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1. The Gandhis, Mandelas and Kings of today

Introduction:

- We cannot celebrate Mahatma Gandhi today nor Nelson Mandela nor Martin Luther King Jr. without inviting their immediate and stern reprimand.
- All three would say, each a bit differently from the other: ‘If you are gathered to celebrate us, stop right here. If you are gathered to think with us, then listen.
- Not to us or to those who speak in our names but to your consciences, for that is all we did.
- We did look back to our heroes and heroines, we did celebrate their anniversaries, but only in order to look more clearly at the world around us and into the future that beckoned.
- India is a free country today, the colonised world is gone. South Africa’s sharp, bruising chains of apartheid iron have snapped.
- The U.S., with its Civil Rights Act in place, has made slavery a thing of the disreputable past.
- It has gone on to elect a distinguished President, Barack Obama, from among people who did not, until very recently, even have the right to ride in a bus on a seat of their choice. But are you Indians, South Africans, Americans a happy and contented people?’
- They would ask us this question in anxiety and in pain. We know the answer.

Torture or Untouchability?

- Albert Lutuli’s and Mandela’s South Africa has signed and ratified without any objections or reservations the United Nations Convention Against Torture.
- Abraham Lincoln’s and Martin Luther King Jr.’s U.S. has done so with reservations.
- Rabindranath Tagore’s and Gandhi’s India has signed but has not ratified the Convention Against Torture.
- What would those two men have had to say about this? Is something about torture more valuable to a state than its outright abolition?
- George Floyd’s dying words, “I can’t breathe”, rival Martin Luther King Jr.’s living words, “I have a dream”.
- That Floyd’s words were uttered when the world was breathing through masks, inhaling with fear, expiring in despair has given us a chilling picture of the human origins of the crisis that we have brought upon ourselves.

The habitual greed of a civilisation: Victims are innocent human beings, poor and marginalised:

- India, South Africa, the U.S., and the whole world are in the grip of the vicious virus that goes by the name of COVID-19 but are in reality in the grip of the gluttony of a civilisation that is disembowelling the earth of its resources and is hunting down the earth’s life forms to gratify its craving for commercial profit.
- There is a wild animal market in every city and town and, more significant than that, within each of us who are not among the poor, in the shape of a callous disregard of life and the sanctity of due proportion.
- The ‘crown’ of the novel coronavirus microbe is not different either in its human origins nor its inhuman effect from the giant plumes that rose over the embers at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
• Its victims are like those of the bomb: **innocent human beings, invariably poor and marginalised.**

• **Zoonotic pandemics are modern powerhouses'** most diabolic, if unintended, creation, after our fabrications of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and the propensity of nation states to practise custodial torture.

## Caste system and its Evils

**• Stratification based on occupation, income, and status**

i. Occupation (olden days)

ii. Income and status

iii. Predicament of weaker section

**• Deprivation, Helplessness and Violence**

Various enquirers and studies have revealed that grievances and violence is due to

1. Poverty
2. Unemployment
3. Poor health care and education
4. Social discrimination

**• Social violence ~ Attack upon individual or their property mainly because of their membership of a particular social groups.**

We are thinking of heroes today. Here the story of a little heroine:

• The **indefatigable documenter of rural livelihoods in India**, P. Sainath, and his colleagues Pushpa Usendi-Rokade, Purusottam Thakur and Kamlesh Painkra tell us: Jamlo Madkam was a 12-year-old from the tribal Muria community of Chhattisgarh who went with others of her village to Telangana to work on chilli farms.

• When the lockdown was announced she was told her work had stopped and she might as well leave. So, with others the little one walked.

• Over three days and 140 kilometres she walked and when she was just 60 kilometres from her village and could walk no more, collapsed and died.

• The virus did not kill her. She was thrown out of no train. But she was thrown out of opportunity, pushed out of life. No government, no politician, no employer but the whole lot of India’s consumerist population, we, did that.

### A long walk home:

1. Gandhi was thrown out of a train on the night of June 7 in 1893, in **Pietermaritzburg**. That train journey changed the course of colonial history.
2. Trains have captured India’s headlines today only very differently. Not by someone being thrown out of one of them but by millions bundling themselves into them.
3. They are **all migrant workers**, exactly as Gandhi himself was in South Africa, except that he was a lawyer with a solid income and in a different country.

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4. These migrant workers were locked out of livelihoods and of ways of travel in their own country but in a far distant part of it when a lockdown was imposed to contain the spread of the virus.
5. While for the upper class of society lockdown meant staying home, watching films, baking, eating, doing stationary exercises and staying one metre away from one another, for these millions it meant the sudden disappearance of wages or work, of every security and, ironically, because they were now obliged to stay cooped up in their tiny dwellings, it also meant overcrowding, inhaling others’ exhalations for hours together.
6. So, they moved on foot, no matter how far they had to go, just to get back home. And for the reason that they were breaking the lockdown rules, they were pushed back.
7. Until it dawned on those who mattered that these fellow human beings had to get home to stay home. And trains were deployed. Too few for too many, they saw the opposite of social distancing.

Conclusion: Rays of hope:

- And yet we must not on this day let hope down. Rajmohan Gandhi has reminded us of Li Wenliang, the Wuhan doctor who first sounded the world about the virus that he had found in patients and then himself succumbed to.
- Li had been pilloried for having started a rumour and disrupted social order. He is now receiving honours.
- “I think there should be more than one voice in a heathy society,” Li said before dying.
- There are Lis among Indian, African and American doctors, nurses, lab assistants, police and guards and there are many who are speaking up not only against racism but against what Sainath has described as classism, a new form of callous elitism.
- Protesters in the U.S. and in England and Australia and elsewhere saying ‘I can’t breathe’ are not doing so in Gandhi’s or Mandela’s or King’s name.
- But they are doing exactly what Gandhi, Mandela and King were doing. They are, in fact, Gandhi, Mandela and King. Together with Li and Floyd and Jamlo they are saying we are with them. We are them.


Context:

- Public transport has returned to the national capital’s streets, but as long as coronavirus infections continue to rise, things will remain far from ‘normal’.
- Experts suggest there is an urgent need to bring in systemic changes to the public transport system to suit the reality of ‘living with the virus’.
- These systemic changes include tiding over the initial phase of low ridership by restoring faith in the mass transit system through staggered hours, social distancing and Covid protocols, and focusing on non-motorised transport to limit contact.
• Central to India’s lockdown to control the spread of COVID-19 was a **complete shutdown of the transport system**.

• Now, as the country emerges from the lockdown, a **proper ramping up of the transport system is needed**. This should not be done in haste, however.

**Can COVID-19 spread through public transport systems?**

• It is difficult to answer this question with numbers. A recent paper from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology argued that New York’s subways seeded the epidemic in the city.

• While the research fails to establish causation from the observed correlation, as the author had admitted, it cannot be discarded as implausible.

• It is commendable that India shut down public transport before it could contribute to the spread, with an early lockdown. We now need to consider what can ensue on a restart, especially of metro rail.

• The experts suggest there are **two ways** to get more people to be less weary of public transport — by issuing Covid safety standard operating procedures, and ramping up the capacity of public transport.

• Just like pollution certificates are essential for vehicles, the government should also come up with Covid safety certification to instil faith.

• While Covid safety protocols will be ensured by the government on buses and the metros, the onus on **sanitising vehicles** and **ensuring passenger safety** in Ola and Uber cabs and autos will fall on owners and drivers.

**COVID-19 and public transport:**

1. Fearing crowd infections, commuters prefer travelling in private modes like two-wheelers.
2. Cities like Delhi, that resumed services nearly four weeks ago, observed less ridership than the allowed 20 passengers per bus, despite the limited frequencies on many routes.
3. Although bus crowding is seen in some cities such as Mumbai, it is temporary and due to a lack of alternatives.
4. A **significant drop in public transport ridership** can be expected for months after resumption, based on opinion surveys.
5. That means measures are needed to gain the public’s confidence in mass transport modes, to avoid a significant modal shift to road traffic.
6. The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation has released **guidelines to tackle several social distancing and sanitisation concerns**, and to address the possibility of viral transmission through tokens, push buttons on lifts, and handrails at the station elevators.

**Are these measures enough to prevent serious viral transmission?**

1. Unfortunately, public transit agencies around the world face the problem of a **dearth of research** by scientists on the **specific modality of COVID-19 transmission** during public transport commute.
2. **Confidentiality laws** usually prevent the availability of contact-tracing data to extract the precise details of how any individual got infected.
3. There have been some notable research efforts, currently under peer review, that did use detailed contact-tracing data from China and Korea.
4. One study says that **SARS-CoV-2** does not seem to get transmitted much outdoors.
5. In fact, **only a single cluster of two cases** out of nearly a thousand was traced to an outdoor infection in China.
6. Correlation to the effect of air conditioning airflow has also been established based on precise seating locations of those infected at a restaurant and at a call centre.
7. Indian authorities who were already working under similar assumptions on the effects of AC will be proven justified by the conclusion of such research that there is clearly high risk in indoor areas under AC with focused air flow.
8. From the above research we can conclude that a **non-AC bus with open windows offers a much less risky outdoor-like environment**.

9. However, it would be wrong to conclude that an AC metro rail coach is risky – for a different reason, in that **contact-time is also very important in viral transmission in indoor spaces**.

**Way Forward:**

✓ Actions are needed from both authorities and the public to keep our public transport systems safe.

✓ If no such actions are taken and a **serious level of viral transmission** is later traced to public transit, the result will be a mode shift to private vehicles.

✓ As pollution and accidents kill more people in India than COVID-19 does now, a mode shift away from public transport will **have long-term consequences**.

✓ Our buses and trains must be perceived as safe, so it is **vital to assure ourselves that public transport is for the public not the virus**.

**Conclusion: Suggestions for more safety:**

- We should expect a lot of passengers to leave in a hurry and to not bother with cleaning their hands, even if hand sanitiser dispensers are available.

- Considering such possibilities, a few safety suggestions that can be implemented immediately.

- The first is to employ staff to wipe the handgrips at frequent intervals, constantly moving from end to end in the train.

- Any handgrips in buses also need to be cleaned often. Another is to **give wet sanitising wipes to every traveller** entering a metro rail coach with a suggestion to have it in their palms before touching or gripping anything. **Wipe disposal bins will be needed in the coaches**.

- The metro rail agencies’ focus may need to shift to the egressing passengers, as it is important to prevent them from transferring what is on their hands to their faces after egress.

- Paid staff or volunteers dispensing hand sanitisers on platforms can be an option.

- Offering contact-less wash basins with soap dispensers at the platform level could be effective. Signs on **hand hygiene vis-a-vis touching surfaces** are needed.

- There are possible options in metro trains to **create external airflow to dissipate viral particles**.

- Metro rail authorities are planning to leave the doors open at the terminal before the next run of each train.

- Since a majority of metro rail stretches in India are elevated, there are other creative options, if safety considerations will allow them. One would be to have staff onboard to direct passengers away from a certain coach to other coaches.

- Eventually, metro rail AC systems could be changed to **High Efficiency Particulate Air filters with frequent circulation of fresh air**.
1. Revolving door: On Manipur politics

Context:

- The politics in Manipur has come under fresh turmoil following the withdrawal of support to the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government from MLAs belonging to the National People’s Party (NPP), two independents and defections by three BJP MLAs to the Opposition.

- The Biren Singh-led government has probably now been reduced to a minority. The uncertainty in the numbers in the 59-member Assembly has been due to several defections in the last three years.

Brief Background:

- In Kihoto Hollohan (1992) case, the SC had upheld the validity of the anti-defection law and had also made the Speaker’s order subject to judicial review on limited grounds.

- It had made it clear that the court’s jurisdiction would not come into play unless the Speaker passes an order, leaving no room for intervention prior to adjudication.

- In the Rajendra Singh Rana case of 2007, the constitution bench set aside the Uttar Pradesh Speaker’s order refusing to disqualify 13 BSP defectors on the grounds that he had failed to exercise his jurisdiction to decide whether they had attracted disqualification, while recognising a ‘split’ in the legislature party.

About Disqualification under the Tenth Schedule

1. The anti-defection law is contained in the 10th Schedule of the Constitution and was enacted by Parliament Constitution (52nd Amendment) Act, 1985.
2. Legislators used to change parties frequently bringing in Political Instability and was also considered as betraying the mandate of voters (who voted for the legislator considering his political party).
3. The purpose of 10th Schedule is to curb political defection by the legislators.
4. There are two grounds on which a member of a legislature can be disqualified.
5. One, if the member voluntarily gives up the membership of the party. Second, if a legislator votes in the House against the direction of his party and such act has not been condoned by the party within 15 days.
6. However, there is an exception – if there is a merger between two political parties and two-thirds of the members of a legislature party agree to the merger, they will not be disqualified.
7. The **Presiding officer of the House (Speaker/Chairman)** is the adjudicating authority with regard to disqualification of legislators under the Tenth Schedule.

**Criticism of the anti-defection Law:**

1. Curbs the freedom of speech & expression of law makers
2. Tyranny of Political Parties: Legislators have to abide by the line taken by Political parties even it is against their own stand or against the interest of her constituency
3. **Role of the Speaker is biased:** Speaker who is a member of a political party is often not neutral and comes under the influence of his political party instead of deciding the cases on merit
4. **Delay in decision making:** several presiding officers have allowed defectors to bolster the strength of ruling parties and even be sworn in Ministers by merely refraining from adjudicating on complaints against them.

**Utter failure of the anti-defection law:**

- The **shenanigans in Manipur** are not unique to the State. The examples of Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh most recently, and Arunachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand earlier show the **utter failure of the anti-defection law** in curbing the brazen subversion of electoral mandates by legislators who get elected on the ticket of one party but do not find it inconvenient to shift to another, due to the lure of ministerial berths or financial gains.
- If the role of the Speaker who has the authority to decide upon defections has been utilised by ruling parties to engineer defections without inviting immediate disqualification in some cases, legislators have also adhered to the law in letter if not spirit by utilising the option of outright resignation.
- This begs the question whether the **anti-defection law actually serves any purpose today**.
- In the absence of any amendments to the law suitably, the only disincentive for defectors is the possibility that voters might punish them in a by-election.
- But as Karnataka recently showed, voters in some States have yet to discern candidacies beyond considerations of patronage and identity, emboldening parties to retain or seize power through immoral machinations.

**Supreme Court directive on Anti-defection law:**

1. Though the law has been able to **curb the evil of defection** to a great extent, a very alarming trend of legislators defecting in groups to another party is visible.
2. The speaker who also belongs to a particular political party could be influenced by political interests.
3. In many cases, the disqualification petition to be decided within a reasonable period of time has lingered on for an indefinite period.
4. Recently the disqualification petition against seven of its MLAs had been pending at Nagaland Legislative Assembly speaker’s court for 10 months.
5. In the recent case of Manipur Congress MLAs’ disqualification case, the three-judge bench of the SC headed by Justice R.F. Nariman directed the speaker of the Manipur Legislative Assembly to dispose of the case within four weeks, failing which the petitioner could approach the High court.
6. In the recent Manipur assembly case, the court gave a deadline of four weeks to the Manipur Assembly Speaker to decide the disqualification question in a legislator’s case.
7. As “failure to exercise jurisdiction” is a recognised stage at which the court can now intervene, the court has thus opened a window for judicial intervention in cases in which Speakers refuse to act.
8. If the SC directive is followed **without any constraints**, it augurs well for the enforcement of the law against defection in letter and spirit.
Conclusion:

Supreme Court in its 21st Jan 2020 order gave the following pronouncements:

Reasonable Time period for deciding on Disqualification:

1. Unless there were “exceptional circumstances”, disqualification petitions under the Tenth Schedule should be decided by Speakers within three months
2. Failure to deliver decision by Speaker within a reasonable time period will entail the court to intervene in the disqualification matter (as has happened now in this case)

Suggested an Independent Body:

1. SC asked the Parliament to consider having an independent and permanent body to decide disqualification petition, which requires an amendment to the constitution.
2. Given the fact that a Speaker belongs to a particular political party, the Court mooted this idea.
3. Also, Speaker wasn’t adjudicating election disputes or disqualification of members under Articles 103/192/329 for good reason, because their fairness could be suspected.

We are facing a deeper challenge of the corrosion of India’s parliamentary system, for even in jurisdictions without such anti-defection laws, we do not see “horse-trading” and “resort politics”.

Hence, beyond institutional fixes, we also need a popular articulation of an ethical politics that causes the public to shun such political manoeuvres.

2. AP HC quashes ordinance curtailing State Election Commissioner’s tenure

Context:

- The Andhra Pradesh High Court has struck down an Ordinance promulgated by the AP government to curtail the tenure of the State Election Commissioner (SEC).
- The court also quashed an order appointing retired judge as the new State Election Commissioner and reinstated post of SEC to previous SEC
Earlier, the state government had promulgated an ordinance to curtail the tenure of State Election Commissioner from five to three years.

**Free and fair elections form the bedrock of a democratic state:**

1. An essential pre-requisite to the conduct of free and fair elections is an **independent and autonomous election commission**, which is insulated from executive interference and political pressures.
2. In recognition and furtherance of this, the Constitution of India vests the superintendence, direction and control of conduct of elections to the offices of President, Vice-President, Parliament and State Legislatures in an independent constitutional body i.e. the Election Commission of India [Article 324(1)].
3. A similar body has been created by the Constitution for conduct of elections to panchayats and other local bodies [Articles 243 K and 243 ZA].
4. Both the Election Commission of India as well as State Election Commissions enjoy certain constitutional safeguards to secure their independent functioning.
5. Political parties, by sheer psychology of power, have a tendency to command and control. Hence, the tussle between an independent EC and political parties has been a long drawn out phenomenon.
6. The recent removal of Andhra Pradesh State Election Commissioner via an ordinance is a recent addition.

**About State Election Commissions (SECs):**

- The State Election Commission has been entrusted with the **function of conducting free, fair and impartial elections to the local bodies** in the state.
  1. **Article 243K(1):** It states that the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Panchayats (Municipalities under Article 243ZA) shall be vested in a State Election Commission consisting of a State Election Commissioner to be appointed by the Governor.
  2. **Article 243K(2):** It states that the tenure and appointment will be directed as per the law made by the state legislature.
- However, State Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his/her office except in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of a High Court.

**Independence and Institutional Autonomy of Constitutional Bodies:**

- The recent removal of Andhra Pradesh State Election Commissioner via an ordinance route is an example encroaching upon the independence of the Constitutional body especially in the light of political accusations and vested interests.
- This development not only threatens institutional autonomy but also falls foul of the constitutional provisions.
- Though the Election Commission of India is facing issues of autonomy due to political interference, the situation at the level of state election commission is grimmer.

**To remove incumbent SEC via ordinance threatens institutional autonomy, falls foul of the Constitution:**

1. The said ordinance reduced the term of State Election Commissioner (SEC) from **five years to three years** and altered the qualifications required to be the SEC.
2. Further, the government by issuing certain orders made the ordinance applicable to incumbent SEC as well. The government’s move is a textbook case of colourable exercise of power.
3. The ordinance route to remove SEC falls foul of both Article 243k and Section 200 of the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1994.
4. **Article 243K(2) explicitly bars removal of SEC from his office except in like manner and on the like ground as a judge of a high court.**
5. Further, it mandates that the conditions of service of the State Election Commissioner shall not be varied to his disadvantage after his appointment.
6. Section 200 of the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act reaffirms the constitutional safeguards laid under Article 243K.
7. In light of these, the government’s move to apply the ordinance amending the SEC’s tenure and qualifications to incumbent SEC may not withstand judicial scrutiny.

Way Forward:

1. The current wording of Article 324(5) is “inadequate” and requires an amendment to bring the removal procedures of Election Commissioners on par with the CEC to provide them with the “same protection and safeguard[s]” as the Chief Election Commissioner.
2. Presently, even at CEC and SEC the administrative expenditure of the Commission is a voted expenditure.
3. However, the expenditure of other independent constitutional bodies similar to the Commission i.e. the Supreme Court, Comptroller & Auditor General, Union Public Service Commission are charged/ non-votable expenditure.
4. The expenditure of the Commission should be charged on the Consolidated Fund of India. The Commission is of the opinion that a charged budget would be a symbol of the independence of the Commission and will secure its unconstrained functioning.
5. Law Commission 255th Report on Electoral Reforms: It recommended, to add a new sub-clause to Article 324 of the Constitution to provide for a separate independent and permanent Secretariat for the ECI along the lines of the Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha Secretariats under Article 98 of the Constitution.
6. Similar provisions can also be made for the State Election Commissions to ensure autonomy, and free and fair local body election.

Conclusion:

- Electoral reforms have been implemented in India mainly through judicial intervention and supported by legal opinion, and have helped to improve perception about the electoral process.
- Perception in a democracy like India might be defined as the opinion of the people gathered by surveys or election studies, and is sought to be represented in political campaigns or decisions on electoral process, interventions of the Election Commission of India (henceforth, ECI), judicial verdicts on reforms like candidate affidavits, and authoritative reports of commissions set up to explore electoral reforms.

3. Can online learning replace the school classroom?

Introduction:

- Online classes, no doubt, provide students to catch up on the classes lost due to the prolonged lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Attending classes online without a break is said to be causing problems like dry eye syndrome, burning sensation of eyes, and ear problems.
- Educationists and doctors have their own reservations on online classes for primary classes. Doctors suggest use of laptops and external speakers, instead of earphones, to avoid eye and ear problems.
- Prolonged use of earphones can result in noise-induced deafness. It can also cause tinnitus and the child may experience ringing sounds in the ear. Severe exposure may cause inability to hear certain frequencies. The problems depend on the duration and intensity of the sound.

Context:

- The COVID-19 outbreak has disrupted the academic year, cancelled classes and examinations across the country.
To ensure that students do not miss out on their studies, schools moved classes online, forcing students to attend lectures via their gadgets.

However, this has also sparked a debate on whether the increased amount of screen time helps students learn or if it impedes their progress.

While Maharashtra has banned online classes from pre-primary to Class II, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh have extended the ban till Class V.

**Reopening of Indian Schools:**

- Schools may be reopening abroad, but we cannot compare that to the situation in India. The schools that have opened in these countries are taking utmost precautions.
- For instance, they are using tissue boxes for every class. Students can dump their used tissues in these boxes.
- But the waste generated is so huge, and it will also require to be discarded safely.
- Do Indian schools have that kind of infrastructure?
- Also, it is difficult to make children sit in the classroom wearing masks, without touching it. Or for them not to touch other children and their masks.

**Reporting an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, is it viable to open schools?**

1. Education is not just about information or content delivered to students via screens. It is about a lot more. And most of it takes place through the social interactions in a school, with peers, with the teachers. Since online classes have begun, all that has been cut out.
2. What’s worrying is the fact that the entire conversation has shifted to the use of technology.
3. It is not just about computers and smartphones, even watching Doordarshan amounts to screen time.
4. Nobody (in India) is really talking about turning schools into safe places, where education can resume.
5. Social Interactions in schools would have other kinds of developmental and cognitive impact on the child and their development.
6. It is high time that we started to talk about how the school actually can be made a space that is safe again, for children to come back to, rather than make a complete switch to online learning.

**What will education look like once schools reopen post COVID-19?**

- There is a large section of the population that is unable to access technology and that’s a huge concern.
- Children belonging to migrant families might have moved far away from their schools.
- Government school teachers in Delhi were trying to reach some of the students whose mobile numbers they have, but they are not able to reach them, they have disappeared.
- And these are kids who are going to be out of school soon. We don’t know whether their families will return to the cities and what’s going to happen to them.
- Teachers are doing enough to develop better online modules, based on activities, but how many children are benefiting from it?
- The problem is that our policy has always neglected the marginalised child. That is why we still have so many children who are not in school. All our policies tend to focus on those who already have access to certain facilities. We just forget the invisible the poor and the marginalised.

**Alternatives that can ensure that students don’t fall back academically:**

1. During this pandemic, many of the policy fault lines across all sectors have come to the fore. Most of all in public health.
2. The fact that our public health system is not geared towards such situations has become evident and obvious to everyone.
3. Even within the education sector, it has become clear that we have not invested in our education system in a way that it can take care of a situation like this.
4. Going forward, we have to start thinking on these lines:
5. We need to improve our education system in such a way that we do not have to keep schools closed in such situations.
6. We need to make it possible for the students to have a safe environment in schools even during a pandemic.
7. We need to ensure that there is no shortage of teachers. It is not just about online instruction, but also about preparing action plans to deal with students who have lost out on education because of the pandemic.
8. A majority of the students who were unable to access technology in this pandemic may become dropouts. This goes against their fundamental right to education.

What are the dangers of exposing children to screens at such a young age of kindergarten?

- Online classes for young children may cause stress on their growing brains. In the actual classroom scenario, they get breaks, interact with friends and the surrounding atmosphere would be conducive to the learning process.
- Sitting for long hours watching the mobile screen or laptop is not advisable for them.
- Exposing children to screens from a young age is not right. It can hamper their overall development. The light emitted from the screen can strain children’s eyes and could lead to vision problems throughout their lives.
- Watching a screen is also a passive activity that can make children lethargic and affect their thinking skills.
- Often, parents expose children to screens right from a young age — using videos to get toddlers to eat without a fuss is a common parenting method. This can lead to several behavioural problems.
- Schools should also keep this in mind while creating online content for younger kids. The lessons should be designed in such a way that the child only spends a few minutes looking at a screen. This can be done by integrating different activities into the lessons.

Way Forward:

✓ Early Childhood Association have suggested that during pandemics, schools can be opened in a staggered manner, with 50% students attending every alternate day.

✓ This will help avoid crowded classrooms and give schools time to clean up their premises.

✓ Temperature checks of teachers, students and non-teaching staff should become mandatory.

✓ Teachers should not give students any books to carry home. Social distancing should be followed strictly by teachers and students.

✓ Second, it will be better to give priority to opening schools for marginalised and migrant children, as they might not have access to technology. We can create separate safe spaces for these children.
Could online learning replace the traditional classroom?

**What is “online learning”?**
- Educational tools that are provided online
- Can be used exclusively online or within a traditional classroom setting

**Trends in online learning:**
- Flipped classroom: Students learn content at home via videos and other digital means. Videos replace lectures, freeing up valuable classroom time. Students come to class to apply what they learned at home.
- Adaptive Learning: Algorithms determine what the most appropriate training modules are for a learner.
- Microlearning: “Learning in small chunks of time” to increase the effectiveness of learning.
- Gamification and Game-Based Learning: Possibility of earning badges and points incentivises learning.
- Video-based learning: 80% of professionals feel that the flexibility and control of online learning with videos improves the quality of learning.
- Focus on Personal Development and Competency-Based Skills: Online learning often focuses on non-academic skills such as leadership, people management, problem-solving, collaboration, and communication.

**How many people are using online learning tools?**
- Over 1 billion learning-related videos are viewed on YouTube every day.
- Over 5 million Europeans have used Grow with Google’s digital skills training.
- 900 universities worldwide have launched 11,430 MOOCs.
- 20 million new learners worldwide enrolled in MOOCs in 2018; adding up to 101 million learners overall.
- 5 million Skillshare users and 6,000 teachers.

**FOR vs AGAINST**
- Breaks down barriers: people from all socio-economic backgrounds can attend free online courses.
- Increases accessibility: for example for disabled students.
- Flexible schedule and environment that allows for individual study planning.
- International online classrooms prepare students for international workplaces.
- Gamification of learning can increase learning effectiveness.
- Reputation: not all employers assign online education the same value as traditional education.
- Lack of Social Interaction: online students are more likely to be isolated.
- Not all subjects are suited for online education, especially ones that require practical experience.
- Statistically high drop-out rates.
- Every learner is different – watching videos and reading may not suit everybody.

**Popular online learning platforms:**
- Adobe Captivate
- docebo
- duolingo
- SAP Litmos
- Skillshare
- Udemy
- WizIQ
- YouTube
4. Measuring the epidemic: Publicness, decentralisation of science and governance is needed

Context:

- It was four weeks ago that the states were finally given more freedom in managing the epidemic.
- They are, of course, better placed to deliver on public health and welfare. They are also generally more accountable.
- According to the recent ICMR serological sample study conducted in mid-May, barely 1 per cent of non-metropolitan India was infected.
- Thus, as the infection spreads and eventually stabilises, there is a lot of heavy lifting that the states must do.
- Since the brahmastra of lockdown is now exhausted, the message of prevention and the device called containment zones are the only ways left to manage the epidemic.

Resilience of the Indian health system must be urgently addressed:

- As epidemiologists tend to consider that the peak of the COVID-19 epidemic may not come before July, the question of the resilience of the Indian health system becomes more pressing, especially in cities like Mumbai, Delhi and Ahmedabad.
- The limitations of the country’s public health system are well-known. India’s public hospitals have only 7,13,986 beds, including 35,699 in intensive care units and 17,850 ventilators, according to a recent study by the Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics & Policy (India) and Princeton University.
- The general perception behind the inadequate provision and availability of healthcare services is attributed to the country’s developing nation status.
- However, India lags behind its BRICS peers on the health and quality index (HAQ index).
- As per the National Health Profile 2018, India’s public health spending is less than 1 per cent of the country’s GDP, which is lower than some of its neighbours, countries such as Bhutan (2.5 per cent), Sri Lanka (1.6 per cent) and Nepal (1.1 per cent). In fact, according to the World Health Organisation, India finishes second from the bottom amongst the 10 countries of its region for its percentage spending of GDP on public health.
- Maldives spends 9.4 per cent of its GDP to claim the top spot in the list, followed by Thailand (2.9 per cent).

What can be achieved within the current framework:

1. Firstly, any area classification must include key socio-economic and demographic determinants. For example, the density of the area, number of people in dwellings with one room or less, or the fraction of people using community toilets.
2. As we know, much of the infection is spreading within dense clusters. Such metrics would indicate vulnerable areas and the limits to reduction in contact rate through policing. Here, decongestion measures such as out-migration may be required. This will also serve as a guide to the future of the locality or ward.
3. The state is staging a comeback everywhere in the world in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.
4. In India, one of the domains where it has to step in is public health. A debate on the **lack of investments in public health** is bound to take place in the country after the dust has settled. But the return of the state does not necessary mean more centralisation.
5. Some state governments are doing a better job than the Centre today and the **most effective ones are the most decentralised ones see Kerala**.
6. It does not mean that civil society has no role to play either: In fact, the situation would be much worse if NGOs and private foundations (using CSR money sometimes) did not play such a huge part at the grassroots level.
7. But the most effective interventions seem to take place when there is a high degree of coordination with the state apparatus.

**Monitoring and preventing the transmission of the covid at local levels:**

1. Ensuring that our **villages and towns** are prepared to meet the disease is an important objective.
2. One metric to measure preparedness is the number of beds, doctors and ambulances per 1,000. This may then be compared with the active cases in the region.
3. In fact, the adverse mortality in some areas is directly correlated with the local shortage of medical care. For most districts in Maharashtra, shortages would start biting at about 200 cases per day.
4. Much of this data at the district level is already being submitted by the states to the central data portal covid19.nhp.gov.in.
5. An important addition would be village-level data on the running of the local quarantine, the functioning of the PDS and availability of drinking water.
6. Coming to prevention, the importance of masks, distance and open ventilation is still not appreciated.
7. A simple statistical metric is to measure the prevalence of masks in an area. This can be done by **installing cameras** in suitable locations and **counting people with masks**.
8. **Social distance measures** are also amenable to indicators. For example, the fraction of buses which have installed a sheet between the driver and the passengers, or recording innovative ways of ticket vending.
9. Popularity of such colour-coding may be effective in social mobilisation.

**Conclusion: Mitigation and adaptation require social comprehension and local solutions:**

- These need scientific studies by regional institutions and partnerships with civil society. Creating and supporting good metrics and providing data is an important step in that direction.
- This will not only save lives, it will reduce fear and help re-start normal life. And yet, the central bureaucracy and elite scientific institutions have not followed this route.
- The epidemic has underlined that **publicness and decentralisation of science and governance is the only way to atma-nirbharta**, of creating knowledge and the professional ability to solve our own problems.
- Without this, the post-cora Indian society would be an unhappy attempt at making the old arrangement work in a degraded reality of fearful and angry people.
- Ultimately, we must learn to live with the virus, but we must also find joy. Only through **constant engagement and adaptation** will we overcome fear and forge a new society that will sustain both life and happiness.
5. Paging the private sector in the COVID fight

Context:

- The COVID-19 pandemic is unlikely to disappear in the immediate future.
- Managing the epidemic and ensuring a full complement of health care will require extraordinary resources and investment.
- India’s public health sector has already spread itself thin in tackling the pandemic.
- Despite governments trying to scale-up testing capacity in the country, there is still a long way to go for mass scale testing.
- This unprecedented crisis has highlighted the critical need to mobilise available resources in public sector, and the private sector in particular.

Strategies to engage the Private Sector:

- The pandemic has provided India an opportunity to restructure the strategies of engaging the private sector in realising public health goals.
- The recent economic package announced for the health sector, of around Rs.2.1 lakh crore, envisions strengthening the health infrastructure in the immediate future.
- This is an opportunity to bring in structural changes in the health sector to rejuvenate partnerships with the private sector.
- There is a proposal of certain policy options to leverage private sector resources for testing, hospitalisation, procurement of biomedical equipment and supplies, and a central intelligence system.

The proposal of following options to scale up testing capacity: The options can be: (can be think of case studies in ethics as how to solve particular problem)

- **Option 1:** An accredited private laboratory can be contracted to be co-located in a public health facility preferably in tier-II/tier-III public hospitals.
- States that already have private laboratories under a public–private partnership (PPP) contract can be asked to add COVID-19 tests.
- The government may procure test kits and the private sector could charge a service fee from the government.
- **Option 2:** Suspect cases can be issued vouchers for testing at any empanelled private laboratories.
- E-vouchers generated by tele-health call centres can subsequently be reimbursed by the government.
- **Option 3:** A mobile sample collection and testing facility can be operated by a private entity in high density clusters; it can also be used as a fever clinic. This arrangement can be under the hub-spoke principle.
- The cost of tests, key performance indicators and payment system should be worked out in the purchase contract.

Hospital infrastructure:

- Hospitalisation of COVID-19 cases cannot be restricted to hospitals in major cities alone.

www.insightsonindia.com
• **Improving the infrastructure and capacity** in tier II and tier III cities in collaboration with the private sector is critical.

• The latest announcement to **increase viability gap funding to 30%** is bound to ease the capex pressure for the private sector.

**Involving private sector: The options can be:** (can be think of case studies in ethics as how to solve particular problem)

• **Option 1:** A private contractor could be hired to refurbish an existing ward in a public hospital into an intensive care unit (ICU) ward with additional beds and equipment and handover the refurbished ward to the public authority.

• Under this turnkey project, an ICU ward could be made available within a short time.

• **Option 2:** In a scenario where the district hospital does not have staff to operate an ICU ward (option 1), a private hospital partner could be contracted to provide staff and operate the ICU ward.

• Alternatively, a private hospital partner can refurbish, operate and later transfer the ICU ward. Though the model takes more time, the operator can convert the facility into any other speciality ward in the future. The Centre can provide viability gap funding to the State to support the development of such a facility.

• **Option 3:** The government can refer patients to empanelled private COVID-19 hospitals, at a fixed package rate.

• This kind of strategic purchasing or insurance reimbursement (say under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana) requires clear policy directions, a robust referral system, agreement on tariffs, and a quick reimbursement mechanism.

• The current government tariffs do not seem to evoke interest from the private sector.

**Supply chain though alternative indigenous resources:**

• The upsurge in the demand for test kits, ventilators, and other biomedical supplies cannot be met by current manufacturers or supply chain sources. **Repurposing through alternate sources indigenously is the need of the hour.**

• A plethora of innovations and prototypes need government laboratories to test in quick time, approve and grant a licence for production which includes patenting.

• Besides facilitating **quick credit access** for manufacturing, the government may also give buy back guarantees and facilitate the supply chain channels.

**Need of the hour: Strong Central Intelligence System:**

1. An **IT system with artificial intelligence capability** should be the backbone of supporting all public and private sector efforts in combating COVID-19.

2. The **intelligence system** should seamlessly help in case identification, contact tracing, managing a tele-health centre, generating e-vouchers, authorising tests, managing referrals for isolation and hospitalisation in the private sector, payment, follow-up, etc.

3. IT behemoths in India should be roped in to configure an **integrated system to detect any unusual pattern in terms of an increase in numbers.**

4. The resources dedicated to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic have the potential to create a **good health infrastructure and strengthen health systems eventually.**

5. However, these initiatives **require quick policy formulation** followed by guidelines for contracting/purchasing, payments, defining standards, supply chain, strengthening procurement, etc.

6. A group of inter-disciplinary experts to **guide in institutionalising the private partnership** arrangements would go a long way.
Conclusion:

- The current strategies to involve the private sector in combating the infectious disease are shrouded in ambiguity.
- There are no clear policy guidelines to use private sector resources that could complement public sector efforts, and how the payments for their services made.
- Having been directed to suspend most of its services and be ready to manage COVID-19 cases (none forthcoming), the private sector is gasping for cash flows.
- Countries that have had a policy-based strategic relationship with the private sector seem to have performed well in controlling this pandemic.
- Instead of ‘arm twisting’ the private sector, there is a need to formulate a stable policy-based strategy to get the private sector on board.

6. Battle against Covid-19 needs to look beyond medical measures

Context:

- The COVID-19 situation in India is dangerously poised. It is imperative that the health workers forcefully articulate this reality. Not doing so amounts to failing in our bounden duty.
- Our purpose is not to recount what has gone wrong, but to figure out what needs to be done.

The immediate redressal of the challenges is important from the health point of view:

First,

1. Soaring hunger needs little elaboration in times of record unemployment and an economy that has all but tanked.
2. In the absence of proven technological medical tools against the virus, the body's innate immunity is the most reliable defence against the disease.
3. Immunity in the face of hunger is like a promise written in sand. India’s chances of staving off large-scale COVID deaths shall depend on how effectively we can deliver food to the hungry.
4. The princely relief of 5 kg rice or wheat and 1 kg of chana a month, for 80 million migrant families, as announced by the Union finance minister, is insufficient.

Second,

1. By slowing down the spread of disease, the lockdown was supposed to provide time for strengthening the healthcare facilities.
2. There is little evidence of this having happened. Claims have been made of arranging lakhs of COVID-19 beds, but these beds have been set aside from the existing hospital beds, thereby compromising the treatment of patients suffering from various other diseases.
Third,

1. There is the problem of untreated morbidity due to non-COVID diseases.
2. Even as we have lacked in effective planning to manage COVID cases, patients suffering from other diseases have been left to their own devices.
3. Taking the 2017 Global Burden of Disease data as a benchmark, within the first 40 days after detection of the first COVID case in India, 50,000 tuberculosis patients may have died.
4. Further, there are more than seven million cases of upper respiratory diseases and nearly five million cases of diarrhoea every day, besides other causes of mortality like ischaemic heart disease and strokes. Regular OPDs are still not functional in many public and private hospitals.

Fourth, There is data obscurity:

1. The importance of comprehensive data for an evidence-based and epidemiologically sound strategy can hardly be over emphasised.
2. But our governments seem to be fighting “data” to suit their convenience, forgetting that “absence of evidence is seldom evidence of absence”.
3. Even in cities like Delhi and Chennai, the system has failed to keep an accurate record of COVID deaths.

Fifth, the absence of a health manpower policy to deal with the pandemic:

1. Historically, there has been near-absence of “managerial physicians” equipped with the social, political and technical understanding of health problems in the Indian public health system.
2. This owes to the overall clinical orientation of our health services, implying an overbearing reliance on tools of biomedicine both for the prevention and treatment of diseases.
3. Consequently, the epidemiologists and social scientists have almost completely been marginalised in COVID policy formulation.
4. While sound clinical knowledge is indispensable for clinical management of patients, a grounded understanding of epidemiology and socioeconomic dynamics of the disease is foundational.

Further, the treatment of the elementary needs of health workers has been demeaning in many ways.

Many doctors have reportedly been served show cause notices, suspensions and even termination of services for simply demanding PPEs (personal protective equipment).

Reasonable demands like shorter durations of duty in COVID areas and regular rotation between COVID and non-COVID areas seem to have been ignored.

This has not only resulted in health workers falling ill and thereby being rendered out of active duty, it has also led to many losing their lives.

Actionable suggestions for consideration of the government to effectively counter the pandemic:

1. First, a necessary condition for formulating evidence-based and epidemiologically sound pandemic control strategy is the formation of a national committee of eminent and experienced epidemiologists, public health experts, clinicians, social scientists with background in health, representatives of pharma and medical equipment industry, biomedical scientists and engineers.
2. Consultations should be sought with eminent citizens, activists, and representatives of the working masses.
3. Second, the central and the state governments should take necessary steps to nationalise all private hospitals.
4. These facilities should be opened for one and all to provide free treatment. The doctors, nurses and other staff of these hospitals should be asked to mandatorily provide their services at remuneration as is applicable to similar staff in public hospitals.
5. Third, the publicly funded tertiary and secondary care hospitals in cities should be readied in all respects by improving sanitation and hygiene, provisioning of equipment, toning up of laboratory facilities, and recruiting the additional staff to meet the work load.
6. The social work departments of public hospitals should be strengthened to ensure proper guidance and facilitation of patients.
7. To finance all of this, the public expenditure on health should be immediately raised to 5 per cent of GDP.
8. Fourth, routine OPD and in-patient services should be resumed in all hospitals for non-COVID cases taking all necessary precautions to ensure the safety of the staff and the patients.
9. To reduce crowding at hospitals, outreach clinics should be organised in communities to treat minor illnesses; OPDs should be organised in the morning and evening shifts to reduce the crowding of patients; and, hand sanitisers and face masks should be made available to all patients and their attendants.
10. Fifth, PPEs should be provided to the healthcare staff in accordance with the requirements of their station of work. Shorter duty hours with rotation and periodic duty offs to relieve stress should be instituted for minimising the attrition of workforce.
11. Sixth, primary and secondary level health facilities ought to be made fully functional and frontline health workers need to be trained and fully geared up for disease surveillance work.
12. This onerous responsibility cannot simply be off-loaded onto them. It would require supportive supervision of senior members of the medical team including doctors.
13. Block-level inter-sectoral teams of departments responsible for peoples’ wellbeing need to reach out to the villages to explain the nature of the health emergency, diligently register their problems, and provide solutions.
14. Seventh, vigorous research on the epidemiological, clinical, social, economic, and political aspects of the pandemic should be undertaken for moderating the policy to a rapidly evolving pandemic situation.
15. Lastly, an epidemic or a pandemic is a far greater social, economic, and political phenomenon than merely a biomedical one because the ability of people to weather the effects of ill-health is mediated through these factors.
16. The enormous migrant crisis that we have witnessed is a testament to this cardinal truth.

Conclusion:

• It is time the government opens up its purse strings for the people.
• The legal framework of controlling pandemics, as laid down in the ‘Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, places the onus of controlling pandemics primarily at the door of the Central government.
• The Centre must not shift the responsibility of dealing with the pandemic on to the states.
• Rather than exclusive reliance on medical measures, it is imperative to alleviate the conditions which imperil the ability of individuals to resist infection and prevent transmission.
• Ensuring the “food security” and “livelihood security” of the people are foremost priorities among these. Many suggestions already exist in the public realm and more can be formulated in consultation with relevant experts.

7. Drug abuse amidst pandemic

Context:

• International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking is observed on June 26 every year to make people, especially the youths, aware about the harmful effects of drugs and highlight the dangers of drug abuse.
• The first International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking was observed in 1989. This year, the world will devote a full day calling out drug abuse and the modes to neutralise the systemic challenges which sustain the illegal drug mess, for the 31st time.
Introduction:

- More people are using drugs, and *more illicit drugs are available than ever*. The COVID-19 crisis has exposed our fragility, with health systems strained and social safety nets stretched to the limit.

- The *economic downturn caused by the global pandemic* may drive more people to substance abuse or leave them vulnerable to involvement in drug trafficking and related crime. We have been here before.

- In the global recession that followed the 2008 *financial crisis*, drug users sought out *cheaper synthetic substances* and patterns of use shifted towards injecting drugs, while governments reduced budgets to deal with drug-related problems.

Vulnerable and marginalised groups, youth, women and the poor have been harmed the most:

- Now facing the *gravest socio-economic crisis* in generations, governments cannot afford to ignore the dangers illicit drugs pose to public health and safety.

- All over the world, the risks and consequences of drug use are worsened by poverty, limited opportunities for education and jobs, stigma and social exclusion, which in turn helps to deepen inequalities, moving us further away from achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- While more people use drugs in developed countries than in developing countries, and wealthier segments of society have a higher prevalence of drug use, people who are socially and economically disadvantaged are more likely to develop drug use disorders.

- Only one out of eight people who need drug-related treatment receive it, according to the World Drug Report 2020.

- Some 35.6 million people suffer from drug use disorders globally.

Pandemic could put people at greater risks from illicit drug trade: UNODC:

1. The pandemic could change the future of the drug market for the worse, warns the annual United Nations report on drug use and intervention recommendations.
2. The *UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) World Drug Report 2020* published, shows that the health crisis and attendant economic downturn could lead to greater vulnerability among the poor and disadvantaged to drug use and the illicit drug trade.
3. The impact of the COVID-10 pandemic [on drug markets] is *unknown and hard to predict*, but it could be far-reaching, the UNODC cautions in its executive summary, which compares the pandemic’s potential impact to that of the 2008 financial crisis.
4. *COVID-19 is going to leave youths jobless*. If people are losing jobs, they are *more vulnerable to organized crime*, illicit trafficking, and being dragged into an illicit economy.
5. Because joblessness and poverty put a lot of pressure on people.
6. Published to coincide with *June 26, the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking*, the report is a wake-up call for many countries.
7. It urges them to continue to clamp down on the illicit drug trade within their borders and to continue providing prevention and rehabilitation programs during the pandemic.
8. According to UNODC data, the world had an estimated *269 million drug users in 2018*, or *5.3 percent of the global population* and an increase from the 210 million users recorded in 2009. Adolescents and young adults comprised the largest proportion of drug users.
9. On the supply side, COVID-19 restrictions on movement could force producers “to seek out new ways to manufacture drugs” and traffickers to find new routes and methods, said the UNODC.
10. Border and other restrictions linked to the pandemic have already caused shortages of drugs on the street, leading to increased prices and reduced purity.
11. Countries have already reported drug shortages, which could have negative health consequences for people with drug use disorders as they search for more harmful alternatives while treatment services are hobbled during lockdowns.
12. But the measures implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are having a mixed impact on drug trafficking in different regions.
13. In Southeast Asia, COVID-19 restrictions had less impact on drug trafficking, as the region’s most widely consumed drug, methamphetamine, was locally produced and used.

The affected segments and sections of society:

1. One out of three drug users are a woman but women represent only one out of five people in treatment.
2. People in prison settings, minorities, immigrants and displaced people also face barriers to treatment due to discrimination and stigma.
3. Around 269 million people used drugs in 2018, up 30% from 2009, with adolescents and young adults accounting for the largest share of users.
4. While the increase reflects population growth and other factors, the data nevertheless indicate that illicit drugs are more diverse, more potent and more available.
5. At the same time, more than 80% of the world’s population, mostly living in low- and middle-income countries, are deprived of access to controlled drugs for pain relief and other essential medical uses.
6. Governments have repeatedly pledged to work together to address the challenges posed by the world drug problem, in the SDGs, and most recently in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.
7. But data indicate that support has actually fallen over time, imperilling government commitment as well as regional and global coordination.
8. Development assistance dedicated to drug control fell by some 90% between 2000-2017. Funding to address drugs may be provided under other budget lines, but there is little evidence of international donor attention to this priority.
9. Assistance for alternative development creating viable, licit forms of income to enable poor farmers to stop growing illicit opium poppy or coca also remains very low.
10. Leaving no one behind requires greater investment in evidence-based prevention, as well as treatment and other services for drug use disorders, HIV, hepatitis C and other infections.
11. We need international cooperation to increase access to controlled drugs for medical purposes, while preventing diversion and abuse, and to strengthen law enforcement action to dismantle the transnational organised crime networks.

Conclusion:

• The main objective of celebrating International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking was to spread awareness against the rampant drug abuse in the society. In view of Covid-19 pandemic, an online campaign was launched to spread awareness.
• Banners, posters, and hoardings depicting ill effects of drug abuse would be shared online.
• SHOs, Suwidha centres and traffic staff was also directed to spread awareness among the people while maintaining social distancing.
• Health-centred, rights-based and gender-responsive approaches to drug use and related diseases deliver better public health outcomes.
• As we seek to overcome and recover from the COVID-19 crisis, our societies cannot risk compounding illicit drug threats through inattention and neglect.
• We need drug strategies addressing the country-level, as well as regional challenges.
8. A phantom called the Line of Actual Control

Context:

- The **India-China border** has been witnessing tensions over the past month, with incidents reported in at least four different locations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- On May 14, Indian Army Chief General said incidents at the Pangong lake in Ladakh on May 5 and at Naku La in Sikkim on May 9 had led to injuries, caused by "aggressive behaviour on both sides".
- Stand-offs at two other spots in **Ladakh, in the Galwan valley and in Demchok**, have reportedly escalated with a build-up of troops by both sides.
- At the heart of India’s and China’s continued inability to make meaningful progress on the boundary issue are **four agreements** signed in September 1993, November 1996, April 2005 and October 2013 between the two countries.
- Ironically, India and China keep referring to these agreements as the **bedrock of the vision of progress on the boundary question**.
- Unfortunately, these are deeply flawed agreements and make the quest for settlement of the boundary question at best a strategic illusion and at worst a cynical diplomatic parlour trick.

### Four agreements signed in 1993, 1996, 2005 and 2013: Deeply flawed agreements:

1. India and China share a boundary that stretches 3,488 km from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh. The border dispute still stands unresolved.
2. The border between India and China is not fully demarcated and the Line of Actual Control (LAC) is neither clarified nor confirmed by the two countries.
3. This leads to different perceptions of the LAC for the two sides while soldiers from either side try to patrol the area.
4. According to the **1993 agreement** (on the maintenance of peace and tranquility along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the India-China border areas**), “pending an ultimate solution”, “the two sides shall strictly respect and observe the LAC between the two sides. No activities of either side shall overstep the LAC”.

5. Further, **both the 1993 and the 1996 agreement** (on **confidence-building** measures in the military field along the LAC) say they “will reduce or limit their respective military forces within mutually agreed geographical zones along the LAC.”

6. This was to apply to major categories of armaments and cover various other aspects as well, including air intrusions “**within ten kilometres along the LAC**”.

**Changing Dynamics Along the LAC:**

- India has been upgrading its roads and military infrastructure around LAC. Last year, India completed the **Darbuk-Shyok-Daulet Beg Oldi (DBO) road** which connects Leh to the **Karakoram Pass**. India also maintains a key landing strip at DBO at 16,000 feet.

- India is rapidly catching up with China, who already enjoys an advantage in both terrain and infrastructure.

- In this context, the stand-off in Ladakh appears to have been triggered by China to **obstruct border infrastructure upgrading activity by India**.

- The strategy behind China’s transgressions across LAC (especially in Sikkim and Ladakh) may intend to signal India to reassess its **strategic convergence with the US**.

**Transgressions are an instrument of Chinese policy:**

- The political resultant of **these two approaches** gives us the situation we have today.

- There is a pattern of ‘normal’ transgression of the disputed boundary by both India and China to **ensure that the respective claims are protected**.

- Over and above this, there is a **pattern of creeping but consistent forward movement** by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) which not only fortifies new positions on its territory but also **transgresses into areas that we presumed were de facto ‘settled’, at least at the local level**.

- When Indian troops resist this and the **field-level mechanisms fail to resolve the matter**, the situation flares up and becomes a political challenge for the Indian government.

**Way Forward: Utilise ties with Southeast Asian nations:**

- India should have done this in 2010, but it’s still not too late. We must **immediately increase naval operations** east of the Malacca Straits and follow up with a **rapid tri-service expeditionary capability** in the **Indian Ocean Region**.

- This should grow into an expeditionary command. Instead of informal summits with Chinese President, Prime Minister Modi must meet the leaders of Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore and Timor-Leste.

- The defence relationships we have built with many Southeast Asian countries over the years can be quietly utilised.

- The South China Sea/Indian Ocean Region maritime domain presents us with the best options: they are far from our borders but not too far; we have the military capabilities to pursue the option; naval power is flexible; and the regional geopolitical context is favourable.

**Conclusion:**

- By disregarding the map, China is not bound in any way by New Delhi’s perception of the LAC, and therefore **does not have to limit liberty of action**. This was evident then and is especially evident now.

- Because the **nature of the terrain, deployment, and infrastructure and connectivity asymmetries** in the border areas continue to be so starkly in China’s favour that it is clear that the **Chinese are in no hurry to settle the boundary question**.
• They see that the cost to India in keeping this question open suits them more than settling the issue.
• It is in the interests of both India & China and global peace, to avoid any military confrontation and seek peaceful co-existence.
• Therefore, the immediate priority for both sides should be to use diplomatic channels and resolve the dispute peacefully.

9. Step by step: On India-China LAC stand-off

Context:
• India has firmly conveyed its demand to China for restoring the status quo as existed in April along the border during the senior military commander talks.
• The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the talks were held in a “cordial and positive” atmosphere, and both sides will continue the military and diplomatic engagements to “resolve the situation”.

What is the reason behind the India-China standoff?
• According to various news reports, the India-China face-off was triggered by India’s construction of a new observation point in the Finger area.
• China then sent a large number of troops which led to a scuffle near the Pangong Tso lake on the intervening night of May 5-6.
• India’s construction of a 60-meter bridge across the Galwan rivulet in Depsang Plains triggered another dispute.

Varying perception of LAC worsened conflict:
• China’s move to mobilize troops of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in the border areas to stop construction activities on the Indian side has been strongly opposed.
• The conflict was also fuelled by differences in the perception of the LAC in Eastern Ladakh.
• Reportedly, there are 12 areas of differences between the two countries in the perception of the LAC.
Restore status quo ante, don’t violate laid down agreements: India to China:

1. With official talks getting under way over the weekend, the month-long stand-off between Indian and Chinese soldiers along the LAC in Ladakh and Sikkim has entered a more considered phase.
2. However, statements from both sides that the talks will continue indicate a desire to resolve the situation.
3. India pressed for restoration of status quo ante, as on April and also cited how China was in violation of all agreements, protocols and laid down drills relating to maintaining ‘peace and tranquillity’ along the LAC and for conduct of soldiers.
4. Also New Delhi’s military officials asked the PLA to demolish all structures that it has built in disputed areas along the un-demarcated LAC. The stress was at the area called ‘finger 4’ north of the Pangong Tso – a 135 km glacial-melt lake.
5. The MEA and the MFA have also reiterated their commitment to abide by agreements between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping, which came after the last big stand-off, at Doklam in 2017, to not allow “differences to escalate into disputes”.
6. During the Doklam incident, even after a meeting between the leaders on the sidelines of a G-20 summit, it had taken several high-level engagements to ensure a drawdown to the 73-day stand-off.

India is sensitive to China but won’t allow change in any border sector:

1. At the 2019 informal summit between India and China at Mamallapuram, on the periphery of Chennai, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping decided to celebrate the 70th anniversary of bilateral relations in 2020 by deepening exchanges at all levels between the legislatures, political parties, cultural and youth organisations, even the militaries of the two countries.
2. The two leaders also decided to organise 70 activities, including a conference on a ship that would trace the historical connect between the two civilisations.
3. Still, with both leaders previously committing to not turning bilateral differences into disputes, it would be in the interest of both parties to withdraw to their respective base camps in Eastern Ladakh as there is no way that India is going to allow China to make unilateral changes in either of the sectors.
4. The PM Modi government will also not come under pressure from China on its legitimate border infrastructure upgrade, which is happening well within its own territory.
5. After 21 rounds of hardly productive Special Representative Dialogue on the resolution of the boundary issue, it is time that the two sides at least exchange maps of the western and eastern sector so that the two armies know each other’s positions on the ground.
6. The two leaders need to keep their communication channels open as both their bureaucracies and militaries carry a huge historical baggage and cannot think beyond protecting their silos.
7. The direct channel will assume further importance as the succession of the Dalai Lama is on the horizon with China expected to come up with its own candidate as it did in the case of the Panchen Lama.
8. The two most-populated nations in the world, the countries with the first and second largest armies in the world, cannot be adversaries forever.

Stand-off can be resolved quickly through talks:

1. Given the differences between the situation now and previous incidents, it would be naive to assume that this stand-off can be resolved quickly through talks.
2. The stand-off is at more than one location, including the Finger areas of the Pangong Tso, Galwan Valley and Gogra post in Ladakh and the Naku La pass in Sikkim, and it will require careful study to decide how to de-induct soldiers.
3. Furthermore, a “status quo ante” will require that Chinese soldiers vacate areas where they have dug in for weeks now.
4. Nothing short of their full withdrawal should satisfy India, which means that more than talks on the ground and by diplomats, there is a need for strong political direction from Beijing to the PLA to do that.
5. Otherwise, India must prepare for a long-drawn stand-off, and manoeuvres aimed at ensuring China’s pull back.
6. In addition, even as the government tries to analyse the reasons for China’s aggressive action, it must introspect on signals it misread and warnings that went unheeded across its strategic command.
7. If such skirmishes normally follow the melting of snowlines, for example, then why was the LAC not adequately manned in April-May?
8. Serious notice should have been taken of China’s protests on the redrawing of the Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh maps, as well as the impact of the Home Minister’s vow in Parliament to “take back” Aksai Chin.

Conclusion:
- The Defence Minister has said that Chinese troops arrived in “heavy numbers” and therefore the government must also study what intelligence was received ahead of such movement, and when action was taken upon it.
- Finally, why has the stand-off emerged at all, after the intense summit-level conversations in Wuhan and Mamallapuram to discuss building trust at the LAC?
- Given the government’s silence on events thus far, it is unlikely that it will put out answers to these questions publicly, but in any event, they must be sought.

10. Remaining nonaligned is good advice

Context:
- For weeks, the India-China stand-off dominated newspaper headlines, warning about the possibility of a major conflict along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Ladakh and Sikkim sectors.
- The deaths of 20 soldiers in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh, where Indian and Chinese forces are facing off, is the first such incident in 45 years.
- This escalation “underlines the scale of the problem and the challenge ahead” for New Delhi in its dealings with Beijing.
- China has clearly twisted the crisis into a strategic opportunity by taking advantage of the geo-political distraction.
- Confirmed facts about incursions during May are that Chinese forces came in sizeable numbers and crossed the un-demarcated LAC at quite a few points in the Ladakh and Sikkim sectors.
- These were in the vicinity of Pangong Tso (Lake), the Galwan Valley, the Hot Springs-Gogra area (all in Ladakh), and at Naku La in the Sikkim sector.
- Talks at the level of military commanders, from lieutenant generals to brigadiers and lower formations, have produced, to repeat the official jargon, a “partial disengagement”.
- That China is becoming more belligerent across strategic theatres, challenging the status quo, is supported by multiple examples from the South China Sea.
- For the Government of India, this is a moment to guard against complacency, fostered by decades of nimble diplomacy that led to equilibrium, however precarious, on the border issue with China.
- It was complacency, fostered by the 1999 bus ride to Lahore, that perhaps led to the Kargil conflict.

Bone of contention and military presence between China and India:

1. Both sides have also agreed, according to the same set of officials, to handle the situation “in line with the agreement” that had been reached.
2. The blandness of the statements conceals many a truth. This time, it would appear, the Chinese are here to stay in places such as the Galwan Valley.
3. It is also unclear, as of now, whether the Chinese would withdraw from Pangong Tso, any time soon. Restoration of the status quo ante which existed in mid-April is thus nowhere on the horizon.
4. Another bone of contention also seems unlikely to be resolved for quite some time, viz., China’s insistence that India stop road construction in the border area on the ground that it is taking place in Chinese territory, which India contests, insisting that it is taking place within Indian territory.

5. Public attention has been deflected from China’s sizeable military presence along the LAC, (comprising armoured vehicles, artillery units and infantry combat vehicles in far larger numbers than at any time in recent years).

6. The partial disengagement may provide many in India an opportunity to claim that China “blinked” while India showed “steely resolve”. This is not, however, the time for political grandstanding. There is a great deal at stake.

According to China: The American orbit and Geopolitical factors affecting China:

1. If we were to examine geopolitical factors, it is no secret that while India professes to be non-aligned, it is increasingly perceived as having shifted towards the American orbit of influence.

2. India’s United States tilt is perhaps most pronounced in the domain of U.S.-China relations.

3. Quite a few instances could be highlighted to confirm the perception that India tends to side with the U.S. and against China whenever there is a conflict of interest between the two.

4. An evident degree of geopolitical convergence also exists between the U.S. and India in the Indo-Pacific, again directed against China.

5. India is today a member of the Quad (the U.S., Japan, Australia and India) which has a definite anti-China connotation.

6. S. President Donald Trump’s latest ploy of redesigning the G-7, including in it countries such as India (India has conveyed its acceptance), but excluding China, provides China yet another instance of India and China being in opposite camps.

7. Coming next to bilateral relations, and notwithstanding the public bonhomie at the level of Mr. Xi and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, relations between the two countries have been steadily deteriorating.
8. India is almost the last holdout in Asia against China’s Belt Road Initiative (BRI). India also loses no opportunity to declaim against the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
9. China further views India’s assertions regarding Gilgit-Baltistan, as an implicit attack on the CPEC, China’s flagship programme.
10. More recently, India was one of the earliest countries to put curbs and restrictions on Chinese foreign direct investment.
11. Adding to this, is the rising crescendo of anti-China propaganda within India. The Global Times has implied in one of its editorial pieces recently, that China’s friendly policy towards India should be reciprocated, and that India “should not be fooled by Washington”.
12. On the eve of the recent high-level border talks between top military leaders, China again made an elliptical reference to the need for India to maintain equidistance between the U.S. and China.

More weightier reasons:

- India needs to undertake a detailed analysis of recent events to find proper answers to many vexed questions.
- To merely affirm that India’s decision to strengthen its border infrastructure was the main trigger for the recent show of strength by China, would be simplistic.
- Both India and China have been strengthening their border infrastructure in recent years, and while the strengthening of the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi road may have angered the Chinese, to ascribe China’s recent show of strength to this would be misplaced.
- A demonstration of military strength by China, merely because India was improving its border infrastructure, would fall into this category.
- Nor does this action fit in with western assertions that such steps demonstrate China’s newly assertive post-pandemic foreign policy.
- There have to be far weightier reasons for China’s actions, and India needs to do a deep dive to discern whether there is a method behind China’s actions.
- For instance, the existence of certain geopolitical factors, an increase in bilateral tensions between India and China, economic pressures, apart from China’s internal dynamics.
- China’s action clearly belies the code of conduct drawn up at the Wuhan (China) and Mamallapuram (Tamil Nadu) summits by the leaders of India and China, and the recent incursions do convey the imprimatur of the top Chinese leadership.

China’s internal dynamics can also be the prominent reason:

1. One should also not ignore the impact of internal pressures that have been generated within China in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in part due to other factors.
2. Xi has, no doubt, accumulated more power than any other Chinese Communist leader since Mao, but there are reports of growing opposition within party ranks to some of his policies, including the BRI.
3. As the full impact of the most serious health crisis that China has faced since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 becomes evident, and alongside this the Chinese economic miracle is also beginning to lose steam, the current Chinese leadership is faced with a unique crisis.
4. The coupling of political and economic tensions has greatly aggravated pressures on Mr. Xi, and the situation could become still more fragile, given the rising tide of anti-China sentiment the world over.
5. How the present crop of Chinese leaders led by Mr. Xi would react to this situation, remains to be seen.

Conclusion:

- These are dangerous times, more so for countries in China’s vicinity, and specially India.
- India is being increasingly projected as an alternative model to China, and being co-opted into a wider anti-China alliance which China clearly perceives as provocation.
• We cannot ignore or forget the circumstances that led to the unfortunate India-China war of 1962.
• Faced with the disaster of the Great Leap Forward, and increasing isolation globally (with even Soviet leaders like Nikita Khrushchev trading barbs), Mao chose to strike at India rather than confront Russia or the West.
• A single misstep could lead to a wider conflagration, which both sides must avoid.
• This is not the time for India to be seen as the front end of a belligerent coalition of forces seeking to put China in its place even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, now seems to be joining the anti-China bandwagon under prodding from the U.S.
• India has consistently followed a different policy in the past, and it is advisable that it remains truly non-aligned and not become part of any coalition that would not be in India’s long-term interest.

11. Building trust: On India-Pakistan ties

Context:
• Two Indian nationals, employed as drivers in the Indian High Commission in Islamabad, went missing for several hours on Monday, in a suspected case of abduction by local security agencies.
• However, later released by authorities in Pakistan after India lodged a strong protest.
• Upon the release, Pakistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed in a note that both the drivers were involved in a traffic accident in the morning and were arrested.
• The initial police report had claimed that the duo was involved in fake currency circulation though the issue remains unconfirmed by the Pakistan foreign office.

Pakistan staffers expelled:
• The incident comes a fortnight after India expelled two employees of the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi on espionage charges.
• They were accused of behaviour “incompatible with their status as members of a diplomatic mission” and were asked to leave India within 24 hours.
• Since the expulsion, the Indian mission in Pakistan has witnessed persistent harassment of diplomats and non-diplomatic staff.
• The daily harassment had become serious and India had sent a note verbale to ensure its officials are treated according to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961 and the Code of Conduct of 1992 that ensures safety of Indian and Pakistani diplomats during hostile exchanges.
In addition, Ceasefire violations have become a everyday occurrence:

1. The shelling and the retaliations along the Line of Control with Pakistan are a matter of consternation, because it has been allowed to go on so long as to become an everyday occurrence.
2. The unfortunate death of Sepoy, and the airlifting of two other soldiers, and Sepoy to the Command Hospital in Udampur because of injuries due to shelling in Poonch sector are the latest grim reminders of this phenomenon.
3. All of May the Pir Panjal range, which fronts the Kashmir Valley, has seen mortar and small arms firing.
4. This has been a worrying trend, as when the shells reach deeper they fall in residential areas, in villages such as Churunda and Silikote.
5. When shells begin raining, villagers panic, leave their homes and run further, to temporary shelters.
6. This additional disruption to life in the aftermath of the dilution of Article 370 last August and the COVID-19 lockdown, is something that should be addressed with urgency.
7. Shelling should not be allowed to be a regular occurrence. Ceasefire with Pakistan along the Line of Control is obviously not working, and the government needs to build bomb shelters for civilians until normalcy returns.

Pakistan firing in Poonch kills soldier:

- There has been heavy exchange of fire at the Line of Control (LoC) after ceasefire violations in several sectors by Pakistan, within hours of the deadly encounter at Handwara that claimed the lives of four soldiers and a J&K policeman.
- Army sources said the soldiers posted along the LoC are inflicting “punishment” for the ceasefire violations by Pakistan at Balakote and Manakote in Poonch, Keri and Tarkundi in Rajouri, Pallanwala in Akhnoor and Uri in Baramullah.
- Ceasefire violations have taken place at five locations in Jammu and one in Kashmir.
- Sources said that the Army is responding with pin-point firing targeting the outposts and other establishments of the Pakistani Army and the launchpads of terrorists.
- The commanders along the LoC have been told to respond strongly to ceasefire violations.

High tension diplomacy between the two countries:

- The abduction of the drivers along with their vehicles, apparent physical assault and charging them with crimes, is part of the high-tension diplomacy between the two countries, where the missions located in the respective national capitals often bear the brunt of hostilities.
- Despite the talk of treating diplomats according to international conventions, diplomats often run the risk of harassment.

Conclusion:

- Unfortunately, aspects of relations with Pakistan in other spheres are in poor repair as well.
- The two personnel from the Indian mission in Islamabad going suddenly missing for a while points to further breakdown in relations.
- It makes evident that India and Pakistan are unable even to adhere to reciprocal protocols regarding staff posted in the missions.
- Whether or not it is a tit-for-tat reaction for India having expelled two Pakistan High Commission officials, on charges of espionage, India must take steps to ensure its diplomatic personnel are spared such harassment, which is always present and episodically on show.
- But with New Delhi studiously avoiding any serious engagement, is the staffing in Pakistan commensurate with the vastly shrunk bilateral relations?
• As the pandemic rages, with travel curbs and reduced face-to-face opportunities, it might be prudent to temporarily maintain only essential mission staff in Pakistan till India is able to obtain trust and stability in the ties.

12. At RIC grouping, Jaishankar sends out cryptic message to China

Context:
• Speaking in the “virtual” presence of his Chinese counterpart at a “Special” Russia-India-China (RIC) trilateral meet at the foreign ministerial level through video-conference, External Affairs Minister, in a veiled dig at China, said “leading voices” of the world must “respect international law and recognise the legitimate interests of partners”.

Historical injustice has stood uncorrected for the last 75 years:
• Pressing India’s claims to permanent membership of the UNSC in an oblique manner, the EAM said India’s contributions at the time of the end of the second world war had not been duly recognised by the victors of that time and that “historical injustice” had then been meted out to India which should now be corrected.
• Speaking at the “Special” RIC meet to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the conclusion of the Second World War as well as the foundation of the United Nations, EAM minister, “This Special Meeting reiterates our belief in the time-tested principles of international relations.
• But the challenge today is not just one of concepts and norms, but equally of their practice.
• The leading voices of the world must be exemplars in every way. Respecting international law, recognizing the legitimate interests of partners, supporting multilateralism and promoting common good are the only way of building a durable world order.”

About Russia-India-China (RIC):
• RIC came together as a strategic triangle in the late 1990s under the mentorship of Yevgeny Primakov as “a counterbalance to the Western alliance.”
• The Russian goal was the “end[ing] its foreign policy guided by the US,” and rebuilding old partnerships with countries like India nurturing relatively newer friendships such as with China.
• While this may have fitted at least partially with India’s goals in those years, it is unclear if this fits with Indian objectives now as New Delhi increases its strategic engagements with the United States and American allies.
• Indeed, India’s growing strategic partnership with the United States, Japan, and Australia conflicts with the RIC’s goals and objectives of seeking to undermine Washington’s role in the Indo-Pacific.
• Washington’s support to India on a number of critical issues, demonstrated most recently when China attempted to raise the Kashmir issue at the UN Security Council, is important.
• In fact, it is the rise of China that is at the front and center of many of India’s strategic engagements.
Recognising the legitimate interests of partners:

- The challenge today is not just one of concepts and norms, but equally of their practice. The leading voices of the world must be exemplars in every way.
- Respecting international law, recognising the legitimate interests of partners, supporting multilateralism and promoting common good are the only way of building a durable world order.
- A violent face-off between Indian and Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh’s Galwan Valley on June 15 had left 20 Indian soldiers dead – the country’s first fatalities in a confrontation along the contested Line of Actual Control (LAC) in 45 years.
- China has repeatedly sought to blame India for the tensions, saying Indian troops had crossed to the Chinese side of the LAC.
- It has also claimed sovereignty over the Galwan Valley in Ladakh, though the region has been under India’s control for decades.

Need to respect ethos of international law:

1. According to reports, the meeting will possibly discuss the recently-concluded Afghanistan peace deal, the return of the Quad (quadrilateral security dialogue involving Australia, India, Japan and the United States), the Indo-Pacific concept and the implications of the end of the INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces) Treaty for the region.
2. The last RIC leaders meeting took place on the sidelines of the G-20 Summit in Osaka in July 2019, just after another trilateral between three democracies – Japan, America, and India (JAI).
3. India has traditionally avoided taking sides in international politics, especially between the great powers, preferring its traditional nonalignment.
4. But China’s rather hostile attitude towards India in recent years is increasingly forcing Indian decisionmakers to confront what China’s growing power has come to mean for India.
5. The 72-day long Doklam crisis, China’s repeated actions at the United Nations, and other forums appears to demonstrate that China is aggressive and unfriendly towards India.
6. This makes it difficult to see how engagements through platforms such as RIC, the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS), or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) are going to alter the basic conflictual nature of relations between India and China.
7. Overall, India’s strategic goals appear to be increasingly incongruent with that of Russia and China.
8. As another case in point, even as the three foreign ministers will be meeting to discuss the Afghan peace deal, Moscow did not invite India to the recent meeting it hosted on Afghanistan.
9. For all the rhetoric on finding a regional solution to Afghanistan, India has been kept out of such deliberations at the behest possibly of China and Pakistan.
10. While there is merit to India engaging both Russia and China, it cannot mask the fact that there are growing tensions within the RIC grouping.

Conclusion:

- Thanking time-tested Russia for convening the meeting, the EAM added, “When the victors met to fashion the ensuing global order, the political circumstances of that era did not give India due recognition.
- This historical injustice has stood uncorrected for the last 75 years, even as the world has changed.
- Pressing India’s claims, Jaishankar said, But beyond history, international affairs must also come to terms with contemporary reality.
- The United Nations began with 50 members; today it has 193. Surely, its decision making cannot continue to be in denial of this fact.
- We, the RIC countries, have been active participants in shaping the global agenda. It is India’s hope that we will also now converge on the value of reformed multilateralism.
• Therefore, on this momentous occasion, it is important for the world to realize both the contribution that India made and the need to rectify the past.

13. Downing the shutters: On H1-B visa halt

Context:
• The White House has made a proclamation restricting the issuance of non-immigrant work visas across the board, purportedly to clamp down on American jobs going to foreign workers, a consistent policy priority of the Donald Trump administration.

H1-B visas among those suspended till year end:
• The broad-brush order includes the H-1B visa for skilled workers, which is widely garnered by Indian nationals, the H-2B visa issued to seasonal workers in the landscaping and hospitality industries, the L-1 visa for intra-company transfers, and the J-1 visa for students on work-study summer programmes.
• It will also impact the H-4 visa for dependents of H-1B visa holders. The proclamation will enter into force on June 24 and be applicable until the end of the calendar year, which notably includes the November 3 presidential election.
• It is intended as a follow-on order reducing the number of foreigners entering the U.S., as it comes on the back of the 60-day halt in legal migration that began on April 23.

What is the H-1B visa programme?
• It is a non-immigrant visa programme for highly skilled foreign workers. Indians are the largest beneficiaries of the programme, getting more than 70 per cent of the 85,000 given out annually by the United States.
• The H-1B is the largest guest worker programme in the United States, and an important channel for high-skilled immigrants to get into the country.
• It allows companies to employ foreign workers in occupations that require technical expertise in areas that are difficult to fill. The H-1B programme has benefitted the tech industry enormously.

Tech giants slam visa curbs:
1. The order will impact both IT firms like TCS, Cognizant and Infosys as well as big tech companies like Google, Apple, Amazon and Facebook, who use the H-1B programme for their staffing needs. Each year, the U.S. issues 85,000 new H-1Bs, most of which go to Indians.
2. Those whose H-1B visas become operational in the next U.S. fiscal year — October 1, 2020 will be severely impacted.
3. The date is just about a month before the U.S. elections Mr. Trump has been selling his policies to curb legal migration as efforts to save American jobs and he is expected to use executive order as a campaigning point with his base.
4. While the May [unemployment] rate of 13.3% reflects a marked decline from April, millions of Americans remain out of work.
5. The order’s impact would save 5,25,000 American jobs by the end of this year, a senior administration official told reporters.

Dreams Disrupted
About 70% of H-1B visas are issued to Indians, mainly workers of US tech firms
About 68% of the 275,000 H-1B applications for FY2021 were for Indian nationals
During Feb-April 2020, over 20 million US workers lost jobs in industries which would hire H-1B and L-1 workers
Suspension to hit H-1B and L-1 workers and their dependents
6. Nevertheless, unemployment rates in ‘computer occupations’ was just 2.5% in May 2020, according to Bureau of Labour Statistics analysed by the National Foundation for American Policy, a non-partisan research organisation.

7. While a broad swathe of workers is likely to be affected by the latest pause in visa processing, the latest restrictions will not apply to visa-holders who are already within the U.S., or those who are outside it and have already been issued valid visas.

8. The reasoning offered by the White House is that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has “significantly disrupted Americans’ livelihoods,” to the extent that the overall unemployment rate in the country nearly quadrupled between February and May 2020 to 13.3%.

How is H-1B visa important to India?

- **Majority H-1B visa holder:** India has been the only country that takes 70 per cent of the 85,000 H-1B visas applied annually. The H-1B visa is crucial for the IT sector in India.

- **IT professionals:** The technology companies of US depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. Hence, a cancellation of H-1B visas will most adversely affect Indian IT professionals.

- **Talent flow:** The US should not obstruct the flow of talent from India as it is an important part of the economic cooperation and almost acts as a strategic bridge between the two countries, and is important for the bilateral ties.

Present system criticised by Immigration hardliners:

- President Trump and immigration hardliners argue that the present system is being abused to bring foreign workers on low wages to displace Americans, instead of attracting the really talented as its original mandate.

- The Trump administration also points towards a “loophole” in the system that allowed companies to hire foreign workers and then “domestically outsource” them to other companies, replacing their American workers.

- They do so by bypassing a rule prohibiting the hiring of a foreign worker if it directly led to the firing of an American worker.

- Outsourcing through a third-party personnel system is critical to the business model of Indian IT services companies.

Conclusion:

- The Trump administration will also seek to plug a “loophole” in the existing H-1B programme that allowed companies to hire foreign workers and then “domestically outsource” them to other companies, replacing their American workers.

- They do so by bypassing a rule prohibiting the hiring of a foreign worker if it directly led to the firing of an American worker.

- Outsourcing through a third-party system is critical to the business model of Indian IT services companies.

- There is little doubt that the policies of the Trump White House are likely to genuflect to the broader requirements of the 2020 presidential campaign, one of which is a sharp focus on “America First,” or in this case the need to project aggressive action against American jobs allegedly being lost to foreign workers.
14. At the high table: On India’s U.N. Security Council win

Context:

- India has been elected to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as a non-permanent member from the Asia-Pacific category.
- India has been elected as one of the non-permanent members to the UNSC with an overwhelming majority of 184 votes out of 192, where the minimum requirement was 128.
- India should work with all member countries to promote global peace, security, resilience and equity.

About United Nations Security Council:

1. The UNSC is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.
2. Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions.
3. It is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.
4. The Security Council consists of fifteen members. Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, and the United States—serve as the body’s five permanent members.
5. These permanent members can veto any substantive Security Council resolution, including those on the admission of new member states or candidates for Secretary-General.

6. The Security Council also has **10 non-permanent members**, elected on a regional basis to serve two-year terms. The body’s presidency rotates monthly among its members.

**UNSC Non-permanent membership: commitment to Multilateralism and Reforms:**

- India’s election to the U.N. Security Council as a **non-permanent member** is a significant diplomatic victory for the country, which has long been pushing for reforms at global institutions.

- The victory wasn’t unexpected as India was the only contestant for the Asia Pacific seat. But the **Indian foreign policy** establishment took no chances as the election would be **done by secret ballot** at the UN General Assembly and two-thirds of the votes were needed for victory.

- **Mexico, Norway and Ireland** were also elected as non-permanent members.

- While Mexico won the Latin American seat uncontested, Norway and Ireland emerged victorious from a three-way contest for the Western Europe and Others Group seat. Canada failed to win enough votes in this group. Neither Kenya nor Djibouti, which were contesting the seat from Africa, won a two-thirds majority.

- India sought the **support of member countries** by highlighting its **commitment to multilateralism and reforms**.

**India’s overall objective ahead in its two year term:**

1. Ahead of the vote, India had launched a **campaign brochure** which highlighted its **demand for transparency** in mandates for **UN peacekeeping missions** and push for the India-led **Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism**, and called for joint efforts for UN reform and expansion of the Security Council.

2. A “**new orientation for a reformed multilateral system**” (NORMS), as laid out by External Affairs Minister, would be India’s overall objective during the two-year tenure that will begin next year.

3. Achieving this would depend on how India will conduct diplomacy in the global body, **build alliances and raise issues** that go beyond the interests of the big five.

4. India has long been of the view that the structure of the UN Security Council doesn’t reflect the realities of the 21st century.

5. It has also got increasing support from member countries for its push for reforms. But the five permanent members of the Security Council have resisted these attempts.

6. The **COVID-19 pandemic** has already **shaken up the global order** and sharpened the rivalry between the U.S. and China. It has also **opened up fresh debates on strengthening multilateralism and multilateral institutions**.

**UNSC Working: most non-transparent and non-consultative way:**

1. In recent decades, **India has been very vocal in demanding for a permanent seat in UNSC**.

2. It is also part of G-4, a **group of 4 nations (India, Brazil, Germany and Japan)** to lobby for permanent positions on the UNSC or at least to make the council more representative.

3. Many member-states have been pledging support for our aspiration for permanent membership. Several P-5 countries have also announced their support. At present, China is the only P-5 member opposing India’s bid.

4. **G-4 wants to expand the permanent seats in the UNSC to 10** to include 6 new members G-4 nations apart from one seat to Africa and one seat to Arabs.

5. While the **expansion of the Security Council** has been **hotly debated** across the world, debate on the working methods of the Council, an equally important aspect of reform to many member states, has attracted less attention.

6. It is true that UNSC has been functioning in the **most non-transparent and non-consultative way**.
7. The undemocratic nature of UNSC within the supposedly democratic UN has compromised the overall credibility of the United Nations.

By any calculus, India qualifies for UNSC Permanent membership:

- India in many ways is a sui generis country. It’s a country of a billion-plus, it’s a country which is a democracy, perhaps the only example in history of a billion-plus people working together in a democratic framework.
- We will bring to it those values and strengths of being able to work cohesively among disparate entities.
- One of the biggest issues that will confront all multilateral organisations and certainly the security council will be issues which are beyond borders.
- Issues of the global commons, whether it is in cases of public health as we are now seeing in the current pandemic, but other issues, for example, cyber [issues]. There are no regulatory mechanisms or no rules on that, and that’s another.
- A third one is issues of high seas. Again, beyond your EEZ [exclusive economic zone], there is very limited understanding of what states can do and what states can’t do.
- Ungoverned spaces lead to opportunities for those who are inimical to global governance to breed, whether it is in states or it is beyond state boundaries, this has been the experience, and therefore, we as a country would like to focus on these things.
- Another area of interest would obviously be technology with a human touch. Increasingly, resilience of human beings is an important factor that all of us have been confronted with where there are disasters, can we have a more humane approach to these, etc.

Conclusion:

- In this context, the challenges before India are many. The Security Council is one of the most important multilateral decision-making bodies where the contours of global geopolitics are often drawn.
- India should avoid the temptation of taking sides at a time when the Security Council is getting more and more polarised.
- To serve its interests and push for its agenda of multilateralism and reforms, India should adopt value-based positions that are not transactional, aspire for the leadership of the non-permanent members of the Council and be the voice of the weaker nations.
1. What is the problem that monetisation is trying to solve?

Context:

- Recently, finance minister said that she is keeping her options open on monetisation of the deficit by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- How the government and the RBI decide on this will have significant implications for India’s economic prospects in the short-term, and indeed in the long-term.
- The International Monetary Fund has christened the ongoing economic crisis due to Covid-19 as “The Great Lockdown” and reckons it to be the worst recession that the world would have faced since the Great Depression that happened in the first half of the 20th Century.
- The total estimated loss to global economic growth is pegged at $9 trillion — more than three times India’s GDP.
- However, while the rest of the world is certain to contract, India is hoping to be one of the few countries that expand their overall GDP, regardless of how small that increase may be.

First off, two clarifications:

- Monetisation of the deficit does not mean the government is getting free money from the RBI.
- If one works through the combined balance sheet of the government and the RBI, it will turn out that the government does not get a free lunch, but it does get a heavily subsidised lunch.
- That subsidy is forced out of the banks. And, as in the case of all invisible subsidies, they don’t even know.
- Second, it is not as if the RBI is not monetising the deficit now; it is doing so, but indirectly by buying government bonds in the secondary market through what are called open market operations (OMOs).
- Note that both monetisation and OMOs involve printing of money by the RBI.
- But there are important differences between the two options that make shifting over to monetisation a non-trivial decision.

RBI operate through only OMO route: Liquidity Instrument:

To understand the issue, some historical context will help.

1. In the pre-reform era, the RBI used to directly monetise the government’s deficit almost automatically.
2. That practice ended in 1997 with a landmark agreement between the government and the RBI.
3. It was agreed that henceforth, the RBI would operate only in the secondary market through the OMO route.
4. The implied understanding also was that the RBI would use the OMO route not so much to support government borrowing but as a **liquidity instrument** to manage the balance between the policy objectives of supporting growth, checking inflation and preserving financial stability.

**Landmark agreement between the government and the RBI:**

In hindsight, the outcomes of that agreement were historic.

1. Since the government started borrowing in the open market, interest rates went up which incentivised saving and thereby spurred investment and growth.
2. Also, the interest rate that the government commanded in the open market acted as a **critical market signal of fiscal sustainability**.
3. Importantly, the agreement shifted control over money supply, and hence over inflation, from the government’s fiscal policy to the RBI’s monetary policy.
4. The India growth story that unfolded in the years before the global financial crisis in 2008 when the economy clocked growth rates in the range of 9 per cent was at least in part a consequence of the high savings rate and low inflation which in turn were a consequence of this agreement.
5. The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act as amended in 2017 contains an **escape clause which permits monetisation of the deficit under special circumstances**.
6. The case is made on the grounds that there just aren’t enough savings in the economy to finance government borrowing of such a large size. Bond yields would spike so high that **financial stability will be threatened**.
7. The RBI must therefore step in and finance the government directly to prevent this from happening.
8. Through its OMOs, the RBI has injected such an extraordinary amount of **systemic liquidity** that bond yields are still relatively soft.

**Other side of Monetisation is, it will lead to Inflation:**

Both monetisation and OMOs involve **expansion of money supply** which can **potentially stoke inflation**.

- If so, why should we be so wary of monetisation?
- Because although they are both potentially inflationary, the inflation risk they carry is different. OMOs are a monetary policy tool with the RBI in the driver’s seat, **deciding on how much liquidity to inject and when**.
- In contrast, monetisation is, and is seen, as a way of financing the fiscal deficit with the quantum and timing of money supply determined by the government’s borrowing rather than the RBI’s monetary policy.

**What is the problem that monetisation is trying to solve?**

- There are cases when monetisation despite its costs is inevitable.
- If the government cannot finance its deficit at reasonable rates, then it really doesn’t have much choice.
- But right now, it is able to borrow at around the same rate as inflation, implying a real rate (at current inflation) of 0 per cent.

**Recently, RBI cuts Interest rates: Why the cut in rates?**

- The interest rates have been on a decline since the global growth rate projections have been brought down following the spread of coronavirus Pandemic.
- The Reserve Bank of India first announced a 75 basis point cut in repo rate on March 27, 2020 to 4.4 per cent and then again announced a cut in repo rate by 40 basis points to 4 per cent on May 22.
- A cut in repo rates not only reduces the rate at which commercial banks borrow from RBI but also leads to a cut in deposit and lending rates for banks.
The RBIs move to cut in repo rate has been to push credit growth and demand in the economy in a bid to augur growth in the economy.

**Way Ahead:**

✓ The author is suggesting that **government should not borrow directly from RBI.**

✓ The logic which is he giving is right now the **banks are flush with liquidity** (savings from the public and liquidity push by RBI) and the **interest rate is less** in the economy and **yield is also less in the economy** (remember yield is directly proportional to interest rate in economy).

✓ Government can easily finance its deficit from the market. If the interest rate becomes so high that borrowing from the market becomes unsustainable and there is less savings in the banks then Government can think of borrowing from the RBI directly and that **again should be one-time measure.**

**Conclusion:**

• If RBI is seen as losing control over monetary policy, it will raise **concerns about inflation.** That can be a more serious problem than it seems.

• **India is inflation prone.** Note that after the global financial crisis when inflation “died” everywhere, we were hit with a high and stubborn bout of inflation.

• In hindsight, it is clear that the RBI, failed to tighten policy in good time.

• Since then we have embraced a monetary policy framework and the **RBI has earned credibility for delivering on inflation within the target.** Forsaking that credibility can be costly.

**2. Who’s afraid of monetisation of the deficit?**

**Context: Reviving growth:**

• As the government began to wrestle with the severe downturn caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic, some economic pundits urged the **government to go out and spend without worrying about the increase in public debt.**

• They said the rating agencies would understand that these are unusual times.

• If they did not and chose to downgrade India, **we should not lose too much sleep over it.**

**Rating and fundamentals by the rating agencies:**

• The decision of the rating agency, Moody’s, to **downgrade India from Baa2 to Baa3** should come as a rude awakening.

• The present rating is just one notch above the ‘junk’ category. Moody’s has also retained its negative outlook on India, which **suggests that a further downgrade is more likely than an upgrade.**

• The rationale given by Moody’s should especially make people sit up. The downgrade, Moody’s says, has **not factored in the economic impact of the pandemic.**

• It has to do with **India’s fundamentals before the onset of the pandemic** and the extended lockdown with which India responded.

• The message should be clear enough. Any further deterioration in the fundamentals from now on will push India into ‘junk’ status.

**Foreign Institutional Investors largely depends on various rating agencies:**

• Institutional investors are **largely bound by covenants** that require them to exit an economy that falls below investment grade.
• If India is downgraded to junk status, foreign institutional investors, or FIIs, will flee in droves. The stock and bond markets will take a severe beating.

• The rupee will depreciate hugely and the central bank will have its hands full trying to stave off a foreign exchange crisis. That is the last thing we need at the moment.

About inflation control:

• **OMO** is said to be a *lesser evil* than direct monetisation because the former is a ‘temporary’ expansion in the central bank’s balance sheet whereas the latter is ‘permanent’.

• But we know that even so-called ‘temporary’ expansions can *last for long periods with identical effects on inflation*.

• What matters, therefore, is not whether the central bank’s balance sheet expansion is temporary or permanent but how it impacts inflation.

• As long as inflation is kept under control, it is hard to argue against monetisation of the deficit in a situation such as the one we are now confronted with.

• Central banks worldwide have *resorted to massive purchases of government bonds in the secondary market* in recent years, with the RBI joining the party of late.

• These are carried out *under Open Market Operations (OMO)*. The impact on money supply is the same whether the central bank acquires government bonds in the secondary market or directly from the Treasury.

Indian Economy degrading before the pandemic in early 2020:

1. Many economists as also the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) expect India’s economy to shrink in FY 2020-21.
2. The combined fiscal deficit of the Centre and the States is expected to be in the region of 1(578,563),(683,598)% of GDP.
3. Moody’s expects India’s public debt to GDP ratio to rise from 72% of GDP to 84% of GDP in 2020-21.
4. The banking sector had non-performing assets of over 9% of advances before the onset of the pandemic.
5. Weak growth and rising bankruptcies will increase stress in the banking sector.
6. The government’s focus thus far has been on *reassuring the financial markets that the fiscal will not spin out of control*.
7. It has kept the ‘discretionary fiscal stimulus’ down to 1% of GDP, a figure that is most modest in relation to that of many other economies, especially developed economies.
8. ‘Discretionary fiscal stimulus’ refers to an increase in the fiscal deficit caused by government policy as distinct from an increase caused by slowing growth, the latter being called an ‘automatic stabiliser’.
9. Keeping the fiscal deficit on a leash addresses the concerns of rating agencies about a rise in the public debt to GDP ratio. But it does little to address their concerns about growth.
10. The debt to GDP ratio will worsen and financial stress will accentuate if growth fails to recover quickly enough.
11. The government’s stimulus package relies heavily on the banking system to shore up growth.
12. But there is only so much banks can do. More government spending is required, especially for infrastructure.

Clearing misapprehensions: Monetisation of the deficit:

- We need to increase the discretionary fiscal stimulus without increasing public debt.
- The answer is monetisation of the deficit, that is, the central bank providing funds to the government.
- Mention ‘monetisation of deficit’ and many economic pundits will cower in terror. These fears are based on misconceptions about monetisation of the deficit and its effects.
- A common misconception is that it involves ‘printing notes’. One image that leaps to mind is the printing presses of central banks cranking out notes with abandon. But that is not how central banks fund the government.
- The central bank typically funds the government by buying Treasury bills.

Solution: Modern Monetary Theory:

1. As proponents of what is called Modern Monetary Theory point out, even that is not required.
2. The central bank could simply credit the Treasury’s account with itself through an electronic accounting entry.
3. When the government spends the extra funds that have come into its account, there is an increase in ‘Base money’, that is, currency plus banks’ reserves.
4. So, yes, monetisation results in an expansion of money supply. But that is not the same as printing currency notes.
5. In such a situation, monetisation of the deficit is more likely to raise actual output closer to potential output without any great increase in inflation.
6. Exponents of the MMT make a more striking point. They say there is nothing particularly virtuous about the government incurring expenditure and issuing bonds to banks instead of issuing these to the central bank.
7. The expansion in base money and hence in money supply is the same in either route.
8. The preference for private debt is voluntary. MMT exponents say it has more to do with an ideological preference for limiting government expenditure. But that is a debate for another day.

Way Forward: Work towards an upgrade:

✓ We have to put our best foot forward now to prevent a downgrade and bring about an upgrade instead.
✓ To do so, we need to note the key concerns that Moody’s has cited in effecting the present downgrade to our rating: slowing growth, rising debt and financial sector weakness. These concerns are legitimate.
✓ We now have a way out of the constraints imposed by sovereign ratings. The government must confine itself to the additional borrowing of Rs.4.2 trillion which it has announced.
✓ Further discretionary fiscal stimulus must happen through monetisation of the deficit.
✓ That way, the debt to GDP ratio can be kept under control while also addressing concerns about growth.
✓ The rating agencies should be worrying not about monetisation per se but about its impact on inflation.
✓ As long as inflation is kept under control, they should not have concerns and we need not lose sleep over a possible downgrade.
3. It’s time for a universal basic income programme in India

Context:

- The ongoing crisis is creating changes that could end up dividing society into pre- and post-COVID-19 days.
- These changes are also likely to exacerbate the novel challenges accompanying the fourth industrial revolution.
- Today, disruptive technologies like artificial intelligence are ushering in productivity gains that we have never seen before.
- They are also steadily reducing human capital requirements, making jobs a premium. A microcosm of these trends can be seen in Silicon Valley. The region is home to five of the world’s eight most valuable companies.
- These giants, all technology companies, have a cumulative market cap of over $4 trillion, yet they together directly employ just 1.2 million people.

About Universal Basic Income:

- A basic income is a regular, periodic cash payment delivered unconditionally to all citizens on an individual basis, without the requirement of work or willingness to work.
- UBI has three components: universality (all citizens included), unconditionality (no prior condition), and agency (by providing support in the form of cash transfers to respect, not dictate, recipients’ choices).

Tool to eradicate poverty:

1. Many consider a universal basic income (UBI) programme to be a solution that could mitigate the looming crisis caused by dwindling job opportunities.
2. UBI is also deliberated as an effective poverty-eradication tool. Supporters of this scheme include Economics Nobel Laureates Peter Diamond and Christopher Pissarides, and tech leaders Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk.
3. UBI in its true sense would entail the provision of an unconditional fixed amount to every citizen in a country.
4. Nevertheless, countries across the world, including Kenya, Brazil, Finland, and Switzerland, have bought into this concept and have begun controlled UBI pilots to supplement their population.
5. India’s huge capacity and infrastructure-building requirements will support plenty of hands in the foreseeable future.
6. Nonetheless, even before the pandemic, India was struggling to find enough opportunities for more than a million job aspirants who were entering the job market each month.
7. The fiscal cost of a UBI pegged at Rs.7,620, at 75% universality, was 9% of the GDP.
8. A UBI on par with the numbers suggested by the Economic Survey could lead to targeted household incomes increasing by almost Rs.40,000 per annum, since the average Indian household size is approximately five.
Suggested previously by various agencies:

1. The Economic Survey 2016-17 advocated in favour of monetizing the existing schemes with universal targeting (gradually) so that none is left out (as it makes it administratively simpler and cuts down problems associated with targeting beneficiaries).
2. India’s Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) with support from UNICEF has been conducting a cash transfer pilot project in rural villages.
3. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) had once proposed quasi-basic income schemes that leave out the well-off top quartile of the population as an effective means of alleviating poverty and hunger.
4. Positive results were found in terms of nutrition, health, education, housing and infrastructure, and economic activity.
5. Sikkim’s ruling party, the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), has decided to include UBI in its manifesto ahead of the Assembly elections 2019 and aims to implement the scheme by 2022.
6. The political will was nonetheless lukewarm because of the costs involved.
7. Requirements to trim some of the existing subsidies to balance the resultant deficit were also difficult political minefields for the then government. So, the proposition was finally shelved.

The times now are very different:

- IMF has projected global growth in 2020 to be -3.0%, the worst since the Great Depression. India is projected to grow at 1.9%.
- The U.S. economy is expected to fall by 5.9%. The unemployment rate and unemployment claim in the U.S., since President Donald Trump declared a national emergency, is the highest since the Great Depression. Unfortunately, India does not even have comparable data.
- UBI will Support unpaid care workers: Those with ill or differently abled relatives are often forced to quit their jobs and look after them full-time.
- UBI would allow care-workers to support themselves, encouraging care work and taking pressure off public services that provide care to the sick and elderly.

Conclusion:

1. UBI is a powerful idea whose time even if not ripe for implementation, is ripe for serious discussion.
2. Lockdowns in some format are expected to be the norm till the arrival of a vaccine.
3. With almost 90% of India’s workforce in the informal sector without minimum wages or social security, micro-level circumstances will be worse in India than anywhere else.
4. The 2017 Economic Survey had flagged the UBI scheme as “a conceptually appealing idea” and a possible alternative to social welfare programmes targeted at reducing poverty.
5. UBI envisages an uncompromised social safety net that seeks to assure a dignified life for everyone, a concept that is expected to gain traction in a global economy buffeted by uncertainties on account of globalization, technological change, and automation.
6. The frequent sight of several thousands of migrant labourers undertaking perilous journeys on foot in inhumane conditions is a disgraceful blight on India.
7. One way to ensure their sustenance throughout these trying times is the introduction of unconditional regular pay checks at maximum universality, at least till the economy normalises. If universal basic income ever had a time, it is now.
4. Textile industry seeks govt support to stay competitive

Context:

- The **textile industry** has urged the government for reimbursement of all the duties and taxes incurred during production to help enhance overall competitiveness of the sector.

- **Cotton textiles exports declined by 16.50 per cent** during April 2019 to February 2020 to USD 9,405 million compared to USD 11,262 million in the same period of the previous financial year, the Textiles Export Promotion Council (TEXPROCIL).

- Sharp declines were reported in major export markets like China (51 per cent), Bangladesh (23 per cent), Vietnam (18.5 per cent) and South Korea (28.46 per cent).

**Importance of MSME sector in Indian Economy:**

- MSMEs play a significant role in the Indian economy contribute towards 29 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 48 per cent to India’s overall exports.

- At a time when, India’s textile industry is passing through unprecedented times due to months of nationwide lockdown to prevent spread of coronavirus (Covid-19), the change in MSME definition would provide a major relief for recovery in both domestic and export fronts.

- The distressed asset fund of Rs 4,000 crore created to help weaker MSMEs that are struggling through non-performing assets norms due to Covid-19 pandemic, will bring them back into the business and they can start activities afresh.

**Revised MSME definition to help ease of doing biz, attract investments: Textile sector:**

- The textile sector welcomes the Centre’s decision to revise the definition of MSMEs and says that it will not only help the sector grow but promote seamless expansion, ease of doing business as well as attract huge investments.

- Increasing sales turnover limit to Rs 250 crore from the recently announced turnover of Rs 100 crore while excluding export sales turnover from this calculation would greatly benefit the highly labour-intensive and fragmented textiles, and clothing sector.

- **Manmade fibre textile industry** would also be the major beneficiary as most of the textile units are under MSME.

- **Higher threshold** will include more units now and will give a huge fillip to the production, domestic supply and exports of manmade fibres textiles. Apart from that spinning and weaving units will also get benefit of this revision.

- The government also approved roadmap for implementing the remaining two packages for MSMEs, namely, a Rs 20,000 crore package for distressed MSMEs and Rs 50,000 crore as equity infusion through fund of funds.
Internal factors, more than competition, are responsible for the stagnation of India's textile exports:

Lack of scale: While India’s spinning capacity is of a global scale, the same cannot be said about weaving and apparel making.

1. In fact, apparel units in the country have an average size of 100 machines. Compare this with Bangladesh which has on an average of at least 500 machines per factory.
2. Apart from lower labour cost and tariff benefits on account of it being a ‘least developed country’, the better economies of scale makes Bangladesh imports highly competitive vis-a-vis India.
3. The only way India can overcome this challenge is by setting up mega apparel parks close to ports with ‘plug and play’ facilities and common infrastructure for effluent treatment, etc.
4. This will help Indian players scale up faster at lowest cost and maximum efficiency in operations.

Bias towards cotton:

1. Indian policymakers have always favoured cotton. Not surprising, as 5.8 million farmers are engaged in cotton cultivation.
2. GST on cotton is uniformly 5 per cent for fibre, yarn and fabric. But not so for man-made fibres (MMF), which are taxed at 18 per cent for fibre, 12 per cent for yarn and 5 per cent for fabric.
3. This inverted tax structure makes MMF textiles costly. This explains why it accounts for just $6 billion of the $39-billion textile exports.
4. But what has complicated the situation is the global shift in fashion towards MMF. Today, 72 per cent of the global textile fibre consumption is MMF.
5. From 48.2 million tonnes in 2010, end use of non-cotton fibre across the world is expected to increase to 94.3 million tonnes by 2025.

Lack of trade agreements:

1. Preferential Trade Agreements, including FTAs, help gain duty-free access to large textile markets such as the EU, Australia and the UK which, otherwise, levy 12-14 per cent import duty.
2. They will help Indian players counter Bangladesh which, as a ‘least developed nation’, gets duty-free access.
3. Vietnam has just signed an FTA with the EU and its apparel exports will also suffer no duty from September.
4. But India’s FTA negotiation with the EU has remained suspended since 2013 after 16 rounds of talks. Wide differences, especially in opening up the automobile and wine sectors, is the reason.
5. An India-Australia Comprehensive Economic Co-operation Agreement has been in the works for eight years (Australia wants greater access for its agri exports).
6. The British government has indicated that the UK-India FTA post-Brexit (a $3- billion opportunity) is not a priority due to high-value trade disputes the two countries are involved in.
7. The government should look through the prism of ‘atmanirbhar’ to adopt an appropriate ‘give and take’ policy and sign the FTAs.
8. Job creation can be an important metric. Every $1 billion increase in textile exports adds 1.5 lakh jobs.

Way Forward:

1. Cooperative societies must be promoted and strengthened in rural and semi-urban areas where there is large concentration of handloom weavers.
2. During COVID-19, the textile firms produced personal protective equipment worth 10,000 crore from zero. Technical textiles further need to be promoted.
3. Expanding Weaving Capacity: The weaving sector is the backbone of the textile industry.
4. On the one hand, promoting the weaving industry gives impetus to the domestic spinning industry and on the other, it makes our garment sector globally more competitive.
5. **Investing in Technology Upgradation**: To ensure rapid transformation of the weaving sector in India, under Amended Technology Upgradation Funds Scheme (ATUFS) of the Government of India, the weaving sector may be considered to get capital subsidy at par with garmenting and technical textiles.

6. These measures would encourage MSME segment to expand their horizons, strengthen them to be a bigger contributor to the economy and boost exports.

7. All these measures will **help exporters of cotton textiles to survive and sustain in exports** which in turn also enable consumption of cotton, which has been procured and stocked by the Cotton Corporation of India in very large quantities.

**Conclusion:**

- To be a serious player in the global market, India needs to have a fibre neutral tax policy. Also, there is an imminent need for an MMF Mission to upgrade the industry’s skill when it comes to non-cotton textiles.

- India needs a **fresh blueprint for the textile sector**. Once that is drawn up, the country needs to move into mission mode to achieve it.

- ‘Atmanirbharta’ will not be possible if the government fails those sectors that are already self-sufficient and capable of dominating the global market.

- With focused interventions in this sector, we might **enhance its performance in terms of more investment, employment generation and export earnings**.

**5. Workforce habits: On tweaking of labour laws**

**Context:**

- Over two months into the national lockdown, India’s workforce, ostensibly blessed to be part of its much-vaunted demographic dividend, is in **complete disarray**.

- There is the visibly disturbing narrative of a few million workers trying to get back home from their respective urban lives as **resources run out and lack of adequate living space** hits hard in the face of a virus that **requires physical distancing**.

- They used their feet, often facing police wrath, till the administration allowed trains and buses to move again.

- While swathes of informal sector workers are moving away from their adopted base, the remaining **10% of the workforce that is formally employed** with social security benefits are beset by pink slips, furloughs, or salary cuts.

- The trend, driven by the **slump in economic activity**, cuts across sectors.

**32% of Indian workforce reports decrease in earned income: Survey:**

1. The survey also suggests that professionals working in IT, manufacturing and media have reported **low confidence towards job stability and career progression** as companies in these industries buckle under the pressure of the novel coronavirus pandemic’s impact.

2. According to the survey, one in four manufacturing professionals, more than one in five IT professionals, and more than two in five media professionals feel their companies will fare worse in the next six months.
3. Yet, professionals in these same sectors have expressed confidence about strong long-term growth.
4. About 77 percent of manufacturing professionals, 67 percent of media professionals, and 65 percent of IT professionals feel their companies will fare better in the next two years.
5. As various sectors announce a hiring freeze, job-seekers have reset their expectations as more Indian professionals anticipate fewer job openings going forward.
6. Findings support this by stating that 48 percent of active job seekers think there will be a decrease in available job opportunities, up 9 percent from last fortnight’s findings.

About 400 million workers in India may sink into poverty: UN report:

- About 400 million people working in the informal economy in India are at risk of falling deeper into poverty due to the coronavirus crisis which is having “catastrophic consequences”, and is expected to wipe out 195 million full-time jobs or 6.7% of working hours globally in the second quarter of this year, the UN’s labour body has warned.
- The International Labour Organization (ILO) in its report titled ‘ILO Monitor 2nd edition: COVID-19 and the world of work’, describes coronavirus pandemic as “the worst global crisis since World War II”.
- The report said the disruption to the world’s economies caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to wipe out 6.7% of working hours globally in the second quarter of this year — the equivalent of 195 million jobs worldwide.

Need of more productivity from various sectors:

- Restrictions have eased slightly, but a return to normalcy has proved challenging even for the firms that are allowed to operate, largely due to inadequate manpower.
- Industry representatives have pleaded with the Labour Ministry to cajole workers to return to their workplaces on being summoned, and if that does not prove effective, make them liable for action under relevant industrial labour legislation.
- Relaxations have also been sought in statutory wage payments for April and May when little work happened.
- Several States offered a temporary fix — stretching permissible working hours from eight to 12, so that productivity can improve even with less-than-optimal staff strength.

Some States are relaxing and purging Labour Laws:

1. While Rajasthan withdrew such an order, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and some others have used the occasion to embark on a purge of labour laws, citing the need to spur investor confidence and revive job creation.
2. Labour unions have protested this wholesale scrapping that would leave employees vulnerable in many aspects.
3. Being a concurrent subject in the Constitution, States, however, need the Centre’s nod to effect these changes.
4. Official instructions to keep paying employees amidst the lockdown have not worked evenly, while tweaks such as lowering the EPF contribution rate do not amount to much relief for firms or their staff.
5. While the nature of work is changing and greater spending is needed on hygiene, the immediate challenge is to inspire employee confidence.

Can a State government nullify Central enactments?

- Labour is a concurrent subject in the Constitution and most pieces of labour legislation are Central enactments. The U.P. government has said that labour laws will not apply for the next three years.
- Even laws to protect basic human rights have been suspended. The Constitution does not envisage approval by the President of a State Ordinance.
• This makes parliamentary laws inoperable in the absence of corresponding legislations on the same subject. Almost all labour contracts are now governed by statutes, settlements or adjudicated awards arrived through democratic processes.

• These processes accord the labour with procedural equality, which ensures progress of a nation. LIC vs D.J. Bahadur & Ors (1980) – The Supreme Court said that any changes in the conditions of service can be only through a democratic process of negotiations or legislation.

Conclusion:

• Most migrant workers are running scared of the pandemic. Getting them home safely is a first step and giving them an emergency income support till the worst of the pandemic subsides is the next.

• But for them to return to work enthusiastically over time, it is equally critical to reorient India’s current approach to urban and industrial housing, workplace social security and minimum wage standards.

• Workers and businesses are facing catastrophe, in both developed and developing economies. We have to move fast, decisively, and together. The right, urgent, measures, could make the difference between survival and collapse.

• The Centre must begin a dialogue with States on this front. Ineffective paper laws such as the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act of 1979 can be reviewed thereafter.

6. A right time to shift pharma gears

Context:

• We are living in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic anxious about our families, our friends and ourselves, depressed by worldwide suffering and anxiety, upset by knowing that once more the poor and marginalised are worse affected.

• Medicines are among humanity’s greatest achievements. They have helped attain dramatic improvements in health and longevity as well as huge cost savings through reduced sick days and hospitalizations.

• The global market for pharmaceuticals is currently worth Rs.110 crore lakh annually, 1.7% of the gross world product (IPFPA 2017).

• Roughly 55% of this global pharmaceutical spending, Rs.60 lakh crore, is for brand-name products, which are typically under patent.

Rules and practices of health care around the world have been better suited to this outbreak?

1. In India, the profit-maximising monopoly price of a new medicine is much lower, but similarly unaffordable for most citizens.

2. In the United States, thousand-fold (100000%) mark-ups over production costs are not atypical.

3. To be sure, before such huge mark-ups can yield any profits, commercial pharmaceutical innovators must first cover their large R&D costs, currently Rs.14 lakh crore a year, including the cost of clinical trials needed to demonstrate safety and efficacy, the cost of capital tied up during the long development process, and the cost of any research efforts that fail somewhere along the way.
4. Consider the Health Impact Fund as a plausible institutional reform of the current regime for developing and marketing new pharmaceuticals.

5. Commercial pharmaceutical research and development (R&D) efforts are encouraged and rewarded through the earnings that innovators derive from sales of their branded products.

6. These earnings largely depend on the 20-year product patents they are entitled to obtain in WTO member states.

7. Such patents give them a temporary monopoly, enabling them to sell their new products without competition at a price far above manufacture and distribution costs, while still maintaining a substantial sales volume.

**Funding R&D and Concerns: There are three main concerns:**

We should evidently continue funding pharmaceutical R&D, it is worth asking whether our current way of doing so is optimal.

First, innovators motivated by the prospect of large mark-ups tend to neglect diseases suffered mainly by poor people, who cannot afford expensive medicines.

1. The 20 WHO-listed neglected tropical diseases together afflict over one billion people (WHO n.d.) but attract only 0.35% of the pharmaceutical industry’s R&D.
2. Merely 0.12% of this R&D spending is devoted to tuberculosis and malaria, which kill 1.7 million people each year.

Second, thanks to a large number of affluent or well-insured patients, the profit-maximising price of a new medicine tends to be quite high.

1. Consequently, most people around the world cannot afford advanced medicines that are still under patent.
2. This is especially vexing because manufacturing costs are generally quite low.
3. Every year, millions suffer and die from lack of access to medicines that can be mass-produced quite cheaply.

Third, rewards for developing and then providing pharmaceutical products are poorly correlated with therapeutic value.

1. Firms earn billions by developing duplicative drugs that add little to our pharmaceutical toolbox and billions more by cleverly marketing their drugs for patients who won’t benefit.
2. These large R&D investments would be much better spent on developing new life-saving treatments for deadly diseases plaguing the world’s poor.

**To address these problems, proposal of a complement to the present regime:**

- The Health Impact Fund as an alternative track on which pharmaceutical innovators may choose to be rewarded.
- Any new medicine registered with the Health Impact Fund would have to be sold at or below the variable cost of manufacture and distribution, but would earn ten annual reward payments based on the health gains achieved with it.

**Health Impact Fund: On funding to Registered Products:**

1. The Health Impact Fund could start with as little as Rs.20000 crore per annum and might then attract some 10-12 medicines, with one entering and one exiting in a typical year.
2. Registered products would then earn some Rs.17000-Rs.20000 crore, on average, during their first ten years.
3. Of course, some would earn more than others by having greater therapeutic value or by benefiting more people.
4. **Long-term funding for the Health Impact Fund** might come from willing governments contributing in proportion to their gross national incomes or from an international tax, perhaps on greenhouse gas emissions or speculative financial transactions.

5. Non-contributing affluent countries would forgo the benefits: the pricing constraint on registered products would not apply to them.

6. This gives innovators **more reason to register** (they can still sell their product at high prices in some affluent countries) and affluent countries reason to join.

7. The Health Impact Fund would get pharmaceutical firms interested in certain R&D projects that are unprofitable under the current regime especially ones expected to produce large health gains among mostly poor people.

**Benefits of Health Impact Fund:**

1. Such projects would **predominantly address communicable diseases**, which continue to impose devastating disease burdens mainly upon the poor.

2. With the Health Impact Fund in place, there would be **much deeper and broader knowledge** about such diseases, a richer arsenal of effective interventions and greater capacities for developing additional, more targeted responses quickly.

3. **Pharmaceutical innovators** would thus have been much better prepared to supply or develop suitable medicines for containing the COVID-19 outbreak.

4. The Health Impact Fund would make an important difference also by rewarding for health outcomes rather than sales.

5. For selling a medicine, it helps, of course, if this medicine is known to be effective. But it is quite possible to sell a relatively ineffective drug or to sell a drug to patients who will not benefit from it or would benefit more from another.

6. With exorbitant mark-ups, this sort of thing happens often: firms seek to influence hospitals, insurers, doctors and patients to use their patented drug and to favour it over others.

**For achieving health gains with their product, innovators need different strategies:**

- **They need to think holistically** about how their drug can work in the context of, or in synergy with, other factors relevant to treatment outcomes.

- **They need to think about therapies and diagnostics together**, in order to identify and reach the patients who can benefit most.

- **They need to monitor results in real time** to recognize and address possible impediments to uptake or therapeutic success.

- **They need to ensure that high-value patients** have affordable access to the drug and are properly instructed and motivated to make optimal use of it with the drug still in prime condition.

- In sum, a reward mechanism oriented towards health gains rather than high-mark-up sales would lead to a sustainable research-and-marketing system that is **better prepared for fast and effective responses** to outbreaks of unknown diseases, such as COVID-19.

**Issue of government risk can be eliminated:**

1. Participation of commercial pharmaceutical firms is crucial for tackling global pandemics. They are best suited to develop and scale up provision of new vaccines and medications fast.

2. At present such firms do, however, face discouraging business risks from governments who may as some have done use compulsory licences to divest them of their monopoly rewards.

3. **Health Impact Fund registration** would remove this risk as states would have no reason to interfere with innovators whose profit lies in giving real and rapid at-cost access to their new product to all who may need it.

4. Nowhere is this focus on results, which the Health Impact Fund would encourage in innovators, more important than in the domain of communicable diseases.
5. Collaborating with national health systems, international agencies and NGOs, such a firm would seek to **build a strong public-health strategy** around its product. Its highest goal would be complete eradication.

6. If it succeeds in year seven, it can enjoy the world’s gratitude and collect three additional handsome reward payments for investment in its other research projects.

**Conclusion:**

- Applying this point to a new disease like COVID-19 is complicated by the fact that we **lack here a well-established baseline** representing the harm the disease would have done in the absence of the new medicine to be assessed.
- For malaria, such a baseline can be established on the basis of a stable disease trajectory observable over many years.
- In the case of a new epidemic, one must **rely on a modelling exercise** that estimates the baseline trajectory on the basis of obtainable data about the spread of the disease and its impact on infected patients.
- This surely is a challenging undertaking which cannot yield precise or uncontroversial results about what damage the epidemic would truly have done if the vaccine or medication in question had not appeared.

7. **Space tech start-ups need more government nurturing, resources**

**Context:**

- In recent, Finance Minister announced a **ground-breaking initiative** by **opening up space and atomic energy to private players**, referring to them as “fellow travellers”.
- And, on May 30, history was created by SpaceX when NASA astronauts were launched into orbit by the **first-ever commercially-built rocket and spacecraft**.
- **“NewSpace” is a rapidly growing market** that will be worth hundreds of billions of dollars in the next decade.

**India needs urgent and radical reforms in its space sector:**

- Today, the **space industry is undergoing a paradigm shift**, moving from Space 3.0 to Space 4.0, driven by changes in motivations, actors, roles, and technologies.
- While Space 3.0 has been characterized by large government investments and public-public collaborations, Space 4.0 is a more democratized and accessible field with more public-private and private-private collaborations.
It entails the emergence of a **plethora of small to medium-sized private companies.**

1. Through the second half of the 20th century, outer space was the sole preserve of national space programmes driven by government-funding, direction and management.
2. As military uses of space and prestige projects like Moon-landing emerged, major private sector entities already in the aviation industry like Boeing and Lockheed won space contracts in the US.
3. The last decades of the 20th century saw significant expansion of satellite-based telecommunication, navigation, broadcasting and mapping, and lent a significant commercial dimension to the space sector.
4. As the digital revolution in the 21st century transformed the world economy, the commercial space sector has begun to grow in leaps and bounds.
5. The global space business is now estimated to be around $400 billion and is expected easily rise to at least trillion dollars by 2040.
6. One example of the rise of private sector companies in the space sector is **SpaceX** run by the US entrepreneur Elon Musk. Hired for a resupply mission for the space station, it now launches more rockets every year than NASA. The entry of private sector has begun to drive down the cost-per-launch through innovations such as reusable rockets.
7. India, however, is quite some distance away from adapting to the unfolding changes in the global space business.
8. In its early years, India’s space programme that was **constrained by lack of resources found innovative ways of getting ahead in space.**
9. Although the ISRO encourages private sector participation in the national space programme, its model is still very 20th century — in terms of governmental domination.

**Can India take advantage by opening up to private players?**

1. The welcome reforms announced by the FM include the levelling of the playing field for private companies in satellites, launches and space-based services by introducing a **predictable policy and regulatory environment to private players** and providing access to geospatial data and facilities of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
2. Many doors of opportunity are opening in this sector. Reportedly, more than **17,000 small satellites** will be launched in **Low Earth Orbit by 2030.** Exciting Indian space-tech startups are emerging in this area.
   1. For instance, **Prixxels, founded by two BITS Pilani graduates,** is building a constellation of nano-satellites to provide global, real-time and affordable satellite imagery services.
   2. Bengaluru-based startup, **Bellatrix Aerospace** offers novel “electric propulsion” systems, which have applications in the field of nano and micro-satellite propulsion.
   3. And Mumbai-based startup **Manastu Space** has developed a “green propulsion” system using hydrogen peroxide as fuel.

**So, what can Indian government do to help such young “co-travellers”?**

1. First, the **crucial issue of funding.** We must trust and support early-stage innovations through “adventure” capital, not just risk-averse venture capital. We also need “patient” capital, as the lead times are long in this sector.
2. The government can be the provider of such adventure and patient capital. It did so in 2000, when we at CSIR launched the New Millennium Indian Technology Leadership Initiative.
3. CSIR gave very low-interest soft loans to early-stage startups, who explored radical ideas. After proof of concept, other financial instruments, including venture capital, became available.
4. So, the public-private partnership that the FM is referring to should be in financing too, not just in development.
5. Second, startups need a head start in the market and the current public procurement system is **heavily loaded against them.**
6. The **lowest-cost-selection approach** must change to lower total cost of ownership.
7. **Path Ahead: Transformative Ideas for India,** edited by Amitabh Kant, carries my chapter on creating an innovative public procurement policy for startups. Perhaps, it is worth revisiting.
8. Third, we need to **create a robust space tech-startup national innovation ecosystem** comprising incubators, accelerators, scalerators and mentors.

9. ISRO has a pivotal role in anchoring this initiative. Just as important will be the synergy with the government’s flagship programmes such as Digital India, Startup India, Make in India, Smart Cities Mission, etc.

10. Fourth, we urgently need a **law that allows private players to participate across the space value chain**, not just bits of it, as is the case today.

11. The **draft Space Activities Bill**, introduced in 2017, has lapsed. This is an opportunity to rewrite it with a bold perspective.

12. Fifth, the nation needs a new mantra. Referring to the principal idea from my recent book on the subject, we must move our aspirations from leapfrogging to pole vaulting. **Can India pole vault to a 10 per cent share of the global space economy within a decade?**

Conclusion:

- As it looks at the growing role of the private sector and the effort by nations like the UAE and Luxembourg, India needs to move quickly towards a **new model for India’s space activity**.
- It needs a regulatory environment that encourages a **more dynamic role for the private sector and promotes innovation**. It will be a pity if India squanders the many advantages of its early start in space by delaying the much-needed reform and reorganisation of its space sector.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given us an inspiring agenda of **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan**.
- To achieve this, we need **“aatmanishwas”** — self-belief, and trust. If we build this atmanishwas with **bold policies coupled with determined actions**, then we can certainly pole vault to a great new future, and sooner rather than later.

**8. Embracing alternative protein**

![Image of food security and health impact]

**FOOD SECURITY**

- Over 820 million people in the world are suffering from hunger
- Current global trends IFIiet estimate that 60% more food will be needed in 2050
- About 50% of grains are fed to livestock, which instead could be fed to 800 million people
- Producing food energy and protein from livestock takes 2.5-10 times more energy than that of grain

**HEALTH IMPACT**

- Animal products are the primary source of saturated fat, which is linked to heart disease and obesity
- 70% of antibiotics are given to farm animals, which could lead to drug-resistant bacteria
- 93% of dioxin (persistent organic pollutant) exposure comes from an animal product diet
- Rural communities living near factory farms suffer from respiratory illnesses and water contamination

**EATING PLANT-BASED DOESN’T NEED TO BE HARD...START WITH SMALL STEPS!**

Order your coffee with a plant-based milk like soy, almond, coconut, or oat.

Swap out animal protein for plant-based protein like tofu, quinoa, beans, lentils, nuts, etc.

Order the vegan option at restaurants or try a vegan restaurant!

**DOCUMENTARIES TO WATCH**

(All available on Netflix)

Cowspiracy

What the Health

Food, Inc.

Forks over knives

Gamechangers
Introduction:

- A growing global population, combined with factors such as changing socio-demographics, will place increased pressure on the world’s resources to provide not only more but also different types of food.

- Increased demand for animal-based protein in particular is expected to have a negative environmental impact, generating greenhouse gas emissions, requiring more water and more land.

- Addressing this “perfect storm” will necessitate more sustainable production of existing sources of protein as well as alternative sources for direct human consumption.

Context:

- On World Environment Day (June 5), the usual routine is to call for the protection of ‘Nature’ but nature isn’t defenceless.

- The emerging concept of planetary health characterises impacts of human-caused disruptions of Earth’s ecological systems.

- COVID-19 is showing us that our lives and livelihoods are intricately intertwined with these systems and when we inflict tremendous harms on the planet, the consequences can be catastrophic.

- We don’t think of the pandemic as an ecological disaster, but COVID-19 didn’t happen in a vacuum.

- It is a direct consequence of anthropogenic impacts on the planet. In these anthropogenic impacts, pandemics and climate change find common causes.

- Nowhere is this link clearer than in the food system, and particularly in our reliance on animals for protein.

Animal sources of protein: Hazards of factory farming:

1. Large-scale, industrial animal agriculture for meat, eggs, and dairy also called factory farming creates and exacerbates planetary health risks at every scale.

2. Scientists at the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization estimate that it is “one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems.”

3. Our need for animal protein uses vast tracts of land and quantities of water to raise those animals, to graze them, and to grow crops to feed them.

4. It contributes more to climate change than emissions from the entire transportation sector.

5. Wild and farmed seafood production also causes significant environmental degradation, species loss, and habitat destruction.

6. Of course, as the names suggest, animals are also the sources of viral outbreaks of swine flu and avian flu.

7. With regular outbreaks of these zoonotic diseases, COVID-19 is unlikely to be the last planetary health crisis caused by the close contact between humans, animals and microbes.

Broader repercussions:

- Globally, the reasons for such overwhelming interest in plant-based meats are twofold: Health and Environment.

- There is a growing movement pitching vegetarian/vegan diets as healthier than meat (or animal products) centric ones, an argument that we will examine later.

- Secondly, the meat industry is seen as harmful for the environment, contributing to deforestation, methane emission, water pollution and more.

- Globally, it is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gases and one of the leading causal factors in the loss of biodiversity”.
Protein sources other than animals are hugely neglected:

1. Expert voices ranging from the Food and Land Use Coalition, to the World Health Organization, to the EAT-Lancet Commission have all identified that diversifying protein sources away from animals is a hugely neglected intervention for human and planetary health.
2. But with rising demand for meat, eggs, and dairy, a chorus of ‘chickpeas over chicken’ may not be enough.
3. All over the world, companies in the exciting ‘alternative protein’ sector are making upgraded versions of meat, eggs, and dairy from plant or crop ingredients, or directly from animal cells.
4. These foods satisfy consumers and producers without taking away their choice, because they taste the same, are used in exactly the same way, but are vastly better for planetary health.
5. Countries like Singapore and Canada are already making alternative protein a central piece of their food security story, with an emphasis on research, entrepreneurship, and self-sufficiency.
6. Factory farming in India is still a small industry compared to the U.S., Brazil, or China, though it is increasingly being seen as an employment and income generator in a country with water scarcity and diminishing land holdings.
7. We think that’s a mistake it is imposing a 20th century industrial model. Instead, we need to build upon our strengths in agriculture and in manufacturing to create a new food system that works for farmers and is robust to systemic shocks.
8. COVID-19 has underscored that we can scarcely afford the consequences of an inefficient protein supply.

Create a 21st century economy delivering plentiful, safe, and nutritious protein:

- Existing protein sources are primarily hindered by their negative environmental impacts with some concerns around health.

- Furthermore, recent research emphasizes the role of livestock as part of the solution to greenhouse gas emissions, and indicates that animal-based protein has an important role as part of a sustainable diet and as a contributor to food security.

- Novel proteins require the development of new value chains, and attention to issues such as production costs, food safety, scalability and consumer acceptance.

- Furthermore, positive environmental impacts cannot be assumed with novel protein sources and care must be taken to ensure that comparisons between novel and existing protein sources are valid.

Conclusion:

- Food security and agricultural income are among our nation’s major challenges in the coming years.
- We should turn this crisis into an opportunity by stimulating research and entrepreneurship in alternative proteins.
- India was never a leader in landlines we leapfrogged that model and built a mobile telecommunications industry that is among the cheapest and most competitive on earth.
- We have a similar opportunity to set aside the liabilities of industrial animal agriculture and create a smarter alternative protein industry supplying us and the rest of the world.
- Greater alignment of political forces, and the involvement of wider stakeholders in a governance role, as well as development/commercialization role, is required to address both sources of protein and ensure food security.
9. Flattening the climate curve

Context: Green House Gases levels:

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

Recent instances consequences of rise in global temperature:

- For the sake of illustration, let us focus only on temperature change. The 2003 European heat wave killed over 70,000 people.
- The years 2015-19 have globally been the warmest years on record. Leave aside the Amazon fire of 2019, the bush fires of 2019-20 in Australia were unprecedented in their scale and devastation.
- While our attention has been on COVID-19, news has just come in that March 2020 has been the second warmest March on record.
- The Climate Impact Lab at the University of Chicago put out a warning for India last year that if global CO2 emissions continue to gallop at the present rate, average summer temperatures would rise by 4˚C in most States.
- Extremely hot days (days above 35˚C), which were only five days in 2010, would increase to 15 days by 2050 and to 42 days by 2100 on average across all districts.
- A more moderate emissions scenario, as a result of countries largely fulfilling their commitments under the Paris Agreement, would keep average global temperature rise below 2˚C compared to pre-industrial levels.

First Curve: An upward trend of CO2 levels:

1. Actually, the CO2 curve began its upward march about 18,000 years ago when it was a little under 200 parts per million (ppm) and earth was much colder.
2. By the time it reached 270 ppm about 11,500 years ago, the warmer conditions accompanying this curve made it possible for the emergence of agriculture.
3. Over the past million years, CO2 levels never exceeded 280-300 ppm.
4. They always went back to 200 ppm before rising again in a cyclical fashion. They remained steady at close to 280 ppm for 10,000 years until, beginning in the mid-19th century, they began to rise again as humans burnt coal and oil to fuel the industrial revolution, and burnt forests to expand agriculture and settlements.
5. From a mere 0.2 billion tonnes of CO2 emissions in 1850, annual emissions increased to 36 billion tonnes by 2018.
6. If all this CO2 had accumulated in the atmosphere, we can say that human life would have been altered beyond recognition.
7. Nature has been rather kind to us so far about one-half of all CO2 emissions have been sanitised from the atmosphere, equally by growing vegetation on land and by absorption in the oceans.
8. Thus, the levels of CO2 in the atmosphere reached 407 ppm in 2018, a level last experienced by earth some three million years ago.
Second Curve: Global Average Temperature curve:

1. The second curve of direct consequence to us is the global average temperature curve.
2. From 1850 onwards, for over a century, the global temperature showed a slight warming trend. But there was nothing suggestive of anything serious.
3. From 1975 onwards, the temperature graph has shown a distinct, upward trend.
4. By 2015, the globe had heated by a full degree Celsius relative to a hundred years previously. Climate modellers unequivocally project that under the current trends of emissions the globe will heat up by 4°C by the end of the century.
5. Climate change involves not just a change in temperature but every other component of weather, including rainfall, humidity and wind speed.
6. Indirect effects follow, such as a rise in sea levels from melting glaciers. Globally there have been several extreme weather events such as hurricanes, heat waves or droughts.
7. While no single event can be directly attributed to climate change, the collective trends are consistent with climate change predictions.

Tackling the climate crisis by the developed countries:

1. At the UN Climate Conference in 2009, the richest nations had pledged to provide $100 billion in aid each year by 2020 to the poorer countries for climate change mitigation and adaptation.
2. In 2017, for which data are available, only $71 billion had been provided, with most of the money going towards mitigation and less than 20% towards climate adaptation.
3. Such numbers had been challenged prior to the 2015 Paris Summit by many countries, including India, because much of the so-called aid provided did not come out of dedicated climate funds but, rather, development funds or simply loans which had to be repaid.
4. The most common excuse is that the world cannot afford to curb GHG emissions for fear of wrecking the economy.
5. An article in Nature in 2019 highlighted the financial dimensions of tackling the looming climate crisis.
6. Apparently, the wealthy nations are spending over $500 billion each year internally on projects aimed at reducing emissions.
7. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, however, estimates that a sustained annual investment of $2.4 trillion in more efficient energy systems is needed until 2035 in order to keep warming below the more ambitious 1.5°C relative to pre-industrial levels.
8. To put this in perspective, that is about 2.5% of the global GDP.
9. Some of the wrangling over money relates to the amounts that the wealthy nations, which have caused most of the GHGs resulting in global warming, agreed to pay other countries to cope with climate change.
10. It thus seems unlikely that the rich countries will deliver $100 billion in tangible climate finance during 2020.

1.5°C rise in temperature will break the safety margin for the planet:

- COVID-19 has unwittingly given humanity a brief respite from the climate change curve. Carbon emissions from fossil fuels have surely reduced in recent weeks.
- How long this respite will last ironically depends on the extent to which the global economy has been wrecked by COVID-19.
- Commentators are already talking about a paradigm shift in the structure and functioning of societies once the pandemic subsides.
- This is also a make-or-break moment for the climate trajectory which has to be flattened within a few years if we are to avoid dangerous climate change.
- Nature’s kindness is not expected to last beyond a 2°C rise in temperature as the carbon sequestered into vegetation will be thrown back into the atmosphere.
• Also remember that earth has already warmed by 1°C and we really have only another 1°C (or 0.5°C if we are concerned about island nations) as a safety margin.

Conclusion:

• COVID-19 has elicited an unprecedented response worldwide.
• Only cognitive psychologists can explain why the spectre of dangerous climate change impacting human civilizations has not yet evoked a comparable response.
• There seems to be wishful thinking that technology can be used to suck out billions of tonnes of CO2 from the atmosphere and store this safely somewhere, but available ones are extremely slow and expensive.
• Hare-brained schemes to regulate solar radiation by geo-engineering are bound to bring nasty surprises.
• There is no substitute to reducing GHG emissions.
• Technologists, economists and social scientists must plan for a sustainable planet based on the principles of equity and climate justice within and across nations.
• It is the responsibility of leaders to alter their mindset and act on the looming climate crisis with the same alacrity they have shown on COVID-19.

GENERAL STUDIES - IV

Suicide, the epidemic we are overlooking

Context:

• It is hard to believe when we lose someone to suicide, especially when it is a successful and popular public figure.
• It does not just affect the family and friends of the person who dies, but in the case of popular figures, it brings a sense of loss to the community.
• Every death by suicide leaves behind a trail of questions and a deep sense of helplessness.
• In the context of the ongoing and unpredictable COVID-19 pandemic, the helplessness is exacerbated.
• What is in our control, however, is to do more to identify the crisis building within ourselves and others, and to learn how to avert it.
Suicide is considered a preventable cause of death:

- Close to 800,000 people die by suicide every year. Furthermore, for each suicide, there are more than 20 suicide attempts.
- Suicides and suicide attempts have a ripple effect that impacts on families, friends, colleagues, communities and societies.
- Suicides are preventable. Much can be done to prevent suicide at individual, community and national levels.
- Suicide is considered a preventable cause of death and does not always involve a history of mental illness.
- Societal and global issues can wear down on us and affect our mental and physical health.

Suicide rates in India and around World:

1. Recent data from the Global Burden of Disease project by the World Health Organisation shows that the suicide rates for Indian men and women are 5 and 2 times the global suicide rate respectively.
2. Further, in India, suicide is the number one cause of death for both sexes between the age of 15 and 39, probably pointing to the significant developments related to career and family typically experienced during these ages.
3. Across the globe, suicide rates among the elderly are falling, but in India there is a trend for sharp increase in suicide rates in old age (70 and above).
4. These trends point to some socio-cultural issues related to age and gender that may affect suicide rates.
5. Indeed, a recent review of suicide data in India found some factors that put an individual more at risk: male unemployment, married female, physical illnesses and social isolation among the elderly, rate of agricultural employment in the state, minority community status, domestic violence, family problems, and alcoholism.

Who is at risk?

- While the link between suicide and mental disorders (in particular, depression and alcohol use disorders) is well established in high-income countries, many suicides happen impulsively in moments of crisis with a breakdown in the ability to deal with life stresses, such as financial problems, relationship break-up or chronic pain and illness.
- In addition, experiencing conflict, disaster, violence, abuse, or loss and a sense of isolation are strongly associated with suicidal behaviour.
- Suicide rates are also high amongst vulnerable groups who experience discrimination, such as refugees and migrants; indigenous peoples; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI) persons; and prisoners.
- By far the strongest risk factor for suicide is a previous suicide attempt.

Why and When Suicide thoughts used to come:

- This just goes to show that the broader political, economic, and socio-cultural factors play a very important role in our mental well-being and we must not blame every case on mental illness.
- Of course, when one is in a suicidal state, there is intense emotional turmoil.
- These environmental and personal stressors can add up and create a sense of a “life not worth living”.
- Many of us have thoughts about death at some point in life, such as “death would be easier”, or, “I cannot go on, I want to get away”.
- However, it is important to recognise when this changes to active desire for killing oneself such as “I want to hurt or kill myself”.

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• The risk for suicide is higher when these thoughts become intentions and there is a specific plan (time, place, method) that comes to mind.

• Criminalisation of mental health issues also adds to this stigma. Suicide attempts are also no longer considered a criminal act in India under the Mental Healthcare Act passed in 2017.

• Therefore, let that not stop you from accurately reporting a suicide attempt or seeking help.

• Do not blame or shame someone for thinking of suicide, or call it a selfish act. It undermines the struggle the person is going through, further stigmatises the thoughts, and prevents them from opening up.

How to overcome Suicide thoughts and become strong:

1. The first step here should be to get away from any lethal means of hurting yourself. Poisonous substances, medicines, equipment like weapons or rope need to be thrown away or removed.

2. Discussing the problem with someone who can help you keep safe is also important. Lock the medicines and give the key to someone else. Give your wallet and car keys to others for safekeeping.

3. Get away from any location where these thoughts are more intense or places your mind had chosen to carry out the plan.

4. Get to a place of safety or distraction, such as a park or café. Stay away from drugs and alcohol when you are feeling low, because they affect emotions negatively and lead to more impulsivity and reduced problem-solving.

5. Reasoning and problem-solving capacity greatly reduces during a suicidal crisis, making situations seem more dire and hopeless. In these moments, you may feel intense agitation, self-hatred, hopelessness, and mental anguish.

6. However, it is important to realise that suicidal thoughts come and go, and that if you make it through the most difficult moments, you have a chance at feeling better.

7. It is not a battle to be fought alone however, and we need an army of support including personal and professional support, and therapy and pharmacological treatment. You shouldn’t delay getting professional help at this juncture.

8. Stigma related to mental health issues prevents help-seeking by persons who are suffering.

9. For instance, non-suicidal self-injury includes acts committed intentionally to hurt oneself but not to kill oneself, such as cutting, scratching, hitting, or burning oneself.

10. These acts are related to higher likelihood of suicide attempts in the future and therefore can be seen as a gateway to suicide attempts. However, such behaviour is often looked down upon and dismissed as attention-seeking.

11. On the contrary, research has consistently shown that people engage in these behaviours to regulate their negative emotions and not to seek attention from others.

Therefore, we must not let our assumptions get in the way of providing support and attempts of the patient to reach out to others.

Listen to the person, support them without judging their struggle, get them professional help and resources, and keep reaching out to them even after they are connected to treatment.

Social support is a known protective factor against suicide, meaning that it reduces the likelihood that a person will attempt suicide.

Therefore, reaching out to others even when they are not obviously struggling is very important.

Conclusion:

• We need to reach out to others when we are struggling. Often, we assume that others are too busy or don’t care, or won’t understand us. However, we have to take the crucial step to let others know how we feel clearly.

• This can be hard when we feel like we don’t belong, or are a burden on others, or are not amongst well-wishers.

• In these instances, we need to try harder to find at least one person who may be supportive and helpful.
• Also, they may not be able to solve our problems, but having emotional support can help us feel less alone.

• It also doesn’t make us emotionally weak to need others, because we all go through emotionally overwhelming times when objective and rational perspective of others can help us see through our emotions.

• You can also start by contacting your local crisis or mental health helpline to get professional help. A list of helplines in India is available here: http://www.suicide.org/hotlines/international/indiasuicide-hotlines.html.

• It may also help to use the app Stay Alive, which is a UK-based app that follows all recommended guidelines for suicide prevention and provides information and resources to cope with suicidal thoughts.

• The app is meant as a self-help tool but cannot be a replacement for professional help. Remember, when in doubt whether anything can make you feel better, start by simply reaching out.
Introduction:
Vice President Venkaiah Naidu has underlined the need to adopt new ways of living in the times of coronavirus and suggested a framework for this “new normal” to deal with the virus. In a Facebook post, he stressed on the need for new attitudes towards life and humanity amidst indications of the virus likely to stay for longer than earlier expected. In a post after the government extended the lockdown on Sunday evening, the Vice President dealt with the philosophical and moral issues thrown by the Covid-19 pandemic and the way life needs to be lived henceforth. He underlined that life cannot be lived in isolation and the virus outbreak highlighted the interconnectedness of lives.

Vice President’s 12 points:

1. Living in harmony with the nature and fellow beings,
2. Knowing that safety and security of lives are interconnected,
3. Rationally analyzing the impact of every movement or action on the spread of virus,
4. Not responding impulsively to the situation and instead living in confidence keeping faith in science which can come up with a solution to the problem,
5. Strict adherence to the behavioral changes ushered in so far like wearing mask,
6. Maintaining physical distance and ensuring hygiene,
7. Preventing stigmatization so that the infected volunteer for treatment,
8. Checking disinformation and prejudices against fellow citizens as carriers of the virus
9. Replacing the sense of collective helplessness by the spirit of the virtue of living interconnected with shared destiny

Impact:

1. Our society is based on human relations, for everything we need people to justify our actions and this is going to change in future.
2. Lockdown brought on by the Covid pandemic have struck people as a painfully long period of isolation. Social distancing seems to be hitting people even more than the scare of the deadly virus.
3. People are getting highly restive and agitated in spite of social media connectivity.
4. Cases of domestic violence have more than doubled in the country during this period.
5. Humans have evolved to be social creatures and are wired to live in interactive groups. Being isolated from family, friends and colleagues can be unbalancing and traumatic for most people and can result in short or even long-term psychological and physical health problems.
6. An increase in levels of anxiety, aggression, depression, forgetfulness and hallucinations are possible psychological effects of isolation.
7. Mental conditions may be precipitated for those with underlying pre-existing susceptibilities and also show up in many others without any pre-condition. Personal relationships help us cope with stress, and if we lose this outlet for letting off steam, it results in a huge emotional void which, for an average person, is difficult to deal with.
8. Just a few days of isolation can cause increased levels of anxiety and depression. Add to it the looming threat of a dreadful disease being repeatedly hammered in through the media and you have a recipe for many shades of mental and physical distress.
9. Prisoners in solitary confinement and patients in isolated hospital units have often shown adverse psychological effects, including increased anxiety, panic attacks and increased levels of paranoia. Social isolation has been found to have a correlation with higher alcoholism.
10. The Covid lockdown has brought forced isolation to many. There are youngsters living away from their families, trapped in small apartments with abysmal cooking skills. Many senior citizens living by themselves found companionship by meeting up with age mates in neighbourhood parks. They find themselves marooned, deprived of social interaction and also the occasional visits by their children. Lack of playtime with peers is making children irritable and edgy.

11. It can be extremely oppressive and claustrophobic for large low-income families huddled together in small single-room houses. Children here are not lucky enough to have many board/electronic games or books to keep them occupied. Add to it the deep insecurity of running out of funds for food and basic necessities.

12. On the other hand, there are people with dysfunctional family dynamics, such as domineering, abusive or alcoholic partners, siblings or parents which makes staying home a period of trial. Incidence of suicide and physical abuse against women has shown a worldwide increase. Heightened anxiety and depression also affect a person’s immune system, making them more susceptible to illness.

13. Long-term lockdowns bring along a series of social, economic and religious upheavals in societies.

14. Lower classes were worse off for living in closely packed, unhealthy environments. A large workforce had been destroyed; farms and factories were abandoned. Wages for labour shot up as did the cost of manufactured goods. There were some positive outcomes too, though at a huge price of death and destruction.

**Role of society:**

1. Society plays a very important role.
2. Our society has different classes, different strata’s of people, different people with different age groups.
3. Today’s media is very active, with the increase in awareness the coping mechanism has also increased.
4. As we have different strata of people, for some strata it is very easy to maintain social distancing.
5. For groups with no resources, home or private vehicles, it becomes difficult to maintain social distancing.
6. Culture has 2 components i.e material and non- material culture and for the nonmaterial to cope up with a material culture, it takes a long time, lag and gap and in this lag different strata of people get affected in different ways.

**Physical distancing not social distancing**

1. When the phrase “social distancing” is used, it is likely to convey a wrong message.
2. Physical distancing is what we need.
3. It said people need social support, however, they are not supposed to meet other people.
4. Social togetherness, can be practised while maintaining physical distance via online mediums.

**Long-term social behavior effects:**

1. As the pandemic becomes a bigger and bigger part of daily life, researchers are warning of changes in how we think, behave and relate to one another – some temporary but others potentially permanent – could be the new normal
2. This crisis may be unprecedented, but there are always patterns in how humans behave when thrust into long periods of isolation and danger.
3. Research hints at what the coming months may look like. Our ability to focus, to feel comfortable around others, even to think more than a few days into the future, may diminish.
4. Large gatherings are going to be rare. Many weddings, sporting events or concerts would be ruled out. And a full return to commuting by public transit will also be delayed. Malls, gyms, restaurants, bar and places of worship, the list is endless.

**Way Forward:**

✓ Our country is very diverse both in terms of population composition, culture and expectation of each other, needs are different, we must try and change our thought process.
✓ Everyone should work together. Planning tends to become tentative and short-term. People cultivate moments of joy when danger recedes, knowing it might not last.
✓ Basic behavioral change should be done. The greatest psychological shift amid widespread crisis may be toward simple social tasks, like checking in on neighbors, caring for the needy, cooking for friends.
✓ Due regards should be given for sanitation and disciplined life.

Link: https://youtu.be/UC_nw43TKVo

2. Say No to child marriage

Introduction:

• Around 15 million girls become victims of child marriage every year across the world. The United Nations says that more than 21% young women and 4% young men the world over were married before they turned 18. At present, 650 million girls and women alive were married before their 18th birthday. Massive efforts have been undertaken by countries as well as the United Nations to prevent the menace that has far reaching implications for children. In the last decade, the proportion of women who were married as children decreased by 15%, from 1 in 4 to approximately 1 in 5. Around 25 million child marriages were prevented in the last 10 years, with South Asia showing the largest decline in the prevalence of child marriages.

UN Report On Child Marriage:

1. Progress over the last decade meant 25 million child marriages were prevented.
2. Overall, the proportion of women who became brides before age 18 decreased by 15 per cent during this period: from one in four to approximately one in five.
3. Worldwide, some 650 million women alive today were married when they were just girls.
4. Largest decline in child marriage in the last 10 years occurred in South Asia.
5. Rates there dropped by roughly a third: from nearly 50 per cent to 30 per cent, largely due to progress in India.
6. Despite this progress, the UN agency estimates 12 million girls are married off each year.
7. Eliminating child marriage and other practices harmful to women and girls are among the targets under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
8. The 17 SDGs focus on people, the planet and prosperity, and have a deadline of 2030.
9. Progress particularly needs to be scaled up in sub-Saharan Africa where the “global burden” of child marriage is now shifting.
10. The region accounted for close to one in three of the world’s most recently married child brides, compared to one in five a decade ago.
11. India saw a sharp decline in child marriages over the last ten years with 27 per cent of girls getting married before their 18th birthday as against 47 per cent a decade ago.
12. This decline in India has contributed significantly to a global decline in child marriages. Overall, the proportion of girls who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent in the last decade, from 1 in 4 to approximately 1 in 5.
13. The UN children’s agency attributed increasing rates of girls’ education, proactive government investments in adolescent girls, and strong public awareness about the illegality of child marriage and the harm it causes are among the reasons for the decline.

Why the practice of child marriage still exists in India?

1. Social groups follow traditions from previous eras without questioning contemporary relevance. Early marriage allows parents to waiver ‘responsibility’ of settling their children.
2. Economically weak and large families encourage the practice as it helps send-off girl children early, while marriage of a boy brings an additional hand to assist in household and economic activities.
3. Members of communities practicing child marriage tend to have little to no formal education. Belief in religious scriptures and the idea that these contain prescription for early marriage drive families to fulfill this “obligation.”

4. Early marriage ensures full “utilization” of fertility and childbearing capacity.

5. Strong caste ties limit the availability of suitable marital partners. As soon as parents identify a match, they make haste in conducting the marriage.

6. Limited education opportunities, low quality of education, inadequate infrastructure, lack of transport and therefore concerns about girls’ safety while travelling to school significantly contribute to keeping girls out of school and therefore tend to favour child marriage.

7. Girls are often seen as a liability with limited economic role. Women’s work is confined to the household and is not valued. In addition, there is the problem of dowry. Despite the fact that dowry has been prohibited for five decades (Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961), it is still common for parents of girls in India to give gifts to the groom and/or his family either in cash or kind. The dowry amount increases with the age and the education level of the girl. Hence, the “incentive” of the system of dowry perpetuates child marriage.

8. The families and girls who might benefit from social protection programmes are not always aware of them and these schemes are often limited to providing cash transfers without the accompanying messages to address the multi-dimensional nature of child marriage.

Laws to prevent child marriages:


Consequences:

- The harmful consequences of child marriage are segregation from family and friends, limiting the child’s interactions with the community and peers, lack of opportunities for education.
- Early maternal and infant deaths
  - Adolescent mothers give birth prematurely or to low weight babies. The health of the child and mother are at risk and often they do not survive.
  - Infant mortality rates are higher than the national average in the states where child marriage is highly prevalent.
- Health Risks A. Because of lack of protection child brides are often exposed to serious health risks, early pregnancy, and various STDs especially HIV/AIDS.
- Violence A. Girl children often face situations of bonded labour, enslavement, commercial sexual exploitation and violence as a result of child marriage.
- She is forced to take up roles that she isn’t mentally prepared for. It eventually leads to isolation and depression.

Solution:

- Increase social awareness A. Children need to be made aware of their human rights and must be taught to refuse and speak up once such an incident is taking place B. The media also needs to adopt a more proactive role in generating awareness towards this heinous ritual. C. Changing social norms and attitudes towards girls.
- To transform social norms, programmes must go hand in hand with other interventions to change parents’ attitudes, improve education, incentivise higher level of education, and increase opportunities for girls to learn, work and earn.
- The values and norms which support the practice of child marriage need to shift.
- Raise awareness about the harmful consequences of child marriage.
- A strong legal and policy system can provide an important backdrop for improvements in services, changes in social norms and girls’ empowerment.
• Imparting value based education to the students in school stressing the importance of education and the ill effects of early marriage.
• Government could rope in achievers like Sakshi Malik, Dipa Karmakar and PV sindhu who have achieved great success in their field and parents and students can seek inspiration from their achieve
• Inform the respective Child Development Project Officers, who are designated government officials, to stop child marriage.

Link: https://youtu.be/RplIMN9GH10

3. Water: Leaving no one behind

Introduction:
Millions of people worldwide are living today with less water than they need, be it in the world’s most prosperous cities or agricultural heartlands. According to the UN, nearly a billion people lack access to basic drinking water. Women and girls spend an estimated 200 million hours hauling water every day. More than 800 children under the age of 5 die from diarrhea every day, due to poor water and sanitation. Just 10 countries account for 60% of the world population without access to clean water – 19% of them live in India. So the next time you leave the tap open while brushing your teeth or bathing, remember that 163 million of our fellow countrymen are living without safe water, a resource meant for all. No one should be left behind in accessing and managing the safe water that they need.

• 2 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water services.
• Over half of the global population or 4.2 billion people lack safely managed sanitation services.
• 297,000 children under five die every year from diarrhoeal diseases due to poor sanitation, poor hygiene, or unsafe drinking water.
• 2 billion people live in countries experiencing high water stress.
• 90 per cent of natural disasters are weather-related, including floods and droughts.
• 80 per cent of wastewater flows back into the ecosystem without being treated or reused.
• Around two-thirds of the world’s transboundary rivers do not have a cooperative management framework.
• Agriculture accounts for 70 per cent of global water withdrawal.
• Roughly 75 per cent of all industrial water withdrawals are used for energy production.

The right to water

• One of the most important recent milestones has been the recognition in July 2010 by the United Nations General Assembly of the human right to water and sanitation.
• The Assembly recognized the right of every human being to have access to enough water for personal and domestic uses, meaning between 50 and 100 litres of water per person per day.
• The water must be safe, acceptable and affordable. The water costs should not exceed 3 per cent of household income. Moreover, the water source has to be within 1,000 metres of the home and collection time should not exceed 30 minutes.

Water and the Sustainable Development Goals:

• Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 is to “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”.
• The targets cover all aspects of both the water cycle and sanitation systems, and their achievement is designed to contribute to progress across a range of other SDGs, most notably on health, education, economics and the environment.
The UN and Water:

- The United Nations has long been addressing the global crisis caused by insufficient water supply to satisfy basic human needs and growing demands on the world’s water resources to meet human, commercial and agricultural needs.
- The ‘Water for Life’ International Decade for Action 2005-2015 helped around 1.3 billion people in developing countries gain access to safe drinking water and drove progress on sanitation as part of the effort to meet the Millennium Development Goals.
- Recent milestone agreements include the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 2015-2030 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, and the 2015 Paris Agreement within the UN Convention Framework on Climate Change.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene:

1. Contaminated water and a lack of basic sanitation are undermining efforts to end extreme poverty and disease in the world’s poorest countries.
2. In 2017, 2 billion people worldwide did not have access to basic sanitation facilities such as toilets or latrines.
3. 673 million people still practised open defecation. According to the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, at least 1.2 billion people worldwide are estimated to drink water that is not protected against contamination from faeces.
4. Even more drink water, which is delivered through a system without adequate protection against sanitary hazards.

Unclean water and child mortality:

- Unclean water and poor sanitation are a leading cause of child mortality. Childhood diarrhoea is closely associated with insufficient water supply, inadequate sanitation, water contaminated with communicable disease agents, and poor hygiene practices.
- Diarrhoea is estimated to cause 1.5 million child deaths per year, mostly among children under five living in developing countries.

Improved sanitation and economic benefits:

- The links between lack of water and sanitation access and the development goals are clear, and the solutions to the problem are known and cost-effective.
- A 2012 WHO study shows that every US $1 invested in improved sanitation translates into an average global economic return of US $5.5. Those benefits are experienced specifically by poor children and in the disadvantaged communities that need them most.

Solutions:

Natural methods like reforestation and forest conservation, reconnecting rivers to flood plains, wetland restoration and water harvesting will regulate the water supply.

1. Agricultural systems that conserve ecosystem services by using practices such as conservation tillage, crop diversification, legume intensification and biological pest control.
2. The environmental co-benefits of nature-based solutions decrease pressures on land conversion and reduced pollution, erosion and water requirements.
3. Constructed wetlands for wastewater treatment can also be a cost-effective and provides adequate supply of water for irrigation and additional benefits that include energy production.
4. Natural and constructed wetlands also biodegrade or immobilise a range of emerging pollutants.
5. Watershed management is another nature-based solution that will spur local economic development, job creation, biodiversity protection and climate resilience.
6. NBS for addressing water availability in urban settlements are of great importance. Managing water flows through urban landscapes can improve water resources availability.
7. Catchment management outside urban areas, improved recycling of water within urban water cycles, green infrastructure within urban boundaries are some of the Nature based solutions for improving water resources availability.

**Way Forward:**

- India’s priority must be:
  - To make our irrigation and water systems amenable to modern concepts.
  - To complete irrigation and water sector reforms.
  - To implement improved water management, governance and regulation practices.
  - Pricing system for water: For making people use water efficiently
- Bigger program on water efficiency as energy efficiency – Setting standards for water management.
- Ensuring minimal pollution in both urban areas and industry.
- Fixing India’s water crisis will need well balanced policies, meticulous strategy and a massive amount of public participation.
- Sugarcane consumes a disproportionate amount of water and water-stressed regions must make an effort to move away from the crop.
- Comprehensive restructuring of India’s Central Ground Water Board and the Central Water Commission in order to create a new 21st Century management authority.
- Right to water should mean a high priority to drinking water.
- India has so far seen the water sector in terms of irrigation projects or water schemes. We need to balance between our water-needs and that of the river itself.

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

### 4. Annular Solar Eclipse

**Introduction:**

- A solar eclipse takes place when the Moon passes between Earth and the Sun, thereby totally or partly obscuring the Sun for a viewer on Earth. Country witnessed an annular solar eclipse on 21st June, 2020.
- This eclipse is a rare annular eclipse that occurs once in every one or two years, and coincides with the northern hemisphere’s longest day of the year, called the summer solstice

**Eclipse:**

- An **eclipse** happens when a planet or a moon gets in the way of the Sun’s light. Here on Earth, we can experience two kinds of eclipses: **solar eclipses** and **lunar eclipses**.

**Solar Eclipse:**

- It is a natural event that takes place on Earth when the Moon moves in its orbit between Earth and the Sun (this is also known as an **occultation**).
- It happens at **New Moon**, when the Sun and Moon are in **conjunction** with each other.
- During an eclipse, the Moon’s shadow (which is divided into **two parts: the dark umbra and the lighter penumbra**) moves across Earth’s surface.
Lunar Eclipse:

1. During a lunar eclipse, Earth gets in the way of the sun’s light hitting the moon. That means that during the night, a full moon fades away as Earth’s shadow covers it up.
2. The moon can also look reddish because Earth’s atmosphere absorbs the other colors while it bends some sunlight toward the moon. Sunlight bending through the atmosphere and absorbing other colors is also why sunsets are orange and red.
3. During a total lunar eclipse, the moon is shining from all the sunrises and sunsets occurring on Earth.

Why don’t we have a lunar eclipse every month?

1. It’s true that the moon goes around Earth every month, but it doesn’t always get in Earth’s shadow.
2. The moon’s path around Earth is tilted compared to Earth’s orbit around the sun. The moon can be behind Earth but still get hit by light from the sun.
3. Because they don’t happen every month, a lunar eclipse is a special event. Unlike solar eclipses, lots of people get to see each lunar eclipse. If you live on the nighttime half of Earth when the eclipse happens, you’ll be able to see it.

Why isn’t there a solar eclipse every month?

1. If the Moon was only slightly closer to Earth, and orbited in the same plane and its orbit was circular, we would see eclipses each month.
2. The lunar orbit is elliptical and tilted with respect to Earth’s orbit, so we can only see up to 5 eclipses per year. Depending on the geometry of the Sun, Moon and Earth, the Sun can be totally blocked, or it can be partially blocked.

Solar Eclipse Types:

1. **Total Solar Eclipse:**
   - It occurs when the Moon completely blocks the solar disk. In a total solar eclipse, the narrowest part of the path (where the Sun is completely blocked and the Moon casts its darkest shadow (called the *umbra*)) is called the “zone of totality”. A phenomenon called “Bailey’s Beads” often appears as sunlight shines out through valleys on the lunar surface.

2. **Annular Solar Eclipse:**
   - When the Moon is farther away in its orbit than usual, it appears too small to completely cover the Sun’s disk. During such an event, a bright ring of sunlight shines around the Moon. This type of eclipse is called an “annular” eclipse.

3. **Partial Solar Eclipse:**
   - It occurs when Earth moves through the lunar penumbra (the lighter part of the Moon’s shadow) as the Moon moves between Earth and the Sun. The Moon does not block the entire solar disk, as seen from Earth. Depending on your location during a partial eclipse, you might see anything from a small sliver of the Sun being blotted out to a nearly total eclipse.

How are a lunar eclipse and solar eclipse different?

1. A lunar eclipse occurs at night and a solar eclipse occurs during the day. There are only certain times when either of them can occur.
2. A lunar eclipse can only occur when the moon is directly opposite the Sun in the sky — a full moon. Even though there is a full moon each month, obviously a lunar eclipse does not occur on a monthly basis because the Sun isn’t *exactly* in line with the Earth and the moon.
3. The moon’s orbit is actually tilted 5 degrees more than that of the Earth; otherwise, we would see a lunar eclipse each month.

4. We can see lunar eclipses more readily than solar eclipses, and it has to do with proximity. The Moon is much closer to the Earth (well over 300 times closer than the Sun!), so the Earth has a much greater chance of blocking sunlight to the Moon, compared to the Moon blocking light from the Sun. Also, a lunar eclipse can be seen from a greater portion of the Earth.

5. Solar eclipses, on the other hand, are more rare and when they do happen can only be seen by a very narrow segment of people on Earth, for a short period of time.

6. It is quite safe to watch a lunar eclipse with the naked eye, while watching a solar eclipse without eyewear protection can seriously damage your eyesight. You can use a telescope to get a clearer view of the moon during an eclipse and really see what is happening.

7. A solar eclipse has always had a more profound effect on humans than a lunar eclipse. This is probably because of the importance of the Sun to all life on Earth. In ancient China, a solar eclipse was thought to be the dragon coming to eat the Sun. The effect that an eclipse has on all life on Earth is of particular interest to scientists. They eagerly await a solar eclipse because it helps them to gather more knowledge about the Sun and its position with respect to Earth.

Do’s during a solar eclipse:

1. Even during a normal day, people are advised not to stare directly at the Sun. So when it comes to the solar eclipse, one should use special-purpose solar filters or ‘eclipse glasses’ in order to protect their eyes.
2. It also advises against using homemade filters or ordinary sunglasses. Even the darkest pair of sunglasses would still transmit far too much sunlight that could damage the eyes.
3. That being said, even while using eclipse glasses, NASA recommends shielding one’s eyes before looking up at the sky during a solar eclipse. Only remove the glasses if you’ve completely looked away or once the solar eclipse is over — not before.
4. While it’s tempting to use a camera to capture the event or use a telescope or binoculars to catch a closer view, scientists advise against it — even if a person is using eclipse glasses at the time. In doing so, one runs the risk of the concentrated solar rays could causing injury.
5. For near or farsighted, they don’t need to take off their glasses in order to view the eclipse. The eclipse glasses can just go over them. In case that feels uncomfortable, they have the option to opt for a hand-held viewer instead.

Don’ts during the solar eclipse:

1. Driving during a solar eclipse isn’t recommended. According to the American Automobile, people should drive with their headlights on and safely park their car before observing the event with adequate protection with the proper gear.
2. But life isn’t perfect, and circumstances may dictate that one may have to be on the road. In such cases, watch out for other distracted drivers. AAA advises drivers should keep some additional space between cars and account for the fact they’ll be driving slower on the day.
1. Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (Amendment) Bill, 2019

Introduction:

- The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (Amendment) Bill, 2019 amends the 2007 Act which protects all senior citizens and parents including those who are neglected and are unable to support themselves. The Bill expands the scope of the 2007 Act and adds certain provisions for their wellbeing and safety.

Concerns with 2007 act:

- Despite this act however, it is a fact that most people in India would rather suffer than have the family name sullied by taking their own children to court for not providing for them.
- This need to maintain a facade is combined with a lack of knowledge of rights, the inherent inability of the elderly to approach a tribunal for recourse under the law, and poor implementation of the Act by various State governments.

Key features of the Bill include:

1. Definitions:
   a. In the Act, the term children refers to children and grandchildren, excluding minors.
   c. Further, the Act defines a relative as the legal heir of a childless senior citizen, excluding minors, who possess or would inherit his property after death. The Bill amends this to include minors represented by their legal guardians.
   d. The Act defines parents to include biological, adoptive, and step parents. The Bill expands the definition of parents to include parent-in-laws, and grandparents.

2. Under the Act, maintenance is defined as the provision of food, clothing, residence, medical attendance and treatment. Welfare is defined to include the provision of food, healthcare, and other amenities necessary for senior citizens. The Bill expands the definition of:
   a. maintenance to include the provision of healthcare, safety, and security for parents and senior citizens to lead a life of dignity,
   b. welfare to include the provision of housing, clothing, safety, and other amenities necessary for the physical and mental well-being of a senior citizen or parent.

3. Maintenance orders: Under the Act, state governments constitute maintenance Tribunals to decide on the maintenance payable to senior citizens and parents. These Tribunals may direct children and relatives to pay a monthly maintenance fee of up to Rs 10,000 to parents and senior citizens. The Bill removes the upper limit on the maintenance fee. The Tribunals may take the following into consideration while deciding the maintenance amount:
   a. the standard of living and earnings of the parent or senior citizen, and
   b. the earnings of the children. The Act requires children and relatives to deposit the maintenance amount with the relevant parent or senior citizen within 30 days of being ordered to do so.
   c. The Bill reduces the number of days to 15.

4. Appeals: The Act provides for senior citizens or parents to appeal the decisions of the maintenance Tribunal. The Bill allows children and relatives also to appeal decisions of the Tribunal.

5. Offences and penalties: Under the Act, abandonment of a senior citizen or parent is punishable with imprisonment of up to three months, or a fine of up to Rs 5,000, or both. The Bill increases the penalty to imprisonment between three and six months, or fine of up to Rs 10,000, or both. The Bill also provides that if the children or relatives fail to comply with the maintenance order, the Tribunal may issue a
warrant to levy the due amount. Failure to pay such fine may lead to imprisonment of up to one month, or until the payment is made, whichever is earlier.

6. **Maintenance officer:** The Act provides for a maintenance officer to represent a parent during proceedings of the Tribunal. The Bill requires maintenance officers to: (i) ensure compliance with orders on maintenance payments, and (ii) act as a liaison for parents or senior citizens.

7. **Establishment of care-homes:** Under the Act, state governments may set up old age homes. The Bill removes this and provides for senior citizen care homes which may be set up by government or private organisations. These homes must be registered with a registration authority set up by the state government. The central government will prescribe minimum standards for these homes, such as food, infrastructure, and medical facilities.

8. **Healthcare:** The Act provides for certain facilities (such as separate queues, beds, and facilities for geriatric patients) for senior citizens in government hospitals. The Bill require all hospitals, including private organisations, to provide these facilities for senior citizens. Further, homecare facilities will be provided for senior citizens with disabilities.

9. **Protection and welfare measures:** The Bill requires every police station to have at least one officer, not below the rank of Assistant Sub-Inspector, to deal with issues related to parents and senior citizens. State governments must constitute a special police unit for senior citizens in every district. The unit will be headed by a police officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police.

**Elderly as a resource:**

1. The elderly should be seen as a blessing, not a burden.
2. The elderly are becoming the fastest growing, but underutilized resource available to humanity. Rather than putting them aside, physically (and mentally), to be cared for separately, they should be integrated into the lives of communities where they can make a substantial contribution to improving social conditions.
3. The benefits of turning the ‘problem’ of the elderly into a ‘solution’ for other social problems is being demonstrated in several countries.

**Lacunae in the bill:**

1. **Isolation and loneliness among the elderly is rising.**
   a. Nearly half the elderly felt sad and neglected, 36 per cent felt they were a burden to the family.
2. **Rise in age-related chronic illness:**
   a. Heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and other chronic diseases will cause more death and illness worldwide than infectious or parasitic diseases over the next few years.
   b. In developed nations, this shift has already happened. Dementia and Alzheimer’s disease are expected to almost double every 20 years, as life expectancy increases.
3. **Special challenges for less developed nations:**
   a. Poorer countries will carry the double burden of caring for older people with chronic diseases, as well as dealing with continued high rates of infectious diseases.
4. **Increasing need for long-term care:**
   a. The number of sick and frail elderly needing affordable nursing homes or assisted living centers will likely increase.
5. **Rise in the Health care costs:**
   a. As older people stop working and their health care needs increase, governments could be overwhelmed by unprecedented costs.
   b. While there may be cause for optimism about population aging in some countries, the Pew survey reveals that residents of countries such as Japan, Italy, and Russia are the least confident about achieving an adequate standard of living in old age.
6. **Elderly women issues:**
   a. They face life time of gender-based discrimination. The gendered nature of ageing is such that universally, women tend to live longer than men.
   b. In the advanced age of 80 years and above, widowhood dominates the status of women with 71 per cent of women and only 29 per cent of men having lost their spouse.
c. Social mores inhibit women from re-marrying, resulting in an increased likelihood of women ending up alone.

d. The life of a widow is riddled with stringent moral codes, with integral rights relinquished and liberties circumvented.

e. Social bias often results in unjust allocation of resources, neglect, abuse, exploitation, gender-based violence, lack of access to basic services and prevention of ownership of assets.

f. Ageing women are more likely to get excluded from social security schemes due to lower literacy and awareness levels.

7. Ageing individual is expected to need health care for a longer period of time than previous generations but elderly care for a shorter period of time

Need of the hour:

- As a signatory to Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), India has the responsibility to formulate and implement public policy on population ageing.

- **Issues of poverty, migration, urbanisation, ruralisation and feminisation compound the complexity of this emerging phenomenon.** Public policy must respond to this burgeoning need and mainstream action into developmental planning.

- **Gender and social concerns of elderly, particularly elderly women,** must be integrated at the policy level.

- The elderly, especially women, should be represented in decision making.

- Increasing social/widow pension and its universalisation is critical for expanding the extent and reach of benefits.

- Renewed efforts should be made for raising widespread awareness and access to social security schemes such as National Old Age Pension and Widow Pension Scheme. Provisions in terms of special incentives for elderly women, disabled, widowed should also be considered.

Link: https://youtu.be/deBSQhFj7gQ

2. India fights back- effect on children

Aspect on how COVID19 affects children:

- Nearly 50 per cent of parents of children below five years of age have not been able to access immunisation services during the nationwide lockdown imposed in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, says child rights NGO CRY.

- According to the study, access to immunisation suffered a huge setback across all regions of the country and a whopping 63 per cent of the surveyed households in northern states reported lack of access to immunisation services.

- Only around half (51 per cent ) of the parents who had children below five years of age were able to access immunisation services during the lockdown.

- One in every four (27 per cent) of the respondents reported non-accessibility of regular healthcare services for children during the lockdown -most reported from the North (31 per cent) followed by the South (21 per cent). In other regions, lack of access to regular healthcare facilities was experienced by less than 20 per cent of parents.

- Even though children have not been the face of this pandemic as they have largely been spared of the direct health effects of COVID-19 so far, findings of the study indicate that they have been among its biggest victims with multiple side-effects on their physical and psycho-social well-being.

- If access to basic healthcare for children was at bay, their access to education was affected equally during the lockdown days.

- Three in every four (77 per cent) of the respondents have reported that the lockdown has affected education and learning. This was again the highest in the North (87 per cent) and least in the West (56 per cent).
While 60 per cent of the parents/primary caregivers pointed out that among the regular activities for children affected were their extra-curricular opportunities; 60 per cent believed that children’s friendships and social lives were affected; and almost an equal section (59 per cent) perceived that their outdoor games and recreational opportunities were majorly compromised, the survey found.

37 percent of the respondents, children’s psychological well-being and happiness have definitely been affected during this phase. This was most reported from the eastern states (51 per cent).

A majority (88 per cent) of the respondents reported an increase in their children’s exposure to online activities (screen time), amongst which 45 per cent reported the increase to a great extent. Region-wise, in South, North, and West, around 40 per cent of the respondents reported that the screen time for children have increased considerably.

Only 43 per cent of the parents reported about being able to watch their children’s online activity continuously. This was the highest in the West (68 per cent), followed by East (50 per cent).

More than half of the respondents (52 per cent) reported about the provision of supervised access to the Internet for their children. One in every five respondents (22 per cent) reported about taking no measures to protect their children when online. This was most reported from North (25 per cent).

**Physical impact:**

The physical activities of children have significantly come down in this period thereby leading to weight gain. The problem of overweight and obesity among children was already common and the lockdown has made the issue worse.

With children unable to play games in the playground they seek entertainment on mobile phones, tablets, laptops etc. The battle of making children play real games rather than virtual has been dealt a big blow due to the lockdown.

Research indicates that screen time beyond one hour adversely affects the mental abilities, including cognition and higher functions, in children.

**Falling into poverty:**

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

**Exacerbating the learning crisis:**

188 countries have imposed countrywide school closures, affecting more than 1.5 billion children and youth.

The potential losses that may accrue in learning for today’s young generation, and for the development of their human capital, are hard to fathom. More than two-thirds of countries have introduced a national distance learning platform, but among low-income countries the share is only 30 percent.

Before this crisis, almost one third of the world’s young people were already digitally excluded.

**Mental impact:**

The anxiety and worries of the parents are easily absorbed by children, as they are very sensitive to changes in the environment.

This may result in pessimistic thoughts leading to depression, anxiety and loneliness.

Another major negative impact is by the mainstream electronic media carrying a regular feed of tragic news leading to an increase in their anxiety levels and attendant sleep disorders, somatoform disorders, and depression.

Many of these children and their parents may need counselling. It is important to recognize these symptoms for an early intervention

Link: [https://youtu.be/CqTnEjWeeOc?list=PLVOgwA_DiGzqPZnhoj99VsKgkv_03gN3i](https://youtu.be/CqTnEjWeeOc?list=PLVOgwA_DiGzqPZnhoj99VsKgkv_03gN3i)
3. Fight Against Malnutrition

Introduction:

- In a bid to tackle malnutrition, government is developing an Atlas to map the crops and food grains grown in different regions of the country so that nutritious protein rich food in local areas can be promoted. The ministry of Women and Child Development in association with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Deendayal Research Institute is developing a POSHAN atlas under POSHAN abhiyan, government’s multi-ministerial convergence mission with the vision to ensure attainment of malnutrition free India by 2022. According to the World Bank Global Nutrition Report – 2018, malnutrition costs India at least $10 billion annually in terms of lost productivity, illness and death and is seriously retarding improvements in human development and further reduction of childhood mortality. POSHAN abhiyan is focusing on ensuring the nutrition of children, women, and pregnant mothers in impoverished areas and the government seems to be looking at community management of the problem.

What is malnutrition?

- Malnutrition refers to deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in a person’s intake of energy and/or nutrients.
- The term malnutrition covers 2 broad groups of conditions.
- One is ‘undernutrition’—which includes stunting (low height for age), wasting (low weight for height), underweight (low weight for age) and micronutrient deficiencies or insufficiencies (a lack of important vitamins and minerals).
- The other is overweight, obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer).

Causes for malnutrition:

1. **Mother’s health:**
   - Scientists say the initial 1,000 days of an individual’s lifespan, from the day of conception till he or she turns two, is crucial for physical and cognitive development.
   - But more than half the women of childbearing age are anaemic and 33 per cent are undernourished, according to NFHS 2006. A malnourished mother is more likely to give birth to malnourished children.

2. **Social inequality:**
   - For example, girl children are more likely to be malnourished than boys, and low-caste children than upper-caste children.

3. **Sanitation:**
   - Most children in rural areas and urban slums still lack sanitation. This makes them vulnerable to the kinds of chronic intestinal diseases that prevent bodies from making good use of nutrients in food, and they become malnourished.
   - Lack of sanitation and clean drinking water are the reasons high levels of malnutrition persists in India despite improvement in food availability.

4. **Lack of diversified food:**
   - With the increase in diversity in food intake malnutrition (stunted/underweight) status declines. Only 12% of children are likely to be stunted and underweight in areas where diversity in food intake is high, while around 50% children are stunted if they consume less than three food items.

5. **Lack of food security:**
   - The dismal health of Indian women and children is primarily due to lack of food security.
   - Nearly one-third of adults in the country have a body mass index (BMI) below normal just because they do not have enough food to eat.

6. **Failure of government approaches:**
   - India already has two robust national programmes addressing malnutrition the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) and the National Health Mission but these do not yet reach enough people.
The delivery system is also inadequate and plagued by inefficiency and corruption. Some analysts estimate that 40 per cent of the subsidised food never reaches the intended recipients.

7. **Disease spread:**
   - Most child deaths in India occur from treatable diseases like pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria and complications at birth. The child may eventually die of a disease, but that disease becomes lethal because the child is malnourished and unable to put up resistance to it.

8. **Poverty:**
   - The staff of ICDS places part of the blame of malnutrition on parents being inattentive to the needs of their children, but crushing poverty forces most women to leave their young children at home and work in the fields during the agricultural seasons.
   - Regional disparities in the availability of food and varying food habits lead to the differential status of under-nutrition which is substantially higher in rural than in urban areas. This demands a region-specific action plan with significant investments in human resources with critical health investments at the local levels.

9. **Lack of nutrition:**
   - Significant cause of malnutrition is also the deliberate failure of malnourished people to choose nutritious food.
   - An international study found that the poor in developing countries had enough money to increase their food spending by as much as 30 per cent but that this money was spent on alcohol, tobacco and festivals instead.

**Measures needed:**

1. *Anganwadis system is the backbone of India’s nutrition target effort and we really have to improve it.*
2. *Primary health infrastructure is not strong so proper steps needs to be taken in this regard.*
3. *Farmers should be encouraged and incentivised for agricultural diversification.*
4. *Innovative and low-cost farming technologies, increase in the irrigation coverage and enhancing knowledge of farmers in areas such as appropriate use of land and water should be encouraged to improve the sustainability of food productivity.*
6. *The government should improve policy support for improving agricultural produce of traditional crops in the country.*
7. *Improve ICDS*
8. *The targeting efficiency of all food safety nets should be improved, especially that of the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), to ensure that the poorest are included.*
9. *In addition, fortification of government-approved commodities within the social safety net programmes can improve nutritional outcomes.*
10. *Child feeding practices should be improved in the country, especially at the critical ages when solid foods are introduced to the diet.*
11. *Fortification, diversification and supplementation may be used as simultaneous strategies to address micro and macronutrient deficiencies.*
12. *Storage capacity should be improved to prevent post-harvest losses.*
13. *There is a need for more robust measures that can take cognizance of all aspects of SDG 2.*
14. *All the major welfare programmes need to be gender sensitive.*
15. *The inherited dehumanising poverty explains the persistence of malnutrition on a large scale.*
16. *Children born in impecunious circumstances suffer the most from malnutrition. It is all the more reason for governments to intervene to provide adequate nutrition to all.*
17. *Taking medical services to the door step of villages*
18. *Funds for food to all yield great returns and help in unlocking the full potential of citizens besides strengthening the workforce.*
19. *Focus to improve the hygiene and cleanliness of our surrounding.*
20. *Real time delivery of such schemes to the targeted beneficiaries.*
21. *Schools kids and their parents should be made aware about the various government programmes.*
Initiatives taken by government:

1. **ICDS:**
   - High priority was accorded to reducing undernutrition in preschool children. The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) was aimed at providing food supplements to children from poor and marginalised sections to bridge the gap between requirement and actual dietary intake.
   - Another component of ICDS programme was weighing children for early detection of growth faltering and undernutrition.

2. **Universal Salt Iodisation:**
   - National Iodine Deficiency Control Programme (NIDDCP) was initiated in 1992 with the goal that all salt for human consumption will be iodised to ensure universal household access to iodised salt.

3. There are a number of existing programmes targeting nutrition outcomes, directly or indirectly. These include the National Health Mission – Janani Suraksha Yojana, the National Rural Drinking Water Programme, Matritva Sahyog Yojana, SABLA for adolescent girls, Mid-day Meal Scheme, Targeted Public Distribution System, National Food Security Mission, MGNREGA and the National Rural Livelihoods Mission among others.

4. **National Nutrition Mission:**
   - NNM has introduced a central nodal agency with extensive financial resources to coordinate various central and state government schemes and imbue them with additional financial resources.
   - The programme will cover all states and districts in a phased manner.
   - The core strategy of the mission is to create decentralised governance systems with flexibility given to states, districts and local level with robust monitoring, accountability and incentive frameworks that will encourage local solutions.
   - More than 10 crore people are likely to be benefitted by this programme.

5. **POSHAN Abhiyaan -PM’s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment from Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan.**
   - The programme through the use of technology, a targeted approach and convergence strives to reduce the level of stunting, undernutrition, anemia and low birthweight in children, as also, focus on adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers, thus holistically addressing malnutrition.
   - The programme aims to ensure service delivery and interventions by use of technology, behavioural change through convergence and lays-down specific targets to be achieved across different monitoring parameters over the next few years.

6. **POSHAN Atlas:** To map the crops and food grains grown in different regions of the country so that nutritious protein rich food in local areas can be promoted.

7. Indian Government has taken important steps, such as the release of fortification standards for five staples by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to fight micronutrient malnutrition, release of food composition tables by the National Institute of Nutrition to increase focus on dietary diversity, and now, the release of nutrition data to address the issue of malnutrition more holistically.

8. The **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-2 goal, which aims to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”, is a priority area for India**, which can offer key solutions for hunger and poverty eradication and also tackle the issue of malnutrition and undernourishment in the country.

**Conclusion:**

- Malnutrition is a complex and multi-dimensional issue.
- Before 2015, the coverage was used to be about 1%, however, the **Mission Indradhanush**, introduced in 2015, sets the target to achieve child vaccine coverage by 5% every year and aims to achieve target of full coverage by 2020. Currently, as a result of Mission Indradhanush, the current rate of vaccination is 7% per year.
- It is primarily caused by several factors, including poverty, inadequate food consumption, inequitable food distribution, improper maternal, infant and child feeding, and care practices, inequity and gender...
imbalances, poor sanitary and environmental conditions, and restricted access to quality health, education and social care services.

- **National Family Health Survey – 4** says the decrease in underweight children was only **10%**. Moreover, **wasting increased by 3%** (from 19.4% to 21%).
- It once again forces us to ask why despite rapid economic growth, declining levels of poverty, enough food to export, and a multiplicity of government programmes, **malnutrition amongst the poorest remains high**.
- **Governance** can be termed ‘good’ only when it **banishes hunger and starvation**. The **poor must also be valued** like the rest of the population since attaching less value to their lives is one unstated reason why their nutritional needs are not taken care of as they should be.

Link: [https://youtu.be/NLzq3hVdST4](https://youtu.be/NLzq3hVdST4)

### 4. World Health Assembly Resolution

**Introduction:**

- The 73rd session of the World Health Assembly (WHA) took place virtually from May 18-19. During the session, countries including India, Japan, Indonesia, New Zealand, UK and Canada accepted a resolution asking for an “impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation” of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) response to the pandemic as well as the identification of the “zoonotic” source of the coronavirus. The origin of the virus is currently believed to be a wet market in Wuhan, China. 116 of the 194 member states were in favour of the resolution.

**World Health Assembly (WHA):**

1. The World Health Assembly (WHA) is the forum through which the World Health Organization (WHO) is governed by its 194 member states.
2. It is the **world’s highest health policy setting body** and is composed of health ministers from member states.
3. In other words it is the **Parliament of WHO**.
4. The members of the World Health Assembly generally meet every year in May in Geneva, the location of WHO Headquarters.
5. The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.

**Resolution:**

1. The resolution, initially proposed by some 60 countries including Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Russia South Africa, the European Union and its member states, Turkey and the UK, was finally backed by more than 120 members.
2. While it does not mention China, the draft says the Director General of the WHO should continue “to work closely with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and countries, as part of the One-Health Approach to **identify the zoonotic source of the virus** and the **route of introduction to the human population**, including the possible role of intermediate hosts, including through efforts such as scientific and collaborative field missions, which will enable targeted interventions and a research agenda to reduce the risk of similar events as well as to provide guidance on how to prevent SARS-COV2 infection in animals and humans and prevent the establishment of new zoonotic reservoirs, as well as to reduce further risks of emergence and transmission of zoonotic diseases.”
3. Further, the resolution states, “Initiate, at the earliest appropriate moment, and in consultation with Member States, a stepwise process of impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation, including
using existing mechanisms, as appropriate, to review experience gained and lessons learned from the WHO-coordinated international health response to COVID-19.”

4. Resolution at the WHO assembly which is not binding and mentioned no countries by name also called for nations to commit to ensuring “transparent, equitable and timely access” to any treatments or vaccines developed against Covid-19

**Why is the resolution important?**

1. It is important because the problem is being faced globally and all countries have been affected and economies have gone down.
2. Since the pandemic, there has been increasing pressure on China, which so far has opposed suggestions for inquiry into the origins of the virus. Meanwhile, the US has repeatedly blamed the WHO and claims the organisation failed to obtain timely information and share it in a transparent fashion.
3. US President Donald Trump threatened to permanently cut funding to the WHO.
4. Last month, Trump halted funding to the organization after he said it had “missed the call” on the pandemic.
5. At present, the US is the WHO’s biggest contributor and makes up over 14.67 per cent of the total funding, at $553.1 million

**China angle:**

1. Resolution has been endorsed at the WHA, it remains to be seen how the probe will be carried out and to what degree of independence. Significantly, the timeline of the probe is also not clear. So far, China has opposed demands calling for an international investigation into the virus.
2. China has been isolated today and doing all sorts to clear its image.
3. It announced a $2 billion donation to the United Nations, which is over twice the amount the US contributed before Trump cut off funding. It also offered to set up hospitals and health infrastructure in Africa.

**Measures to strengthen WHO:**

- **Increase the WHO’s technical capacities and capabilities**—Creating new departments focused on science, antimicrobial resistance and digital health will also broaden the WHO’s range of expertise and keep up with the latest public health challenges and opportunities.
- **Help focus on the mission of WHO**—which does not have the capacity to do everything and has frequently found itself responding to situations rather than setting its own agenda. It may also encourage member states to provide additional resources if they have a better idea of where that money is going.
- **Coordinate with other global players**—as these reforms do not address how the organization should interact with major global health players like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Doctors Without Borders.
- **Mobilize more resources**—WHO’s current biennial budget is 4.42 billion, with overwhelming majority dictated by donors and their priorities, which leaves the organization limited control over the funding.

**Conclusion:**

- The countries should stop politicizing the virus and ramp up their capabilities to fight the pandemic without overwhelming the healthcare infrastructure.
- **Global cooperation** on the issue rather than issuing blame on each other. It augurs well for nations if WHO was strengthened with adequate finances.
- Any pandemic has a point of start and point of end, it is important to understand the source so as study the virus and develop vaccines accordingly.
- International agreement on early warning is needed.

Link: [https://youtu.be/AZJuoNds80](https://youtu.be/AZJuoNds80)
5. International Court of Justice

Key observations made by the ICJ:

1. Islamabad has violated Article 36 of Vienna Convention of Consular Relations, 1963, by not informing India about Jadhav’s arrest immediately after Pakistan Army had taken him into custody.
2. India had been deprived of ‘right to communicate with and have access to Jadhav, to visit him in detention and to arrange for his legal representation’.

About ICJ:

1. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN). It was established in June 1945 by the Charter of the United Nations and began work in April 1946.
2. The seat of the Court is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands). Of the six principal organs of the United Nations, it is the only one not located in New York (United States of America).
3. The Court’s role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.
4. The Court is composed of 15 judges, who are elected for terms of office of nine years by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council. It is assisted by a Registry, its administrative organ. Its official languages are English and French.
5. It has two primary functions: to settle legal disputes submitted by States in accordance with established international laws, and to act as an advisory board on issues submitted to it by authorized international organizations.

Members:

1. The International Court of Justice is composed of 15 judges elected to nine-year terms of office by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council.
2. In order to be elected, a candidate must receive an absolute majority of the votes in both bodies.
3. In order to ensure a measure of continuity, one third of the Court is elected every three years. Judges are eligible for re-election.

Presidency:

1. The President and Vice-President are elected by the Members of the Court every three years by secret ballot. The election is held on the date on which Members of the Court elected at a triennial election begin their terms of office or shortly thereafter. An absolute majority is required and there are no conditions of nationality. The President and Vice-President may be re-elected.
2. The President presides at all meetings of the Court; he/she directs its work and supervises its administration, with the assistance of a Budgetary and Administrative Committee and various other committees, all composed of Members of the Court. During judicial deliberations, the President has a casting vote in the event of votes being equally tied.
3. In The Hague, where he/she is obliged to reside, the President of the Court takes precedence over the doyen of the diplomatic corps.
4. The Vice-President replaces the President in his/her absence, in the event of his/her inability to perform his/her duties, or in the event of a vacancy in the presidency. He/she receives a daily allowance for doing so. In the absence of the Vice-President, this role falls to the senior judge.

How the Court Works:

- The Court may entertain two types of cases: legal disputes between States submitted to it by them (contentious cases) and requests for advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by United Nations organs and specialized agencies (advisory proceedings).
Who nominates the candidates?

1. Every state government, party to the Charter, designates a group who propose candidates for the office of ICJ judges. This group includes four members/jurists of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (machinery which enables arbitral tribunals to be set up as desired and facilitates their work) also picked by the State. Countries not part of the statute follow the same procedure where a group nominates the candidates.
2. Each group is limited to nominate four candidates, two of whom could be of their nationality. Within a fixed duration set by the Secretary-General, the names of the candidates have to be sent to him/her.

Qualifications of ICJ judges:

1. A judge should have a high moral character.
2. A judge should fit to the qualifications of appointment of highest judicial officers as prescribed by their respective states or.
3. A judge should be a juriconsult of recognized competence in international law.

The 15 judges of the Court are distributed as per the regions:

1. Three from Africa.
2. Two from Latin America and Caribbean.
3. Three from Asia.
4. Five from Western Europe and other states.
5. Two from Eastern Europe.

India’s relationship with ICJ:

India has remained involved in cases at ICJ on six occasions, including the present Jadhav case. Pakistan was the opposing party in the four out of six cases.

- In 1955, Portugal claimed the right of passage through the territory of India to ensure communications between its territory of Daman and its enclave territories of Dadra and Nagar-Haveli.
- India contended that the events that took place in Dadra on 21st & 22nd July 1954 overthrew Portuguese authority in these enclaves creating tension in the surrounding Indian Territory.
  - Verdict: The ICJ did not find fault with India and ruled that India has not acted contrary to its obligations.
- In 1971, India said that the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) had no jurisdiction on a complaint filed by Pakistan.
  - Verdict: ICJ held that ICAO is indeed competent to entertain the complaint made to it by Pakistan.
- In 1973, Pakistan sought proceedings against India on the charges of genocide against 195 Pakistani nationals, prisoners of war or civilian internees in the Indian custody.
- The case ended after both India and Pakistan governments held discussions and came to an agreement on the issue.
- In 1999, Pakistan entered into a dispute on the destruction of a Pakistani aircraft by India in 1999. Pakistan said that the ICJ had jurisdiction in this issue.
  - Verdict: ICJ concluded that it had no jurisdiction to entertain the application filed by Pakistan.
- In 2014, The Republic of the Marshall Islands instituted proceedings against all nuclear weapon states, including India, contending breach of customary law obligations on nuclear disarmament.
- India said that the ICJ had no jurisdiction in the case.
  - Verdict: ICJ accepted that it cannot proceed to the merits of the case because of lack of jurisdiction.
- In 2017, India filed a case on illegal detention of former Indian Navy Officer Kulbhushan Jadhav by Pakistan. The case is in progress at ICJ.
Verdict: ICJ has directed Pakistan to review conviction order of Kulbhushan Jadhav and India should be granted consular access to the Navy officer as per Article 36 of Vienna Convention of Consular Relations, 1963 and Pakistan should recon

Link: https://youtu.be/SUXP6fKvqLA

6. Vatican summit on Sexual abuse

Introduction:
- For the first time in Catholic history, 190 global church leaders have gathered in the Vatican to address the crisis of clergy sexual abuse, described as the most serious crisis in the church since the Reformation.

What’s the summit about?
- The Vatican sexual abuse summit, officially the Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church, was a four-day Catholic Church summit meeting in Vatican City that ran from 21 to 24 February 2019, convened by Pope Francis to discuss preventing sexual abuse by Catholic Church clergy.
- It was a four-day gathering of about 190 Catholic leaders who will discuss how to resolve the issue of the sexual abuse of minors.
- It took place in the Vatican, in Rome, under the official title of “Protection of Minors in the Church”.
- It has described the meeting’s goal as making “absolutely clear” to bishops how to act to prevent and deal with sexual abuse.
- It focuses on sharing best practices in dealing with abuse, educating bishops on the problem, and on bolstering transparency, responsibility and accountability in the church. It will not, crucially, focus on canon law reform.
- The pope has asked those invited to pray for the coming meeting.

The summit is important for at least three reasons.
- First, although similar meetings have taken place in the past, it is the first time that a pope has summoned senior bishops for it.
- Second, Pope Francis has given more voice to survivors of clerical sexual abuse – he has met some of them and has urged bishops to do the same in their countries before leaving for Rome. Some survivors will also give their testimony at the summit.
- Finally, the Vatican has acknowledged that sexual abuse is a global problem in the church, and not only an issue in some specific countries, as it had previously downplayed it.

What do survivors want?
- Survivors want the Vatican to remove from the priesthood not only any priest guilty of sexually abusing a child, but also any bishops and cardinals involved in covering him up and shuffling them to other posts.
- Other demands include handing over priest offenders to civil authorities and ending alternative punishment such as sentences to a life of “penance and prayer” or retreat in religious institutions instead of jail.
- All survivors pledge to carry on their battle.
- During the summit, victims of abuse gathered in Rome to protest, shouting “Zero tolerance!”

Takeaways:

1. Responsibility
- The summit was opened by warning the attending bishops and religious superiors that their constituents were demanding concrete actions, not just words.
2. Accountability

- Cardinals called for more accountability in the Catholic Church. Cardinal called for transparent legal procedures on how to report and investigate those accused of abuse and those negligent in handling abuse cases. He elaborated upon his “metropolitan model” proposal, in which metropolitan bishops would investigate suspected abuse with the consultation of lay experts, and then submit the results to the Vatican.

3. Transparency

- It was stressed the need for transparency and traceability, so that abuse cases can be followed by victims and Catholics. Marx also condemned the use of pontifical secrecy to suppress abuse cases.

4. Papal priorities

- Pope Francis ended the summit with a half-hour speech that included condemnations of the abuses by clergy and cautions against being too extreme in response to the crisis. Rev.

Indian Laws: Amendments in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012:

Key changes proposed:

- It will make punishment more stringent for committing sexual crimes against children including death penalty.
- It includes provision of death penalty in cases of sexual offences against children.
- The amendments also provide for levy of fines and imprisonment to curb child pornography.
- Amendments are also proposed to protect children from sexual offences in times of natural calamities and in other situations where children are administered, in any way, any hormone or any chemical substance, to attain early sexual maturity for the purpose of penetrative sexual assault.

Nature of Child abuse in institutions:

- Children have been hurt and abused at school.
- Children are being abused by the caretaker and bus attendant.
- Abuse that our children face from classmates, teachers and even school heads.
- Many students have died or been injured due to poor infrastructure at the schools.
- A survey conducted by World Vision India revealed that one in every two children is a victim of sexual abuse.
- A UNICEF report said that majority of abuses of children was reported for the age group of 5 to 11 years.
- Children are unable to deal with the consequences of the humiliation meted out to them.

Link: https://youtu.be/PPVyAWRV8S8

7. Quad-plus diplomacy

Introduction:

- US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo recently held a video conference with his counterparts from India, Australia, Brazil, Israel, Japan and South Korea on issues related to the coronavirus pandemic. Pompeo and his counterparts discussed the importance of international cooperation, transparency, and accountability in combating the COVID-19 pandemic and in addressing its causes.
The Quad:

1. Regional coalition known as the ‘Quad’, the quadrilateral formation includes Japan, India, United States and Australia.
2. All four nations find a common ground of being the democratic nations and common interests of unhindered maritime trade and security.
3. The idea was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007. However, the idea couldn’t move ahead with Australia pulling out of it.

Significance:

- Quad is an opportunity for like-minded countries to share notes and collaborate on projects of mutual interest. All four countries share a vision of an open and free Indo-Pacific. Each is involved in development and economic projects as well as in promoting maritime domain awareness and maritime security.
- The Quad grouping is one of the many avenues for interaction among India, Australia, Japan and the US and should not be seen in an exclusive context. Quad should not be seen in any comparative or in an exclusive context.

Analysis:

1. Officials of the four “Quad” countries (Australia, India, Japan and the United States) teleconferenced about how to respond to the pandemic.
2. Quad meetings are no longer unusual. But this one was special because it included three additional Indo-Pacific powers: New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam. The call, was intended to exchange notes on how these powers were tackling the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Indeed, whether this was even a “Quad-Plus” meeting is an open question. It appears that only the Indian government formally announced that this meeting was held, and true to fashion, New Delhi did not reference the Quad at all.
4. Attempt to keep the Quad-plus countries within a certain sphere of influence and strategic direction.
5. The Quad-plus countries have held subsequent meetings, discussing not just battling the current pandemic situation but also sharing of technologies, and more importantly, ways to get the global economy back on track without significant setback. They also appear to have agreed on the need to initially focus on the public health dimension of the crisis, and therefore will first target the development of vaccines, manufacture of equipment and calibrating treatment options.
6. Each of the “plus three” parties are an important partner the Quad countries. Vietnam is an important strategic partner for all four Quad members. South Korea is also, despite the latter’s somewhat troubled relations occasionally with Japan and the US. Importantly, Seoul has managed COVID-19 successfully in comparison to other regional governments.
7. New Zealand’s path to the Quad mirrors the evolution in Indian thinking. Like New Zealand, India too had traditionally shied away from choosing between the United States and China. But China’s aggressive behaviour in attempting to deny India the strategic space it seeks in the Indo-Pacific, as well as in global platforms such as the Nuclear Suppliers’ Group (NSG) has propelled New Delhi to shift increasingly towards partnerships with others in the Indo-Pacific.
8. India had been somewhat uncomfortable with the Quad because of the perception that it was a containment effort against China.
9. The slow but steady institutionalisation of the Quad suggests that its future expansion is a real possibility.
10. Efforts to coordinate responses to COVID-19 by the Quad-Plus countries may be a means to expand the original formulation at a pace that would be comfortable to potential new members and without eliciting a Chinese rebuke.
11. These factors provide a pragmatic path to greater security cooperation via a Quad-Plus arrangement in future years. Expanding the Quad is not going to be easy, and will bring with it challenges of divergent concerns and burden sharing problems. But there is clearly an impetus for Quad expansion that will begin to find expression in coming months.
Significance Quad- grouping for the US:

- The US believes the Quad, as one of the elements of its larger Indo-Pacific strategy for “a free, open and rules-based order” in face of an aggressive and expansionist China in the region, should eventually evolve into a ministerial-level dialogue imbued with a strong military dimension.
- But Washington also recognizes that New Delhi for now remains opposed to any militarization of the Quad, which was revived after a decade as a joint secretary-level dialogue in November 2017, with its second meeting being held in June this year. India has also made it clear that the US should not “conflate” the Indo-Pacific with the Quad, stressing the centrality of Asean in the former.

Significance for India:

1. By joining the quad India has taken a significant turn in its policy for the subcontinent.
2. It gives New Delhi a powerful platform to advance its interests in East Asia, coordinate strategies with powerful friends and add more strength to its Act East initiative.
3. The geostrategic term “Indo-Pacific” as opposed to “Asia-Pacific” has been gaining currency.
4. It will deepen India’s ties with US, Australia and Japan with benefits in diplomatic leverage and sharing of burden in de
5. Working with US and its allies in the Asia-Pacific will provide New Delhi significant leverage in shaping US policies in Afghanistan-Pakistan to the benefit of India.

QUAD a reflection of multi-polar foreign policy:

Though India is part of Quad, it is not a formal alliance or any security architecture against China. Moreover, alliances are not even feasible in this globalized world based on complex interdependence. But QUAD membership reinforces India’s multi-polar foreign policy as:

1. India is associated with several forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS etc.
2. The other members of these grouping face some sought of strategic competition from USA, but India has managed well to maintain strategic autonomy which is a pillar of multi polar world order.
3. China’s assertion in South China Sea (SCS) compromises freedom of navigation. Through QUAD India seeks to reassert rule based world order to counter China’s growing power and assertion.
4. Democratic, Cooperative and Peacekeeping endeavour: The QUAD initiative is group of four largest and powerful democracies in the world which values democratic, peaceful, rule based international order.
5. India held that the Quad was more about sharing democratic experiences than a security arrangement directed at China.
6. Emergence of Indo-pacific: USA under its pivot to China policy held Indo-Pacific region is now world’s most strategic location.
7. Different nations are seeking to project their strategic power in the region.
8. India’s membership to QUAD should be seen in this light as a counterbalancing initiative to secure its own neighbourhood.

Concerns:

1. Emergence of new players like the U.S. and Japan has only increased multiple regional rivalries in the region.
2. While the quadrilateral grouping will bring developmental projects, it will considerably erode India’s primacy in the neighbourhood.
3. India had impeded Chinese demand for a diplomatic mission in Bhutan, now it would be a challenge if US pursues the same.
4. India objected to Chinese naval presence in Sri Lanka. Now India will not be able to object to U.S. naval warships and Japanese presence there.
5. India while pursuing aspirations in global alliances falls short of its regional commitments. New Delhi has changed its position on Hambantota several times, ambivalent on tackling political issues in Nepal, Maldives crisis, Myanmar Rohingya issue etc.
6. Strategic analysts argue that India is dragging itself into the US-China rivalry.

Link: https://youtu.be/lG-PSX0jioXs

8. The Afghanistan puzzle & India

Introduction:

- India welcomed the power-sharing deal announced by Afghanistan between President Ashraf Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah, which ended months of political discord triggered by last year’s disputed presidential election. The Ministry of External Affairs said India hoped the political agreement and creation of a council for national reconciliation will result in renewed efforts for establishing enduring peace and stability, and putting an end to externally-sponsored terrorism and violence in Afghanistan. According to the deal, Ghani will stay as the president while Abdullah will helm the High Council of National Reconciliation (HCNR) with executive authority and his team will have a 50 per cent share in the cabinet. The HCNR has been mandated to lead future peace talks, including with the Taliban.

Why Afghanistan is important for India?

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

Power Sharing deal and Significance:

- Mr Ghani will stay on as president.
- Dr Abdullah will lead peace talks with the Taliban, should they get under way.
- The deal calls for Abdullah to lead the country’s National Reconciliation High Council and some members of Abdullah’s team would be included in Ghani’s Cabinet.
- The Reconciliation Council has been given the authority to handle and approve all affairs related to Afghanistan’s peace process.
- The deal comes as Afghan authorities are hoping to enter peace talks with the Taliban to end years of violence.
- It is hoped the deal in the capital Kabul will help to maintain the balance of power that existed before last year’s disputed presidential election.
- India has welcomed the deal. It has called for renewed efforts for establishing enduring peace and stability, and putting an end to externally-sponsored terrorism and violence in Afghanistan.
- Economically, it is a gateway to the oil and mineral-rich Central Asian republics.
- Afghanistan has also become the second-largest recipient of Indian foreign aid over the last five years.

India’s policy towards peaceful Afghanistan:

- The Afghanistan wants India to be involved not in internal politics but because we are the most important power in the region and an emerging power.

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India’s development assistance has been the source of its considerable influence and goodwill among Afghan citizens.

Major projects, such as the Salma Dam and Parliament building in Kabul, that began in 2008-09, have now been completed.

Last year India and Afghanistan agreed to initiate an ambitious and forward-looking ‘New Development Partnership’, according to which India agreed to take up 116 high-impact community development projects to be implemented in 31 provinces of Afghanistan, including in the fields of education, health, agriculture, irrigation, drinking water, renewable energy, flood control, micro-hydropower, sports infrastructure and administrative infrastructure.

India has been giving a lot of non-lethal military assistance. In 2016 four MI 25 attack helicopters were given to Afghanistan.

India is the biggest regional donor to Afghanistan and fifth largest donor globally with over $3 billion in assistance.

India has built over 200 public and private schools, sponsors scholarships and hosts Afghan students.

India has shied away from involving itself in full scale war in Afghanistan.

India’s position on Taliban:

The Taliban has reinforced its intent to engage with India by nudging its readiness to accept Kashmir as India’s internal affair amid a new round of international diplomacy to encourage a broad-based political settlement in Afghanistan.

The Taliban are clearly sending a signal that they want to open a channel of communication with India.

India refused to recognise the Taliban regime of 1996-2001 and rather supported the ‘Norther Alliance’ in fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan.

India has long held the position of dealing only with the elected government in Kabul, and has always considered the Taliban a terrorist organisation backed by Pakistan.

India supports an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled peace process.

Kandahar Hijack of 1999 and Taliban’s proximity to Pakistan’s deep state has also embittered the Indo-Taliban relations.

However, India’s refusal to engage with Taliban will give Pakistan a free hand to use it as a proxy in India’s internal matters.

Given India’s regional and global positions, it is appropriate for India to engage with all the key players in Afghanistan, not only in terms of the government but also in terms of political forces, society and the Afghan body politic.

India’s position on non-engagement with Taliban has reduced its role in international diplomatic efforts. US wants India to have more active role, other than economic and humanitarian, in the peace process.

Need for corrective diplomatic action

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

Link: https://youtu.be/CCr1osP7Eno

9. India- Vietnam connections

Introduction:
• India and Vietnam held delegation-level talks at Hyderabad House in Delhi. While the Indian delegation was led by Vice President Venkaiah Naidu, his Vietnamese counterpart Dang Ngoc headed the Vietnam team. Dang was on a three-day visit to India. During the visit, Vietnamese budget airline Vietjet announced the operation of five new routes connecting India and Vietnam. New Delhi-Da Nang route will commence operations with a frequency of five flights per week. New routes connecting Mumbai with Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City will operate with three weekly flights and four weekly flights. Currently, the airline operates flights from and to New Delhi, Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi at a frequency of four flights per week and three flights per week respectively. Vietnam is also seeking to boost its farm produce exports to India to alleviate the impact of coronavirus on the Southeast Asian country’s trade with China, its largest trading partner

Significance of the Relationship:
• India’s first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the first visitors to Vietnam after its victory against the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.
• Vietnam is a strategic pillar of India’s Act East Policy, and key interlocutor in ASEAN.
• Over the years, political contacts have strengthened as reflected in several high-level visits by leaders from both sides.
• India’s thrust under the ‘Act East’ policy combined with Vietnam’s growing engagement within the region and with India has paid rich dividends.
• India and Vietnam closely cooperate in various regional forums such as ASEAN, East Asia Summit, Mekong Ganga Cooperation, Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) besides UN and WTO.
• Both India and Vietnam possess the capacity to find compatibility in areas promoting defence cooperation and infrastructure simultaneously.
• Vietnam, which is under maritime pressure from China’s activities in the South China Sea (SCS), wants India to deepen its military engagement further.

Vietnam is important for India’s look east policy:
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• Both India and Vietnam possess the capacity to find compatibility in areas promoting defence cooperation and infrastructure simultaneously.
• Vietnam, which is under maritime pressure from China’s activities in the South China Sea (SCS), wants India to deepen its military engagement further.
• The India-Vietnam Joint Statement of March 2018 reiterates the focus given to sub-regionalism.
• India’s proposal to improve humanitarian and disaster relief and maritime transportation links found the eager backing of Vietnam, which also supported India’s proposed anti-terrorism measures.
• Mutual trust, threats emerging from a rising China and a convergence of strategic interests have contributed to the deepening of ties between the two nations to an extent that Vietnam now engages
India at the level of a ‘comprehensive strategic partner’, which is a clear indication of importance both the nations put in this critical partnership.

- Vietnam ratified the CPTPP, asserting its growing economic impact globally, with exports increasing to approximately $240 billion for the year 2018.

Bilateral Relations:

- Cultural and economic links between India and Vietnam date back to 2nd century.
- India and Vietnam have robust trade and economic relations with bilateral trade of USD 12.8 billion in 2017-18.
- Trade and economic linkages continue to grow.
- Defence Cooperation has emerged as a significant pillar of India’s strategic partnership with Vietnam.
- Military exchanges between India and Vietnam are quite robust. The two sides conducted their first-ever bilateral land warfare and naval exercises in early 2018.
- Indian ships regularly make friendly port calls to Vietnam.
- For the first time, a Vietnamese ship participated in the International Fleet Review at Vishakhapatnam, in February 2016.
- The Indian Business Chamber (INCHAM) is an organisation of Indians living in Vietnam, primarily to promote trade and business interactions.
- The Indian Cultural Centre was opened in Hanoi in September 2016, with the objective of strengthening India’s cultural presence in Vietnam.

Common Concerns between the two nations:

- An area of potential convergence for both Vietnam and India is health care.
  - Vietnam has highlighted the importance of linking economic growth to universal health care, whereby 80% population would be covered by health insurance.
  - India too, since 2011, has been focussing on the need to deliver accessible and affordable health insurance to weaker sections of society.
  - A potential area of convergence in the realm of health care through joint public-private partnership agreements can be explored by the two countries.
- Today there is increasing security concerns in the areas of maritime security and adherence to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- Amid a rapid build-up of Chinese military presence and massive reclamation of submerged features in Southeast Asia, both Vietnam and India are concerned about the balance of power in nautical Asia.
- Vietnam opposed the “Quad” or quadrilateral coalition among India, the US, Japan and Australia.
- The proposed sale of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile has taken a back seat as there has been no response from Hanoi.
- The $ 500 mn line of credit offered in 2016 has yet to be operationalised for facilitating deeper defence cooperation.

Conclusion:

- Time bound delivery of specific projects between India and ASEAN countries should be looked at.
- Relation roles in the fields of political, economic, strategic field including defence and security which are in the upward trajectory.
- It can be expected that political relations get improved in the coming 5 years when the diplomatic relations complete 50 years between the two nations.
- But India needs to improve economic ties with Vietnam to achieve the set target up to 2020. Scholars have now been saying that BIMSTEC which has two South East Asian countries namely, Myanmar and Thailand should consider to expand itself to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.
- Then it will be a very powerful body and lasting link between India and ASEAN.

Link: https://youtu.be/SbbinYd14Zo

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10. Hong Kong National Security Law

Introduction:

- Chinese authorities plans to bypass Hong Kong’s legislature to enact a national security law that pro-democracy campaigners say is aimed at cracking down on dissent in the city. A motion to enable the drafting of the law which targets secession, sedition, terrorism and foreign interference in Hong Kong was brought before the National People’s Congress, China’s lawmaking body, at its annual meeting in Beijing. The introduction of the legislation has sparked fear and outrage from pro-democracy figures in Hong Kong, who say that Beijing has fallen back on promises it made when it took back the former British colony in 1997.

Details:

1. The law is called the “NPC Decision on Establishing and Improving the Legal System and Enforcement Mechanisms for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to Safeguard National Security”.
2. It essentially empowers the NPC to draft new national security laws for Hong Kong.
3. The scope of the laws could cover any activity that “seriously endangers national security”.
4. It is aimed at enabling “measures to counter, lawfully prevent, stop and punish foreign and overseas forces’ use of Hong Kong to carry out separatist, subversive, infiltrative, or destructive activities”.

Background and Impacts:

- Hong Kong was a British colony from 1841 when China ceded the island to the British after the First Opium War – which had erupted over British traders smuggling opium into China.
- Britain handed Hong Kong back to China in 1997 as a ‘special administrative region’.
- The territory has been ruled under the ‘one country, two systems’ formula agreed by then U.K. and Chinese leaders.
- Hong Kong citizens have more autonomy and freedom than mainland Chinese, but the elective process is still partly controlled by China.
- At present, Hong Kong residents can only vote for pre-approved political candidates under Chinese law, making it impossible for a critic of Beijing to get on the ballot.
- China’s growing emphasis on the principle of “one country” has met resistance from Hong Kong’s young activists, who underline the idea of “two systems”.
- China’s recent focus on extending its national security laws to Hong Kong has sharpened the inherent contradictions in the Anglo-Chinese compact and triggered large-scale protests against Beijing’s effort to tighten its grip over the city.
- China may use the changed law to target political opponents in Hong Kong.
- Extradited suspects are likely to face torture.
- Also, they say, the change in the law will deal another blow to Hong Kong’s already crumbling autonomy.
- Article 4 of the Basic Law, the mini-constitution which governs post-colonial Hong Kong, promises to “safeguard the rights and freedoms of the residents of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and of other persons in the Region in accordance with law”. The bill is against Article 4 of the Basic law.
- It would further erode the freedoms people enjoy under the Basic Law.
- The issue thus brings to light the tensions between the Hong Kong’s Beijing-appointed elite rule, and the expectations of civil society and pro-democracy movement.
- There are also concerns about the impact on Hong Kong’s much cherished judicial independence, which has helped underpin investment and business and made the city an international financial centre.

How is Hong Kong’s chief executive chosen?

- The chief executive is elected by an Election Committee of 1,200 people, who are in turn chosen by representatives of various sectors in Hong Kong – who only make up 6% of the electorate.
- The chief executive must be formally appointed to the role by the central Chinese government.
• The Basic Law states that the “ultimate aim” is for the chief executive to be selected by “universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee”.
• This means that many in Hong Kong feel they were promised a level of democracy that has not been delivered.

What is Washington’s position on the issue?

• China has frequently condemned what it describes as foreign interference in its domestic matters. In particular, Beijing has singled out Washington as a driving force behind street protests in Hong Kong.
• Two members of the U.S. Congress quickly responded to the latest developments by proposing a bipartisan bill that would essentially sanction any Chinese officials who enforce the proposed national security law. The measure would impose sanctions on people or entities that violate China’s legal obligations to Hong Kong under the Basic Law, as well as on banks that do “significant transactions” with them.
• Last year, amid some of the most violent demonstrations in Hong Kong, Congress overwhelming passed — and President Donald Trump signed into law — the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019. The law calls for mandatory sanctions on Chinese officials found responsible for human rights violations, and requires the State Department to annually review Hong Kong’s special status, which awards it preferential trade treatment.

International condemnation:

1. This move is being seen as a direct violation of China’s international commitments by the United States and its allies – the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia.
2. The US and allies are extremely concerned that this action will exacerbate the existing deep divisions in Hong Kong society.
3. US has already revoked the special trading status given to Hong Kong.

Link: https://youtu.be/mO-yu5pNhzw

GENERAL STUDIES - III

1. Bad Bank

Introduction:

• Indian lenders want the government to provide up to $2 billion to set up a “bad bank” at a time when their heavy pile of soured debt is expected to double in size due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to media reports. The banks have proposed that the government set up an asset reconstruction company (ARC) to initially buy non-performing loans worth up to a total of 1 trillion rupees. The Indian Banks’ Association (IBA) has drafted the proposal and sent it to the government and the Reserve Bank of India for their approval, according to the same media reports.

Concept of Bad Bank:

• A bad bank is a bank set up to buy the bad loans and other illiquid holdings of another financial institution.
• The entity holding significant nonperforming assets will sell these holdings to the bad bank at market price. By transferring such assets to the bad bank, the original institution may clear its balance sheet— although it will still be forced to take write-downs.
• A bad bank structure may also assume the risky assets of a group of financial institutions, instead of a single bank.
• Bad banks are typically set up in times of crisis when long-standing financial institutions are trying to recuperate their reputations and wallets. While shareholders and bondholders generally stand to lose money from this solution, depositors usually do not.
• Banks that become insolvent as a result of the process can be recapitalized, nationalized, or liquidated. If they do not become insolvent, it is possible for a bad bank’s managers to focus exclusively on maximizing the value of its newly acquired high-risk assets.
• Some criticize the setup of bad banks, highlighting how if states take over non-performing loans, this encourages banks to take undue risks, leading to a moral hazard.
• The 2017 Economic Survey examined this idea, suggesting the creation of a Public Sector Asset Rehabilitation Agency (PARA).
• Before that, the 2015 Asset Quality Review conducted by Reserve Bank under Governor Raghuram Rajan, which forced banks to recognise problem accounts as non-performing assets, had also sparked a debate on bad bank as a possible solution.
• In short, the idea is not novel and has been suggested by various people at different points of time.

Why be concerned about bad loans?

1. Indian banks’ pile of bad loans is a huge drag on the economy.
2. It’s a drain on banks’ profits. Because profits are eroded, public sector banks (PSBs), where the bulk of the bad loans reside, cannot raise enough capital to fund credit growth.
3. Lack of credit growth, in turn, comes in the way of the economy’s return to an 8% growth trajectory. Therefore, the bad loan problem requires effective resolution.

Is the current framework equipped to handle NPAs?

• If there is no appetite for AMCs, AIFs and ARCs to take over bad loans, it could be because the owners of those assets want a price higher than the fair market value.
• ARCs will buy those pools of stressed assets only if they see continued viability of those pools being recovered and if they are able to get higher returns than the original purchase price.

Benefits:

1. This helps banks or FIs clear-off their balance sheets by transferring the bad loans and focus on its core business lending activities.
2. Large debtors have many creditors. Hence bad bank could solve the coordination problem, since debts would be centralised in one agency.
3. It can effect speedier settlements with borrowers by cutting out individual banks.
4. It can drive a better bargain with borrowers and take more stringent enforcement action against them.
5. It can raise money from institutional investors rather than looking only to the Government.

Things to consider while creating a bad bank:

• The first is that it should be based on a criterion as any such exercise creates a moral hazard which should be eschewed.
• Second, there have to be strict performance criteria for the banks selling such assets. This can be through a multi-stage approach where these assets are bought piecemeal by the bad bank based on how future incremental assets perform.
• Third, the criteria for buying assets should be transparent and a pecking order must be drawn up where probably the restructured assets get priority.
• Last, a competitive approach should prevail among the banks so that they work hard to qualify for the sale of bad assets to the bad bank. This, in fact, will ensure better governance standards too.

Concerns:

• The bad bank will require significant capital to purchase stressed loan accounts from public sector banks.
The chances of private participation are low unless investors are allowed a major say in the governance of the new entity.

Bad bank will not address more serious corporate governance issues plaguing public sector banks that led to the NPA problem.

Setting up a new institution would be very time-consuming.

Challenges on its ownership structure as well as the pricing of bad loans taken over from banks.

**Way Forward:**

✓ The larger focus must be on the ‘Twin Balance Sheet’ (TBS) problem of corporates and banks.
✓ Instead of recapitalising the banks year after year, it would be better for the government to focus on recovery.
✓ Just setting up one PARA will not be enough to get the banking sector back on track.
✓ The most efficient approach would be to design solutions tailor-made for different parts of India’s bad loan problem.

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

## 2. Data: The New Gold

**Introduction:**

- Prime Minister Modi, who addressed the grand ‘Howdy, Modi!’ event in Houston, described data as the “new oil” and the “new gold”. He also indicated that *India was in a strong position to lead the world in the industry 4.0 revolution, that relies on big data analytics and digital technology to improve manufacturing.* Making a strong pitch to potential investors in America, the Prime Minister also referred to the cheap cost of mobile data in India and referred to the increasing use of digital technology to set up businesses, facilitate economic transactions and interact with the government.

- A new India build on a strong foundation of data and digital technology. Data in India can drive growth, industrial revolution 4.0 and bring governance closer to those governed.

- Making a strong pitch to potential investors in the United States, the Prime Minister also referred to the cheap cost of mobile data in India and referred to the increasing use of digital technology to set up businesses, facilitate economic transactions and interact with the government.

- “Today it is said that data is the new oil. I will also add that data is the new gold. Industry 4.0 is focused on data. Now, please listen carefully, if there is one country in the world where data is cheapest, then that is India,” the Prime Minister said, adding, “Digital India is India’s new face to the world”.

- “There was a time when filing tax returns was a headache. It would take months. But, on August 31, on only one day, nearly 50 lakh Indians filed their I-T returns online... that is nearly double Houston’s population,” the PM said, highlighting the use of digital technology by his government.

- In March, a study by a United Kingdom-based price comparison website showed India provided mobile data at the lowest rates in the world. In INR terms, Indians paid Rs. 18 per GB of data against a global average of Rs. 600

**What is Data?**

- Plain facts are data
- Processed and organized in context, data becomes information.

**Processed data:**

- Helps decide objectives, design tasks, recruit talent.
• Complete tasks.

**Industrial Revolution 4.0:**

- The Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0) is a term that describes present technological age. It is the fourth industrial era since the inception of the initial Industrial Revolution of the 18th century. The key elements of the fourth revolution are the fusion of technologies ranging from the physical, digital to biological spheres. Prime Minister gave an institutional shape to the expression by launching the Centre for Fourth Industrial Revolution in India.

**Characteristics of IR 4.0:**

- It is characterized by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres.
- It brings together digital technology and the physical world to create a new range of products and services.
- The possibilities of billions of people connected by mobile devices, with unprecedented processing power, storage capacity, and access to knowledge, are unlimited.
- And these possibilities will be multiplied by emerging technology breakthroughs in fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles, 3-D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, materials science, energy storage, and quantum computing.
- The revolution is evolving at an exponential rather than a linear pace and it is disrupting almost every industry in every country.

**Digital India:**

- **Digital India** is a campaign launched by the Government of India in order to ensure the Government’s services are made available to citizens electronically by improved online infrastructure and by increasing Internet connectivity or by making the country digitally empowered in the field of technology. The initiative includes plans to connect rural areas with high-speed internet networks. Digital India consists of three core components: the development of secure and stable digital infrastructure, delivering government services digitally, and universal digital literacy.

**Key Projects:**

1. Digilockers
2. in
3. SBM Mobile app
4. eSign framework to enable citizens to digitally sign document online
5. Online registration system launched under eHospital application
6. DeitY platform for large scale digitization of records.
7. Deployment of Wi-Fi hotspots under BSNL.

**Achievements:**

1. Over 12,000 rural post office branches linked digitally.
2. Common services centres grew to reach 3.76 lakh.
3. Bharat Net has reached 1.29 lakh gram panchayats.
4. eKYC launched to open bank accounts.
5. Total number of digital payments transactions at Rs 332.34 cr.
6. Electronics manufacturing has doubled.

**Digital Economy:**

- Digital economy is defined as an economy that focuses on digital technologies, i.e. it is based on digital and computing technologies. It essentially covers all business, economic, social, cultural etc. activities that are supported by the web and other digital communication technologies.
There are three main components of this economy, namely,

1. e-business
2. e-business infrastructure
3. e-commerce

Link: https://youtu.be/vcFc6kKOgQ

3. HIV: New hope

Introduction:
HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is one of the world’s most serious public health challenges. Around 37 million people worldwide are living with HIV. Of these, 1.8 million are children under 15 years of age.

- The remarkable research breakthrough that appears to have cured the anonymous “London Patient” of HIV is based on a stem cell transplant involving CCR5-delta 32 homozygous donor cells. This is the same treatment that cured Timothy Ray Brown, known as the “Berlin Patient” when he received two stem cell transplants in 2007 and 2008.
- The news comes nearly 12 years to the day after the first patient known to be cured, a feat that researchers have long tried, and failed, to duplicate. The surprise success now confirms that a cure for HIV infection is possible, if difficult, opine researchers.

What Is HIV?

1. HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that attacks cells that help the body fight infection, making a person more vulnerable to other infections and diseases.
2. It is spread by contact with certain bodily fluids of a person with HIV, most commonly during unprotected sex (sex without a condom or HIV medicine to prevent or treat HIV), or through sharing injection drug equipment.
3. If left untreated, HIV can lead to the disease AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome).
4. The human body can’t get rid of HIV and no effective HIV cure exists. So, once you have HIV, you have it for life.
5. However, by taking HIV medicine (called antiretroviral therapy or ART), people with HIV can live long and healthy lives and prevent transmitting HIV to their sexual partners. In addition, there are effective methods to prevent getting HIV through sex or drug use, including pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).
6. First identified in 1981, HIV is the cause of one of humanity’s deadliest and most persistent epidemics.

What Is AIDS?

1. AIDS is the late stage of HIV infection that occurs when the body’s immune system is badly damaged because of the virus.
2. In the U.S., most people with HIV do not develop AIDS because taking HIV medicine every day as prescribed stops the progression of the disease.
3. A person with HIV is considered to have progressed to AIDS when:
   a. the number of their CD4 cells falls below 200 cells per cubic millimeter of blood (200 cells/mm3). (In someone with a healthy immune system, CD4 counts are between 500 and 1,600 cells/mm3.)
   b. they develop one or more opportunistic infections regardless of their CD4 count.
4. Without HIV medicine, people with AIDS typically survive about 3 years. Once someone has a dangerous opportunistic illness, life expectancy without treatment falls to about 1 year. HIV medicine can still help people at this stage of HIV infection, and it can even be lifesaving. But people who start ART soon after they get HIV experience more benefits—that’s why HIV testing is so important.
Symptoms:

1. Some people with HIV do not show symptoms until months or even years after contracting the virus.
2. However, around 80 percent of people may develop a set of flu-like symptoms known as acute retroviral syndrome around 2–6 weeks after the virus enters the body.
3. The early symptoms of HIV infection may include:
   - Fever
   - Chills
   - joint pain
   - muscle aches
   - sore throat
   - sweats particularly at night
   - enlarged glands
   - a red rash
   - tiredness
   - weakness
   - unintentional weight loss
   - thrush
4. These symptoms might also result from the immune system fighting off many types of viruses.
5. However, people who experience several of these symptoms and know of any reason they might have been at risk of contracting HIV over the last 6 weeks should take a test.

Asymptomatic HIV:

1. In many cases, after the symptoms of acute retroviral syndrome, symptoms might not occur for many years.
2. During this time, the virus continues to develop and cause immune system and organ damage. Without medication that prevents the replication of the virus, this slow process can continue for an average of around 10 years.
3. A person living with HIV often experiences no symptoms, feels well, and appears healthy.
4. Complying rigidly to a course of ART can disrupt this phase and suppress the virus completely. Taking effective antiretroviral medications for life can halt on-going damage to the immune system.

HIV and AIDS: What’s the connection?

1. To develop AIDS, a person has to have contracted HIV. But having HIV doesn’t necessarily mean that someone will develop AIDS.
2. Cases of HIV progress through three stages:
   a. **stage 1**: acute stage, the first few weeks after transmission
   b. **stage 2**: clinical latency, or chronic stage
   c. **stage 3**: AIDS
3. As HIV lowers the CD4 cell count, the immune system weakens. A typical adult’s CD4 count is 500 to 1,500 per cubic millimeter. A person with a count below 200 is considered to have AIDS.
4. How quickly a case of HIV progresses through the chronic stage varies significantly from person to person. Without treatment, it can last up to a decade before advancing to AIDS. With treatment, it can last indefinitely.
5. There is no cure for HIV, but it can be controlled. People with HIV often have a near-normal lifespan with early treatment with antiretroviral therapy. Along those same lines, there’s technically no cure for AIDS. However, treatment can increase a person’s CD4 count to the point where they’re considered to no longer have AIDS. (This point is a count of 200 or higher.) Also, treatment can typically help manage opportunistic infections.
6. HIV and AIDS are related, but they’re not the same thing.
India and HIV/AIDS:

1. According to National AIDS Control Organization of India, the prevalence of AIDS in India in 2015 was 0.26% i.e about 2.11 million people.
2. India is home to the world’s third-largest population suffering from HIV/AIDS.
3. India aims to end HIV/AIDS by 2030 and is a signatory of UNAIDS programme 90-90-90 strategy by 2020.
4. It is also enshrined in Government of India’s National Health Policy (NHP 2017)
5. In 2017, 79% of people living with HIV were aware of their status, of whom 56% were on antiretroviral treatment (ART)

Prevention:

1. Wear condoms to prevent other STIs.
2. Receive vaccinations for potential OIs.
3. Understand the germs in your surrounding environment that could lead to an OI. A pet cat, for example, could be a source of toxoplasmosis. Limit exposure and take precautions, such as wearing protective gloves while changing litter
4. Avoid foods that are at risk of contamination, such as undercooked eggs, unpasteurized dairy and fruit juice, or raw seed sprouts.
5. Do not drink water straight from a lake or river or tap water in certain foreign countries. Drink bottled water or use water filters.
6. Ask your doctor about work, home, and vacation activities to limit exposure to potential OIs

Link: https://youtu.be/I8gKEBX7tKY

4. Biodiversity: Warning bells

Introduction:

- Relentless pursuit of economic growth coupled with climate change has brought an unprecedented one million species at doorstep of extinction. This is the finding of a landmark report on the damage done by modern civilisation to the natural world. The report compiled by 145 expert authors from 50 countries is based on the review of about 15,000 scientific and government sources. Their conclusion is that only a wide-ranging transformation of the global economic and financial system can pull ecosystems that are vital to the future of human communities worldwide back from the brink of collapse.

- The report has been endorsed by 130 countries, including the U.S., Russia and China. It is also the first comprehensive global report in 15 years at the state of the planet’s biodiversity.

- It includes, for the first time, indigenous and local knowledge as well as scientific studies. The authors say they found overwhelming evidence that human activities are behind nature’s decline.

UN Report on Biodiversity:

1. The average abundance of native species in most major land-based habitats has fallen by at least 20%, mostly since 1900. More than 40% of amphibian species, almost 33% of reef-forming corals and more than a third of all marine mammals are threatened.
2. The picture is less clear for insect species, but available evidence supports a tentative estimate of 10% being threatened.
3. At least 680 vertebrate species had been driven to extinction since the 16th century and more than 9% of all domesticated breeds of mammals used for food and agriculture had become extinct by 2016, with at least 1,000 more breeds still threatened.
4. Three-quarters of the land-based environment and about 66% of the marine environment have been significantly altered by human actions. On average these trends have been less severe or avoided in areas held or managed by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities.
5. More than a third of the world’s land surface and nearly 75% of freshwater resources are now devoted to crop or livestock production.

6. The value of agricultural crop production has increased by about 300% since 1970, raw timber harvest has risen by 45% and approximately 60 billion tons of renewable and nonrenewable resources are now extracted globally every year – having nearly doubled since 1980.

7. Land degradation has reduced the productivity of 23% of the global land surface, up to US$577 billion in annual global crops are at risk from pollinator loss and 100-300 million people are at increased risk of floods and hurricanes because of loss of coastal habitats and protection.

8. In 2015, 33% of marine fish stocks were being harvested at unsustainable levels; 60% were maximally sustainably fished, with just 7% harvested at levels lower than what can be sustainably fished.

9. Urban areas have more than doubled since 1992.

10. Plastic pollution has increased tenfold since 1980, 300-400 million tons of heavy metals, solvents, toxic sludge and other wastes from industrial facilities are dumped annually into the world’s waters, and fertilizers entering coastal ecosystems have produced more than 400 ocean ‘dead zones’, totalling more than 245,000 km² (591-595) – a combined area greater than that of the United Kingdom.

11. Negative trends in nature will continue to 2050 and beyond in all of the policy scenarios explored in the Report, except those that include transformative change – due to the projected impacts of increasing land-use change, exploitation of organisms and climate change, although with significant differences between regions.

12. Since 1970 the global human population has more than doubled (from 3.7 to 7.6 billion), rising unevenly across countries and regions; and per capita gross domestic product is four times higher – with ever-more distant consumers shifting the environmental burden of consumption and production across regions.

**Single use plastics:**

1. There is **no central and comprehensive definition** for single-use plastic, crucial for any ban to be successful.

2. Governments currently use various definitions.

3. The problems caused by them were recognized in 2007.

4. It has been found everywhere ie **right from depth of the oceans to the peaks of Himalayas**.

5. Single used plastics are **used once and thrown away**.

6. They accumulate in the water bodies and choke the drains which lead to floods.

**Living planet report:**

1. It is published every **2 years by WWF**, first published in

2. It is based on the ‘Living Planet Index’ and ‘Ecological footprint calculations’.

3. The ‘Living Planet Index’ is an indicator of the **state of global biological diversity** managed by Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and WWF.

4. Ecological footprint is the **biologically productive area needed** to provide for everything used by people: fruits and vegetables, fish, wood, fibres, absorption of CO₂ from fossil fuels use, and space for buildings and roads. It is currently developed by Global Footprint Network (an independent think-tank). The **GHG footprint and carbon footprint** are a component of Ecological Footprint.

5. Humanity’s Ecological Footprint for 2014 was 1.7 planet Earth’s. This meant that humanity’s demands were 1.7 times faster than what the Earth’s ecosystems renewed.

6. It is a **science-based analysis** on the **health of Earth and the impact of human activity**.

7. The **2018 report** has found a **decline of 60% in population sizes of vertebrate species** from 1970 to 2014. The **tropics of South and Central America** had an 89% loss compared to 1970.

8. **Issues like Ocean acidification, loss of corals, increasing Carbon in the atmosphere, species disappearance** due to habitat loss and degradation, etc are highlighted in the 2018 report.

9. **Increasing use of plastics** that ultimately reaches the oceans and seas via rivers is also a cause for deaths of marine organisms.

10. The latest report calls for **new goals post-2020** alongside Convention on Biological Diversity, the Paris **Climate Agreement** and the **Sustainable Development Goals**.
Environmental crisis:

1. Ozone Depletion
2. Greenhouse Effect and Global Warming
3. Desertification
4. Deforestation
5. Loss of Biodiversity

Link: https://youtu.be/E2ZXTjm-UJk

5. Melting of Himalayan glaciers

Introduction:

- At the Paris climate conference in December 2015, 195 countries adopted the first-ever universal, legally binding global climate deal. This set out a global action plan to limit global warming to well below 2°C and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C. But despite the global efforts, there are forecasts that the world global temperature may rise above 1.5°C.

The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment Report:

1. The report was made together by researchers, experts and policymakers, brought by Hindu Kush Himalayan Monitoring and Assessment Report (HIMAP) and International centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)
2. The Assessment has been titled “Mountain, Climate Change, Sustainability and People”.
3. According to report, even the most ambitious goal set by the Paris Agreement to limit global warming would lead to a 2.1 spike in temperature in the Hindu Kush Region, leading to melting of 1/3rd of the region’s glaciers by 2100, potentially destabilizing Asia’s rivers.
4. If the Green House Gas emissions continue at their current level, the region can lose up to 2/3rd of its ice. So, the amount of GHG emissions will determine the amount of glaciers melted in these mountainous ranges.
5. The melting of these glaciers will put a threat on 1.9 billion people.
6. Hind Kush, the world’s third pole is 3,500 km long spread over 8 countries in South Asia and home to 10 major river basins is under severe threat of climate change.
7. 8 Countries covered by Hindu Kush Himalayas (HKH region): Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan.
8. 10 Major river basins in HKH region: Amu Darya, Brahmaputra, Ganges, Indus, Irrawaddy, Mekong, Salween, Tarim, Yangtze, Yellow rivers.
9. The HKH region form the largest area of permanent ice cover outside of the North and South Poles, and so are often referred to as “Third Pole”.
10. HKH region is home to 4 global biodiversity hotspots, several important bird areas, and hundreds of mountain peaks. It provides ecosystem services (water, food, energy, etc) to nearly 2 billion people through its river basins.
11. Melting of glaciers can be a threat to water and food security and increase the risks of disasters.
12. Elevation Dependent Warming is a phenomenon of more increase in temperature in mountains than at lower altitudes.
13. Since the 1970s, about 15% of ice in the HKH region has disappeared as temperature have risen.
14. Water supply in the region is closely dependant on rainfall during monsoon and trickling meltwater from glaciers during dry season.
15. Lower flows of river water due to glacial melting will cut power from hydro dams that generate much of the region’s electricity.
16. Farmers in the foothills and downstream will face a serious impact.
Consequences of melting glaciers:

1. A lot of places all over the world depend exclusively on the constantly flowing water from glaciers that are melting in producing electricity. Reducing or stopping the flowing of water will mean stopping the production of electricity. The modern world cannot do without electricity, in which case people will resort to other forms of producing electricity, some of which will end up polluting the environment and further increase global warming.
2. It has ramifications for the global climate. This region is a heat source in summer and a heat sink in winter.
3. It could trigger a multitude of biophysical and socio-economic impacts, such as biodiversity loss, increased glacial melting, and less predictable water availability—all of which will impact livelihoods and well-being in the HKH.
4. Faster snow and glacier melting due to warming is already manifesting in formation of glacial lakes. Glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF) are becoming frequent and causing huge casualties and loss to local infrastructures.
5. Glaciers in HKH have been retreating faster, and consistently causing greater water flows in rivers. In Tibetan Plateau, river run off has increased by 5.5 per cent.
6. Most of the lakes in high altitudes have also reported water level rise by 0.2 m/year besides their surface areas expanding.
7. ICIMOD report paints a bleak picture for the future of a region that is the source of Asia’s 10 major rivers and provides water, food, energy and carbon storage for almost two billion people.
8. Biodiversity is in steep decline driven by human development, pollution, overexploitation of resources and climate change. Example: Urbanization is on rise in many of the HKH countries.
9. With the growing impacts of climate change, along with new infrastructure development, trade routes and hydropower dams planned for the fragile region, the effects on the biodiversity is set to worsen further.
10. Along with species loss this will mean the loss of the key environmental services the region provides—such as water and carbon storage—to the rest of Asia.
11. Many of these areas are remote and authorities have little control over border regions sometimes plagued with ongoing conflict. Example: Indo-Burma hotspot.

Impacts of climate change globally:

1. Climate change is bringing rising incidents of disasters like wildfires, cyclones, hurricanes, droughts, floods, etc.
2. Rising human development and industrial progress are held responsible for the climate change occurring today. Natural resources like trees are being cut for urbanization and non-renewable resources (like fossil fuels) are being used at a very high rate.
3. Global temperatures are rising and extreme weather conditions are being witnessed.
4. Mountain glaciers and ice sheets covering Antarctica, Greenland and Arctic Sea are vanishing.
5. Rapid rise in sea level in recent years has threatened low-lying islands and coastal cities.
6. Wildlife and their habitats are affected. Some species are being pushed towards extinction.
7. Ocean acidity is increasing that threatens shellfish, including crustaceans, affecting marine food chains.
8. Agriculture is facing a threat.

Initiatives done by the Government:

1. Formation of International Solar Alliance (ISA)
2. Focus on increasing forest cover.
3. National Clean Air Program (NCAP)
4. Launch of National Air Quality Index in 2015
5. Namami Gange Program for cleaning Ganga river.
7. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana to increase LPG connections.
8. Waste management has emerged as a priority issue.
10. Reducing the use of single use

Link: https://youtu.be/JpbOlAtcT8o

6. Tackling Radicalism

Introduction:
- Centre banned the Jamaats-e-Islami J&K (JeI), houses of dozens of workers and leaders of the group have been sealed by authorities at several locations across the Kashmir valley. Magistrates issued orders of sealing all institutions and properties linked to the JeI. The home ministry, on 28 February, had declared the JeI an unlawful organisation for five years, and several of its workers were arrested. The centre said that the JeI was “in close touch” with terror groups and is likely to “escalate secessionist movement” in Jammu and Kashmir. The notification, banning the group under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, was issued by the home ministry after a high-level meeting on security, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, following the Pulwama terror attack in which 40 CRPF soldiers were martyred in a suicide bombing by Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammed. The two main political parties of the state – the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and the National Conference (NC) criticized the centre’s move to ban the JeI.

Radicalization:
- Radicalization is a process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo or contemporary ideas and expressions of the nation.
- The outcomes of radicalization are shaped by the ideas of the society at large; for example, radicalism can originate from a broad social consensus against progressive changes in society or from a broad desire for change in society.
- Radicalization can be both violent and nonviolent, although most academic literature focuses on radicalization into violent extremism (RVE).
- There are multiple pathways that constitute the process of radicalization, which can be independent but are usually mutually reinforcing.
- Radicalization that occurs across multiple reinforcing pathways greatly increases a group’s resilience and lethality.
- Furthermore, by compromising its ability to blend in with non-radical society and participate in a modern, national economy, radicalization serves as a kind of sociological trap that gives individuals no other place to go to satisfy their material and spiritual needs

Types of Radicalisation:
- Right-Wing Extremism: It is characterized by the violent defence of a racial, ethnic or pseudo-national identity, and is also associated with radical hostility towards state authorities, minorities, immigrants and/or left-wing political groups. E.g.: Ku Klux clan in USA.
- Politico-Religious Extremism: It results from political interpretation of religion and the defence, by violent means, of a religious identity perceived to be under attack (via international conflicts, foreign policy, social debates, etc.). Any religion may spawn this type of violent radicalization. E.g.: ISIS using Islam as an alibi.
- Left-Wing Extremism: It focuses primarily on anti-capitalist demands and calls for the transformation of political systems considered responsible for producing social inequalities, and that may ultimately employ violent means to further its cause. It includes anarchist, Maoist, Trotskyist and Marxist-Leninist groups that use violence to advocate for their cause. E.g.: Naxalism in India.
- Internet Radicalization: Internet is used by terrorist as an effective tool for radicalisation and terror financing. Terror groups use the internet to advocate the use of violence to further a religious, ideological or political cause.
Steps needed to deal Radicalism in India:

- A **consistent counter radical strategy** is required to tackle radicalism.
- **Institutions have to be strengthened:** Educational and political institutions should be strengthened at ground level so that people of any state feel empowered. Also, enough number of job opportunities should be provided to people to decrease their chances of joining any radicalist organization.
- Central agencies like RAW, IB to play important role in covert operations to know the extremist propaganda and to inform the state special cell regarding the mechanism to regulate the actions of the radicalized youth.
- There should be sufficient evidence behind banning any organization. This is necessary to avoid court cases. Also, Intelligence Agencies, Law Enforcement Agencies and Judicial Courts need to act in unison on this matter.
- Once government identifies any radicalist organization, it needs to **take hold of their physical and financial resources**.
- **Countering activities of radicalists.** If hate can be taught, then love and social responsibilities toward people and the nation can also be taught. This is necessary to de-radicalize people.
- It needs to be ensured that people who been de-radicalized feel safe and secure in the country.
- The corner stone for radicalization is **poverty, deprivation and isolation and lack of employment and standard education opportunities, these to be addressed** by the government and policies to be formulated for inclusive participation and facilitation of all means for their development.
- **Political executive** plays an important role in drawing the youth into decision making and giving responsibility for the development of the community.
- **Social media to be regulated** when such info of such activities to be held and to draw a legalized guide lines to regulate in due means without contradicting the privacy of an individual.

**Conclusion:**

- Radicalisation is a danger to internal security and polarises the Indian society deepening the sectarian differences.
- Thus it is imperative to fight radicalisation on all fronts.
- Initiatives like UDAAN they must be inclusive in nature and drag youth from all sections, Nehru yuva kendra to be given impetus in such areas to involve youth in all capacity, cultural and sports activities so there are less chances for them to get influenced from such ideological goals.

Link: [https://youtu.be/2l-ws-tjIze](https://youtu.be/2l-ws-tjIze)
UPSC IAS ESSAY WRITING CHALLENGES

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

1. “Never Let a Good Crisis Go to Waste”
   Link: https://youtu.be/i9lymGchNiw

2. “Post Independence, the Issue of Land is at the Core of India’s Non-Achievement of Its Development Aspirations”
   Link: https://youtu.be/4FAJCYp7eGg

3. “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.”
   Link: https://youtu.be/UKKFnD4cVAQ

   Link: https://youtu.be/brs5j3mm1zw