2021

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FULL-FLEDGED CLASSROOM COURSE
FOR UPSC CSE 2021
(Integrated Prelims, Mains and Interview Program)
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GENERAL STUDIES – 1

Topics: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

1. Raja Parba festival of Odisha

Context:
The festival is being celebrated in Odisha.

Why and when is it celebrated?
This is a three-day-long festival dedicated to Mother Earth (Bhuma Devi) and womanhood at large.
The festivities begin a day before Mithuna Sankranti and conclude two days after that.

How is it celebrated?
The first day of the festival is called Pahili Raja, the second is Mithuna Sankranti and the third Bhu daha or Basi Raja.
The preparation begins one day before Pahili Raja, and it is called Sajabaja. Primarily, it is a time for the unmarried girls to prepare for their matrimony.
They follow various customs related to the festival by consuming nutritious food like Podapitha, not walking barefoot, taking a bath on the first day, and merrily swinging on ropes attached to a tree.
During the Parba, Odia people do no undertake any construction works or tilling that requires the earth to be dug. And by not doing such activities, they pay ode to the Mother Earth who needs a break from routine work.
The festival concludes with a custom called Vasumati Snana or the bathing of Bhuma Devi. Women worship a stone that symbolises the Mother Earth. They give her a bath with turmeric paste and offer her flowers and smear her with Sindoor.

Association with Agriculture:
This festival is also associated with the end of the summer season and the arrival of the monsoon. And therefore, it is also associated with agriculture and cultivation related communities and activities.

Sources: pib.

2. Talamaddale

Context: The traditional art of ‘talamaddale’, a variant of Yakshagana theatre, has gone virtual in times of COVID-19. A performance was streamed live on social media on June 13.

About Talamaddale:
It is an ancient form of performance dialogue or debate performance in Southern India in the Karavali and Malnad regions of Karnataka and Kerala.
The plot and content of the conversation is drawn from popular mythology but the performance mainly consists of an impromptu debate between characters involving sarcasm, puns, philosophy positions and humour.

How is it different from Yakshagana?
Unlike the Yakshagana performance, in the conventional ‘talamaddale,’ the artists sit across in a place without any costumes and engage in testing their oratory skills based on the episode chosen.
If music is common for both Yakshagana performance and ‘talamaddale’, the latter has only spoken word without any dance or costumes.
Hence it is an art form minus dance, costumes and stage conventions.

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3. Keeladi excavations

The Context:
Skeletal remains of a child excavated as part of Keeladi’s 6th phase excavation. The skeleton was found buried between two terracotta urns.

All about Keeladi excavations:
1. Excavations in Keeladi prove that an urban civilisation existed in Tamil Nadu in the Sangam era on the banks of the river Vaigai.
2. Many antiquities have been unearthed that provide crucial evidence to understanding the missing links of the Iron Age [12th century BCE to 6th century BCE] to the Early Historic Period [6th century BCE to 4th century BCE] and subsequent cultural developments.
3. Literate society: Tamil Brahmi letters found were inscribed when the pot was wet or after the pot became dry. This clearly suggests literacy levels in the 6th century BC.
4. Agrarian society that reared cattle: Skeletal fragments of cow/ox, buffalo, sheep, goat, nilgai, blackbuck, wild boar and peacock were found.
5. High standard of living: Long walls, Well-laid floors along with roof tiles in a collapsed state, iron nails fastened to the poles and rafters prove a high standard of living during the Sangam age.
6. Items found: Brick structures, terracotta ring wells, fallen roofing with tiles, golden ornaments, broken parts of copper objects, iron implements, terracotta chess pieces, ear ornaments, spindle whorls, figurines, black and redware, rouletted ware and a few pieces of Arretine ware, besides beads made of glass, terracotta and semi-precious stones.
7. Graffiti marks are found in earthenware, caves and rocks in or near the excavation sites.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Where is Keeladi?
2. What is Sangam era?
3. Key elements unearthed at the site?
4. Trade during sangam era.
5. Use of gold coins in ancient India.

Sources: the Hindu.
• He was a 13th-century ruler who founded the Ahom kingdom that ruled Assam for six centuries. Contemporary scholars trace his roots to Burma.
• He is widely referred to as the architect of “Bor Asom” or “greater Assam”.
• Sukapha is said to have left a place called Maulung in AD 1215 with eight nobles and 9,000 men, women and children — mostly men.
• It was in Charaideo that Sukapha established his first small principality, sowing the seeds of further expansion of the Ahom kingdom.
• The founders of the Ahom kingdom had their own language and followed their own religion. Over the centuries, the Ahoms accepted the Hindu religion and the Assamese language.
• To commemorate Sukapha and his rule, Assam celebrates “Asom Divas” on December 2 every year.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Who are Ahoms?
2. Sukapha- How he expanded his territory?
3. Significance of Asom Divas.
4. Geographical location of Assam and neighbouring states.
5. Where was Maulung?

Mains Link:
Write a note on Chaolung Sukapha and his contributions to the Ahom community.
Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/the-legacy-of-sukapha-founder-of-ahom-kingdom-6468320/.
Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present- significant events, personalities, issues.

1. Pune NGO aims to revive spirit of ‘Lal-Bal-Pal’

Context:
In a bid to revive the Independence-era spirit of the ‘Lal-Bal-Pal’, named after nationalists Lala Lajpat Rai, ‘Lokmanya’ Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal, and to mark the death centenary of Tilak, Pune-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) ‘Sarhad’ will launch a series of literary and cultural programmes to strengthen connections between Maharashtra and West Bengal.

Rationale behind the event:
Punjab, Bengal and Maharashtra have played significant roles during the struggle for Indian Independence. The historical association and cultural bonds among the three States was solidified in the modern era by the trinity of ‘Lal-Bal-Pal’.

After Independence, while the socio-cultural bonds between Maharashtra and Punjab have grown stronger, Maharashtra’s ties with Bengal have somewhat weakened, despite a rich pedigree of literary and cultural affinity in the past.

Highlights:
• It will be a two-year-long event and is named ‘Maharashtra-Bengal friendship chapter’.
• It is envisioned as a people’s cultural revivalist movement in these two States.
• It will commence on Tilak’s death centenary (August 1, 1920-August 1, 2020) and will go on till August 15, 2022 to mark the 150th birth anniversary of the great philosopher, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh.

Brief overview of contributions made by Lal- Bal- Pal:
• The triumvirate had played a stellar role in the second phase of the Swadeshi movement which gathered momentum after the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon in 1905, and which called for the boycott of all imported items and the use of Indian-made goods.
Lal-Bal-Pal mobilized Indians across the country against the Bengal partition, and the demonstrations, strikes and boycotts of British goods that began in Bengal soon spread to other regions in a broader protest against the Raj.

The nationalist movement gradually faded with the arrest of its main leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak and retirement of Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh from active politics.

Some facts:
1. In 1895, Lal started the Punjab National Bank—the first Indian bank to begin solely with Indian capital, and that continues to function till date.
2. In 1917, Lal founded the Indian Home Rule League of America there.
3. In 1884, Tilak founded the Deccan Education Society in Pune, and under the banner, opened the New English School for primary studies and Fergusson College for higher education.
4. Bipin Chandra Pal was of a strong opinion that a mass reliance on Swadeshi goods would help people get rid of their poverty.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. First Indian to join the Indian Civil Service (ICS).
2. Contributions of Aurobindo Ghosh.
3. Who translated Tilak’s Geetarahasya and Sant Tukaram’s abhangs into Bengali?
4. Contributions of Rabindranath Tagore.
5. Who established Shantiniketan?
6. Who was the Viceroy of India when the partition of Bengal took place?
7. Objectives of Swadeshi movement.
8. Key contributions of Lal Bal pal.

Mains Link:
Discuss the key contributions of Lal Bal Pal to India’s freedom struggle.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: The Freedom Struggle – its various stages and important contributors /contributions from different parts of the country.

1. Variyamkunnath Kunjahammed Haji

Context:
Freedom fighter Variyamkunnath Kunjahammed Haji’s life is set to be portrayed on the silver screen, in a project starring Malayalam actor Prithviraj Sukumaran.

Who was Variyamkunnath Kunjahammed Haji?

- Born in 1870s, he was a brave freedom fighter who stood up to the British in Kerala’s Malabar region in early 20th century and even established a short-lived regime of his own.
- His father, Moideen Kutty Haji, was deported and jailed in the Andaman Islands for his participation in a rebellion against the British. Such personal incidents, very early on in his life, played an important role in lighting the fire of vengeance inside Kunjahammed.
- He used art as an instrument to rally the locals against the British.
- He promised support the Indian National Congress and Khilafat movement against the atrocities of the British and the landlords.
• Haji was aware of the strength of Hindu-Muslim unity and ensured people of other faiths were given adequate security.

Causes of the 1921 rebellion:
• When Haji got the news that his countryman and Khilafat leader Ali Musaliyar was arrested at Tirurangadi and the mosque has been looted and some police officers killed in the ensuing fight, Haji decided to take arms against the British and arranged a band of army with the help of some sepoys who enthusiastically rallied behind him.
• He ensured that the movement had a secular character. But at the same time, he targeted all those who helped the British, be they Hindu or Muslim.

Outcomes:
1. As the rebellion helmed by the Haji and others began to spread across the Ernad and Valluvanad taluks of erstwhile Malabar district, British officers and the local police loyal to them escaped, leaving vast tracts of territory firmly under the control of the local rebels. The territory was declared an ‘independent state’ in August 1921 with Haji its undisputed ruler.
2. For nearly six months, Haji ran a parallel Khilafat regime headquartered in Nilambur, with even its own separate passport, currency and system of taxation.
3. During the time, an extensive army with the participation of Hindu men was built with the express aim of thwarting any attempt by the British to overthrow the Khilafat rule.
4. Tenants were granted the power over the lands they cultivated along with tax incentives.

How his rule came to an end?
The rule did not last long. In January 1922, under the guise of a treaty, the British betrayed Haji through his close friend Unyan Musaliyar, arresting him from his hideout and producing him before a British judge. He was sentenced to death along with his compatriots.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Who was Haji?
2. What was the 1921 Malabar rebellion all about?
3. How he established his own independent state and ruled it?
4. What is Khilafat Movement?
5. Outcomes of Khilafat movement.

Mains Link:
Who was Varyiamkunnath Kunjahammed Haji? How he stood up to the British in Malabar region in 1921? Discuss the outcomes of the rebellion.
Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-varyiamkunnath-kunjahammed-haji-the-khilafat-leader-6471224/
Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: History of the world will include events from 18th century such as industrial revolution, world wars, redrawing of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization, political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc.- their forms and effect on the society.

1. What is victory day?

Context:
Russia, on June 24th, celebrated 75th Victory Day, with a military parade that was meant to be held on 9 May (Postponed because of COVID pandemic).

What is Victory Day?
Victory Day marks the end of World War II and the victory of the Allied Forces in 1945.
Adolf Hitler had shot himself on April 30. On May 7, German troops surrendered, which was formally accepted the next day, and came into effect on May 9.

In most European countries, it is celebrated on May 8, and is called the Victory in Europe Day.

Why does Russia not celebrate Victory Day on the same date?
This is because the instrument of surrender signed on May 7 stipulated that all hostilities would cease at 23:01 Berlin Time on May 8 and, as time in Moscow was an hour ahead, this would push the ceasefire into May 9.

1. An initial document was signed in Reims, France on May 7.
2. But, Russia argued that some German troops considered the Reims instrument a surrender to the Western allies only and that fighting continued in eastern Europe, especially in Prague.
3. Therefore, Soviet Union demanded another signing.
4. A second surrender ceremony then took place in a manor on the outskirts of Berlin late on May 8, when it was already May 9 in Moscow.
5. Both texts stipulated that forces under German control were to cease operations at 11:01pm Berlin Time.

Therefore, in the eyes of the Soviet Union, the head of Germany's armed forces surrendered personally to Joseph Stalin’s representative on May 9 and the instrument of surrender was signed in the early hours of that day.

Is the June 24 date particularly significant?
The celebrations this year were pushed to June because of the Covid-19 pandemic.
Nevertheless, June 24th is also significant for Russia.

- After winning the war and having its own Victory Day on May 9, Stalin wanted to commemorate the victory with a military parade on June 24, 1945 in commemoration of the victory over Germany in the Great Patriotic War.
- Hence the first Victory Day Parade took place on June 24 in Moscow.

However, since then, the Victory Day Parades have taken place on May 9.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Axis and Allied powers.
2. Reasons for the WW2.
3. Outcomes of WW2.
4. Why Victory Day celebration dates differ across the world?
5. Why Russia Chose May 9th?

Mains Link:
Write a note Victory Day celebrated by Russia.
Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/victory-day-why-russia-celebrates-wwii-triumph-on-a-different-date-6473090/.
Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India.

1. Commission to Examine Sub Categorization of other Backward Classes

Context:
Cabinet approves Extension of term of the commission constituted under Article 340 of the constitution to examine the issue of Sub-categorization within other Backward Classes in the Central List.
What is Article 340?

Article 340 of the Indian Constitution lays down conditions for the appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of the backward classes. The President may by order appoint a Commission consisting of such persons as he thinks fit to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes within the territory of India.

Constitutional basis:

Article 14 of the Constitution guarantees equality before the law. That means un-equals cannot be treated equally. Measures are required to be taken for the upliftment of un-equals to bring them on par with the advanced classes.

Article 16 (4) provides that the State can make any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens who, in the opinion of the state, are not adequately represented in the services under the State.

Sub-categorisation:

National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) proposed the sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) back in 2015.

In October 2017, President Ram Nath Kovind, in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 340 of the Constitution, appointed a commission to examine the issue of sub-categorisation of OBCs, chaired by retired Justice G. Rohini, to ensure social justice in an efficient manner by prioritising the Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs).

Need for sub-categorisation:

Sub-categorization of the OBCs will ensure that the more backward among the OBC communities can also access the benefits of reservation for educational institutions and government jobs.

At present, there is no sub-categorisation and 27% reservation is a monolithic entity.

Analysis:

This decision speaks to the long years of failure in effectively preventing large sections of the creamy layer from taking advantage of the quota system to the detriment of the poorer sections among their own caste groups.

In effect, the Union government is now seeking to ensure a more equitable distribution of reservation benefits by further differentiating caste groups coming under backward classes on the basis of their levels of social and economic backwardness.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Overview of Articles 340, 14, 15 and 16.
2. Head of the commission to examine the issue of sub-categorisation of OBCs.
3. President’s power under Article 340.
5. Powers to include or exclude communities from the central list of OBCs.
6. States powers to categorise OBCs.

Mains Link:

Discuss the need for sub-categorisation of OBCs.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc., geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

1. Cyclonic Storm ‘NISARGA’

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Tropical Cyclones- factors responsible, the process, naming and impact.
Context: Cyclonic Storm formed over East central Arabian Sea has been named Nisarga. The name in the new list was suggested by Bangladesh.

The cyclone track -- issued by India Meteorological Department (IMD) authorities -- show that Nisarga will cross very close to the Mumbai coast while entering the land. Maharashtra and Gujarat are on pre-cyclone alert as very heavy to extremely heavy rainfall is expected in parts of the states.

What’s next?
Conditions are favourable for intensification of the cyclone because the sea surface temperature is about 30 to 32 degrees Celsius, as compared to a normal of 28 degrees Celsius during this season. It is very likely to intensify into a Severe Cyclonic Storm during next 12 hours.

What is a cyclone?
Tropical Cyclone is any large system of winds that circulates about a center of low atmospheric pressure in a counter-clockwise direction north of the Equator and in a clockwise direction to the south.

Cyclone formation:
1. Cyclone is the formation of very low-pressure system with very high-speed winds revolving around it.
2. Factors like wind speed, wind direction, temperature and humidity contribute to the development of cyclones.
3. Before cloud formation, water takes up heat from the atmosphere to change into vapour. When water vapour changes back to liquid form as raindrops, this heat is released to the atmosphere.
4. The heat released to the atmosphere warms the air around. The air tends to rise and causes a drop in pressure. More air rushes to the centre of the storm. This cycle is repeated.

Additional facts:
- Cyclones around the world are named by Regional Specialised Meteorological Centres and Tropical Cyclone Warning Centres. There are a total of six RSMCs and five TCWCs, including the India Meteorological Department.
- The Indian weather bureau has been mandated with the duty to name cyclones that develop over the North Indian ocean, including Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, by following a standard procedure.
- IMD released a list of cyclone names in April 2020 as suggested by the 13 countries.
- The next few cyclones will be named Gati (named by India), Nivar (Iran), Burevi (Maldives), Tauktae (Myanmar) and Yaas (Oman).

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Factors responsible for the genesis of cyclones.
2. Naming of cyclones in various regions of the world.
3. Why more cyclones in Eastern coast of India?
4. What is coriolis force?
5. What is latent heat of condensation?

Mains Link:
Discuss the factors responsible for the formation of tropical cyclones.
All about tropical cyclones:
https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Qq3ssZmuhXY
Sources: pib.
2. Sun’s Corona

Context: Scientists have recently discovered tiny flashes of radio light emanating from all over the Sun, which they say could help in explaining the long-pending coronal heating problem. The data was collected with the help of the Murchison Widefield Array (MWA) radio telescope.

What is it?
The radio lights or signals under study result from beams of electrons accelerated in the aftermath of a magnetic explosion on the Sun.

These observations are the strongest evidence till date that the tiny magnetic explosions, originally referred to as ‘nanoflares’ by eminent American solar astrophysicist Eugene Parker. Researchers believe that these explosions could indeed be heating up the corona.

What Is the Sun’s Corona?
The Sun’s corona is the outermost part of the Sun’s atmosphere. The corona is usually hidden by the bright light of the Sun's surface. That makes it difficult to see without using special instruments. However, the corona can be viewed during a total solar eclipse.

Features:
The corona is about 10 million times less dense than the Sun’s surface. This low density makes the corona much less bright than the surface of the Sun.

Why is the corona so hot?
The corona’s high temperatures are a bit of a mystery. Astronomers have been trying to solve this mystery for a long time. The corona is in the outer layer of the Sun’s atmosphere—far from its surface. Yet the corona is hundreds of times hotter than the Sun’s surface.

How does the corona cause solar winds?
The corona extends far out into space. From it comes the solar wind that travels through our solar system. The corona’s temperature causes its particles to move at very high speeds. These speeds are so high that the particles can escape the Sun’s gravity.

About Widefield Array (MWA) radio telescope:
- It is a joint project between an international consortium of organisations to construct and operate a low-frequency radio array.
- Operating in the frequency range 70–300 MHz, the main scientific goals of the MWA are to detect neutral atomic Hydrogen emission from the cosmological Epoch of Reionization (EoR), to study the sun, the heliosphere, the Earth's ionosphere, and radio transient phenomena, as well as map the extragalactic radio sky.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Where is MWA radio telescope located?
2. What are radio waves?
3. Different layers of sun?
4. What are solar flares?
5. What are Sunspots?

Sources: the Hindu.
3. What is a Solar Eclipse?

Context:
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.

What is a 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.

Then, why isn’t there a solar eclipse every month?
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. 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 a 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.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
2. Types of Solar Eclipses.
3. Umbra vs Penumbra.
4. Moon’s orbit around the earth.
5. Why isn’t there a solar eclipse every month.

**Mains Link:**
Write a note on annular solar eclipse.
Sources: the Hindu.

### 4. Why do earthquakes happen in Mizoram?

**Context:**
A medium intensity earthquake of 5.1 magnitude rocked Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur and the other northeastern States on 21st June.

#### Why Mizoram and Tripura are more vulnerable?
As per the seismic hazard map of India, both the states of **Mizoram and Tripura lie entirely in Zone V.**

- Also, in **Mizoram,** lie the southern most end of the **Purvanchal Himalayan range.** Their folded structure is a **synclinorium** consisting of **broad synclines** and **tight-faulted anticlines.**
- Therefore, earthquakes in this region are generally shallow, though a few quakes of intermediate depth have occurred. Most deeper earthquakes occur along and across the international border, in **Myanmar’s Chin Division.** Earthquake activity in Tripura is mainly shallow. **The Dauki Fault** which follows the international border of India and Bangladesh in Meghalaya passes though northern sections of Tripura.
- The other major threat is from the **Madhupur Fault in Bangladesh.**

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**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Who releases seismic hazard map of India?
2. Earthquake waves - types, propagation and impact.

[www.insightsonindia.com](http://www.insightsonindia.com)
3. What are anticlines and synclines?
4. Fold mountains- reasons for formation and examples.
5. Fault mountains in India.

Mains Link:
Discuss why north east region of India is more vulnerable to earthquakes.
Sources: the Hindu.

5. WMO findings on lightning strikes

Highlights:
1. Brazil recorded a lightning strike that travelled a distance of 709 kilometres in 2018.
2. The previous record for the longest detected distance for a single lightning flash was for 321 km on June 20, 2007, across the US state of Oklahoma.
3. Brazil has the highest incidence of lightning in the world — an average of 77.8 million strikes per year.
4. Argentina recorded a strike that lasted for 16.73 seconds in 2019.
5. The previous record was a single lightning flash that lasted continuously for 7.74 seconds on August 30, 2012 over Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, France.
6. The lightning flashes that have now entered the record books are known as ‘Megaflashes’ in scientific parlance.

Lightning strikes in India:
1. Bihar is second after Uttar Pradesh with the maximum number of deaths due to lightning.
2. At least 170 people died in Bihar due to lightning in 2019 between April 1 and July 31.
3. The number of lightning days across India have been increasing significantly every month.
4. Lightning strikes kill more people in India than any other extreme weather event.

What is lightning?
It is a very rapid — and massive — discharge of electricity in the atmosphere, some of which is directed towards the Earth’s surface.
These discharges are generated in giant moisture-bearing clouds that are 10-12 km tall.

How does it strike?
1. The base of these clouds typically lies within 1-2 km of the Earth’s surface, while their top is 12-13 km away. Temperatures towards the top of these clouds are in the range of minus 35 to minus 45 degrees Celsius.
2. As water vapour moves upward in the cloud, the falling temperature causes it to condense. Heat is generated in the process, which pushes the molecules of water further up.
3. As they move to temperatures below zero degrees celsius, the water droplets change into small ice crystals. They continue to move up, gathering mass — until they are so heavy that they start to fall to Earth.
4. This leads to a system in which, simultaneously, smaller ice crystals are moving up and bigger crystals are coming down.
5. **Collisions follow, and trigger the release of electrons** — a process that is very similar to the generation of sparks of electricity. As the moving free electrons cause more collisions and more electrons, a chain reaction ensues.

6. This process results in a situation in which the top layer of the cloud gets positively charged, while the middle layer is negatively charged. The electrical potential difference between the two layers is huge — of the order of a billion to 10 billion volts. In very little time, a massive current, of the order of 100,000 to a million amperes, starts to flow between the layers.

7. An enormous amount of heat is produced, and this leads to the heating of the air column between the two layers of the cloud. This heat gives the air column a reddish appearance during lightning. As the heated air column expands, it produces shock waves that result in thunder.

**How does this current reach the Earth from the cloud?**

1. While the Earth is a good conductor of electricity, it is electrically neutral. However, in comparison to the middle layer of the cloud, it becomes positively charged. As a result, about 15%-20% of the current gets directed towards the Earth as well. It is this flow of current that results in damage to life and property on Earth.

2. There is a greater probability of lightning striking tall objects such as trees, towers or buildings. Once it is about 80-100 m from the surface, lightning tends to change course towards these taller objects. This happens because air is a poor conductor of electricity, and electrons that are travelling through air seek both a better conductor and the shortest route to the relatively positively charged Earth’s surface.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**

1. How lightning strikes?
2. What are megaflashes?
3. Is earth a good conductor of electricity?
4. Types of clouds.
5. Lightning strikes in India.

**Mains Link:**

Write a note on how lightning phenomenon.


Sources: down to earth.

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**6. Zealandia**

Researchers from GNS Science in New Zealand have announced that they mapped the shape and size of the Zealandia continent in unprecedented detail.

**Background:**

Scientists confirmed the existence of an eighth continent, called Zealandia, under New Zealand and the surrounding ocean in 2017.

Because 94% of Zealandia’s 2 million square miles are underwater, mapping the continent is challenging.

**Latest findings:**

1. Zealandia’s area is nearly 2 million square miles (5 million square kilometers) — about half the size of Australia.

2. But only 6% of the continent is above sea level. That part underpins New Zealand’s north and south islands and the island of New Caledonia.

3. Latest map depicts coastlines, territorial limits, and the names of major undersea features. The map is part of a global initiative to map the planet’s entire ocean floor by 2030.
4. This map also reveals where Zealandia sits across various tectonic plates, which of those plates are being pushed under the other in a process known as subduction, and how quickly that movement is happening.

How Zealandia evolved?

**Gondwana** formed when Earth’s ancient supercontinent, **Pangea**, split into two fragments.

- **Laurasia** in the north became Europe, Asia, and North America.
- **Gondwana** in the south dispersed to form modern-day Africa, Antarctica, South America, and Australia.

Further, **Geologic forces** continued to rearrange these land masses, and **Zealandia was forced under the waves about 30 million to 50 million years after it broke off Gondwana as the largest tectonic plate** — the Pacific Plate — slowly subducted beneath it.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. About Pangea, Gondwana and Laurasia.
2. Where is Zealandia?
3. Regions surrounding.
4. What are tectonic plates? Name the major plates.
5. Size and composition of earth’s crust.

**Mains Link:**
Write a note on Zealandia.

Sources: TOI.
GENERAL STUDIES – 2

Topics: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure; Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries.

1. Official language in High Courts

Context: Lawyers have challenged in the Supreme Court a law which makes Hindi the official language in courts in Haryana.

What’s the issue?
The petition contends that the Haryana Official Language (Amendment) Act of 2020 has unconstitutionally and arbitrarily imposed Hindi as the sole official language to be used in lower courts across the State.

What’s the concern?
- The lawyers have argued that English is widely used by advocates and the subordinate judiciary in lower courts in justice administration work.
- The imposition of Hindi as the sole language would result in an unreasonable classification between lawyers who are fluent in Hindi and those who are not.
- They say the amendment was a violation of the fundamental right to equality, freedom to practice a profession of choice, dignity and livelihood.

What the Constitution says?

Article 348 (1) of the Constitution of India provides that all proceedings in the Supreme Court and in every High court shall be in English Language until Parliament by law otherwise provides.

- Under Article 348 (2), the Governor of the State may, with the previous consent of the President, authorize the use of the Hindi language or any other language used for any official purpose of the State, in the proceedings of the High Court having its principal seat in that State provided that decrees, judgments or orders passed by such High Courts shall be in English.

Section 7 of the Official Languages Act, 1963, provides that the use of Hindi or official language of a State in addition to the English language may be authorized, with the consent of the President of India, by the Governor of the State for purpose of judgments etc. made by the High Court for that State.
The provision of optional use of Hindi in proceedings has already been made in the High Courts of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Which states in India have the provision of optional use of Hindi in Court proceedings?
2. What is Eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution.
3. What is Article 348 related to?
4. Governors’ powers to authorise the use of Hindi in High Court proceedings.
5. Who can add or remove languages from 8th schedule?

Mains Link:
Why lawyers in Haryana have opposed the state government’s move to impose Hindi as the official language in courts in Haryana? Discuss.


Sources: the Hindu.

2. Petition on nation’s name

Context: The Supreme Court has ordered that a plea to change India’s name exclusively to ‘Bharat’ be converted into a representation and forwarded to the Union government for an appropriate decision.
The Court said, “Bharat and India are both names given in the Constitution. India is already called ‘Bharat’ in the Constitution”.

What’s the issue?
A petition was filed which said, ‘India’ is a name of foreign origin. The name can be traced back to the Greek term ‘Indica’.
The petition seeks an amendment to Article 1 of the Constitution, which says “India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States”. It wants ‘India’ to be struck off from the Article. This is to ensure citizens of this country to get over the colonial past and instil a sense of pride in our nationality. And it will also justify the hard fought freedom by our freedom fighters.

How constituent assembly dealt with this?
The constituent assembly debated Article 1 of the then draft constitution prepared under the chairmanship of BR Ambedkar.
It was a heated debate that saw sharp exchanges among the members on November 18, 1949 - just eight days before the Constitution was adopted by “We, the people”.
HV Kamath objected to the Ambedkar committee’s draft that had two names - India and Bharat.
- He proposed amendments to Article 1 putting Bharat or alternatively Hind as the primary name for the country and pronouncing India only as the name in the English language.
Seth Govind Das said, "India, that is, Bharat" are not beautiful words for the name of a country. We should have put the words "Bharat known as India also in foreign countries."
- Das cited the Vedas, the Mahabharat, couple of Puranas and the writings of Chinese traveller Huien-Tsang to say that Bharat was the original name of the country, hence India should not be put as the primary name in the constitution post-independence.
- He also invoked Mahatma Gandhi saying that the country fought the battle of freedom raising the slogan of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" asserting that Bharat could be the only plausible name for the country.
Among others who supported India being named only as Bharat included KV Rao from Andhra Pradesh.
MA Ayyangar of Madras province proposed names of Bharat, Bharat Varsha and Hindustan as substitutes for India in Article 1.
At the end, when Rajendra Prasad put the amendments to vote, all fell. Article 1 remained intact as "India, that is Bharat". However, the debate has continued.

What the constitution says?
As per Article 1 in the Constitution, the territory of India shall consist of: The territories of the states, The Union territories and Any territory that may be acquired.
The names of the States and the Unions have been described in the First Schedule. This schedule also held that there were four Categories of State and territories - Part A, Part B, Part C and Part D.
In the seventh amendment of the Constitution in 1956 the distinction between the Part A and Part B states was abolished. Subsequently states were reorganized on linguistic basis.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is Article 1?
2. What is the union of states?
3. Territory of India includes?
4. Who can change the name of states and what is the procedure to be followed?
5. Amendments to article 1 to 3?
Mains Link:
Write a note on schedule 1 of the Indian Constitution.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GCK7FLJV9.1&imageview=0.
Sources: the Hindu.
3. **10th Schedule of the Constitution**

**Why in News?**
The Supreme Court has asked the Goa Assembly Speaker to respond to a plea filed by the opposition Congress party to decide on the disqualification proceedings against 10 legislators who joined the ruling BJP in July last year.

**What’s the issue?**
- In July last year 10 MLAs, purportedly claiming to form a two-third of Indian National Congress (INC), decided to merge the said legislature party with the BJP and accordingly addressed a communication to that effect to the Speaker.
- Based on the communication, the Speaker took note of the “alleged merger of INC’s legislative party in the Goa Legislative Assembly, and allotted the 10 seats in the Assembly along with the members of the BJP”.

However, petitioners contended that the legislators in question have incurred disqualification under Article 191(2) of the Constitution, read with para 2 of the Tenth Schedule (defection), and are liable to be disqualified as members of the Legislative Assembly.

**What is the anti-defection law?**
The Tenth Schedule was inserted in the Constitution in 1985 by the 52nd Amendment Act.

1. It lays down the process by which legislators may be disqualified on grounds of defection by the Presiding Officer of a legislature based on a petition by any other member of the House.
2. The decision on question as to disqualification on ground of defection is referred to the Chairman or the Speaker of such House, and his decision is final.

The law applies to both Parliament and state assemblies.

**Disqualification:**
If a member of a house belonging to a political party:
1. Voluntarily gives up the membership of his political party, or
2. Votes, or does not vote in the legislature, contrary to the directions of his political party. However, if the member has taken prior permission, or is condoned by the party within 15 days from such voting or abstention, the member shall not be disqualified.
3. If an independent candidate joins a political party after the election.
4. If a nominated member joins a party six months after he becomes a member of the legislature.

**Exceptions under the law:**
Legislators may change their party without the risk of disqualification in certain circumstances.

- The law allows a party to merge with or into another party provided that at least two-thirds of its legislators are in favour of the merger.
- In such a scenario, neither the members who decide to merge, nor the ones who stay with the original party will face disqualification.

**Decision of the Presiding Officer is subject to judicial review:**
The law initially stated that the decision of the Presiding Officer is not subject to judicial review. This condition was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1992, thereby allowing appeals against the Presiding Officer’s decision in the High Court and Supreme Court. However, it held that there may not be any judicial intervention until the Presiding Officer gives his order.

**Advantages of anti-defection law:**
1. Provides stability to the government by preventing shifts of party allegiance.
2. Ensures that candidates remain loyal to the party as well the citizens voting for him.
3. Promotes party discipline.
4. Facilitates merger of political parties without attracting the provisions of Anti-defection
5. Expected to reduce corruption at the political level.
6. Provides for punitive measures against a member who defects from one party to another.
Various Recommendations to overcome the challenges posed by the law:

1. **Dinesh Goswami Committee on electoral reforms**: Disqualification should be limited to following cases:
   - A member voluntarily gives up the membership of his political party
   - A member abstains from voting, or votes contrary to the party whip in a motion of vote of confidence or motion of no-confidence. Political parties could issue whips only when the government was in danger.

2. **Law Commission (170th Report)**:
   - Provisions which exempt splits and mergers from disqualification to be deleted.
   - Pre-poll electoral fronts should be treated as political parties under anti-defection.
   - Political parties should limit issuance of whips to instances only when the government is in danger.

3. **Election Commission**:
   - Decisions under the Tenth Schedule should be made by the President/Governor on the binding advice of the Election Commission.

InstaLinks:

- Prelims Link:
  1. Names of various committees and commissions with regard to Anti Defection law.
  2. Committees vs Commissions.
  5. Is anti-defection law applicable to the presiding officer?
  6. Relevant Supreme Court cases and verdicts.

- Mains Link:
  Examine the provisions of Anti-defection law. Has this law largely failed to meet its objective? Discuss.
  Sources: the Hindu.

4. **Reservation is not a fundamental right says Supreme Court**

What’s the Context?
The Supreme Court has said that reservation of seats to certain communities was not a Fundamental Right.

What’s the issue?
The Court said this while refusing to act on a petition filed by all political parties from Tamil Nadu who sought 50% OBC reservation in the all-India NEET seats surrendered by states.

All political parties from Tamil Nadu filed a writ petition under Article 32 of the Constitution. They accused the Centre of violating the “right of the people of Tamil Nadu to have a fair education” by not implementing the 50% quota for Backward Classes and Most Backward Classes for the All India Quota seats in medical and dental science courses.

Key observations made by the Court:
Reservation is not a fundamental right”, Hence, Article 32 could not be applied. Therefore, not giving the quota benefits cannot be construed as a violation of any constitutional right.

Petitioners’ arguments:
Non-implementation of such reservations in the state amounted to violation of Fundamental Rights of its residents.
This is because, the Director General of Health Services is not following any of the following laws to provide reservations:
1. The Tamil Nadu Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions and of Appointments or Posts in the Services under the State) Act, 1993 to provide 50% reservation for OBC candidates in All India Quota in undergraduate as well as postgraduate medical courses in Tamil Nadu.
2. 27% reservation for OBC candidates in All India Quota in undergraduate as well as postgraduate medical courses to other States.

Court’s verdict on Reservation in promotions:
In February 2020, the Supreme Court ruled that there is no fundamental right to claim reservation in public jobs and no court can order a state government to provide for reservation to SC/STs.

Additional information:

Constitutional Provisions regarding Reservations:
1. Articles 15(4) and 16(4) state that the equality provisions do not prevent the government from making special provisions in matters of admission to educational institutions or jobs in favour of backward classes, particularly the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs).
2. Article 16(4A) allows reservations to SCs and STs in promotions, as long as the government believes that they are not adequately represented in government services.
3. In the Indra Sawhney case of 1992, the Supreme Court fixed the upper limit for the combined reservation quota should not exceed 50% of seats.
4. In 2019, the 103rd Constitution Amendment Act was passed empowering both Centre and the states to provide 10% reservation to the EWS category of society in government jobs and educational institutions.

Writ jurisdiction:
The Supreme Court under Article 32 and the High courts under Article 226 of the Constitution can issue the writs of habeas corpus, mandamus, prohibition, certiorari and quo-warranto to check and enforce fundamental rights.
The Parliament under Article 32 can also empower any other court to issue these writs. However, no such provision has been made so far.
The Supreme Court can issue writs only for the enforcement of fundamental rights whereas a High court can issue writs for the enforcement of Fundamental Rights and also for an ordinary legal right.

InstaLinks:
1. What is NEET?
2. Constitutional provisions wrt to Reservations.
3. Overview of articles 32, 226, 14, 15 and 16.
4. What are writs?
5. Difference in powers of SC and HC wrt writ jurisdictions.
6. Indra Sawhney case verdict.
7. When can Article 32 be suspended?
8. Who can empower any other court to issue writs?

Mains Link:
Reservation is not a fundamental right. Discuss in the light of recent verdict of the Supreme Court.
Sources: the Hindu.
Topics: Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

1. PM CARES Fund Not A 'Public Authority' Under RTI Act

Context: Stating that PM CARES FUNDS is not a 'public authority' under Section 2(h) of the Right to Information Act, 2005, the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) has refused to divulge information sought in an application filed under the RTI Act.

What is 'public authority' under RTI?
As per Section 2(h) of the RTI Act, "public authority" is means any authority or body or institution of self-government established or constituted:
1. by or under the Constitution;
2. by any other law made by Parliament;
3. by any other law made by State Legislature;
4. by notification issued or order made by the appropriate Government.

The definition of 'public authority' also includes bodies owned, controlled or substantially financed by the government and non-governmental organizations substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate Government.

Implications of this move:
- For a trust which is created and run by 4 cabinet ministers in their ex-officio capacities, denying the status of 'public authority' is a big blow to transparency and not to mention our democratic values.
- The name, composition of the trust, control, usage of emblem, government domain name everything signifies that it is a public authority. By simply ruling that it's not a public authority and denying the application of RTI Act, the Government has constructed walls of secrecy around it.

What is PM CARES fund?
The PM CARES Fund was created on 28 March 2020, "with the primary objective of dealing with any kind of emergency or distress situation, like posed by the COVID-19 pandemic". It is a “public charitable trust”.

Who administers the fund?
Prime Minister is the ex-officio Chairman of the PM CARES Fund and Minister of Defence, Minister of Home Affairs and Minister of Finance, Government of India are ex-officio Trustees of the Fund.

Why it should be monitored?
Reports suggest that PM CARES has already received contributions in excess of Rs. 10,000 crores. It amassed a staggering Rs. 6,500 crores in its very first week with donations from large corporate houses and celebrities.

What’s government’s argument?
The argument against conferring PM CARES the status of a “public account” seems to be that it is a fund based on voluntary contributions of individuals and organisations, and as such, beyond the full-fledged scrutiny of the CAG.

Need of the hour:
The very purpose of having a separate public account of India under Article 266(2), as against the Consolidated Fund of India [Article 266(1)] and the Contingency Fund of India (Article 267), is to cover receipts that do not fall in either of these two funds. Similarly, since PM CARES conforms to being a “public account” and as vast sums of money have been collected manifestly at the behest of the government of India, allowing the CAG to audit it will be a step in the direction of transparency and instil public confidence in the Fund.

What the Constitution of India says?
Under **Article 266(2) of the Constitution**, “public moneys received by or on behalf of the Government of India”, which is not on account of revenue from taxes, duties, repayment of loans and the like should be credited to the Public Account of India.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. Articles 266 vs 267.
2. What is a public account?
3. Who administers PM CARES fund?
4. Which organisations are exempted from the ambit of RTI act?
5. What is Consolidated fund of India?

**Mains Link:**
Discuss why PM CARES fund should be brought within the ambit of RTI act?
Sources: the Hindu.

### 2. Delhi’s decision to limit health services

**Context:** Delhi Lt Governor Anil Baijal has issued **two orders** that struck down key announcements made by the Delhi government in the past week. These include:
1. To reserve beds in private and Delhi government hospitals for residents of Delhi.
2. To limit the scope of Covid-19 testing.

**What’s the issue?**
Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has announced to restrict COVID-19 treatment in Delhi’s private hospitals and those run by the government of NCT only to those with proof of residence in the city. Besides, the **Director General of Health Services Delhi (DGHS),** had ruled out testing of asymptomatic contacts of confirmed patients.

**Why Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi overruled this decision?**
1. **Right to Health’** is an integral part of **Right to Life** under **Article 21** of the Constitution. While health care is far from being universal in India, positively denying that to someone on the grounds of residency is insensitive and irresponsible.
2. The **NCT is functionally contiguous with Gurugram in Haryana and NOIDA in Uttar Pradesh.** Thousands cross these borders for work and other needs including health care. People contribute to tax revenues in three different jurisdictions. And hence there cannot be restrictions.
3. In his second order, the L-G, pointing out “deviation” from guidelines of the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR), directed the **Delhi government to test asymptomatic direct and high-risk contacts of confirmed cases as well.** It is because deviation in the ICMR guidelines can result in inadequate contact tracing of affected individuals and can result in further spread of COVID-19 in NCT of Delhi.

**What has been the government’s argument and the rationale behind this move?**
Situation in Delhi is already worsening. 5.5 lakh COVID-19 cases are expected by July-end for which 80,000 beds could be needed.

**Powers of Lt. Governor to issue such orders:**
He is empowered to issue such orders in his capacity as chairperson of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA).
These powers have been conferred under **Section 18(3) read with Section 18(2)(d) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.**

**What was the problem with Delhi Government’s order?**
If this order was implemented, it would have largely had two effects:
1. It would have **denied healthcare to scores of patients from other states who come to Delhi for specialised treatment** that is unavailable to them in their hometowns.

2. It would have led to **denial of medical care to even those living and working in Delhi** as they don’t have identity proofs of residency in Delhi.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**

1. SDMA- composition, functions and powers.
2. Lt Governor of Delhi Vs Governors of states- difference in powers and their appointment.
3. DDMA- chairperson and powers to overrule government orders.
4. NCR consists of?
5. Who appoints the Chief Minister of Delhi?

**Mains Link:**

Can treatment In hospitals of a particular state be reserved for only the residents of that state? Discuss the issues involved.


Sources: the Hindu.

### 3. Krishna and Godavari water utilisation

**Context:** The Union government is going to take stock of water utilisation from the **Krishna and Godavari rivers** following Telangana and Andhra Pradesh filing complaints against each other. In this regard, the Union Ministry of Jal Sakti has asked the Chairpersons of the **Krishna and Godavari River Management Boards** to procure the details of the irrigation projects in Maharashtra and Karnataka, too, and submit them to the Centre in a month.

**Need for:**

The main objective of the exercise appears to be to assess **whether surplus water will be available for the new projects in the light of the disputes.**

**What’s the issue?**

The two States- AP ans Telangana- share stretches of the Krishna and the Godavari and own their tributaries. They have embarked on several new projects without getting clearance from the river boards, the Central Water Commission and the apex council comprising the Union Water Resources Minister and the Chief Ministers, as mandated by the **Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014**. But, Telangana government last year filed a complaint against AP government for taking up projects across Krishna river.

**The Krishna:**

It is an east-flowing river.

**Originates** at Mahabaleshwar in Maharashtra and merges with the Bay of Bengal, flowing through Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

**Tributaries:** Tungabhadra, Mallaprabha, Koyna, Bhima, Ghataprabha, Yerla, Warna, Dindi, Musi and Dudhganga.

**Godavari River:**

Rises from **Trimbakeshwar** near Nasik in Maharashtra and flows for a length of about 1465 km before outfalling into the Bay of Bengal.

**Basin:** The Godavari basin extends over states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha in addition to smaller parts in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Union territory of Puducherry.

**Tributaries:** Pravara, Purna, Manjra, Penganga, Wardha, Wainganga, Pranhita (combined flow of Wainganga, Penganga, Wardha), Indravati, Maner and the Sabri.
InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Tributaries of Krishna.
2. Tributaries of Godavari.
3. East vs West flowing rivers of India.
4. Interstate river water disputes - key provisions.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Rule of Law index

Why in News?
A petition was filed in the Supreme Court asking the Court to direct the government to setup expert panels to boost India’s prospects in the Rule of Law Index.

What has the petitioner demanded?
A direction to the government to constitute expert committees to examine the best practices of the countries ranked among top 20 in Rule of Law Index-2020 and accordingly take steps to improve the “pathetic ranking” of India.

And why these demands have been made?
On March 11, the World Justice Project announced the Rule of Law Index and ranked India in the 69th position.

- India has never been ranked even among top 50 in the Index, but successive governments did nothing to improve international ranking of India.
- The nation’s ranking in the Index “confirms poor performance in eight sectors, constraints on government powers, absence of corruption, open government, fundamental rights, public order and security, regulatory enforcement and civil and criminal justice”.
- Besides, poor rule of law has a devastating effect on right to life, liberty, economic justice, fraternity, individual dignity and national integration.
- It also offends rights guaranteed under Articles 14 and 21.

What has the Court said?
This was not an "appropriate case" for the court and a representation to this effect can be made to the government for taking action.
This petition may be treated as representation by the respondents for such appropriate actions as may be found appropriate, which may be decided within a period of six months.

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Additional information:
What is Rule of Law index?

www.insightsonindia.com
Released by the World Justice Project- an independent organisation.

It is a quantitative assessment tool designed to offer a detailed and comprehensive picture of the extent to which countries adhere to the rule of law in practice.

The index covers 128 countries.

How are countries ranked?
It measures countries’ rule of law performance across eight factors:

How is rule of law defined?
The World Justice Project defines the rule of law system as one in which the following four universal principles are upheld:
1. The government and its officials and agents are accountable under the law.
2. The laws are clear, publicized, stable and fair, and protect fundamental rights, including the security of persons and property.
3. The process by which the laws are enacted, administered, and enforced is accessible, efficient, and fair.
4. Justice is delivered by competent, ethical, and independent representatives and neutrals who are of sufficient number, have adequate resources and reflect the makeup of the communities they serve.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Who releases the Rule of Law index?
2. Factors on which countries are ranked?
3. Top 10 and bottom 10 as per the 2020 report.
4. India’s performance this year and past years.
5. What is a petition?
6. Article 32.

Mains Link:
Write a note on the rule of law index. Discuss how India can perform better in this.


Sources: the Hindu.

5. What is a Review Petition?

Context:
The Supreme Court has refused to review its 2018 judgment which decriminalised adultery.

What had the Court ruled then?
The original judgment was by a Constitution Bench led by then chief justice Dipak Misra who found that Section 497 (adultery) of the Indian Penal Code cannot “command” married couples to remain loyal to each other for the fear of penal punishment.

- Two individuals may part if one cheats, but to attach criminality to infidelity is going too far.
- The court had reasoned that there was no data whatsoever to support claims that abolition of adultery as a crime would result in “chaos in sexual morality” or an increase of divorce.

Why Court struck down Section 497?
Section 497 perpetuates subordinate status of women, denies dignity, sexual autonomy, and is based on gender stereotypes. Section 497 based on women as chattel, seeks to control sexuality of woman, hits the autonomy and dignity of woman.

It also violates rights guaranteed under Articles 14 and 21.

Past Supreme Court judgements on adultery:
The adultery law had come up in court thrice in the past — in 1954, in 1985, and in 1988.
1. In 1954, the SC rejected that Section 497 violated the right to equality.
2. In 1985, it said that women didn’t need to be included in the law as a party which can make complaints.
3. In 1988, the Supreme Court said that the adultery law was a “shield rather than a sword”.

What is a review petition and when can it be filed?
Under Article 137, the Supreme Court has the power to review any of its judgments or orders.

Scope for review:
When a review takes place, the law is that it is allowed not to take fresh stock of the case but to correct grave errors that have resulted in the miscarriage of justice.
The court has the power to review its rulings to correct a “patent error” and not “minor mistakes of inconsequential import”.
In a 1975 ruling, Justice Krishna Iyer said a review can be accepted “only where a glaring omission or patent mistake or like grave error has crept in earlier by judicial fallibility”.

In a 2013 ruling, the Supreme Court has laid down three grounds for seeking a review of a verdict it has delivered:
1. The discovery of new and important matter or evidence which, after the exercise of due diligence, was not within the knowledge of the petitioner or could not be produced by him.
2. Mistake or error apparent on the face of the record.
3. Any other sufficient reason. It means a reason that is analogous to the other two grounds.
In 2013 Union of India v. Sandur Manganese & Iron Ores Ltd) case, the court laid down nine principles on when a review is maintainable.

Who can file a review petition?
As per the Civil Procedure Code and the Supreme Court Rules, any person aggrieved by a ruling can seek a review. However, the court exercises its discretion to allow a review petition only when it shows the grounds for seeking the review.

Time- period within which a review petition should be filed?
As per 1996 rules framed by the Supreme Court:
1. A review petition must be filed within 30 days of the date of judgment or order. While a judgment is the final decision in a case, an order is an interim ruling that is subject to its final verdict.
2. In certain circumstances, the court can condone a delay in filing the review petition if the petitioner can establish strong reasons that justify the delay.

The procedure to be followed:
1. The rules state that review petitions would ordinarily be entertained without oral arguments by lawyers. It is heard “through circulation” by the judges in their chambers.
2. Review petitions are also heard, as far as practicable, by the same combination of judges who delivered the order or judgment that is sought to be reviewed.
3. If a judge has retired or is unavailable, a replacement is made keeping in mind the seniority of judges.
4. In exceptional cases, the court allows an oral hearing. In a 2014 case, the Supreme Court held that review petitions in all death penalty cases will be heard in open court by a Bench of three judges.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Review vs Curative petition.
2. Procedure to be followed.
3. Who can file?
4. Time- period within which a review petition should be filed?
5. What is Section 497 of IPC?
6. What is Article 137?
Mains Link:
What is a review petition? What is the procedure to be followed? Discuss.
Link:
Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Disqualification shadow on 7 Nagaland MLAs

Context: Gauhati High Court has directed Nagaland Assembly Speaker Sharingain Longkumer to conclude the disqualification proceedings against seven lawmakers of the Opposition Naga People’s Front (NPF) and pass appropriate orders within six weeks from June 2.

What’s the issue?
On April 24, 2019, the NPF filed disqualification petitions against its seven suspended MLAs for “wilfully” defying its collective decision to support the Congress candidate in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.
NPF claimed the seven MLAs had willfully given up their party membership, thereby attracting provisions under the 10th Schedule (anti-defection law) of the Constitution.
These MLAs, however, said as the NPF’s decision to support the Congress candidate was “against the principle of regionalism”, they said they had backed the other candidate. The NPF had not contested the polls.

What is the anti-defection law?
The Tenth Schedule was inserted in the Constitution in 1985 by the 52nd Amendment Act.
3. It lays down the process by which legislators may be disqualified on grounds of defection by the Presiding Officer of a legislature based on a petition by any other member of the House.
4. The decision on question as to disqualification on ground of defection is referred to the Chairman or the Speaker of such House, and his decision is final.
The law applies to both Parliament and state assemblies.

Disqualification:
If a member of a house belonging to a political party:
5. Voluntarily gives up the membership of his political party, or
6. Votes, or does not vote in the legislature, contrary to the directions of his political party. However, if the member has taken prior permission, or is condoned by the party within 15 days from such voting or abstention, the member shall not be disqualified.
7. If an independent candidate joins a political party after the election.
8. If a nominated member joins a party six months after he becomes a member of the legislature.

Exceptions under the law:
Legislators may change their party without the risk of disqualification in certain circumstances.
• The law allows a party to merge with or into another party provided that at least two-thirds of its legislators are in favour of the merger.
• In such a scenario, neither the members who decide to merge, nor the ones who stay with the original party will face disqualification.

Decision of the Presiding Officer is subject to judicial review:
The law initially stated that the decision of the Presiding Officer is not subject to judicial review. This condition was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1992, thereby allowing appeals against the Presiding Officer’s decision in the High Court and Supreme Court. However, it held that there may not be any judicial intervention until the Presiding Officer gives his order.

Advantages of anti-defection law:
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8. Ensures that candidates remain loyal to the party as well the citizens voting for him.
10. Facilitates merger of political parties without attracting the provisions of Anti-defection
11. Expected to reduce corruption at the political level.
12. Provides for punitive measures against a member who defects from one party to another.

Various Recommendations to overcome the challenges posed by the law:

4. **Dinesh Goswami Committee on electoral reforms**: Disqualification should be limited to following cases:
   A member voluntarily gives up the membership of his political party
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   Provisions which exempt splits and mergers from disqualification to be deleted.
   Pre-poll electoral fronts should be treated as political parties under anti-defection.
   Political parties should limit issuance of whips to instances only when the government is in danger.

6. **Election Commission**:
   Decisions under the Tenth Schedule should be made by the President/ Governor on the binding advice of the Election Commission.

**InstaLinks**:

**Prelim Link**:
7. Names of various committees and commissions with regard to Anti Defection law.
8. Committees vs Commissions.
10. Merger vs Split of political parties.
11. Is anti-defection law applicable to the presiding officer?
12. Relevant Supreme Court cases and verdicts.

**Mains Link**:
Examine the provisions of Anti-defection law. Has this law largely failed to meet its objective? Discuss.
Sources: the Hindu.

**2. What is Finance Commission Grants & Other Transfers?**

**Context**: The Finance Ministry has released Rs 6,195.08 crore **revenue deficit grant** to 14 states as the third equated monthly instalment to enhance their resources during Covid-19 crisis.

The government on May 11, 2020 had released Rs 6,195.08 crore to 14 states as the second equated monthly instalment of the **Post Devolution Revenue Deficit Grant as recommended by the 15th Finance Commission**. This would provide them additional resources during the Corona crisis.

The 15th Finance Commission used the following criteria while determining the share of states:
(i) 45% for the income distance.
(ii) 15% for the population in 2011
(iii) 15% for the area
(iv) 10% for forest and ecology
(v) 12.5% for demographic performance, and
(vi) 2.5% for tax effort.
For 2020-21, the Commission has recommended a total devolution of Rs 8,55,176 crore to the states, which is 41% of the divisible pool of taxes. This is 1% lower than the percentage recommended by the 14th Finance Commission.

**What are the various grants recommended by the 15th Finance Commission?**
The Terms of Reference of the Finance Commission require it to recommend grants-in-aid to the States. These grants include: (i) revenue deficit grants, (ii) grants to local bodies, and (iii) disaster management grants.

**What is the Finance Commission?**
The Finance Commission is *constituted by the President under article 280 of the Constitution*, mainly to give its recommendations on distribution of tax revenues between the Union and the States and amongst the States themselves.

Two distinctive features of the Commission’s work involve redressing the vertical imbalances between the taxation powers and expenditure responsibilities of the centre and the States respectively and equalization of all public services across the States.

It is the duty of the Commission to make recommendations to the President as to:

1. the distribution between the Union and the States of the net proceeds of taxes which are to be, or may be, divided between them and the allocation between the States of the respective shares of such proceeds;
2. the principles which should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues of the States out of the Consolidated Fund of India;
3. the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the Panchayats and Municipalities in the State on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State;
4. any other matter referred to the Commission by the President in the interests of sound finance.

**Composition:**
As per the provisions contained in the Finance Commission [Miscellaneous Provisions] Act, 1951 and The Finance Commission (Salaries & Allowances) Rules, 1951, the Chairman of the Commission is selected from among persons who have had experience in public affairs, and the four other members are selected from among persons who:

- are, or have been, or are qualified to be appointed as Judges of a High Court; or
- have special knowledge of the finances and accounts of Government; or
- have had wide experience in financial matters and in administration; or
- have special knowledge of economics.

**InstaLinks:**
Prelims Link:
1. FC- composition.
2. Functions of FC.
3. Appointment of members and constitution of FC.
4. Types of FC grants.
5. Formula used by 15th finance commission.

Mains Link:
Give an account of the composition and functions of the Finance Commission as mentioned in the Constitution of India.
Sources: the Hindu.

**Topics: Salient features of the Representation of People’s Act.**

1. **Secrecy of ballot**

Why in News?
Supreme Court has delivered its judgment on Secrecy of Ballot.
The judgment came on an appeal against the Allahabad High Court decision setting aside the voting of a no-confidence motion in a zila panchayat in Uttar Pradesh in 2018.

The High Court had found that some of the panchayat members had violated the rule of secrecy of ballot. It relied on CCTV footage to conclude that they had either displayed the ballot papers or by their conduct revealed the manner in which they had voted.

What has the Supreme Court said on Secrecy of Ballot?
- Secrecy of ballot is the cornerstone of free and fair elections. The choice of a voter should be free and the secret ballot system in a democracy ensures it.
- It is the policy of law to protect the right of voters to secrecy of the ballot.
- Even a remote or distinct possibility that a voter can be forced to disclose for whom she has voted would act as a positive constraint and a check on the freedom to exercise of franchise.
- The principle of secrecy of ballots is an important postulate of constitutional democracy.
- However, a voter can also voluntarily waive the privilege of non-disclosure. No one can prevent a voter from doing. Nor can a complaint be entertained from any, including the person who wants to keep the voter’s mouth sealed as to why she disclosed for whom she voted.

What the RPA says?
Section 94 of the Representation of People Act upholds the privilege of the voter to maintain confidentiality about her choice of vote.

What next?
The apex court ordered a re-vote of the motion within the next two months. It ordered the Allahabad District Judge or his nominee to act as the presiding officer. The vote should be conducted by the secret ballot system.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is Section 94 of RPA?
2. What is a writ petition?
3. What is first past the post system?
4. Constitutional provisions related to panchayat elections in India.
5. Appeals against High Court judgments.

Mains Link:
What is Secrecy of Ballot? Why Supreme Court has termed it as the cornerstone of free and fair elections? Discuss.
Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. 23 additional MFP items included in MSP list
Context: Ministry of Tribal Affairs has announced inclusion of 23 additional Minor Forest Produce (MFP) items in Minimum Support Price (MSP) list.
They include Van Tulsi seeds, Van Jeera, Mushroom, Black Rice and Johar Rice among others.

Significance:
This enhances the coverage from 50 to 73 items. This comes in view of the COVID-19 pandemic so that much needed support could be provided to the tribal MFP gatherers.

What is this scheme all about?
The Union Cabinet, in 2013, approved a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for marketing of non-nationalized / non monopolized Minor Forest Produce (MFP) and development of a value chain for MFP through Minimum Support Price (MSP).

This was a measure towards social safety for MFP gatherers, who are primarily members of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) most of them in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) areas.

Objectives of the scheme:

- Ensure that the tribal population gets a remunerative price for the produce they collect from the forest and provide alternative employment avenues to them.
- Establish a system to ensure fair monetary returns for forest dweller’s efforts in collection, primary processing, storage, packaging, transportation etc, while ensuring sustainability of the resource base.
- Get them a share of revenue from the sales proceeds with costs deducted.

Implementation:

1. The responsibility of purchasing MFP on MSP will be with State designated agencies.
2. To ascertain market price, services of market correspondents would be availed by the designated agencies particularly for major markets trading in MFP.
3. The scheme supports primary value addition as well as provides for supply chain infrastructure like cold storage, warehouses etc.
4. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs will be the nodal Ministry for implementation and monitoring of the scheme. The Minimum Support Price would be determined by the Ministry with technical help of TRIFED.

What is MFP?

**Section 2(i) of the Forest Rights Act** defines a Minor Forest Produce (MFP) as all non-timber forest produce of plant origin and includes bamboo, brushwood, stumps, canes, cocoon, honey, waxes, Lac, tendu/kendu leaves, medicinal plants etc.

The definition of “minor forest produce” includes bamboo and cane, thereby changing the categorization of bamboo and cane as “trees” under the Indian Forest Act 1927.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. Who decides about Products to be covered under MFP?
2. How many products are currently covered under MFP?
3. Permission for collection of MFPs inside National Parks and other protected areas?
4. Centrally sponsored vs Central Sector schemes.
5. Who decides on MSP?

Mains Link:

Recognition of tribal rights over non-timber forest products (NTFPs) would accelerate empowerment of the poor and marginalised. Comment.

Sources: pib.

**2. One Nation-One Ration Card scheme**

Context: Three more States included in One Nation One Card scheme- Odisha, Sikkim and Mizoram. The facility so far is enabled in 17 States/UTs.

About the scheme:

One Nation One Ration Card (RC) will ensure all beneficiaries especially migrants can access PDS across the nation from any PDS shop of their own choice.

**Benefits**: no poor person is deprived of getting subsidised foodgrains under the food security scheme when they shift from one place to another. It also aims to remove the chance of anyone holding more than one ration card to avail benefits from different states.

**Significance**: This will provide freedom to the beneficiaries as they will not be tied to any one PDS shop and reduce their dependence on shop owners and curtail instances of corruption.
Standard format of ‘one nation, one ration card’:
A standard format for ration card has been prepared after taking into account the format used by different states.

- For national portability, the state governments have been asked to issue the ration card in bi-lingual format, wherein besides the local language, the other language could be Hindi or English.
- The states have also been told to have a 10-digit standard ration card number, wherein first two digits will be state code and the next two digits will be running ration card numbers.
- Besides this, a set of another two digits will be appended with ration card number to create unique member IDs for each member of the household in a ration card.

Challenges:
Prone to corruption: Every state has its own rules for Public Distribution System (PDS). If ‘One Nation, One Ration Card’ is implemented, it will further boost corruption in an already corrupted Public Distribution System. The scheme will increase the woes of the common man and, the middlemen and corrupt PDS shop owners will exploit them.
Tamil Nadu has opposed the proposal of the Centre, saying it would result in undesirable consequences and is against federalism.

Insta Links:
Prelims Link:
1. What is PDS?
2. What is NFSA? Eligibility? Benefits?
3. How are fair price shops established?
Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of One Nation One Ration Card scheme.
Sources: pib.

3. Electronics incentive schemes launched
Context: The government has launched three incentive schemes with a total outlay of about ₹48,000 crore to boost large-scale manufacturing of electronics in the country.

The schemes are:
1. Production Linked Incentive:
   Targeted at mobile phone manufacturing and specified electronic components.
   The government initially plans to incentivise 10 firms — five global and five local.
   This Scheme shall extend an incentive of 4% to 6% on incremental sales (over base year) of goods manufactured in India and covered under the target segments, to eligible companies, for a period of five years subsequent to the base year.

2. Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS):
   It shall provide financial incentive of 25% on capital expenditure for the identified list of electronic goods, i.e., electronic components, semiconductor/ display fabrication units, Assembly, Test, Marking and Packaging (ATMP) units, specialized sub-assemblies and capital goods for manufacture of aforesaid goods.

3. Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0) Scheme:
   It shall provide support for creation of world class infrastructure along with common facilities and amenities, including Ready Built Factory (RBF) sheds / Plug and Play facilities for attracting major global electronics manufacturers, along with their supply chains.

Significance:
With the three new schemes, the government aims to manufacture electronics worth ₹8 lakh crore, while generating employment for about 10 lakh people in the next five years.
Potential:
India has been able to achieve “modest success” in electronics manufacturing. India has emerged as the second largest mobile manufacturer of the world.
In 2014-15, the value of mobiles produced was ₹18,992 crore with six crore units. This increased to ₹1.7 lakh crore in value and 30 crore in terms of units in 2018-19.

Conclusion:
This is a step towards self-reliant India. A self-reliant India is not an India of isolation. It is not an inward looking India. It is one which enhances its capacity and develops an ecosystem as an asset to the global economy.

Link:
Sources: the Hindu.

4. Amendments to the Essential Commodities Act

Context: Cabinet has approved historic amendment to the Essential Commodities Act.
Under the proposed amendments, essentials like cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes have been excluded from the Essential Commodities Act.

Benefits:
- This will remove fears of private investors of excessive regulatory interference in their business operations.
- The freedom to produce, hold, move, distribute and supply will lead to harnessing of economies of scale and attract private sector/foreign direct investment into agriculture sector.
- It will help drive up investment in cold storages and modernization of food supply chain.

What is Essential Commodities Act?
Enacted in 1955.
Used by the Government to regulate the production, supply and distribution of a whole host of commodities it declares ‘essential’ in order to make them available to consumers at fair prices.
The list of items under the Act include drugs, fertilisers, petroleum and petroleum products.
The Centre can include new commodities as and when the need arises, and take them off the list once the situation improves.
Under the Act, the government can also fix the maximum retail price (MRP) of any packaged product that it declares an “essential commodity”.

How it works?
1. If the Centre finds that a certain commodity is in short supply and its price is spiking, it can notify stock-holding limits on it for a specified period.
2. The States act on this notification to specify limits and take steps to ensure that these are adhered to.
3. Anybody trading or dealing in a commodity, be it wholesalers, retailers or even importers are prevented from stockpiling it beyond a certain quantity.
4. A State can, however, choose not to impose any restrictions. But once it does, traders have to immediately sell into the market any stocks held beyond the mandated quantity.

But, why the recent Economic Survey said that this act is outdated and must go?
Case study:
In September 2019, the Centre invoked the ECA Act’s provisions to impose stock limits on onions after heavy rains wiped out a quarter of the kharif crop and led to a sustained spike in prices.
- Although the restrictions on both retail and wholesale traders were meant to prevent hoarding and enhance supply in the market, the Survey showed that there was actually an increase in price volatility and a widening wedge between wholesale and retail prices.
- This is due to the fact that ECA act fails to differentiate between hoarding and Storage.
Thus in the long term, the Act disincentivises development of storage infrastructure, thereby leading to increased volatility in prices following production/consumption shocks — the opposite of what it is intended for.

The report finds that the ECA has been enacted in the year 1955, when the economy was ravaged by famine and food shortages. The government should note that today’s scenario is much more different.

Why is it important?
- The ECA gives consumers protection against irrational spikes in prices of essential commodities.
- The Government has invoked the Act umpteen times to ensure adequate supplies.
- It cracks down on hoarders and black-marketeers of such commodities.
- State agencies conduct raids to get everyone to toe the line and the errant are punished.

Conclusion:
Without the ECA the common man would be at the mercy of opportunistic traders and shopkeepers. It empowers the government to control prices directly too.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Items included under the Act.
2. Powers to include and remove commodities from the list.
3. Is it mandatory for the states to follow centre’s guidelines?
4. When and who releases the Economic Survey?
5. Can the govt fix MRP of a product under this act?

Mains:
Discuss the significance of Essential Commodities Act. Why the recent Economic Survey said that this act is outdated and must go? Discuss.
Sources: pib.

5. Law against mob lynching

Context: A pan-Northeast legal group has sought a law to deal specifically with mob lynching. This follows the killing of two people in Assam within a week in May.

How are these cases handled?
There is "no separate" definition for such incidents under the existing IPC. Lynching incidents can be dealt with under Section 300 and 302 of IPC.

Section 302 provides that whoever commits murder shall be punished with death or imprisonment for life and shall also be liable to fine. Offence of murder is a cognisable, non-bailable and non-compoundable offence.

What is meant by lynching?
Any act or series of acts of violence or aiding, abetting (encouraging) such act/acts thereof, whether spontaneous or planned, by a mob on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, language, dietary practices, sexual orientation, political affiliation, ethnicity or any other related grounds.

SC guidelines:
1. There shall be a “separate offence” for lynching and the trial courts must ordinarily award maximum sentence upon conviction of the accused person to set a stern example in cases of mob violence.
2. The state governments will have to designate a senior police officer in each district for taking measures to prevent incidents of mob violence and lynching.
3. The state governments need to identify districts, sub-divisions and villages where instances of lynching and mob violence have been reported in the recent past.
4. The nodal officers shall bring to the notice of the DGP about any inter-district co-ordination issues for devising a strategy to tackle lynching and mob violence related issues.
5. Every police officer shall ensure to disperse the mob that has a tendency to cause violence in the disguise of vigilantism or otherwise.
6. Central and the state governments shall **broadcast on radio, television and other media platforms** about the serious consequences of mob lynching and mob violence.

7. Despite the measures taken by the State Police, if it comes to the notice of the local police that an incident of lynching or mob violence has taken place, the jurisdictional police station shall immediately ** lodge an FIR**.

8. The State Governments shall prepare a ** lynching/mob violence victim compensation scheme** in the light of the provisions of Section 357A of CrPC within one month from the date of this judgment.

9. If a police officer or an officer of the district administration fails to fulfill his duty, it will be considered an act of deliberate negligence.

**Need of the hour:**
Every time there is a case of honor killing, hate crimes, witch hunting or mob lynching we raise demands for special legislation to deal with these crimes. But, the fact is that these crimes are nothing but murders and the existing provisions under IPC and CrPC are sufficient to deal with such crimes. Coupled with the guidelines laid down in Poonawala’s case, we are sufficiently equipped to deal with mob lynching. However, what we lack is due enforcement of the existing laws and accountability of the enforcement agencies.

**Attempts by various states in this regard:**
- **Manipur** government came up first with its Bill against lynching in 2018, incorporating some logical and relevant clauses.
- **Rajasthan** government passed a bill against lynching in August 2019.
- **West Bengal** too came up with a more stringent Bill against lynching.

**What the Centre can do?**

1. While adopting the guidelines, the Centre would do well to incorporate sections in the law for penal action against doctors who stand accused of dereliction of duty, for delay in attending to victims of lynching, or submitting false reports without carrying out a proper and thorough medical examination of the victims, either under coercion by the police or due to their own prejudice against the community or religion of the victims.

2. **Under the compensation scheme for the victims**, the amount to be paid to the victims should be recovered from the perpetrators of the crime or collective fines be imposed on the villagers where the lynching takes place.

3. While framing the laws, the Centre could even provide for punitive action against political leaders found guilty of inciting mobs.

4. **Punitive action to be taken against police officers** accused of dereliction of duty, as incorporated in the law enacted by Manipur government, could be replicated in the Central law too as it would deter police officials acting in a partisan manner in favour of the lynch mob.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**

1. States which have passed laws against mob lynching.
2. What is Poonawala’s case?
3. What are the provisions available against mob lynching under IPC?

**Mains Link:**

Mob Lynching has become a recurring phenomenon in India which is surging hate violence targeting religious and caste minorities. Explain the causative factors and suggest ways to address it.


Sources: the Hindu.

**6. Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules of 2020**

**Context:** **Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules of 2020** notified by the Ministry of Civil Aviation.
These rules seek to regulate the production, import, trade, ownership and operation of unmanned aircraft systems or drones. They also create a framework for their use by businesses.

Overview:
Who can sell drones? Only authorised entities.
Who can own or operate? Entities authorised by the Director General of Civil Aviation.
Permits for flying these also have to be sought online and a log has to be shared after the flight.
Applicability: The norms apply to all existing drones as well.
Exception: Nano-drones weighing 250 grams or less can be operated without a drone pilot license.
Insurance: No unmanned aircraft (UA) system shall be operated in India unless there is in existence a valid third party insurance policy to cover the liability that may arise on account of a mishap.

Rule number 36 and 38 in the Ministry’s draft state that no unmanned aircraft shall carry any payload, unless specified by the Director General of DGCA. Neither shall a person “drop or project or cause or permit to be dropped or projected from a UAS (unmanned aircraft system) in motion anything,” except when specified.

Eligibility: For owning and using a drone, one has to be at least 18 years old. In the case of companies, the requirement is that their main place of business has to be in India and the chairman and at least two thirds of directors have to be Indian citizens. Also, businesses operating drones have to be substantially owned and effectively controlled by Indian nationals.

Need for these rules:
Drones have wide use in commercial, safety, law and order, disaster management and surveillance operations, which cuts down manpower requirement and costs. The government is also keen to encourage domestic production of drones.
Besides, the rules come at a time the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the role technology can play in reducing human interface and costs.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Which drones do not require permission?
2. Who can own and operate?
3. Who can give permits?
4. What are rules 36 and 38?
5. Is third party insurance necessary?

Mains Link:
Discuss the need for and significance of rules on drones.
Sources: the Hindu.

7. Tablighi activity now a specific visa violation
Context: Union Home Ministry has included indulging in Tablighi activities as a specific visa violation under the new amendments.

Overview of the amendments:
It has added a new category—“restriction on engaging in Tabligh activities” in the “general policy guidelines relating to Indian visa.”
The guidelines provide details of 24 categories of visas and the various conditions under which they could be granted online or by missions abroad.
The $500 fine is also for other violations such as overstay of more than two years, visiting protected areas and cases involving both overstay and visa violations.
As per the amended guidelines:
1. Foreign nationals granted any type of visa and Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) cardholders shall not be permitted to engage themselves in Tabligh work.
2. There will be no restriction in visiting religious places and attending normal religious activities like attending religious discourses.

3. However, preaching religious ideologies, making speeches in religious places, distribution of audio or visual display/pamphlets pertaining to religious ideologies, spreading conversion, etc. will not be allowed.

What’s the issue?
Home Ministry is the nodal agency that gives permission to any foreigner to participate in any international event.
The MHA had blacklisted 960 foreigners who participated in the Tablighi Jamaat event in March at Nizamuddin markaz (centre) in Delhi in March 2020.
A foreigner who is blacklisted cannot get a visa from any of the missions to come to India.

What is Tablighi Jamaat?
Founded by a Deobandi Islamic scholar at Mewat, Uttar Pradesh, in 1926, the Tablighi Jamaat (Society of Preachers) focusses on ‘purifying’ the Muslim faith. It has presence in 150 countries.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is Tablighi Jamaat?
2. Different types of visas issued in India?
3. Issuing authority?
4. Nodal agency in India to give permission to any foreigner to participate in any international event.

Mains Link:
Write a note on tablighi jamaat.
Sources: the Hindu.

8. Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) issue

Context: The Supreme Court has said it was “totally impermissible” for the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to “misuse” a judgment of the Apex Court to demand ₹4 lakh crore in adjusted gross revenue (AGR) from public sector undertakings.
The Court has also questioned the viability of the government’s 20-year ‘formula’ for telecom companies to repay their AGR dues to the tune of ₹1.42 lakh crore.

What has the Court said?
The Court pointed out its October 2019 judgment which was completely silent with regard to public sector undertakings.

What has the government said?
The government told the Court that it would file an affidavit explaining as to why the AGR demands were raised against the PSUs.

Background:
Last year, the Supreme Court upheld the definition of Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) calculation as stipulated by the Department of Telecommunications. The order by the top court means that the telecom companies will have to immediately clear the pending AGR dues, which amount to nearly Rs 1.47 lakh crore.
What is AGR?
Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) is the usage and licensing fee that telecom operators are charged by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). It is divided into spectrum usage charges and licensing fees, pegged between 3-5 percent and 8 percent respectively.

How is it calculated and what’s the contention?
As per DoT, the charges are calculated based on all revenues earned by a telco – including non-telecom related sources such as deposit interests and asset sales. Telcos, on their part, insist that AGR should comprise only the revenues generated from telecom services.

Challenges for telecom sector:
The AGR issue has triggered panic in the banking industry, given that the telecom sector is highly leveraged. Vodafone Idea alone has a debt of Rs 2.2 lakh crore that it has used to expand infrastructure and fund spectrum payments over the years. The mutual fund industry has an exposure of around Rs 4,000 crore to Vodafone Idea.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is AGR? How is it calculated?
2. What was SC’s verdict on this?
3. Composition of TRAI?
4. How spectrum allocation is done in India?

Mains Link:
Discuss the challenges facing Indian telecom sector today. What should the Government of India do to save the telecom sector?
Sources: the Hindu.

9. Supplying washed coal
Context:
The government had recently amended the Environment Protection Act to drop the mandatory washing of coal supplied to thermal power plants.
This notification undid the government’s 2016 order, which made coal washing mandatory for supply to all thermal units more than 500 km from the mine as part of its climate-change commitments.

What’s the issue?
Few experts had opposed this move. They said, the notification would “undo whatever limited progress” was made so far in reducing pollution load at coal-based power stations.
However, the government defended its move and has questioned those opposing, “How is coal not dirty within 500 km, and how does it become dirty after 500 km?”

What was the rationale behind the mandatory washing requirement?
From January 2014 onwards, the Environment Ministry had been working towards “progressive reduction” of distance that unwashed coal would travel, keeping in view that ultimately all coals, irrespective of distance from supplying mines, will have to be washed and comply with less than 34 per cent ash limit.

- This was done in line with the country’s stand in climate change negotiations – not to reduce coal consumption and rather focus on emission control.
• Washing coal increases the efficiency and quality of the dry fuel.
• In theory, a process like coal washing was supposed to be good for everyone; thermal power plants would have fewer operational problems due to poor coal quality.
• The combustion of washed coal would be better from an emissions and local air pollution perspective, and the unnecessary transport of large amounts of ash and non-combustible material would be minimized.

This was ultimately aimed at the protection of the environment.

Why the present government decided to do away with this?
• Agreeing that coal washing does not help reduce emissions, the power ministry has said that “coal rejects from washery find their way into the market for use by industries and create pollution”.
• It said washing of coal is unable to meet its intended objective as “it merely localises the pollution around coal mines which otherwise would have been distributed over larger areas”.
• It has also pointed out that the process of coal washing is cumbersome and costly. It also leads to reduction in the calorific value of the coal as well.

Way ahead:
The power ministry has instead batted for pollution control technologies at power generation units.
• Under the guidelines of the Central Pollution Control Board, plants with close to 50 gigawatt of thermal power capacity need to install emission control systems.
• It would also be beneficial to use raw coal instead of washed coal.
• With the use of supercritical technology in power plants, technological improvement to arrest emissions, unwashed coal can be used efficiently and economically using washed coal which makes power generation costlier.

India’s domestic coal consumption, production, and production targets (FY2005-20)

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Link:
Sources: the Hindu.

10. Sec 309 IPC

Context:
India has the highest suicide rate in the South-East Asian region, according to the World Health Organization report released last year.
• India’s suicide rate is at 16.5 suicides per 100,000 people.
• India also had the third-highest female suicide rate (14.7) in the world.

Suicide was decriminalised in India in 2017, but Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code still stays.

Who can be booked under Section 309 IPC? What punishment does it carry?
Anyone who survives an attempted suicide can be booked under Section 309 IPC, which deals with “Attempt to commit suicide”.

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The law, brought in by the British in the 19th century, reflected the thinking of the time, when killing or attempting to kill oneself was considered a crime against the state, as well as against religion.

Was it repealed?
No. The section continues to remain in the IPC.
What has happened though, is that The Mental Healthcare Act (MHCA), 2017, which came into force in July 2018, has significantly reduced the scope for the use of Section 309 IPC — and made the attempt to commit suicide punishable only as an exception.

1. Section 115(1) of The MHCA says: “Notwithstanding anything contained in section 309 of the Indian Penal Code any person who attempts to commit suicide shall be presumed, unless proved otherwise, to have severe stress and shall not be tried and punished under the said Code.”

Role and responsibility of the government:
Section 115(2) says that “The appropriate Government shall have a duty to provide care, treatment and rehabilitation to a person, having severe stress and who attempted to commit suicide, to reduce the risk of recurrence of attempt to commit suicide.”

Concerns and issues associated with this section:
1. Use of this Section can potentially deprive a victim of treatment in the golden hour, as hospitals wait for a go-ahead from police in what would be seen as a “medico-legal case”.
2. It is possible that unscrupulous hospital authorities may misuse this situation and charge extra to “hush up” the case by not informing the police; similar extortion is possible on the part of corrupt police personnel as well.
3. All of this is in addition to the trauma and harassment that an already severely distressed individual and people around him/her would likely be going through.

Arguments in favour of Section 309: why it should be retained?
There are occasions when people show up at government offices and threaten to kill themselves if their demands are not met. It is in these cases, where police suspect that the person does not intend to commit suicide but is using the threat as a way to unfairly pressure or blackmail the system. And during such instances this section need to be used.
If 309 is repealed, there will be no provision to take action against those who intend to create trouble of this sort.

Need of the hour:
Section 309 IPC can be redefined in such a manner where it can still be leveraged in law and order situations, and not be used against those who are suffering from genuine mental health issues.

Observations made by the Supreme Court and Law Commissions:
In ‘Gian Kaur vs State of Punjab’, 1996, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of Section 309.
In 1971, the Law Commission in its 42nd Report recommended the repeal of Section 309 IPC. The IPC (Amendment) Bill, 1978, was even passed by Rajya Sabha, but before it could be passed by Lok Sabha, Parliament was dissolved, and the Bill lapsed.
In 2008, the Law Commission in its 210th Report, said that an attempt to suicide needed medical and psychiatric care, and not punishment.
In March 2011, the Supreme Court too recommended to Parliament that it should consider the feasibility of deleting the section.

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**Quote:**

Sociologist *Emile Durkheim* had famously hypothesised that ‘suicides are a result of not just psychological or emotional factors but social factors as well’.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Who can be booked under Section 309 of IPC?
3. Law Commission- constitution and composition.
4. Section 115of MHCA.

**Mains Link:**

In recent years, suicide cases have received alarming attention, for they account for the majority of India’s health burden. Critically analyse the high suicide death rate in the country and how India is responding to this challenge?


Sources: Indian Express.

**Topics: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.**

**1. PM Svanidhi**

*What to study?*

*For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the scheme.*

*Context:* The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has launched PM Svanidhi, or Pradhan Mantri Street Vendor’s AtmaNirbhar Nidhi scheme. The scheme was announced by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on 14 May to enable street vendors to resume their livelihoods, which have been hit hard due to the national lockdown.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has signed MoU with Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) in order to engage SIDBI as the Implementation Agency for PM Street Vendor’s AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) - a Special Micro-Credit Facility for Street Vendors.

**Role of SIDBI:**

SIDBI will manage the credit guarantee to the lending institutions through Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE). It will develop and maintain a customized and integrated IT Platform providing end-to-end solutions to ensure engagement and information flow between Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), Lending Institutions, Digital Payment Aggregators and other stakeholders.

**Overview:**

1. It is a special micro-credit facility plan to provide affordable loan of up to ₹10,000 to more than 50 lakh street vendors, who had their businesses operational on or before 24 March.
2. The scheme is valid until March 2022.
3. Small Industries Development Bank of India is the technical partner for implementation of this scheme.
4. It will manage the credit guarantee to the lending institutions through Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises.

Loans under the scheme:
- Under the scheme, vendors can avail working capital loan of up to ₹10,000, which is repayable in monthly instalments within one year.
- On timely/early repayment of the loan, an interest subsidy of 7% per annum will be credited to the bank accounts of beneficiaries through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) on six-months basis.
- There will be no penalty on early repayment of loan.

Eligibility:
The scheme is applicable to vendors, hawkers, thelewalas, rehriwalas, theliphadwalas in different areas/contexts who supply goods and services. Street vendors belonging to the surrounding peri-urban/rural areas are also included.

Need for:
The lockdown has affected the lives and livelihoods of many especially daily wagers including street vendors whose businesses were affected due to the restrictions.
- Street vendors usually work with a small capital base taken on very high interest rates from informal sources. Further, they might have consumed their savings and high cost capital during the lockdown. Therefore, there is an urgent need to provide affordable credit for working capital through formal banking channel to street vendors to help them resume the business.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Validity of the scheme.
2. Who implements?
3. Eligibility under the scheme?
4. Rate of interest?
5. What is SIDBI?

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of PM SVANIDHI scheme.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=G6N7FFH1U.1&imageview=0.
Sources: the Hindu.

2. A declared foreigner and foreigners’ tribunal

Context: Siddeque Ali has become the last declared foreigner to be released from the only detention centre in Barak Valley in Assam as the beneficiary of a Supreme Court order.

What has the Court said?
In April this year, amid the coronavirus pandemic, the Supreme Court had directed the release of those detainees who were declared foreigners and have been lodged in the detention centres of Assam for two years or more.
The Court had also lowered the personal bond amount from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 5,000.
So far, 339 DFs have been released from the detention centres since April 13.

Who is a declared foreigner?
A declared foreigner, or DF, is a person marked by any of the 100 Foreigners’ Tribunals (FTs) in Assam for allegedly failing to prove their citizenship after the State police’s Border wing marks him or her as an illegal immigrant.

Why such measures are necessary?

- There are a total of 802 declared foreigners in various detention centres of Assam.
- Some people are declared foreigners on account of poor documentation or poor legal assistance and lack of resources. They have not been able to prove they are Indian citizens.
- Some are either too poor to pursue their cases in higher courts or have their appeals turned down.
- 29 declared foreigners have died in detention due to various ailments since 2016, with ten of them having died between March 1, 2019 and February 20 this year.

As human beings, they also have at least the basic human right to live and not to die of COVID-19 in the precincts of a prison, which has despicable living conditions.

What is a Foreigners tribunal?

In 1964, the govt brought in the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order.

Composition: Advocates not below the age of 35 years of age with at least 7 years of practice (or) Retired Judicial Officers from the Assam Judicial Service (or) Retired IAS of ACS Officers (not below the rank of Secretary/Addl. Secretary) having experience in quasi-judicial works.

Who can setup these tribunals?

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has amended the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964, and has empowered district magistrates in all States and Union Territories to set up tribunals (quasi-judicial bodies) to decide whether a person staying illegally in India is a foreigner or not.

Earlier, the powers to constitute tribunals were vested only with the Centre. Typically, the tribunals there have seen two kinds of cases: those concerning persons against whom a reference has been made by the border police and those whose names in the electoral roll has a “D”, or “doubtful”, marked against them.

Who can approach?

The amended order (Foreigners (Tribunal) Order, 2019) also empowers individuals to approach the Tribunals. Earlier, only the State administration could move the Tribunal against a suspect.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) (IMDT) Act vs Foreigners Tribunal (Order) 1964.
2. Burden of proof under this order.
3. Powers to approach the tribunal and kind of cases to be decided by the tribunal.
4. Composition of the tribunal.
5. Tribunals vs Courts.
6. NPR vs NRC.
7. Geographical location of Assam and other NE states.
8. Refugee vs illegal Migrants.
9. Fundamental Rights available for Foreigners and other constitutional provisions wrt to Foreigners.

Mains Link:
Discuss briefly the laws that are in place to tackle illegal non-citizens in the country. Why was the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964 amended? Explain.

Link: https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/last-eligible-foreigner-freed-from-detention/article31808572.ece

Sources: the Hindu.
3. Universal Basic Income

Context: National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has informed the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) that the recommended implementation of a universal basic income was “under examination and active consideration” of the Centre.

Why its needed now?
- In order to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, the governments across the world have imposed measures like lockdown and social distancing.
- However, these measures have caused collateral damage to almost every sector of the economy, so much so that the International Monetary Fund held the current economic crisis could be the worst ever since the Great depression 1929.
- With almost 90% of India’s workforce in the informal sector without minimum wages or social security, micro-level circumstances in India are worse than anywhere else.

Therefore, regular payments through Universal Basic Income (UBI) can ensure the sustenance of the workers engaged in the informal sector, at least till the economy normalises.

What is Universal Basic Income?
It is a programme for providing all citizens of a country or other geographic area/state with a given sum of money, regardless of their income, resources or employment status.

The main idea behind UBI is to prevent or reduce poverty and increase equality among citizens. The essential principle behind Universal basic income is the idea that all citizens are entitled to a livable income, irrespective of the circumstances they’re born in.

UBI has the following important components:
1. universality (all citizens included)
2. unconditionality (no prior condition)
3. Periodic (Payments at periodic regular intervals)
4. Payments in cash (not food vouchers or service coupons)

Benefits of Universal Basic Income (UBI):
1. Provide secured income to individuals.
2. Reduce poverty and income inequality in society.
3. Increase the purchasing power of every poor which will further increase aggregate demand.
4. Easy to implement because no identification of the beneficiary is involved.
5. Reduce the wastage of government money because its implementation is very simple.

Supporters of the idea:
The Economic Survey of India 2016-17 has advocated the concept of Universal Basic Income (UBI) as an alternative to the various social welfare schemes in an effort to reduce poverty.

Other Supporters of the UBI programme include Economics Nobel Laureates Peter Diamond and Christopher Pissarides, and tech leaders Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk.

Challenges in Implementing Universal Basic Income in India:
High cost involved in implementing UBI is a major factor contributing towards lack of political will in working towards the universal basic income in India.
It would reduce the motivation for work and might encourage people to live off assured cash transfers and it is simply unaffordable.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Components of UBI.
2. Supporters.

Mains Link:
Examine the arguments in favour and against introduction of universal basic income in India.

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4. Concerns over suspension of PCPNDT rules

Why in News?
The Supreme Court has asked the government to explain its decision to suspend crucial rules of a parliamentary law against pre-natal sex determination and sex selection till June end, amid the COVID-19 national lockdown. However, the Court has refused to put on hold the notification.

What has happened?
On April 4, a notification was issued by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare which put on hold the implementation of certain rules of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex-Selection Rules) of 1996 till June 30, 2020. The government’s notification suspends rules 8, 9(8), and 18A(6) of the PCPNDT Act.

- This move was widely criticised for its future consequences and possibility of spike in sex-selective abortions in the country.
- In the absence of the rules, many fear that it could lead to undocumented misuse by clinic owners as well as parents.

Clause 9:
The suspension of Clause 9(8) is of particular concern.
The Rule reads: “Rule 9(8): Every Genetic Counselling Centre, Genetic Laboratory, Genetic Clinic, Ultrasound Clinic and Imaging Centre shall send a complete report in respect of all pre-conception or pregnancy related procedures/techniques/tests conducted by them in respect of each month by 5th day of the following month to the concerned Appropriate Authority.”

Concern: Since the medical facilities come under essential services and thus are exempted from the lockdown, if the clinic is open and conducting tests it should be duty-bound to keep a register of such tests and suspension of the rule could lead to illegal procedures.

About PCPNDT Act:
It was enacted in response to the decline in Sex ratio in India, which deteriorated from 972 in 1901 to 927 in 1991.

The main purpose of enacting the act is to ban the use of sex selection techniques before or after conception and prevent the misuse of prenatal diagnostic technique for sex selective abortion.

Offences under this act include conducting or helping in the conduct of prenatal diagnostic technique in the unregistered units, sex selection on a man or woman, conducting PND test for any purpose other than the one mentioned in the act, sale, distribution, supply, renting etc. of any ultrasound machine or any other equipment capable of detecting sex of the foetus.

The Act mandates compulsory registration of all diagnostic laboratories, all genetic counselling centres, genetic laboratories, genetic clinics and ultrasound clinics.

Amendments:
1. The act was amended in 2003 to improve the regulation of the technology used in sex selection.
2. The Act was amended to bring the technique of pre conception sex selection and ultrasound technique within the ambit of the act.
3. The amendment also empowered the central supervisory board and state level supervisory board was constituted.

Why strict implementation of this law is necessary?
The number of girls missing at birth due to the practice of gender biased sex selection in India has been estimated at 0.46 million girls per year for the period 2001-12 (which is 5.52 million girl children, missing at birth for the 12-year period).
The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act and the Rules thereunder, are aimed at remedying this social evil.

**Insta Link:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. What is banned under PCPNDT Act.
2. What changes were introduced through the 2003 Amendments.
3. Implementation of the act.
4. Offences under the act.
5. Clause 8 and 9 under the act are related to?

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the features and significance of PC&PDNT Act.

**Source:** the Hindu.

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**5. Assistance to Disabled persons for purchasing/fitting of aids/appliances (ADIP) scheme**

**Why in News?**
First ever distribution of assistive aids & devices to divyangjan through virtual platform under ADIP Scheme of M/O Social Justice & Empowerment in Firozpur, Punjab.

This is the first camp being organized by the ALIMCO under DEPwD after opening of lockdown with the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) approved by the Government of India.

**About the ADIP Scheme- the Assistance to Disabled persons for purchasing/fitting of aids/appliances (ADIP) scheme:**

Being implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

**Objective:** to assist the needy disabled persons in procuring durable, sophisticated and scientifically manufactured, modern, standard aids and appliances that can promote their physical, social and psychological rehabilitation, by reducing the effects of disabilities and enhance their economic potential.

**Implementation:** The scheme is implemented through implementing agencies such as NGOs, National Institutes under the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment and ALIMCO (a PSU that manufactures artificial limbs).

**Eligibility:**
A person satisfying all the following conditions are eligible:
1. Indian citizen of any age
2. Has 40% disability or more (must have the requisite certificate)
3. Monthly income, not more than Rs.20000.
4. In the case of dependents, income of parents/guardians should not exceed Rs.20000 per month.
5. Must not have received assistance during the last 3 years for the same purpose from any source. However, for children below 12years of age, this limit would be one year.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. What is ALIMCO?
2. Who is implementing ADIP scheme?
3. Who is eligible?
4. How is this scheme different from Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana?

**Mains Link:**
Write a note on the Assistance to Disabled persons for purchasing/fitting of aids/appliances (ADIP) scheme.
**Sources:** pib.
6. Credit Guarantee Scheme for Sub-ordinate Debt (CGSSD) launched

Context:
The scheme was announced by the Finance Minister as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan. It is also called as “Distressed Assets Fund—Sub-ordinate Debt for MSMEs”.

Overview:
- It is a scheme for the distressed MSME sector.
- The scheme seeks to extend support to the promoter(s) of the operational MSMEs which are stressed and have become NPAs as on 30th April, 2020.
- As per the Scheme, guarantee cover worth Rs. 20,000 crores will be provided to the promoters who can take debt from the banks to further invest in their stressed MSMEs as equity.
- The scheme will be operationalised through Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for MSEs (CGTMSE).

Implementation:
1. Promoter(s) of the MSMEs will be given credit equal to 15% of their stake (equity plus debt) or Rs. 75 lakh whichever is lower.
2. Promoter(s) in turn will infuse this amount in the MSME unit as equity and thereby enhance the liquidity and maintain the debt-equity ratio.
3. 90% guarantee coverage for this sub-debt will be given under the Scheme and 10% would come from the concerned promoters.
4. There will be a moratorium of 7 years on payment of principal whereas the maximum tenor for repayment will be 10 years.

Significance:
The scheme would provide much-required support to around 2 lakh MSMEs and will help in reviving the economic activity in and through this sector. It will also help in protecting the livelihoods and jobs of millions of people who depend on them.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Beneficiaries under the scheme.
2. About Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for MSEs (CGTMSE).
3. Categorisation of MSMEs.
4. MSME share in India’s GDP.

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of this scheme.
Sources: pib.

7. Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana

Context:
Cabinet has approved 2% Interest Subvention approved on prompt repayment of Shishu Loans under Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana for a period of 12 months.
- The estimated cost of the Scheme would be approximately Rs. 1,542 crore which would be provided by the Government of India.
- This Scheme is for implementation of one of the measures relating to MSMEs, announced under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

Eligibility:
The scheme will be extended to loans which meet the following criteria - outstanding as on 31st March, 2020; and not in Non-Performing Asset (NPA) category, as per Reserve Bank of India (RBI) guidelines, on 31st March 2020 and during the period of operation of the Scheme.
The interest subvention would be payable for the months in which the accounts are not in NPA category including for the months that the account becomes a performing asset again, after turning NPA.
Implementation strategy:
The Scheme will be implemented through the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) and will be in operation for 12 months.

Significance:
- The Scheme has been formulated as a specific response to an unprecedented situation and aims to alleviate financial stress for borrowers at the ‘bottom of the pyramid’ by reducing their cost of credit.
- It will incentivize people who will make regular repayments of loans.

About the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) scheme:
Launched in April, 2015. The scheme’s objective is to refinance collateral-free loans given by the lenders to small borrowers.
- Banks and MFIs can draw refinance under the MUDRA Scheme after becoming member-lending institutions of MUDRA.
- Mudra Loans are available for non-agricultural activities up to Rs. 10 lakh and activities allied to agriculture such as Dairy, Poultry, Bee Keeping etc. are also covered.
- Mudra’s unique features include a Mudra Card which permits access to Working Capital through ATMs and Card Machines.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Coverage of MUDRA scheme.
2. Types of loans.
3. About SIDBI.
4. Features and Benefits under the scheme.
5. New schemes launder under Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.
Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of PMUY.
Sources: pib.

Topics: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

1. Congo declares new Ebola epidemic

Context: Democratic Republic of Congo has declared a new Ebola epidemic in the western city of Mbandaka. The announcement comes as a long, difficult and complex Ebola outbreak in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is in its final phase, while the country also battles COVID-19 and the world’s largest measles outbreak.

Concerns:
This is the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s 11th outbreak of Ebola since the virus was first discovered in the country in 1976. The city of Mbandaka and its surrounding area were the site of Democratic Republic of the Congo’s 9th Ebola outbreak, which took place from May to July 2018.

What you need to know about Ebola?
Ebola virus disease (EVD), formerly known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever, is a severe, often fatal illness in humans.
Transmission: The virus is transmitted to people from wild animals and spreads in the human population through human-to-human transmission.
The average EVD case fatality rate is around 50%. Case fatality rates have varied from 25% to 90% in past outbreaks.
Prevention: Community engagement is key to successfully controlling outbreaks. Good outbreak control relies on case management, surveillance and contact tracing, a good laboratory service and social mobilisation.

Treatment: Early supportive care with rehydration, symptomatic treatment improves survival. There is yet no licensed treatment proven to neutralise the virus but a range of blood, immunological and drug therapies are under development.

Vaccines: An experimental Ebola vaccine, called rVSV-ZEBOV proved highly protective against EVD in a major trial in Guinea in 2015.

- The rVSV-ZEBOV vaccine is being used in the ongoing 2018-2019 Ebola outbreak in DRC. Pregnant and breastfeeding women should have access to the vaccine under the same conditions as for the general population.
- The public mistrust and militia attacks have prevented health workers from reaching some hard-hit areas for administering the vaccines.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. How is Ebola spread?
2. What are zoonotic diseases?
3. Differences between virus, bacteria and other pathogens.
4. Where is Congo?
5. Regions in Africa where Ebola outbreak was observed?

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=G6N7FF43S.1&imageview=0.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. 2021 QS World University rankings

Context: 17th edition of the QS World University rankings has been released.

What is QS World University rankings?

It is an annual publication of University rankings by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS)- A british company specialising in the analysis of higher education institutions around the world.

Previously, it was called Times Higher Education – QS world University rankings. The name changed since 2010.

It is the only international ranking to have received the approval of International Ranking Expert Group (IREG).

How are universities ranked?

To rank institutions, QS uses six indicators:
1. Academic reputation.
2. Employer reputation.
3. Faculty/student ratio.
4. Citations per faculty.
5. International faculty ratio.
6. International student ratio.
Top 20 institutions this year:

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Performance of Indian Institutions:

1. **Top three from India featured in top 200 and their rankings**: Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay (172), followed closely by Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore (185), and IIT Delhi (193). However, all three have dropped in their rankings compared to the last year.

2. **In total, 21 Indian higher education institutions have found their place among the world’s top 1,000** (It was 24 last year). Of these 21, 14 have fallen in rank over the past 12 months, while **four have improved their position**.

3. Indian higher education institutions **perform strongly in research quality**, even though they fail to increase their academic standing, teaching capacity, and levels of internationalisation at the same rate as their global competitors.

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

Indian institutions got **zero score on ratio of international faculty and students**. India also scored poorly on **faculty-student ratio**. This is because India **counts only full-time faculty**, whereas American universities include even PhD students who are teaching or research assistants.

**What should India do now?**

The government has already formed a committee on **how we can improve the perception of the premier Indian institutes abroad**. The government should now launch a **campaign similar to incredible India to change the perception**.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**

1. Name the 6 indicators used to rank institutions.
2. In which parameter has India scored zero?
3. Total Indian institutions in top 200 and 1000?
5. When was institutions of eminence scheme launched?
6. Top 10 institutions worldwide.

**Mains Link:**

Write a note on institutions of Eminence scheme.


Sources: the Hindu.
3. Does using UV ray mechanism on food items kill the coronavirus?

Context: Many sweet shop owners across India have started using the UV light mechanism to disinfect food items and killing the virus.

How is it being used?
UV radiations are normally used to kill microorganisms. Particularly, UV-C, also known as Ultraviolet germicidal irradiation (UVGI) is a disinfection method that uses short-wavelength ultraviolet light to kill or inactivate microorganisms by destroying their nucleic acids and disrupting their DNA, leaving them unable to perform vital cellular functions and stops their replication.
- UVGI is used in a variety of applications, such as food, air, and water disinfection.
- Few research studies have found that UVC radiation is also effective in killing coronaviruses on various surfaces, but efficiency is variable for different kinds of surfaces depending on their texture.

What is UV radiation?
UV radiation is the portion of the Electro Magnetic spectrum between X-rays and visible light.

The most common form of UV radiation is sunlight, which produces three main types of UV rays:
1. UVA
2. UVB
3. UVC

Key features:
- UVA rays have the longest wavelengths, followed by UVB, and UVC rays which have the shortest wavelengths.
- While UVA and UVB rays are transmitted through the atmosphere, all UVC and some UVB rays are absorbed by the Earth’s ozone layer. So, most of the UV rays you come in contact with are UVA with a small amount of UVB.

Sources: Indian Express.

4. NIRF Ranking 2020 released

What is NIRF?
National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) was started in 2015. It is used for ranking institutions of higher education in different categories and domains of knowledge.

Parameters used for ranking institutions:
1. Teaching, Learning and Resources.
2. Research and Professional Practices.
4. Outreach and Inclusivity.
5. Peer Perception.

Why is NIRF used?
1. It encourages institutes to compete against each other and simultaneously work towards their growth.
2. These rankings also attract foreign students, providing a solid base for the ‘Study in India’ programme for the growth of higher education in India.
3. It is also one of the criteria for private institutions assessment for the Institutions of Eminence (IoE) Scheme.

What changes have been made in this edition?
This is the fifth consecutive edition of these rankings.
This year ‘Dental’ category has been introduced for the first time bringing the total tally to 10 categories/subject domains.

Why Indian institutions do not fare well in International rankings like QS World university rankings?
In international rankings, Indian institutions struggle on the “internationalisation” parameter in global rankings. It is due to the high weightage given to the perception which is a subjective parameter.
Whereas, in NIRF, 90% of the parameters are completely objective and fact-based, while only 10% is based on the subjective parameter of perception by academic peers and employers.

Performance of various institutions:
(Please go through the following image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Category</th>
<th>Colleges Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IIT Madras, IISc Bangalore, IIT Delhi</td>
<td>Miranda House DU, LSR for Women DU, Hindu College DU</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Category</th>
<th>Medical Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IISc Bangalore, JNU New Delhi, BHU Varanasi</td>
<td>AllIMS, New Delhi, PGIMER Chandigarh, Christian Medical College, Bangalore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<th>Engineering Category</th>
<th>Law Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IIT Madras, IIT Delhi, IIT Bombay</td>
<td>National Law School of India University, Bengaluru, NLU New Delhi, Nalsar University of Law, Hyderabad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<th>Management Category</th>
<th>Architecture Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IIM Ahmedabad, IIM Bangalore, IIM Calcutta</td>
<td>IIT Kharagpur, IIT Roorkee, NIT Calicut</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pharmacy Discipline</th>
<th>Dental College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jamia Hamdard University, Punjab University, National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research Mohali</td>
<td>Maulana Azad Institute of Dental Science, Manipal College of Dental Science, Dr DY Patil Vidyapith Pune</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is NIRF?
2. Parameters used for ranking.
3. Top institutions in various categories.
4. Performance of various institutions this year vs last year.
5. What is Institutions of eminence scheme?

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of Institutions of Eminence scheme.
Sources: the Hindu.

5. Amoebiasis or amoebic dysentery
Context:
A team of researchers from the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has developed new drug molecules against the protozoa that causes amoebiasis.
What is Amoebiasis or amoebic dysentery?
It is a parasitic infection of the colon with the amoeba Entamoeba histolytica.
According to WHO, Entamoeba histolytica is the third-leading cause of morbidity and mortality due to parasitic disease in humans.
This protozoan is anaerobic or micro-aerophilic in nature such that it cannot survive high concentrations of oxygen.
However, during infection, it faces a high surge of oxygen inside the human body. The organism synthesizes large amounts of cysteine to counter oxidative stress.

Spread of the disease:
It spreads through drinking or eating uncooked food, such as fruit, that may have been washed in contaminated local water.

Symptoms:
1. Pain areas: in the abdomen
2. Gastrointestinal: blood in stool, diarrhoea, or flatulence
3. Whole body: fatigue, fever, or loss of appetite
4. Also common: weight loss

Treatment:
Treatment consists of self-care and antiparasitics.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is a protozoan?
2. What is an anaerobic protozoan?
3. What causes amoebiasis?
4. What are the symptoms?
5. What is cysteine?
Sources: pib.

6. Rapid antigen test
The Context:
The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has recommended the use of Standard Q COVID-19 Ag antigen detection test in containment zones and healthcare settings in combination with the RT-PCR test.
This is to be used in specified settings, and kits from only one manufacturer have got approval - the South Korean company S D Biosensor.

What are antigens?
Antigens are foreign substances that induce an immune response in the body.

What is the rapid antigen detection test for Covid-19?  
It is a test on swabbed nasal samples that detects antigens that are found on or within the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It is a point-of-care test, performed outside the conventional laboratory setting, and is used to quickly obtain a diagnostic result.

How is rapid antigen detection test different from RT-PCR test? 
Like RT-PCR, the rapid antigen detection test too seeks to detect the virus rather than the antibodies produced by the body. The most significant difference between the two is time.

- RT-PCR test takes a minimum of 2-5 hours including the time taken for sample transportation.
- In a rapid antigen detection test, the maximum duration for interpreting a positive or negative test is 30 minutes.

What are the limitations of an antigen test’s results?
1. These tests are very specific for the virus, but are not as sensitive as molecular PCR tests. This means that positive results from antigen tests are highly accurate, but there is a higher chance of false negatives, so negative results do not rule out infection.

2. Negative results from an antigen test may need to be confirmed with a PCR test prior to making treatment decisions or to prevent the possible spread of the virus due to a false negative.

3. Once the sample is collected in the extraction buffer, it is stable only for one hour. Therefore, the antigen test needs to be conducted at the site of sample collection in the healthcare setting.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Differentiate between- RT-PCR, Rapid antibody and rapid antigen tests.
2. What are antibodies?
3. What are antigens?
4. How body’s immune system works?
5. What are lymphocytes?
6. Coronavirus that affect humans.

Mains Link:
Write a note on rapid antigen tests.
Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/how-rapid-antigen-test-detects-coronavirus-where-it-will-be-used-6460735/.
Sources: Indian Express.

7. What is Vaccine Nationalism?
The Context:
The United States has now twice indicated that it would like to secure priority access to doses of COVID-19 vaccine. Other countries, including India and Russia, have taken similar stances. This prioritisation of domestic markets has become known as vaccine nationalism.

How it works?
Vaccine nationalism occurs when a country manages to secure doses of vaccine for its own citizens or residents before they are made available in other countries. This is done through pre-purchase agreements between a government and a vaccine manufacturer.

How was it used in the past?
Vaccine nationalism is not new. During the early stages of the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic, some of the wealthiest countries entered into pre-purchase agreements with several pharmaceutical companies working on H1N1 vaccines.

- At that time, it was estimated that, in the best-case scenario, the maximum number of vaccine doses that could be produced globally was two billion.
- The US alone negotiated and obtained the right to buy 600,000 doses. All the countries that negotiated pre-purchase orders were developed economies.

Why its not good? What are the associated concerns?
- Vaccine nationalism is harmful for equitable access to vaccines.
- It further disadvantages countries with fewer resources and bargaining power.
- It deprives populations in the Global South from timely access to vital public health goods.
- Taken to its extreme, it allocates vaccines to moderately at-risk populations in wealthy countries over populations at higher risk in developing economies.

What needs to be done?
- International institutions — including the WHO — should coordinate negotiations ahead of the next pandemic to produce a framework for equitable access to vaccines during public health crises.
- Equity entails both, affordability of vaccines and access opportunities for populations across the world, irrespective of geography and geopolitics.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is vaccine nationalism?
2. Which drugs are being used in the treatment of COVID 19 disease?
3. Various tests to detect SARS-COV 2.
4. What is H1N1?

Mains Link:
What is Vaccine Nationalism? What are the concerns associated? Discuss.
Sources: Down to Earth.

8. Annual TB Report 2020 released

Context:
The Annual TB Report is prepared and published by the Central TB Division, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, GOI.

Highlights:
1. 20.04 lakh notified TB patients in 2019 in India, which is a 14% increase from 2018.
2. Reduction in the number of missing cases to 2.9 lakh cases as against more than 10 lakhs in 2017.
3. Private sector notifications increased by 35% with 6.78 lakh TB patients notified.
4. Proportion of children diagnosed with TB increased to 8% in 2019 compared to 6% in 2018.
5. **Provision of HIV testing for all notified TB patients increased** from 67% in 2018 to 81% in 2019.
6. Expansion of treatment services has resulted in a **12% improvement in the treatment success rate of notified patients**. For 2019, it is 81% compared to 69% in 2018.

Nikshay system:
The country is achieving near-complete on-line notification of TB patients through the **NIKSHAY system**.
- Nikshay is an **information management system** that acts like a one-stop solution for managing patients’ information and monitor program activity and performance all over the country.
- It is developed and maintained by the **Central TB Division (CTD), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** in collaboration with the **National Informatics Centre (NIC), and the World Health Organization Country office for India**.

**National Tuberculosis Elimination Program (NTEP):**
It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** being implemented under the aegis of the **National Health Mission** with resource sharing between the State Governments and the Central Government.
**The goal of the program** is to achieve a TB-free India with zero deaths, disease and poverty due to tuberculosis.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. SDG on TB reduction.
2. What is NTEP and the goal under it?
3. About Central TB Division.
4. Annual TB report is released by?
5. What is TB? How is it caused?

**Mains Link:**
“India’s TB report must be seen in light of the country’s slide in Hunger Index”, critically analyse the statement in the light of recently released Annual India Tuberculosis (TB) report.
Sources: pib.

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9. **Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report**

**Context:**
2020 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report released by UNESCO.
In line with its mandate, the **2020 GEM Report assesses progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on education and its ten targets**, as well as other related education targets in the SDG agenda.

**Key findings:**
**COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in education systems across the world.** About 40% of low- and lower-middle-income countries have not supported learners at risk of exclusion during this crisis, such as the poor, linguistic minorities and learners with disabilities.

**Efforts to maintain learning continuity during the pandemic may have actually worsened exclusion trends.** During the height of school closures in April 2020, almost 91% of students around the world were out of school.

**Issues with alternatives:** Education systems responded with distance learning solutions, all of which offered less or more imperfect substitutes for classroom instruction.
- Many poorer countries opted for radio and television lessons, 55% of low-income, 73% of lower-middle-income and 93% of upper-middle-income countries adopted for online learning platforms for primary and secondary education.
- Even as governments increasingly rely on technology, the digital divide lays bare the limitations of this approach. Not all students and teachers have access to adequate internet connection, equipment, skills and working conditions to take advantage of available platforms.

**School closures also interrupted support mechanisms from which many disadvantaged learners benefit.**
- Resources for blind and deaf students may not be available outside schools.
• Children with learning disabilities or those who are on the autism spectrum may struggle with independent work in front of a computer or the disruption of daily school routines.
• For poor students who depend on school for free meals or even free sanitary napkins, closures have been a major blow.

Cancellation of examinations in many countries, including India, may result in scoring dependent on teachers’ judgements of students instead.
• This could be affected by stereotypes of certain types of students.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Who releases this report?
2. Overview of report.
4. What are SDGs?
5. SDG goals on education.

Mains Link:
Discuss how global COVID 19 pandemic has affected the education worldwide.
Sources: the Hindu.

10. Kala Azar

Context:
The only drug available against leishmaniasis, miltefosine, is rapidly losing its effectiveness because of emerging resistance to this drug due to a decrease in its accumulation inside the parasite, which is necessary for the drug to kill the parasite.
• So, a team of researchers had been exploring ways to tackle miltefosine resistance. This team has now shown allosteric modulation of transporter proteins of Leishmania using computationally-designed synthetic peptides.
• These promising research outcomes indicate that this approach could prove useful in the long run to develop novel therapeutics against drug-resistant Leishmania parasites.

Kala-azar:
What is it? Visceral leishmaniasis (VL), also known as kala-azar, black fever, and Dum Dum fever, is the most severe form of leishmaniasis and, without proper diagnosis and treatment, is associated with high fatality.

Spread: Caused by protozoan parasites of the Leishmania genus, migrates to the internal organs such as the liver, spleen (hence “visceral”), and bone marrow.

Signs and symptoms include fever, weight loss, fatigue, anemia, and substantial swelling of the liver and spleen.

Additional facts:
Leishmaniasis is a neglected tropical disease affecting almost 100 countries including India.
It is caused by a parasite called Leishmania, which is transmitted through the bite of sand flies.
There are three main forms of leishmaniasis – visceral, which affects multiple organs and is the most serious form of the disease, cutaneous, which causes skin sores and is the most common form; and mucocutaneous, which causes skin and mucosal lesion).
InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About Leishmaniasis.
2. Forms of leishmaniasis.
3. Different names of Kala Azar.
4. Symptoms.
5. What are protozoans?
6. What is miltefosine used for?

Mains Link:
How is kala-azar caused? Examine what measures has the government taken to tackle those disease. Sources: pib.

11. International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking 2020

Observed on 26 June.
Theme: “Better Knowledge for Better Care”.
Why June 26th?
The date June 26 is to commemorate Lin Zexu’s dismantling of the opium trade in Humen, Guangdong, ending in June 25 1839, just before the First Opium War in China.

On this occasion, UNODC World Drug Report 2020 was also released.

Highlights:
- Around 269 million people used drugs worldwide in 2018, which is 30 per cent more than in 2009.
- Over 35 million people suffer from drug use disorders.
- Rising unemployment and reduced opportunities caused by the pandemic are also likely to disproportionately affect the poorest, making them more vulnerable to drug use and also to drug trafficking and cultivation in order to earn money.
- Most used substance in 2018: Cannabis. Cannabis also remains the main drug that brings people into contact with the criminal justice system.
- Most harmful: Opioids.
- Who use them? Adolescents and young adults account for the largest share of those using drugs, while young people are also the most vulnerable to the effects of drugs because they use the most and their brains are still developing.
- Low-income countries still suffer a critical shortage of pharmaceutical opioids for pain management and palliative care.

Indian Government has taken several policy and other initiatives to deal with drug trafficking problem:
- It constituted Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD) in November, 2016 and revived the scheme of “Financial Assistance to States for Narcotics Control”.
- In 2017, the government approved new Reward Guidelines with increased quantum of reward for interdiction or seizure of different illicit drugs.
- Narcotics Control Bureau has been provided funds for developing a new software i.e. Seizure Information Management System (SIMS) which will create a complete online database of drug offences and offenders.
- The government has constituted a fund called “National Fund for Control of Drug Abuse” to meet the expenditure incurred in connection with combating illicit traffic in Narcotic Drugs; rehabilitating addicts, and educating public against drug abuse, etc.
- The government is also conducting National Drug Abuse Survey to measure trends of drug abuse in India through Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment with the help of National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre of AIIMS.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About UNODC.
2. Overview of scheme of “Financial Assistance to States for Narcotics Control”.
3. Composition of Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD).
5. About Narcotics Control Bureau.
6. International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking and theme this year.

Mains Link:
India is vulnerable to narcotic drug trafficking. Critically examine its causes. Also comment on the role of Government in combating drug problem.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GE07HHV89.1&imageview=0.
Sources: UN, the Hindu.

12. The pandemic imposes a steep learning curve

Context:
Across the world, education has been drastically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Most instruction has moved online.
- Higher education has gone digital where possible.

Efforts by Indian government:
Online higher education using MOOCs, or massive open online classrooms, has been encouraged by the Ministry of Human Resource Development for some time now via the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) and SWAYAM platforms.

But in India’s case, educationists and policy makers advise caution on Online education. Why?
1. Because of contrast in rural versus urban infrastructure, the variable quality of staff, and the diverse types of subjects that are taught.
2. Courses that traditionally need a laboratory or practical component are an obvious example where online classes cannot offer an alternative.
3. The adoption or integration of technology in education also depends on the specific institution and its location: there is a huge digital divide in the country in terms of bandwidth and reliable connectivity, as well as very unequal access to funding.
4. There can been a serious impact on academic research in all disciplines. There is need for close personal interaction and discussion in research supervision.
5. Not all students have equal access to the Internet, and more than half in any class in any institution are simply not able to attend lectures in real time for want of the required combination of hardware and electrical connectivity in their homes.
6. Many online classes are poorly executed video versions of regular classroom lectures. Across the board, teachers recognise this as unsatisfactory.

How can it be improved?
1. This is a chance to re-imagine higher education in India. For long this has been elitist and exclusionary; education has been less about learning and more about acquiring degrees. The pandemic can change that if we let it. Some ways include:
   2. Gandhiji’s “Nai Talim” put a high premium on self study and experiential learning, for instance.
   3. Digital tools such as artificial intelligence (AI) can be adapted to deliver personalised instruction based on the learning needs for each student.
   4. Pedagogic material must be made available in our other national languages; this will extend access, and can help overcome staff shortages that plague remote institutions.
   5. The state will have to bear much of the responsibility, both to improve digital infrastructure and to ensure that every needy student has access to a laptop or smartphone.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. About NPTEL.
2. SWAYAM Portal.
3. What Nai Taleem means?

Mains Link:
Across the world, education has been drastically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most instruction has moved online. Discuss issues associated with online learning.

Sources: the Hindu.

Launched for the occasion of “International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking”.
Launched by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

The Action Plan has the following components:
1. Awareness generation programmes.
2. Focus on Higher Educational institutions, University Campuses and Schools.
3. Community outreach and identification of dependent population.
4. Focus on Treatment facilities in Hospital settings.
5. Capacity Building Programmes for Service Provider.

Implementation:
It would focus on 272 most affected districts and launch a three-pronged attack combining efforts of Narcotics Bureau, Outreach/Awareness by Social Justice and Treatment through the Health Dept.

De-addiction Facilities would be set up.
Drop-in-centres for addicts will be set up and also on peer-led community based outreach programmes for high risk populations – particularly the youth- will be launched.
Integrated Rehabilitation Centre for Addicts (IRCAs) would reach out to communities to help those affected by drug addiction.

Key facts:
1. The Narcotics Control Bureau has identified the "most affected" 272 districts which mostly belong to Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and the North-East lead the states.
2. These districts have been identified by the Centre as those hugely affected by drug abuse.
3. The 'Nasha mukt Bharat' campaign was originally launched in 2015 by Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab.
4. According to the national list of districts most affected by substance abuse, 18 of the 22 districts in Punjab are among those identified by the NCB along with 10 out of Haryana's 22 districts.

Need for:
About 8,50,000 Indians inject drugs, about 4,60,000 children and 1.8 million adults need help for inhalant dependence and 7.7 million Indians require help for opioid dependence.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking- Date and theme this year.
2. What are IRCAS? How they are funded?
3. About UNODC.

Mains Link:
Sources: pib.
14. **World Bank's STARS project**

**What is it?**
STARS stands for *Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States Program (STARS)*.
It is a project to improve the quality and governance of school education in six Indian states.

**Six states are-** Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Rajasthan.

Some 250 million students (between the age of 6 and 17) in 1.5 million schools, and over 10 million teachers will benefit from the program.

**Reform initiatives under the project include:**

1. **Focusing more directly on the delivery of education services at the state, district and sub district levels** by providing customized local-level solutions towards school improvement.
2. **Addressing demands from stakeholders, especially parents, for greater accountability and inclusion** by producing better data to assess the quality of learning; giving special attention to students from vulnerable section.
3. **Equipping teachers to manage this transformation** by recognizing that teachers are central to achieving better learning outcomes.
4. **Investing more in developing India’s human capital needs** by strengthening foundational learning for children in classes 1 to 3 and preparing them with the cognitive, socio-behavioural and language skills to meet future labour market needs.

**Atmanirbhar and education:**
Atmanirbhar Bharat calls for an *India that is able to produce and deliver local goods and services to its citizens*. This applies equally to education for all children.

Delivering a service, like education, requires a *capable state*, especially given the scale and complexity of its large and diverse population.

Building state capability involves a *process of learning to do things on one’s own*. This is precisely the *idea behind an Atmanirbhar Bharat*.

Fundamentally, therefore, it cannot be outsourced.

- In other words, *state capability is about getting things done in the government, and by the government, by ensuring effective implementation that is responsive to local needs*, but also about being able to design and conduct reforms.

**Why is the STARS approach to build state capacity flawed?**

1. **It fails to address the basic capacity issues:** major vacancies across the education system from District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), district and block education offices, to teachers in schools, remain unaddressed.
2. World Bank ignores that *decentralising decision-making requires the devolution of funds and real decision-making power*. It requires not just investment in the capacity of the front-line bureaucracy but also in increasing their discretionary powers while fostering social accountability.
3. **Trust is entirely ignored in the World Bank project.** Instead, the Bank displays yet again an over-reliance on *Information and Communications Technology (ICT)* as a panacea that lacks any backing in evidence (Trust here implies listening and collaborating across different levels within the administration).
4. **Outsourcing basic governance functions by “expanding private initiatives” and “reducing government tasks”** will not make education “more relevant to local needs” or “democratically promote people’s participation by empowering local authorities” as stated in the project document.

**What needs to be done?**

1. Administration must be equipped with adequate physical, financial and human resources. An overburdened bureaucracy with vacancies and without basic equipment cannot be expected to be effective.
2. Administrative or governance reforms must give greater discretion to the front-line bureaucracy to address local issues and innovate if required.
3. There needs to be trust within the administration among peers and across different levels within the administration.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. States covered under the STARS project.
3. Institutions of World Bank.
5. What is open data initiative?

**Mains Link:**
Write a note on World Bank’s STARS project.

Link: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/the-stars-project-needs-an-overhaul/article31947675.ece
Sources: the Hindu.

*Topics: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.*

1. **TULIP - Urban Learning Internship Program**

**Context:** TULIP - Urban Learning Internship Program for providing opportunities to fresh Graduates in all ULBs & Smart Cities launched.

TULIP has been conceived pursuant to the **Budget 2020-21 announcement** by the Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman under the theme ‘Aspirational India’.

**Key features:**
1. TULIP is a program for providing fresh graduates experiential learning opportunities in the urban sector.
2. It would help enhance the value-to-market of India’s graduates and help create a potential talent pool in diverse fields like urban planning, transport engineering, environment, municipal finance etc.
3. It will lead to infusion of fresh ideas and energy with engagement of youth in co-creation of solutions for solving India’s urban challenges.
4. This launch is also an important stepping stone for fulfilment of MHRD and AICTE’s goal of 1 crore successful internships by the year 2025.

**Need for and Significance of the program:**
Such a program will help reap the benefits of India’s demographic dividend as it is poised to have the largest working-age population in the world in the coming years.

- India has a substantial pool of technical graduates for whom exposure to real world project implementation and planning is essential for professional development.
- General education may not reflect the depth of productive knowledge present in society. Instead of approaching education as ‘doing by learning,’ our societies need to reimagine education as ‘learning by doing.’

Thus TULIP would help fulfil twin goals of providing interns with hands-on learning experience as well as infusing fresh energy and ideas in the functioning of India’s ULBs and Smart Cities.

Sources: pib.

2. **SWADES: Skill Mapping Exercise for Returning Citizens**

**Context:** The initiative, undertaken as part of the Vande Bharat Mission, aims at empowering the returning citizens with relevant employment opportunities.
Key features:
1. It is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Ministry of External Affairs.
2. The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) is supporting the implementation of the project.
3. It aims to create a database of qualified citizens based on their skill sets and experience to tap into and fulfil demand of Indian and foreign companies.
4. The collected information will be shared with the companies for suitable placement opportunities in the country.

Implementation:
The returning citizens are required to fill up an online SWADES Skills Card. The card will facilitate a strategic framework to provide the returning citizens with suitable employment opportunities through discussions with key stakeholders including state governments, industry associations and employers.

Need for and significance:
The spread of COVID-19 across the globe has had a significant economic impact with thousands of workers losing their jobs and hundreds of companies shutting down globally. Many of Indian citizens returning to the country through the Vande Bharat Mission of the Government of India may be facing uncertainty regarding their future employment opportunities. So, this initiative will help in deployment of returning Indian workforce matching their skill sets.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is NSDC?
2. What is National Skill Development Mission?
3. Implementation of SWADES?
4. What is Vande Bharat Mission?
Sources: pib.

3. Patanjali Coronavirus (Covid-19) Medicine:
Context:
Yoga guru Ramdev’s Patanjali Ayurved Ltd has launched what they claimed was the first Ayurvedic medicine to cure Covid-19.

About the medicine:
Ramdev has claimed that ‘Coronil tablet’, ‘Swasari Vati’ and ‘Anu Taila’ had shown “100 per cent favourable results” during clinical trials on Covid-19 patients.

What next?
The AYUSH Ministry has sought details about the medicine and has directed Patanjali and Ramdev to stop advertising such claims.

Overview of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954:
- It prohibits advertisements of drugs and remedies that claim to have magical properties, and makes doing so a cognizable offence.
- The penalty carries a maximum sentence of 6 months imprisonment with or without fine on first conviction. In case of any subsequent conviction, the term may be up to a year.
- If the convicted party is a company, all members of the company will be deemed guilty.
The law prohibits advertising of drugs and remedies for:
1. inducing miscarriage or preventing conception in women
2. improving or maintaining the capacity for sexual pleasure
3. correction of menstrual disorders
4. curing, diagnosing or preventing any disease or condition mentioned in an included schedule

Definition:
The act defines "magic remedy" as any talisman, mantra, amulet or any other object which is claimed to have miraculous powers to cure, diagnose, prevent or mitigate a disease in humans or animal. It also includes such devices that are claimed to have power to influence structure or function of an organ in humans or animals.

Criticisms:
The law is rarely enforced and several such products are freely available to the public.
The law is considered severely outdated as 14 of the diseases in the list are now curable, and newer diseases like AIDS are not on the list.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Definition of magic remedy.
2. What is banned under the said law?
3. Penalties proposed under the law.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Role of civil services in a democracy.

1. Civil Services Board

Context:
The Punjab government, last week, constituted a three-member civil services board to decide on IAS transfers and postings in the state.

Opposition to this move:
This notification providing for fixed tenure of IAS officers has left some leaders in the state upset.
- It is because they feel appointment and transfer of IAS officers are a prerogative of the state.
- They say, If their term is fixed, it will not only create functional and administrative problems, but also overstep the authority and jurisdiction of the state government.
- With the fixed tenure rule and Chief Secretary’s board having all power to examine a recommendation for a transfer, the leaders feel their influence has been reduced to a naught and all power handed to the CS.

What is the government's argument in its favour?
- It says if the officials have a fixed tenure they will be able to provide better administration.
- They will also feel safe and try to stick to the rules instead of pleasing political bosses.
- It says every official requires 3-6 months to get into the groove at his new place of posting. If he stays there for two years, it would mean better delivery and stable tenure to people.

What is a Civil Services Board? What are its functions?
To insulate the bureaucracy from political interference and to put an end to frequent transfers of civil servants by political bosses, the Supreme Court had in 2013 directed the Centre and the states to set up a civil services board to consider transfers and postings of bureaucrats among others.
As per rules, all states should have a civil services board to decide on transfers and postings of the bureaucrats.

Functions:
- The board is mandated to decide on the transfer of a civil servant before completion of his or her fixed tenure.
• The rules mandate the civil services board to submit an annual report on January 1 to the central government about the date of the meetings held by them.

**Composition:**
The civil services board is headed by chief secretary of a state.
• It has senior most additional chief secretary or chairman, Board of Revenue, Financial Commissioner or an officer of equivalent rank and status as member.
• In addition, it will have Principal Secretary or Secretary, Department of Personnel in the state government as member secretary.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. What is it?
2. Composition.
3. Functions.
4. How many states have set up CSB?

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the functions and objectives of Civil Services Boards.

Link: [https://indianexpress.com/article/india/no-information-on-constitution-of-civil-services-board-by-mp-centre-4805230/](https://indianexpress.com/article/india/no-information-on-constitution-of-civil-services-board-by-mp-centre-4805230/).
Sources: Indian Express.

**Topics: India and its neighbourhood- relations.**

1. **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**

**Context:** China under the multi-billion-dollar CPEC will set up a 1,124-megawatt power project- Kohala Hydropower Project- in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir despite India’s objection to it.

A tripartite agreement has been finalised among China’s Three Gorges Corporation, the authorities in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and the PPIB to implement the 1,124-megawatt Kohala hydroelectric power project under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) framework.

**Details:**
• The project will be built on the Jhelum River and aims at annually providing more than five billion units of clean and low-cost electricity for consumers in Pakistan.
• This marks one of the largest investments of USD 2.4 billion in an independent power producer (IPP) in the region.

**About CPEC:**
The CPEC is the flagship project of the multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a pet project of Chinese President Xi Jinping, aimed at enhancing Beijing’s influence around the world through China-funded infrastructure projects.

The 3,000 km-long China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) consists of highways, railways, and pipelines. CPEC eventually aims at linking the city of Gwadar in South Western Pakistan to China’s North Western region Xinjiang through a vast network of highways and railways.

The proposed project will be financed by heavily-subsidised loans, that will be disbursed to the Government of Pakistan by Chinese banks.

**But, why is India concerned?**
It passes through PoK.
CPEC rests on a Chinese plan to secure and shorten its supply lines through Gwadar with an enhanced presence in the Indian Ocean. Hence, it is widely believed that upon CPEC’s fruition, an extensive Chinese presence will undermine India’s influence in the Indian Ocean.
It is also being contended that if CPEC were to successfully transform the Pakistan economy that could be a “red rag” for India which will remain at the receiving end of a wealthier and stronger Pakistan. Besides, India shares a great deal of trust deficit with China and Pakistan and has a history of conflict with both. As a result, even though suggestions to re-approach the project pragmatically have been made, no advocate has overruled the principle strands of contention that continue to mar India’s equations with China and Pakistan.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. What is CPEC?
2. What is BRI initiative?
3. What is string of pearls initiative?
4. Where Gilgit- Baltistan?
5. Important ports in Pakistan and Iran.

Mains Link:
Discuss India’s concerns on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) framework. Suggest how India should tackle the challenges posed by this alliance?
Sources: the Hindu.

2. Govt. to boost infrastructure in areas along China border

Context: The government has approved new guidelines to boost infrastructure in areas along China border.

These include:
1. Spend 10% funds of a Centrally sponsored scheme only on projects in Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim.
2. The Border Area Development Programme (BADP) has been allocated ₹784 crore in the 2020-21 fiscal and the money is distributed to the border States and Union Territories depending on various criteria such as the length of the international border and population.
3. Projects for developing strategically important villages and towns in border areas that have been identified by the border guarding forces will be given priority.
4. Construction of roads, bridges, culverts, primary schools, health infrastructure, playfields, irrigation works, mini-stadiums, indoor courts for basketball, badminton and table tennis can be undertaken within 10 km of the border.

Need for:
The ongoing border tension with China at multiple points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) is more serious than past incidents, indicating China’s planning and the likelihood of a protracted stand-off. Therefore, the creation of infrastructure “would help integrate these areas with the hinterland, create a positive perception of care by the country and encourage people to stay on in the border areas leading to safe and secure borders”.

India- China Border:
India and China share a 3,488 km long boundary. Unfortunately, the entire boundary is disputed. The line, which delineates the boundary between the two countries, is popularly called the McMahon line, after its author Sir Henry McMahon.
In 1913, the British-India government had called a tripartite conference, in which the boundary between India and Tibet was formalized after a discussion between the Indian and the Tibetans. A Convention was adopted, which resulted in the delimitation of the Indo-Tibetan boundary. This boundary is, however, disputed by China which terms it as illegal.
In 1957, China occupied Aksai Chin and built a road through it. This episode was followed by intermittent clashes along the border, which finally culminated in the border war of 1962. The boundary, which came into existence after the war, came to be known as Line of Actual Control (LAC). It is a military held line.

Attempts to resolve the issue:
1. The rapprochement between the two countries in 1976 enabled India and China to initiate **High Level border talks in 1981** to find a solution to the vexed problem. After eight rounds, the talks broke down in 1987.
2. In 1988, following Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to China, the **Joint Working Group (JWG)** was set up to look into the border problem.
3. In 1993, the **Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control (LAC)** was signed and the India-China Expert Group of Diplomatic and Military Officers was set up to assist the JWG.
4. In 1996, the **Agreement on Confidence Building Measures (CBMs)** in the Military Field along the LAC was signed.
5. In 2003, **two special representatives (one each from India and China)** were appointed to find a political solution to the border dispute.
6. Till 2009, these two special representatives had held 17 rounds of talks, but it seems they have not made much headway.

**Insta Link:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. What is LoC and how is it established, geographical extent and significance?
2. What is LAC?
3. Where is Nathu La?
4. Where is Pangong Tso?
5. Who administers Akashi Chin?

**Mains Link:**
Creation of infrastructure would help integrate border areas areas with the hinterland, create a positive perception of care by the country and encourage people to stay on in the border areas leading to safe and secure borders. Discuss.

**Link:**
[https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GCK7FKMOP.1&imageview=0](https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GCK7FKMOP.1&imageview=0).

Sources: the Hindu.

### 3. Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA)

**Context:** India and Australia have signed a historic agreement, called ‘**Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA)**’, to allow access to military bases for logistics support.
This was agreed upon at the **first-ever virtual bilateral summit** between India Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison.

**What is MLSA?**
- The agreement will facilitate reciprocal access to military logistics facilities, allow more complex joint military exercise and improve interoperability between the security forces of the two nations.
- It allows reciprocal access to military facilities in terms of logistics support which generally include food, water, petroleum (fuel), spare parts and other components.
- The agreement will be useful during joint military exercises, peacekeeping operations, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief operations, scheduled deployments of military platforms, and any other exigent situations that may arise.
- It will help in improving interoperability between the involved parties.

**Significance:**
- The MLSA assumes greater importance in light of India and Australia’s limited naval capabilities.
- Normally, a scarcity of resources puts severe limitations on a country’s ability to project power in the distant waters, leaving its far-off assets at the mercy of other actors.
- Therefore, countries avoid dispersion of their resources and concentrate on their near waters.
- In the case of India and Australia, such a limitation does not match their ambitions in the region; it also puts them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis a belligerent China.

For this reason, the MLSA holds considerable significance.
4. Scrapping of Article 370 and LAC Tensions

Context:
An influential Chinese think-tank- China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR)- has linked the current tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) to India’s move last year to abrogate Article 370 and change the status of Jammu and Kashmir.

What has the CICIR said on this?
It described the move as a joint challenge to China and Pakistan, saying the move had “posed a challenge to the sovereignty of Pakistan and China” and “made India-Pakistan relations and China-India relations more complex.”

What happened?
Last year, India released a new map following the changes in Article 370.
China alleges that India opened up new territory on the map, incorporated part of the areas under the local jurisdiction of Xinjiang and Tibet into its Ladakh union territory.
And this forced China into the Kashmir dispute, stimulated China and Pakistan to take counter-actions on the Kashmir issue, and dramatically increased the difficulty in resolving the border issue between China and India.

Background:
Recently, there has been an increased tension in the India-China relations, due to the Chinese transgressions into Indian territory, across the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh. Talks are on at various levels to diffuse the situation.

What did Article 370 say?

- The J&K Constitution defined a permanent resident as one who was a State subject as of May 14, 1954, or had been a resident of the State for 10 years with a legally acquired property.
- Non-permanent residents could not acquire immovable property, get government employment, scholarships or other aid provided by the State government.
- The premise of this special Article emanated from residency laws issued by the then Maharaja Hari Singh to prevent immigration of people from neighbouring Punjab during British rule.
- Curbs on land acquisition by non-permanent residents are not unique to J&K. Himachal Pradesh and several North-Eastern States, too, have similar provisions.
- In 2002, the J&K High Court had struck down the provision of women losing their permanent resident status if they married a non-permanent resident. Their children, however, could not enjoy succession rights.

What’s in store now

- J&K will now have no separate flag or Constitution and the tenure of the Assembly will be five years, instead of the earlier six years.
- The Indian Penal Code (IPC) will replace the Ranbir Penal Code (RPC) to deal with criminal cases.
- Article 356, under which President’s rule can be imposed in any State, will also be applicable to the UTs of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.
- People from other states can purchase land and properties and the Right to Information Act will be applicable to the new UTs.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Regions of dispute.
2. What is LAC?
3. LAC vs LOC?
4. Important passes between India and China.
5. What is Article 370? What has changed now wrt J&K?

Mains Link:
Discuss how abrogation of Article 370 has escalated border tensions between India and China.
Sources: the Hindu.
5. Why banning trade with China will hurt India more?

Context:
The Indian government has tried to respond to the border dispute with China by training its guns on trade. The idea resonating in Indian streets is that Indians should boycott Chinese goods and thus “teach China a lesson”.
- But, given China’s centrality and India’s insignificant share in global trade, banning trade will barely hurt China while adversely impacting Indian consumers and businesses.

Boycotting China is not as easy as data from key sectors show:
1. **Smartphones**: Market size: Rs 2 lakh Cr; Share of Chinese products: 72%.
2. **Telecom Equipment**: Market size: Rs 12,000 Cr; Share of Chinese products: 25%.
3. **Auto Components**: Market size: 43.1 lakh Cr.; Share of Chinese products: 26%.
4. **Internet Apps**: Market size: 45.0 Crore smartphone users; Share of Chinese products: 66% of people use at least one Chinese app on their smartphones.
5. **Solar Power**: Market size: 37,916 MW; Share of Chinese products: 90%.
6. **Steel**: Share of Chinese products: 18-20%.
7. **Pharma/API**: Market size: 1.5 Lakh Crore; Share of Chinese products: 60%.

When is "Boycott China" possible?
When the economical gap between India and China is narrowed, the country, prompted by emotions of nationalism amid the standoff between the two countries, can boycott Chinese products and carve out a path for 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat.'

Why is China cheaper?
1. **Provision of cheap labour** is one of the factors that contribute to cheaper Chinese products.
2. **Raw materials are cheaper**. They are a significant part of the total cost of the product. Since the Chinese firms invest in bulk purchases for bulk production, it saves the tremendous cost of production.
3. **Efficient business ecosystem** comprising of a network of suppliers, component manufacturers, distributors, government agencies, and customers. All have key-roles to play in ironing out the production process.
4. **Business loans are easily accessible**, especially for bigger industries which provides a greater financial cushion to businesses in the manufacturing segment.
5. The Chinese factories have been criticized for their lower compliance with health and safety regulations and environmental protection laws.
6. China follows a **Value Added Tax (VAT) system**. A tax which is charged only on the "value-added" to a product, material or service at every stage of its further manufacture or distribution. Exported goods are subject to zero per cent VAT. In simpler terms, they enjoy a VAT exemption or rebate policy.

Why 'Boycott Chinese Products' Movement is difficult in India?
**Trade deficit**: In 2018-19, India's exports to China were mere $16.7 billion, while imports were $70.3 billion, leaving a trade deficit of $53.6 billion.

**Private Indian companies with Chinese investment**: Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from China stood at a total of $1.8 billion between 2015 and 2019. Chinese tech investors have put an estimated $4 billion into Indian start-ups. Over a period of five years ending March 2020, 18 of India's 30 unicorns are now Chinese-funded.

**China's dominance in the Indian digital market**: Apps with Chinese investments constituted a substantial 50% of top app downloads (both iOS and G Play combined) which includes web browsers, data sharing and social media apps as per the Gateway house report.

A blanket ban on Chinese imports will hurt all small businesses at a time when they are already struggling to survive, apart from hitting India’s ability to produce finished goods.

What can be done?
Estimates indicate that a **third of the Chinese imports constitute low-tech goods** that were either made earlier by Indians, or are still being made but in smaller quantities.
- These can surely be discouraged, and re-replaced by local products and brands.
• In addition, such attempts will prove to be a fillip for the hundreds of small and medium firms, which have languished due to the lack of demand.
• If the MSME segment kicks off, the overall manufacturing sector will get a boost, which will benefit the ‘Make in India’ scheme.
• As local sales grow, Indians will become competitive. They can emerge as exporters of these products, and battle globally with China.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Disputed border areas between India and China.
2. What is trade deficit?
3. What are unicorns?
4. India and China bilateral trade- overview and key figures.
5. What is FDI?
6. FDI vs FPI.

Mains Link:
How and why boycotting Chinese goods will have little or no impact on the country? Discuss.
Sources: the Hindu.

6. Russia-India-China grouping

Why in News?
India will participate in the virtual meeting of the Russia-India-China grouping on June 23.
The Indian decision to go ahead with the ministerial level exchange has created an opening for de-escalation of tension along the Line of Actual Control with the Russian diplomatic sources indicating that they support “constructive dialogue” over the tension in eastern Ladakh.

What is RIC?
Conceived by the then Russian foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov in 1998.
The group was founded on the basis of “ending its subservient foreign policy guided by the U.S.,” and “renewing old ties with India and fostering the newly discovered friendship with China.”

Significance and potential of the grouping:
Together, the RIC countries occupy over 19 percent of the global landmass and contribute to over 33 percent of global GDP.
All three are nuclear powers and two, Russia and China, are permanent members of the UN Security Council, while India aspires to be one.
The trio could also contribute to creating a new economic structure for the world.
They could work together on disaster relief and humanitarian assistance.

Importance of RIC for India:
• It forms the core of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).
• India is in a geostrategic sweet spot today.
• It is important for India as an aspiring power to be able to thwart China’s aspirations of being a hegemon in both the maritime and continental spheres.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. What is RIC group? When was it founded?
2. WTO- establishment and objectives.
3. What is G20?
4. What is Paris agreement?

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of RIC grouping.
Link:
7. India-China border dispute: Importance of Pangong Tso

Why in News?
Amid military talks, reports of Chinese build-up at Pangong.

Why there is a dispute here?
The Line of Actual Control (LAC) - the line that separates Indian and Chinese troops since 1962 - generally runs along the land except for the width of Pangong Tso. Here it runs through water. Both sides have marked their areas announcing which side belongs to which country.

India controls about 45 km stretch of the Pangong Tso and China the rest.
The current site of confrontation is spurs jutting out of Chang Chenmo, an eastern extension of the Karakoram Range. These spurs are called fingers.

Who controls what?
There are eight of them in contention here. India and China have different understanding of where the LAC passes through.

- **India has maintained that the LAC passes through Finger 8**, which has been the site of the final military post of China.
- **India has been patrolling the area** - mostly on foot because of the nature of the terrain - up to Finger 8. **But Indian forces have not had active control beyond Finger 4.**
- **China, on the other hand**, says the **LAC passes through Finger 2**. It has been patrolling up to Finger 4 - mostly in light vehicles, and at times up to Finger 2.

What is happening now?
- The current impulses of China seem to be guided by 255 km Daulat Beg Oldie-Darbuk-Shayok road. It extends up to the base of the Karakoram pass, which is the last military post. **Daulat Beg Oldie** is the highest airfield in the world. This road, when complete, will reduce the travel time from Leh to Daulat Beg Oldie from two days to six hours.
- The latest Chinese move is also part of its long-term strategy to gain greater control of the area. It was under this design, China had built road up to 5 km on the Indian side of the LAC in 1999, during the Kargil war with Pakistan.

Why China wants to encroach areas alongside Pangong Tso?
• Pangong Tso is strategically crucial as it is very close to Chusul Valley, which was one of the battlefronts between India and China during the 1962 war.
• China appears to keep India constricted in the region by taking strategic advantage of looking over the Chusul Valley, which it can do if it advances along Pangong Tso.
• China also does not want India to boost its infrastructure anywhere near the LAC. China fears it threatens its occupation of Aksai Chin and Lhasa-Kashgar highway.
• Any threat to this highway also puts Chinese rather imperialist plans in Pakistan-occupied territories in Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir, and beyond in Pakistan.

About Pangong Tso:
Pangong Tso literally translates into a "conclave lake". Pangong means conclave in Ladakhi and Tso means a lake in Tibetan language.
Situated at over 14,000 feet, Pangong Tso or Pangong Lake is about 135 km long. It is formed from Tethys geosyncline. It is a salt water lake.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. What is LoC and how is it established, geographical extent and significance?
2. What is LAC?
3. Where is Nathu la?
4. Where is Pangong Tso?
5. Who administers Akashi Chin?
6. Where is Naku La?
7. Who controls what in Pangong Tso lake region?

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of Pangong Tso for India and China.
Sources: the Hindu.

8. In border claims, reimagining South Asia’s boundaries
(Before understanding this article, you need to know the following:
• State-centrism has given the state structure the propriety to be the sole arbiter of disputes, if any, among communities and regions falling within the territorial limits of nation states.
• As per this principle, it is the state that articulates, defines, and represents “national” interests in negotiations with other states.)

Now, What’s the issue?
Border disputes, such as Kalapani dispute, are “handled” rather than “addressed” within the given dispensation of South Asian statecraft.
The main problem here is that the decisions flow from within a state-centric paradigm.
• People living in the disputed regions and their emotions are not taken into account.
• Often, territorial boundaries are valued more than lives, livelihoods and the well-being of the people located at the edges of nation states.
What we forget is countries here not only share cultural and civilisational backgrounds but also an "officially" recognised porous border.

Need of the hour:
South Asia is perhaps the most natural regional grouping of states around the world. And, at the same time, it is also the most difficult and contested grouping.
South Asia needs to be rethought, not as a region of states, but as a region of regions.
It is a land where contact zones should exist beyond the limits of territorial boundaries shared by the member-states. There is a need to go beyond the popular debates revolving around such “troubling” questions such as: how much area has been “encroached” upon by which state and on what basis.

It is because such questions seem to be troubling to those who are to maintain their lifeworld at those zones.

- In a certain sense, the people living at the edges of nation states within South Asia do not actually belong to any of the two nation states.
- Or in other words, they belong to both the states at the same time.

Plurality, differences and inclusivity bring coherence to borderland ontology; they defy the logic of singular, unifying, exclusive identities that the nation states privilege.

Way ahead:
Both India and Nepal, and for that matter, other South Asian countries need to rethink South Asia as a region of regions before they submit to the enticements of a new language of “regional cooperation” — one that is ontologically empty but materially more rewarding. Region and regional identity are not just issues of “realpolitik” in South Asia; rather, the need is to “officially” accommodate this rather naturally drafted way of doing politics, if we are genuinely concerned about South Asian geopolitics.

Link:
https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/in-border-claims-reimagining-south-asias-boundaries/article31940545.ece

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Global Vaccine Summit

Context: Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi recently addressed the virtual Global Vaccine Summit hosted by UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson in which over 50 countries - business leaders, UN agencies, civil society, government ministers, Heads of State and country leaders participated. Overall the summit raised almost £7bn to Gavi, the international vaccine alliance. India pledged 15 Million US Dollars.

Background:
The virtual summit this week comes against the backdrop of the University of Oxford's fast-track trials for a potential vaccine to protect against coronavirus. However, it has a wider remit as the UK hopes it would help raise the funds required for Gavi to vaccinate over 300 million children against infectious diseases in the world's poorest countries over the next five years.

What is GAVI?
Created in 2000, Gavi is an international organisation – a global Vaccine Alliance, bringing together public and private sectors with the shared goal of creating equal access to new and underused vaccines for children living in the world’s poorest countries.

Members: Gavi brings together developing country and donor governments, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank, the vaccine industry in both industrialised and developing countries, research and technical agencies, civil society, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other private philanthropists.

Main activities:
1. GAVI’s strategy supports its mission to save children’s lives and protect people’s health by increasing access to immunisation in poor countries.
2. It contributes to achieving the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals by focusing on performance, outcomes and results.
3. Its partners provide funding for vaccines and intellectual resources for care advancement.
4. They contribute, also, to strengthening the capacity of the health system to deliver immunisation and other health services in a sustainable manner.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Members of GAVI?
2. Largest contributors to GAVI?
3. Who organised global vaccine summit recently?
4. How much has India pledged to GAVI?
5. What is a vaccine?
6. What are different types of vaccines?

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of GAVI.
Sources: pib.

2. Naval liaisons at RMIFC and EMASOH

Context:
India is looking to post Navy Liaison Officers at the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar and also at the European maritime surveillance initiative in the Strait of Hormuz for improved Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).

About Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC):
The RMFIC functions under the aegis of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) of which India became an Observer in March 2020 along with Japan and the United Nations. It is based in Madagascar. It is designed to deepen maritime domain awareness by monitoring maritime activities and promoting information sharing and exchange.

About the European maritime surveillance initiative in the Strait of Hormuz:
The EMASOH headquarters is composed of Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and French officers and based at the French naval base in Abu Dhabi. The aim is “to monitor maritime activity and guarantee freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.” It was started by France in February 2020.

How this will help India?
This will be in the overall realm of improving linkages of the Navy’s Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram with other IFCs and become the repository for all maritime data in the IOR.

Additional information:
About Indian Ocean Commission:
Founded in 1982, the IOC is an intergovernmental organisation comprising five small-island states in the Western Indian Ocean: the Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion (a French department), and Seychelles. It was institutionalized in 1984 by the Victoria Agreement in Seychelles. Following a request from New Delhi, the IOC granted observer status to India on March 6 at the Commission’s 34th Council of Ministers.
In 2012, the IOC was one of the four regional organisations to launch the MASE Programme — the European Union-funded programme to promote Maritime Security in Eastern and Southern Africa and Indian Ocean. The Commission has a Secretariat which is located in Mauritius.
About the Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR):
The Navy set up the IFC-IOR in December 2018 within the premises of the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) in Gurugram to track maritime movements in the region.

France became the first country to deploy a Liaison Officer at the IFC-IOR followed by the U.S. and several other countries including Australia, Japan and the United Kingdom have announced their intention to post LOs.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is IOC?
2. When and how was it established?
3. Who are the members and observers?
4. How France is involved in this?
5. What is IFC-IOR?
6. What is RMIFC?
7. Who established EMASOH?
8. Locate Persian Gulf and strait of Hormuz.

Mains Link:
Discuss how observer status at the Indian Ocean Commission help India secure its strategic objectives.


Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian diaspora.

1. Why China is opposing THAAD defence systems in South Korea?

What is THAAD Defence system?
THAAD is an acronym for Terminal High Altitude Area Defense.
It is a transportable, ground-based missile defense system.
This anti-ballistic missile defense system has been designed and manufactured by the US company Lockheed Martin.

How it operates?
THAAD is coupled with space-based and ground-based surveillance stations, which transfer data about the incoming missile and informs the THAAD interceptor missile of the threat type classification. THAAD is alarmed about incoming missiles by space-based satellites with infrared sensors.

Where all it has been deployed?
South Korea, the UAE, Guam, Israel and Romania.

What is this South Korea-China controversy over THAAD about?
• US has a base in South Korea. So, the US operates THAAD missile defense system in this base.
• The US had previously announced that the deployment of this missile defense system was a countermeasure against potential attacks by North Korea, particularly after the country had engaged in testing ballistic missiles.
• This was felt necessary for the US because, in 2017, matters escalated in the Korean Peninsula after North Korea test fired a few missiles in the direction of US bases in Japan.
• These moves by the US and by extension, South Korea, particularly angered China.

China’s concerns are based on the following:
The system has inbuilt advanced radar systems that could track China’s actions.
The US having a presence in the region particularly through its many military bases in Japan and South Korea is particularly worrying for China.
The US exerts influence over South Korea and Japan and may interfere with Beijing’s long-term military, diplomatic and economic interests in the region.

How this controversy has affected South Korea?
The impact of the controversy was not limited to a diplomatic level, but had far-reaching consequences.
1. When the controversy first arose in 2017, China had hit South Korea economically. South Korean businesses, including large conglomerates found their diversified operations hampered.
2. Post this development in 2017, tourism from China to South Korea fell drastically.
3. South Korea’s entertainment industry witnessed concerts, shows and other commercial ventures in China by K-pop stars being forced to cancel as a result of this controversy.
4. South Korean cosmetics and beauty products that are extremely popular in China also witnessed their sales being impacted, due to calls on social media to boycott South Korean products.

What next?
Following the deployment of replacement missiles now, China has issued a statement urging the US not to harm bilateral relations between Beijing and Seoul.
The US and South Korea have consistently maintained that these missiles are only to counter potential threats by North Korea.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is THAAD?
2. US military bases worldwide.
4. Sea and oceans surrounding China.

Mains Link:
How THAAD defence system seeks to undermine China’s dominance in the region?
Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/thaad-missile-defence-system-south-korea-us-china-6434536/.
Sources: Indian Express.
2. Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA)

Context: The government of Philippines has suspended plans to cancel the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), a deal that is important to Washington’s moves to counter Beijing’s rising regional power.

Background:
On February 11, the Philippines officially sent a notice terminating the VFA to the United States through its embassy in Manila. Political analysts interpreted the reversal as a sign that China’s neighbours are worried about its growing military assertiveness. The Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia all have disputes with China about its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

What is it?
A visiting forces agreement (VFA) is an agreement between a country and a foreign nation having military forces visiting in that country. VFA spells out the rules, guidelines and legal status of the U.S. military when operating in the Philippines. The VFA also affirms the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty as well as the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement — agreements that enable the U.S. military to conduct joint exercises and operations in the Philippines.

The Philippine Senate ratified the VFA in 1999.

Implications for the US:
Terminating the VFA would leave the U.S. military without any legal or operational standing in the Philippines — and that’s a problem for the alliance. Without a VFA, the U.S. military would not be able to support any defense agreements.

Implications for the Philippines:
The U.S. alliance and the VFA remain important to Philippine national security. In contrast to high degrees of trust and support for the United States, Filipinos hold much more negative attitudes toward China and remain wary of Beijing’s actions in the South China Sea. The Philippine public has also soured on Chinese foreign investment. The U.S.-Philippine alliance and the VFA therefore act as an insurance policy against Chinese threats.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Countries bordering South China Sea.
2. Location of Philippines and key areas surrounding.
3. What is VFA?
4. Important military bases of USA around the world.
5. Difference between LOC and LAC?

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GCK7FLJTA.1&imageview=0.
Sources: the Hindu.

3. What are Social Bubbles?

Why in News?
Many countries have started gradually lifting restrictions even as the number of cases of the infection continues to rise.
One of the ways of effective social distancing strategies to keep the Covid-19 curve flat suggested by experts include the idea of social bubbles.
What are social bubbles?
The idea is based on New Zealand’s model of household “bubbles”, an exclusive social group that is allowed to meet with each other amid the pandemic.
A bubble is referred to as an individual’s household or the people that one lives with. People may be allowed to extend their bubbles slightly to include caregivers or children who might be in shared care. These people don’t need to live in the same household but must be local.
New Zealand followed this approach during the lockdown and allowed the expansion of the bubbles as transmission slowed and restrictions eased.

Benefits of these bubbles:
In case a member of the bubble develops symptoms, the entire bubble quarantines itself, preventing further spread of the infection.
Bubbles allow those who are isolated to come into more social contact and to reduce the most harmful effects of the current social restrictions, while continuing to limit the risk of chains of transmission.

Have they been effective?
Studies have shown that the concept of social bubbles proved effective for New Zealand since it allowed people who were isolated, vulnerable or struggling to receive the care and support they needed.
Such a policy can be an effective policy for other countries to encourage compliance with social distancing regulations while meeting care and support needs.

Relevance of social bubbles at workplaces:
Social bubbles can also be applied by employers to create departmental or work unit bubbles of employees. For instance, for hospitals and essential workers, the risk of transmission can be minimised by introducing shifts with a similar composition of employees. This could mean clubbing together employees based on their residential proximity.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is a bubble?
2. Travel vs Social Bubbles?
3. Which countries have been implementing social bubbles?
4. Name of the virus which caused COVID 19 disease.
5. Location of New Zealand on world map.

Mains Link:
What are social bubbles? How they can help contain the spread of Novel Corona virus?
Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-what-are-social-bubbles-6444354/.
Sources: Indian Express.

4. Cooperative security in Persian Gulf littoral
What is Persian Gulf region and why is it so significant?
The lands around the Persian Gulf are shared by eight countries - Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.
- These countries are major producers of crude oil and natural gas, and thereby contribute critically to the global economy and to their own prosperity.
- The area has approximately two-thirds of the world’s estimated proven oil reserves and one-third of the world’s estimated proven natural gas reserves.
- This factor has added to their geopolitical significance.
- A considerable amount of sea trade passes through the gulf, leading to heavy traffic in the region.
Given its significance, the framework for stability and security in the region should have the following:
1. conditions of peace and stability in individual littoral states;
2. freedom to all states of the Gulf littoral to exploit their hydrocarbon and other natural resources and export them;
3. freedom of commercial shipping in international waters of the Persian Gulf;
4. freedom of access to, and outlet from, Gulf waters through the Strait of Hormuz;
5. prevention of conflict that may impinge on the freedom of trade and shipping
6. prevention of emergence of conditions that may impinge on any of these considerations.

Why this is important for India too?
- The Gulf is an integral part of India’s ‘extended neighbourhood’, both by way of geographical proximity and as an area of expanded interests and growing Indian influence.
- India is dependent on the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states for 42 per cent of its overall oil imports; three of the top five oil suppliers to India are Gulf states.
- Indians make up the Gulf states’ largest expatriate community, with an estimated 7.6 million Indian nationals living and working in the region; especially in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
- The GCC is India’s largest regional-bloc trading partner, which accounted for $104 billion of trade in 2017–18, nearly a 7 per cent increase from $97 billion the previous year. This is higher than both India–ASEAN trade ($81 billion) and India–EU trade ($102 billion) in 2017–18.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is GCC?
2. Middle East countries?
3. Strait of Hormuz?
4. Top oil producers of the world.
5. Persian Gulf countries in the region.
Mains Link:
Discuss why stability and peace is important in the Persian Gulf region for India and the world.
Link: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/in-persian-gulf-littoral-cooperative-security-is-key/article31774318.ece.
Sources: the Hindu.

5. China issues white paper on COVID-19 fight

Context: China has issued a white paper on the country’s battle against COVID-19. The document is titled "Fighting COVID-19: China in Action."

The paper explains:
China's prevention, control and treatment efforts in the battle against the virus, as well as the efforts made at a global level in international cooperation.

Highlights:
From early outbreak to an all-out nationwide effort to save as many lives as possible, the Chinese Government has taken the most comprehensive, the strictest and the most thorough prevention and control measures to combat the coronavirus outbreak.

China has made full use of the weapon to win the battle against COVID-19.

It has vowed to continue advocating globalization and multilateralism amid the coronavirus pandemic and in its aftermath.

It has released information on COVID-19 in an open and transparent manner as required by law.

What’s the issue?

US president Donald Trump and leaders of several countries have accused China of not being transparent in reporting the deadly disease, leading to huge human casualties and economic crisis across the world. Recently, the World Health Assembly (WHA), the decision-making body of Geneva-based World Health Organisation (WHO), passed a unanimous resolution to probe the origin of the virus. China also backed the resolution.

Impact:

The coronavirus has infected over 68,00,000 people and killed nearly 4,00,000 across the world. The US is the worst affected country with over 1.9 million cases and more than 1,09,000 deaths, while the total number of cases in China stand at 84,177. The global economy, which was in a sluggish recovery even before the coronavirus outbreak, is now bound to suffer a "severe recession" in 2020.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:

1. Locate Wuhan on Map.
2. Types of Coronavirus which affect humans.
3. UNSC- objectives and permanent members.
4. Countries in the South China Sea region.
5. Locate Taiwan and Hong Kong.


Sources: the Hindu.

6. Democrats unveil police reform bill

Context: Top US congressional Democrats have unveiled a bill- the Justice in Policing Act- to overhaul police practices as Americans gather daily to protest excessive use of force and systemic racism. The legislation would make sweeping changes designed both to deter police use of force and hold officers more accountable for abuses.

The legislation now needs support from Republicans.

Background:

This comes two weeks after the death of George Floyd, the black, unarmed man who died after a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes. The incident sparked nationwide furor over sustained brutality against black Americans.

The bill proposes to:

1. Reform “qualified immunity” for officers, making it easier for people whose constitutional rights were violated to recover damages
2. Change the federal standard of criminal police behavior from “willful” to acting “knowingly or with reckless disregard,” to address the difficulty of prosecuting officers
3. Start a federal registry of police misconduct and require states to report use of force to the U.S. Justice Department
4. Ban police use of chokeholds and carotid holds, and condition funding for state and local departments on barring the practices
5. Stop the use of “no-knock” search warrants in drug cases in the U.S., while also making state and local money contingent on stopping use of the warrants
6. Give the Justice Department subpoena power to carry out “pattern and practice” investigations into police department conduct
7. Provide state attorneys general with grants to carry out pattern and practice probes and create a process for independent investigations into uses of force
8. Require training on racial bias and implicit bias at the federal level, and condition state and local funding on offering training
9. Curb transfers of military-grade weapons to state and local police
10. Classify lynching as a federal hate crime

Racism in the USA:
Despite the civil war over slavery, and the civil rights movement for dignity and equality, systemic discrimination and violence against blacks persists. Racism continues unabated.

What is Racism?
Racism is a systematic ideology, a complex set of beliefs and practices that, on the presumed basis of biology, divides humanity into the ‘higher’ us and a lower ‘them’.

What can it lead to?
It not only sustains a permanent group hierarchy but deeply stigmatises those designated as inferior. This sense of hierarchy provides a motive for say, whites to treat blacks in ways that would be viewed as cruel or unjust if applied to members of their own group. For instance, contact with them is often regarded as contaminating, polluting. It should therefore be avoided or kept to a minimum.

Racism naturalises a person’s belief, character and culture. For example, being uneducated is seen not as socio-economic deprivation but a sign of inherited low IQ; blacks are predatory and are also seen to have an innate streak of savagery, which unless kept down by brute force from time to time, might explode and destroy civilisation.

Need of the hour:
Only a peaceful movement to end institutionalised racism, with both blacks and white participants, quite like the recent protests after Floyd’s murder, can break the back of this evil.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Presidential vs Parliamentary form of Govt.
2. How the President of USA is elected?
3. US president vs PM of India- Key differences.
Sources: the Hindu.


Context: The U.S. State Department has released its annual International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report.

What is it?
The annual Report to Congress on International Religious Freedom, also known as the International Religious Freedom Report, describes the status of religious freedom, government policies violating religious belief and practices of groups, religious denominations and individuals, and U.S. policies promoting religious freedom. The report is a survey of the state of religious freedom across the world.

Observations made on Religious freedom in India:
1. The report takes note of the change in the status of Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act(CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).
2. It discusses in detail mob Lynchings and anti-conversion laws and related issues.
3. Lawmakers failed: The report notes, Issues of religiously inspired mob violence, lynching and communal violence were sometimes denied or ignored by lawmakers.
4. It details incidents of “cow vigilantism” and other types of mob violence.
5. The report also takes note of the Babri Masjid decision by the Supreme Court and the challenges to the 2018 reversal of a ban on some women entering the Sabarimala temple.

Impact and implications:
The report outlines the U.S. engagement with India on the issues.
USCIRF had, in April, recommended to Secretary of State that the State Department downgrade India’s religious freedom to the lowest grade — ‘Country of Particular Concern (CPC)’. The Secretary of State is not obliged to accept the recommendation.
It recommended that the Trump administration “impose targeted sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals’ assets and/ or barring their entry into the United States citing specific religious freedom violations”.

India’s response:
India has said the USCIRF’s “biased and tendentious” comments against the country were “not new”, but that, on this occasion, “its misrepresentation has reached new levels”.

Note: Details on this issue have been covered in detail previously on: https://www.insightsonindia.com/2020/04/29/uscirf-2020-annual-report/.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is USCIRF?
2. What are countries of particular concern?
3. What is CAA?
4. What is NRC?
5. Which state in India has a NRC?

**Mains Link:**
How successful Indian polity has been in maintaining communal harmony in the state? Discuss.


Sources: the Hindu.

8. Sikkim-Tibet Convention of 1890

**Context:** The skirmishes and the standoff between Indian and Chinese troops at Naku La in Sikkim last month, in an area of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has brought back the focus onto the historical Sikkim-Tibet Convention of 1890.

Experts say, as per this convention, **Naku la belongs to India.** Besides, Prior to Sikkim’s merger with India in 1975, China has officially accepted this demarcation.

**What is the 1890 convention?**
The treaty was formalised between Britain and Chinese kingdom.
It was signed at Calcutta Convention in 1890. Of the eight Articles mentioned in the treaty, Article 1 is of critical significance.
As per Article (1), it was agreed that the boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Teesta and its affluents, from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu and northwards into other rivers of Tibet.
The line commences at Mount Gipmochi, on the Bhutan frontier, and follows the above-mentioned water-parting to the point where it meets Nepal territory.
However, Tibet refused to recognise the validity of Convention of 1890 and further refused to carry into effect the provisions of the said Convention.
In 1904, a treaty known as a Convention between Great Britain and Tibet was signed at Lhasa.
As per the Convention, Tibet agreed to respect the Convention of 1890 and to recognise the frontier between Sikkim and Tibet, as defined in Article (1) of the said Convention.
On April 27, 1906, a treaty was signed between Great Britain and China at Peking, which confirmed the Convention of 1904 between Great Britain and Tibet.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
Locate on the map:
1. Nathu la.
2. Jelep la.
3. Doklam.

Article 1 of the above said convention.


Sources: the Hindu.

9. SIPRI report on India China Nuclear weapons

**Context:**
A new yearbook released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).
The yearbook “assesses the current state of armaments, disarmament and international security”.

[www.insightsonindia.com](http://www.insightsonindia.com)
What is SIPRI?
Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) established in 1966 is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. Based in Stockholm the Institute provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.

What has it said in its latest report?

India and its neighbours:
1. All nations that have nuclear weapons continue to modernise their nuclear arsenals, while India and China increased their nuclear warheads in the last one year.
2. China is in the middle of a significant modernisation of its nuclear arsenal. China’s nuclear arsenal had gone up from 290 warheads in 2019 to 320 in 2020.
3. China is developing a so-called nuclear triad for the first time, made up of new land and sea-based missiles and nuclear-capable aircraft.
4. India’s nuclear arsenal went up from 130-140 in 2019 to 150 in 2020.
5. Pakistan, too, is slowly increasing the size and diversity of the nuclear forces. It has reached 160 in 2020.
6. Both China and Pakistan continue to have larger nuclear arsenals than India.

Global scenario:
1. Together the nine nuclear-armed states — the U.S., Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea — possessed an estimated 13,400 nuclear weapons at the start of 2020, which marked a decrease from an estimated 13,865 nuclear weapons at the beginning of 2019.
2. The decrease in the overall numbers was largely due to the dismantlement of old nuclear weapons by Russia and the U.S., which together possess over 90% of the global nuclear weapons.

Need of the hour:
The U.S. and Russia have reduced their nuclear arsenals under the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) but it will lapse in February 2021 unless both parties agree to prolong it. Therefore, efforts should be made to extend the New START or negotiate a new treaty. The deadlock over the New START and the collapse of the 1987 Soviet–U.S. Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty) in 2019 suggest that the era of bilateral nuclear arms control agreements between Russia and the U.S. might be coming to an end.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is SIPRI?
2. How many nuclear armed states are there in the world?
3. 2020 nuclear warhead inventories.
4. Comparison with previous report findings?
5. What is the New START treaty?
6. Which countries have reduced nuclear warheads over the last year?
7. What is nuclear triad?

Mains Link:
Comment on the latest findings of 2020 SIPRI Yearbook.
10. **U.S. Uighur rights Bill**

**Context:**
U.S. President Donald Trump has signed legislation calling for sanctions over the repression of China’s Uighur Muslims.

**Details:**
- The Bill calls for **sanctions against those responsible for repression of Uighurs and other Muslim groups in China’s Xinjiang province**, where the United Nations estimates that more than a million Muslims have been detained in camps.
- It singles out the region’s Communist Party secretary, Chen Quanguo, as responsible for “gross human rights violations” against them.
- The Bill also calls on U.S. firms operating in Xinjiang region to ensure their products do not include parts using forced labour.

**Background:**
The United Nations estimates that **more than a million Muslims have been detained in camps in the Xinjiang region**. The U.S. State Department has accused Chinese officials of subjecting Muslims to torture, abuse “and trying to basically erase their culture and their religion.”

**Who are Uighurs?**
Uighurs are a Muslim minority community concentrated in the country’s northwestern Xinjiang province. They claim closer ethnic ties to Turkey and other central Asian countries than to China, by brute — and brutal — force.

**Why is China targeting the Uighurs?**
Xinjiang is technically an autonomous region within China — its largest region, rich in minerals, and sharing borders with eight countries, including India, Pakistan, Russia and Afghanistan.
- Over the past few decades, as economic prosperity has come to Xinjiang, it has brought with it in large numbers the majority Han Chinese, who have cornered the better jobs, and left the Uighurs feeling their livelihoods and identity were under threat.
- This led to sporadic violence, in 2009 culminating in a riot that killed 200 people, mostly Han Chinese, in the region’s capital Urumqi. And many other violent incidents have taken place since then.
- Beijing also says Uighur groups want to establish an independent state and, because of the Uighurs’ cultural ties to their neighbours, leaders fear that elements in places like Pakistan may back a separatist movement in Xinjiang.
- Therefore, the Chinese policy seems to have been one of treating the entire community as suspect, and launching a systematic project to chip away at every marker of a distinct Uighur identity.

**InstaThink:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. Who are Uighurs?
2. Where is Xinjiang?
3. Who are Han Chinese?

**Link:**

Sources: the Hindu.

11. **What is GAFA tax?**

**Why in News?**
The United States has reportedly pulled out of talks aimed at overhauling the global tax system for digital giants. With this, France has now confirmed an "impasse" on the so-called GAFA tax.

What's the concern now?
France as well as U.K., Spain, Italy and others have imposed taxes on the largest digital firms. U.S. officials have slammed the moves as discriminating against American firms, and say any new levies should come only as part of a broader overhaul of international tax rules.
- Now, the US withdrawal from talks risks reigniting a transatlantic trade spat.

Background:
In January, 137 countries agreed to negotiate a deal on how to tax tech multinationals by 2020-end, under the auspices of the OECD. France, Britain, Italy and Spain have already sent a reply expressing their desire to agree on “a fair digital tax at the level of the OECD as quickly as possible.

Additional information:
What is GAFA tax?
GAFA tax—named after Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon—is a proposed digital tax to be levied on large technology and internet companies. France has decided to introduce the tax (3% tax on revenues from digital activities).

The rationale for having separate taxation on digital firms:
1. Existing tax norms that are framed envisaging brick and mortar business models are not suitable to regulate online services.
2. The technology companies differ from traditional businesses as a result of user participation in creating value, which, in turn, translates into revenue.
3. The often complex corporate structures set up by several companies that derive huge revenues from major European economies but allow them slash their tax bills by shifting profits to low-tax jurisdictions. (Base Erosion and Profit Sharing issue)

European countries in particular say the so-called GAFA — Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon — are unfairly exploiting tax rules that let them declare profits in low-tax havens, depriving them of a fair share of their fiscal payments.

Digital tax in India:
India has the second-largest online users in the world, with over 560 million internet users, and hence, from the viewpoint of its tax revenue base, digital businesses could not be overlooked. However, as is the case in other jurisdictions, Indian tax laws were suited for conventional business models such as brick and mortar stores and thus in dire need of an overhaul.

Recent Amendments:
To ensure that value created digitally is appropriately taxed; two significant amendments were introduced in Indian taxation laws in the recent past –
1. The “Equalization Levy” —
A tax aimed at foreign digital companies has been in place since 2016 and levied a 6% tax payable on gross revenues from online advertising services, which raked over Rs. 550 crores in fiscal year 2017-2018.
   - The new amendment, effective from April 1, 2020, essentially expands the equalization levy from online advertising to nearly all online commerce activities, done in India by businesses that do not have taxable presence in India through applicability of 2% on its revenues.
   - Specifically, it is levied on consideration receivable by the e-commerce operator for supply or services or facilitation of supply or service to – Person resident in India, Non-resident under specified circumstances such as through sale of data collected from a person resident in India, and Person who buys goods or services through an IP address located in India.

2. The concept of “Significant Economic Presence” (SEP):
www.insightsonindia.com
Introduced for the purposes of corporate income tax, which expanded to include the following:

- Advertisement which targets a customer residing in India or who accesses advertisement through internet protocol (IP) address located in India.
- Sale of data collected from a person residing in India or who uses an IP address located in India.
- Sale of goods/services using data collected from a person residing in India or who uses IP address located in India.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. OECD- objectives, members and eligibility.
2. What is GAFAs?
3. Which European countries have imposed tax on large digital firms?
4. What is the equalisation levy?
5. Applicability of this levy in India.

**Mains Link:**
What is GAFAs? Which countries have imposed it? Discuss its significance.
Sources: the Hindu.

### 12. Madhesis oppose new Nepal rule

**Why in News?**
Nepali opposition party leaders have opposed the planned changes in the existing citizenship rules that will most notably affect the families in Nepal’s plains also known as the Madhes region where cross-border kinship with India is common.

However, the government defends its move by citing India’s citizenship rules to justify the amendments the Nepalese govt has brought.

**Proposed changes:**

- The Bill seeks to amend the country’s Citizenship Act that would require a foreign woman married to a Nepali national to wait seven years for naturalised citizenship.
- It includes seven rights that a foreign woman married to a Nepali national can exercise till she acquires citizenship certificates.
Lack of a citizenship certificate will not bar them from running any businesses and earn, use and sell any fixed and movable assets, make profits through businesses and get involved in transaction of property of any kind.

Who are Madheshi? Why they are concerned about these changes?
- The Madheshi are residents of Terai region in the south of Nepal at the foothill of the Himalayas on the border with India in Bihar.
- The Madhesis have castes and ethnicity similar to Bihar and eastern UP, with frequent inter-marriages between families on either side of the border.
- They believe these changes will introduce uncertainty and tension in the society and families.
- Critics have termed the changes as racially motivated.

Changing ties between India and Nepal:
The move to amend the citizenship act comes days after the Nepal government completed the process of *redrawing the country’s political map through a Constitutional amendment*, incorporating three strategically important Indian areas, a move that could severely jolt relations with New Delhi.

InstaLinks:
1. Who are Madheshi people?
2. Where is Terai region in India?
3. Overview of of India’s Citizenship Amendment Act.
5. Himalayan ranges in and around Nepal.

Mains Link:
Who are Madhesis? Why they are concerned about the changes proposed in Nepal’s Citizenship law?
Sources: the Hindu.

13. Japan to rename islands disputed with China

Context:
A local council- assembly of Ishigaki city- in southern Japan has voted to rename an area, including islands disputed with China and Taiwan, a move Beijing denounced as illegal and a “serious provocation”.

What’s approved?
It has approved a plan to change the name of the area covering the Tokyo-controlled Senkaku Islands — known by Taiwan and China as the Diaoyus — from “Tonoshiro” to “Tonoshiro Senkaku”.

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What’s approved?
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Source: [Sources](#).
What’s the issue now?
The uninhabited islands are at the centre of a festering row between Tokyo and Beijing. Besides, Taiwan says the islands are part of its territory, and also protested the move.

About Senkaku Islands:
The Senkaku Islands are located in the East China Sea between Japan, the People’s Republic of China, and the Republic of China (Taiwan). The archipelago contains five uninhabited islands and three barren rocks, ranging in size from 800 m² to 4.32 km².

What are the grounds for Japan’s territorial sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands?
The Senkaku Islands were not included in the territory which Japan renounced under Article 2 of the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951 that legally defined the territory of Japan after World War II. Under Article 3 of the treaty, the islands were placed under the administration of the United States as part of the Nansei Shoto Islands. The Senkaku Islands are included in the areas whose administrative rights were reverted to Japan in accordance with the Agreement between Japan and the United States of America Concerning the Ryukyu Islands and the Daito Islands that entered into force in 1972.

What is China’s claim?
China says that the islands have been part of its territory since ancient times, serving as important fishing grounds administered by the province of Taiwan. Taiwan was ceded to Japan in the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, after the Sino-Japanese war. When Taiwan was returned in the Treaty of San Francisco, China says the islands should have been returned too.

What next?
The Senkaku/Diaoyu issue highlights the more robust attitude China has been taking to its territorial claims in both the East China Sea, the South China Sea and also on the Indian side.

Other border disputes of China:
It has island and maritime border disputes with Taiwan, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea and its extension. The disputes include islands, reefs, banks and other features in the South China Sea including Spratly Islands (with Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Taiwan), Paracel Islands (Vietnam), Scarborough Shoal (Philippines), and Gulf of Tonkin (Vietnam).

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. South China Sea dispute- regions involved, countries’ claims.
2. Where are Senkaku Islands?
3. What is the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951?
4. China- Taiwan relations.
Mains Link:
How China’s aggressive expansionist policy is being viewed by countries worldwide? Discuss.
Sources: the Hindu.

14. Trump suspends H-1B visas till year-end

Context:
USA has decided to extend the 60-day ban on immigrant and non-immigrant worker visas till the end of 2020.
The ban is effective immediately so the processing of all new H-1B, H-2B, J and L visa categories stands suspended.

- H-1B, H-2B, J and L visa holders, and their spouses or children already present in the US shall not be impacted by the new worker visa ban.

**What are H-1B, H-2B, L and other work visas?**
In order to fill a vacuum of highly-skilled low-cost employees in IT and other related domains, the US administration issues a certain number of visas each year which allows companies from outside the US to send employees to work on client sites.

1. **H-1B**: Person is Specialty Occupation: To work in a specialty occupation. Requires a higher education degree of its equivalent.

2. **L1 visas** allows companies to transfer highly skilled workers to US for a period of up to seven years.

3. **H-2B visas** allow food and agricultural workers to seek employment in the US.

4. **J-1 Visas**: It is for students on work-study summer programmes.

**Why this order was issued?**
To protect American jobs during the ongoing pandemic. The entry of additional workers through the H-1B, H-2B, J, and L non-immigrant visa programmes presents a significant threat to employment opportunities for domestic workers by undercutting their jobs.

**How does it impact Indian IT companies?**
Indian IT companies are amongst the biggest beneficiaries of the US H-1B visa regime, and have since the 1990s cornered a lion’s share of the total number of visas issued each year.

- Indians had applied for as many as 1.84 lakh or 67 per cent of the total H-1B work visas for the current financial year ending March 2021.

The executive order has also made sweeping changes to the H-1B work visa norms, which will no longer be decided by the currently prevalent lottery system.

- The new norms will now favour highly-skilled workers who are paid the highest wages by their respective companies.

- This could result in a significant impact on margins and worker wages of Indian IT companies which send thousands of low-cost employees to work on client sites in the US.

**Criticisms and concerns:**
This order has been criticised by the tech industry as well as politicians on both sides of the aisle as damaging to the U.S. economy.

- Critics say, this order has the potential to do permanent damage to the USA’s reputation of attracting the best and the brightest.

- The ban on issuing visas will harm employers, families, universities, hospitals, communities and delay America's economic recovery.

- Without highly skilled immigrants, the industry will slow down and the economy will worsen affecting the timeline for a treatment and cure of Covid-19 as well.

Sources: the Hindu.

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**15. U.N.-75 declaration delayed**

**What’s the issue?**
Commemorative declaration marking the 75th anniversary of the signing of the U.N. Charter has been delayed.

**Why?**
Member states could not reach an agreement on phraseology. They have objected to the use of a phrase “shared vision of a common future”.

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Because, the phrase, “community with a shared future for mankind” is closely associated with the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) and especially Chinese President Xi Jinping as an articulation of the country’s vision for the world.

Who is opposing?
The Five Eyes — the U.S., the U.K., Australia, New Zealand and Canada — along with India, have objected. The current impasse comes at a time when China’s relationships with a number of democracies, including India, Australia and the U.S., are strained.

Silence process:
With this objection, the ‘silence’ process (a procedure by which a resolution passes if no formal objections are raised within a stipulated time) has been broken. However, China, on behalf of itself and Russia, Syria and Pakistan raised objections to the silence being broken.

What the countries demand?
The objecting countries wanted the resolution to read, “We will work together with partners to strengthen coordination and global governance for the common good of present and future generations and to realize our shared vision for a better future as envisaged in the preamble of the UN Charter.”

75th anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter:
The Charter was signed in San Francisco on June 26, 1945 and came into force on October 24, 1945. It is the foundational treaty of the United Nations.

Objectives: Conceived above all as a means to save future generations from the scourge of war, the Charter calls for the organization to maintain international peace and security; promote social progress and better standards of life; strengthen international law; and promote human rights.

As a charter, it is a constituent treaty, and all members are bound by its articles. Article 103 of the Charter states that obligations to the United Nations prevail over all other treaty obligations.

What is Five Eyes?
It is an intelligence alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. These countries are parties to the multilateral UKUSA Agreement, a treaty for joint cooperation in signals intelligence.

Origins: It began in 1946 when the United States and the United Kingdom agreed to an open exchange of intelligence on the communications of foreign nations. It was expanded when Canada joined the alliance in 1948, followed by Australia and New Zealand in 1956.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
   1. Highlights of the UN Charter.
   2. When it came into force?
   3. Various UN organs.
   5. Five eyes.

Link: https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/un-75-declaration-delayed/article31927129.ece
Sources: the Hindu.

16. ASEAN states warn of S. China Sea tensions
What’s the issue?
China has been pushing its presence in the Exclusive Economic Zones of other countries while claimants are preoccupied tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting the United States to call on China to stop its “bullying behaviour” there.

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• In April, Beijing unilaterally declared the creation of new administrative districts on islands in the troubled waterways to which Vietnam and the Philippines also have competing claims.
• In early April, Vietnam said one of its fishing boats was sunk by a Chinese maritime surveillance vessel.
• In January, Chinese boat trespassed into Indonesia’s [italics]exclusive economic zone[/italics] off the coast of the northern islands of Natuna.

Because of these incidents, Vietnam and the Philippines have warned of growing insecurity in Southeast Asia. Besides, the oft mentioned Nine-Dash line that China uses as a basis for its claims in the waters is once again at odds with Indonesia’s claim that the line lacks an international legal basis.

Main Concern now:
One of the fundamental principles of [italics]the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)[/italics] has been to resolve regional disputes by peaceful means. But over the years, the position of ASEAN on the South China Sea disputes has weakened its image internationally and failing to resolve this issue would lead to questions being raised about its credibility as an effective regional organization.

About the dispute:
It is a dispute over territory and sovereignty over ocean areas, and the Paracels and the Spratlys – two island chains claimed in whole or in part by a number of countries.
Alongside the fully fledged islands, there are dozens of rocky outcrops, atolls, sandbanks and reefs, such as the Scarborough Shoal.

Who Claims What?
1. China:
claims by far the largest portion of territory – an area defined by the “nine-dash line” which stretches hundreds of miles south and east from its most southerly province of Hainan.

2. Vietnam:
hotly disputes China’s historical account, saying China had never claimed sovereignty over the islands before the 1940s. Vietnam says it has actively ruled over both the Paracels and the Spratlys since the 17th Century – and has the documents to prove it.

3. Philippines:
both the Philippines and China lay claim to the Scarborough Shoal (known as Huangyan Island in China) – a little more than 100 miles (160km) from the Philippines and 500 miles from China.

4. Malaysia and Brunei:
They lay claim to territory in the South China Sea that they say falls within their economic exclusion zones, as defined by UNCLOS – the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Brunei does not claim any of the disputed islands, but Malaysia claims a small number of islands in the Spratlys.

Insta Links:
Prelims Link:
1. Countries involved in the dispute.
2. What is nine dash line?
3. Disputed islands and their locations?
4. Important straits, passes and seas in the region.
5. What is UNCLOS?
6. Locate Taiwan strait and Luzon Strait.

**Mains Link:**
Write a note on South China Sea dispute.
Sources: the Hindu.

17. **In 24 hours, Palestine faces an existential threat**

**Context:**
On June 24, the UN Secretary General António Guterres told a virtual meeting of the United Nations Security Council that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at a “watershed moment”.
- The Israeli plans to annex parts of the West Bank have alarmed the Palestinians, many Israelis and the international community.

Such annexation would be “a most serious violation of international law”.

**What needs to be done now?**
He called upon the Israeli government to abandon its annexation plans and asked the Middle East Quartet (the United States, Russia, the European Union and the UN) to resume its mandated mediatory role.

**What’s the issue?**
The UN Secretary General’s alarm has been sounded in the context of the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s reported plan to annex on July 1 around 30% of the Occupied West Bank.
This will include annexation of all the existing (post-1967) settlements in addition to areas surrounding them and access roads.

**What is Annexation in the international law? Why Israel’s move is illegal?**
Under international law, annexation is forcible acquisition of territory by one state at the expense of another state.
Such an act even if sanctified by Israeli law is illegal under international law and would violate the universally acknowledged principle of the “inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force”.
- This is the accepted position of all international legal bodies including the International Court of Justice.
- Even, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) has described the annexation of occupied territory as a serious violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the Geneva Conventions.
- It is also contrary to the fundamental rule affirmed many times by the UN Security Council and the General Assembly that acquisition of territory war or by force is inadmissible.

**Where is West Bank?**
It is a landlocked territory near the Mediterranean coast of Western Asia, bordered by Jordan to the east and by the Green Line separating it and Israel on the south, west and north. The West Bank also contains a significant section of the western Dead Sea shore.

**What are the disputed settlements here? Who lives there?**
1. The West Bank was captured by Jordan after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.
2. Israel snatched it back during the Six Day War of 1967, and has occupied it ever since.
3. It has built some 130 formal settlements in the West Bank, and a similar number of smaller, informal settlements have mushroomed over the last 20-25 years.
4. Over 4 lakh Israeli settlers — many of them religious Zionists who claim a Biblical birthright over this land — now live here, along with some 26 lakh Palestinians.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Overview of the proposed West Asia Peace plan?
2. What is Six Day war?
4. Middle East quartet.
Locate the following on map:
1. Goals Heights.
2. West Bank.
4. Dead Sea.

Link: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/in-24-hours-palestine-faces-an-existentia-threat/article31948506.ece
Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

1. Group of Seven (G-7) club

Context: Calling the existing Group of Seven (G-7) club a “very outdated group of countries”, US President Donald Trump has said that he wanted to include India, Russia, South Korea, and Australia in the group.

What is G7?
The G7, originally G8, was set up in 1975 as an informal forum bringing together the leaders of the world’s leading industrial nations.
The summit gathers leaders from the European Union (EU) and the following countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

How did G7 become G8?
• Russia was formally inducted as a member in the group in 1998, which led G7 to become G8.
• However, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s condemnable act of moving Russian troops into eastern Ukraine and conquering Crimea in 2014 drew heavy criticism from the other G8 nations.
• The other nations of the group decided to suspend Russia from the G8 as a consequence of its actions and the group became G7 again in 2014.

How the G-7 summit works?
The G-7 nations meet at annual summits that are presided over by leaders of member countries on a rotational basis.
The summit is an informal gathering that lasts two days, in which leaders of member countries discuss a wide range of global issues.
The groundwork for the summit, including matters to be discussed and follow-up meetings, is done by the “sherpas”, who are generally personal representatives or members of diplomatic staff such as ambassadors.

Significance:
G7 is capable of setting the global agenda because decisions taken by these major economic powers have a real impact. Thus, decisions taken at the G7 are not legally binding, but exert strong political influence.

What criticisms have been made of the G7?
1. G7 gatherings tend to attract thousands of protesters. Many protesters claim the G7 – which has no representative from any African, Russian or Middle Eastern nation – is completely outdated.
2. Protest groups also use the worldwide platform as a stage to lobby and campaign on issues that are important to them.
3. G7 leaders are creating a wide gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ both in their countries as well as across the globe, according to a new report published by non-profit Oxfam International. As a result, they are making the fight against alleviating poverty more difficult, claimed the report.

**How can it be made more effective?**
1. Work towards implementing tax models for the rich individuals and corporations to pay their fair share of tax.
2. Consider how new and existing wealth taxes could be used as a tool to fight poverty and inequality.
3. Invest in healthcare and education and provide aid to developing countries.
4. Work towards limiting greenhouse gas emissions down to zero well before mid-century.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. G7 vs G8 vs G20.
2. Geographical location of member countries.

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the relevance of G7 countries today. What are the reforms necessary to make the grouping more effective?

Link: [https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-whats-the-g7-group-trump-says-wants-to-include-india-6436248/](https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-whats-the-g7-group-trump-says-wants-to-include-india-6436248/)

Sources: Indian Express.

2. India is all set to be UNSC's non-permanent member

**Context:** India is all set to become a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the eighth time.

**Background:**
Elections will be held on June 17 by the UN General Assembly to elect five of the ten nonpermanent members. India is the single candidate in the Asia-Pacific group and would return to the council after a decade starting January 2021.

**How are non-permanent members elected?**
Each year, the General Assembly elects five non-permanent members out of a total of 10, for a two-year term.

**Distribution of seats:** These 10 seats are distributed among the regions thus: five for African and Asian countries; one for Eastern European countries; two for Latin American and Caribbean countries; two for Western European and other countries.

**Of the five seats for Africa and Asia,** three are for Africa and two for Asia; there is an informal understanding between the two groups to reserve one for an Arab country. The Africa and Asia Pacific group takes turns every two years to put up an Arab candidate.

**Elections:**
Elections for terms beginning in even-numbered years select two African members, and one each within Eastern Europe, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Terms beginning in odd-numbered years consist of two Western European and Other members, and one each from Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Votes:**
Irrespective of whether a country is a “clean slate” candidate and has been endorsed by its group, it needs to secure the votes of two-thirds of the members present and voting at the General Assembly session (a minimum of 129 votes if all 193 member states participate).

When contested, the elections for non-permanent seats can be fraught and can go on for several rounds. In 1975, there was a contest between India and Pakistan, which went to eight rounds. Pakistan won the seat that year. In 1996, India lost a contest to Japan.

About UNSC:
What is it?
The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.

Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions; it is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.

Permanent Members: 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. These permanent members can veto any substantive Security Council resolution, including those on the admission of new member states or candidates for Secretary-General.

Proposed reforms:
Reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) encompasses five key issues:
1. categories of membership.
2. the question of the veto held by the five permanent members.
3. regional representation.
4. the size of an enlarged Council and its working methods.
5. the Security Council-General Assembly relationship.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Name the permanent members of UNSC?
2. How are non-permanent members elected?
3. Voting powers at UNSC.
4. How are non-permanent seats distributed?
5. UNGA vs UNSC.

Mains Link:
Discuss why India should be given a permanent seat at the UNSC.
Sources: the Hindu.

3. International Criminal Court (ICC)
Context: U.S. President Donald Trump has issued an executive order authorising sanctions against individuals involved in an International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation into whether U.S. forces committed war crimes in Afghanistan.

- The order authorises Secretary of State to block assets in the U.S. of ICC employees involved in the probe
- It also authorises to block entry into the U.S. of these individuals.

What’s the case?
ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda wants to investigate possible crimes committed between 2003 and 2014, including alleged mass killings of civilians by the Taliban, as well as the alleged torture of prisoners by Afghan authorities and, to a lesser extent, by U.S. forces and the CIA.

The ICC decided to investigate after prosecutors’ preliminary examination in 2017 found reasonable grounds to believe war crimes were committed in Afghanistan and that the ICC has jurisdiction.

Why the US is opposing?

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Mr. Trump has repeatedly attacked The Hague-based ICC set-up to prosecute war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. He says, the Court has jurisdiction only if a member state is unable or unwilling to prosecute atrocities itself.

Besides, the U.S. government has never been a member of the court.

About ICC:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Court Established</th>
<th>1946</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UN-Relationship</td>
<td>Official court of the U.N., commonly referred to as the &quot;World Court.&quot;</td>
<td>Independent. May receive case referrals from the UN Security Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>The Hague, The Netherlands</td>
<td>The Hague, The Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Cases</td>
<td>Contentious between parties &amp; Advisory opinions</td>
<td>Criminal prosecution of individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Matter</td>
<td>Sovereignty, boundary, &amp; maritime disputes, trade, natural resources, human rights, treaty violations, treaty interpretation, and more.</td>
<td>Genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, crimes of aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>UN-funded.</td>
<td>Assessed contribution from state parties to the Rome Statute; voluntary contributions from the U.N.; voluntary contributions from governments, international organizations, individuals, corporations and other entities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The International Criminal Court (ICC), located in The Hague, is the court of last resort for prosecution of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

It is the first permanent, treaty based, international criminal court established to help end impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community.

Its founding treaty, the Rome Statute, entered into force on July 1, 2002.

**Funding:** Although the Court’s expenses are funded primarily by States Parties, it also receives voluntary contributions from governments, international organisations, individuals, corporations and other entities.

**Composition and voting power:**

The Court’s management oversight and legislative body, the Assembly of States Parties, consists of one representative from each state party.

- Each state party has one vote and “every effort” has to be made to reach decisions by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, decisions are made by vote.
- The Assembly is presided over by a president and two vice-presidents, who are elected by the members to three-year terms.

**Criticisms:**

- **It does not have the capacity to arrest suspects** and depends on member states for their cooperation.
- Critics of the Court argue that there are insufficient checks and balances on the authority of the ICC prosecutor and judges and insufficient protection against politicized prosecutions or other abuses.
- The ICC has been accused of bias and as being a tool of Western imperialism, only punishing leaders from small, weak states while ignoring crimes committed by richer and more powerful states.
- **ICC cannot mount successful cases without state cooperation** is problematic for several reasons. It means that the ICC acts inconsistently in its selection of cases, is prevented from taking on hard cases and loses legitimacy.

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**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**

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4. IAEA begins meet over Iran’s n-programme

The Context:
The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has expressed “serious concern” about Iran’s failure to cooperate with its probe into undeclared nuclear material in the country.

Observations made by IAEA:
1. Iran had failed to give its inspectors access to two sites the agency wanted to visit.
2. Iran didn’t answer questions about the use of possible undeclared nuclear material in the early 2000s and what had happened to it since.
3. There is a big jump in Iran’s nuclear fuel stockpile, far above the levels permitted under the 2015 pact.
4. Iran has reduced its compliance with the nuclear deal in response to sweeping U.S. sanctions.

What next?
If Iran fails to answer the IAEA’s questions, the issue could be sent up to the U.N. Security Council, which has previously imposed sanctions on Iran. However, permanent members of the security council Russia and China have publicly played down the significance of Iran’s past nuclear work.

Why this oversight is necessary?
The suspected work on a uranium metal disk, which could be used as a nuclear weapon component, and on neutrons—which are used to trigger a nuclear implosion—point to Iranian work on a neutron initiator for a nuclear weapons test or nuclear weapons device.

Iran’s stockpile of enriched uranium has grown by around 50% since February to 1,572 kilograms. That puts Iran’s stockpile of the nuclear fuel far above the limit of 202.8 kilograms stipulated in the 2015 nuclear accord. With 1,000 kilograms of low-enriched uranium, Iran would likely have enough material to fuel a single bomb once the material is further enriched, a process some experts believe could take as little as three months.

Can Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) be reinstated?
It is clear that the 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal cannot simply be reinstated. Not only has Iran been in breach of key JCPOA commitments from day one of the agreement, it has now made significant progress toward nuclear bomb capabilities over the last two years since openly violating the agreement’s enrichment restrictions.

A simple return to the JCPOA, with its sunset clauses beginning to lift almost all restrictions on enrichment a bare three years from now, would all but guarantee full Iranian military nuclear capability in a very short period of time.

What was the Iran nuclear deal?
Iran agreed to rein in its nuclear programme in a 2015 deal struck with the US, UK, Russia, China, France and Germany.
Under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA) Tehran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water, all key components for nuclear weapons.

Sources: the Hindu.
The JCPOA established the Joint Commission, with the negotiating parties all represented, to monitor implementation of the agreement.

**Why has US pulled out of the deal now?**

Trump and opponents to the deal say it is flawed because it gives Iran access to billions of dollars but does not address Iran’s support for groups the U.S. considers terrorists, like Hamas and Hezbollah. They note it also doesn’t curb Iran’s development of ballistic missiles and that the deal phases out by 2030. They say Iran has lied about its nuclear program in the past.

**About IAEA:**

Set up as the world’s “Atoms for Peace” organization in 1957 within the United Nations family. Reports to both the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council. Headquarters in Vienna, Austria.

**Functions:**

1. Works with its Member States and multiple partners worldwide to promote the safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear technologies.
2. Seeks to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and to inhibit its use for any military purpose, including nuclear weapons.

**Board of Governors:**

- 22 member states (must represent a stipulated geographic diversity) — elected by the General Conference (11 members every year) – 2 year term.
- At least 10 member states — nominated by the outgoing Board.
- Board members each receive one vote.
- Recommendations to the General Conference on IAEA activities and budget.
- Responsible for publishing IAEA standards.
- Responsible for making most of the policy of the IAEA.
- Appoints the Director General subject to General Conference approval.

**Programs:**

1. Program of Action for Cancer Therapy (PACT).
2. Human Health Program.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**

1. What is JCPOA? Signatories.
2. Iran and its neighbours.
3. What is IAEA? Relation with the UN.
4. Members of IAEA.
5. Programs of IAEA.
7. What is Uranium Enrichment?

**Mains Link:**

Write a note on JCPOA.

Link: [https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/iaea-begins-meet-over-irans-n-programme/article31836260.ece](https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/iaea-begins-meet-over-irans-n-programme/article31836260.ece)

Sources: the Hindu.

**5. Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID)**

**Why in News?**
China has released genome sequencing data for the coronavirus responsible for a recent outbreak in Beijing. It has shared this data with **WHO and GISAID**.

**What the data suggest?**
1. At least one of the strains tied to the Chinese capital’s largest wholesale food market had reportedly shown similarities to a strain found in Europe.
2. Local confirmed infections had been recorded for five consecutive days in two areas, apparently referencing Beijing and the neighbouring province of Hebei.

**Background:**
Beijing has seen 183 confirmed cases since the outbreak last week at the Xinfadi market and the situation for prevention remains very grave.

**What is genomic sequencing?**
Genomic sequencing is a technique that allows us to read and interpret genetic information found within DNA or RNA.

**Why is it important to understand the genomic sequence of COVID-19?**
The SARS-CoV2 genome, as it is formally known, has about 30,000 base pairs, somewhat like a long string with 30,000 places where each one of these occupy one of four chemicals called nucleotides.
- This long string, with its unique combination of nucleotides, is what uniquely identifies the virus and is called its genomic sequence.
- A look at virus genome sequences from patient samples that test positive for COVID-19 helps researchers to understand how the virus is evolving as it spreads. So far, there are over 1,000 COVID-19 genomes that have been published worldwide.

Therefore, sequencing is necessary because:
1. It helps track the transmission route of the virus globally.
2. It can determine how quickly the virus is adapting as it spreads.
3. It identifies targets to therapies.
4. It is required to understand the role of co-infection.

**What is GISAID?**
The GISAID platform was launched on the occasion of the Sixty-first World Health Assembly in May 2008. GISAID is a global science initiative and primary source for genomic data of influenza viruses and and the novel coronavirus responsible for COVID-19.
- In 2010 the Federal Republic of Germany became the official host of the GISAID platform and EpiFlu™ database providing sustainability of the platform and stability through its public-private-partnership with the GISAID Initiative to this day.
- In 2013 the European Commission recognized GISAID as a research organization and partner in the PREDEMICS consortium, a project on the Preparedness, Prediction and the Prevention of Emerging Zoonotic Viruses with Pandemic Potential using multidisciplinary approaches.

**Key role:**
The Initiative ensures that **open access to data in GISAID is provided free-of-charge to all individuals** that agreed to identify themselves and agreed to uphold the GISAID sharing mechanism governed through its Database Access Agreement.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. What is Genome Sequencing?
2. How it works?
3. RNA vs DNA.
4. Who administers GISAID.

**Mains Link:**
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InsightsIAS
What is genome sequencing? How it helps prevent the spread of COVID 19?
Sources: the Hindu.

6. Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (EAG)

Context:
India attended the virtual 32nd special Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (EAG) plenary meeting, under the aegis of the Financial Action Task Force.

What is EAG?
The EAG is a regional body comprising nine countries: India, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus.
Established in 2004, it is an associate member of the FATF.

• The founding conference was held in Moscow on October 6, 2004 and was attended by six founding countries: Belarus, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.

• In 2005 and 2010 the group was expanded to include Uzbekistan (2005), Turkmenistan (2010) and India (2010).

• The Agreement on the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism was signed in Moscow in June 2011, granting the EAG the status of a regional intergovernmental organization.

The main tasks of the EAG:
1. Assisting member-states in implementing the 40 FATF anti-money laundering Recommendations and the 9 Special FATF Recommendations on combating terrorist financing (FATF 40+9 Recommendations).
2. Developing and conducting joint activities aimed at combating money laundering and terrorist financing.
3. Implementing a program of mutual evaluations of member-states based on the FATF 40+9 Recommendations, including assessment of the effectiveness of legislative and other measures adopted in the sphere of AML/CFT efforts.
4. Coordinating international cooperation and technical assistance programs with specialized international organizations, bodies, and interested states.
5. Analyzing money laundering and terrorist financing trends (typologies) and exchanging best practices of combating such crimes taking into account regional specifics.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is EAG?
2. When was it established and who are its founding members?
3. What is FATF?
4. Black vs Grey list?
5. Members of EAG vs FATF.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. China to join UN arms trade treaty

Context:
National People’s Congress, China’s top legislative body, has voted to join the global treaty to regulate conventional arms sales at a time when the country has been cornered over its handling of pandemic and curbing of Hong Kong’s autonomy.
This comes after US President Donald Trump announced plans last year to pull the United States out of the agreement — which entered into force in 2014.

**What does the Arms Trade Treaty seek to do?**
It has the ambitious aim of responding to international concern that the $70 billion a year trade in conventional weapons leaves a trail of atrocities in its wake.

The treaty calls for the **international sale of weapons to be linked to the human rights records of buyers.** It requires countries to establish **regulations for selling conventional weapons.**

- It calls for potential arms deals to be evaluated in order to determine whether they might enable buyers to carry out genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes.
- The treaty also seeks to **prevent conventional military weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists or organized criminal groups,** and to stop deals that would violate UN arms embargos.

**What types of conventional weapons deals does the Arms Trade Treaty seek to regulate?**
Conventional weapons covered by the UN Arms Trade Treaty include tanks and other armored combat vehicles, artillery, attack helicopters, naval warships, missiles and missile launchers, and small arms.

It also establishes **common international standards for the regulation of the international trade in ammunition, weapons parts, and arms components.**

The treaty **does not regulate the domestic sale or use of weapons in any country.** It also recognizes the legitimacy of the arms trade to enable states to provide for their own security.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**

1. What’s covered under the treaty?
2. When it came into force?
3. How many signatories?
4. Has India joined the treaty?
5. Who countries have pulled away from the treaty?

**Sources:** the Hindu.

**8. Pakistan to remain on FATF grey list**

**Context:**
Pakistan is likely to remain on the **grey list of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** for failing to comply with the global terrorist financing watchdog’s deadline to prosecute and penalise terrorist financing in the country.

**What’s the issue?**
At an **FATF meeting in February,** Islamabad had been told that ‘all deadlines’ had expired and if they didn’t prosecute and penalise terrorist financing by June, the watchdog would take action.

At the **Paris plenary too,** the FATF had expressed serious concerns over Pakistan’s failure to complete its 27-point action plan in line with the agreed timelines – which ended in September 2019.

**Implications:**

- With Pakistan’s continuation in the ‘Grey List’, it will be difficult for the country to get financial aid from the IMF, the World Bank, the ADB and the European Union.
- This will further enhance problems for the nation which is in a precarious economic situation.
- Also, there is **every possibility that the global body may put the country in the ‘Black List’.**

**About FATF:**
It is an inter- governmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7.
Its **Secretariat is located at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) headquarters in Paris.**

**Member Countries:** There are 39 member of FATF, representing most financial centres around the world. This includes 2 regional organisations- GCC and EC. The FATF Plenary is the decision making body of the FATF. It meets three times per year.
What is blacklist and grey list?

**Black List:** Countries known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs) are put in the blacklist. These countries support terror funding and money laundering activities. The FATF revises the blacklist regularly, adding or deleting entries.

**Grey List:** Countries that are considered safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering are put in the FATF grey list. This inclusion serves as a warning to the country that it may enter the blacklist.

**Insta Links:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. G7 vs G8 vs G20.
2. Black vs Grey list.
3. Are FATF’s decisions binding on member countries?
4. Who heads the FATF?
5. Where is its secretariat?

**Mains Link:**
What is the mandate and objectives of Financial Action Task Force? Discuss its importance for India – Pakistan relations.


Sources: the Hindu.
GENERAL STUDIES – 3

Topics: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

1. Why Moody’s downgraded India’s rating?

Context: Moody’s Investors Service (“Moody’s”) has downgraded the Government of India’s foreign-currency and local-currency long-term issuer ratings to “Baa3” from “Baa2”. It stated that the outlook remained “negative”.

Implications:
The latest downgrade reduces India to the lowest investment grade of ratings and brings Moody’s ratings for the country in line with the other two main rating agencies in the world — Standard & Poor’s (S&P) and Fitch. A rating downgrade means that bonds issued by the Indian governments are now “riskier” than before, because weaker economic growth and worsening fiscal health undermine a government’s ability to pay back. When India’s sovereign rating is downgraded, it becomes costlier for the Indian government as well as all Indian companies to raise funds because now the world sees such debt as a riskier proposition.

There are four main reasons why Moody’s has taken the decision:
1. Weak implementation of economic reforms since 2017.
2. Relatively low economic growth over a sustained period.
3. A significant deterioration in the fiscal position of governments (central and state).
4. And the rising stress in India’s financial sector.

What does “negative” outlook mean?
“The negative outlook reflects dominant, mutually-reinforcing, downside risks from deeper stresses in the economy and financial system that could lead to a more severe and prolonged erosion in fiscal strength than Moody’s currently projects”.

In particular, Moody’s has highlighted persistent structural challenges to fast economic growth such as “weak infrastructure, rigidities in labor, land and product markets, and rising financial sector risks”. In other words, a “negative” implies India could be rated down further.

What is Moody’s outlook on economic growth, jobs and per capita income?
Moody’s expects India’s real GDP to contract by 4.0% in the current financial year. Thereafter it expects a sharp recovery in 2021-22. But over the longer term, it states “growth rates are likely to be materially lower than in the past”.

Key observations made by Moody’s:
More than two years ago, in November 2017, Moody’s had upgraded India’s rating to “Baa2” with a “stable” outlook. At that time, it expected that “effective implementation of key reforms would strengthen the sovereign’s credit profile” through a gradual but persistent improvement in economic, institutional and fiscal strength.

But those hopes were belied. Since that upgrade in 2017, implementation of reforms has been “relatively weak and has not resulted in material credit improvements, indicating limited policy effectiveness,” according to Moody’s.

The low effectiveness of policy and the resulting loss of growth momentum is evidenced in:

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• The sharp deceleration in India’s GDP growth rates- provisional estimates for 2019-20 were pegged at 4.2% — the lowest annual growth in a decade.
• Worsening government (both Centre and state-level) finances.
• Each year, the central government has failed to meet its fiscal deficit (essentially the total borrowings from the market) target. This has led to a steady accretion of total government debt.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link: 1. Comparison of credit rating scales by various agencies. 2. What is GDP? 3. What is a negative outlook?
Mains Link: What Moody’s downgrade means for India? How it should tackle the situation? Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=G6N7FFH3E.1&imageview=0.
Sources: the Hindu.

2. Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)

What is PLFS?
PLFS is India’s first computer-based survey which gives estimates of key employment and unemployment indicators like the labour force participation rate, worker population ratio, proportion unemployed and unemployment rate in rural households annually and on a quarterly basis for the urban households.
• The PLFS also gives the distribution of educated and unemployed people, which in turn can be used as a basis for skilling of youth to make them more employable by industry.
• The survey was launched in 2017 and the first annual report was released (July 2017-June 2018), covering both rural and urban areas, in May 2019.

Definitions:
Labour Force Participation Rate: It is the percentage of people in the labour force (those who are working or seeking or available for work) in the population.
Worker Population Ratio is the percentage of employed people.
Unemployment rate shows the percentage of people unemployed among the labour force.
Unemployed: A person who is unable to get work for even an hour in the last seven days despite seeking employment is considered unemployed.

Key findings:
1. India’s unemployment rate fell between July 2018 and June 2019 to 5.8% from 6.1% during the same period of 2017-18, even as the labour force participation rate rose to 37.5% from 36.9%.
2. The worker population ratio also increased, to 35.3% as against 34.7% in the 2017-18.
3. Urban unemployment rate reduced to 7.7% in 2018-19 from 7.8% and in rural India to 5% from 5.3%.
4. Female participation rate improved in both urban and rural India during the period under review, going up to 18.6% in 2018-19 from 17.5% the year before.

Challenges ahead:
To retain the falling trend in unemployment rate in 2019-20, which has witnessed a long nationwide lockdown between March and June to prevent the spread of Covid-19, resulting in job losses across sectors.
According to monthly data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, unemployment rate in India shot up significantly from 7.87% in June 2019 to 23.48% in May 2020.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link: Please go through data and numbers mentioned in the above article. For eg- unemployment rate in urban areas, rural areas, changes etc.
Mains Link:
Critically analyze the state of unemployment and the political discourse around it in India.
Sources: the Hindu.

3. Shapes of economic recovery

Context: Most economists are unanimous that in the current financial year, India’s economy will contract.
- The difference of opinion is only about the extent of this contraction.
- The range varies between minus 4% to minus 14%.
Many economists are of the opinion that after hitting rock bottom this year, the economy will start its recovery in the next financial year (2021-22).

What should be the ideal shape of the economic recovery for India?
Given the weakness of the economy going into the Covid crisis as well as the less than adequate fiscal stimulus, India is likely to end up with an “elongated U-shape” recovery.

Shapes:
The Z-shaped recovery is the most optimistic scenario in which the economy quickly rises like a phoenix after a crash. It more than makes up for lost ground (think revenge-buying after the lockdowns are lifted) before settling back to the normal trend-line, thus forming a Z-shaped chart.

In V-shaped recovery the economy quickly recoups lost ground and gets back to the normal growth trend-line.

A U-shaped recovery is a scenario in which the economy, after falling, struggles and muddles around a low growth rate for some time, before rising gradually to usual levels.

A W-shaped recovery is a dangerous creature — growth falls and rises, but falls again before recovering yet again, thus forming a W-like chart.

The L-shaped recovery is the worst-case scenario, in which growth after falling, stagnates at low levels and does not recover for a long, long time.
The J-shaped recovery is a somewhat unrealistic scenario, in which growth rises sharply from the lows much higher than the trend-line and stays there.

Other shapes:
1. There is also the Swoosh shaped recovery, similar to the Nike logo — in between the V-shape and the U-shape. Here, after falling, growth starts recovering quickly but then, slowed down by obstacles, moves gradually back to the trend-line.
2. There is also the Inverted square root shaped recovery. Financier George Soros, who coined this term years ago, explained that while there could a rebound from the bottom, the growth slows and settles a step down.

Factors responsible:
The shape of economic recovery is determined by both the speed and direction of GDP prints. This depends on multiple factors including fiscal and monetary measures, consumer incomes and sentiment.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Have a brief overview of various curves mentioned above.
Sources: the Hindu.

4. Rising forex reserves and its importance
Context: Amid pandemic, India’s foreign exchange reserves are rising and are slated to hit the $500 billion mark soon.
In the month of May, forex reserves jumped by $12.4 billion to an all-time high of $493.48 billion (around Rs 37.30 lakh crore) for the week ended May 29.

Important fact for Prelims:
The level of foreign exchange reserves has steadily increased by 8,400 per cent from $5.8 billion as of March 1991 to the current level.

What are forex reserves?
Forex reserves are external assets in the form of gold, SDRs (special drawing rights of the IMF) and foreign currency assets (capital inflows to the capital markets, FDI and external commercial borrowings) accumulated by India and controlled by the Reserve Bank of India.

Why they are important?
1. Official foreign exchange reserves are held in support of a range of objectives like supporting and maintaining confidence in the policies for monetary and exchange rate management including the capacity to intervene in support of the national or union currency.
2. It will also limit external vulnerability by maintaining foreign currency liquidity to absorb shocks during times of crisis or when access to borrowing is curtailed.

Why are forex reserves rising despite the slowdown in the economy?
Rise in investment in foreign portfolio investors in Indian stocks and foreign direct investments (FDIs).
Fall in crude oil prices has brought down the oil import bill, saving the precious foreign exchange.
Overseas remittances and foreign travels have fallen steeply – down 61 per cent in April from $12.87 billion.

What’s the significance of rising forex reserves?
The rising forex reserves give a lot of comfort to the government and the Reserve Bank of India in managing India’s external and internal financial issues at a time when the economic growth is set to contract by 1.5 per cent in 2020-21. It’s a big cushion in the event of any crisis on the economic front and enough to cover the import bill of the country for a year. The rising reserves have also helped the rupee to strengthen against the dollar. Reserves will provide a level of confidence to markets that a country can meet its external obligations, demonstrate the backing of domestic currency by external assets, assist the government in meeting its foreign exchange needs and external debt obligations and maintain a reserve for national disasters or emergencies.

Where are India’s forex reserves kept?
The RBI Act, 1934 provides the overarching legal framework for deployment of reserves in different foreign currency assets and gold within the broad parameters of currencies, instruments, issuers and counterparties. As much as 64 per cent of the foreign currency reserves is held in the securities like Treasury bills of foreign countries, mainly the US. 28 per cent is deposited in foreign central banks. 7.4 per cent is also deposited in commercial banks abroad.

India also held 653.01 tonnes of gold as of March 2020, with 360.71 tonnes being held overseas in safe custody with the Bank of England and the Bank for International Settlements, while the remaining gold is held domestically.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Components of forex reserves?
2. Who handles it?
3. Does RBI earn any returns on them?
4. Trends in forex reserves over the last decade.

Mains Link:
Discuss how rising forex reserves are beneficial for India’s economy.
Sources: Indian Express.

5. Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan launched

Context:
Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the mega 'Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan' aimed to boost livelihood opportunities in rural India amid the ongoing Covid-19 crisis.

Highlights of the scheme:
- The first priority of the scheme is to meet the immediate requirement of workers who have gone back to their districts by providing them with livelihood opportunities.
- The focus is also on rural citizens.
- It is a focused campaign of 125 days across 116 districts in six states to work in mission mode.
- Public works worth 50,000 crore rupees to be carried out under the scheme.
- It includes focused implementation of 25 different types of work to provide employment and to create durable infrastructure.
- The villages will join this programme through the common service centres and Krishi Vigyan Kendras.

Implementation of the scheme:
The scheme will be a coordinated effort by 12 different ministries including rural development, Panchayati Raj, Road transport and highways, mines, drinking water and sanitation, environment, railways, petroleum and natural gas, new and renewable energy, border Roads, Telecom and agriculture.
Why these 6 districts were chosen?
Post-COVID-19 lockdown, maximum migrant workers have returned to these six states.
- These districts are estimated to cover about 2/3 of such migrant workers.
- The chosen districts include 27 aspirational districts.

Significance of the scheme:
The jobs selected in the campaign will enable proper utilisation of the strength and skill of people. It will also enable the government to convert Covid crisis into an opportunity.
The campaign will contribute towards provision of modern facilities, such as internet connectivity, laying of optic fibre cables, to increase internet speed in villages, so that children in villages are able to study and learn like those in cities.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Districts covered under the scheme.
2. What are aspirational districts?
3. Types of works covered under the scheme.
4. What are CSCs?
5. Various ministries involved in the implementation of the scheme.

Mains Link:
Discuss the features and significance of the scheme.
Sources: the Hindu.

6. International Comparison Program

Context:
The World Bank has released new Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) for reference year 2017, under International Comparison Program (ICP), that adjust for differences in the cost of living across economies of the World.
Globally 176 economies participated in 2017 cycle of ICP.

What is ICP?
International Comparison Program (ICP) is the largest worldwide data-collection initiative, under the guidance of UN Statistical Commission (UNSC).
- The goal is of producing Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) which are vital for converting measures of economic activities to be comparable across economies.
- Along with the PPPs, the ICP also produces Price Level Indices (PLI) and other regionally comparable aggregates of GDP expenditure.
- The next ICP comparison will be conducted for reference year 2021.

India and the ICP:
- India has participated in almost all ICP rounds since its inception in 1970.
- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation is National Implementing Agency (NIA) for India, which has the responsibility of planning, coordinating and implementing national ICP activities.
- India has also been a co-Chair of the ICP Governing Board along with Statistics Austria for the ICP 2017 cycle.

Worldwide status:
- Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) of Indian Rupee per US$ at Gross Domestic Product (GDP) level is now 20.65 in 2017 from 15.55 in 2011.
- Exchange Rate of US Dollar to Indian Rupee is now 65.12 from 46.67 during same period.
- Price Level Index (PLI) — the ratio of a PPP to its corresponding market exchange rate—is used to compare the price levels of economies, of India is 47.55 in 2017 from 42.99 in 2011.

India’s position:
1. In 2017, India retained and consolidated its global position, as the third largest economy, accounted for 6.7 percent ($8,051 billion out of World total of $119,547 billion) of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in terms of PPPs.
2. China (16.4%) and United States (16.3%), respectively.
3. India is also third largest economy in terms of its PPP-based share in global Actual Individual Consumption and Global Gross Capital Formation.

REGIONAL STATUS: ASIA-PACIFIC REGION:
1. In 2017, India retained its regional position, as the second largest economy, accounted for 20.83 % of Regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in terms of PPPs.
2. China was at 50.76% (first) and Indonesia at 7.49% (third).
3. India is also second largest economy in terms of its PPP-based share in regional Actual Individual Consumption and regional Gross Capital Formation.
4. Among 22 participating economies in Asia-Pacific region, the Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) of Indian Rupee per Hong Kong Dollar (HK$) at Gross Domestic Product (GDP) level is now at 3.43 in 2017 from 2.97 in 2011.
5. The Exchange Rate of Hong Kong Dollar to Indian Rupee is now at 8.36 from 6.00 during same period.

What is PPP?
The rate at which the currency of one country would have to be converted into that of another country to buy the same amount of goods and services in each country.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is ICP? Who conducts it?
2. Co-Chair of the ICP Governing Board for the ICP 2017 cycle.
3. UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) - composition and functions.
4. What is PPP?
5. What is PLI?
6. India’s performance at the global and regional level.
7. Comparison with previous year performances.

Mains Link:
Comment on India’s performance in the 2017 International Comparison Program.
Sources: pib.

Topics: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

1. Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF)

Context: In an effort to give a push to digital payments across the country, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is setting up a Payment Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF) of Rs 500 crore.

All you need to know about the fund:
Objective: This fund has been created to encourage acquirers to deploy point of sale (PoS) infrastructure, both physical and digital, in tier-3 to tier-6 centres and north eastern states.
Contributions to the fund: The RBI has made an initial contribution of Rs 250 crore covering half the fund. The remaining will come from the card issuing banks and card networks operating in the country.
Management: The fund will be governed through an advisory council but it will be managed and administered by the RBI.

Need for and Significance:
Over the years, payments ecosystem in the country has evolved with a wide range of options such as bank accounts, mobile phones, cards, etc. To provide further fillip to digitisation of payment systems, it is necessary to give impetus to acceptance infrastructure across the country, more so in underserved areas. The fund is also in line with the measures proposed by the vision document on payment and settlement systems in India 2019-2021. The enhanced ability of PoS infrastructure is supposed to reduce demand of cash over time. By 2021, there will be around 5 million active PoS by 2021.

Acceptance Development Fund:
In a similar move, last year, the RBI had also proposed to set up an Acceptance Development Fund which will be used to develop card acceptance infrastructure across small towns and cities. The Fund will be used to ensure growth of card acceptance infrastructure such as swipe machines across the country particularly in Tier III and Tier VI cities.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. PIDF- contributions, management and objectives.
2. RBI- governors and Deputy governors- tenure and appointment.
3. What are POS devices?
4. Who manages ATM network in India?
5. What is opportunity cost?
Sources: the Hindu.

2. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code
Context: The government promulgated an ordinance to amend the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) whereby fresh insolvency proceedings will not be initiated for at least six months starting from March 25 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Default on repayments from March 25, the day when the nationwide lockdown began to curb COVID-19 infections, would not be considered for initiating insolvency the proceedings for at least six months.

Insolvency proceedings would not be initiated for “any default arising on or after March 25, 2020 for a period of six months or such further period, not exceeding one year from such date, as may be notified in this behalf”.

“No application shall ever be filed for initiation of corporate insolvency resolution process of a corporate debtor for the said default occurring during the said period,”

The ordinance suspends sections 7, 9 and 10 on grounds that:
1. the pandemic has created uncertainty and stress for business for reasons beyond their control
2. the nationwide lockdown has added to disruption of normal business operations
3. in such circumstances it would be difficult to find adequate number of resolution applicants for a distressed/defaulting business

The suspension will also curb operational creditors, such as vendors and suppliers, from filing insolvency proceedings against corporate debtors. It will also block corporate debtors from self-filing in order to restructure debt.

Background:
Section 7, 9 and 10 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 allow for insolvency filings by financial creditors, operational creditors and the corporate debtor itself.
**Implications:**
While the ordinance is intended to provide respite to the corporate debtor, taking away recourse under IBC will only mean ballooning of the liabilities without resolution. Certain provisions in the amendment can spring unwarranted consequences and open up the possibility of gross misuse of the leeway by wilful defaulters and fraudulent promoters. Suspending Section 10 of the Code will also hurt businesses stuck in the vicious cycle of debt and wanting to exit.

**What is insolvency and bankruptcy?**
**Insolvency** is a situation where individuals or companies are unable to repay their outstanding debt. **Bankruptcy**, on the other hand, is a situation whereby a court of competent jurisdiction has declared a person or other entity insolvent, having passed appropriate orders to resolve it and protect the rights of the creditors. It is a legal declaration of one’s inability to pay off debts.

**About the IBC:**
The IBC was **enacted in 2016**, replacing a host of laws, with the aim to **streamline and speed up the resolution process of failed businesses**. The Code also consolidates provisions of the current legislative framework to form a **common forum for debtors and creditors of all classes to resolve insolvency**. The code stipulates that the **resolution process of a stressed company will have to be completed in a maximum of 270 days**.

**When does the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) apply?**
In March this year, the government raised the **threshold for invoking insolvency under the IBC to Rs 1 crore from Rs 1 lakh** with a view to prevent triggering of such proceedings against small and medium enterprises that are facing currently the heat of coronavirus pandemic.

The Code creates various institutions to facilitate resolution of insolvency. These are as follows:
**Insolvency Professionals:** A specialised cadre of licensed professionals is proposed to be created. These professionals will administer the resolution process, manage the assets of the debtor, and provide information for creditors to assist them in decision making.
**Insolvency Professional Agencies:** The insolvency professionals will be registered with insolvency professional agencies. The agencies conduct examinations to certify the insolvency professionals and enforce a code of conduct for their performance.
**Information Utilities:** Creditors will report financial information of the debt owed to them by the debtor. Such information will include records of debt, liabilities and defaults.
**Adjudicating authorities:** The proceedings of the resolution process will be adjudicated by the National Companies Law Tribunal (NCLT), for companies; and the Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT), for individuals. The duties of the authorities will include approval to initiate the resolution process, appoint the insolvency professional, and approve the final decision of creditors.
**Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board:** The Board will regulate insolvency professionals, insolvency professional agencies and information utilities set up under the Code. The Board will consist of representatives of Reserve Bank of India, and the Ministries of Finance, Corporate Affairs and Law.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. What is insolvency and bankruptcy?
2. Various institutions established under the IBC code.
3. NCLT- composition and functions.
4. What are debt recovery tribunals?
5. Sections 7, 9 and 10 of IBC.

**Mains Link:**
Discuss how suspension of initiation of fresh insolvency proceedings will help shield companies impacted by the outbreak of Covid-19.
Sources: the Hindu.
3. What is a rights issue?

Why in News?
Many companies including Reliance Industries Limited, Mahindra finance, Tata Power, Shriram Transport Finance among others plan to raise funds (aggregating to over Rs 10,000 crore) through rights issue amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

What is rights issue?
It is an offering of shares made to existing shareholders in proportion to their existing shareholding.
- Companies often offer shares in a rights issue at a discount on the market price.
- Rights issues are used by companies seeking to raise capital without increasing debt.
- Shareholders are not obliged to purchase shares offered in a rights issue.

Why are companies going for rights issue in current times?
For a rights issue, there is no requirement of shareholders’ meeting and an approval from the board of directors is sufficient and adequate. Therefore, the turnaround time for raising this capital is short and is much suited for the current situation unlike other forms that require shareholders’ approval and may take some time to fructify.
Thus the rights issue are a more efficient mechanism of raising capital.

What were the temporary relaxations provided in the wake of Covid-19 by SEBI?
Sebi reduced the eligibility requirement of average market capitalisation of public shareholding from Rs 250 crore to Rs 100 crore for a fast track rights issuance.
It also reduced the minimum subscription requirement from 90 per cent to 75 per cent of the issue size.
Also, listed entities raising funds upto Rs 25 crores (erstwhile limit was Rs 10 crores) through a rights issue are now not required to file draft offer document with SEBI.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. SEBI- composition and important functions.
2. What is rights issue?
3. Who can avail it?
4. How is it different from conventional shares?
Sources: the Hindu.

4. RBI proposes comprehensive framework for sale of loans

Context: RBI has released draft Framework for ‘Sale of Loan Exposures’.
The move is aimed at building a robust secondary market for bank loans that could ensure proper price discovery and can be used as an indicator for impending stress.

What are loan sales?
Loan sales may be resorted to by lenders for any reasons ranging from strategic sales to rebalance their exposures or as a means to achieve resolution of stressed assets by extinguishing the exposures.

Highlights of the draft:
1. Standard assets would be allowed to be sold by lenders through assignment, novation or a loan participation contract (either funded participation or risk participation).
2. Stressed assets would be allowed to be sold only through assignment or novation only. They may be sold to any entity that is permitted to take on loan exposures by its statutory or regulatory framework.
3. The draft lays down norms for sale of NPAs to Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) also buy back of NPAs in case the ARCs manage to turn them into standard assets.
4. The draft also proposes to do away with the requirement of Minimum Retention Requirement (MRR) for sale of loans by lenders.

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Relevance:
- These guidelines will be applicable to commercial banks, all financial institutions, non-banking finance companies and small finance banks.
- The directions will be applicable to all loan sales, including sale of loans to special purpose entities for the purpose of securitisation.

Significance of these guidelines:
A dynamic secondary market for bank loans will ensure proper discovery of credit risk pricing associated with each exposure, and will be useful as a leading indicator for impending stress, if any, provided that the volumes are sufficiently large.
Link: https://www.thehindu.com/business/rbi-moots-comprehensive-norms-for-sale-of-loans/article31781755.ece
Sources: the Hindu.

5. Housing Finance Companies
Context:
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed stringent norms for housing finance companies.

Proposed norms include:
1. At least 50% of net assets should be in the nature of ‘qualifying assets’ for HFCs, of which at least 75% should be towards individual housing loans.
2. Such HFCs which do not fulfil the criteria will be treated as NBFC – Investment and Credit Companies (NBFC-ICCs) and will be required to approach the RBI for conversion of their Certificate of Registration from HFC to NBFC-ICC.
3. The NBFC-ICCs which want to continue as HFCs would have to follow a roadmap to make 75% of their assets individual housing loans.
4. The target has been set at 60% by March 31, 2022, 70% by March 31, 2023, and 75% by March 31, 2024.
5. It has also proposed a minimum net-owned fund (NOF) of ₹20 crore as compared to ₹10 crore now. Existing HFCs would have to reach ₹15 crore within a year and ₹20 crore within two years.

What are qualifying assets?
The RBI defined ‘qualifying assets’ as loans to individuals or a group of individuals, including co-operative societies, for construction/purchase of new dwelling units, loans to individuals for renovation of existing dwelling units, lending to builders for construction of residential dwelling units.

Regulatory oversight:
- A housing finance company is considered a non-banking financial company (NBFC) under the RBI’s regulations.
- A company is treated as an NBFC if its financial assets are more than 50% of its total assets and income from financial assets is more than 50% of the gross income.

Link: https://www.thehindu.com/business/Industry/rbi-to-tighten-rules-for-home-finance-firms/article31854231.ece#
Sources: the Hindu.

6. Urban, multi-State cooperative banks to come under RBI supervision
Context:
To ensure that depositors are protected, the Centre has decided to bring all urban and multi-State cooperative banks under the direct supervision of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The Union Cabinet has approved an ordinance to this effect.
How were these banks regulated so far?
Currently, these banks come under dual regulation of the RBI and the Registrar of Co-operative Societies.

- The role of registrar of cooperative societies includes incorporation, registration, management, audit, supersession of board and liquidation.
- RBI is responsible for regulatory functions such maintaining cash reserve and capital adequacy, among others.

Co-operative banks are registered under the States Cooperative Societies Act. They come under the regulatory ambit of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) under two laws, namely, the Banking Regulations Act, 1949, and the Banking Laws (Co-operative Societies) Act, 1955.

What necessitated this?
This comes after several instances of fraud and serious financial irregularities, including the major scam at the Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank last year.
In September, the RBI was forced to supercede the PMC Bank’s board and impose strict restrictions.

Implications of the latest move:
Empower the RBI to regulate all urban and multi-state co-operative banks on the lines of commercial banks. It will also provide more security to depositors.

- There are 1482 urban co-operatives banks and 58 multi-state co-operative banks.
- These banks have a depositor base of 8.6 crores, who have saved a huge amount of Rs 4.84 lakh crore with these banks.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What are cooperative banks?
2. How they are regulated?
3. What is dual regulation?
4. Provisions under which these banks are constituted and regulated?

Sources: the Hindu.

7. Consolidated notification on MSME classification and registration

The Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Ministry has issued consolidated notification for classification and registration of MSMEs to be effected from July 1. This notification would supersede all earlier notifications with regard to classification or registration of MSMEs.

As per the latest notification:
1. An MSME would hereafter been referred to as Udyam and the registration process as Udyam Registration.
2. The Registration can be filed online based on self-declaration. Uploading of documents, papers or certificate as proof would not be necessary henceforth.
3. The basic criteria for MSME classification would be on investment in plant, machinery and equipment and turnover.
4. Export of goods or services or both would be excluded while calculating the turnover of any enterprise and investment calculation linked to the IT return of the previous year.
5. Champions Control Room across the country have been made legally responsible for facilitating entrepreneurs in registration and thereafter.

As per the latest classification:
1. Micro enterprises would be those with investments not exceeding Rs one crore and turnover of Rs 5 crore.
2. Small enterprises would be those with investment up to Rs 10 crore and turnover of up to Rs 50 crore.
3. Medium enterprises - as those with investments not exceeding Rs 50 crore and turnover of Rs 250 crore.

**Significance and implications of these measures:**
The measures would completely change the way MSMEs work, ensure they compete globally besides resulting in newer enterprises entering the fray.
With the stimulus, these enterprises will be in a position to lead to a fast V-shaped recovery the moment the pandemic is brought under control.

**Significance of MSMEs:**
With around 63.4 million units throughout the geographical expanse of the country, MSMEs contribute around 6.11% of the manufacturing GDP and 24.63% of the GDP from service activities as well as 33.4% of India’s manufacturing output.
They have been able to provide employment to around 120 million persons and contribute around 45% of the overall exports from India.
About 20% of the MSMEs are based out of rural areas, which indicates the deployment of significant rural workforce in the MSME sector.

**Additional fact:**
International MSME Day was observed on 27 June under the theme “COVID-19: The Great Lockdown and its impact on Small Business.”

**InstaLinks:**
*Prelims Link:*
1. Share of MSME sector in India’s GDP and exports.
2. The basic criteria for MSME classification.
3. What is referred to as Udyam according to Government of India?
4. Classification of MSMEs.
5. What is V-shaped recovery?
6. SDGs on MSMEs.

**Mains Link:**
What is the potential of India's MSME sector? Discuss the challenges and concerns associated with the growth of MSME sector in India.
Sources: ibib.

**Topics:** Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

### 1. Direct seeding of rice

**Context:** The Punjab government has decided to deploy direct seeding of rice (DSR) technique instead of the traditional transplantation of paddy this year due to the shortfall of agricultural labourers triggered by reverse migration in the wake of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

**What is Direct Seeding of Rice (DSR)?**
Here, the pre-germinated seeds are directly drilled into the field by a tractor-powered machine. There is no nursery preparation or transplantation involved in this method. Farmers have to only level their land and give one pre-sowing irrigation.

**How is it different from conventional method?**
In transplanting paddy, farmers prepare nurseries where the paddy seeds are first sown and raised into young plants.
The nursery seed bed is 5-10% of the area to be transplanted. These seedlings are then uprooted and replanted 25-35 days later in the puddled field.
Advantage of DSR:

**Water savings.** The first irrigation (apart from the pre-sowing rauni) under DSR is necessary only 21 days after sowing. This is unlike in transplanted paddy, where watering has to be done practically daily to ensure submerged/flooded conditions in the first three weeks.

**Less Labour.** About three labourers are required to transplant one acre of paddy at almost Rs 2,400 per acre.

**The cost of herbicides** under DSR will not exceed Rs 2,000 per acre.

**Reduce methane emissions** due to a shorter flooding period and decreased soil disturbance compared to transplanting rice seedlings.

Limitations:

- Non-availability of herbicides.
- **The seed requirement for DSR is also high,** 8-10 kg/acre, compared to 4-5 kg/acre in transplanting.
- Further, **laser land levelling is compulsory in DSR.** This is not so in transplanting.
- The sowing needs to be done timely so that the plants have come out properly before the monsoon rains arrive.

InstaLinks:

**Prelims Link:**
1. What are herbicides?
2. India’s largest rice producing states.
3. Suitable climatic conditions for rice.
4. Who announces MSP?
5. What is green revolution?

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the significance of Direct Seeding of Rice (DSR).
Sources: down to earth.

2. GM seeds: the debate, and a sowing agitation

Context: In the current kharif season, farmers would undertake mass sowing of GM seeds for maize, soyabean, mustard brinjal and herbicide tolerant (Ht) cotton, although these are not approved.

So, in this regard, Shetkari Sanghatana — a farmers’ union— has announced **fresh plans in its agitation for use of genetically modified seeds.**

What is the movement about?

- The Sanghatana has announced that this year they are going to undertake large-scale sowing of unapproved GM crops like maize, Ht Bt cotton, soyabean and brinjal across Maharashtra.
- Farmers who plant such variants will put up boards on their fields proclaiming the GM nature of their crop.
- This action will draw attention to the need for introduction of the latest technology in the fields.

What are genetically modified seeds?

Genetic engineering aims to **transcend the genus barrier by introducing an alien gene in the seeds** to get the desired effects. The **alien gene could be from a plant, an animal or even a soil bacterium.**

For example:

1. **Bt cotton**, the only GM crop that is **allowed in India,** has two alien genes from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) that allows the crop to develop a protein toxic to the common pest pink bollworm.
2. **Ht Bt** cotton is derived with the insertion of an additional gene, from another soil bacterium, which allows the plant to **resist the common herbicide glyphosate.**
3. **In Bt brinjal**, a gene allows the plant to resist attacks of fruit and shoot borer.

4. **In DMH-11 mustard**, genetic modification allows cross-pollination in a crop that self-pollinates in nature.

**What is the legal position of genetically modified crops in India?**

In India, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) is the apex body that allows for commercial release of GM crops. **Penalty:** Use of the unapproved GM variant can attract a jail term of 5 years and fine of Rs 1 lakh under the Environmental Protection Act, 1986.

**Why are farmers rooting for GM crops?**

**Reduced costs:** Cost of weeding goes down considerably if farmers grow Ht Bt cotton and use glyphosate against weeds. In case of Bt brinjal, the cost reduces as the cost of production is reduced by cutting down on the use of pesticides.

**Concerns:** Environmentalists argue that the long-lasting effect of GM crops is yet to be studied and thus they should not be released commercially. Genetic modification, they say, brings about changes that can be harmful to humans in the long run.


Sources: Indian Express.

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### 3. Intercropping

**Why in News?**

Kerala government is planning to modify specific laws that govern the plantation sector to allow the **management to intercrop food crops with cash crops** such as tea, coffee, cardamom and rubber. **Laws that need modification include** the Kerala Land Reforms Act, Kerala Grants and Leases (Modification of Rights) Act and Kerala Land Utilisation Order.

**Need for:**

To break its **dependency on food imports from neighbouring States.** To **guard against possible food protectionism** by large-scale producers by opening up plantations for farming edibles.

**Implications:**

Plantations encompassed 8 lakh hectares in Kerala. An amendment of the law would free up an estimated 2 lakh hectares for inter-cropping.

- The proposed modification would also permit plantations to diversify into dairy and poultry farming.
- It would spur investment in precision farming characterised by high yield food crops, reduced use of toxic pesticides, chemical fertilisers and water.

**Proposed plan:**

The Kerala Agriculture University had zoned Kerala into **23 agro-climatic sectors.**

- It had suggested that oranges, apples, avocados, grapefruit and winter vegetables as ideal intercrop for **high altitude tea plantations in regions such as Munnar.**
- In **rubber growing regions**, the cultivation of rambutan, mangosteen and other tropical fruits in small plots interspersed among the trees has been suggested.
- It had also suggested jack fruit as shade trees in **tea, coffee and cardamom plantations.**

**What is intercropping?**

It is the **cultivation of two or more crops simultaneously on the same field.**
The main goal is to produce a greater yield on a given piece of land by making use of resources of ecological processes that would otherwise not be utilised by a single crop.

There are different approaches to intercropping such as:
1. Mixed intercropping – two or more crops are planted in a mix without a distinct row arrangement.
2. Row intercropping – two or more crops are planted in distinct rows.
3. Relay intercropping – two or more crops are grown at the same time as part of the life cycle of each i.e. a second crop is sown after the first crop has been well established but before it reaches its harvesting stage.
4. Strip intercropping – growing two or more crops at the same time in separate strips wide enough apart for independent cultivation.

Advantages of intercropping:
More efficient use of light, water and other nutrient resources compared to single crops. It allows for effective management of cover crops because crop mixtures have lower pest densities.
Potential increased crop yields per unit area.
Improved soil fertility by leguminous intercrops e.g. nitrogen fixing.
Reduced soil erosion.
Lowered soil surface evaporation.

Some cons of intercropping:
- Intercropping is not always suited to a mechanised farming system.
- Time consuming: It requires more attention and thus increased intensive, expert management.
- There is reduced efficiency in planting, weeding and harvesting which may add to the labour costs of these operations.
- The biggest challenge to adopting intercropping systems is the advance planning of planting, cultivation, fertilisation, spraying and harvesting of more than one crop in the same field.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Different cropping patterns.
2. Climatic conditions for tea and coffee.
3. Types of intercropping.
4. Pros and cons.
5. What is Zero Budget Natural Farming?

Mains Link:
Discuss the features and significance of intercropping.
Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

1. Locust control

Context: As India struggles to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, it faces a new challenge. Several parts of the country have experienced heavy infestations of locusts – an insect that devours crops and foliage, often leaving devastation in its wake.
It is said to be the worst attack in 26 years. The species attacking are desert locusts.

What is the attack all about? What are ‘desert locusts’?
Desert locusts (Schistocerca gregaria), which belong to the family of grasshoppers, normally live and breed in semi-arid or desert regions. For laying eggs, they require bare ground, which is rarely found in areas with dense vegetation.

How they form swarms?
As individuals, or in small isolated groups, locusts are not very dangerous. But when they grow into large populations their behaviour changes, they transform from ‘solitary phase’ into ‘gregarious phase’, and start forming ‘swarms’. A single swarm can contain 40 to 80 million adults in one square km, and these can travel up to 150 km a day.

Large-scale breeding happens only when conditions turn very favourable in their natural habitat, desert or semi-arid regions. Good rains can sometimes generate just enough green vegetation that is conducive to egg-laying as well as hopper development.

If left uncontrolled, a single swarm can increase 20 times of its original population in the first generation itself, and then multiply exponentially in subsequent generations.

What factors led to their sudden and early growth this year?
These locusts usually breed in the dry areas around Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea along the eastern coast of Africa, a region known as the Horn of Africa. Other breeding grounds are the adjoining Asian regions in Yemen, Oman, southern Iran, and in Pakistan’s Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

1. Many of these areas received unusually good rains in March and April, and that resulted in large-scale breeding and hopper development. These locusts started arriving in Rajasthan around the first fortnight of April, much ahead of the normal July-October normal.
2. Cyclonic storms Mekunu and Luban had struck Oman and Yemen respectively that year. Heavy rains had transformed uninhabited desert tracts into large lake where the locust swarms breed.
3. Apart from the search for food, their movement has been aided by westerly winds that were, this time, further strengthened by the low-pressure area created by Cyclone Amphan in the Bay of Bengal. Locusts are known to be passive flyers, and generally follow the wind. But they do not take off in very strong windy conditions.

Why worry about them?
The danger is when they start breeding. A single gregarious female locust can lay 60-80 eggs three times during its average life cycle of 90 days. If their breeding is coterminous with that of the kharif crop, we could well have a situation similar to what maize, sorghum and wheat farmers of Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia experienced in March-April.

The origins of locust control:
In the nineteenth century, India experienced serious locust outbreaks in 1812, 1821, 1843-’44, 1863, 1869, 1878, 1889-’92, and 1896-’97. Several efforts were made to combat the swarms.

The first of these measures was to systematically collect and record data regarding locust occurrences. The colonial system employed an interesting mix of local reliance and global cooperation in collecting data. It rested on the exchange of knowledge and techniques between various provinces of India as well as with other countries similarly ravaged by the pestilence.

Genesis of LWO:
Only after the 1927-’29 outbreak that ravaged the central and western parts of India was the need felt for a centralised organisation to gather information about locusts and control them. This resulted in the formation of the Standing Locust Committee in 1929 and the Central Locust Bureau in 1930. This culminated in 1939 in the establishment of the present-day Locust Warning Organisation.

Popular method:
- Currently, the most commonly used control is insecticide. Sprayed from land or aerial vehicles, whole swarms can be targeted in relatively short periods of time.
- Swarms of locusts are being scared away by the district administration in Panna using police sirens.
- Farmers in Budhni and Nasrullaganj areas of Madhya Pradesh’s Sehore district have been beating utensils in a bid to drive away locusts.
Non-chemical measures:
Experts have expressed disappointment over the fact that despite the known side-effects of aerial spraying of pesticides, governments’ locust control policies are focussed only on chemical spray.

Few non-chemical measures to consider:
1. Destroy the breeding grounds and locust larvae before they could fly.
2. Use of oil-tarred screens to kill locusts (also known as Cyprus screen).
3. **Net system and the dhotar method.** The net system involved holding a “capricious” bag and swinging it around fields, trapping young locusts in the process. The dhotar method involved using a blanket to trip locusts resting on bushes.
4. Devise an insect-control technique that involved ploughing the fallow lands where locusts are resting: the escaping insects became an easy target for birds.
5. **Natural predators** such as wasps, birds and reptiles may prove effective at keeping small swarms at bay.
6. Emphasise *inter-state and international cooperation*, along with coordinated efforts of the state.

Conclusion:
Insecticides may give temporary relief during an infestation, but they might also endanger the birds that act as natural predators of locusts. The way ahead lies in state-supported protection of birds. This should include a conscious effort to bring back species like house sparrows that have been disappearing rapidly.

InstaLinks:
**Prelims Link:**
1. Different types of locusts?
2. Difference between solitary and gregarious natures of locusts?
3. What are westerly disturbances?
4. What is Indian Ocean Dipole?
5. What is Locust Warning Organisation?

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the economic impacts of severe locusts attacks on India.

Link: [https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=G1H7FCVDM.1&imageview=0](https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=G1H7FCVDM.1&imageview=0).

Sources: the Hindu.

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2. Minimum Support Prices (MSPs)

**Context:** CCEA has approved the increase in the Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) for all mandated Kharif crops for marketing season 2020-21. This is to ensure remunerative prices to the growers for their produce. The highest increase in MSP is proposed for nigerseed (Rs 755 per quintal) followed by sesamum (Rs 370 per quintal), urad (Rs 300 per quintal) and cotton (long staple) (Rs 275 per quintal). The differential remuneration is aimed at encouraging crop diversification.

**About MSP:**
What is it?
In theory, an MSP is the minimum price set by the Government at which farmers can expect to sell their produce for the season. When market prices fall below the announced MSPs, procurement agencies step in to procure the crop and ‘support’ the prices.

**Who announces?**
The Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs announces MSP for various crops at the beginning of each sowing season based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP). The CACP takes into account demand and supply, the cost of production and price trends in the market among other things when fixing MSPs.
Why is it important?
Price volatility makes life difficult for farmers. Though prices of agri commodities may soar while in short supply, during years of bumper production, prices of the very same commodities plummet. MSPs ensure that farmers get a minimum price for their produce in adverse markets. MSPs have also been used as a tool by the Government to incentivise farmers to grow crops that are in short supply.

Factors taken into consideration for fixing MSP include:
1. Demand and supply;
2. Cost of production;
3. Price trends in the market, both domestic and international;
4. Inter-crop price parity;
5. Terms of trade between agriculture and non-agriculture;
6. A minimum of 50% as the margin over cost of production; and
7. Likely implications of MSP on consumers of that product.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Composition of CCEA.
2. What is CACP?
3. How many crops are covered under MSP scheme?
4. Who announces MSP?
5. Difference between Kharif and Rabi crops.
Mains Link:
Sources: pib.

3. The Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020

Aims and objectives of the ordinance:
The ordinance basically aims at creating additional trading opportunities outside the APMC market yards to help farmers get remunerative prices due to additional competition.
- This will supplement the existing MSP procurement system which is providing stable income to farmers.
- It will certainly pave the way for creating One India, One Agriculture Market and will lay the foundation for ensuring golden harvests for our hard working farmers.

Overview of the ordinance:
1. The Ordinance will create an ecosystem where the farmers and traders will enjoy freedom of choice of sale and purchase of agri-produce.
2. It will also promote barrier-free inter-state and intra-state trade and commerce outside the physical premises of markets notified under State Agricultural Produce Marketing legislations.
3. It also proposes an electronic trading in transaction platform for ensuring a seamless trade electronically.
4. The farmers will not be charged any cess or levy for sale of their produce under this Act.
5. There will also be a separate dispute resolution mechanism for the farmers.

Significance:
- This is a historic-step in unlocking the vastly regulated agriculture markets in the country.
- It will open more choices for the farmer, reduce marketing costs for the farmers and help them in getting better prices.
- It will also help farmers of regions with surplus produce to get better prices and consumers of regions with shortages, lower prices.

Need for present challenges:
- Farmers in India today suffer from various restrictions in marketing their produce.
• There are restrictions for farmers in selling agri-produce outside the notified APMC market yards. The farmers are also restricted to sell the produce only to registered licensees of the State Governments.
• Barriers exist in free flow of agriculture produce between various States owing to the prevalence of various APMC legislations enacted by the State Governments.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
  1. What is an ordinance?
  2. What are APMCs?
  3. What is eNAM?

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of this ordinance.
Sources: pib.

4. Sahakar Mitra scheme launched

Key facts about the scheme:
• It is an initiative by National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)
• It would also provide an opportunity to professionals from academic institutions to develop leadership and entrepreneurial roles through cooperatives as Farmers Producers Organizations (FPO).
• Under the programme, each intern will get financial support over a 4 months internship period.

Eligibility:
• Professional graduates in disciplines such as Agriculture and allied areas, IT etc. will be eligible for internship.
• Professionals who are pursuing or have completed their MBA degrees in Agri-business, Cooperation, Finance, International Trade, Forestry, Rural Development, Project Management etc. will also be eligible.

Significance and expected impacts of the scheme:
Assist cooperative institutions access new and innovative ideas of young professionals. The interns gain experience of working in the field giving confidence to be self-reliant. It is expected to be a win-win situation both for cooperatives as well as for the young professionals.

Additional information:
• National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) was established by an Act of Parliament in 1963 under Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare. It has many regional centres to provide the financial assistance to Cooperatives/Societies/Federations.
• FPO is a Producer Organisation (PO) where the members are farmers. Small Farmers’ Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) is providing support for the promotion of FPOs.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
  1. Key objectives of the scheme.
  2. Eligibility.
  3. Implementation by?
  4. What is NCDC?
  5. What are cooperatives? Constitutional provisions.
  6. What is an FPO?
  7. What is SFAC?

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of Sahakar it Ralph scheme.
Sources: pib.
5. Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana
Context: Annual allotment of Rs. 4000 crore made to State Governments under ‘Per Drop More Crop’ component of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY-PDMC) for the year 2020-21.

About “Per Drop More Crop” component of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY-PDMC):
The Department of Agriculture Cooperation and Farmers’ Welfare is implementing the “Per Drop More Crop” component of PMKSY-PDMC. It is operational in the country from 2015-16.
It focuses on enhancing water efficiency at farm level through micro irrigation technologies such as "drip and sprinkler" irrigation.

Funding:
Micro Irrigation Fund corpus of Rs. 5000 crore has been created with NABARD.
The objective of the fund is to facilitate the states in mobilizing the resources for expanding coverage of Micro Irrigation by taking up special and innovative projects and also for incentivising micro irrigation beyond the provisions available under PMKSY-PDMC to encourage farmers to install micro irrigation systems.

Assistance:
The Government provides financial assistance @ 55% for small and marginal farmers and @ 45% for other farmers for installation of Drip and Sprinkler Irrigation systems. In addition, some States provide additional incentives/top up subsidy for encouraging farmers to adopt Micro Irrigation.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Components of PMKSY.
2. About the Micro Irrigation fund.
3. What is NABARD?
4. Assistance provided by the centre under this scheme.

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of the scheme.
Sources: pib.

6. One Nation-One Ration Card scheme
Context:
14 states/UTs yet to join the scheme.

About the scheme:
One Nation One Ration Card (RC) will ensure all beneficiaries especially migrants can access PDS across the nation from any PDS shop of their own choice.

**Benefits:** no poor person is deprived of getting subsidised foodgrains under the food security scheme when they shift from one place to another. It also aims to remove the chance of anyone holding more than one ration card to avail benefits from different states.

**Significance:** This will provide freedom to the beneficiaries as they will not be tied to any one PDS shop and reduce their dependence on shop owners and curtail instances of corruption.

**Highlights of the scheme:**
1. The poor migrant workers will be able to buy subsidised rice and wheat from any ration shop in the country but for that their ration cards must be linked to Aadhaar.
2. Migrants would only be eligible for the subsidies supported by the Centre, which include rice sold at Rs. 3/kg and wheat at Rs. 2/kg. It would not include subsidies given by their respective state government in some other state.

**Standard format of 'one nation, one ration card':**
A standard format for ration card has been prepared after taking into account the format used by different states.
- For national portability, the state governments have been asked to issue the ration card in bi-lingual format, wherein besides the local language, the other language could be Hindi or English.
- The states have also been told to have a 10-digit standard ration card number, wherein first two digits will be state code and the next two digits will be running ration card numbers.
- Besides this, a set of another two digits will be appended with ration card number to create unique member IDs for each member of the household in a ration card.

**Challenges:**
**Prone to corruption:** Every state has its own rules for Public Distribution System (PDS). If ‘One Nation, One Ration Card’ is implemented, it will further boost corruption in an already corrupted Public Distribution System.

**Way Forward:**
The current migrant crisis should be seen as an opportunity to develop a national migration policy addressing the challenges faced by migrant workers’ productivity, living conditions and social security.
- While this must be done, the government must also fast-track the ONORC scheme because India’s present rights-based regime is based on the assumption that people are sedentary.
- The ONORC should also include access to health and other things.

**Insta Links:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. What is PDS?
2. What is NFSA? Eligibility? Benefits?
3. How are fair price shops established?
4. Proposed format.

**Mains Link:**
www.insightsonindia.com
Discuss the significance of One Nation One Ration Card scheme.
Sources: pib.

7. Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) launched
Context:
Approved by Cabinet in pursuance of recently announced Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package.

Overview:
- Size of the fund is Rs. 15000 crore.
- This Fund will incentivise infrastructure investments in dairy, meat processing and animal feed plants.

Eligibility, funding and implementation:
- **Who is eligible?** Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), MSMEs, Section 8 Companies, Private Companies and individual entrepreneur with only 10% margin money contribution by them.
- **Rest of the Funds:** The balance 90% would be the loan component to be made available to them by scheduled banks.
- **GOI will provide 3% interest subvention to eligible beneficiaries.**
- **There will be 2 years moratorium period for repayment of the loan** with 6 years repayment period thereafter.

Credit Guarantee Fund:
- A Credit Guarantee Fund of Rs. 750 crore will also be set up.
- It is to be managed by NABARD which would provide credit guarantee to the projects which are covered under the MSME defined ceilings.
- Guarantee Coverage would be up to 25% of the Credit facility of the borrower.

Significance:
- This ensures the availability of capital to meet upfront investment required for these projects.
- It also helps enhance overall returns/pay back for investors.
- Such investments in processing and value addition infrastructure by eligible beneficiaries would also promote exports by adding to farmers’ incomes.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. Who will manage the Credit Guarantee Fund?
2. Interest subvention under the scheme.
3. Who is eligible?
4. Funding.
5. About the Dairy Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF).
6. NABARD- composition and important functions.

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the features and significance of AHIDF.
Sources: pib.

8. Scheme for formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (FME)
Context:
The government has launched the scheme- Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Enterprises (PM FME). The scheme will be implemented for five years until 2024-25.

About the scheme:
The Union Cabinet, last month, had given its approval to this scheme. It is for the Unorganized Sector on All India basis.
Objectives:
1. Increase in access to finance by micro food processing units.
2. Increase in revenues of target enterprises.
3. Enhanced compliance with food quality and safety standards.
4. Strengthening capacities of support systems.
5. Transition from the unorganized sector to the formal sector.
6. Special focus on women entrepreneurs and Aspirational districts.
7. Encourage Waste to Wealth activities.
8. Focus on minor forest produce in Tribal Districts.

Salient features:
1. Centrally Sponsored Scheme. Expenditure to be shared by Government of India and States at 60:40.
2. 2,00,000 micro-enterprises are to be assisted with credit linked subsidy. Micro enterprises will get credit linked subsidy at 35 per cent of the eligible project cost with ceiling of Rs. 10 lakh.
3. Beneficiary contribution will be minimum 10 per cent and balance from loan. Seed capital will be given to SHGs (Rs. four lakh per SHG) for loan to members for working capital and small tools.
5. Focus on perishables.

Administrative and Implementation Mechanisms:
1. The Scheme would be monitored at Centre by an Inter-Ministerial Empowered Committee (IMEC) under the Chairmanship of Minister, FPI.
2. A State/UT Level Committee (SLC) chaired by the Chief Secretary will monitor and sanction/recommend proposals for expansion of micro units and setting up of new units by the SHGs/ FPOs/ Cooperatives.
3. The States/UTs will prepare Annual Action Plans covering various activities for implementation of the scheme, which will be approved by Government of India.
4. A third party evaluation and mid-term review mechanism would be built in the programme.
5. National level portal would be set-up wherein the applicants/individual enterprise could apply to participate in the Scheme. All the scheme activities would be undertaken on the National portal.

Benefits of the scheme:
1. Nearly eight lakh micro-enterprises will benefit through access to information, better exposure and formalization.
2. It will enable them to formalize, grow and become competitive.
3. The project is likely to generate nine lakh skilled and semi-skilled jobs.
4. Scheme envisages increased access to credit by existing micro food processing entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs in the Aspirational Districts.
5. Better integration with organized markets.
6. Increased access to common services like sorting, grading, processing, packaging, storage etc.

Why we need this scheme?
There are about 25 lakh unregistered food processing enterprises which constitute 98% of the sector and are unorganized and informal. Nearly 66% of these units are located in rural areas and about 80% of them are family-based enterprises.
This sector faces a number of challenges including the inability to access credit, high cost of institutional credit, lack of access to modern technology, inability to integrate with the food supply chain and compliance with the health & safety standards.
Strengthening this segment will lead to reduction in wastage, creation of off-farm job opportunities and aid in achieving the overarching Government objective of doubling farmers' income.

InstaThink:
Prelims Link:
1. Difference between centrally sponsored and central sector scheme.
2. Core vs core of core schemes.
3. Role of states in this scheme.
4. Who monitors this scheme at state levels?
5. Focus of the scheme.

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the significance of the Scheme for formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (FME).

**Sources:** pib.

**Topics: Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.**

### 1. Country of Origin in GeM platform

**Context:**
Government e-Marketplace (GeM) has brought in certain changes to promote ‘Make in India’ and ‘Aatmanirbhar Bharat’.

**These include:**
1. It is now mandatory for sellers to enter the Country of Origin while registering all new products on GeM.
2. Sellers, who had already uploaded their products before the introduction of this new feature on GeM, have to regularly update the Country of Origin.
3. There shall be a provision for indication of the percentage of local content in products.
4. ‘Make in India’ filter has now been enabled on the portal. Buyers can choose to buy only those products that meet the minimum 50% local content criteria.

**About GeM:**
**What is it?** GeM is a state-of-the-art national public procurement platform of Ministry of Commerce and Industries, that has used technology to remove entry barriers for bonafide sellers and has created a vibrant e-marketplace with a wide range of goods and services.

**Aim:** GeM aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement.

**GeM facilities:**
1. Listing of products for individual, prescribed categories of Goods/ Services of common use.
2. Look, estimate, compare and buying facility on dynamic pricing basis.
3. Market place buying of majority of common User Items.
4. Buying Goods and Services online, as and when required.
5. Transparency and ease of buying.
6. Useful for low value buying and also for bulk buying at competitive price using Reverse Auction/ e-bidding.
7. Continuous vendor rating system.
8. Return policy.
Benefits of GeM:
1. Enhances transparency.
2. Increased efficiency.
4. Savings to the government.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

1. Draft Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2020

Why in News now?
Few states have voiced their concerns against the proposed bill. These include-West Bengal, Punjab, Puducherry, Kerala, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Delhi, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. They called the draft Bill a violation of “the spirit of co-operative federalism” and accused the Centre of failure to consult the States on the Bill since electricity is on the Concurrent List.

Contentious clauses in the Bill:
The Bill seeks to end subsidies. All consumers, including farmers, will have to pay the tariff, and the subsidy will be sent to them through direct benefit transfer.
States are worried about this clause because:
• This would mean people would have to pay a huge sum towards electricity charges, while receiving support through direct benefit transfer later.
• This would result in defaults leading to penalties and disconnection.
The draft also “divests” the States of their power to fix tariff and hands over the task to a Central government-appointed authority.
• This is discriminatory, since the tariff can be tweaked according to the whims and fancies of the Central government.

Another provision makes it compulsory for the State power companies to buy a minimum percentage of renewable energy fixed by the Centre.
• This would be detrimental to the cash-strapped power firms.

Additional information:
The Electricity Act, 2003 has governed the laws regarding the generation, distribution, transmission, trading and use of electricity so far.
But, experts around the country have opined that some of the provisions of the Act have become dated and archaic, needing an update.
In order to address some recurring issues, and to promote further commercial incentive for private players to enter the market, the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2020 was introduced in April this year.

Highlights of the Bill:
Policy Amendments:
Renewable Energy: It delegates the Central Government with the power to prepare and notify a National Renewable Energy Policy “for promotion of generation of electricity from renewable sources”, in consultation with State Governments.
Cross Border Trade: The Central Government has been delegated with the power to prescribe rules and guidelines to allow and facilitate cross border trade of electricity.
Creation of Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority: It has been proposed to be given sole jurisdiction to adjudicate upon matters on performance of obligations under a contract regarding sale, purchase and transmission of electricity, which exclusion of this specialized authority’s jurisdiction on determination of tariff or any other dispute regarding tariff.

Functional Amendments:
Payment Security: It proposes a mechanism wherein “no electricity shall be scheduled or despatched under such contract unless adequate security of payment as agreed upon by the parties to the contract, has been provided”.

Constitution of selection committee to recommend members for commissions/ authorities: There is a slew of provisions for the constitution of a Selection Committee for making recommendations of members to the Appellate Tribunal and the Chairperson and Members of Central Commission, Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority, State Commissions and Joint Commissions.

Grant of Subsidy mandated: The benefit of subsidy to be granted directly to the consumer and the licensee shall charge the consumers as per the tariff determined by the Appropriate Commission. The determination of tariffs shall be fixed by the commission without accounting for subsidies. Further, basis the tariff policies, surcharges and cross subsidies shall be progressively reduced.

Inclusion of Distribution Sub-licensee and Franchisee: To ease the burden of distribution licensees and in order to promote some form of demographic specialization, the distribution licensees, can appoint another entity for distribution of electricity on its behalf, within its area of supply.

Enhancement of the powers of the Appellate Tribunal of Electricity: APTEL is proposed to have the powers of a High Court to deal with wilful disobedience of persons and entities under the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971. Additionally, any person can appeal the decisions of the Authority which is introduced by this Amendment in front of the APTEL. The numbers of members at the APTEL have also been proposed to be increased by the Amendment.

Applicable to the whole of India: It is needless to mention, that in addition to the above mentioned broad themes that the Amendment seeks to cover, the Act shall now be applicable to the territory which was erstwhile exempted from the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Composition and powers of Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority:
1. The Authority will be headed by a retired Judge of the High Court.
2. It is proposed to be set-up with powers of the Civil Court.
3. It will enforce performance of contracts related to purchase or sale or transmission of power between a generating, distribution or transmission companies.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Composition of the proposed Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority.
2. Key functions of ECEA.
3. How DISCOMS in the country function?
4. What is the National Load Despatch Centre?
5. Composition and functions of the Appellate Tribunal (APTEL).
6. Key provisions of the draft.

Mains Link:
Discuss the key features and significance of Draft Electricity Act (Amendment) Bill, 2020.
Sources: the Hindu.

2. Indian Gas Exchange launched in e-ceremony
What is it?
Indian Gas Exchange (IGX) is the first nationwide online delivery-based gas trading platform.
- IGX will be a delivery-based trading platform for delivery of natural Gas.
- Incorporated as a wholly owned subsidiary of the IEX - India’s energy market platform.
The platform is fully automated with web-based interface to provide a seamless trading experience to the customers.

How will this exchange work?
The IGX is a digital trading platform that will allow buyers and sellers of natural gas to trade both in the spot market and in the forward market for imported natural gas across three hubs — Dahej and Hazira in Gujarat, and Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh. Importantly, Natural Gas (LNG) will be re-gassified and sold to buyers through the exchange, eliminating the need for buyers and sellers to find each other. The exchange also allows much shorter contracts — for delivery on the next day, and up to a month — while ordinarily contracts for natural gas supply are as long as six months to a year.

Will domestically produced natural gas also be bought and sold on the exchange?
No. The price of domestically produced natural gas is decided by the government. It will not be sold on the gas exchange.

Why this was necessary?
Domestic production of gas has been falling over the past two fiscals as current sources of natural gas have become less productive. Domestically produced natural gas currently accounts for less than half the country’s natural gas consumption; imported LNG accounts for the other half. LNG imports are set to become a larger proportion of domestic gas consumption as India moves to increase the proportion of natural gas in the energy basket from 6.2% in 2018 to 15% by 2030.

Benefits:
This will help the nation move towards free market pricing of natural gas. The exchange is expected to facilitate transparent price discovery in natural gas, and facilitate the growth of the share of natural gas in India’s energy basket.

About Natural Gas:
It is the cleanest fossil fuel among the available fossil fuels. It is used as a feedstock in the manufacture of fertilizers, plastics and other commercially important organic chemicals as well as used as a fuel for electricity generation, heating purpose in industrial and commercial units. It is also used for cooking in domestic households and a transportation fuel for vehicles.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is traded on IGX?
2. What is IEX?
3. What is Natural Gas?
4. Where is it used?
5. Why it is called a clean fuel?

Mains Link:
Discuss the features and significance of Indian Gas Exchange.
Sources: pib.
## Social stock exchanges

**Context:** A working group constituted by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on social stock exchanges has submitted its recommendations.

**Terms of reference of the panel:**
The panel was set up by Sebi in September 2019 under the Chairmanship of Ishaat Hussain, Director at SBI Foundation and former Finance Director at Tata Sons, to suggest possible structures and regulations for creating SSE to facilitate listing and fund-raising by social enterprises as well as voluntary organisations.

**Background:**
The idea of a social stock exchange (SSE) for listing of social enterprise and voluntary organisations was mooted by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman while presenting the Union Budget 2019-20.

**Key recommendations:**
1. Allow direct listing of non-profit organisations through the issuance of bonds and a range of funding mechanisms.
2. Funding mechanisms suggested include some of the existing mechanisms such as Social Venture Funds (SVFs) under the Alternative Investment Funds.
3. A new minimum reporting standard has also been proposed for organisations which would raise funds under social stock exchanges (SSE).
4. Profit social enterprises can also list on SSE with enhanced reporting requirements. To encourage, giving culture some tax incentives have also been suggested.

**What is social stock exchange (SSE)?**
It is a novel concept in India and such a bourse is meant to serve private and non-profit sector providers by channelling greater capital to them.

As per the proposal, SSE can be housed within the existing stock exchange such as the BSE and/or National Stock Exchange (NSE).

This will help the SSE leverage the existing infrastructure and client relationships of the exchanges to onboard investors, donors, and social enterprises (for-profit and non-profit).

**Significance:**
With this, Social welfare enterprises and non-profits could soon get to raise so-called social capital on a transparent electronic platform, aiding the process of rebuilding livelihoods ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic.

These recommendations, if implemented as a package, can result in a vibrant and supportive ecosystem, enabling the non-profit sector to realise its full potential for creating social impact.

**Need for social capital:**
India will need a significant amount of patient capital to repair and rebuild those livelihoods, which are the bedrock of her economy. Conventional capital that prioritises financial returns will not be able to carry such a burden all by itself.

Social capital, on the other hand, is more suited for this role. It is not only patient but its goal is precisely to support and fortify social structures that are in danger of collapsing because of COVID-19.

**What is a social enterprise?**
A social enterprise is a revenue-generating business. Its primary objective is to achieve a social objective, for example, providing healthcare or clean energy.

This in no way means that a social enterprise can’t be highly profitable. In fact, most social enterprises look and operate like traditional businesses. The only catch is that the profit these entities generate is not necessarily used for payouts to stakeholders, but reinvested into their social programmes.

**Global examples:**

www.insightsonindia.com
UK: The Social Stock Exchange in London functions more as a directory connecting social enterprises and potential investors.
Kenya: The Kenya Social Investment Exchange, connects vetted social enterprises with impact investors, both foreign and domestic.
Canada: Backed by the Ontario government, the SVX is an online platform that allows investments in Canadian companies and funds that have “a positive social or environmental impact”.
Singapore: The Impact Investment Exchange runs a social stock exchange in partnership with the Stock Exchange of Mauritius, which is open to limited accredited investors who want to invest.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is a social enterprise?
2. What is SSE?
3. What is social capital?
4. SEBI- key functions.

Mains Link:
India will need a significant amount of social capital to repair and rebuild those livelihoods, which are the bedrock of her economy. Discuss.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GJN7FF0GG.1&imageview=0.
Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

1. LiDAR- Light Detection and Ranging

Context: Archaeologists are using LiDAR data to continue their researches amid global pandemic. In this method, they make high-resolution maps using laser light.

What is LiDAR?
It is a remote sensing method that uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure ranges (variable distances) to the Earth. These light pulses—combined with other data recorded by the airborne system—generate precise, three-dimensional information about the shape of the Earth and its surface characteristics.

How it works?
A lidar instrument principally consists of a laser, a scanner, and a specialized GPS receiver. Airplanes and helicopters are the most commonly used platforms for acquiring lidar data over broad areas. LiDAR follows a simple principle — throw laser light at an object on the earth surface and calculate the time it takes to return to the LiDAR source. Given the speed at which the light travels (approximately 186,000 miles per second), the process of measuring the exact distance through LiDAR appears to be incredibly fast.

Challenges with LiDAR:
• Can’t perform well in fog, rain, snow and dusty weather.
• Struggles to detect a glass wall or door, which is why smartphone manufacturers and self-driving car makers use LiDAR along with secondary cameras and sensors.

InstaLinks:
www.insightsonindia.com
Prelims Link:
1. What is GPS?
2. Location based navigation services of various countries including India.
3. How LiDAR works?
4. Applications of LiDAR.
5. What is Laser?

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of LiDAR technology.
Sources: the Hindu.

2. Fifth State of Matter

Why in News?
NASA scientists on Earth have collaborated with astronauts on the International Space Station (ISS) to corral the first ever Bose-Einstein condensate (BEC) - the fifth state of matter - outside of Earth’s gravity. The matter has been created in one of the coldest places in the universe - the Cold Atom Laboratory – a device on board the International Space Station (ISS).

Basics- What is a matter, an atom and molecule?
Matter is the "stuff" that makes up the universe — everything that takes up space and has mass is matter. All matter is made up of atoms, which are in turn made up of protons, neutrons and electrons. Atoms come together to form molecules, which are the building blocks for all types of matter. Both atoms and molecules are held together by a form of potential energy called chemical energy.

Five states of matter:
There are four natural states of matter: Solids, liquids, gases and plasma. The fifth state is the man-made Bose-Einstein condensates.

About Bose-Einstein condensate:
A Bose-Einstein condensate is so named because its existence was posited almost a century ago by Albert Einstein and Indian mathematician Satyendra Nath Bose. This exotic material only exists when atoms of certain elements are cooled to temperatures near absolute zero. At that point, clusters of atoms begin functioning as a single quantum object with both wave and particle properties.

When was it first created?
BEC was created by scientists in 1995. Using a combination of lasers and magnets, scientists cooled a sample of rubidium to within a few degrees of absolute zero. At this extremely low temperature, molecular motion comes very close to stopping. Since there is almost no kinetic energy being transferred from one atom to another, the atoms begin to clump together. There are no longer thousands of separate atoms, just one "super atom."

Why study BEC?
A BEC is used to study quantum mechanics on a macroscopic level. Light appears to slow down as it passes through a BEC, allowing scientists to study the particle/wave paradox. A BEC also has many of the properties of a superfluid, or a fluid that flows without friction. BECs are also used to simulate conditions that might exist in black holes.

Why is it easy to create BEC in space?
BECs have been produced in a variety of experiments on Earth since 1995, but these are hindered by gravity, which collapses the clouds in a split second.
To make a BEC, scientists must first corral and then supercool atoms.

- In the near-zero gravity in space, they can mix the ingredients in a much smaller catchment “trap.” On Earth’s surface, the atoms begin to repel each other and fly apart almost instantaneously.
- On Earth, laboratories can only maintain Bose-Einstein condensates for a matter of milliseconds. However, research aboard the ISS has created a Bose-Einstein condensate that persisted for more than a second.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:

1. What is a matter?
2. Different states of matter?
3. What is BEC? Why is it called so?
4. When was the first BEC created?
5. Required conditions for BEC?
6. What is absolute zero temperature?
7. Why it is easy to create BEC in space than on earth?
8. What is Cold Atom Laboratory?

Mains Link:
Discuss how the study of BEC helps scientists under the dark matter.
Sources: toi.

3. Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre

Overview:

- Created to provide private players to use Indian space infrastructure.
- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will remain the basic body that decides what missions are to be undertaken but this new body will help fill the gaps.
- With this, Private companies will be provided level playing field in satellites, launches and space-based services.
- Future projects for planetary exploration, outer space travel will be open for the private sector.

Significance and expected outcomes:

India is among a handful of countries with advanced capabilities in the space sector.
- With these reforms, the sector will receive new energy and dynamism, to help the country leapfrog to the next stages of space activities.
- This will not only result in an accelerated growth of this sector but will enable Indian Industry to be an important player in global space economy.
- With this, there is an opportunity for large-scale employment in the technology sector and India becoming a Global technology powerhouse.
- Allow ISRO to focus more on research and development activities, new technologies, exploration missions and human spaceflight programme.
**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. ISRO- establishment and how is ISRO director appointed?
2. About New Space India Limited (NSIL).
3. What is Demo 2 mission?

**Mains Link:**
Write a note historic reforms initiated in the Space sector by the Government of India.
Sources: pib.

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### 4. Statistics day

Celebrated on 29th June every year.
Observed in recognition of the notable contributions made by Late Professor Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis in the fields of statistics, statistical system and economic planning.

**Theme:**
This year’s Theme is "SDG- 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) & SDG- 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls)."

**Contribution of PC Mahalanobis to Statistics (1893 –1972):**
1. He is referred to as the chief architect of Indian statistical system as well as father of statistical science in India.
2. He established the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) in 1931 in Kolkata.
3. The institute founded the journal *Sankhya*, along the lines of Karl Pearson’s Biometrika.
4. In 1959 it was made an autonomous body of Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation.
5. He also helped in the establishment of Central Statistical Organisation (CSO), the National Sample Survey (NSS) and the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI).
   He introduced three key concepts to the theory and practice of sample surveys which are: Pilot surveys, Optimum survey design and Inter Penetrating Network of sub-samples technique (IPNS).
   He also served as the Chairman of the United Nations Sub-Commission on Statistical Sampling.
6. In 1936 he introduced a statistical measure named the Mahalanobis distance. It is widely used in cluster analysis and classification techniques.
   The Mahalanobis model, was employed in the Second Five Year Plan, which worked towards the rapid industrialisation of India.

Sources: pib.

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**Topics: Awareness in space.**

1. **NASA’s Gateway Lunar Orbit outpost**

**Context:**
NASA recently finalised the contract for the initial crew module of the agency’s Gateway lunar orbiting outpost.
The contract, which is worth $187 million has been awarded to Orbital Science Corporation of Dulles, Virginia, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Northrop Grumman Space.

**What is the contract for?**
NASA has issued this contract to design the habitation and logistics (HALO) support for the Gateway, which is a part of NASA’s Artemis program that aims to send the first woman and the next man to the Moon by 2024.
The HALO refers to the pressurised living quarters where astronauts will spend their time while visiting the Gateway.
These quarters will be about the size of a small apartment and will provide augmented life support in tandem with NASA’s Orion spacecraft.

**What is NASA’s Gateway Lunar Orbit outpost?**

[www.insightsonindia.com](http://www.insightsonindia.com)
The Gateway is a small spaceship that will orbit the Moon, meant for astronaut missions to the Moon and later, for expeditions to Mars. It will act as a temporary office and living quarters for astronauts, distanced at about 250,000 miles from Earth. The spaceship will have living quarters, laboratories for science and research and docking ports for visiting spacecraft. Compared to the ISS, the Gateway is much smaller.

How long will it take to build the Gateway?
As of now, NASA has targeted the completion of the Gateway for 2026, while work on the spaceship is already underway. By 2022, NASA plans to ready the power and propulsion for the spaceship, which will be launched on a partner-provided commercial rocket.

What is Artemis?
Artemis—Acceleration, Reconnection, Turbulence and Electrodynamics of Moon’s Interaction with the Sun. It is NASA’s next mission to the Moon.
Objective: To measure what happens when the Sun’s radiation hits our rocky moon, where there is no magnetic field to protect it. Artemis was the twin sister of Apollo and goddess of the Moon in Greek mythology.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is Artemis?
2. Significance of Artemis.
3. What is Orion Spacecraft?
4. What is Gateway Lunar Orbit outpost?
5. How is it different from the ISS?
6. Why is it proposed to be used?
7. NASA missions to the Moon and Mars.
Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of Gateway Lunar Orbit Outpost.
Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-what-is-nasas-gateway-lunar-orbiting-outpost-6460219/.
2. Detection of fluorine in hot Extreme Helium Stars

Context:
A study by the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) an autonomous institute of Department of Science and Technology has detected the presence of singly ionised fluorine for the first time in the atmospheres of hot Extreme Helium Stars. This discovery makes a strong case that the main formation of these objects involves a merger of a carbon-oxygen (CO) and a Helium (He) white dwarf.

Significance of the latest findings:
The origin and evolution of these Hydrogen deficient objects have been shrouded in mystery. Their severe chemical peculiarities challenge the theory of well-accepted stellar evolution as the observed chemical composition of these stars do not match with that predicted for low mass evolved stars.

What is an Extreme Helium Star?
An extreme helium star or EHe is a low-mass supergiant that is almost devoid of hydrogen, the most common chemical element of the universe. There are 21 of them detected so far in our galaxy.

What is a White Dwarf?
1. A white dwarf is what stars like the Sun become after they have exhausted their nuclear fuel.
2. Near the end of its nuclear burning stage, this type of star expels most of its outer material, creating a planetary nebula. Only the hot core of the star remains.
3. This core becomes a very hot white dwarf, with a temperature exceeding 100,000 Kelvin.
4. Unless it is accreting matter from a nearby star (see Cataclysmic Variables), the white dwarf cools down over the next billion years or so.
5. A typical white dwarf is half as massive as the Sun, yet only slightly bigger than Earth.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Awareness in the fields of IT, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

1. What is the ELISA-based Antibody Test?

Context: The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has advised the States to conduct sero-surveys to measure the coronavirus exposure in the population using IgG ELISA Test.

Significance:
As per the direction of the council, the coronavirus (COVID-19) exposure in the general population as well as in high-risk populations would be measured and the outcome will help “decide the future course of action against the pandemic”.

What is an ELISA-based test?
The Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assays (ELISAs) based test is used for the detection of antibodies that are produced by the body to fight against antigens or foreign substances.

How is it carried out?
ELISA-based tests are blood-based tests, which have high sensitivity and specificity.
1. The test involves drawing the blood of the person.
2. The sample is then placed inside the small wells of an ELISA plate.
3. These plates are coated with the antigen or the inactivated form of the virus.
4. If the blood contains antibodies, it binds to the antigen and a substrate solution is added to the well.
5. The reaction usually produces a colour change, thus detecting antibodies.
What is IgG?
Immunoglobulin G (IgG) is an antibody. The body produces Immunoglobulin M (IgM) and IgG antibodies to fight against a pathogen.

1. The IgM antibodies are produced in four-seven days after pathogens enter the body.
2. The IgG antibodies are produced between 10-14 days of the pathogen's appearance. If the IgG antibody is detected, it can be concluded that the person was exposed to SARS-CoV-2.

How is it different from rapid antibody kits and RT-PCR tests?
ELISA is also a form of a rapid test. However, other rapid antibody test kits are point-of-care and use a finger-prick method to draw blood. They take much lesser time and do not need a laboratory process to detect antibodies.
Both, ELISA-based tests and point-of-care tests are not used for confirming Covid-19 infection and are only used for surveillance purpose.
Those who test positive using these tests are usually tested with RT-PCR tests.
- RT-PCR tests are considered as the gold standard for confirming the presence of SARS-CoV-2.
- RT-PCR is a time consuming, lab-based test and involves the collection of throat and nasal swabs and is not a blood-based test.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is RT PCR?
2. What is ELISA based test?
3. What are antigens and antibodies?
4. Differences between IgG and IgM antibodies.
5. What is ICMR?
Mains Link:
Discuss how Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assays (ELISAs) Based test is carried out to detect the presence of SARS-COV2 in individuals.
Sources: the Hindu.

2. What is OTT (over-the-top) streaming?
Context: Majority producers in the Malayalam film industry declared that they do not prefer online release for their movies amid COVID-19 outbreak.

What’s the issue?
As the theatres remain closed amid the pandemic, the release of many movies were postponed for over three months. Following this, a few producers announced OTT release for their movies. The announcement irked theatre owners and they declared that they will boycott movies of the producer and actor if they go with the online release.

WHAT IS OTT?
An “over-the-top” media service is any online content provider that offers streaming media as a standalone product. The term is commonly applied to video-on-demand platforms, but also refers to audio streaming, messaging services, or internet-based voice calling solutions.
OTT services circumvent traditional media distribution channels such as telecommunications networks or cable television providers.
As long as you have access to an internet connection — either locally or through a mobile network — you can access the complete service at your leisure.

WHY USE OTT?
1. High-value content at low cost.
2. Original content like Netflix and Amazon prime.
3. Compatibility with multiple devices.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. RT-PCR tests: What it is and how it is done?

Context: Bombay High Court has said all frontline workers, including those who are asymptomatic, in hospitals and containment zones in Vidarbha shall be entitled to be tested for COVID-19 using RT-PCR (Rapid Antibody and Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction) method.

What happened?
It was announced based on a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking these tests on medical staff, police personnel and others working with COVID-19 patients.

Need for:
Frontline workers, including doctors, nurses, police personnel, and sanitation workers are performing a “herculean” task by putting their lives at risk to protect the lives of others. They are the warriors and soldiers in this process. Therefore, these workers are covered under the definition of suspected cases and hence, should be tested.

How RT-PCR is used for detecting Covid-19?
The causative agent for Covid19 is the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It is an RNA virus, that means it infiltrates a healthy cell to multiply and survive. Thus, the RT-PCR test is for the identification of SARS-CoV-2 RNA. In this, the RNA is converted to DNA through a process called 'reverse transcription' for detecting viruses.

How it is carried out?
The SARS-CoV-2 RNA is generally detectable in respiratory specimens during the acute phase of infection.
1. For that upper and lower respiratory specimens (such as nasal, nasopharyngeal) are collected.
2. This sample is treated with several chemical solutions that remove substances, such as proteins and fats, and extracts only the RNA present in the sample.
3. Real-time RT-PCR setup usually goes through 35 cycles, which means that by the end of the process, around 35 billion new copies of the sections of viral DNA are created from each strand of the virus present in the sample.
4. As new copies of the viral DNA sections are built, the marker labels attach to the DNA strands and then release a fluorescent dye, which is measured by the machine's computer and presented in real-time on the screen. The computer tracks the amount of fluorescence in the sample after each cycle. When the amount goes over a certain level of fluorescence, this confirms that the virus is present.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Difference between RNA and DNA.
2. Differences between RT PCR and antibody tests.
3. What is a RNA virus? How it survives?
4. What are antibodies?

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of RT-PCR test.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=G9V7FFPE9.1&imageview=0.
Sources: the Hindu.

4. Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI)

Why in News?
India joins Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) as a founding member to support the responsible and human-centric development and use of AI.

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What is GPAI?
It is an international and multi-stakeholder initiative to guide the responsible development and use of AI, grounded in human rights, inclusion, diversity, innovation, and economic growth. This is also a first initiative of its type.
GPAI will be supported by a Secretariat, to be hosted by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris, as well as by two Centers of Expertise- one each in Montreal and Paris.

Founding members:
Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the European Union.

How this initiative works?
1. It will bridge the gap between theory and practice on AI by supporting cutting-edge research and applied activities on AI-related priorities.
2. In collaboration with partners and international organizations, GPAI will bring together leading experts from industry, civil society, governments, and academia to collaborate to promote responsible evolution of AI.
3. It will also evolve methodologies to show how AI can be leveraged to better respond to the present global crisis around COVID-19.

How this helps for India?
By joining GPAI as a founding member, India will actively participate in the global development of Artificial Intelligence, leveraging upon its experience around use of digital technologies for inclusive growth.

What is AI?
Artificial intelligence is the branch of computer science concerned with making computers behave like humans. AI refers to the ability of machines to perform cognitive tasks like thinking, perceiving, learning, problem solving and decision making.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND OPPORTUNITIES

How AI works

Areas of focus for firms looking to exploit AI opportunities

Evolution of AI

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is AI?
2. What is GPAI? Objectives?

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3. Founding members.
4. Secretariat of GPAI?
5. OECD, objectives and members.

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the objectives of the GPAI.
Sources: pib.

**Topics:** Conservation related issues, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

### 1. Nagar van scheme

**Context:** With biodiversity the theme of *World Environment Day (WED)*, the ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC) has launched ‘Nagar Van’ (city forest) scheme.

**About Nagar Van scheme:**
- The scheme emphasises on urban forestry.
- Under the scheme, around 200 urban forests are to be developed all over the country in the next five years.
- The scheme will also provide an opportunity to the states to manage urban ecosystems.

**Why urban forestry?**
Biodiversity conservation has traditionally been considered confined to remote forest areas but with increasing urbanisation a need has arisen to safeguard and save biodiversity in urban areas also. Urban forest is the best way to bridge this gap. Hence, this scheme.

**Need for protection:**
India is endowed with rich biodiversity having several species of animals and plants and hosts 4 of the 35 global bio-diversity hotspots containing several endemic species. However, increasing population, deforestation, urbanisation and industrialisation have put our natural resources under tremendous pressure causing loss of biodiversity. Biodiversity is vital for survival of all life form on this planet and is a key to providing various ecological services.

Sources: pib.

### 2. Oil spill in Russia’s Arctic region

**What happened?**
Russia has declared a state of emergency after a power plant fuel leak in its Arctic region caused 20,000 tonnes of diesel oil to escape into a local river, turning its surface crimson red.

**Where the incident took place?**
The oil has been discharged into Ambarnaya river. The river is part of a network that flows into the environmentally sensitive Arctic Ocean. Emergency measures are announced within Russia’s Krasnoyarsk Region, located in the vast and sparsely populated Siberian peninsula. The power plant is located near the Region’s Norilsk city, around 3000 km northeast of Moscow.

**How did the leak happen?**
The thermoelectric power plant at Norilsk is built on permafrost, which has weakened over the years owing to climate change. This caused the pillars that supported the plant’s fuel tank to sink., leading to a loss of containment on May 29. Reports said that around 20,000 tonnes of diesel oil was released into the Ambarnaya river, which has since drifted 12 km on its surface.

**What has Russia done so far?**
- A probe has been ordered into the incident.

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2. Boom obstacles were placed in the river, but they were unable to contain the oil because of shallow waters.
3. So far, three criminal proceedings have been launched, and the head of the power plant has been detained.
4. The state of emergency declared would bring in extra forces and federal resources for the clean-up efforts.

What is the extent of the damage?
Environmentalists have said the river would be difficult to clean, given its shallow waters and remote location, as well as the magnitude of the spill. This is the second-largest known oil leak in modern Russia’s history in terms of volume. Damages to the Arctic waterways could be at least 6 billion rubles (over $76 million). This excludes atmospheric damage due to greenhouse gases and soil pollution. The installed buoys will only help collect a small part of the pollution and nearly all the diesel fuel will remain in the environment.

What does the oil spill mean for permafrost?
Ground that remains frozen for two or more consecutive years is considered permafrost. Permafrost is composed of rock, soil, sediments and varying amounts of ice that bind elements together, according to the university. Some permafrost is frozen for tens, hundreds or even thousands of years. Norilsk is constructed on permafrost and there is a threat to its existence because of melting ice due to climate change. The diesel leak can have a serious impact on the local ecology. The Ambarnaya river flows to the Pyasin lake and river Pyasina, which connects it to the Kara sea, a part of the Arctic Ocean.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Locate the following on map:
   I. Pyasino lake.
   II. Kara sea.
   III. Ambarnaya river.
2. Countries in the Arctic circle.
3. Arctic council.
4. International whaling commission.
Mains Link:
The oil spill in Russia’s Arctic region has become a cause for worry to the environment. Examine.
Sources: the Hindu.
3. Sundarbans devastated by cyclone Amphan

Context: The powerful cyclone that struck India and Bangladesh last month passed through the vast mangrove forests of the Sundarban delta.

What’s the matter?
The storm's impact was devastating for the millions who live in the Sundarbans. About 28% of the Sunderbans has been damaged.

Despite the massive plantation drives, it may take years to restore the mangroves. Experts say the mangroves not only reduce wind speed but breaks the waves during a storm surge caused by a cyclone.

How Sundarbans was affected?
Cyclone Amphan hit on May 20 with heavy rains, a massive storm surge and sustained winds of 170 kilometers (105 miles) per hour and gusts of up to 190 kph (118 mph). It passed directly through the Sundarbans, devastating it.

The lives of the estimated 4.5 million people in the region are tied to the fragile ecosystem. Farming, fishing, collecting honey and tourism are the few employment opportunities available. But climate change has been making their lives harder.

Cyclone Amphan also damaged almost the entire length of the 100-kilometer (62-mile) nylon fence that had been erected to prevent tigers from straying into human habitations.

But it is the breaking of embankments, resulting in salt water pouring onto the land, which will have the most durable impact on livelihoods. Saline water kills freshwater fish in ponds in a day, most sources of drinking water disappear, and land can’t be used for cultivation for up to five years.

Impact of COVID 19 pandemic:
The coronavirus is complicating relief work as well. During the cyclone, villagers huddled in crowded storm shelters, which authorities feared could spread the virus. Since the storm, the number of cases in the state has increased to over 5,500 with more than 300 deaths from 3,103 cases and 181 deaths on the day of the cyclone.

About Sundarbans:
1. The Sundarbans comprises hundreds of islands and a network of rivers, tributaries and creeks in the delta of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra at the mouth of the Bay of Bengal in India and Bangladesh.
2. Located on the southwestern part of the delta, the Indian Sundarban constitutes over 60% of the country’s total mangrove forest area.
3. It is the 27th Ramsar Site in India, and with an area of 4,23,000 hectares is now the largest protected wetland in the country.
4. The Indian Sundarban, also a UNESCO world heritage site, is home to the Royal Bengal Tiger.
5. It is also home to a large number of “rare and globally threatened species, such as the critically endangered northern river terrapin (Batagur baska), the endangered Irrawaddy dolphin (Orcaella brevirostris), and the vulnerable fishing cat (Prionailurus viverrinus).”
6. Two of the world’s four horseshoe crab species, and eight of India’s 12 species of kingfisher are also found here. Recent studies claim that the Indian Sundarban is home to 2,626 faunal species and 90% of the country’s mangrove varieties.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Where is Sundarbans?
2. What are mangroves?
3. Flora and fauna in the regions.
4. How are Cyclones named?
5. Recent cyclones in BoB region.

Mains Link:
Discuss the impact of cyclone amphan on Mangroves in India.

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4. Environmental performance index

**Context:** 12th edition of the biennial Environment Performance Index (EPI Index 2020) has been released.

**About the index:**
The index ranks 180 countries on 32 performance indicators across 11 categories covering environmental health and ecosystem vitality. The index is a method of quantifying and numerically marking the environmental performance of a state’s policies. This index was developed from the Pilot Environmental Performance Index, first published in 2002, and designed to supplement the environmental targets set forth in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. The EPI was preceded by the Environmental Sustainability Index (ESI), published between 1999 and 2005. Both indices were developed by Yale University (Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy) and Columbia University (Center for International Earth Science Information Network) in collaboration with the World Economic Forum and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission.

**Performance of India and neighbours:**
India secured 168th rank. The country scored 27.6 out of 100 in the 2020 index.
- India’s rank was 177 (with a score of 27.6 out of 100) in 2018.
- India scored below the regional average score on all five key parameters on environmental health, including air quality, sanitation and drinking water, heavy metals and waste management.
- It has also scored below the regional average on parameters related to biodiversity and ecosystem services too.
- Among South Asian countries, India was at second position (rank 106) after Pakistan on ‘climate change’.
- The 11 countries lagging behind India were — Burundi, Haiti, Chad, Soloman Islands, Madagascar, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoir, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Liberia.
- All South Asian countries, except Afghanistan, were ahead of India in the ranking.

**Suggestions for India:**
- India needs to re-double national sustainability efforts on all fronts.
- The country needs to focus on a wide spectrum of sustainability issues, with a high-priority to critical issues such as air and water quality, biodiversity and climate change.

**Global performance:**
- Denmark came in first place, followed by Luxembourg and Switzerland. The United Kingdom ranked fourth.
- The US is far behind other industrialized nations on environmental performance and now ranks 24th in the world.

Sources: down to earth.

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5. Nature Index 2020

**Context:** Nature Index ratings for the year 2020 have been released.

Sources: the Hindu.
What is the Nature Index?
The Nature Index is a database of author affiliations and institutional relationships. The index tracks contributions to research articles published in 82 high-quality natural science journals, chosen by an independent group of researchers.

- The database is compiled by Nature Research, a division of the international scientific publishing company Springer Nature that publishes academic journals.
- The Index provides a close to real-time proxy of high-quality research output and collaboration at the institutional, national and regional level.
- The Index is updated monthly and also releases annual tables of country.
- It serves as an indicator of high-quality research in the Natural and Physical Sciences.

Nature Index metrics:
The Index provides several metrics to track research output and collaboration. These include article count, fractional count, and multilateral and bilateral collaboration scores.

Performance of Indian institutions:
- Three of the autonomous institutions of the Department of Science & Technology, Government of India have found their place among top 30 Indian Institutions.
- These are the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science (IACS), Kolkata at 7th position, Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bangalore at 14th position and S. N. Bose National Centre for Basic Sciences, Kolkata at 30th position.
- Globally the top-rated Indian institutions in this list are Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), a group of 39 institutions at the 160th position and Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore at the 184th position.

Global Institutions:
The top five positions have gone to the United States of America, China, Germany, United Kingdom and Japan.

Sources: pib.

6. New guidelines for import of exotic species

Context: Union Government has issued advisory to streamline the process for import and possession of exotic live species in India.
The move comes as the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) has raised global concern about illegal wildlife trade and zoonotic diseases.

What are exotic live species?
Exotic live species are animal or plant species moved from their original range to a new one most often by people.

Some of the most sought after exotic species in India are Ball python, Scarlet Macaw, sea turtles, sugar glider (Petaurus breviceps), marmoset and grey African parrots.

What it includes? What it does not?
According to the advisory, the phrase “exotic live species” includes “animals named under the Appendices I, II and III of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora” and “does not include species from the Schedules of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972”.

Need for regulation:
While import of live exotic animals is covered under Customs Act in India, wildlife experts have long been asking for stringent laws and guidelines to document and regulate numbers of exotic species being kept as pets by individuals and breeders in India.
- Many citizens have kept CITES (Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species) enlisted exotic animal species in their possession.
• However, there is no unified information system available of such stock of species at the State or Central level.
• Besides, often these species are illegally trafficked into the country to avoid lengthy documentation and scrutiny.

As per the recently released guidelines:
1. Environment Ministry will collect stock information from the holders of such species through voluntary disclosure in next six months.
2. The registration will be done for the stock of animals, new progeny, as well as for import and exchange.
3. The declarer would not be required to produce any documentation in relation to the exotic live species if the same has been declared within six months of the date of issue of the advisory.
4. For any declaration made after six months, the declarer shall be required to comply with the documentation requirement under the extant laws and regulations.
5. Further, a person trying to import a live exotic animal will have to submit an application for grant of a licence to the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), under the provisions of the advisory.
6. The importer will also have to attach a No Objection Certificate (NOC) of the chief wildlife warden of the state concerned along with the application.

Implications and significance of this move:
This will help in better management of the species and guide the holders about proper veterinary care, housing and other aspects of well-being of the species. The database of exotic animals will also help in control and management of zoonotic diseases on which guidance would be available from time to time to ensure safety of animals and humans.

What is missing?
Experts said the advisory did not provide answers to all problems.
• Matters such as spread of invasive species as well as zoonotic diseases had not been taken care of in the advisory.
• Limiting the scope of the latest advisory to only those species covered under CITES drastically limits the scope of the advisory itself.
• There is also a growing domestic trade in exotic species of wildlife that is unfortunately not listed under the various appendices of CITES (such as sugar gliders, corn snakes).
There is no mention of the welfare standards of such captive facilities that could lead to ‘legal’ backyard breeding of wildlife with poor to no welfare concern of the wild animals involved.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What are exotic species - definition in the advisory?
2. What is CITES?
3. Classification of species under CITES?
4. What is Wildlife (Protection) Act? Species protected under various schedules of this act.
5. As per the new guidelines, what is the procedure to be followed while importing new exotic species?
6. What about the existing species in the country?
7. About chief wildlife warden of the state.

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of recently issued guidelines for import of exotic species in the country.
Sources: the Hindu.

7. Census of Asiatic Lion

Context: Census of Asiatic lion was recently conducted by the Gujarat government and the details have been released.

About the lion census:
The census is conducted once every five years. This year it was delayed due to lockdowns.
The first Lion Census was conducted by the Nawab of Junagadh in 1936; since 1965, the Forest Department has been regularly conducting the Lion Census every five years.
The 6th, 8th and 11th Censuses were each delayed by a year, for various reasons.

Key figures this year:
28% rise in population of Lions: Total estimated Lions in Gir region is 674. It was 523 in 2015.
36% Expanse in distribution: Today, Asiatic lions are present in Protected Areas and agro-pastoral landscapes of Saurashtra covering nine districts, over an expanse of about 30,000 sq. km. It was 22,000 sq. km in 2015.

Factors responsible for steady rise in population:
Over the last several years, the lion population in Gujarat has been steadily rising.
How was the census carried out this year? How is it different from previous census?

Reduced participation: Every year, the state Forest Department invites NGOs, experts and wildlife enthusiasts to join the Census for transparency and augmenting manpower. But this time, it was not advisable to send so many people inside the forest as the Bronx Zoo in New York had reported a case of transmission of novel coronavirus from a human to a tigress.

So, this year, the count was estimated not from a Census, but from a population “observation” exercise called Poonam Avlokan.

How it was carried out?
- Poonam Avlokan (developed in 2014) is a monthly in-house exercise carried out every full moon.
- Field staff and officers spend 24 hours assessing the number of lions and their locations in their respective jurisdictions.
- Unlike previous census, which had nearly 2000 participants, this census had around 1400 staff and a few experts.
- These staff kept moving in their respective territories and made their estimates based on inputs provided by lion trackers and on chance sightings.

What is Block counting method?
India uses this method to estimate the numbers.
In this method, census enumerators remain stationed at water points in a given block and estimate abundance of lions in that block, based on direct sighting of lions who need to drink water at least once in 24 hours during the summer.
There are inherent issues with this method. So, newer methods should be adopted - such as camera trapping and identifying lions based on permanent marks on their body, and statistical estimates based on the animals' predatory patterns and numbers of their prey base.

Concerns over the estimates:
Few experts are doubtful about the estimated numbers. They say it could be an overestimation. It is because:
1. 12 lions were killed in a flash flood in Amreli just a month after the 2015 census.
2. More than two dozen lions in an outbreak of canine distemper virus (CDV) and babesiosis in 2018.
3. A babesiosis outbreak was reported this summer too, and around two dozen lions are reported killed.

Why we need to relocate the lions to other regions?
Presently, Asiatic lions are confined only to Gujarat. A single epidemic could wipe the entire population and the species might become extinct. Hence, introduction of species to new areas and states might be a good idea.

Additional information:

| Asiatic Lion Conservation Project: | Announced in Feb this year by the centre and Gujarat state government. Key aspects of the conservation project include undertaking “habitat improvement” measures, making more sources of water available, creating a wildlife crime cell, and a task force for the Greater Gir region. |
| Relocation of lions: | The Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh was identified to be the most suitable for reintroducing the species, according to a Supreme Court-appointed technical expert committee, but there has been no progress on the proposal. |
| Supreme Court order: | The SC in April 2013 had ordered the translocation of some lions from Gujarat to Madhya Pradesh. |
| About Asiatic Lions: | Listed as ‘Endangered’ under the IUCN Red List. |
| Its population is restricted to the state of Gujarat in India. |
Wildlife under constitution: In 1976, the 42nd amendment incorporated protection of wildlife and forests in the Directive Principles. It also included forests and protection of wild animals in the Concurrent List – Seventh Schedule (Article 246) of the Constitution.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Asiatic lions vs African lions- conservation status and distribution.
2. When was the first census conducted?
3. Census- male- female numbers, growth in numbers, expansion in area.
4. What is Poonam Avlokan?
5. What was SC’s verdict on relocation of lions? Which place was chosen?
6. What is Asiatic lion conservation project?
8. What is CDV?
9. What is babesiosis?
10. About Gir Forest.

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of Asiatic Lion Conservation project.
Sources: the Hindu.

8. World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought: 17 June

Theme for 2020:
Food. Feed.Fibre. - the links between consumption and land.

Why June 17?
This day was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly resolution in 1995, after the day when United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification was drafted.

What is Desertification?
- Desertification is the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. It is caused primarily by human activities and climatic variations. Desertification does not refer to the expansion of existing deserts.
- It occurs because dryland ecosystems, which cover over one third of the world’s land area, are extremely vulnerable to overexploitation and inappropriate land use. Poverty, political instability, deforestation, overgrazing and bad irrigation practices can all undermine the productivity of the land.

About UNCCD:
Established in 1994. It is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.
- It is the only convention stemming from a direct recommendation of the Rio Conference’s Agenda 21.
- To help publicise the Convention, 2006 was declared “International Year of Deserts and Desertification”.
- Focus areas: The Convention addresses specifically the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, known as the drylands, where some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples can be found.
- Aim: Its 197 Parties aim, through partnerships, to implement the Convention and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The end goal is to protect land from over-use and drought, so it can continue to provide food, water and energy.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is the nodal Ministry for this Convention.
Concerns for India:
India has witnessed an increase in the level of desertification in 26 of 29 states between 2003-05 and 2011-13, according to the State of India’s Environment (SoE) 2019 in Figures.

More than 80 per cent of the country’s degraded land lies in just nine states: Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana.

Top three districts with highest area under desertification or land degradation are Jaisalmer, Rajasthan (92.96 per cent during 2011-13 and 98.13 per cent during 2003-05), Lahaul and Spiti, Himachal Pradesh (80.54 per cent during 2011-13 and 80.57 per cent during 2003-05) and Kargil, Jammu and Kashmir (78.23 per cent during 2011-13 and 78.22 per cent during 2003-05).

Main reasons that cause desertification in India are:
1. Water erosion (10.98 per cent).
2. Wind erosion (5.55 per cent).
3. Human-made/settlements (0.69 per cent).
4. Vegetation degradation (8.91 per cent).
5. Salinity (1.12 per cent).
6. Others (2.07 per cent).

Mains Link:
Differentiate between land degradation and desertification? Discuss impact of desertification on ecology.

Sources: down to earth.

9. World Crocodile Day
Observed on June 17th every year.

It is a global awareness campaign to highlight the plight of endangered crocodiles and alligators around the world.

India is home to three crocodilian species:
1. The mugger or marsh crocodile (Crocodylus palustris)
2. The estuarine or saltwater crocodile (Crocodylus porosus)
3. The gharial (Gavialis gangeticus)

Details:
Mugger:
- The mugger crocodile, also called the Indian crocodile, or marsh crocodile, is found throughout the Indian subcontinent.
- It is listed as vulnerable by IUCN.
- The mugger is mainly a freshwater species, and found in lakes, rivers and marshes.

Gharial:
- The Gharial or fish eating crocodile is native to the Indian subcontinent.
- It is listed as a Critically Endangered by IUCN.
- Small released populations are present and increasing in the rivers of the National Chambal Sanctuary, Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, Son River Sanctuary and the rainforest biome of Mahanadi in Satkosia Gorge Sanctuary, Orissa.
Saltwater Crocodile:
It is the largest of all living reptiles. It listed as least concern by IUCN. It is found throughout the east coast of India.

Crocodile conservation programmes in India:
The Gharial and Saltwater crocodile conservation programme was first implemented in Odisha in early 1975 and subsequently the Mugger conservation programme was initiated, since Odisha is having distinction for existence of all the three species of Indian crocodilians. The funds and technical support for the project came from UNDP/FAO through the Government of India.

‘BAULA’ PROJECT AT DANGAMAL: ‘Baula’ is the Oriya term for Saltwater Crocodile. Dangmal is in Bhitarkanika sanctuary.

MUGGER PROJECT AT RAMATIRTHA: The Ramatirtha center, in Odisha, is meant for Mugger crocodiles.

GHARIAL PROJECT AT TIKARPADA, Odisha.

CAPTIVE BREEDING OF CROCODILES AT NANDANKANAN, Odisha.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Types in India and their conservation status.
2. Which species are native to India.
3. Habitats.
4. Conservation areas and programmes.
5. Differences between three species.

Sources: Down to Earth.

10. Decarbonizing Transport Project

Context:
NITI Aayog and the International Transport Forum (ITF) of OECD jointly launched the ‘Decarbonizing Transport in Emerging Economies’ (DTEE) project in India on 24 June.

About the project:
The ambitious five-year project will help India develop a pathway towards a low-carbon transport system through the development of modelling tools and policy scenarios.

• The project will design a tailor-made transport emissions assessment framework for India.
• The India project is carried out in the wider context of the International Transport Forum’s Decarbonizing Transport initiative.

Decarbonising Transport in Emerging Economies (DTEE):
It supports transport decarbonisation across different world regions.

Current participants: India, Argentina, Azerbaijan, and Morocco.

Implementation: The DTEE is collaboration between the International Transport Forum (ITF) and the Wuppertal Institute, supported by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety.

How this will help India?
The transport sector of India is the third most greenhouse gas (GHG) emitting sector, where the major contribution comes from the road transport sector.
Out of the total carbon dioxide emissions in India, 13% come from the transport sector. These emissions have more than tripled since 1990.
In India, CO2 emitted per inhabitant was just about a twentieth of that of an average OECD country, yet, India’s transport CO2 emissions are likely to increase by almost 6% annually to 2030.
This project will provide the government with a detailed understanding of current and future transport activity and the related CO2 emissions as a basis for their decision-making.

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International Transport Forum (ITF):
It was created in 2006 by ministers from 43 countries.
It is an intergovernmental organisation within the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with 60 member countries.
It acts as a think tank for transport policy and organises the Annual Summit of transport ministers.
ITF is the only global body that covers all transport modes.
The ITF is administratively integrated with the OECD, yet politically autonomous.
It is headquartered in Paris, France.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is OECD?
2. What is ITF? Members?
3. Participants of DTEE.
4. What is International Climate Initiative (IKI)?
5. Who organises the annual summit of transport ministers?

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of DTEE.
Sources: pib.

11. Ozone pollution spiked in several cities during lockdown

Context:
According to an analysis by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), while particulate matter and nitrous oxide levels fell during the lockdown, ozone — also a harmful pollutant — increased in several cities.

Factors responsible for tropospheric ozone pollution:
Ozone is primarily a sunny weather problem in India that otherwise remains highly variable during the year. The surge is because of few characteristics of summer pollution. These include: high winds, intermittent rains and thunderstorms, and high temperature and heat waves.

What is Ozone?
Ozone (O3) is a colourless, reactive oxidant gas that is a major constituent of atmospheric smog.

How Tropospheric, or ground level ozone is formed?
Ozone is not directly emitted by any source but is formed by photochemical reactions between oxides of nitrogen (NOx) and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and gases in the air under the influence of sunlight and heat. This happens when pollutants emitted by cars, power plants, industrial boilers, refineries, chemical plants, and other sources chemically react in the presence of sunlight.

Concerns:
Ozone at ground level is a harmful air pollutant, because of its effects on people and the environment, and it is the main ingredient in “smog.” Elevated ground-level ozone exposures affect agricultural crops and trees, especially slow growing crops and long-lived trees.
InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is Ozone?
2. Tropospheric GS Stratospheric ozone.
3. How ground level ozone is formed?
4. Role of Ozone in the formation of smog.
5. What are VOCs?
Mains Link:
Discuss the health concerns associated with the formation of ozone at the ground level. 
Sources: The Hindu.

12. Scheme for Promotion of academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)
Context:
Researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology Madras are collaborating with their counterparts in Germany to develop new materials for green energy solutions.
  • This project has been taken up under the Scheme for Promotion of academic and Research Collaboration or SPARC.
  • It aims at developing alternative technologies to produce green hydrogen in anticipation of transition to hydrogen-based economy.

Need for and significance of the project:
Conventional methods of generating hydrogen result in a large quantity of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that imposed serious environmental concerns. This project aims to develop novel low cost electrocatalysts for hydrogen evolution reactions.

What is SPARC?
It is an initiative of the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
  • The scheme aims at improving the research ecosystem of India’s higher educational institutions by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian Institutions and the best institutions in the world.
  • Under this Scheme, 600 joint research proposals will be awarded for 2 years to facilitate strong research collaboration between Indian research groups with the best in class faculty and renowned research groups in the leading universities of the world, in areas that are at the cutting edge of science or with direct social relevance to the mankind, specifically India.

Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur is the National Coordinating Institute to implement the SPARC programme.

Sources: The Hindu.

13. Draft EIA notification
Why in News?
Student unions from several universities and colleges from across India have petitioned Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar to put the draft of the proposed Environment Impact Assessment Notification 2020 on hold.

Background:
www.insightsonindia.com
Environment Impact Assessment in India is **statutorily backed by the Environment Protection Act, 1986** which contains various provisions on EIA methodology and process.

The draft notification is issued under the powers vested in the central government under **the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986** to take all such measures for “protecting and improving the quality of the environment.

**The key points of dispute with the proposed draft are that:**

1. **It shortens the period of public consultation hearings** to a maximum of 40 days.
2. **It reduces from 30 to 20 days the time provided for the public to submit their responses during a public hearing** for any application seeking environmental clearance.
3. **It also allows the declaration of some areas as “economically sensitive areas” without a public hearing or environmental clearance,** and several “red” and “orange”-classified toxic industries could now operate as close as 0-5 km from a Protected Area in “callous disregard” for forests.
4. **The increased validity of the environment clearances for mining projects (50 years versus 30 years currently) and river valley projects (15 years versus 10 years currently) raises the risk of irreversible environmental, social and health consequences on account of the project remaining unnoticed for long.**

**What is EIA?**

EIA is an important process for evaluating the likely environmental impact of a proposed project. It is a process whereby people’s views are taken into consideration for granting final approval to any developmental project or activity. It is basically, a decision-making tool to decide whether the project should be approved or not.

**The EIA process involves:**

- **Screening:** this stage decides which projects need a full or partial assessment study.
- **Scoping:** this stage decides which impacts are necessary to be assessed. This is done based on legal requirements, international conventions, expert knowledge and public engagement. This stage also finds out alternate solutions.
- **Assessment & evaluation of impacts and development of alternatives:** this stage predicts and identifies the environmental impacts of the proposed project and also elaborates on the alternatives.
- **EIA Report:** in this reporting stage, an environmental management plan (EMP) and also a non-technical summary of the project’s impact is prepared for the general public. This report is also called the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- **Decision making:** the decision on whether the project is to be given approval or not and if it is to be given, under what conditions.
- **Monitoring, compliance, enforcement and environmental auditing:** monitoring whether the predicted impacts and the mitigation efforts happen as per the EMP.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. EIA process.
2. Environment (Protection) Act, 1986- Key provisions,
4. Article 253 of the Constitution.

**Mains Link:**

Explain the significance of the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) process in the Indian context. Also highlight the concerns associated with it.


Sources: the Hindu.

14. **What is Anthropause?**

Also called as the “Great Pause”, it is a term coined by the researchers in the UK. It refers to the coronavirus-induced lockdown period and its impact on other species.
How curbs imposed during this period led to unusual animal behaviour?
There were pumas sighted in Chile’s Santiago, jackals in the parks of Tel Aviv in Israel, dolphins in the waters of Italy and even a monkey fight on the streets of Thailand.

Why study this period?
As a result of the lockdown, nature appears to have changed, especially in urban environments, since not only are there now more animals, but also some “unexpected visitors.”
On the other hand, there are some animals for whom the lockdown may have made things more challenging.
- For instance, for various urban-dwelling animals, such as rats, gulls and monkeys who depend on food provided or discarded by humans, the lockdown would have made life more difficult.
The researchers believe studying this period will provide valuable insights into the relationship between human-wildlife interactions in the 21st century.
It might also be useful in preserving global biodiversity, maintaining the integrity of ecosystems and predicting global zoonoses and environmental changes.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Locate the following on map: Tel Aviv, Santiago and Thailand.
2. Dolphins species in India and their habitats.
3. What is Anthropause? Who coined the term?
4. Zoonoses.
Mains Link:
Write a note on Anthropause.
Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Disaster and management.

1. Disaster Management Act

Context: In the 68 days since the nationwide lockdown was imposed to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, the Union Home Ministry on an average, issued 1.3 orders a day.
The orders were issued under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, invoked for the first time in the country since the legislation was drafted after the tsunami in 2004.

Relevance of DM Act in this pandemic:
COVID-19 is the first pan India biological disaster being handled by the legal and constitutional institutions of the country.
The current lockdown has been imposed under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 (DM Act).
Under the Act, the States and district authorities can frame their own rules on the basis of broad guidelines issued by the Ministry.
- The legal basis of the DM Act, is Entry 23, Concurrent List of the Constitution “Social security and social insurance”.
- Entry 29, Concurrent List “Prevention of the extension from one State to another of infectious or contagious diseases or pests affecting men, animals or plants,” can also be used for specific law making.
A notified disaster:
Central government has included the Covid-19 outbreak as “Notified Disaster” as a “critical medical condition or pandemic situation”.

About the Disaster Management Act, 2005:
The stated object and purpose of the DM Act is to manage disasters, including preparation of mitigation strategies, capacity-building and more.
It came into force in India in January 2006.
The Act provides for “the effective management of disasters and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.”
The Act calls for the establishment of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), with the Prime Minister of India as chairperson.
The Act enjoins the Central Government to Constitute a National Executive Committee (NEC) to assist the National Authority.
All State Governments are mandated to establish a State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA).

Powers given to the Centre:
- Power bestowed by DM Act on Central Government and NDMA are extensive.
- The Central Government, irrespective of any law in force (including over-riding powers) can issue any directions to any authority anywhere in India to facilitate or assist in the disaster management.
- Importantly, any such directions issued by Central Government and NDMA must necessarily be followed the Union Ministries, State Governments and State Disaster Management Authorities.
- In order to achieve all these, the prime minister can exercise all powers of NDMA (S 6(3)). This ensures that there is adequate political and constitutional heft behind the decisions made.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is DM Act?
2. Bodies established under this act.
3. Composition of NDMA.
5. What is a notified disaster?
6. Functions of NDRF.
Mains Link:
Is the Disaster Management Act, 2005, ill-suited to be the main economic law of the country? Analyse the need for a pandemic law in the current situation facing the world.
Sources: the Hindu.

2. Sixth mass extinction
Context: The ongoing sixth mass extinction may be one of the most serious environmental threats to the persistence of civilisation, according to new research.
The research was published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS).

What is the mass extinction of species?
Mass extinction refers to a substantial increase in the degree of extinction or when the Earth loses more than three-quarters of its species in a geologically short period of time. So far, during the entire history of the Earth, there have been five mass extinctions.

Reasons and impacts:
The five mass extinctions that took place in the last 450 million years have led to the destruction of 70-95 per cent of the species of plants, animals and microorganisms that existed earlier. These extinctions were caused by “catastrophic alterations” to the environment, such as massive volcanic eruptions, depletion of oceanic oxygen or collision with an asteroid. After each of these extinctions, it took millions of years to regain species comparable to those that existed before the event.

What is the sixth mass extinction?
The sixth, which is ongoing, is referred to as the Anthropocene extinction. Researchers have described it as the “most serious environmental problem” since the loss of species will be permanent.

Why it is attributable to humans?
One of the reasons that humanity is an “unprecedented threat” to many living organisms is because of their growing numbers. The loss of species has been occurring since human ancestors developed agriculture over 11,000 years ago. Since then, the human population has increased from about 1 million to 7.7 billion.

Changes occurred and occurring:
More than 400 vertebrate species went extinct in the last century, extinctions that would have taken over 10,000 years in the normal course of evolution. In a sample of 177 species of large mammals, most lost more than 80 per cent of their geographic range in the last 100 years, and 32 per cent of over 27,000 vertebrate species have declining populations. Many of the species currently endangered or on the brink of extinction are being decimated by legal and illegal wildlife trade.

Several species of mammals that were relatively safe one or two decades ago are now endangered, including cheetahs, lions and giraffes. There are as few as 20,000 lions left in the wild, less than 7,000 cheetahs, 500 to 1,000 giant pandas, and about 250 Sumatran rhinoceros.

Vulnerable regions:
Tropical regions have seen the highest number of declining species. In South and Southeast Asia, large-bodied species of mammals have lost more than four-fifths of their historical ranges. While fewer species are disappearing in temperate zones, the percentage is just as high or higher. As many as half of the number of animals that once shared our planet are no longer here, a loss described as “a massive erosion of the greatest biological diversity in the history of Earth”.

What happens when species go extinct?
Impact can be tangible such as in the form of a loss in crop pollination and water purification. If a species has a specific function in an ecosystem, the loss can lead to consequences for other species by impacting the food chain. Effects of extinction will worsen in the coming decades as the resulting genetic and cultural variability will change entire ecosystems.
• When the number of individuals in a population or species drops too low, its contributions to ecosystem functions and services become unimportant, its genetic variability and resilience is reduced, and its contribution to human welfare may be lost.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is mass extinction?
2. Previous extinctions and the factors responsible.
3. The sixth mass extinction and factors responsible.

Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-what-is-the-ongoing-sixth-mass-extinction-6439257/. Sources: Indian Express.

3. Assam gas leak

What happened?
Since the morning of May 27, natural gas has been continuously flowing out of a gas well in Assam following a blowout — or a sudden, uncontrolled release of gas/oil.
This happened after the blowout at the Oil India Limited's (OIL) Baghjan gas well in Assam's Tinsukia district.
• People from surrounding villages have been evacuated, while a variety of fish and an endangered Gangetic dolphin have died.

Leakage:
The current discharge is at 90,000 SCMD at a pressure of 4,200 PSI, far higher than the normal producing pressure of around 2,700 PSI.

Why do blowouts happen?
The pressure balance in a well may be disturbed leading to ‘kicks’ or changes in pressure. If these are not controlled in time, the ‘kicks’ can turn into a sudden blowout.
There are many possible reasons behind blowouts, “from simple lack of attention, poor workmanship, bad maintenance, old age, sabotage to morpho-tectonic factors”.

Why is it so difficult to control?
The control of a blowout depends on two things: the size of the reservoir and the pressure at which the gas/oil is flowing out.
This reservoir was particularly difficult to control since it was a gas well and ran the risk of catching fire at any point.

What is being done?
While many blowouts automatically collapse on their own, it can take up to months. To control a blowout, the first step is to pump in water, so that the gas does not catch fire.

How serious is the impact to the neighbourhood?
As many as 1,610 families with 2,500-3,000 people have been evacuated to relief camps. There are reports of deaths of a river dolphin, and a variety of fish. While the administration has kept an ambulance with paramedical staff on standby, locals have complained of symptoms such as burning of eyes, headache etc.
Also close is the Maguri-Motapung wetland — an Important Bird Area notified by the Bombay Natural History Society.

Impact on the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park:
It is at an aerial distance of 900 metres from the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park.
The national park houses some of the rare and endangered species of flora and fauna – around 36 species of mammals and nearly 400 species of birds.

About Natural Gas:

www.insightsonindia.com
Natural gas is the cleanest fossil fuels among the available fossil fuels. It is used as a feedstock in the manufacture of fertilizers, plastics and other commercially important organic chemicals as well as used as a fuel for electricity generation, heating purpose in industrial and commercial units.

Natural gas is also used for cooking in domestic households and a transportation fuel for vehicles.

Link: 
Sources: the Hindu.

4. IFLOWS-Mumbai

What is it?
It is an Integrated Flood Warning System and is a joint initiative between the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

- Mumbai is only the second city in the country after Chennai to get this system.

How it works?
The warning system will be able to relay alerts of possible flood-prone areas anywhere between six to 72 hours in advance.

- The system can provide all information regarding possible flood-prone areas, likely height the floodwater could attain, location-wise problem areas across all 24 wards and calculate the vulnerability and risk of elements exposed to flood.
- The primary source for the system is the amount of rainfall, but with Mumbai being a coastal city, the system also factors in tidal waves and storm tides for its flood assessments.

Why was this system needed in Mumbai?
Mumbai, the financial capital of India, has been experiencing floods with increased periodicity.

- The recent flood on 29 August 2017 had brought the city to a standstill.
- Last year, post-monsoon and unseasonal rainfall as late as October, two tropical cyclones in the Arabian Sea had caught authorities off guard and left a trail of destruction.
- The flood during 26th July 2005, when the city received a rainfall of 94 cm, a 100 year high in a span of 24 hours had paralyzed the city completely.

Significance of this system:
Urban flooding is common in the city from June to September, resulting in the crippling of traffic, railways and airlines. As a preparedness for floods before they occur, the system will help in warning the citizens so that they can be prepared in advance for flooding conditions.
Sources: pib.

5. Individual contributions to NDRF get green light from Finance Ministry

Context:
The Finance Ministry has given approval to a proposal to allow individuals and institutions to contribute directly to the National Disaster Relief Fund (NDRF).

Significance and implications of this move:
This is a significant development at a time when many have expressed concerns about donations sent to the PM CARES Fund or the Prime Minister’s National Relief Fund, as both claim they are not public authorities subject to questions under the Right to Information Act.

About NDRF:
The NDRF was set up in accordance with Section 46 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005. It is meant to “meet the expenses for emergency response, relief and rehabilitation” for any threatening disaster situation.
It is a fund managed by the Central Government for meeting the expenses for emergency response, relief and rehabilitation due to any threatening disaster situation or disaster. Constituted to supplement the funds of the State Disaster Response Funds (SDRF) of the states to facilitate immediate relief in case of calamities of a severe nature.

- Although Section 46 includes a clause regarding grants made by any person or institution, provisions for such donations had not been made.

Located in the “Public Accounts” of Government of India under “Reserve Funds not bearing interest”.

What is PMNRF? When was it setup?

In pursuance of an appeal by the then Prime Minister, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru in January, 1948, the Prime Minister’s National Relief Fund (PMNRF) was established with public contributions to assist displaced persons from Pakistan.

- The resources of the PMNRF are now utilized primarily to render immediate relief to families of those killed in natural calamities like floods, cyclones and earthquakes, etc. and to the victims of the major accidents and riots.
- Assistance from PMNRF is also rendered, to partially defray the expenses for medical treatment like heart surgeries, kidney transplantation, cancer treatment, etc.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. NDRF- establishment, funding and management.
2. What is Section 46 of DM Act?
3. What is PMNRF?
4. What is PMCARES?
5. What is a public account?
6. Who is a public authority?

Sources: the Hindu.

6. Styrene Gas leak case

Context:
Andhra Pradesh State government has extended the time for submission of report by the high-power committee that is probing the styrene monomer vapour leak incident at the LG Polymers unit till June 30.

Background:
The committee was constituted to investigate into the May 7 incident that had killed 12 persons and hospitalised many others residing in the vicinity of the factory located at R.R. Venkatapuram village.

- The government had earlier asked the committee to submit the report by June 22.
- The committee, besides probing the cause of the incident, would also find possible solutions to address the concerns raised by the victims and recommend steps to be taken, and identify hazardous industries.

A quick look at Styrene Gas and its impacts:

What is Styrene?
Styrene — an organic compound used in the production of polymers, plastics and resins — is manufactured in petrochemical refineries. It is a poisonous, inflammable gas. It is also known as PVC gas (polyvinyl chloride), as it is used in the production of PVC. Styrene is the 20th most-used chemical in the world, according to the World Health Organization.

Where it can be found?
The chemical can be found in air, water and soil once released into the environment. It is broken down in air in 1-2 days, while it evaporates from soil and shallow water surfaces. It is broken down by micro-organisms if it reaches soil.

**Styrene occurs naturally in small quantities in some plants and foods** (cinnamon, coffee beans, balsam trees and peanuts) and is also found in coal tar.

**How it affects living beings?**
1. When humans are exposed to styrene, it causes eye irritation and gastro-intestinal effects.
2. It also impacts the outer layer of tissues in the skin causing erosion and bleeding in the short term.
3. Long-term effects include central nervous system dysfunction, depression, hearing loss and peripheral neuropathy (a numb feeling in the hands and feet).
4. It also leads to an increase in the colour confusion index that may lead to colour blindness.
5. Styrene is a possible carcinogen and can cause cancer under long exposure.

**InstaLinks:**
- **Prelims Link:**
  1. What is Styrene? Where and how it occurs?
  2. How and when liquid styrene turns into its gaseous form?
  3. Does it occur naturally?
  4. Health impacts.
  5. Applications.


**Sources:** the Hindu.

**Topics:** Linkages between development and spread of extremism.

### 1. Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act

**Context:** The police have filed an FIR against Devangana Kalita, who is associated with the *Pinjra Tod* group, under the stringent **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act** in connection with a case related to communal violence in north-east Delhi in February.

**About Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act:**
Passed in 1967, the law aims at **effective prevention of unlawful activities associations in India.**

The Act assigns **absolute power to the central government,** by way of which if the Centre deems an activity as unlawful then it may, by way of an Official Gazette, declare it so.

It has death penalty and life imprisonment as **highest punishments.**

Under UAPA, **both Indian and foreign nationals can be charged.** It will be applicable to the offenders in the same manner, even if crime is committed on a foreign land, outside India.

Under the UAPA, the **investigating agency can file a charge sheet in maximum 180 days** after the arrests and the duration can be extended further after intimating the court.

**Amendments and changes:**
The **2004 amendment,** added “**terrorist act**” to the list of offences to ban organisations for terrorist activities, under which 34 outfits were banned. Till 2004, “unlawful” activities referred to actions related to secession and cession of territory.

In August, Parliament cleared the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill, 2019** to designate individuals as terrorists on certain grounds provided in the Act.

- The Act **empowers the Director General of National Investigation Agency (NIA) to grant approval of seizure or attachment** of property when the case is investigated by the said agency.
- The Act **empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases of terrorism** in addition to those conducted by the DSP or ACP or above rank officer in the state.

**Criticisms of UAPA:**
The law is often misused and abused. Could be used against political opponents and civil society activists who speak against the government and brand them as "terrorists."
The 2019 amendment gives unfettered powers to investigating agencies. The law is against the federal structure, given that ‘Police’ is a state subject under 7th schedule of Indian Constitution.

What needs to be done?
Anti-terror laws should not be used as tool to silence the critics of government. A committee may be set up to examine and supervise the process of designating individuals as terrorists and investigation of cases with objectivity and fairness. Arbitraryness under the law should be checked through Judicial review.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Definition of unlawful activity.
2. Powers of Centre under the act.
3. Is judicial review applicable in such cases?
5. Can foreign nationals be charged under the act?

Mains Link:
Do you agree that the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act could prove catastrophic for fundamental rights? Is sacrificing liberty for national security justified? Discuss and provide for your opinion.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

1. The lone wolf threat

Meaning:
The term "lone wolf" is used by US law enforcement agencies and the media to refer to individuals undertaking violent acts of terrorism outside a command structure.

A lone actor, lone-actor terrorist, or lone wolf is someone who prepares and commits violent acts alone, outside of any command structure and without material assistance from any group. They may be influenced or motivated by the ideology and beliefs of an external group and may act in support of such a group.

Why in News now?
Because of the recent knife attack at a park in Reading, a town west of London, which killed three people and injured three others. This incident is yet another reminder of the threat of lone wolf attacks the U.K. is facing. Since November 2019, the country has seen three such major incidents.

Why its hard to prevent such attacks?
Terrorist organisations embrace this tactic to spread violence in countries where coordinated big attacks are impossible.

In coordinated terror attacks, the chances of competent intelligence agencies detecting the perpetrators are much higher. But, in Lone wolf attacks, extremist individuals translate their beliefs into violent actions, and therefore are hard to detect and prevent.

Need of the hour:
The government and the security agencies need to adopt a multi-pronged approach towards radicalisation, which is anchored in human intelligence, strong ties with communities and community leaders and deradicalisation programmes.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Legitimate concern: on law and order in Nagaland

Context:
With the legitimacy of the Constitutionally-elected state government’s being “challenged on a day-to-day basis by the armed gangs who question the sovereignty and integrity of the nation”, Nagaland Governor has told the chief minister that he “could no longer abstain from constitutional obligations in the state under Article 371A (1) (b) of the Constitution”.

What is Article 371A(1)(b) all about?
It applies exclusively to Nagaland and bestows upon the governor “special responsibility with respect to law and order”. According to the provision, the governor, for all practical purposes, has the final say on all matters related to the state’s law and order and on what constitutes law and order.

What’s the issue?
The governor has voiced concerns of sections of civil society over the slide in law and order; illegal collections by armed groups have been an issue for several years.

What next?
Despite the Centre’s heady statements heralding a Naga peace accord since 2015, it is nowhere close to finalising it with the groups. In some ways, this is due to the NSCN-IM’s obstinacy such as its insistence on retaining a separate flag and a Constitution for the State of Nagaland and its unwillingness to dismantle its parallel administrative and paramilitary structure.
The distrust it invokes among other Naga organisations besides other north-eastern governments because of its core ideology of a “greater Nagalim”, and the inherent difficulties in getting other insurgent actors on board have made this a conflict that persists despite the ceasefire and a problem that does not lend itself to a quick solution.

How old is the Naga political issue?

Pre-independence:
1. The British annexed Assam in 1826, and in 1881, the Naga Hills too became part of British India. The first sign of Naga resistance was seen in the formation of the Naga Club in 1918, which told the Simon Commission in 1929 “to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times”.
2. In 1946 came the Naga National Council (NNC), which declared Nagaland an independent state on August 14, 1947.
3. The NNC resolved to establish a “sovereign Naga state” and conducted a “referendum” in 1951, in which “99 per cent” supported an “independent” Nagaland.

Post-independence:
On March 22, 1952, underground Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the Naga Federal Army (NFA) were formed. The Government of India sent in the Army to crush the insurgency and, in 1958, enacted the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.

When did the NSCN come into being?
A group of about 140 members led by Thuingaleng Muivah, who were at that time in China, refused to accept the Shillong Accord, and formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland in 1980. As per the accord, NNC and NFG agreed to give up arms. In 1988, the NSCN split into NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) after a violent clash.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Parts of States included under Greater Nagalim.
2. About Naga Club and NNC.
3. When was the Naga Referendum held?
4. Overview of AFSPA.
5. Overview of Article 371 and sub provisions thereunder.

Mains Link:
Discuss the issues and challenges associated with the Naga Peace Accord.

Link: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/legitimate-concern/article31948490.ece
Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention

1. Kerala govt. issues data security guidelines

Context: Kerala government issues guidelines on COVID-19 data collection, processing. This is in the wake of the Sprinklr controversy.

What’s the issue?
The government had engaged the U.S.-based data analytics firm in collecting data. It ran into a controversy.

- The government had said it had contracted Sprinklr as an emergency measure to crunch the health data of citizens to understand how the pandemic would behave in Kerala.
- However, the Opposition had dragged the government to the High Court, accusing it of having used the outbreak as a cover to allow the U.S.-based firm to “harvest and monetise” the medical information of the State’s population.

Key guidelines:
1. **Consent**: If any sensitive personal data is breached, explicit consent should be obtained from the data principal.
2. **Anonymity**: Officials should ensure that all the data collected and collated from Kerala on COVID-19 containment activities should be anonymised so that unique identification of the data principal is not possible.
3. **Access to third party**: Every citizen who has provided data will be informed that it is likely to be accessed by third party service providers.
4. **Format**: Specific consent has to be obtained in the requisite format. The privacy policy illustrating the compliance in Malayalam and English forms will be included. The privacy policy will also be explicitly specifying the purpose for which data is collected and the data should be used only for the purpose for which it has been collected.
5. **Storage of data**: The data collected will be stored in encrypted form. If data is stored in Cloud, the Cloud service provider will be approved by the Central Government and the guidelines issued for procurement of cloud by government departments should be strictly followed.
6. **If data is collected from a data principal involuntarily** using an automated device like GPS and Bluetooth, it will be done on prior explicit consent of the data principal.
7. **Security audit**: Any software or application to be hosted in the SDC will be subjected to security audit before hosting it.
What’s the reason behind bringing of these guidelines?
Recently, Kerala High Court had expressed its concern over the confidentiality of information gathered from COVID-19 patients. The Court asked the state government to anonymize all data collected from citizens before allowing access to US company Sprinklr Inc.
The Court had also asked the state government to explore the Central Government’s submission that it’s the Ministry of Information and Technology that is capable of providing a service similar to Sprinklr which later saw them informing that it will be done through State Data Centre (SDC).

Sources: the Hindu.

2. NPCI denies breach of BHIM app data

What happened?
A recent report by security researchers alleged leak of personal data of millions of users of the BHIM payment application due to a website breach.
As per the report, 409-gigabyte of data, comprising 7.26 million records, were leaked, and the trove included personal identifiable information such as Aadhaar details, residence proof, bank records and complete profiles. However, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has denied the claim, asking “everyone to not fall prey to such speculation”.

What is BHIM?
Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) is a UPI based payment interface. Developed by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). Allows real time fund transfer. Launched in December, 2016.

The BHIM apps has three levels of authentication:
1. For one, the app binds with a device’s ID and mobile number.
2. Second a user needs to sync whichever bank account (UPI or non-UPI enabled) in order to the conduct transaction.
3. Third, when a user sets up the app they are asked to create a pin which is needed to log into the app. The UPI pin, which a user creates with their bank account is needed to go through with the transaction.

About NPCI:
NPCI is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India. It is an initiative of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Indian Banks’ Association (IBA) under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, for creating a robust Payment and Settlement Infrastructure in India. It has been incorporated as a not for profit company. The Company is focused on bringing innovations in the retail payment systems through the use of technology for achieving greater efficiency in operations and widening the reach of payment systems.

Initial promoters:
The ten core promoter banks are State Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, Canara Bank, Bank of Baroda, Union Bank of India, Bank of India, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Citibank N. A. and HSBC. In 2016 the shareholding was broad-based to 56 member banks to include more banks representing all sectors.

What does the NPCI offer?
NFS: National Financial Switch (NFS) ATM network with 37 member banks and connecting 50,000 ATMs was taken to NPCI’s authority from the Institute for Development and Research in Banking Technology (IDRBT) on 14 December 2009. After taking over, NFS ATM network has grown many folds.

IMPS: Immediate Payment Service (IMPS).

AePS: Aadhaar-enabled Payment Service (AePS).

CTS: Cheque Truncation System (CTS) facilitates extended cut-off time to accept customer cheques by banks and reduces timelines for clearing.

RuPay: RuPay is a new card payment system launched to satisfy RBI’s vision to offer a domestic, open-loop, and the multilateral system.

NACH: National Automated Clearing House (NACH) is a web-based solution that facilitates interbank, high volume electronic transactions that are repetitive in nature.

APBS: Aadhaar Payment Bridge (APB) System is used by the government and government agencies to make direct benefit transfers with respect to various Central and state-sponsored schemes.

*99#: is a USSD-based mobile banking service of NPCI launched in November 2012.

UPI: Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is a system that makes multiple bank accounts to be accessed from a single mobile application.

Bharat BillPay: is a system conceptualised by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and driven by NPCI.

NETC: National Electronic Toll Collection (NETC) is a nation-wide programme designed to meet the electronic tolling requirements in India.

BHIM: Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) was launched to make payments simpler and easier. Instant bank-to-bank payments can be made using a mobile number or virtual payment address (UPI ID).

BharatQR: Basically, a QR code is a series of black squares arranged in a square grid that can be read by a camera.

*99# is a USSD-based mobile banking service of NPCI launched in November 2012.

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InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:

1. Various services provided by NPCI.
2. Who controls ATMs in the country?
3. What is UPI?
4. What is National Automated Clearing House (NACH)?
5. What is National Financial Switch?
6. Three levels of authentication in BHIM.

Link:
https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=G9V7FFP8N.1&imageview=0.

Sources: the Hindu.

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3. Global report on the illegal wildlife trade

Context:
First global report on the illegal wildlife trade was recently released by FATF. It is called the “Money Laundering and the Illegal Wildlife Trade” report.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has described illegal wildlife trade as a “global threat”, which also has links with other organised crimes like modern slavery, drug trafficking and arms trade.

Key findings:

1. The illegal trade is estimated to generate revenues of up to $23 billion a year.
2. Criminals are frequently misusing the legitimate wildlife trade, as well as other import-export type businesses, as a front to move and hide illegal proceeds from wildlife crimes.
3. They also rely regularly on corruption, complex fraud and tax evasion.
4. There is a growing role of online marketplaces and mobile and social media-based payments to facilitate movement of proceeds warranting a coordinated response from government bodies, the private sector and the civil society.
5. According to the 2016 UN World Wildlife Crime report, criminals are illegally trading products derived from over 7,000 species of wild animals and plants across the world.
Challenges:
Jurisdictions often do not have the required knowledge, legislative basis and resources to assess and combat the threat posed by the funds generated through the illegal trade.
Criminal syndicates are misusing formal financial sector to launder the proceeds.
- Funds are laundered through cash deposits, under the guise of loans or payments, e-banking platforms, licensed money value transfer systems, and third-party wire transfers via banks.
- Accounts of innocent victims are also used and high-value payments avoided to evade detection.
Front companies, often linked to import-export industries, and shell firms are used for the movement of goods and trans-border money transfers.

What needs to be done?
1. The report says financial probe is key to dismantling the syndicates involved, which can in turn significantly impact the associated criminal activities.
2. Jurisdictions should consider implementing the good practices. They include providing all relevant agencies with the necessary mandate and tools; and cooperating with other jurisdictions, international bodies and the private sector.
3. Legislative changes are necessary to increase the applicability of anti-money laundering laws to the illegal wildlife trade-linked offences.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Getting out of the ‘guns, germs and steel’ crisis

Context:
India is said to be going through the ‘guns, germs and steel’ crisis.
(The name is borrowed from the title of Jared Diamond’s classic book on the evolution of societies and nations, Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human8 Societies).

What it represents?
2. Coronavirus “germs” in our bodies.
3. “Steel” makers and other businesses on the verge of bankruptcy.

Why this is worrisome for India?
This is the gravest confluence of military, health and economic crises threatening our nation in more than a generation.
Each of these would qualify as an independent, large crisis by itself, warranting a specific resolution.
1. The Chinese military threat calls for immediate and strategic action by our defence and foreign affairs establishments.
2. The COVID-19 health epidemic is here to stay and needs constant monitoring by the Health Ministry and local administration.
3. The economic collapse is an enormous challenge that needs to be overcome with prudent policy.

Need of the hour:
The common thread across these is that its resolution requires significant financial resources.
Standing up to a military threat by a superpower neighbour will pose an inevitable drain on the finances of the government (Kargil war has proven this).
To face the COVID-19 epidemic, the central government will need additional funds of the equivalent of at least one percentage point of GDP to continue the fight against COVID-19.
The lockdown has affected all the four major drivers of our economy- people’s spending on consumption, government spending, investment and external trade.
What needs to be done now?
The government needs to spend an additional eight percentage points of GDP while revenues will be lower by two percentage points of GDP, a combined gap of 10% of GDP.
Potential new sources of revenue such as a wealth tax or a large capital gains tax are ideas worth exploring for the medium term but will not be of much immediate help.

This will pose a new challenge- junk crisis:
To fulfil its obligation, the government needs is to borrow copiously.
This will lead to a fourth dimension to the "guns, germs and steel crisis"; a “junk” crisis.
With rising debt levels, international ratings agencies will likely downgrade India’s investment rating to “junk”, which will then trigger panic among foreign investors.

Conclusion:
India thus faces a tough “Dasharatha” dilemma — save the country’s borders, citizens and economy or prevent a “junk” rating.
The government’s choices are either to be bold and embark on a rescue mission, or do nothing and hope the situation resolves itself.
On balance, it seems that the best course of action is to borrow unabashedly to pull India out of the “guns, germs and steel” crisis and deal with the consequences of a potential “junk” nation label.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. 59 Chinese Apps Banned
Indian government has put a ban on 59 apps including TikTok and WeChat.
This marks the largest sweep against the Chinese technology companies.

Why the Govt decided to ban 59 Chinese apps?
These measures have been undertaken since there is credible information that these apps are engaged in activities which are prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of state and public order.
• The government had received complaints from various sources including several reports about misuse of some mobile apps available on Android and iOS platforms for stealing and surreptitiously transmitting users’ data in an unauthorised manner to servers which have locations outside India.
Therefore, the decision has been taken in a bid to safeguard the interests of crores of Indian mobile users.

Background:
The ban comes days after Indian intelligence agencies red flagged these Chinese apps over safety and privacy issues of users.
The recommendations of the intelligence agencies have backing of the National Security Council Secretariat which determined that certain China-linked applications could be detrimental to the country’s security.

How it Will Affect Indian Users?
Jobs at stake:
Most of these platforms have Indian creators, for many of whom this is the only source of income.
Some apps on the banned list are widely popular among Indians.
• TikTok (one of the banned apps) has more than 100 million active users in India. TikTok was the only source of income for many users.
Besides, many of these apps such as UC News and others have offices and employees in India, hence following the ban, scores of jobs could be at stake.

What next?
Meity has issued instructions to Google and Apple to remove the banned applications from their respective application stores.

Additionally, telecom operators and Internet service providers will be asked to block access and use of these applications on their networks.

For this, the Ministry has invoked its power under **Section 69A of the Information Technology Act** read with the relevant provisions of the **Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking of Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009**.

**Link:**

**Sources:** the Hindu.

**Topics:** Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

### 1. Border Adjustment tax

**Context:** A NITI Aayog member has favoured imposing a **border adjustment tax (BAT)** on imports to provide a level-playing field to domestic industries. This suggestion comes in the backdrop of the **USA-China trade tensions (trade war)** which are expected to rise even further post-Covid-19.

**What is BAT?**

BAT is a duty that is proposed to be imposed on imported goods in **addition to the customs levy** that gets charged at the port of entry.

**What is BAT?**

BAT is a fiscal measure that imposes a charge on goods or services in accordance with the **destination principle of taxation**.

Generally, **BAT seeks to promote “equal conditions of competition”** for foreign and domestic companies supplying products or services within a taxing jurisdiction.

**Need for:**

The Indian industry has been complaining to the government about **domestic taxes** like electricity duty, duties on fuel, clean energy cess, mandi tax, royalties, biodiversity fees that get charged on domestically produced goods as these duties get embedded into the product.

But **many imported goods do not get loaded with such levies** in their respective country of origin and this gives such products **price advantage** in the Indian market.

**Sources:** the Hindu.

### 2. India China Galwan Valley standoff

**Context:**

- Even as India and China are engaged in military-level talks and in controlled engagement, there has been a violent face-off between the army troops of both sides.
- Recently, China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the Indian Army clashed and used stones, knives, and machetes to attack each other and this resulted in fatalities on both sides.

This incident happened at **Galwan Valley in Eastern Ladakh region**.

**Background:**

India and China share a border that is more than **3,440km (2,100 miles)** long and have **overlapping territorial claims**.

From past one month, Indian and Chinese armies have been locked in a tense stand-off at **three points along the Line of Actual Control** — the Galwan River Valley, Hot Springs area and the Pangong Lake — since early May.
The strategic importance of Galwan River Valley (GRV):
The Galwan river is the highest ridgeline and it allows the Chinese to dominate the Shyok route passes, which is close to the river. It lies along the western sector of the LAC and close to Aksai Chin, a disputed area claimed by India but controlled by China.

Why tensions are suddenly on rise in this area?
India is trying to construct a feeder road emanating from Darbuk-Shyok Village – Daulat Beg Oldi road (DS-DBO road). This road runs along the Shyok River and is the most critical line of communications close to LAC. Hence, Chinese are keen on controlling this area as they fear that the Indian side could end up threatening their position on the Aksai Chin plateau by using the river valley.

Way ahead for India:
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.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Locate on map- the disputed areas between India and China, Pakistan and Nepal.
2. Where is Galwan valley?
3. Locate shook river.
4. Tributaries of Indus River and their origins.
5. Where is Naku La and Nathu La?
6. What is DS- DBO road?
Sources: the Hindu.
1. Mahindra Logistics launches queer inclusion policy

Context: To foster the inclusion of LGBTQAI+ employees, Mahindra Logistics Ltd. (MLL) has unveiled a five-year plan which aims at hiring queer people and extending benefits to same-sex partners.

Key provisions:
- The policy includes adoption leave for queer workers.
- Same-sex partners shall be eligible for 12-week adoption leave, starting from the date of the adoption.
- Benefits under the existing medical insurance shall be extended to same-sex partners on declaration of their partner’s details.
- The company’s definition of compassionate leave — which can be availed for four days by an employee in case of death of an immediate family member — will be extended to same-sex partners.
- To make the workplace inclusive for queer employees, MLL will offer LGBTQAI+ staff counselling services on request, for them and three immediate family members, which includes their partner.
- There will be equal opportunity and non-discrimination in various processes, including recruitment, transfer, relocation, training and development, and promotion.
- Any incident of sexual harassment reported by a queer employee shall be investigated by the internal complaints committee.
- The company also seeks to bridge the gender diversity gap by hiring more women, and aims to hire more persons with disabilities.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Why the Telangana HC compared Covid-19 to a Trojan horse?

Context: Last week, the Telangana High Court pulled up the state government over its low rate of coronavirus testing.

It also said, not testing in large numbers is almost like inviting the Trojan horse.

What it means?
Used as a metaphor, the term “Trojan horse” refers to any person or thing that deceives or misleads a target in order to attack it from the inside. It is derived from the ancient Greek story of the Trojan War — an epic that has for centuries influenced western poetry, art and literature.

About Trojan War:
Fought after the ancient Greek state of Sparta invaded Troy, a kingdom located on the western shores of modern-day Turkey, after the Spartan queen Helen eloped with the Trojan prince Paris. According to some versions, Helen was abducted by the Trojans.

- Distraught, Helen’s husband, the Spartan king Menelaus marched with his brother Agamemnon, the King of Mycenae (another Greek state), to rescue Helen. The Greek side was supported by other powerful allies, and included the fabled warriors Achilles, Odysseus, Nestor, and Ajax. The Greeks crossed the Aegean Sea and laid siege to Troy demanding Helen’s return.
- A bloody battle raged for more than 10 years, after which the Greeks made a show of retreating from their positions, while leaving a large wooden horse inside which some of their soldiers hid at the gates of Troy.
- The unsuspecting Trojan people decided to haul the wooden horse that they ostensibly took to be a gift, into their city. At nighttime, the Greek soldiers led by Odysseus emerged from the horse and opened the city gates from inside, through which a larger force entered, leaving Troy to ruin.
- As per Homerian classic Odyssey, Helen returned to Sparta with Menelaus.

What HC’s reference to Trojan horse means?
The High Court was comparing asymptomatic coronavirus carriers to the Trojan horse.

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Similar to the story of Troy, we could be interacting with asymptomatic carriers, talking to them, inviting them over, while suspecting nothing, and before we know it, the virus would have transmitted to us. Since a person has no symptoms, it is not possible to know if they are coronavirus carriers unless they are tested.

**Facts for Prelims:**

In 1998, UNESCO designated the Trojan remains at Hisarlik in Turkey as a World Heritage Site.


Sources: Indian Express.

### 3. Coronavirus lockdown | Migrant workers should not be prosecuted, says Supreme Court

**Context:** The court passed the order on migrant workers after *suo motu taking cognisance of the migrant workers’ exodus*.

**Power of High Courts to take up such matters:**

High Courts, as constitutional courts, were well within their jurisdiction to take cognisance of violation of fundamental rights of migrant workers and we have no doubt that those proceedings shall proceed.

**What has the Court said?**

Migrant workers should not be prosecuted for trying to reach home amid the national lockdown. States/Union Territories should withdraw all complaints under Section 51 of the Disaster Management Act and other related offences lodged against migrant labourers who are alleged to have violated lockdown measures by moving on roads. Railways should provide the States with 171 more Shramik Special trains within the next 24 hours to transport migrant workers.

**What’s the issue?**

Society as a whole is moved by the miseries and difficulties being faced by migrant workers. They had set out on foot from big cities for their native villages to escape starvation, unemployment and disease during the pandemic. But, they are often stopped by the police at various check posts and prevented from entering into their states or villages. This has left them shelterless and made more vulnerable. A migrant worker who walked home would have faced a year in prison or been fined or suffered both if found guilty of obstructing the law under Section 51 of the Act.

**What next?**

Migrant labourers are forced to proceed to their native place after cessation of their employment. They are already suffering. They have to dealt by the police and other authorities in a humane manner. So, once they are brought back to their homes, the states need to attend the needs of the migrant labourers. These include source of employment, provision of food and ration for them. Counselling centres should be set up to reach out to them and explain the various schemes framed for their rehabilitation and employment. The centres should freely provide information and even “extend helping hand” to those workers who want to return to their places of past employment.


Sources: the Hindu.
4. Odisha bank manager suspended after woman drags 100-year-old mother on a cot to branch:

What happened?
The incident happened in a village of Odisha’s Nuapada district.
- On June 9, Punjimati Dei, her daughter, visited bank to withdraw the amount since her mother was bedridden.
- When physical verification was needed, having no option, Ms. Dei placed her mother on a cot and dragged her along the road to the bank. She was then able to withdraw her money.

A video of Ms. Dei dragging her mother on a cot has since gone viral.

How was the situation handled?
This unfortunate incident was taken seriously by the State government and the Chairman of UGB was requested to take stern action after due enquiry.

Based on the enquiry, the bank manager has been suspended.

What has the bank said?
The bank, however, clarified that the manager had offered to visit the woman’s house, but could not do so as there was a rush at the branch, which has only a single officer assigned to it.
- But, in her anxiety to get the money early and avoid rush the next day, Ms. Dei had come to the branch on June 10 before business started by pulling her mother on a cot from her residence, to the surprise of the branch staff.
- Though payment was made, the unfortunate incident had happened and it was widely covered by media.

The bank’s Chairman, expressing regret over the incident, said the branch manager did not have any intention of causing harassment, but the incident, which was the result of a communication gap, ended up showing the bank in poor light.

Link:
Sources: the Hindu.
FACTS FOR PRELIMS

1. Goa plans to bring back collector-approved travel pass system:
   With Goa witnessing a huge influx of people in the last couple of days, the state government is planning to go back to its previous system of issuing travel passes that require approval by authorities, in place of the self-generated e-passes introduced earlier this week.
   As per the previous system, district collectors would issue travel passes to people if they wanted to enter the state. Once the travel pass system is introduced, the health authorities will know how many people are going to arrive on a particular day.

2. Rule 266 and 267 of the Lok Sabha:
   Context: Rajya Sabha secretariat has denied permission for members of the standing committee on Home Affairs to join a meeting of the panel through videoconference.
   Why? The reason videoconference meetings were not being allowed was because it violated the principle of confidentiality, as there was no guarantee of a member sitting alone at such events.
   What do rules say?
   Rule 267 states that committee meetings have to be held in the Parliament building. However, the Speaker has the powers to change the venue.
   Rule 266 mandates that all committee meetings have to be held in private.

3. Nepal’s Constitution Second Amendment Bill:
   - The government of Nepal has tabled the crucial Constitution Amendment Bill to formalise the country’s new map, which claims parts of India as its territory.
   - The Bill will change the Schedule 3 of the Nepalese Constitution and replace the existing map with the map that was unveiled on May 20.
   - The new map depicts the sliver of strategically important land covering Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani as part of Nepal.
   [Map of Nepal showing new map]
   India- Nepal Boundary has been covered in detail: https://www.insightsonindia.com/2020/05/25/why-are-india-and-nepal-fighting-over-kalapani/.

4. Band-tail Scorpionfish:
   Scientific name—Scorpaenopsis neglecta.
   It is well-known for its stinging venomous spines and ability to change colour.
   The fish is called ‘scorpionfish’ because its spines contain neurotoxic venom.
   Why in News?
   Researchers have found a rare fish from Sethukarai coast in the Gulf of Mannar. This was the first time that the particular species was found alive in Indian waters.

5. National Career Service (NCS) project:
   Ministry of Labour and Employment under its National Career Service (NCS) project has now started offering free online Career Skills Training for its registered job-seekers.
   - This course on soft skills assists the learners in enhancing personality development with modules on corporate etiquette, improving interpersonal skills, making impactful presentation including other necessary soft skills demanded by the industry at present.

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6. Missile Park ‘Agneeprastha’ to be set up at INS Kalinga:

It aims to capture glimpses of missile history of INS Kalinga from its establishment in 1981 till date.

- It will be dedicated to all the officers, sailors and support staff of INS Kalinga.
- It will also commemorate the award of the prestigious Unit Citation to INS Kalinga for the year 2018-19.
- P-70 ‘Ametist’, an underwater launched anti-surface missile from the arsenal of the old ‘Chakra’ (Charlie-1 submarine) which was in service with Indian Navy during 1988-91 is the main attraction point in the Park.
- INS Kalinga is a premier Naval Establishment located on the Visakhapatnam- Bhemunipatnam beach road under the Eastern Naval Command.

7. Mahesh Navmi:

It is an auspicious Hindu festival that is celebrated by the devotees of Lord Shiva— also known as Lord ‘Mahesh’.

- The festival is primarily celebrated by people of Maheshwari community, who are usually known for their family business.
- The festival is observed on the ninth day of Shukla Paksha (Waxing moon) in the month of Jyeshta according to the Hindu Calendar.
- This year, Mahesh Navami is being observed on May 31.
- The festival is mainly celebrated by the people of Rajasthan.

8. “My Life – My Yoga” contest:

Also called “Jeevan Yoga” contest.

- It is a Video Blogging Contest.
- It is a joint effort by the Ministry of AYUSH and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).
- Announced by PM during the course of his monthly Mann Ki Baat address to the nation.
- The contest focuses on the transformative impact of Yoga on the lives of individuals, and comes as one of the activities related to the observation of the sixth International Day of Yoga (IDY) coming up on 21st June 2020.
- For the India contestants, prizes worth Rs. 1 lakh, 50K and 25K for 1st, 2nd and 3rd ranking within each of the categories have been announced within the first leg.
- It is held both at the national level and global level.
9. What Is Antifa?
- Short for “anti-fascists,” antifa is not a single organization but rather an umbrella term for far-left-leaning movements that confront or resist neo-Nazis and white supremacists at demonstrations.
- Anti-fascists of the movement tend to be grouped on the leftward fringes of the US political spectrum, many describing themselves as socialists, anarchists, communists or anti-capitalists.
- The origin is traced as far back as Nazi Germany.
- While the movement has had a presence in several European countries and has come into focus in the United States in recent years, Antifa does not have a formal organisational structure. The movement has been known to have a presence in the US in the 1980s.
- Antifa members typically dress in black and often wear a mask at their demonstrations, and follow far-left ideologies such as anti-capitalism. They take up causes such as LGBTQ and indigenous rights. What makes them stand out is the violence.

Why in News?
As massive protests following the death of George Floyd continued to rock the United States, President Donald Trump has announced that the far-left group Antifa would be designated as a terrorist organisation by his government.

10. Tiananmen square massacre:
context: For the first time in 30 years, Hong Kong will not hold a mass vigil commemorating the Tiananmen square massacre.
what happened?
On June 4, 1989 Chinese troops cracked down on pro-democracy protesters around Beijing’s Tiananmen Square. No official death toll has ever been released, but rights groups estimate hundreds, if not thousands, were killed. The massacre made headlines around the world but it particularly resonated in Hong Kong, which was then eight years away from being handed over from British to Chinese control.

11. SPIC MACAY:
- Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music And Culture Amongst Youth (SPIC MACAY) is a voluntary youth movement which promotes intangible aspects of Indian cultural heritage.
- It does this by promoting Indian classical music, classical dance, folk music, yoga, meditation, crafts and other aspects of Indian culture.
- It is a movement with chapters in over 300 towns all over the world.
- It was established by Dr. Kiran Seth in 1977 at IIT Delhi.
why in news?
PM addresses SPIC MACAY’s International Convention.

12. CHAMPIONS: Technology Platform to empower MSMEs:
PM launched the technology platform CHAMPIONS which stands for Creation and Harmonious Application of Modern Processes for Increasing the Output and National Strength.
Objectives: Grievance Redressal, To help them capture new opportunities and To identify and encourage the sparks.
The platform also aims to identify the sparks, i.e., the bright MSMEs who can withstand at present and become national and international champions.
13. **Ultra Swachh:**
It is a disinfection unit to disinfect a wide range of materials, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), electronics items, fabrics, etc.
Developed by DRDO.
The system uses an advanced oxidative process comprising of multiple barrier disruption approach using Ozonated Space Technology for disinfection.

14. **National Productivity Council (NPC):**
NPC is national level organization to promote productivity culture in India. Established by the Ministry of Industry, Government of India in 1958.
- It is an autonomous, multipartite, non-profit organization with equal representation from employers’ & workers’ organizations and Government, apart from technical & professional institutions and other interests.
- NPC is a constituent of the Tokyo-based Asian Productivity Organisation (APO), an Inter Governmental Body, of which the Government of India is a founder member.
- Functions: NPC teams up with its clients to work out solutions towards accelerating productivity, enhancing competitiveness, increasing profits, augmenting safety and reliability and ensuring better quality. It provides reliable database for decision-making, improved systems and procedures, work culture as well as customer satisfaction both internal & external.

15. **National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC):**
For effective implementation of relief measures in the wake of natural calamities, the Government of India has set up a Standing National Crisis Management Committee with Cabinet Secretary as Chairman.
Key functions:
- Oversee the Command, Control and Coordination of the disaster response.
- Give direction to the Crisis Management Group (CMG) as deemed necessary.

16. **Depsang:**
It is an area at a crucial dip (called the Bulge) on the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- The Chinese Army occupied most of the plains in 1962.
- India controls the western portion of the plains as part of Ladakh, whereas the eastern portion is part of the Aksai Chin region, which is controlled by China and claimed by India.

Why in News?
There have been reports of a heavy Chinese presence at Depsang.
The “Depsang plain” is one of the few places in the Western Sector where light armour (vehicles) would have ease of manoeuvre, so any Chinese buildup there is a cause for concern.
17. **Global Economic Prospects:**
- It is the World Bank’s semi-annual flagship publication on the state of the world economy.
- It examines global economic developments and prospects, with a special focus on emerging market and developing economies.
- It is issued twice a year, in January and June. The January edition includes in-depth analyses of topical policy challenges while the June edition contains shorter analytical pieces.

18. **Changpa community:**

*Why in News?*
The Chinese Army’s intrusion in Chumur and Demchok since January has left Ladakh’s nomadic herding Changpa community cut off from large parts of summer pastures. This has also resulted in a sharp rise in deaths of young Pashmina goats this year in the Korzok-Chumur belt of Changthang plateau in Ladakh.

*About Changthangi or Pashmina goat:*
1. It is a special breed of goat indigenous to the high-altitude regions of Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir.
2. They are raised for ultra-fine cashmere wool, known as Pashmina once woven.
3. These goats are generally domesticated and reared by nomadic communities called the Changpa in the Changthang region of Greater Ladakh.
4. The Changthangi goats have revitalized the economy of Changthang, Leh and Ladakh region.

19. **Kolkata Port Trust renamed as Syama Prasad Mookerjee Trust:**

*Context:*
Cabinet approves renaming of Kolkata Port Trust as Syama Prasad Mookerjee Trust.
The decision was previously announced on January 12 at the inaugural ceremony of the 150th anniversary celebrations of the port.

*Key facts:*
- In the early 16th century, the Portuguese first used the present location of the port to anchor their ships, since they found the upper reaches of the Hooghly river, beyond Kolkata, unsafe for navigation.
- After the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833, this port was used to ship lakhs of Indians as ‘indentured labourers’ to far-flung territories throughout the Empire.
- The Kolkata port is the only riverine port in the country, situated 203 km from the sea. The river Hooghly, on which it is located, has many sharp bends, and is considered a difficult navigational channel.
- The Farakka Barrage, built in 1975, reduced some of the port’s woes as Ganga waters were diverted into the Bhagirathi-Hooghly system.

20. **Amery Ice Shelf (AIS):**
The AIS is one of the largest glacier drainage basins in the world, located on the east coast of Antarctica, at about 70ºS Latitude, 70ºE Longitude.

It is located at the head of Prydz Bay between the Lars Christensen Coast and Ingrid Christensen Coast.
It is part of Mac. Robertson Land.

*Why in News?*
The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR) predicts that there would be a 24% increase in the expansion of Ameri Ice Shelf (AIS) boundaries by 2021 and another 24% expansion by 2026 from its 2016 positions.

Scientists feel that this study would help understand the ongoing changes in the ocean and atmospheric forces better.
21. **Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine & Homoeopathy (PCIM&H):**

**Context:** Cabinet approves establishment of Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine & Homoeopathy (PCIM&H) as Subordinate Office under Ministry of AYUSH.

**Key facts:**
- Presently, Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine & Homoeopathy (PCIM&H) is an autonomous body under the aegis of Ministry of AYUSH established since 2010.
- The Commission serves as an umbrella organization for Ayurvedic Pharmacopoeia Committee (APC), Siddha Pharmacopoeia Committee (SPC), Unani Pharmacopoeia Committee (UPC) and Homoeopathic Pharmacopeia Committee (HPC).
- Pharmacopoeial Laboratory for Indian Medicine (PLIM) and Homoeopathic Pharmacopoeia Laboratory (HPL) are its supporting structures.

22. **SaalBhar60:**

A new campaign on air pollution unveiled by Haridwar-based Ridhima Pandey. It demands that the government put in place measures to ensure that the PM 2.5 levels in cities is 60 micrograms per cubic metre, which is the safe limit for 24 hours as prescribed by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

23. **Tripoli:**

Tripoli is the capital city and the largest city of Libya. It is located in the northwest of Libya on the edge of the desert, on a point of rocky land projecting into the Mediterranean Sea and forming a bay.

**Why in News?**
Libya’s UN-backed gov’t announces taking over Tripoli from the militias of Haftar.

24. **World Environment Day:**


**Why June 5?** To mark the first day of The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment which was held in Stockholm, Sweden from June 5–16 in 1972.

**This year’s host** is Colombia in partnership with Germany.

**Theme:** In 2020, the theme is biodiversity—a concern that is both urgent and existential.

25. **Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India (ECGC):**

It is a fully government-owned company that was established in 1957 to promote exports by providing credit insurance services.
• The ECGC provides Export Credit Insurance to Banks (ECIB) to protect the banks from losses on account of export credit at the Pre and Post-Shipment stage given to exporters due to the risks of insolvency or protracted default of the exporter borrower.
• It functions under the administrative control of the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Department of Commerce.

26. Petrapole:
It is the Indian side of Petrapole-Benapole border checkpoint between India and Benapole of Bangladesh, on the Bangladesh-India border, near Bongaon in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal.
• Petrapole border is the only land port in south Bengal. It is also the largest land customs station in Asia.
• The landport alone accounts for nearly 60 per cent of the bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh.

27. ‘#iCommit’ initiative:
Launched on the occasion of World Environment Day.
• The ‘#iCommit’ initiative is centred around the idea of building an energy resilient future.
• The calls upon all stakeholders and individuals to continue moving towards energy efficiency, renewable energy, and sustainability to create a robust and resilient energy system in the future.
• The initiative is driven by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), under the administration of Ministry of Power.
• It includes a diverse set of players such as Governments, Corporates, Multilateral and Bilateral Organisations, Think Tanks and Individuals.

28. Healthy and Energy Efficient Buildings Initiative:
• Launched by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) MAITREE program.
• This initiative will address the challenges of retrofitting existing buildings and air conditioning systems so that they are both healthy and energy efficient.

29. Deccan Queen:
It runs between Mumbai and Pune.
• Its birthday was celebrated on June 1st. It began operations on 1st June 1930.
• This train holds many a record, including that of being India’s first superfast train, first long-distance electric-hauled train, first vestibuled train, the first train to have a ‘women-only’ car, and the first train to feature a dining car.
• It was started by the Great Indian Peninsula Railway (GIPR), the forerunner of the Central Railway. This was the first deluxe train introduced to serve the two important cities of the region, and was named after Pune – also known as the “Queen of Deccan” (“Dakkhan ki Rani” in Hindi).

30. World Oceans Day:
Celebrated on June 8, 2020.
Theme: "Innovation for a Sustainable Ocean."
The concept was originally proposed in 1992 by Canada’s International Centre for Ocean Development (ICOD) and the Ocean Institute of Canada (OIC) at the Earth Summit -- UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. World Oceans Day was officially recognised by the United Nations in 2008.

31. Jaya Jaitly task force:
Constituted by Women and Child Development Ministry.
To examine issues related to age of motherhood, lowering Maternal Mortality Rate and improvement of nutritional levels.
- Headed by Jaya Jaitly and it will submit its report by 31st July of next month.
- The mandate of the task force involves examining the correlation of age of marriage and motherhood with health, medical well-being and nutritional status of mother and neonate/infant/child, during pregnancy, birth and thereafter.

32. World Food Safety Day (WFSD):
Second World Food Safety Day (WFSD) was celebrated on 7 June 2020.
Theme: “Food safety, everyone’s business”.
WFSD was first celebrated in 2019, to strengthen commitment to scale up food safety made by the Addis Ababa Conference and the Geneva Forum in 2019 under the umbrella of “The Future of Food Safety”. Through the World Food Safety Day, WHO in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) pursues its efforts to mainstream food safety in the public agenda and reduce the burden of foodborne diseases globally.

33. Coro-bot- World’s first 'Internet-controlled' robot:
Engineer from Thane has made a first-of-its kind 'Internet-controlled' robot specifically to address the needs of hospitals treating COVID-19 patients.
- The gizmo, aptly called 'Coro-bot' independently dispenses food, water, beverages, medicines - and even some good advice - to Corona patients without the needs for nurses, ward staff or other care-givers.
- It eliminates the need of physical presence or contact of nurses or ward boys with the patient.
- Designed and created by Pratik Tirolkar, founder of a start-up PNT Solutions, Dombivali.

34. Spandan Campaign:
Chhattisgarh government has launched the Spandan Campaign to contain incidents of suicide and fratricide involving police personnel.
- Under the campaign, the superintendents of police associated with the Chhattisgarh Government will start a parade in their districts every Friday. After the event, the grievances of the personnel are to be addressed. Also, the campaign has made medical treatment and counselling of depressed officers mandatory.
- The campaign will also make arrangements for yoga classes for the police personnel at all the district headquarters. Cooperation of local yoga teachers have been sought to conduct these classes.
- Also, the police officers have been instructed to the redress grievances of police personnel in regular intervals. The superintendents have been instructed to visit police stations regularly and make arrangements for recreational activities.

35. Magnetocaloric materials:
They are certain materials in which application and removal of a magnetic field causes the materials to become warmer or cooler.
Why in News?
Scientists at the International Advanced Research Centre for Powder Metallurgy and New Materials (ARCI), an autonomous R&D Centre of Department of Science and Technology (DST) has developed a rare-earth-based magnetocaloric material that can be effectively used for cancer treatment.
36. **Airborne Rescue Pod for Isolated Transportation (ARPIT):**

   Designed, developed and manufactured by Indian Air Force. The pod is used for the evacuation of critical patients with infectious diseases from the high altitude, remote and isolated areas across the country.
   - It has a transparent and durable cast Perspex for enhanced patient visibility which is larger, higher, and wider than the existing models.
   - The ARPIT uses High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) H-13 class filters and supports invasive ventilation using Transport Ventilator.

37. **About CAT:**

   The Central Administrative Tribunal was established by an Act of Parliament namely Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985 as sequel to the 42nd amendment of the Constitution of India inserting Article 323 A.

   **Functions:** The tribunal adjudicates disputes and complaints with respect to Recruitment and Conditions of Service of the persons appointed to the Public Services and Posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or any State or of any other Local Authorities within the territory of India or under the control of the Government of India.

   **Composition:** The Tribunal is headed by the Chairman and 65 Members, 33 from Judicial (including Chairman) and 33 from the Administrative stream. The Chairman is normally a retired Chief Justice of a High Court.

   **Why in News?**

   18th Bench of Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) for the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh inaugurated recently.

38. **"COVID BEEP" App:**

   It is country's first indigenous wireless physiological parameters monitoring system for the COVID 19 affected patients.

   Developed by Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) medical college, Hyderabad in collaboration with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Hyderabad and the Department of Atomic Energy.

   COVID BEEP stands for Continuous Oxygenation and Vital Information Detection Biomed ECIL ESIC Pod.

39. **NAIMISHA 2020:**

   It is an initiative to provide a chance to participants and art enthusiasts to create and learn from practising artists.

   - The programme includes online workshops sessions on painting, sculpture, printmaking and indrajaal (an interdisciplinary creative workshop).
   - Organised by National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA).
   - The exhibition of selected artworks from the program will be displayed on So’ham, the cultural media platform of NGMA.

40. **Gairsain becomes Uttarakhand's summer capital:**

   Gairsain in Chamoli district was formally declared as the summer capital of Uttarakhand.
   - It would be developed as an ideal seat of the administration.
   - The Legislative Assembly of the state is located at Dehradun, the winter capital city.

41. **India’s first online waste exchange platform:**

   - Launched by the Andhra Pradesh Government.
   - It will help the authorities monitor the movement of hazardous waste real-time using the tools incorporated in the platform.
   - The platform will be handled by the AP Environment Management Corporation (APEMC).
- The APEMC will streamline collection of the waste from industries, sort and streamline the waste as hazardous or non-hazardous or e-waste according to category, and scientifically dispose it off at various waste disposal centres.

42. **Locations of North Korea and South Korea:**

**Context:** North Korea has cut off all inter-Korean communication lines with the South, including a hotline between the two nations’ leaders. The North said this was the first in a series of actions, describing South Korea as "the enemy". This move was triggered by South Korean activists who sent anti-Pyongyang messages in balloons across the border.

**Key facts:**
- It is a country in East Asia constituting the northern part of the Korean Peninsula.
- The country is bordered to the north by China and by Russia along the Amnok and Tumen rivers, and to the south by South Korea, with the heavily fortified Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating the two.

43. **What is the Coral Triangle Day?**

- Held every year on June 9.
- It is a massive celebration of the Coral Triangle, the world's epicentre of marine biodiversity, which encompasses the seas of 6 countries in the Asia-Pacific region: Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Timor Leste.
- **Objective:** The event brings together individuals, organizations, and establishments on one special day of the year to shed light on ocean conservation and the numerous ways to protect and conserve the Coral Triangle.
- Coral Triangle is considered as one of the 3 mega ecological complexes on Earth, together with Congo Basin and the Amazon Rainforest. The region contains 76% of all known coral species, 37% of all known coral reef fish species and 53% of the world's coral reefs.
- The first Coral Triangle Day was celebrated on June 9, 2012 in conjunction with World Oceans Day which is celebrated every year on June 8.

44. **Turant Customs:**

Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, CBIC has launched its flagship programme Turant Customs, at Bengaluru and Chennai. Under this, importers will now get their goods cleared from Customs after a faceless assessment is done remotely by the Customs officers located outside the port of import. Now, the goods imported at Chennai may be assessed by the Customs officers located at Bengaluru and vice versa, as assigned by the Customs’ automated system.

45. **Ramon Magsaysay Award:**

**Context:** Cancelled this year due to COVID 19 pandemic.

**About the Award:**
- It is Asia’s highest honour and is often regarded as the region’s equivalent of the Nobel Prize.
- It was established in 1957 by trustees of the New York City based Rockefeller Brothers Fund and Philippine government in the memory of Philippines’ third President Ramon Magsaysay.
- It is awarded annually to individuals or organizations from Asia region for their altruistic and philanthropic service.
- It carries Medallion bearing the likeness of the late President Ramon Magsaysay, cash prize and a certificate.
46. Important places and events from Chhattisgarh in News:
Context: Ministry of Tourism brings out the “Hidden Treasures of Chhattisgarh” through 30th webinar under Dekho Apna Desh series.
Places:
1. Karkabhat – Megalithic burial site.
2. Dipadih – Temple complex dating back to the 7th Century.
Others:
Ghotul – It is both an ancient tribal system of education as well as the campus with its own system of hierarchs.
Sonabai- Famous bas relief ornamentation works of Chhattisgarh got its roots when Sonabai made little toys for her son Daroga Ram to lull him to sleep.

47. World Accreditation Day (WAD):
Celebrated on 9th June every year to highlight as well as promote the role of accreditation in trade & economy.
Theme: “Accreditation: Improving Food Safety”.
The day was jointly established by the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC).

Accreditation, Licensing, & Certification

Accreditation
The purpose of becoming accredited typically is to demonstrate to your stakeholders that your organization meets a rigorous set of standards that are focused on quality of services and evidence-based practices.

Licensing
Most organizations or agencies get licensed because it is a requirement and the focus is on public safety.

Certification
Certification confirms that an individual or organization meets a minimum set of predetermined and standardized criteria to perform a specific function. Certification may enable the individual or entity to provide a specialized service.

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48. Daulat Beg Oldie:
- DBO is the northernmost corner of Indian territory in Ladakh, in the area better known in Army parlance as Sub-Sector North.
- It has the world’s highest airstrip, originally built during the 1962 war but abandoned until 2008, when the Indian Air Force (IAF) revived it as one of its many Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) along the LAC.
• DBO is less than 10 km west of the LAC at Aksai Chin.
• To the west of DBO is the region where China abuts Pakistan in the Gilgit-Baltistan area, once a part of the erstwhile Kashmir principality.

Why in News?
The construction of the 255-km long Darbuk-Shyokh-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) all-weather road is said to be the immediate reason behind the standoff between Indian Army and a Chinese Army along LAC. Built by BRO, the road runs almost parallel to the LAC and connects Leh to DBO.

49. Operation Desert Chase:
It was the name of the Anti-espionage operation started by Military Intelligence (MI) in early 2019. It successfully culminated in June 2020 with the arrest of two men. Both were arrested under relevant sections of Official Secrets Act, 1923.
Context:
Under this operation, Rajasthan Police arrested two civil defence employees in Jaipur based on Military Intelligence (MI) inputs that they had been passing on sensitive information to Pakistan’s spy agency ISI.

50. Athirappilly hydroelectric project:
Context: The Kerala government has issued a fresh no-objection certificate (NOC) for the state electricity board to proceed with the implementation of the proposed Athirapally hydro-electric project, which had been shelved several times in the past due to protests by green activists.
Key facts:
• The project will have an installed capacity of 163 mw.
• Under the project, a dam is proposed to be constructed on the Chalakudy River.
• The Chalakudy River is a tributary of the Periyar River and originates in the Anamalai region of Tamil Nadu.

51. CPCB to classify railway stations based on waste water generation:
Central Pollution Control Board will classify railway stations under the red, orange and green categories based on the quantity of waste water generated.
Red: railway stations generating waste water equal to or more than 100 Kilo Litres per Day.
Orange: those greater than 10 KLD but less than 100 KLD.
Green: less than 10 KLD waste water generation.

52. Indian Gaur:
Context: The first population estimation exercise of Indian gaur carried out in the Nilgiris forest division in February has revealed that more than an estimated 2,000 Indian gaurs inhabit the 300 sq. km range.
Threats: On an average, a total of 60 gaurs die each year in the Nilgiris forest division, many due to accidents, owing to their proximity to human habitations.
About Indian Gaur:
• The gaur, Bos gaurus, also called the Indian bison, is one of the largest extant bovines.
• It is native to South and Southeast Asia and has been listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List since 1986.
• Distribution: In India, the population was estimated to be 12,000–22,000 in the mid-1990s. The Western Ghats and their outflanking hills in southern India constitute one of the most
extensive extant strongholds of gaur, in particular in the Wayanad – Nagarhole – Mudumalai – Bandipur complex.

53. **Anti-viral Viroblock textile technology:**

**Context:** Textile major Arvind Limited has announced the launch of an anti-viral textile technology for its fabric and garment products.

**Significance:**
Research shows that viruses and bacteria, can remain active on textile surfaces for up to two days. Arvind claims that garments treated with HeiQ Viroblock actively inhibit viruses and kill them upon contact, helping to minimize the potential for re-transmission of pathogens through clothing.

**What is HeiQ Viroblock?**
HeiQ Viroblock NPJ03 is an intelligent Swiss textile technology that is added to the fabric during the final stage of the textile manufacturing process. It is a special combination of advanced silver and vesicle technology.
- It has proven effective against SARS-CoV-2, the COVID-19 causing virus
- Suitable for all fiber types, from medical nonwovens (e.g. face masks) to fabrics for clothing and home textiles.

54. **Lunar lake:**

Team Of Scientists To Examine Why Maharashtra's Lunar Lake Has Turned Pink.
Some experts have attributed it to the salinity and presence of algae in the water body.

**Key facts:**
- Lunar crater lake was identified as a unique geographical site by a British officer named CJE Alexander in 1823.
- It is an ancient circular lake created by a meteorite strike in Maharashtra.
- It is relatively young geologically, at just 50,000 years old.
- Lunar Lake lies within the only known extraterrestrial impact crater found within the great Deccan Traps, a huge basaltic formation in India (Source: Wikipedia)

55. **World Day against Child Labour:**

Observed every year on June 12th.
- Intended to foster the worldwide movement against child labour in any of its forms.
- First launched in 2002 to raise awareness and prevent child labour by the International Labour Organisation.
- Theme: COVID-19 - Protect children from child labour now, more than ever”.
- UN Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7 set by the international community calls for an end to child labour in all its forms by 2025.

56. **Malabar gliding frog:**

**Why in News?**
It was recently spotted at Pullad, near Kozhencherry.

**Key facts:**
- **Scientific name:** Rhacophorus malabaricus.
Features: It is a green frog with slender body, webbed feet, unusual body positions, very well camouflaged and gliding in the air. It is endemic to the rain forests of Western Ghats.
Males are smaller than females.
Threats: Deforestation, climate change, developmental activities, toxic chemicals.
IUCN Conservation status: Least Concern.

57. Monkey Park in Karnataka:
- The state government is planning to establish a monkey park on the uninhabited islands in the Sharavathi backwaters region.
- Need for: The idea came up following a spike in the cases of monkeys raiding agricultural and plantation crops in Malnad region in recent times and several protests by farmers.
- As a solution to the menace, the State government took a decision to establish the park and in the 2020-21 budget, ₹6.25 crore was allocated for the purpose.

In Himachal Pradesh, there are state-of-the-art monkey sterilisation and rehabilitation centres to address the monkey menace.

58. What is Juneteenth?
Juneteenth is the portmanteau of June and nineteenth and while it is not a federal holiday, it is recognised as a state holiday in over 45 US states. The day is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the US and is observed on June 19.
It is also known as Emancipation Day or Juneteenth Independence Day.
On June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas and announced the end of both the Civil War and slavery. Since then, Juneteenth has become a largely symbolic date representing freedom for African Americans.

59. ArogyaPath:
It is CSIR National Healthcare Supply Chain Portal that aims to provide real-time availability of critical healthcare supplies.
It was launched recently to serve manufacturers, suppliers and customers to effectively deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.
60. **Captain Arjun:**

Railway Protection Force, Pune, under the Central Railways, has launched a Robotic ‘CAPTAIN ARJUN’ to intensify the screening and surveillance. The robot will screen passengers while they board trains and keep a watch on anti-social elements. It is equipped with a motion sensor, one PTZ camera and one Dome Camera. The Cameras use Artificial Intelligence algorithms to track suspicious and antisocial activity.

61. **PK Mohanty panel:**

Constituted by RBI.

To **review guidelines of ownership of private sector banks.**

Terms of reference:

1. examine the existing regulation and guidelines on ownership of private sector banks.
2. suggest appropriate norms to address the issue of concentration of control and ownership of banks.
3. review the eligibility criteria of the individuals to apply for banking license.

62. **International Albinism Awareness Day:**

Observed every year on **June 13** to highlight the rights of those born with albinism and increase awareness of the genetic condition.

Theme this year: ‘**Made To Shine’**.

**Albinism** — a rare disease, according to the National Institutes of Health — is characterised by a lack of melanin pigment in skin, hair and eyes. Those with albinism are vulnerable to sun exposure, something that increases chances of skin cancer and severe visual impairment.

Albinism is also widespread among animals as well and is caused by the absence of melanin in their bodies.

63. **Malathion:**

It is a **pesticide** that is widely used in agriculture, residential landscaping, public recreation areas, and in public health pest control programs such as mosquito eradication.

**Why in News?**

HIL India Ltd. supplies 25 MT Malathion 95% ULV Insecticides to **Iran** for Locust Control Programme.

**Need for:**

As per the reports of the **Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)**, the hopper stage population of locust is building up in **Sistan-Baluchistan Region of Iran**, which shall migrate to India in coming months leading to further crop devastation. Government of India has taken an initiative to counter the locust menace at its breeding ground itself and approached Iran for coordinated efforts.

(For more details on desert locusts: [click here](#).)

64. **Places in News:**

**Context:** Mentioned as part of 32nd session of the **DekhoApnaDesh webinar series of Ministry of Tourism** titled “**Trekking in the Himalayas- Magical Experiences**”.

**Places:**

1. **Kuari Pass (Uttarakhand):** This trek was explored by Lord Curzon and is also known as the Curzon trail.
2. **Brahma Taal (Uttarakhand):** It is a hidden and secluded lake amidst the ridge, where Lord Brahma meditated according to the mythology.
3. **Fotoksa**r is a picturesque village in **Ladakh**. It is the part of **the Lingshed- Padum trek (also known as The Great Zanskar trek).**
4. **Roopkund (Uttarakhand):** It is a high altitude glacial lake. It lies in the lap of **Trishul massif.**
(Note: Please locate these place on map and look for important rivers, National parks and places of significance.)

65. **Magallanodon baikashkenke:**

**Context:** Researchers from Chile and Argentine have discovered teeth of an extinct species of the lineage of Gondwanatheria. It was unearthed in Patagonia. The species is named *Magallanodon baikashkenke.*

**Key facts:**
- The animal is the oldest mammal ever discovered in Chile.
- The name *Magallanodon* is due to the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Hernando de Magallanes and Baikashkenke’s first round the world tribute to the Tehuelches, in whose language it means “grandfather’s valley”.
- The small mammal would have lived in southern Patagonia during the late Cretaceous era, alongside dinosaurs, crocodiles, turtles and birds.

66. **PNGRB:**

The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) was constituted under The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board Act, 2006.

- It seeks to protect the interests of consumers and entities engaged in specified activities relating to petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas and to promote competitive markets and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
- The board has also been mandated to regulate the refining, processing, storage, transportation, distribution, marketing and sale of petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas excepting production of crude oil and natural gas so as and to ensure uninterrupted and adequate supply of petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas in all parts of the country.

67. **Schizothorax sikusirumensis:**

It is a new species of fish discovered in Arunachal Pradesh recently.

- The fish species belongs to genus *Schizothorax.*
- The name of this fish species has been derived from the name of the rivers where it was found - junction of River Siku and Sirum near Gakang area under Mebo circle of East Siang District.

68. **Pangolin:**

**Why in News?**

China has accorded the pangolin the highest level of protection and removed the scales of the endangered mammal from its list of approved traditional medicines.

**Key facts:**

Pangolin is the only scaly mammal on the planet.

According to CITES, it is also the most illegally traded vertebrate within its class (Mammalia).

**Of the eight species of pangolin worldwide,** two are found in India. They are Chinese pangolin, mostly found in northeast India and Indian pangolin.

**Protection Status:**

1. Chinese pangolin has been listed as “critically endangered”.
2. Indian pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) has been listed as “endangered”.

www.insightsonindia.com
It is also a Schedule I category protected animal, under the Wildlife Protection Act (1972).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>2013 Assessment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sunda pangolin</td>
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<td>Indian pangolin</td>
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<td>Black-bellied pangolin</td>
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69. **What is dexamethasone?**

- It is an **anti-inflammatory drug**, commonly used to treat conditions in which the body’s immune system does not function properly, and causes inflammation and tissue damage.
- Dexamethasone reduces the production of the chemicals that cause inflammation and also reduces the activity of the immune system by affecting the way white blood cells function.
- It falls in a category called **corticosteroids**, which closely mimic cortisol, the hormone naturally produced by the adrenal glands in humans.

**Why in News?**
It has become the subject of discussion after researchers from the Recovery Trial reported that it helps reduce death rates in certain Covid-19 patients.

70. **Jagannath Rath Yatra:**

- Popularly known as the ‘**Festival of Chariots**’, Rath Yatra festival in honour of Puri’s Lord Jagannath is grand celebration.
- The festival is dedicated to **Lord Jagannath, his sister Goddess Subhadra and elder brother Balabhadra**.
- All the three deities of the temple – Jagannath, Subhadra and Balabhadra – travel in three different chariots during this festival. **The chariots are called Nandighosha, Taladhwaja, and Devadalana respectively.**
- **New chariots for all the three deities are constructed every year using wood** even if the architect of the chariots remain similar. **Four wooden horses are attached to each chariot.**

**Why in News?**
Supreme Court of India has stayed annual Rath Yatra at Puri's Jagannath Temple in Odisha which was scheduled from June 23. The apex court said that 'Lord Jagannath won't forgive us if we allow this year's Rath Yatra'.

71. **Kodumanal:**

- Kodumanal is a **village located in the Erode district in Tamil Nadu**. It is located on the northern banks of **Noyyal River, a tributary of the Cauvery.**
- It was once a flourishing ancient trade city known as **Kodumanam**, as inscribed in **Patittrupathu of Sangam Literature.**
- It served as a trade-cum-industrial centre from 5th century BCE to 1st century BCE.
- The place is an important archaeological site, under the control of State Archaeological Department of Tamil Nadu.

**Why in News?**
The following things have been found during the ongoing excavation at the site:
10 Pots and bowls placed outside three-chambered burial cists and inside the cairn-circle. This has thrown light on burial rituals and the concept of afterlife in **megalithic culture**.

**Other findings:** Animal skull, possibly of a wolf or a dog; precious stones; copper smelting units; potteries.

### 72. SATYABHAMA portal:
- Launched by Ministry of Mines.
- SATYABHAMA stands for Science and Technology Yojana for Aatmanirbhar Bharat in Mining Advancement.
- Designed, developed and implemented by National Informatics Centre (NIC), Mines Informatics Division.
- It allows **online submission of project proposals along with monitoring of the projects and utilization of funds / grants**. The researchers can also submit progress reports and Final Technical Reports of the projects in the electronic format in the portal.

### 73. What is Covifor?
It is an antiviral **Remdesivir** for treatment of COVID 19.
Drug Controller General of India has recently given its nod to **Drugmaker Hetero** to launch this new drug.
It is the **second such drug to enter the Indian market after Fabiflu by Glenmark**, which came a day earlier.

### 74. Golden Langurs:
**Why in News?**
Primatologists have observed that the **Gee's golden langur** induce **stillbirth of babies** killed inside the womb of females, besides practising infanticide.
**Forced abortion and infanticide** happen when a new male takes over. He often kills the baby of a lactating female or hits the abdomen of a female impregnated by the deposed male till the point of abortion.

**Other Concerns:**
Obstructions such as wires, and gaps in the forest due to felling, have increased the threat of inbreeding among golden langurs.

**Facts:**
- **Habitat:** semi evergreen and mixed deciduous forests.
- Found in Small regions of **western Assam** and in the neighbouring foothills of the **black mountains of Bhutan**.

**Protection status:**
- **Schedule I species** in the Wildlife Protection Act (1972).
- **CITES** Appendix I.
- **Endangered** in IUCN Red List.

**Population:**
In 2019, Bhutan recorded a drop of 62% in the population of golden langurs over the 2009 census. The recorded estimation in Assam in 2009 was 5,140.
This year’s census could not be completed due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

### 75. International Yoga Day:
Observed on June 21st every year.
**Theme for 2020:** “Yoga for Health – Yoga at Home”.

**Background:**
The UN proclaimed June 21 as International Day of Yoga by passing a resolution on December 11, 2014, during the 69th session of the General Assembly.

### 76. Swabhiman Anchal:
- Swabhiman Anchal, formerly known as **Cut-off area**, in **Malkangiri district of Odisha** has been a Maoist stronghold.
• The area was covered by water from three sides and inhospitable terrain by another. It had long been a stronghold of naxalites.
• The Maoists from Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh used to slip into Swabhiman Anchal to take refuge.

Why in News?
The Odisha police has been strengthening security infrastructure in the area.

77. UNICEF Kid Power:

Why in News?
UNICEF Kid Power’ has listed 13 Yoga stretches and poses for children.

What is it?
• UNICEF Kid Power is a program of UNICEF USA that gives kids the power to save lives by connecting their everyday activity to real-world impact.
• Launched in 2015, the initiative, in collaboration with technology firms, develops activity tracker bands for kids.
• These bands act as a kids’ fitness tracker bracelet that connects to a smartphone app. The app lets users complete missions, which counts total steps and awards points.
• The points then unlock funding from partners, which is then used by UNICEF to deliver packets of therapeutic food (Ready-to-use Therapeutic Food (RUTF)) to severely malnourished children around the globe.

HOW UNICEF KID POWER WORKS
Participation has its rewards. Here’s how UNICEF Kid Power turns fun physical activity into positive social impact.

Step 1
Kids get active with the UNICEF Kid Power Blend and go on missions to earn points.

Step 2
The more kids move, the more points they earn, the more lives they save.

Step 3
Points unlock packets of therapeutic food, which UNICEF delivers to severely malnourished children.

78. Macaws:

Context: Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has busted a wildlife smuggling syndicate with seizure of a consignment of exotic macaws which had been smuggled from Bangladesh to Kolkata.
  • The birds were identified as Hyacinth Macaw, Pesquet’s Parrot, Severe Macaw and Hahn’s Macaw.
  • All the birds were seized under provisions of the Customs Act and Wild Life Protection Act, 1972. Offences under these laws are punishable with a sentence of up to seven years of imprisonment.

Protection status:
They are all protected species under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), with Hyacinth Macaw being accorded the highest protection and listed under Appendix I. Protection under CITES implies ban in global and domestic trade of the species.

79. Pokhran potteries:

Context:
The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has launched its flagship “Kumhar Sashaktikaran Yojana” in Rajasthan’s Pokhran, to restore the lost glory of the pottery site.
Under this, KVIC distributed 80 electric potter wheels to 80 potter families in Pokhran which has a rich heritage in terracotta products.

Key facts:
• Pokhran is one of the aspirational districts identified by the Niti Ayog.
• Pokhran served as the test site for India’s first underground nuclear weapon, ballistic missiles.
80. **Kumbhar Sashaktikaran Program:**

It is an initiative of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) for empowerment of potters’ community in the remotest of locations in the country. The program reaches out to the potters in many states including U.P., M.P., Maharashtra, J&K, Haryana, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Assam, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Telangana and Bihar. This program provides the following support to potters.

- Training for advanced pottery products
- Latest, new technology pottery equipments like the electric Chaak
- Market linkages and visibility through KVIC exhibitions

81. **YUKTI 2.0:**

It is an initiative to help systematically assimilate technologies having commercial potential and information related to incubated startups in our higher education institutions.

YUKTI stands for Young India combating COVID with Knowledge, Technology and Innovation.

Ministry of HRD prepared the portal in view of Coronavirus.

- Through this portal, the Ministry of Human Resource Development will endeavor to ensure that students, teachers and researchers in higher educational institutions are getting appropriate support to meet the requirements needed to advance their technologies and innovations.

82. **Gaia hypothesis:**

Gaia hypothesis put forth by James Lovelock is an ecological theory proposing that living creatures and the physical world are in a complex interacting system that maintains equilibrium.

83. **Blazars:**

Blazars are among the brightest objects in the universe thanks to emissions powered by supersized black holes.

- The most distant of the newly discovered blazars started to emit their light when the universe was just 1.4 billion years old.
- Blazars are similar to all active galaxies, acquiring energy from matter falling toward a central supermassive black hole. A small part of this infalling material becomes redirected into a pair of particle jets, which blast outward in opposite directions at nearly the speed of light.

84. **Skills Build Reignite:**

MSDE-IBM partnership unveils Free Digital Learning Platform “Skills Build Reignite” to reach more job seekers & provide new resources to business owners in India.

- The free digital learning platform provides job seekers and entrepreneurs, with access to free online coursework and mentoring support designed to help them reinvent their careers and businesses.
- Job seekers, individual business owners, entrepreneurs and any individual with learning aspirations can access content on topics including Artificial intelligence, Cloud, Data analytics and security to reskill and upskill themselves, at no cost.
- There is also personalized coaching for entrepreneurs, seeking advice to help establish or restart their small businesses as they begin to focus on recovery to emerge out of the COVID-19 pandemic.
85. **Ashadhi Bij, the Kutchi New Year:**
- Ashadhi Bij/Beej is the 2nd day of Shukla paksha of Ashadha month of the Hindu calendar (June – July).
- The Kutchi people of Gujarat celebrate their Kutchi New Year on this day.
- This day is associated with the beginning of rains in Kutch, Gujarat.

86. **Kushinagar airport declared as international airport:**
   It is in Uttar Pradesh.
   - Kushinagar is an important Buddhist pilgrimage site, where Gautam Buddha attained Mahaparinirvana.
   - Kushinagar is dotted with several other Buddhist sites in the nearby surroundings like Sravasti (238 km), Kapilvastu (190 km) and Lumbini (195 km).

87. **Shwe oil & gas project in Myanmar:**
   CCEA has approved additional investment of US$ 121.27 million by ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) towards further development of Shwe oil & gas project in Myanmar.
   - ONGC Videsh (OVL) has been associated with exploration and development of Shwe gas project in Myanmar since 2002.
   **Significance:**
   The participation of Indian PSUs in oil & gas exploration and development projects in neighbouring countries is aligned with India’s Act East Policy, and also part of India’s strategy to develop Energy Bridges with its neighbours in addition to further strengthening India’s energy security needs.

88. **What is the Order of the Nine Angles?**
   O9A is considered to be a satanic, anarchist group founded in the UK in the 1970s that now operates around the world, including in the US.
   The group describes itself as “a diverse, and world-wide, collective of diverse groups, tribes, and individuals, who share and who pursue similar sinister, subversive, interests, aims and life-styles, and who cooperate when necessary for their mutual benefit and in pursuit of their shared aims and objectives…”
   **Why in News?**
   A US Army private has confessed to plotting an attack on his own unit by sharing secret information with this obscure satanic neo-Nazi group.
89. Nation’s top wheat contributor:
Madhya Pradesh (MP) this year surpassed Punjab to become the number one contributor of wheat. Punjab, however, is still a way ahead from MP as far as per hectare productivity of wheat is concerned, which is around 52 per cent more (per hectare) than MP.
- This year wheat was sown on 330.2 LH across the country against 296.98 LH last year.
- Of the total wheat area in the country, MP’s share was 31 per cent, while Punjab cultivated wheat on 10.6 per cent of the total national area.

90. World’s first yoga university outside India has been launched in Los Angeles:
It is named Vivekananda Yoga University (VaYU).
- VaYU will offer online graduate programmes based on scientific principles and modern research approaches to yoga.
- Eminent Indian yoga guru Dr. H R Nagendra, Chancellor of Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthan (SVYASA) is the first Chairman of VaYU.

91. Navigating the New Normal:
- It is a campaign launched by NITI Aayog, in partnership with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), Centre for Social and Behavioural Change (CSBC), Ashoka University, and the Ministries of Health and WCD.
- It focuses on COVID-safe behaviours, especially wearing masks, during the ‘Unlock’ phase of the ongoing pandemic.

92. What are Placebos?
Placebos are substances that are made to resemble drugs but do not contain an active drug. A placebo is made to look exactly like a real drug but is made of an inactive substance, such as a starch or sugar.

93. Maareech:
It is an advanced anti-torpedo decoy system that is capable of being fired from all frontline ships.
- It was recently inducted by the Indian Navy.
- Designed and developed indigenously by the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO).
- It is capable of detecting, locating and neutralizing incoming torpedo.

94. Sankalp Parva:
Ministry of Culture is celebrating the “Sankalp Parva” from 28th June to 12 July 2020. This initiative has been launched following the call of Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi to plant at least five trees either in Office campus or wherever it is possible in order to ensure clean and healthy environment of the country.
Ministry of Culture has recommended planting 5 trees: Bargad, Awla, Pepal, Ashok and Bel. These 5 trees represent the herbal heritage of the country.

95. Fishing cats:
Why in News?
The Odisha Government has started a two-year conservation project for Fishing Cats in Bhitarkanika National Park.

Key facts:
The fishing cat is nocturnal (active at night).
State animal of West Bengal.
Habitats: In India, fishing cats are mainly found in the mangrove forests of the Sundarbans, on the foothills of the Himalayas along the Ganga and Brahmaputra river valleys and in the Western Ghats.

Protection:
1. **Vulnerable** — IUCN Red List.
2. **CITES**: Appendix II
3. **Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**: Schedule I.

**Fishing Cat Project**, launched in 2010 started raising awareness about the Cat in West Bengal.

### 96. Gynandromorphs:

They are *chimeric individuals having both male and female tissues*, and are viewed by the scientific community as a *genetic aberration*. It is common in some arthropod taxa such as *Crustacea* and *Arachnida*.

**Why in News?**
Researchers have *Gynandromorphism* in the *Libellulid Dragonfly Crocothemis Servilia* from India.

### 97. Covaxin:

- It is **India’s first COVID vaccine candidate** approved by the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI).
- Covaxin is an *inactivated vaccine created from a strain of the infectious SARS COV-2 virus*.
- It is **the first vaccine that has got approval of the drug controller for phase 1 and II human clinical trials**.
- The vaccine has been developed by Hyderabad Major **Bharat Biotech** in collaboration with **ICMR** and the **National Institute of Virology (NIV)**.

The company is also involved in the development of **CoroFlu**, a nasal vaccine for COVID-19, as part of an international collaboration of virologists at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and vaccine firm FluGen.
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