario to ensure both its own relevance in Afghanistan and stability in the region.
4. To begin with, there is the question of talks with the Taliban, which India has thus far refused.
5. India needs to monitor the Taliban’s approach to groups fostered by the Pakistani state to target India.
6. India must focus on assisting Afghanistan in every manner possible to ensure that the country’s elections are as peaceful and participative as possible.
7. On the military front as well, India must move quickly to provide helicopters as well as engineering/tech support for Afghan hardware.
8. Indian government must realise that its consistent undermining of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) because of problems with Pakistan is also weakening Afghanistan’s engagement with the subcontinent, which India had worked hard to foster.
9. For regional security there must be closer involvement of regional powers in international efforts to ensure non-interference and a stable Afghanistan; this also requires involvement of the Central Asian Republics, which border Afghanistan.
10. It is important for India to coordinate its efforts with those of Russia and Iran to ensure success.

Concerns here for India:

1. The concern is whatever regime emerges after peace talks there should be political plurality, minority and women rights respected, giving up of terrorism.
2. We are quite exposed because we have given aid of 3B $. Pakistan wants India should not play any major role there.
3. **Is India an ally?** In the Doha agreement, the Taliban has guaranteed “enforcement mechanisms that will prevent the use of the soil of Afghanistan by any group or individual against the security of the United States and its allies”. However, it is unclear whether India, which is not a U.S. ally, is included in this definition, and whether Pakistan-backed groups that threaten India would still operate in Afghanistan.
4. **Impact of prisoner release and lifting sanctions**: India is also most worried about the “mainstreaming of the Haqqani network”, which Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists reportedly fight alongside and were responsible for the 2008 bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul. Release of prisoners would be a boost for these terror groups.
6. Threats from Pakistan: The U.S. has committed to taking Taliban leaders off the UN Security Council’s sanctions list by May 29, 2020, which could considerably bring down the number of terrorists Pakistan is accused of harbouring, according to the FATF greylist conditions.

7. Recognition to Taliban: As per the agreement, the US appears to have submitted to the possibility of a Taliban-led government, by extracting promises that the Taliban will not provide “visas, passports, travel documents or asylum” to those threatening the U.S. and its allies. This appears to sideline India’s support for the election process for leadership in Afghanistan.

Conclusion:

- Echoing the Afghan stand, India has been asserting that the peace process must be “Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled.”

Link: [https://youtu.be/Ji68iGwOAAg](https://youtu.be/Ji68iGwOAAg)

**SECURITY ISSUES**

**SECTION 505- TACKLING RUMOURS**

**Introduction:**

- Delhi police got over 3,000 distress calls from people panicked over riot-related rumours like violence, arson and stone pelting across the national capital. Around one-fifth of these calls on the emergency 100 and 112 numbers came from Shaheen Bagh in South East Delhi and nearby areas in South Delhi. Panic gripped residents across the national capital following false rumours of violence but the police denied any incident and appealed for calm. Besides the PCR calls, several people from within Delhi as well as outside called up police officials, including officers, directly to verify information about violence breaking out, the officer added. The rumours prompted senior police officers to come on ground and quell the hoax while also taking to social media to control panic. The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation also shut down the entry and exit gates of seven metro stations but did not give any reason. The stations were reopened later. The police said it was closely monitoring the social media accounts spreading fake news or rumours and action will be taken against them.

**Decoding Section 505 of IPC:**

1. Whoever makes, publishes or circulates any statement, rumour or report
   a. with intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, any officer, soldier, sailor or airman in the Army, Navy or Air Force of India to mutiny or otherwise disregard or fail in his duty as such; or
   b. with intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, fear or alarm to the public, or to any section of the public whereby any person may be induced to commit an offence against the State or against the public tranquility; or
   c. with intent to incite, or which is likely to incite, any class or community of persons to commit any offence against any other class or community, shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.

2. Statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill will between classes
   Whoever makes, publishes or circulates any statement or report containing rumour or alarming news with intent to create or promote, or which is likely to create or promote, on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, caste or community or any other ground whatsoever, feelings of enmity, hatred or ill-will between different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities, shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.

3. Offence under sub-section (2) committed in place of worship, etc- Whoever commits an offence specified in sub-section (2) in any place of worship or in any assembly engaged in the performance of religious worship or religious ceremonies, shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to five years and shall also be liable to fine.
What is the exception under section 505?

- It does not amount to an offence, within the meaning of this section, when the person making, publishing or circulating any such statement, rumour or report, has reasonable grounds for believing that such statement, rumour or report is true and makes, publishes or circulates it in **good faith and without any such intent as aforesaid.**

**Monitoring and surveillance**

1. If we look at the establishment of the Central Monitoring System (“CMS”), which is a centralised telephone interception provisioning system installed by the Centre for Development of Telematics to automate the process of lawful interception; monitoring of telecommunications, there is a lack of clarity on the scope, functions, and technical architecture of the CMS.

2. It is worrying that there is no specific law which mandates or regulates the CMS. Surveillance in India is primarily governed by the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 (“Telegraph Act”) and the IT Act. Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act which empowers the Indian government to intercept communications on the occurrence of any “public emergency” or in the interest of “public safety”, when it is deemed “necessary or expedient” to do so in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of an offence.

3. On the other hand Section 69 of the IT Act (as amended in 2008) grants the government with the power to intercept, monitor or decrypt or cause to be intercepted or monitored or decrypted any information transmitted received or stored through any computer resource if it is satisfied that it is necessary or expedient to do in the interest of the sovereignty or integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognisable offence relating to above or for investigation of any offence.

4. It is relevant to note that prerequisites of ‘public emergency’ and ‘public safety’ which were earlier nearly the same in the IT Act, and the Telegraph Act, have now been removed from IT Act with which the power of the government has become more extensive in relation to interception and monitoring of telecommunications.

**Need for regulations of social media and challenges:**

1. The speed and reach of social media has meant that subversive rumours and fake news get aired with impunity.

2. This has resulted in serious law and order problems. In India, this phenomenon has assumed dangerous proportions.

3. Fake news on WhatsApp has led to lynchings and communal flare-ups in many parts of the country. This menace needs to be curbed.

4. Too stringent a policy of policing social media could violate the individual’s right to privacy.

5. It’s not easy to force Facebook Inc., the owner of WhatsApp, to give up on the app’s unique selling proposition to the user of complete end-to-end confidentiality.


7. They deny decrypting or intercepting messages sent through their platforms.

8. Traceability would undermine end-to-end encryption, weaken consumer privacy and cybersecurity.

9. Since WhatsApp users converse outside Indian boundaries, the storage of a foreign user’s data could come with its own jurisdiction issues.

10. Asking a foreign company to establish an entity in India is only asking for greater control without clearly identifying the potential harm.

11. WhatsApp’s recent decision to restrict forwarding of messages to five users may only have limited impact in curtailing rumours.

Link: [https://youtu.be/SyJRwJs5zGM](https://youtu.be/SyJRwJs5zGM)
UPSC IAS ESSAY WRITING CHALLENGES

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

1. “Indifferentism is the worst kind of disease that can affect people.”
   
   Hints: https://youtu.be/xlH9YHf__wc

2. “Those who have wisdom have all: Fools with all have nothing.”
   
   Hints: https://youtu.be/_xowlhp9L7w

3. “Pandemics such as COVID-19, though catastrophic, are in the end meant to reset humanity and its priorities”
   
   Perspectives Video: https://youtu.be/7bfs____TSHE

4. “In order to understand the world, one has to turn away from it on occasion”
   
   Perspectives Video: https://youtu.be/XTXirV61PpE

5. “Problems cannot be solved at the same level of awareness that created them”
   