

IASBABA'S

MONTHLY MAGAZINE

MARCH 2020

Epidemic Diseases Act

Vivad se Viswas Bill

126th Constitutional Amendment

Sex-Selective Abortion

COVID-19

Long Term Repo Operations



PREFACE

With the present shift in examination pattern of UPSC Civil Services Examination, 'General Studies – II and General Studies III' can safely be replaced with 'Current Affairs'. Moreover, following the recent trend of UPSC, almost all the questions are issue-based rather than news-based. Therefore, the right approach to preparation is to prepare issues, rather than just reading news.

Taking this into account, our website www.iasbaba.com will cover current affairs focusing more on 'issues' on a daily basis. This will help you pick up relevant news items of the day from various national dailies such as The Hindu, Indian Express, Business Standard, LiveMint, Business Line and other important Online sources. Over time, some of these news items will become important issues.

UPSC has the knack of picking such issues and asking general opinion based questions. Answering such questions will require general awareness and an overall understanding of the issue. Therefore, we intend to create the right understanding among aspirants – 'How to cover these issues?

This is the **58th edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **MARCH 2020** which can be accessed from <https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/>

VALUE ADDITIONS FROM IASBABA

- **Must Read and connecting the dots.**
- **Also, we have introduced Prelim and mains focused snippets and Test Your Knowledge (Prelims MCQs based on daily current affairs) which shall guide you for better revision.**
- **'Must Read' section**, will give you important links to be read from exam perspective. This will make sure that, you don't miss out on any important news/editorials from various newspapers on daily basis.
- Under each news article, **'Connecting the dots'** facilitates your thinking to connect and ponder over various aspects of an issue. Basically, it helps you in understanding an issue from multi-dimensional view-point. You will understand its importance while giving Mains or Interview.

Must Read Articles: We have not included them in the magazine. Those following DNA on daily basis may follow it- <https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/>

"Tell my mistakes to me not to others, because these are to be corrected by me, not by them."

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Beat the Heat of Current Affairs Prelims 2020 in 12 Uber Cool Sessions by Tauseef Ahmad (One of the Founders of IASbaba)

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Dogra Dynasty

Part of: Prelims and GS-I- History

In news-

- Jammu Airport and the Jammu University to be renamed after Hindu Dogra monarchs Maharaja Hari Singh and Maharaja Gulab Singh, respectively
- **Maharaja Gulab Singh** founded the Dogra dynasty and became the first monarch of Jammu & Kashmir kingdom in 1846.
- J&K was annexed by the Sikhs in 1819 and Gulab Singh was made Raja of the state by Sikhs in 1820
- In the First Sikh War (1845–46), Maharaja Gulab Singh held aloof and then appeared as a mediator. As a reward, Jammu & Kashmir was given to him by the British for a cash payment
- **Maharaja Hari Singh** was the last Dogra monarch, who acceded to India in 1947. He contributed troops to British war effort in World War II and served on Churchill's imperial War cabinet

Dholavira

Part of: Prelims and GS-I- Art & Culture

In news

- Government of India has submitted nomination dossier of 'Dholavira: A Harappan City' for inclusion in the World Heritage List for the year 2020.
- Dholavira is an archaeological site at Khadirbet in Bhachau Taluka of Kutch District, in the state of Gujarat. Dholavira's location is on the Tropic of Cancer.
- Also known locally as Kotada timba, the site contains ruins of an ancient Indus Valley Civilization/Harappan city.
- It is one of the five largest Harappan sites and most prominent archaeological sites in India belonging to the Indus Valley Civilization.



Sukhna Lake

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Geography

In News:

- The Punjab and Haryana High Court has declared Sukhna lake as a living entity.
- Sukhna Lake is a **rain-fed lake**, located within Chandigarh and its catchment area falls both in Punjab and Haryana.
- The lake was **constructed in 1958** and is spread over 3 sq km
- Earlier, Uttarakhand High Court declared the rivers Yamuna and Ganga as legal or juridical persons, enjoying all the rights, duties and liabilities of a living person

Namda- Traditional craft of Kashmir

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Art & Culture

In News:

- Achievements of Arifa Jaan from Jammu and Kashmir- who revived the traditional Namda craft of carpet weaving- were shared on Social media by PM Modi under #SheInspiresUs.
- Namda is a form of matting.
- They are made from wool by practice of felting the wool rather than weaving it. The Felted carpets are predominantly made of pure wool
- Namda is usually a sandwich of many layers of wool flattened over each other. After a layer is spread, it is sprinkled homogenously with water and pressed with a tool known as 'pinjra'(woven willow wicker)
- It is said to have originated in the 11th century when Akbar ordered for asuitable coverage for his horse who was affected by biting cold



- Pic Source: [Hindustan Times](https://www.hindustantimes.com)

Attukal Pongala

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Culture

In News:

- The Attukal Pongala is a ten-day-long festival held in Attukal Temple, Thiruvananthapuram(Kerala) is the largest congregation of women for a festival in the world.
- Pongala, which means 'to boil over', is the ritual in which women prepare sweet payasam (a pudding made from rice, jaggery, coconut and plantains cooked together) and offer it to the Goddess or 'Bhagavathy'. The ritual can only be performed by women
- The festival commences with the musical rendering of the story of the Goddess (Kannaki Charitam) that invokes the victory of Good over Evil, by the slaying of Pandyan King.
- Also known as "the Sabarimala of Women".

90 yrs of salt movement

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Modern History

In News:

- The salt movement led by Gandhi started on March 12 in 1930, from Sabarmati Ashram to the coastal village of Dandi (240 miles)
- The Salt March is also known as the Dandi March and the Dandi Satyagraha.
- Objective:
 - To produce salt from the seawater in the coastal village of Dandi, as was the practice of the local populace until British officials introduced taxation on salt production and deemed their sea-salt reclamation activities illegal.
 - It was a direct-action campaign of tax resistance and nonviolent protest against the British salt monopoly under the 1882 British Salt Act.
- The march directly followed the Poorna Swaraj declaration of sovereignty and self-rule by the Indian National Congress on 26 January 1930.
- The then Viceroy, Lord Irwin was hardly perturbed by the threat of a salt protest and the government did nothing to prevent the salt march from taking place.
- The salt tax accounted for 8.2% of the British Raj revenue from tax
- When Gandhi broke the salt laws on 6 April 1930, it sparked large scale acts of civil disobedience against the British Raj salt laws by millions of Indians.
- As per the Gandhi-Irwin Pact Indians were allowed to make salt for domestic use

Chaitra Jatra Festival

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Culture

In News:

- The annual Chaitra Jatra festival scheduled to be held on March 17 at **Odisha's Tara Tarini hill shrine** is cancelled as a precautionary measure against COVID-19 infection.
- Tara Tarini hill shrine on banks of the **Rushikulya river**, is a major centre of Shakti worship in Odisha.

Prelims Value Addition

- After Gahirmatha in Kendrapara district of Odisha, the Rushikulya river mouth in Ganjam district has emerged as the second largest **nesting site** of the endangered **olive ridley turtles**.

- Indian Navy's sailboat INSV Tarini was named after Tara Tarini hill shrine.
- The **first Indian all-woman crew** had circumnavigated the globe in **INSV Tarini**.

Puri Jagannath Temple

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Art & Culture

In News:

- The Jagannath Temple in Puri was called the **"White Pagoda"**.
- The temple is a **part of Char Dham** (Badrinath, Dwarka, Puri, Rameswaram) pilgrimages that a Hindu is expected to make in one's lifetime.
- When most of the deities in the temples of India are made of stone or metal, the **idol of Jagannatha is made of wood** which is ceremoniously replaced in every twelve or nineteen years by using sacred trees.
- The temple is believed to be constructed in the 12th century by King Anatavarman Chodaganga Deva of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty.
- The temple is famous for its **annual Ratha Yatra or Chariot festival**, in which the three principal deities (Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra) are pulled on huge and elaborately decorated temple cars
- **Jagannath Puri temple** is called '**Yamanika Tirtha**' where, according to the Hindu beliefs, the power of 'Yama', the god of death has been nullified in Puri due to the presence of Lord Jagannath.

Colour Coded Weather Warning

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Geography

- **In News:** The Met department issued a fresh yellow weather warning for heavy rain and snowfall accompanied by thunderstorm and lightning in Himachal Pradesh
- Colour-coded warnings are issued by **Indian Meteorological Department (IMD)**
- **Parent Ministry:** Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- **Objective:** To alert people ahead of severe or hazardous weather this has the potential to cause damage, widespread disruption or danger to life.
- IMD uses four colour codes to indicate various categories of alerts
 - **Green (All is well):** No action is required and No advisory is issued.
 - **Yellow (Be Aware):** It indicates severely bad weather panning across several days. It also suggests that the weather could change for the worse, causing disruption in day-to-day activities.
 - **Orange / Amber (Be prepared):** It is issued as a warning of extremely bad weather with the potential of disruption in commute with road and rail closures, and interruption of power supply.
 - The sounding of the orange alert is a sign for people to prepare for evacuation, keep food packets ready and protect themselves and their family from bad weather.
 - **Red (Take Action):** When the extremely bad weather conditions are certainly going to disrupt travel and power, and has significant risk to life, the red alert is

issued. In this case, people must take all measures to protect their families and follow the instructions of local authorities and disaster-response teams

Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-II- Governance; GS-I- Modern History

- **In News:** Kerala State government invoked the act in Kasaragod district on 21 March 2020.
- **Background of the Act:** It was introduced by British government to tackle the epidemic of bubonic plague that had spread in the erstwhile Bombay Presidency in the 1890s.
- Some of the key features of the act are:
 - It empowers **state governments/UTs to take special measures** and formulate regulations for containing the outbreak, like inspection of persons travelling by railways, segregation in hospitals etc.
 - It empowers state **to prescribe such temporary regulations** to be observed by the public
 - It provides **penalties** for disobeying any regulation or order made under the Act.
 - It gives **legal protection** to the implementing officers acting under the Act.

Prelims Value Addition

- In 1897, the year the law was enforced, **freedom fighter Bal Gangadhar Tilak** was punished with 18 months' rigorous imprisonment after his newspapers **Kesari and Mahratta** admonished imperial authorities for their handling of the plague epidemic.
- Health is a State subject.

Rushikulya River: Over one lakh turtles have laid eggs along its coast

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-I- Geography

- It is one of the major rivers in the state of **Odisha**
- It originates from Daringbadi hills of the Eastern Ghats range and flows into Bay of Bengal
- After Gahirmatha in Kendrapara district of Odisha, the Rushikulya river mouth in Ganjam district has emerged as the second largest **nesting site** of the endangered **olive ridley turtles**.

Yakshagana

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-II- Governance; GS-I- Art and culture

In News:

- Over 900 Yakshagana scripts are digitised through voluntary community efforts

Prelims Value Addition

- Yakshagana is a **traditional theatre form of Karnataka**.
- It combines dance, music, dialogue, costume, make-up, and stage techniques with a unique style and form.
- It is performed with massive headgears, elaborate facial make-up and vibrant costumes and ornaments.
- It is performed with **percussion instruments** like chenda, maddalam, jagatta or chengila (cymbals) and chakratala or elathalam (small cymbals).

- Yakshagana is traditionally presented **from dusk to dawn**.
- It is believed to have evolved from pre-classical music and theatre during the period of the Bhakti movement
- Earlier days, the Yakshagana theatre was known as Bhagavatara attar, which revolved round the stories of Lord Krishna and Vishnu

Various festivals across the country being celebrated

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I – Art and Culture

In News:

- Indian Prime Minister greeted people on the occasion of various festivals across the country being celebrated on 25th March, 2020.

Key takeaways:

- The festivals being celebrated are **Yugadi, Gudhi Padwa, Navreh and Sajibu Cheiraoba**.
- These festivals mark the New Year's Day for the people belonging to **Hindu religion and Sanamahism religion**.
- They are celebrated on the first day of the Hindu lunisolar calendar **month of Chaitra**.
- This typically falls in March or April of the **Gregorian calendar**.

Important value additions:

Festivals	Description
Yugadi	It is celebrated in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana states in India.
Gudhi Padwa	It is celebrated in and near Maharashtra and Goa .
Navreh	It is celebrated by Kashmiri Pandits.
Sajibu Cheiraoba	It is celebrated by the people who follow the Sanamahism religion of the Indian state of Manipur.

Kavutheendal ceremony

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Art and Culture

In News:

- **Kavutheendal ceremony**, a part of the **Meena Bharani festival**, was recently performed at **Sri Kurumba Bhagavathy Temple** in Kerala.

Key takeaways:

- The ceremony usually sees huge number of devotees.
- Amidst the coronavirus lockdown, the ceremony was performed by a representative of the **Velan community**, without the presence of any devotee.

Important value additions:

Kavutheendal ritual

- It is considered as **the largest congregation of oracles** in the world.
- This ritual is based on the notions of purity/impurity inherent in Brahminical Hinduism.

Velan community

- The community belongs to scheduled caste that lives mainly in Kerala.

Sri Kurumba Bhagavathy Temple

- It is a Hindu temple at **Kodungallur** of Kerala state in India.
- It is dedicated to the **goddess Bhadrakali**, a form of Maha Kali worshipped in Kerala.

Tribal rituals for lockdown

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Art and Culture

In News:

- Various tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh **performed rituals** to observe lockdown in the wake of coronavirus pandemic.

Key takeaways:

- **Arr-Rinam** was performed by the **Galos community**.
- The **Adi community** performed **Motor ritual**.
- The **Nyishi community** observed **Arrue** involving self-quarantine.

Important value additions:**Galos community**

- They belong to the **Tani group** inhabiting Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, besides Tibet.
- Only the Galos **maintain genealogy** through given names.
- The Galos perform Popir dance.
- They have been recognized as a Scheduled Tribe under the constitution.

Adi community

- They are **one of the most populous groups** of indigenous peoples in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.
- Their **prime festivals** are Aran, Donggin, Solung, and Etor.
- The majority of Adi traditionally follow **Donyi-Polo** religion.

Nyishi community

- It is the largest ethnic group in Arunachal Pradesh.
- The Nyishi language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family.
- Polygyny is prevalent among the Nyishi.

Homam ceremony performed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Art and Culture

In News:

- **Homam ceremony** was recently performed at **Srikalahastheeswara Devasthanam**.

Key takeaways:

- The Homam is generally performed to **ensure prosperity and well-being** at the global level and health and longevity at the individual level.
- This time it was particularly performed to undo the **negative effects of coronavirus**.

Important value additions:**Srikalahastheeswara Devasthanam**

- The temple is famous across the world for performing '**Rahu Ketu Puja**' every day to fight the 'toxic' effect of Rahu and Ketu, the 'rogue serpents' among the pantheon of Hindu gods.
 - This is the **only Saivite shrine** in the country to **remain open** during the solar and lunar eclipse.
-



National Population Register (NPR)

Part of: GS Prelims –Polity and GS-II- Government Polices

In news:

Context: Bihar Assembly passed a unanimous resolution stating that there is no need for a National Register of Citizens in the State and that the implementation of the NPR would be done strictly according to the 2010 format.

What is NPR?

- NPR is a register of usual residents of the country. It includes both Indian citizens as well as a foreign citizen.
- According to the Citizenship Rules, 2003, a usual resident is a person who has resided (or intends to reside) in a local area for the past 6 months
- The entire NPR exercise will be conducted by the Office of the Registrar General of India (RGI) under the Union Home Ministry.
- The first NPR was prepared in 2010 and updation of this data was done (except in Assam and Meghalaya) during 2015 by conducting door to door survey.
- The present NPR has a database of 119 crore residents.
- The NPR 2020 enumeration exercise will be undertaken during April–September 2020

How is the NPR linked to the National Register of Citizens?

- NPR is considered to be the mother database for “identity purposes”.
- The Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003 mandates that particulars of “every family and individual” in the NPR would be used for verification in the National Register of Citizens (NRC)
- The Local Registrar is empowered, during verification, to mark out the particulars of individuals whose citizenship is doubtful, with “appropriate remarks” for further enquiry.

What happens if individual citizenship is marked doubtful?

- The individual concerned has to then appear before the Sub-district or Taluk Registrar of Citizen Registration to prove s/he is a citizen before a formal decision is taken to include or to exclude their particulars in NRC
- The onus to prove s/he is a citizen is entirely on the individual concerned.
- Thus, the data collected through NPR becomes the crux for determining the citizenship of a person.

What is the NPR format of 2010?

- Fifteen identity particulars of the individual members of the household are sought in the 2010 format.
- These include name, relationship to the head of the household, sex, date of birth, marital status, educational qualification, occupation/activity, names of parents, place of birth (of everybody staying in the household at the time), nationality, present address of usual residence, duration of stay at the present address and permanent residential address.

What does the updated NPR manual of 2020 say?

- Certain new information will be collected like **Aadhaar, mobile, voter ID, passport** and driving licence, if available with the residents on a voluntarily basis.
- New format also requires residents to disclose their **mother tongue** and the **places & dates of birth of their parents** even if they are not living in the same household at the time or not alive

What is the problem?

- **Lack of Documentation:** In a country where a large part of the population is underprivileged and where people have not been able to formalise their birth due to lack of access to health care, the task of disclosing the **exact birth and place of birth, especially of their aged parents** and orphans, would prove to be a daunting task.
- **Fear of Exclusion:** NPR is being viewed in fear as a facilitator for the NRC. Along with this, the passage of Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 has induced fears among sections of society (particularly Muslims) that inadequate documents may invite remarks by local registrar during enumeration exercise, thus stripping off their citizenship status.
- **CAA, 2019** fast-tracks citizenship-by-naturalisation process of persons from six religious communities, other than Muslims, who have fled persecution from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.
- State governments are nervous that the NPR data would be used to target citizens on the basis of their identity and deprive them of their public services

What lies ahead?

- The workforce for updation of NPR 2020 has to be provided by the State governments.
- With more States objecting to the new format and its contentious clauses, the exercise may reach an impasse.
- Widespread doubts about the intentions behind the NPR may also affect the smooth conduct of the Census.

Connecting the dots

- What happens when State & Centre reach impasse (suppose in case of NPR)? Should Judiciary get involved or should mechanism like Inter-State Council be utilized?
- Cooperative Federalism
- Article 131 of Indian Constitution

National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA)

Part of: Prelims and GS-III-Economy; GS-II- Governance

In news-

- NFRA was **constituted in 2018** under section 132 (1) of the **Companies Act, 2013**.
- **It is an independent regulator** for enforcement of auditing standards and ensuring the quality of audits so as to enhance investor and public confidence in financial disclosures of companies.
- It can probe listed companies and those unlisted public companies having paid-up capital of no less than Rs 500 crore or annual turnover of no less than Rs 1,000 crore. (while ICAI retains jurisdiction of small listed companies)

- It can even investigate professional misconduct committed by members of the **Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI)** for prescribed class of body corporate or persons.

Central Fraud Registry

Part of: Prelims and GS-III-Economy; GS-II- Governance

In news-

- There has been decline in frauds at Public Sector Banks from ₹50,329 crore in 2013-14 to just ₹3,781 crore in the first three quarters of 2019-20 (Finance Ministry)
- RBI** has put in place a central fraud registry, which is a **searchable database** to help banks detect instances of fraud by borrowers early on.
- It also helps Banks in **carrying out due diligence** during the credit sanction process
- Frauds of below 5 Crore will be monitored by regional offices of RBI and above 5 Crore will be monitored by the Central Fraud Monitoring Cell (CFMC) of RBI

Top Three SDGs & India

Part of: GS Prelims –Polity and GS-II- Government Polices

Context: President Donald Trump applauded India's achievements during his speech in Motera stadium in Ahmedabad.

The top three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations are namely poverty elimination (SDG-1), zero hunger (SDG-2), and good health & well-being (SDG-3) to be attained by 2030



Pic Source: [UNO](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/)

India's Present status with regard to these three goals:

- The World Bank's estimates of extreme poverty — measured as \$1.9/per capita/per day at purchasing power parity of 2011 — show a secular decline in India from 45.9% to 13.4% between 1993 and 2015.
- If the overall growth process continues as has been the case since, say, 2000 onwards, **India may succeed in eliminating extreme poverty by 2030.**
- National Food Security Act (NFSA) that subsidises grains to the tune of more than 90% of its cost to 67% of the population can help India attain the goal of zero hunger before 2030
- The **real challenge** for India, however, is to achieve the third **goal of good health** and well-being by 2030

Poor Health condition in India (as per NFHS- In 2015-16)

- Almost 38.4% of India's children under the age of five years were stunted
- 35.8% of children (below 5 years) were **underweight** (low weight for age)
- 21% of children (below 5 years) suffered from wasting (low weight for height)
- Also, the **Global Hunger Index (GHI)** ranks India at 102 out of 117 countries in terms of the severity of hunger in 2019.
- **Slow Progress:** The decadal decline in underweight children from 42.5% in 2005-06 to 35.8% in 2015-16 amounts to less than 1 per cent decline per year.
- **Behind Other Nations:** According to the **Global Nutrition Report**, 2016, at the present rates of decline, India will achieve the current stunting rates of China by 2055

What are the government ambitions w.r.t malnutrition?

- The **National Nutrition Strategy**, 2017, aims to reduce the prevalence of underweight children (0-3 years) by 3% points every year by 2022 from NFHS 2015-16 estimates.
- Under **National Nutrition Mission** (renamed as POSHAN Abhiyaan), 2017, government aims to reduce
 - Stunting by 2% per annum,
 - Undernutrition by 2% per annum,
 - Anemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls) by 3% per annum
 - Low birth weight by 2% per annum

In order to achieve good Health, government has to focus on below four areas

1. Mother's education.

- It is one of the most important factors that has a positive multiplier effect on child care and access to healthcare facilities.
- It also increases awareness about nutrient-rich diet, personal hygiene, etc.
- This can also help contain the family size in poor, malnourished families.
- Thus, a high priority to female literacy, in a mission mode through liberal scholarships for the girl child, would go a long way towards tackling this problem.

2. Access to improved sanitation and safe drinking water.

- The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan should shift its focus from mere ODF declaration to ODF+ and ODF++ strategies which involve proper functioning of community toilets, efficient waste sludge management and recycling measures.
- Jal Jeevan Mission which aims to provide piped drinking water to all Households by 2024 needs to be implemented in mission mode

3. Change in dietary patterns

- There is a need to shift dietary patterns from cereal dominance to the consumption of nutritious foods such as livestock products, fruits and vegetables, pulses, etc.
- But they are generally costly and their consumption increases only by higher incomes and better education.
- Diverting a part of the food subsidy on wheat and rice to more nutritious foods can help

4. New agricultural technologies

- India must adopt new agricultural technologies of bio-fortifying cereals, such as zinc-rich rice, wheat, iron-rich pearl millet
- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has to work closely with Farmer Producer Organizations and NGOs so as to make newer seeds and modern farm practices affordable and accessible to all farmers in the country.

Conclusion

- Global experience shows that with the right public policies focusing on agriculture, improved sanitation, and women's education, one can have much better health and well-being for its citizens, especially children. India can certainly do better, but only if it focuses on this issue.

Connecting the dots

- 17 Sustainable Development Goals
- India's achievements in Millennium Development Goals
- India's Ayushman Bharat Programme

National Interlinking of Rivers Authority(NIRA)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Federalism; Governance

In News:

- The Central government is working on the establishment of an exclusive body, NIRA, to implement projects for linking rivers.
- The proposed NIRA is expected to take up both inter-State and intra-State projects.
- It will also make arrangements for generating up funds, internally and externally.
- As of now, six ILR projects — the Ken-Betwa, Damanganga- Pinjal, Par-Tapi-Narmada, Manas-Sankosh-Teesta-Ganga, Mahanadi-Godavari and Godavari-Cauvery (Grand Anicut) — have been under examination of the authorities.
- Once approved, the projects will be pursued as national projects, wherein the Centre will absorb 90% of the cost and the States concerned the rest.

Did You Know?

- National Water Development Agency (NWDA) is responsible for the formulation of proposals of the linking of rivers.

Janaushadhi Week

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- The Janaushadhi week is being celebrated across the country from 1st March to 7th March 2020.
- Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana is an initiative by Department of Pharmaceuticals started in 2008 to provide quality medicines at an affordable price
- PMBJP stores have been set up to provide generic drugs, which are available at lesser prices but are equivalent in quality and efficacy as expensive branded drugs
- Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI), under Ministry of Chemical and Fertilizers, is the implementation agency for PMBJP

Schemes to preserve and promote culture of tribal

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- **Award to Young Talented Artists:** Talented youngsters of the age group of 18-30 years are selected and given a onetime cash award of Rs. 10,000/- for their talent in the field of rare art forms
- **Guru Shishya Parampara:** This scheme envisages transmitting our valued traditions to the coming generations. Disciples are trained under veterans in art forms which are rare and vanishing.
- **Shilpgram:** To promote folk and tribal art and crafts of the zone by organizing seminar, workshops, exhibitions, craft fairs, design development and marketing support to the artisans living in the rural areas.
- **Octave:** To promote and propagate the rich cultural heritage of North East region comprising of eight States namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura to the rest of India.
- **National Cultural Exchange Programme (NCEP):** Under this scheme, various festivals of performing arts, exhibitions, yatras etc are organized in member States.
- **Sahitya Akademi,** an autonomous organization under Ministry of Culture, encourages the preservation and promotion of languages, especially the unrecognized and tribal languages.

Teacher Education

Part of: GS Prelims –Polity and GS-II- Government Polices

Context: India is estimated to have the largest workforce within the next decade. This means that a population bulge is on the cusp of entering the higher education ecosystem now.

The pressing need of the hour is to focus on providing the best quality teacher education to those who aspire to build the future of this country.

Learning Crisis in India

- Almost half of the children in grade 5 in rural India cannot solve a simple two-digit subtraction problem
- 67 % of children in grade 8 in public schools score less than 50 per cent in competency-based assessments in mathematics.

Present Status of Teacher Education

- Currently, there are about 94 lakh teachers across all schools in India.
- **Teacher vacancies** are to the tune of almost 60-70% in some states
- **On the other hand**, there are **17,000-odd Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs)** that are responsible for preparing teachers through programmes such as the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed), and Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed).
- These TEIs could generate over 19 lakh freshly trained teachers every year as against the estimated annual requirement of 3 lakh teachers.
- In other words, these institutes could therefore be producing one-fifth of the total number of school teachers.
- **Poor Quality of TEIs:** The pass-percentage in central teacher eligibility tests that stipulate eligibility for appointments as teachers has not exceeded 25% in recent years. This indicates that teacher education system is producing poor-quality teachers.

Reasons for the Present Poor Status of Teacher Education

Inadequacies of planning, regulation, policy and organisational structures have been responsible for poor teacher education eco-system. Major factors which has contributed to this sorry state of affairs are:

1. Toothless NCTE

- The National Council for Teacher Education (**NCTE**) and its four regional committees (north, south, east and west), **established by statute**, are responsible for teacher education in India.
- However, the Act assigns disproportionate power to the regional committees which grant programme affiliation while **the Council has been rendered toothless**.
- The decade between 2004 and 2014 saw a five-fold increase in the number of programmes recognised by these regional committees

2. Dominated by Private Sector:

- About 90% of these institutes are privately owned and majority of them are standalone institutes, running single programmes with as few as 50 students.
- **Commercialisation** combined with perverted incentives and widespread corruption have resulted in a massive proliferation of sub-standard private TEIs.
- Most of these TEIs are financially unviable, some function out of tiny rooms with duplicate addresses, and a few could even be selling degrees at a fixed price.

3. Lack of effective Assessment

- These institutes function in isolation from the rest of the higher education system, and there is no system to assess and accredit them.
- Consequently, there is no systemic sieve to ensure the entry of only motivated and meritorious individuals into the teacher education space.

4. Poor Planning

- **Regional Disparity:** Almost half of the total TEIs are in the northern region and one-third of the total TEIs are concentrated in Uttar Pradesh
- **Disproportionate Focus on Select few Programmes:** While there are about 17 recognised teacher education programmes, a majority of TEIs offer only B.Ed and D.El.Ed programmes. Master of Education (M.Ed) is offered in less than 10% of the TEIs

- As a result the country is actually facing a shortage of subject-teachers in secondary schools and teacher-educators for whom a M.Ed degree is a requisite

5. Outdated teacher preparation curriculum

- The curriculum was updated over a decade ago which is not in sync with modern needs where technological advancements can be leveraged

Way Ahead:

- **Preparation of Credible Comprehensive Data:** Till date, there is no accurate real-time database of the number and details of teacher education institutes, students enrolled and programmes offered. Such data can be used for proper planning and reforming the organisational structure.
- **An accurate system of assessment and accreditation** must be developed to ensure high-quality teacher education. The National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) has only covered 30% of all institutes since its establishment back in 1994. Therefore, multiple accreditation agencies be empanelled to cover the extensive landscape of the teacher education sector
- **Teacher education curriculum** must be regularly revamped and revised to ensure that our teacher education system is aligned to global standards.
- **Tap the export potential of Teachers:** Experts have advocated for a shift towards integrated four-year subject-specific programmes to be housed in multidisciplinary colleges and universities. This could potentially serve as an avenue for India to outsource its surplus high-quality teachers to over 70 countries that face a teacher shortage.
- **Strengthening governance mechanism** which clearly establishes ownership and accountability for set work streams across multiple agencies.

Conclusion

The draft National Education Policy presents a ray of hope. Its vision to restore integrity and credibility to the teacher education system needs to be translated into effective action

Connecting the dots

- Draft National Education Policy
- Swam Prabha

[Third party can access judgment copy](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Judiciary, Governance

In News:

- Apex court has ruled that court documents such as copies of judgments and pleadings can be obtained only if court rules permit it, and **not under the RTI Act**.
- The bench upheld **Rule 151 of Gujarat High Court Rules**, which allows access to certified copies of judgments, orders and pleadings to a third-party — or those not party to a case — only under the order of an officer of the court.
- In November 2019, unanimous decision by a five-judge bench had said that “transparency does not undermine judicial independence” while bringing **the CJI office under RTI**.

State Funding of Polls

Part of: GS Prelims – Polity and GS-II- Government Polices

Context: The Minister of State for Finance has informed Lok Sabha that the Election Commission of India (ECI) is not in favour of state funding of elections.

Current Scenario of Political Funding

- **Individual Persons:** Section 29B of RPA allows political parties to receive donations from individual persons.
- **Indirect State Funding:** It includes methods except direct funding, like free access to media, free access to public places for rallies, free or subsidized transport facilities. It is allowed in India in a regulated manner.
- **Electoral Trusts:** A non-profit company created in India for orderly receipt of voluntary contributions from any person like an individual or a domestic company
- **Corporate Funding-** Earlier corporates to donate up to 7.5 percent of the net average profits earned in the preceding three years. However, this limitation was the done away with 2017 Finance Act
- Changes were made in the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010 via the 2018 Finance Bill to allow **foreign companies registered in India** to make political donations.
- **Electoral Bonds:** It is like a promissory note that can be bought by any Indian citizen or company incorporated in India from select branches of SBI. They can then donate the same to any eligible political party of his/her choice

Issues with Political Funding

- Use of Shell/Fake companies to **route Black Money**
- Limits imposed on Individual expenditure during elections but **no such caps on expenditure by Political Parties**
- Corporate donations cover more than the two-third of total funds collected by the political parties thus engendering an **unholy Corporate-Politician nexus**
- 75% of the donors to a political party are **anonymous**. The source of money could be crime, drug or ill-intentioned foreign money, which cannot be tracked.
- The money that is received in cash is not audited properly and therefore becomes a source of malfeasance.

A few government reports have looked at state funding of elections in the past are:

1. Indrajit Gupta Committee on State Funding of Elections (1998)

- It endorsed state funding of elections, seeing “full justification constitutional, legal as well as on ground of public interest” in order to establish **a fair playing field for parties with less money**.
- The Committee recommended **two limitations to state funding**.
- Firstly, that state funds should be given **only to national and state parties** allotted a symbol and not to independent candidates.
- Secondly, that in the short-term state funding should **only be given in kind**, in the form of certain facilities to the recognised political parties and their candidates.
- The Committee noted that at the time of the report the economic situation of the country only suited **partial and not full state funding of elections**

2. Law Commission Report on Reform of the Electoral Laws (1999)

- It concluded that total state funding of elections is “desirable” so long as political parties are prohibited from taking funds from other sources.
- Additionally, it strongly recommended that the **appropriate regulatory framework** be put in place with regard to political parties (provisions ensuring internal democracy, internal structures and maintenance of accounts, their auditing and submission to Election Commission) before state funding of elections is attempted

3. National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2001)

- It did not endorse state funding of elections but concurred with the 1999 Law Commission report that the appropriate framework for regulation of political parties would need to be implemented before state funding is considered

4. Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2008)

- “**Ethics in Governance**”, a report of the Second ARC also recommended partial state funding of elections for the purpose of reducing “illegitimate and unnecessary funding” of elections expenses.

Merits of State Funding of Elections

- It will become possible for **new and cleaner candidates** from outside the mainstream parties to join politics;
- It will **ease the pressure on parties themselves** to give tickets to criminals and other rogues primarily because they can manage their own funding
- Parties themselves will become more **internally democratic**, as candidates will not be over-dependent on party bosses for cash.

Issues of public funding of elections

- This will encourage spawning of new parties every now and then.
- Further, it will burden the exchequer.

ECI's View on State Funding of Election

- It would not be able to prohibit or check candidates' expenditure or expenditure by others over and above that which is provided for by the state.
- Instead it has suggested for reforms in funding of Political Parties- Proper receipt of funds, auditing of the expenditure of Political Parties and more transparency in funding process.

Alternatives Suggested:

- Former election commission chairman S.Y. Qureshi has suggested **state funding of the political parties** instead of state funding of elections.
- A **National Election Fund** can be created where people can donate anonymously. And at the end of the five years, the collected amount can be given to respective political parties based on performance. 70% of the European countries have this system.

Connecting the dots

- RTI of Political Parties
- Criminalisation of Politics and relation to Electoral funding

[EC moots linking Aadhar with Voter-ID](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II-Constitutional Bodies

In News:

- Election Commission has mooted this idea to ensure preparation of an **error free electoral roll**, and to prevent duplication of entries
- The proposal requires an amendment to the **Representation of People's Act 1951**
- The move would **allow migrant labour** and workers to vote even if they are away from their homes at the time of elections.
- It would also allow **automatic inclusion of citizens** into electoral roll once the person attains 18 years of age.

Value addition for Prelims

- The Election Commission of India is an autonomous constitutional authority established **under Article 324** responsible for administering election processes of offices of President and Vice-President of India and Parliament and State Legislatures
- Article 324-329 deals with provisions of elections and ECI
- Originally the commission had only one election commissioner but after the **Election Commissioner Amendment Act 1989**, it has been made a multi-member body.
- The commission now consists of one Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners.
- A similar independent constitutional authority has been created to conduct elections to municipalities, Panchayats and other local bodies (Articles 243 K and 243 ZA).

Chief Information Commissioner (CIC)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II-Quasi-Judicial Bodies

In News:

- President appoints Information Commissioner Bimal Julka as CIC
- Central Information Commission is presently at a reduced strength of six information commissioners, against the sanctioned strength of 11 (including the CIC).

Value addition for Prelims

- The Chief Information Commissioner(CIC) and Information Commissioners(CI) shall be appointed by the President on **the recommendation of a committee consisting of**
 - The Prime Minister, who shall be the Chairperson of the committee.
 - The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha.
 - A Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister.
- Section 12(5) of the RTI Act 2005 provides that the CIC and IC shall be persons of eminence in public life with wide knowledge and experience in law, science and technology, social service, management, journalism, mass media or administration and governance.
- Also, CIC/IC shall **not be a MP or MLA**, or hold any other office of profit or connected with any political party or carrying on any business or pursuing any profession.
- CIC shall hold office for a **term of five years** from the date on which he enters upon his office and shall not be eligible for reappointment
- Salaries and allowances payable to and other terms and conditions of service of the CIC shall be the **same as that of the Chief Election Commissioner** and that of ICs shall be the same as that of Election Commissioner

- Information Commissioner(IC) shall also hold office for a **term of five years** from the date on which he enters upon his office and shall not be eligible for reappointment of IC. However, **IC is eligible for appointment as CIC**
- Where the Information Commissioner is appointed as the Chief Information Commissioner, his term of office shall not be more than five years in aggregate as the Information Commissioner and the Chief Information Commissioner.

Internet Shutdowns

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- The Software Freedom Law Centre (SFLC) released data on internet shutdown in India.
- Internet in India was shut down for 314 times between 2017 & 2019 and 95 of these lasted more than a day
- There were at least 147 instances over these three years for which there is no data on the duration of the shutdowns as there is lack of any form of communication on these blockades.
- There is a rising trend to use Section 144 of the Code Of Criminal Procedure to justify the communications blockade and the continuance of it

Did You Know about the rules on suspension of the internet?

- Under the Indian Telegraph Act of 1885, only the Home Secretary of the central or the state government can pass orders to enforce an internet shutdown in any area.
- The order must include the detailed reasons for the shutdown and must be sent to a review committee the next day.
- The committee shall, within five days, submit its report and only if the shutdown is justified even after that will the communications blockade continue.

126th Constitutional Amendment: Anglo-Indians Protest at Jantar Mantar

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Indian Polity

In News:

- The Amendment act allows for continuing the reservation of seats for SC & STs in the Lok Sabha (Article 330) and state assemblies (Article 332) for another 10 years, upto January 25, 2030 which was due to end on 25th Jan 2020.
- The reservation for Anglo-Indians in the form of “nomination” (Article 331 & 333) is set to expire on 25th Jan 2020 as this Bill does not extend the facility to the community.
- Currently, only some state Assemblies likes Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand etc. have one Anglo-Indian member each. The Amendment does away with this as well.
- Article 334 originally provided that reservation of seats would cease 10 years after the commencement of Constitution. But this was extended every 10 years (8th, 23rd, 45th, 62nd, 79th and 95th amendments)

Competition policy: Online Versus Offline

Context: The online marketplace or the platform/intermediation service market is now largely **characterised by duopolies** where several of these companies have come under the scrutiny of the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

Some of the sectors where duopolies exist in online marketplace are:

- E-commerce: Amazon and Flipkart
- Transport: Uber and Ola
- Food service: Zomato and Swiggy
- Travel bookings: MakeMyTrip and Yatra

The emergence of duopolies does not bode well because:

- **Possibility of collusion**- It is possible that at some point, the players will find it in their interest to venture into some sort of agreement that allows both of them to survive, rather than be engaged in a race to the bottom — as has seemingly happened in the telecom sector.
- **Increased Lobbying with Political Class** to keep the regulatory framework in their favour. This is highly possible in societies where Democracies are not matured.
- As result **innovation in the sector begins to decline**, as both market players are assured of their position & revenues

The issues involved with duopoly online space have far reaching ramifications for both online and off-line market places, some of which are:

- Impact of such market structures on **online competition** – Duopolies be it any sector may create barriers for entry of new players
- Players engaging in **predatory pricing** through deep discounting & offers
- Impact on **offline competition** – as a result of predatory pricing offered by these online companies
- **Impact on Consumer Welfare** –
 - They are able to access variety of goods at much **cheaper cost** (discounted by companies).
 - Consumers **do benefit in the short run** but once the competition is driven out, the platform starts raising prices to recoup previous losses.
 - Also, their **data is being mined** without their explicit consent which is being used for behavioural manipulation regarding consumer spending

Assessing whether a platform is engaged in predatory pricing may not be a straightforward exercise. This is because of

- The **dynamics of online pricing** (prices change over time), their unique cost structures as well as the impact of economies of scale and organisational efficiency in lowering costs, all need to be factored in.
- Besides, one would also have to take into account that even **offline firms engage in deep discounting** to clear inventories.

- It is quite likely that once competition is eliminated and the platform starts to raise prices, new players will enter the market, attracted by higher prices. Thus, deep discounting strategies **cannot be used for extended periods of time**

In theory, the online market structure should facilitate greater competition given the lower barriers to entry. But this may not be the case due to reasons like:

- **Mechanism of positive feedback loop:** As these digital companies grow, more the users coming on board these platforms greater is the benefit due to positive feedback loop. This leads to **market concentration**.
- Given the **network effects**, which are common in digital spaces, it becomes difficult for new players to enter these spaces, and gain market share as there isn't much space for many such networks.
- Another reason is that the **online space is highly capital intensive**. Deep pockets are required to fund the discounts to get customers on board initially. Duopoly incumbents having access to huge capital engage in various strategies (mergers & acquisitions) to restrict entry and thus competition.

Therefore, it is presumed that **competition in online space is likely to be restricted** and new entrants in the will be rare, unless facilitated by:

- Technological changes i.e. innovation
- Regulatory intervention
- Through deep discount pricing backed by deep pocketed firm

Way Forward:

- If regulatory intervention is required to check predatory pricing, it could kick in before market power or dominance is established. A
- Alternatively, the definition of market dominance could be expanded to take into account deep pockets.
- Competition policy should be driven by safeguarding competition, not competitors. It should seek to bring about greater transparency in pricing and reduce information asymmetry.

Connecting the Dots

- Net Neutrality
- Duopoly in Beverages – Pepsi and Coca-Cola- Has it led to collusion?

Suspension of Members of Lok Sabha

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- Seven Congress members were suspended, for the remainder of the Budget Session, which ends on April 3, for unruly behaviour in the Lok Sabha.
- Rules under which MPs in Lok Sabha can be suspended
 - **Rule Number 373 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business** – Here Speaker may direct the member of House to withdraw from proceeding for the remainder of day's sittings

- **Rule 374** – Member named by speaker for suspension and the same needs to be passed by motion of the House. The member will thence be suspended from the service of the House for a period not exceeding the remainder of the session.
- **Rule 374A** - It is invoked by Speaker for automatic suspension of member of the House – for five consecutive sittings or the remainder of the session, whichever is less in the event of grave disorder occasioned by a Member
- While the Speaker is empowered to place a Member under suspension, the authority for revocation of this order is not vested in her.
- It is for the House, if it so desires, to resolve on a motion to revoke the suspension

SC order on Land Acquisition

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- SC upheld **Section 24 (2)** of Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act of 2013 (LARR-2013)
- The 2013 Act replaced the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 and provides for higher compensation to those deprived of land by the government for both public and private sector projects.
- It also mandates consent of a majority of land-owners and contains provisions for rehabilitation and resettlement.

What did the section 24(2) of LARR-2013 deal with?

- It dealt with land acquisition compensation awards made five years “prior or more” to the coming of existence of the 2013 Act
- The provision said that in such cases, if the physical possession has not been taken “or” the compensation is not paid, the acquisition proceeding is “deemed to have lapsed”.
- The government, if it so wishes, would have to initiate fresh acquisition proceedings under the new Act of 2013, which provides for fair compensation

What did SC rule?

- The land acquisition proceeding under Section 24(2) would only lapse if the authorities have neither taken physical possession nor paid the compensation due to the landowner for five or more years prior to January 1, 2014.
- In Other words, an “or” in the Section was “interpreted” as an “and”.
- Thus, there is no lapse if possession has been taken and compensation has not been paid. Similarly, there is no lapse if compensation has been paid and possession not taken of the land.

Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship programme

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- MGNFP was launched in the IIM Bengaluru
- The Fellowship is part of the SANKALP programme of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

- Objective: To provide skilled manpower for District Skill Committees to prepare the District Skill Development plan.
- Under the pilot project, IIMB will train 75 graduates for two years in preparing the District skill plan considering the skill gaps, market utilities, government schemes and institutions available in the district
- Its unique design will allow the Fellows to take academic learning at IIM Bangalore and use it in the field, under faculty mentorship, with the goal of understanding challenges and barriers that the district ecosystem faces in fostering growth and development

Hindu Adoption

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Society; GS-II- Polity

In News:

- Supreme Court has held that a Hindu adoption is not valid unless the man takes prior consent from his wife and that there is actual ceremony of adoption
- These two conditions were mandated in the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act of 1956

Prelims Value Addition

- Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is statutory body of Ministry of Women & Child Development
- It is established under Juvenile Justice Act, 2015.
- It is a nodal body for adoption of Indian children.
- It is mandated to monitor and regulate in-country and inter-country adoptions.
- It deals in orphan, abandoned or surrendered children.
- It deals with inter-country adoptions according to Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 1993 ratified by India in 2003.

School education

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource Development in its latest report on budgetary grants for school education and literacy for 2020-21, has made the following observations:

- The allocation to the School Education and Literacy department has suffered a cut of 27.52%, amounting to Rs. 22,725 crore in the Budget Estimate for 2020-21,
- **Access to Electricity:** Only 56.45% of government schools had electricity (for 2017-18)
- In politically well-represented state of Uttar Pradesh, almost 70% of schools lacked electricity.
- **Playground:** Only 56.98% of schools had a playground (for 2017-18)
- **Boundary Wall:** Almost 40% of schools lacked a boundary wall (for 2017-18)
- **Disability Friendly:** Neglect of toilet construction for children with special needs
- **Girl Toilets:** Absence of toilets for girls in nearly one-third of secondary schools
- **Inadequate laboratories** for higher secondary science students

Government Steps in Education Sector

- NDA government launched '100-day programme' for education after coming to power for second term in 2019
- The 100 day programme focused in part on **training of schoolteachers** and **opening of central schools**.
- Since Education is in Concurrent list Union government operates its own schemes and sponsors several school education programmes covering the States, notably Samagra Shiksha and the Mid-Day Meal scheme.

Samagra Shiksha

- It is an overarching programme for the school education sector extending from pre-school to class 12
- It subsumes the three Schemes of
 - Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA),
 - Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)
 - Teacher Education (TE).
- **Objective:** Improving school effectiveness measured in terms of equal opportunities for schooling and **equitable learning outcomes**.
- Major features of the scheme are
 - **Holistic approach to education-** Treat school education holistically as a continuum from Pre-school to Class 12
 - **Administrative reform** - Single and unified administrative structure leading to harmonized implementation.
 - **Enhanced Funding for Education**
 - **Focus on Quality of Education** – With emphasis on improvement of Learning Outcomes, capacity building of Teachers and utilizing technology. Outcome oriented allocation of resources
 - **Focus on Digital Education** - Support 'Operation Digital Board' in all secondary schools over a period of 5 years. Digital initiatives like Shala Kosh, Shagun, Shaala Saarthi to be strengthened. "DIKSHA", digital portal for teachers to be used extensively for upgrading skills of teachers
 - Focus on Inclusion and reducing gender gap
 - **Focus on Skill Development-** Strengthening of vocational education at secondary level as an integral part of curriculum
 - **Focus on Sports and Physical Education** - Sports equipment will be provided to all schools under this component.
 - **Focus on Regional Balance-** Preference to Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs), LWEs, Special Focus Districts (SFDs), Border areas and the 115 aspirational districts identified by Niti Aayog

Way Forward:

- **Effective implementation of Samgra Shiksha Abhiyan**
- Mission-mode approach to infrastructure ensuring that no school is left behind.
- **Solar power** can be installed in schools and toilets built for all students in 100 days.
- **Community participation** to ensure that the objectives are satisfactorily met

- Incentivizing State governments (Finance Commission Grants) to enhance expenditure on Schooling

Conclusion

- A public school system that guarantees universal access, good learning and all facilities has to be among the highest national priorities.

Connecting the dots

- ASER Report
- In India we have islands of Excellence in Higher Education System – Critically Analyse

Epidemic Disease Act, 1897

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- States have been asked by Centre to invoke provisions of Section 2 of the Epidemic Disease Act, 1897 by means of which all advisories issued by the Union health ministry and state governments from time to time are enforceable
- The act was introduced by the British to tackle the epidemic of bubonic plague that broke out in the then state of Bombay in 1897
- The then Governor-General of colonial India had conferred special powers upon the local authorities to implement the measures necessary for the control of epidemics
- Under the act, temporary provisions or regulations can be made to be observed by the public to tackle or prevent the outbreak of a disease.
- **Section 2A** of the Act empowers the central government to take steps to prevent the spread of an epidemic. It allows the government to inspect any ship arriving or leaving any port and the power to detain any person intending to sail or arriving in the country.
- **Section 3** provides penalties for disobeying any regulation or order made under the Act
- **Section 4** gives legal protection to the implementing officers acting under the Act.

Right to Property

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Polity

In News:

- Supreme Court has stated that forcible dispossession of a person's property a human right violation
- SC stated that right to property is both a human right and a constitutional right — the latter under Article 300A of the Constitution.
- The court noted "some amount of property right is an indispensable safeguard against tyranny and economic oppression of the government."
- Article 300A states that - No person shall be deprived of his property save by the authority of law.
- The 44th constitutional amendment act, 1978 inserts article 300-A.
- Before this amendment, right to property was the fundamental right, enshrined in **article 19 (1) (f) & 31** of the Constitution.

- After 44th amendment, article 300-A only prohibits deprivation of the right to property by mere executive order unless that order is made or authorised by some law enacted by the legislature
- However, the aggrieved person can challenge the legality or fairness of procedure followed for acquisition of land instead of acquisition of land

YuViKa: Yuva Vigyani Karyakram (Young Scientist Programme)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Governance

In News:

- **ISRO** has shortlisted 358 high school students from across the country to be part of its second annual 'catch them young' programme, YuViKa.
- **This Program by ISRO** is primarily aimed at imparting basic knowledge on Space Technology, Space Science and Space Applications to the younger ones with the intent of arousing their interest in the emerging areas of Space activities
- The programme will be of **two weeks' duration during summer holidays** and the schedule will include invited talks, experience sharing by the eminent scientists, facility and lab visits, exclusive sessions for discussions with experts, practical and feedback sessions.
- 3 students each from each State/ Union Territory will be selected to participate in this programme covering CBSE, ICSE and State syllabus. 5 additional seats are reserved for OCI candidates across the country.

ECI reform plan: For a level playing field

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Governance

Even as electoral democracy has taken strong root in India, there are some unhealthy patterns that have emerged some of which are:

- Candidates and winners in Assembly and Lok Sabha polls have largely been from affluent sections
- With elections becoming expensive, most parties have sought to field richer candidates irrespective of their merit in representing public interest.
- Campaign finance regulations by the Election Commission of India that imposes limits on election expenditure by candidates have not been sufficient deterrents.
- Poll results have tended to be a function of either party or leader preference by the voter rather than a statement on the capability of the candidate.
- In many cases, capable candidates stand no chance against the money power of more affluent candidates.
- Increasing number of candidates contesting in elections having criminal cases against them

As a result, ECI is considering certain reforms which are pending with the centre, some of these are:

1. ECI is considering tightening ways to cap the expenditure of political parties.

- But even this can be meaningful only if there is more transparency in campaign finance which suggests that the electoral bonds system, as it is in place now, is untenable.
- 2. The ECI has suggested bringing social media and print media under the “silent period” ambit after campaigning ends.
 - Regulating social media will be difficult and it remains to be seen how the ECI will implement this.
- 3. The ECI also plans to introduce new “safe and secure” voting methods.
 - The use now of the EVM as a standalone, one-time programmable chip-based system, along with administrative safeguards renders it a safe mechanism that is not vulnerable to hacking.
 - Any other “online” form of voting that is based on networked systems should be avoided
- 4. Aadhaar-Voter ID linkage to weed out duplications and misrepresentations from the electoral rolls
 - The idea of an Aadhaar-linked remote voting system that is sought to be built as a prototype could be problematic considering how the unique identity card has excluded genuine beneficiaries when used in welfare schemes
- 5. Amendments to Section 20(6) of the Representation of the People’s Act, 1951 to allow the husband of a female officer to be registered as a service voter where she holds office.
- 6. Granting powers to ECI to deregister a party
- 7. Greater autonomy to ECI
 - Giving Constitutional protection to all members of ECI
 - Charging budget of ECI to Consolidated Fund of India
 - Setting up Independent Secretariat for ECI like those for Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha

Two key measures are missing from the recommendations — the need for **more teeth for the ECI in its fight against “vote buying” and hate speech.**

- Increasingly, parties have resorted to bribing voters in the form of money and other commodities in return for votes, and while the ECI has tried to warn outfits or in some cases postponed polls, these have not deterred them.
- In times when hate speech is used during elections, the ECI lacks power of disqualification of the candidate that would create true deterrence

Conclusion

ECI’s plans to strengthen the electoral process are welcome, but some require scrutiny

Connecting the dots

- Liberhan Commission recommendations against parties which misuse religion.

NPR- No Doubtful Category

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- Home Minister assured Parliament that no participant in the process will be marked 'doubtful' in case he or she is unable to provide the information sought.
- The Home minister also stated that "No document is being asked. All information is voluntary. Whatever information a participant wants to share will be recorded"
- NPR is a register of usual residents of the country. It includes both Indian citizens as well as a foreign citizen.
- According to the Citizenship Rules, 2003, a usual resident is a person who has resided (or intends to reside) in a local area for the past 6 months

Committee recommends monetising weather data

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- Parliamentary committee on science, technology and environment recommended that the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) should explore monetisation of the weather data.
- The panel suggested that MoES could charge private users such as insurance companies that rely on data and information put out by the Ministry
- The India Meteorological Department, an organisation under the MoES, is tasked with gathering, analysing and disseminating meteorological data.

Did You Know?

- The MoES had been allotted ₹2070 crore for financial year 2020-21 up from ₹1901 crore last year.
- MoES didn't have funds to acquire a Polar Research Vessel, as well as kickstart the Deep Ocean Mission. The mission proposes to explore the deep ocean similar to the space exploration started by ISRO about 35 years ago.
- India has been allotted a site of 75,000 sq. km. in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB) by the UN International Sea Bed Authority for exploitation of polymetallic nodules (PMN).
- PMN are rocks scattered on the seabed containing iron, manganese, nickel and cobalt.
- It has been estimated that 380 million metric tonnes of polymetallic nodules are available at the bottom of the seas in the Central Indian Ocean

Essential Commodities Act

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- Government puts **masks and hand sanitisers** under Essential Commodities Act.
- ECA enacted by Parliament in 1955 provides for the **regulation and control of production, distribution and pricing** of commodities which are declared as essential.
- Aim: Maintaining/increasing supplies/securing equitable distribution and availability of these commodities at fair prices.
- The Centre can include new commodities as and when the need arises, and can take them off the list once the situation improves (in view of public interest).

- Once a notification is issued, anybody trading or dealing in a commodity, be it wholesalers, retailers or even importers are prevented from stockpiling it beyond a certain quantity
- **States are the implementing agencies** to EC Act, 1955

Vivad se Viswas Bill

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- The Parliament has given its nod to Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Bill, 2020.
- The Bill intends to provide a one-time opportunity to end disputes related to personal income tax and corporate tax.
- Under this scheme, taxpayers whose tax demands are locked in dispute in multiple forums, can pay due taxes by March 31, 2020, and get a complete waiver of interest and penalty.
- For payments made after March 31 and till June 30, a 10% penalty would be charged.
- However, cases above ₹5 crore have been excluded — large evasion-related and fraud cases — and they cannot take advantage of this scheme.
- The scheme aims to resolve **483,000 direct tax-related disputes** pending in various appellate forums.
- As on the November 30, 2019, the disputed direct tax arrears amount to ₹9.32-lakh crore.

Common eligibility test (CET)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- Government will have common test – CET- for railway, bank, Central government jobs from 2021
- The CET will replace the first level tests conducted by the Staff Selection Commission (SSC), the Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) and the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS).
- To streamline the hiring process, Centre will set up an autonomous **National Recruitment Agency** to conduct the online test.
- There will be Common Portal for registration, single entrance fee and Common Curriculum
- Merits of having Common test are:
 - **Level playing field** for all candidates by removing the obstacles involved in appearing for multiple examinations
 - **Reduced Chances of Paper Leak:** A standardised question bank with multiple questions of similar difficulty levels will be created in a central server.
 - An algorithm will be used to jumble and dole out different questions, so that each candidate receives a different question paper, reducing the chances of cheating and paper leakage.

- **Quick Process:** Scores will be generated quickly, delivered online and be valid for a three-year period. Presently these exam cycle process takes on an average 6-12 months
 - **Huge Savings:** For the recruiting agencies, the savings in terms of logistics will be huge.
 - For more specialised positions, the CET will act as the preliminary elimination level, which can be followed by further testing by the separate agencies.
 - One of the big concerns is language but the Centre has planned to make the test available in multiple languages including all those notified under Schedule 8 of the Constitution
-

Spanish Flu

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- As COVID-19 grows into a global health crisis, parallels are being drawn with the Spanish influenza of 1918-19,
 - Spanish Flu is considered the most devastating pandemic in recent history, with an estimated toll of 20-50 million lives.
 - The 1918 influenza pandemic (1918-20; colloquially known as the **Spanish flu**) was the first of the two pandemics involving **H1N1 influenza** virus, with the second being the swine flu in 2009.
 - The focal point of that pandemic a century ago was India (brought to India by World War I soldiers returning home), where between 10-20 million Indians died
-

National Creche Scheme (NCS)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- As on 11th March 2020, **6453** creches are functional across the country under NCS
 - National Creche Scheme (earlier named as Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme) is being implemented as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme**.
 - **Objective:** To provide day care facilities to children (age group of 6 months to 6 years) of working mothers.
 - The salient features of the National Creche Scheme are as follows:
 - Daycare Facilities including Sleeping Facilities.
 - Early Stimulation for children below 3 years and pre-school Education for 3 to 6 years old children.
 - Supplementary Nutrition (to be locally sourced)
 - Growth Monitoring
 - Health Check-up and Immunization
-

J&K will soon have a domicile policy: Home Minister

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Polity- Federalism

In News:

- A proper domicile police for J&K ensure protection to domiciles of J&K in government jobs, educational institutions and land rights.
- On August 5, 2019, the Centre revoked the special status of J&K under **Article 370 and Article 35A of the Constitution**.
- These two revoked provisions had enabled the J&K Assembly to decide the “**permanent residents**” of the erstwhile State, prohibiting people from outside from buying property and ensuring job reservation for residents.

Did you know?

- **Article 371** grants some temporary, transition and special provisions to some states in the country.
- Ranging from Article 371-A to Article 371-J, this Article gives special provisions for the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa and Karnataka.

Nomination to Rajya Sabha

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Polity

In News:

- President nominated former CJI Ranjan Gogoi to Rajya Sabha
- **Twelve members** are nominated to the **Rajya Sabha** by the **President** of India for six-years term for their contributions towards arts, literature, sciences, and social services.
- This right has been bestowed upon the President according to the Fourth Schedule (**Articles 4(1) and 80(2)**) of the Constitution of India.

Classical Languages

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Polity

In News:

- Rajya Sabha passes bill to grant the status of Central universities to three deemed Sanskrit universities:
 - Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan in Delhi
 - Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth in Delhi
 - Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth in Tirupati.
- Currently there are **six languages** that enjoy the ‘**Classical**’ status in India:
 - Tamil (declared in 2004), Sanskrit (2005), Kannada (2008), Telugu (2008), Malayalam (2013), and Odia (2014).
- All the Classical Languages are **listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution**.
- The guidelines for declaring a language as ‘Classical’ are:
 - High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years
 - A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers;
 - The literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community

- The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

Places in News:

- **Pakke Tiger Reserve** - a biodiversity hotspot of the eastern Himalayas is located in Arunachal Pradesh

The **Sundarban National Park** is located in the south-east of Calcutta in the District of **West Bengal** and forms part of the **Gangetic Delta**.

National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- NABL is a Constituent Board of **Quality Council of India**.
- NABL has been established with the objective to provide Government, Industry Associations and Industry in general with a scheme for **third-party assessment** of the quality and technical competence of testing and calibration laboratories.

About Quality Council of India (QCI)

- QCI was set up in 1997 as an autonomous body
- It was setup jointly by the Government of India and the Indian Industry represented by the three premier industry associations i.e.
 - Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM),
 - Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and
 - Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)
- It aims to establish and operate national accreditation structure and promote quality through National Quality Campaign.
- Ministry of Commerce & Industry, is the nodal ministry for QCI.
- **Chairman** of QCI is **appointed by the Prime Minister** on recommendation of the industry to the government.

Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Federalism

In News:

- The Assam government's decision to restrict large gatherings as a precaution against the COVID-19 may cast a shadow on the BTC elections(40 seats)
- BTC Polls are conducted by **State Election Commission**
- Any decision on rescheduling the polls would be taken by the **Governor**, who is the constitutional head of areas under the Sixth Schedule.

About BTC

- The second Bodo accord, 2003 led to the formation of the **Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)** under the provisions of the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution**

- The area under the BTC jurisdiction is now officially called the **Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR)** comprising of 3,082 villages in **four districts— Kokrajhar, Chirang, Udalguri and Baska.**

Sixth schedule of the Constitution:

- The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India (Articles 244(2) and 275(1)) provides for decentralized self-governance and dispute resolution through local customary laws in parts of the North East which are mainly tribal areas.
- It contains provisions as to the Administration of Tribal Areas in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram

The National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill, 2019

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- The Bill was passed by Rajya Sabha
- The Bill seeks to repeal the Indian Medicine Central Council Act, 1970 and provides for a medical education system to ensure availability of quality medical professionals of Indian System of Medicine

Key features of the bill are:

- The Bill provides for the establishment of the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM). The NCISM will consist of 29 members, **appointed by the central government.**
- Functions of the NCISM include:
 - Framing policies for regulating medical institutions and medical professionals of Indian System of Medicine
 - Assessing the requirements of healthcare related human resources and infrastructure
 - Ensuring compliance by the State Medical Councils of Indian System of Medicine of the regulations made under the Bill
 - Ensuring coordination among the autonomous boards set up under the Bill.
- **Autonomous Boards:** The bill sets the following boards under supervision of NCISM
 - The Board of Ayurveda and the Board of Unani, Siddha, and Sowa-Rigpa
 - The Medical Assessment and Rating Board for Indian System of Medicine:
 - The Ethics and Medical Registration Board:
- The central government will constitute an **Advisory Council for Indian System of Medicine.** The Council will be the primary platform through which the states/union territories can put forth their views and concerns before the NCISM.
- **Entrance Exam:** There will be a uniform National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test for admission to under-graduate education in each of the disciplines of the Indian System of Medicine in all medical institutions regulated by the Bill.

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Judicial Propriety

Context: Within five months of his retirement as Chief Justice of India, Justice Ranjan Gogoi has been nominated to the Rajya Sabha by the government.

Former CJI had presided over politically sensitive cases (**Assam NRC, Sabarimala, Ayodhya, Rafale, CBI**) in which the government was a party.

This raises the question that, should judges stop accepting post-retirement jobs offered by the government, at least for a few years after retiring.

Consequence of Post-retirement appointments of Judges of Higher Courts

- Post-retirement appointments mean that Judges, during his serving period, can get vulnerable to the ruling dispensation pressures so as to deliver the verdict in government's favour in a **quid-pro-quo arrangement**.
- It is often feared that a judge who is nearing retirement could decide cases in a manner that pleases the government in order to get a favourable post-retirement position.
- It would signal that the **judiciary is not independent**, but is vulnerable to dictates of the executive

- Deteriorates the **Public Perception** about the integrity of the Judiciary.
- The very fact that a judge accepts such an appointment could **cast doubt on his judgements.**

Independence of Judiciary

- The authority of the Supreme Court of India can be said to be resting on two things: The cogency of its reasoning, and the integrity of its judges.
- India has adopted the **doctrine of Separation of Powers** whereby Legislature, elected by people, makes laws; executive who is a part of Legislature (Parliamentary form of government) implements the laws and Judiciary interprets these laws
- The judiciary is the upholder of the Constitution and provides a check against executive excesses, arbitrariness, and unlawful steps.
- Being Guardian of Constitution, the judiciary has to be independent — insulated from pressures and inducements.
- Independence of the Judiciary is ensured by many constitutional provisions like
 - Judges do not hold their offices at the **“pleasure” of the President**
 - They can only be impeached by a special majority of both houses (**Article 124(4)**) of Parliament
 - **Article 121 and 211** provides that there shall be no discussion in the legislature of the state with respect to the conduct of any judge of Supreme Court or of a High Court in the discharge of his duties
 - The **salaries and allowances of the judges are charged** on the Consolidated Fund of India in case of Supreme Court judges
 - Parliament can only add to the powers and **jurisdiction** of the Supreme Court but **cannot curtail them**
 - Both the Supreme Court and the High Court have the power to punish any person for their contempt (Article 129 and 215)

Is this the first time that such post-retirement appointment is taking place?

- No, retired judges have been appointed to political office since independence.
- In 1952, **Justice Fazl Ali** was appointed the Governor of Orissa, shortly after retiring from the Supreme Court.
- In 1958, **Chief Justice M C Chagla** resigned from the Bombay High Court in order to become India's Ambassador to the US at Prime Minister Nehru's invitation.
- In April 1967, **Chief Justice Subba Rao** resigned from the Supreme Court to contest elections for President.
- **Justice Baharul Islam** served as Judge of Supreme Court from 4th Dec 1980 to 12th Jan 1983. He contested elections as a Congress party candidate and was elected to the Rajya Sabha from 15th June 1983 to 14th June 1989. He gave a Judgement in the case absolving the then Congress Bihar Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra in the urban cooperative bank scanda
- **Ranganath Mishra** served as CJI 25 Sep 1990 to 24 Nov 1991. He was first Chairman of the NHRC in 1993 and a member of the Rajya Sabha on a Congress ticket from 1998 to 2004. He was the sole member of the Commission of Inquiry into the 1984 anti-Sikh riots which gave clean chit to Congress Party

- In more recent times, **Chief Justice P Sathasivam** was appointed the Governor of Kerala.

Should Judges be prohibited from Post-retirement appointment?

- There is no explicit prohibition against judges accepting Rajya Sabha nominations
- **In the Constituent Assembly, K T Shah**, suggested that High Court and Supreme Court judges should not take up an executive office with the government, “so that no temptation should be available to a judge for greater emoluments, or greater prestige which would in any way affect his independence as a judge”.
- **Article 124(7) of the Indian Constitution** provides that a retired Supreme Court judge cannot “plead or act in any court or before any authority within the territory of India”.
- However, this provision only restricts post-retirement appointments in Judiciary itself, but not in posts of president, governor, member of parliament, etc
- **In its 14th report in 1958, the Law Commission** noted that retired Supreme Court judges used to engage in two kinds of work after retirement:
 - Firstly, **“chamber practice”** (a term which would, today, mean giving opinions to clients and serving as arbitrators in private disputes) and secondly, **“employment in important positions under the government”**.
 - The Law Commission frowned upon chamber practice, but did not recommend its abolition.
 - However, it strongly **recommended banning post-retirement government employment** for Supreme Court judges because the government was a large litigant in the courts.
- The Commission’s recommendations were never implemented.

Challenges in prohibiting the post-retirement appointments:

- It is often thought that the solution to this problem requires explicit prohibition on any post-judicial appointment, including commissions of inquiry.
- The solution is not that simple; after all, there are **many positions that require judges to be appointed**.
- Institutions like NHRC, SHRC, NGT, Lokpal often require appointment of Judges of Higher Court. Thus, a blanket prohibition will restrict the working of other important institutions of our Democracy

Way Forward:

- **Cooling-off period:** Several appointments to administrative bodies require a cooling-off period for individuals so as to eliminate the possibility or suspicion of a conflict of interest or quid pro quo. This cooling-off period must be extended to Indian Judiciary.
- **Former CJI R M Lodha** recommended a **cooling-off period of at least 2 years**.
- The 16-point code of conduct for judges also called the “Restatement of Values of Judicial Life” -adopted at a Chief Justices Conference in May 1997- needs to be followed by Judges in letter and spirit

Connecting the dots

- Post-retirement prohibitions on Election Commission of India

- Case of Justice **Mohammad Hidayatullah** who was appointed vice-president nine years after his tenure as CJI ended.

An SC verdict violative of minority rights

Context:

Supreme Court upheld the **West Bengal Madrasah Service Commission Act, 2008**. The court set aside a Calcutta High Court verdict which had held the legislation was unconstitutional

What is the legislation all about?

- As per the provision of the act, the **appointment of teachers** in these theological institutions (Madrassas) shall now be made **by a board nominated by the government**.
- As per Section 10 of the act, all appointments of teachers to the religious schools are to be recommended by the commission and the management committee shall be **bound by such recommendations**.
- Section 11 says that anyone appointed in contravention of this Act shall not be considered a teacher and such an appointment shall be invalid.
- Section 12 **empowers the government to deny grants** to the schools that refuse to make appointments in accordance with such recommendations.
- Further, government recognition and affiliation of such schools can be withdrawn, if government guidelines are not followed

Why were cases filed against this law?

- Several petitions were filed in the court challenging the validity of the law, contending that the government, which funds or provides aid to the minority institutions, can formulate guidelines for appointments of teachers **but cannot itself appoint them**
- Also, the act **violates Article 30** which stated that all minorities shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- Additionally, the judgment by a three-judge bench in **Chandana Das (2019) case** gave the Sikh minority institutions of West Bengal the right to appoint teachers.

The dual test criterion

- In Rev. Sidharjbhai (1963), a six-judge bench of the Supreme Court observed that every government regulation in respect of a minority institution shall be valid only when it satisfies the dual test, i.e.,
 - i. It is regulative and not destructive of the organisation's minority character
 - ii. It makes the minority institution an effective vehicle of minority education.

Other Judgements which upheld the Minority Institution's right to appoint teachers & Staff

- Kerala Education Bill case (1957)
- Rev. Father W. Proost (1969)
- Very Rev. Mother Provincial (1969)
- Ahmedabad St. Xaviers (1974)
- **Bihar State Madrasa Education Board (1990)**, where the court observed "under the guise of regulating educational standards to secure efficiency in institution, the state is not

entitled to frame rules or regulations compelling the management to surrender its right to administration”.

- **In T.M.A. Pai (2003)**
 - An 11-judge bench reiterated that the management of minority institutions should have freedom in day-to-day affairs of the institutions, for example, in appointment of teaching and non-teaching staff and administrative control.
 - However, minimum qualifications, experience and other conditions may be fixed by the government.
- The apex court has been consistent in holding that the term includes rights of minority institutions to select their governing bodies, teachers and staff and exercise disciplinary control over them and a right to fix reasonable fees and admit students in a fair and transparent manner.

Importance of Minority Rights

- Protection of minorities is the hallmark of a civilisation.
- Lord Acton said: “The most certain test by which we judge whether a country is really free is the amount of security enjoyed by minorities.
- special safeguards were guaranteed to the minorities and incorporated under Article 30 with a view to instil in them a sense of confidence and security.
- Also, in the Kesavananda Bharati case (1973), minority rights were held to be the part of basic structure of the Constitution.
- Minority rights and special privileges (like Article 30) is thus necessary to ensure a thriving and a vibrant Democracy

Conclusion

The Chief Justice of India has now referred this judgment to a larger bench where we need to see if the judgement is upheld or reversed.

Connecting the dots

- Article 29 and its difference with Article 30
- Is Article 30 absolute? Or is it limited by reasonable restrictions?

Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda Bill, 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

In News:

- The bill accords the Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda at Jamnagar, Gujarat, the status of **‘institution of national importance’** by clubbing the cluster of ayurveda institutes at the Gujarat Ayurveda University campus in Jamnagar.
- The three institutes (in Jamnagar) which would be a part of the proposed conglomeration are
 - The Institute of Post Graduate Teaching and Research in Ayurveda
 - Gulabkunwerba Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya
 - The Institute of Ayurveda Pharmaceutical Sciences.
- The objective of the institute will be the promotion of quality and excellence in education, research and training in Ayurveda and allied disciplines

Giving Human Rights Commissions more teeth

Context: The Madras High Court is to decide on whether the recommendations made by such panels are binding upon the state

A Brief Background

- In 1993, the Indian Parliament enacted the **Protection of Human Rights Act**.
- The purpose of the Act was to establish an **institutional framework** that could effectively protect, promote and fulfil the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution.
- Therefore, the Act created a **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)**, and also, Human Rights Commissions at the levels of the various States.
- These institutions can be considered as “**fourth branch institutions**” (similar to how other institutions like ECI, CAG, CIC which perform vital functions of Constitution)
- HRCs was established in conformity with the **Paris Principles**, adopted for the promotion and protection of human rights in Paris (October, 1991) and endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 December, 1993.

Functions and Powers of NHRC/SHRC

- They are empowered to inquire into the violations of human rights committed by state authorities, either upon petitions presented to them, or upon their own initiative.
- While conducting these inquiries, the Commissions are granted **identical powers to that of civil courts**, such as the examining witnesses, ordering for documents, receiving evidence, and so on.
- Section 18 of the Protection of Human Rights Act empowers the Human Rights Commission to “**recommend**” to the concerned government
 - to grant compensation to the victim
 - to initiate prosecution against the erring state authorities,
 - to grant interim relief, and to take various other steps.
- Furthermore, Section 18 of the Human Rights Act also **obligates the concerned government** to “forward its comments on the report, including the action taken or proposed to be taken thereon, to the Commission”, within a period of one month.

Criticism of NHRC/SHRCs

- **Politicisation** of autonomous bodies
- The Human Rights Commissions are **toothless**: The word “recommend” in Section 18 of the act has been interpreted till now as **only advisory in nature** and not binding on the government. Thus, the government left free to disobey or even disregard their findings.
- If the state was left free to obey or disobey the findings of the Commission, then the constitutional role of NHRC/SHRC would be effectively pointless (effectively, the state judging itself)
- NHRC does **not have any mechanism of investigation**. In majority cases, it asks the concerned Central and State Governments to investigate the cases of the violation of Human Rights
- **Inadequacy of funds** hamper the working of these bodies.
- A large number of grievances go unaddressed because NHRC **cannot investigate the complaint registered after one year of incident**.

- National Human Rights Commission powers related to violations of human rights by the armed forces have been largely restricted.

A case for making the recommendations & reports of HRCs binding on government

- In the past, courts have invoked constitutional purpose to determine the powers of various **fourth branch institutions** in cases of ambiguity
- The Supreme Court laid down detailed guidelines to ensure the independence of the **Central Bureau of Investigation**
- Various judgments have endorsed and strengthened the powers of the **Election Commission** to compulsorily obtain relevant details of candidates, despite having no express power to do so.
- Very recently, the Supreme Court held in the context of “opinions” rendered by the **Foreigners Tribunals**, held that these “opinions” were binding.
- The Human Rights Commission has the **powers of a civil court**, and proceedings before it are deemed to be judicial proceedings.
- This provides strong reasons for its findings to be treated — at the very least — as **quasi-judicial**, and binding upon the state (unless challenged)

Conclusion

- The requirement of state accountability in a democracy committed to a ‘culture of justification’ — strongly indicates that the Commission’s recommendations should be binding upon the state

Connecting the dots

- National Commission on Scheduled Castes (NCSC)/ National Commission on Scheduled Tribes/ National Commission on Backward Classes - are their recommendations binding?
- Tribunalisation of Judiciary

Disqualification under Tenth Schedule

Context: In a first, the **Supreme Court removed Manipur Minister** Thounaojam Shyamkumar Singh, against whom disqualification petitions were pending before the Speaker since 2017. Further, the court restrained him “from entering the Legislative Assembly till further orders”.

Brief Background of the case

- The concerned person had become **an MLA in 2017 on a Congress ticket before switching to the BJP** to become Minister in Manipur State Government.
- A disqualification petition against the minister was pending before the Speaker since 2017 but the Speaker failed to take the decision within a reasonable time period.
- **On 21st January 2020**, a three-judge Supreme Court Bench had asked the Speaker of Manipur Legislative Assembly to decide the **disqualification (under Tenth Schedule)** petitions of the concerned MLA within four weeks. It also gave other pronouncements (discussed below)
- Supreme Court invoked its **extraordinary powers under Article 142** of the Constitution to remove the minister from the Cabinet.

Disqualification under the Tenth Schedule

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

Criticism of the anti-defection Law

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

Supreme Court Judgement in Kihoto Hollohan (1992) case:

- Five Judge Bench of SC **upheld the validity** of the Constitution's Tenth Schedule.
- It was also held in this case that a Speaker or a Chairman, acting Tenth Schedule, **is a Tribunal** and thus his discretionary powers were protected by Constitution. (**Dissenting view by Justice JS Verma** questioned the fairness of speaker in adjudication)
- This verdict had also made the **Speaker's order subject to judicial review** on limited grounds and that mere procedural infirmities could not prompt judicial intervention.
- It was also held that **judicial review cannot be available at a stage prior to the making of a decision** by the Speaker/Chairman.

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

- **Reasonable Time period for deciding on Disqualification**
 - Unless there were "exceptional circumstances", disqualification petitions under the Tenth Schedule should **be decided by Speakers within three months**
 - Failure to deliver decision by Speaker within a reasonable time period will entail the court to intervene in the disqualification matter (as has happened now in this case)
- **Suggested an Independent Body**

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

Way Forward:

- The Constitution is called a living document because of its ability to grow and change with time and circumstances. Clearly, the Tenth Schedule has fallen short in fulfilling its objective of preventing defections and needs a relook.
- Parliament must fix this flaw and institute a tribunal recognising the significance of anti-defection provisions in upholding the sanctity of Parliament.

Connecting the dots

- Speakers role in deciding whether the bill is money bill or not

Britain's model of Speaker's post

Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Federalism

- **In News:** Assam State Election Commissioner has deferred the elections to the 40-seat BTC in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

About BTC

- BTC is an autonomous district council under the provisions of the **Sixth Schedule** of the Constitution
- It was formed as a result of the second Bodo accord, 2003
- The area under the BTC jurisdiction is now officially called the **Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR)** comprising of 3,082 villages in four districts— Kokrajhar, Chirang, Udalguri and Baska.

Prelims Value Addition

- The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India (Articles 244(2) and 275(1)) provides for decentralized self-governance and dispute resolution **through local customary laws** in parts of the North East which are mainly tribal areas.
- It contains provisions as to the Administration of Tribal Areas in the States of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**
- **Governor** is the constitutional head of areas under the Sixth Schedule.

Institutes of Information Technology (IIIT) Laws Amendment Bill 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Education & Governance

- The Bill seeks to declare five IIITs set up under the PPP mode in Surat, Bhopal, Bhagalpur, Agartala, and Raichur as **institutions of national importance**.

- The bill proposes to bring the above five institutes under the IIIT (Public-Private Partnership) Act, 2017, similar to the **other 15 IIITs established** under the scheme through public-private partnership
- Currently, these institutes are **registered as Societies** under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and do not have the power to grant degrees or diplomas.
- On being declared institutions of national importance, the five institutes will be **granted the power to grant degrees** and use the nomenclature B.Tech or M.Tech or Ph.D degrees.
- **Funding:** The central government will contribute 50% towards the expenses of institutes functioning under the PPP mode. 35% will be borne by the states and 15% by the industries

Capital Punishment

Context: Four convicts in Nirbhaya gangrape and murder case were hanged to death at Tihar jail in Delhi.

The last death sentence executed by the justice system in India was the 30 July 2015 hanging of terrorist Yakub Memon, who was convicted in the 1993 Mumbai blasts.

In 2012, the government, post Nirbhaya incident, set up **the Justice J.S. Verma Committee** to look into rape laws.

- The report led to stringent changes through the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013
- On the imposition of the death penalty, the government went against what the Verma report had suggested — that seeking such a punishment “would be a regressive step in the field of sentencing and reformation”.
- However, several recommendations were simply not considered, some of which are
 - Those Charged with Sexual Crimes cannot contest Polls
 - Make Marital Rape an offence
 - Bring Sexual Crimes by armed Forces under Criminal Law

Now, repeat offenders in rape cases can be awarded the death sentence.

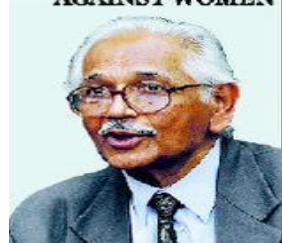
However, there has not been significant improvement over safety & security of women

- As per NCRB data a total of **3.78 lakh cases of crimes against women** were recorded across India in 2018 compared to 3.59 lakh in 2017 and 3.38 lakh in 2016.
- The **total number of rape cases** in 2018 was pegged at 33,356, of which Madhya Pradesh registered 5,450 rapes, the maximum in 2018.
- The **crime rate per one lakh women** population was 58.8 in 2018 compared to 57.9 in 2017. At the end of 2018, 33.6% cases were pending police investigation.
-

COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO SUGGEST LEGAL REFORMS TO CURB SEXUAL OFFENCES AGAINST WOMEN


JUSTICE HAS SPOKEN

FAILURE OF GOVERNANCE IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN



Justice J.S. VERMA
Former Chief Justice of India

1 Rules out death sentence for rape convicts, even in the rarest of the rare cases	2 Life imprisonment must always mean imprisonment for 'the entire natural life of the convict'	3 No to chemical castration. Mutilation of body not permitted by Constitution
4 Recommends more punishment for trafficking. Stalking should be viewed as a serious offence	5 Against reducing the age of a juvenile from 18 to 16. Says Indian jails do not have reformatory and rehabilitation policies	6 Lambasts police for gender insensitivity. Not registering cases of sexual assault by police officers is an offence

7  **INDIAN ARMY RAPE**
Womensfolk protesting nude in Manipur demanding removal of AFSPA

Calls for immediate review of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and similar protocols for application in areas of internal conflict. Serious allegations of sexual assault by armed forces is causing alienation in regions such as the North East

Pic [Source](#)

It is in this light that, Criminologists and Socialists have for long been demanding abolition of the death penalty on the grounds that it is inhumane and out of the purview of Social Contract.

Arguments in Favour of Death Penalty:

- **Deterrent effect:** By executing convicted criminals, we would be able to deter would-be-criminals from committing heinous crimes in future.
- **Retribution:** One of the key principles of retribution is that people should get what they deserve in proportion to the severity of their crime. Thus death penalty needs to be awarded to those who commit severe crimes
- **Closure for Victim's family:** Death penalty is said to provide emotional closure for victims of crimes

Arguments against the Death Penalty

- **No Strong evidence** to show that **death penalty is an effective deterrent to crime.**
- Death has been prescribed as a punishment for murder since 1860 (the year IPC was drafted), still, murders continue unabated.
- Death has been prescribed in rape cases since 2013 (376A), still, rapes continue to happen and in fact, the brutality of rapes has increased manifold.
- **Execution of the Innocent:** The most common argument against capital punishment is that sooner or later, innocent people may get killed, because of mistakes or flaws in the justice system.
- **Moral grounds:** Human rights activists argue that death penalty is **sanitised form of vengeance** and takes away the scope of reform/rehabilitate in criminals
- **Natural Rights:** State is an institution created by Man whose primary purpose is to protect life. It is not within the purview of State to take away life which is given by God/Nature.

Supreme Court on Death Penalty

- **Jagmohan Singh v. State of UP 1973 case:** According to Article 21 deprivation of life is constitutionally permissible if that is done according to the **procedure established by law.**

- **Rajendra Prasad v. State of UP 1979 case:** If the murderous operation of a die-hard criminal jeopardizes social security in a persistent, planned and perilous fashion then his enjoyment of fundamental rights may be rightly annihilated.
- **Bachan Singh v. the State of Punjab 1980 case:** Death penalty is not to be awarded except in the 'rarest of rare cases' when the alternative option is unquestionably foreclosed.
- **Machhi Singh v. State of Punjab 1983 case:** The Supreme Court laid down certain considerations for determining whether a case falls under the category of rarest of rare cases or not.

Conclusion

- Deterrence is most effective when the punishment happens soon after the crime. The more the legal process distances the punishment from the crime - either in time, or certainty - the less effective a deterrent the punishment will probably be.
- It's not the severity, but the certainty of punishment which can act as a deterrent.

Connecting the dots

- 35th Law Commission report on Death Penalty
- Capital Punishment in other countries

Finance Bill: Passed in Lok Sabha without debate

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-II- Indian Polity

- The Finance Bill is introduced in the Lok Sabha immediately after the presentation of the annual budget, as directed by **Article 110 (a) of the Constitution of India**.
- This Bill encompasses all amendments required in various laws pertaining to tax, in accordance with the tax proposals made in the Union Budget.

Prelims Value Addition

- **Money Bills:** It is concretely defined in Article 110.
- A Bill is said to be a Money Bill if it **only** contains provisions related to taxation, borrowing of money by the government, expenditure from or receipt to the Consolidated Fund of India. It can be introduced only in Lok Sabha and has to mandatorily certify as such by the Speaker of Lok Sabha.
- **Financial Bills:** A Bill that contains some provisions related to taxation and expenditure, and additionally contains provisions related to any other matter is called a Financial Bill. Article 117 of Constitution deals with financial bills.

Preventive Detention, PSA and NSA

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Polity

In News:

- **Public Safety Act** and **National Security Act** were in news because of recent detentions that took place after abrogation of **Article 370** and also due to NCR and Anti-CAA protests.
- Besides, recently former J&K CM Omar Abdulla was released after revocation of his detention.
- So it is important to understand the concept of **Preventive detention and FRs** as well.

Important value additions:**Preventive Detention**

- It is the imprisonment of a person with the **aim of preventing him from committing further offences** or of maintaining public order.
- **Article 22 (3)** - If a person is arrested or detained under preventive detention, then the protection against arrest and detention **under Article 22 (1) and 22(2) shall not be available.**
- A detainee under preventive detention can have no right of personal liberty guaranteed by Article 19 or Article 21.
- To prevent reckless use of Preventive Detention, certain safe guards are provided in the constitution:
 - A person may be taken to preventive custody only for 3 months at the first instance.
 - The detainee is entitled to know the grounds of his detention.
 - The detaining authorities must give the detainee earliest opportunities for making representation against the detention.

Public Safety Act (PSA)

- The Jammu & Kashmir Public Safety Act, 1978 is a **preventive detention law.**
- A person is taken into custody to prevent him/her from acting in a manner that is a threat to the security of J&K.
- It is very similar to the **National Security Act.**
- It allows for detention of a person **without a formal charge.**
- Detention can be up to **two years.**
- Detained person need not be produced before a magistrate within 24 hours of the detention.
- The detained person **does not have the right to move a bail application** before a criminal court.
- He/she **cannot engage** any lawyer also.
- Only The High Court and the Supreme Court have the jurisdiction to hear habeus corpus petitions against the detention.

National Security Act

- The purpose of The National Security Act of 1980 is to make provisions for preventive detention **in certain cases** and for related matters.
- The act extends to the **whole of India.**
- The act **empowers** the Central Government and State Governments to detain a person to prevent him/her from acting in any manner prejudicial:

- to the security of India,
- to the relations of India with foreign countries,
- to the maintenance of public order,
- to the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the community it is necessary so to do.
- The act also gives power to the governments to **detain a foreigner** in a view to regulate his presence or expel from the country.
- The maximum period of detention is **12 months**.

Judicial Administration Reform

Context: Criticism on Supreme Court about delay in hearing of crucial cases due to its inefficient administrative functioning.

Allegations on Supreme Court

- Critical cases like those concerning personal liberty, law and order and Democratic functioning, are posted after long intervals
- The Government is being granted a luxury of time to respond.
- Example: Kashmir notification (Article 370), Citizenship Amendment Act, Electoral bonds

Impact of Judicial inaction on significant cases

- Fait accompli can be created due to lack of judicial action in such cases where immediacy is pre-eminent.
- Adds fuel to perception that judicial inaction is due to executive influence
- Erodes public trust on apex court
- Increases backlogs in Judiciary

What are the possible reasons causing this situation?

- CJI has been given the onerous dual charge of heading both the administrative and judicial functions of the court.
- Increasing number of cases has made handling both these tasks difficult
- Some of the administrative functions carried out by CJI includes:
 - All service-related matters of the SC's 2,500 employees
 - Issue office orders to streamline the registry
 - Supervise measures for security and infrastructure
 - Chair committees
 - Interview candidates for the various courts, etc
- Inadequate capabilities & training of Junior officers under CJI who handle these tasks

Possible Solution – CEO

- A chief executive officer – an independent professional who is equipped with the day-to-day management of the Court and is not beholden to the judges in any way
- CEO will be charged with the entire mission of running the Court, so that the judges can concentrate on adjudication of cases
- It will reduce the burden on CJI which will lead to faster resolution of cases.

Challenges ahead

- CEO needs to be given adequate operational autonomy to ensure efficiency in management of Court's administrative functioning
- He/she should be answerable to a committee of the Court, comprising judges and bar representatives

Conclusion

Resolution of significant cases in a time-bound manner is crucial for robust functioning of Democracy

Connecting the dots

- Judicial Vacancies in India – Its impact and challenges
- Need for digitisation of Judicial process as a part of Judicial reform

MPLADS Funds

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Polity

In News:

- The Vice President of India appealed to all Members of Parliament to **contribute at least Rs. 1 crore** initially from their **MPLADS funds**.
- The funds shall **supplement the Government's efforts** in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

Key takeaways:

- The contribution will facilitate Members of Parliament to **recommend funds for purchase** of the equipments for Government Hospitals / Dispensaries.
- The **Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation** has suitably amended the relevant guidelines to allow one-time dispensation under MPLADS for managing COVID-19.

Important value additions:

MPLADS funds

- It is a scheme formulated by the Government of India that **enables the members of parliaments (MP)** to recommend developmental work in their constituencies.
- The emphasis is on creating **durable community assets** based on locally felt needs.
- **The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI)** looks into its working.
- The funds released under the scheme are **non-lapsable**.
- The MPs have a **recommendatory role** under the scheme.
- The MPLADS is **fully funded** by the Government of India.
- The **annual MPLADS fund** entitlement per MP constituency is **Rs. 5 crore**.

PM-CARES Fund

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Governance

In News:

- **'Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund'** (PM CARES Fund) has been set up as a **national fund** to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key takeaways:

- The **primary objective** is to deal with **any kind of emergency** or distress situation, like posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The fund will also help in providing **relief to the affected**.
- This fund will **enable micro-donations** as a result of which a large number of people will be able to contribute with the smallest of denominations.
- Contribution by corporates to PM-CARES Fund will be considered as **CSR expenditure under the companies law**, as per Corporate Affairs Ministry's memorandum.

Important value additions:

PM CARES Fund

- **The Prime Minister** is the **Chairman** of the fund.
- **Other Members** include Defence Minister, Home Minister and Finance Minister.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

- **Under section 135** of the Companies Act, 2013, every company having **net worth** of at least Rs 500 crore, **turnover** of Rs 1,000 crore or more, or a **minimum net profit** of Rs 5 crore during the immediate preceding financial year has to make CSR expenditure.
- The CSR initiatives of companies **thrust on creating value** in the lives of the communities around its areas of business and manufacturing operations.

PM National Relief Funds (PMNRF)

- These are the other funds under the Prime Minister.
- He is the **chairman of the fund**.
- The PMNRF is used to support people affected by **natural and man-made disasters**.
- This includes **acid attacks, accidents and riots**.
- It is also allotted to people for **kidney transplantation** treatments, **heat, surgeries**, etc.

COVID-19: Rope in civil society to ease supply of food

Context: The COVID-19 pandemic & the ensuing lockdown has disrupted all major sectors of the economy. However, if unattended the crisis can have most devastating impact on the agricultural sector on which nearly 60% of India's population is dependent.

During the relief package announced by government it stated that the beneficiaries of the PDS can avail three months' ration at one go along with front loading money for farmers under PM-KISAN yojana. However, more needs to be done

Do You Know?

- In 1918, the Spanish Flu infected 500 million people globally, when the world's population was just 1.8 billion.
- The pandemic claimed the lives of 50 million people — 14 million to 18 million of them in India.

What are the challenges with food during this times of crisis?

- **Implementation Difficulties with relief package:** Challenge for fair price shops to deliver the provisions in an orderly manner with intact supply chain
- **Reduced Farmer income:** Shortage of labour during this harvest season may lead to wastage of food produce especially perishable products like fruits & vegetables
- **High Prices:** Disruption in food chain can lead to high prices for consumers

- **Chaos & Anarchy:** If adequate food is not provided in a timely manner to people, it may lead to social unrest and political instability that further derails corrective measures.

Alternatives available

- **Suspend the APMC Act** and encourage NGOs, civil society and corporate houses to directly procure from farmers.
- **Suspension of weekly markets** where social distancing is seldom practiced
- **Rope in civil society** - NGOs, resident welfare associations & religious organisations - for orderly and safe distribution of food — both pre-cooked and fresh
- **Home (street) delivery** of food provisions to avoid crowding
 - In Metro Cities like Bengaluru & Delhi, **collaboration with food deliver companies** like Zomato & Swiggy can help overcome supply chain constraints imposed due to lockdown
 - Local authorities can be given this task in semi-urban and rural areas

Challenges

- Labour for harvesting the produce
- Safety of delivery personnel
- Perishability of fruits & vegetables
- Poultry industry affected – due to reduction in intake of chicken & eggs - has spill over effect on Maize (that is used as feed in Poultry sector)

Way Ahead

- The Procurement agencies (FCI) and delivery agencies need to be trained about safety measures and supplied with safety gear
- Compensating poultry and maize farmers
- Announcing Rs 50/quintal per month to farmers as an incentive to stagger bringing farm produce to the market — say after May 10
- Unloading of excessive buffer stock which is about 77 million metric tonnes (MMT) on March 1, against the norm of 21.4 MMT.
- Use of data analytics to optimize the quantity and delivery of goods
- Retail distribution lines need to be seamlessly linked to wholesale supply lines.

Connecting the dots

- Doubling of Farmers income – Ashok Dalwai Committee
- Food Riots that has happened in the past across the world (Think French Revolution)

COVID-19: Challenges faced by Migrant Workers

In the crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic, some of the worse challenges are faced by the inter-state migrant workers.

Do You Know?

- The cost of the lockdown is pegged at around \$120 billion (nearly ₹9 lakh crore) or 4% of the GDP.
- The lockdown will effectively put over 45 million migrants, working on daily basis, out of work.

Problems of Inter-State migrant worker

- Sudden announcement of lockdown left them unprepared for it.
- Contrary and uncoordinated government orders caused confusion (Ex: Delhi migrants)
- Dire situation with no work, money or food
- Harassment at the hands of house owners
- Lack of political voice due to their migrant status
- Anxiety about the survival of their families back home
- Physical distancing for the unorganised sector is difficult in India given the realities of high density human settlements (Ex: slums)
- All the above factors lead to their mass exodus from urban areas to their homes often by foot due to suspension of Transport facilities.

Solution:

- Making arrangements for travel to their home towns is not advisable as there is a danger of spread of virus to rural areas where health infrastructure is meagre.
- People will stay where they are, only if real support is provided.
- School buildings, community halls and stadiums can serve as temporary shelters for migrants (Karnataka model)
- Food grains from excessive buffer stocks to be supplied to these centres.
- Self-managed community kitchens to be set up
- Adequate safety training and safety gear needs to be provided to those housed in temporary shelters

Conclusion

Thus, there needs to be a plan of action based on compassion and understanding of conditions on the ground.

Connecting the dots

- Other vulnerable sections of society & problems faced due to lockdown
- Migrants causing the demand for reservation of jobs for local people – legislations passed by State governments like AP, Maharashtra – Critically Analyze

Student Suicides: Young Lives Matter:

Context: India has the highest suicide rate amongst 15-29-year-olds globally and this rate has been increasing

Present Scenario of Student Suicides

- Overall, India saw 1.3 lakh suicides in 2018, of which students made up 8%, almost the same as those involved in the farming sector, while 10% of them were unemployed people.

- While 28,000 students committed suicide between 1999-2003, by 2014-18 this number had increased to 46,554
- Every hour one student commits suicide in India, with about 28 such suicides reported every day, according to data compiled by NCRB
- The NCRB data shows that 10,159 students died by suicide in 2018, an increase from 9,905 in 2017, and 9,478 in 2016.
- Maharashtra had the highest number of student suicides in 2018 with 1,448 — almost 4 suicides every day — followed by Tamil Nadu with 953 and Madhya Pradesh with 862.

Reasons for Students Committing Suicide:

- **Academic Stress-** A quarter of the student suicides in 2018 were because of “failure in exams”. Suicides even in premier institutes such as IITs hold a mirror to the stressful education system.
- **Relationship breakdown** is another leading cause.
- **Lack of adequate support:** A student commits suicide when he doesn’t get emotional support at the time of crisis
- **High expectations from Students:** Parental and peer pressure also have an adverse effect on mental health of students which leads to suicidal tendencies. Kota, primarily known as a coaching centre hub, has seen a series of student deaths every year. 58 students ended their lives in Kota between 2013 and 2017.
- **Social Stigma:** not enough discussion around depression and suicides
- **Mental Issues:** Anxiety disorder, depression, personality disorder — all these result in mental illness that leads a student towards suicide.

Steps that can be taken

- **Social Awareness:** The first step is to start a serious debate on the issue in schools and colleges
- **Academic Support Groups by College administration:** Teachers and College staff should form groups which identify people who are not performing well in academics and provide them with special coaching/guidance.
- **Counselling centres in Colleges:** This may help student have an avenue to get proper psychiatric guidance on dealing with their emotional/mental issues
- **Helplines by NGO and Civil Society Groups:** This can help those who are having suicidal tendencies
- **Leveraging Social media groups:** while technology is rightly blamed for increasing self-imposed isolation and alienation, especially among the young, it can also be part of the solution—chatbots that are intended to fight depression among humans by addressing loneliness are an example.

Connecting the Dots

- Farmer Suicides
- Mental Health Act – that has decriminalized suicidal attempts

Sex-Selective Abortion

- **Context:** Recent case of infanticide in Tamil Nadu's Usilampatti, historically notorious for its crude methods of killing female babies.
- The killing of one-month child took place through inhuman practice of feeding female infants with the toxic milk of a local herb

Sex-selective abortion is the practice of terminating a pregnancy based upon the predicted sex of the infant. It usually happens when a female child is detected during pregnancy.

Present Scenario

- Data on **sex ratio at birth (SRB)** culled from the Civil Registration System, show an alarming fall over the years. From 903 girls for every 1,000 boys in 2007, it dropped to 877 in 2016.
- Four States have an **SRB equal to or below 840**: Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan (806), Bihar (837), Uttarakhand (825) and Tamil Nadu (840).
- **While infanticide may have come down**, sex selective abortion at scan centres continues as the preferred vehicle for parents obsessed with son preference.

Some of the reasons attributed to sex-selective abortion & female infanticide:

- Preference for Boys: In a **Patriarchal** society girls are generally considered liability until they are married off.
- Availability of latest technology
- Lack of effective implementation of existing laws designed against such crimes
- Absence of family planning tools
- Absence of Women in decision making

Impact of female foeticide:

- Decline in Sex ratio
- Early marriages of women often at the cost of their educational empowerment
- Trafficking of women for sexual work and marriage.
- Increased crimes against women like sexual harassment, lewd remarks against women, and instances of eve teasing.
- Increased fragmentation of land due to increase in male members in household
- Decline in moral & ethical standards of the society as a whole
- Perpetuation of Patriarchy and gender inequality

Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act

- The act was enacted in 1994 in response to the decline in Sex ratio in India, which deteriorated from 972 in 1901 to 927 in 1991
- **The main purpose of the act is** ban the use of sex selection techniques before or after conception and prevent the misuse of prenatal diagnostic technique for sex selective abortion.

Salient features of the act:

- It regulates the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques, like ultrasound and amniocentesis by allowing them their use only to detect few cases.
- No laboratory or centre or clinic will conduct any test including ultrasonography for the purpose of determining the sex of the foetus.

- No person, including the one who is conducting the procedure as per the law, will communicate the sex of the foetus to the pregnant woman or her relatives by words, signs or any other method.
- **Advertisement** for pre-natal and pre-conception sex determination facilities will attract fine of Rs 10000 and imprisonment upto 3 years.
- The Act mandates compulsory registration of all diagnostic laboratories, all genetic counselling centres, genetic laboratories, genetic clinics and ultrasound clinics
- The Act was amended to bring the technique of pre conception sex selection and ultrasound technique within the ambit of the act.
- The 2003 amendment also empowered the central supervisory board and state level supervisory board was constituted.

Other measure taken by government to improve condition of females:

- **‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’ campaign**
- The objectives of this initiative are to prevent of gender biased sex selective elimination, and to ensure survival and protection of the girl child. The strategies involved in this scheme are:
 - Implement a sustained Social Mobilization and Communication Campaign to create equal value for the girl child & promote her education.
 - Place the issue of decline in CSR/SRB in public discourse, improvement of which would be a indicator for good governance.
 - Focus on Gender Critical Districts and Cities low on CSR for intensive & integrated action.
 - Mobilize & Train Panchayati Raj Institutions/Urban local bodies/ Grassroot workers as catalysts for social change, in partnership with local community/women’s/youth groups.
- Legislations for creating a safe and secure environment for females.
 - POCSO Act (Prevention of Children from Sexual offences)
 - Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act
 - Changes in the Criminal Law on the recommendations of Justice Verma Committee
- Enhanced Focus on Health & Education of Child
 - Provision of better nutrition through ICDS, MDM,
 - Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram
 - Scholarship schemes like Pragati
 - Special girl’s school like Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas
- **Political Empowerment:** Reservation of seats for women in Panchayats and Urban Local bodies are provided to enhance the decision making powers of women which leads to increased awareness among women about their rights especially reproductive rights

Way Forward:

- Need to ramp up awareness building exercises
- Use technology to monitor every single pregnant woman right down to taluk levels until at least one year after birth.
- Stricter enforcement of the PCNDT act

- Reservation for women in State Legislative Assemblies and Parliament

Conclusion

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

Connecting the dots

- Reproductive rights of women
- Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act and its recent amendments.

MSP & Direct benefit transfer - Punjab Case Study

Context: Government plans to implement direct benefit transfer (DBT) in MSP payments in Punjab starting with the wheat crop that will arrive in the mandis from April.

The current system

- Minimum Support Prices (MSP) are announced by Central Government on recommendation of Commission on Agricultural costs and Prices (CACP)
- The Food Corporation of India and state agencies undertake grain procurement through commission agents in APMC mandis
- The payment is made into the agent's account, who then makes a payment to farmer who sells the produce to him.

Situation in Punjab State

- Punjab has some 48,000 of these mandi intermediaries, of which 28,000-odd are active and each dealing with anywhere from 20 to 200 farmers.
- In 2018-19 alone, 169.16 lakh tonnes (lt) of paddy and 129.12 lt of wheat got procured from Punjab.
- These, at their respective MSPs of Rs 1,770 and Rs 1,840 per quintal, would have been worth almost Rs 53,700 crore
- At 2.5%, the commission payments over and above this to the commission agents would have been around Rs 1,342.5 crore.
- Also, landless tenants represented an estimated 30-35% of Punjab's farmers who cultivate land belonging to others that include government employees, NRIs and permanent urban residents within and outside the state.

Concerns of Landless tenants

- **Not being either the owner or a registered tenant farmer** means that they cannot access any crop credit from the local primary agricultural cooperative society,
- They even cannot benefit from the **government's loan waiver**
- Not eligible for the Centre's Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) **income support schemes**
- Under PM-Kisan, there are 22.40 lakh farmers in Punjab receiving annual income support of Rs 6,000 each which includes only landowning farmers

- Even at the time of sale at the agriculture produce market committee (APMC) mandi the documents ('J form') which gives details of the crop, quantity and price, mentions only the name of the landowner.

DBT for MSP

- The Punjab government, at the nudging of the Centre, has made it compulsory for agents to provide bank and Aadhaar numbers of all their farmers.
- This data is to be linked to the Centre's Public Financial Management System (PFMS) network, which will enable direct payment of MSP monies into the accounts of farmers rather than that of the agents
- For collecting the details of landless farmers, the government is, therefore, relying on the agents.

Challenges/Opposition to DBT

- **Tenants:** 30-35% of Punjab's farmers are unregistered landless tenant farmers. As a result, even though they are the actual cultivators, they would not be eligible (lack of necessary documents) to receive MSP money into their accounts
- If MSP payment is transferred directly into bank accounts, only the landowners will benefit.
- **Commission Agents:** They, of course, are least inclined to support the scheme as they stand to lose their 2.5% commission fee on MSP procurement. Also, their power and role in the entire supply chains gets diminished
- It was commission agents in APMC mandis who used to provide loans to landless tenants to raise their crops. Hence, if the government reduces the role of agent it will in turn impact their ability to provide loans to tenants. This **affects the working capital availability for these tenants**

Way forward

- Conducting a single **census** on landless farmers in the state
- Ensuring the **regularisation of the tenancy**. This means flexibility in State tenancy laws. Adoption of Model Tenancy Act of Centre would be a step in the right direction.

Connecting the dots

- DBT in fertilizers
- Food Coupons Vs Subsidised food provision
- Price deficiency Payment Scheme

Rehabilitation of Beggars

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Society

In News:

- **The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment** is exploring the possibilities of a scheme for persons engaged in the act of begging.
- The Scheme would cover identification, rehabilitation, provision of medical facilities, counselling, education, skill development with the support of State governments & NGOs.
- The Ministry provides funds to the **National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation (NBCFDC)** for skill development programmes for beggars

About NBCFDC

- NBCFDC is a Government of India Undertaking under the aegis of **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment**.
 - It was incorporated under Section 25 of the Companies Act 1956 on 13th January 1992 as a Company not for profit.
 - Its objective is to promote economic and developmental activities for the benefit of Backward Classes and to assist the poorer section of these classes in skill development and self-employment ventures.
-



Women Transforming India Awards (WTI)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I-Society; GS-II- Polity

In News:

- The fourth edition of WTI Awards was organized by NITI Aayog
- **Objective of Awards:** To highlight the commendable and ground-breaking endeavors of India's women leaders and change makers.
- Since 2018, the Awards have been hosted under the aegis of NITI Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship Platform (NAWEP) with a special focus on entrepreneurship.
- NAWEP has become a forum dedicated to educating, enabling and empowering women entrepreneurs.

International Women's day (IWD)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Society; GS-II- Polity

In News:

- It is celebrated on the 8th of March every year to help forge a gender equal world, celebrate women's achievements and increasing visibility.
- The theme of 2020 was "I am Generation Equality: Realizing Women's Rights".
- IWD has occurred for well over a century, with the first IWD gathering in 1911 supported by over a million people in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland.
- The day is not country, group or organization specific - and belongs to all groups collectively everywhere

Do You Know?

- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative was launched in 2015 to ensure survival, protection and empowerment of the girl child.
- The objectives of this initiative are to prevent of gender biased sex selective elimination, and to ensure survival and protection of the girl child.
- After the launch of the scheme, the sex ratio at birth has improved from 923 to 931

Women work participation rates

Context: Women's work participation rates have fallen sharply — from 29 per cent in 2004-5 to 22 per cent in 2011-12 and to 17 per cent in 2017-18

Concerned with ostensibly declining women's work participation, identifying sectors from which women are excluded and more importantly, in which women are included have been missed out in our analysis. It is thus time to count women's work rather than women workers.

Anatomy of the decline

- Decline in women's work participation rates shows that it is driven by rural women.
- In the prime working age group (25-59), urban women's worker to population ratios (WPR) fell from 28% to 25% between 2004-5 and 2011-12, stagnating at 24% in 2017-18.

- However, rural women's WPR declined sharply from 58% to 48% and to 32% over the same period.
- Among rural women, the largest decline seems to have taken place in women categorised as unpaid family helpers — from 28% in 2004-5 to 12% in 2017-18. This alone accounts for more than half of the decline in women's WPR.
- The remaining is largely due to a drop of about 9% in casual labour, while their regular salaried work increased by a mere 1 percentage point
- In contrast, women counted as focusing solely on domestic duties increased from 21% to 45%

Some of the reasons for the decline are:

- **Increasing incomes:** As husbands and other family income increases, women's incentive to work declines.
 - Goldin's U- Shaped Hypothesis: where female labour force function is related to the level of education and the emergence of the white collar sector jobs supports the argument of rising incomes impacting female labour force participation
- **Economic Slowdown**, particularly in last three years, has pushed women out of the labour force as there is overall increase in unemployment.
- **Lack of Employment Opportunities for educated rural women:** Rural men with a secondary level of education have options like working as a postman, driver or mechanic — few such opportunities are open to women.
 - Women with secondary education have only half the work participation rate compared to their uneducated sisters.
- **Weakness in Survey System** which fails to take into account the exact nature of work being done by females (especially in rural areas).
 - With shortage of funds and trained personnel, the National Sample Surveys increasingly relies on contract investigators hired for short periods, who lack these skills.

Way Forward:

- **More Robust Survey System**
 - Need to ask detailed questionnaire while undertaking surveys especially about the primary and secondary activity status of each household member
 - Similar questions also need to be asked about livestock ownership and about people caring for the livestock, ownership of petty business and individuals working in these enterprises
- Develop data collection processes from the lived experiences of women and **count women's work rather than women workers**
- Implementation of the recommendations of 'Shramshakti: Report of National Commission on Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector'
- Providing employment opportunities for women in rural areas by adopting **decentralization in our developmental strategy**

Connecting the dots

- Educational level and Women work wages disparity
- Global Gender Gap Index

A case for more policewomen

Context: India persists with a male-dominated police force.

In 2009 the Home Ministry **set 33% as the target for women's representation in the police.**

Present Status of Women in Police

- **Inadequate representation:** In 2019, women comprised less than 10% of police personnel.
- Only seven States (Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujarat and Sikkim) had more than 10% policewomen.
- **Slow pace of women intake:** There has been only a 5% increase in the number of policewomen in a decade (3.65% in 2009 to 8.98% in 2019).
- The **annual change in the share of women** in the police force from 2012 to 2016 was found to be less than 1% across States, according to the India Justice Report, 2019
- At this rate, most States will take **over 50 years to achieve the 33% target.**

Selective Implementation

- Although States have adopted the **reservation policy**, they are very selective about its implementation.
- **Restrictive Reservations:** Very few States apply reservation for women at all the entry points (constable, sub-inspector, and deputy superintendent of police levels) or to all posts at each level.
 - Some States (Kerala and Karnataka) have reservation for women only at the constable rank.
 - Some (Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu) extend it to the constable and sub-inspector ranks. But here too there are restrictions: reservation is limited to specific cadre posts within each rank.

Consequence of Selective Implementation

- **Huge disparity** in the representation of women across ranks
- **Inadequate Women at Top decision making level:** There are far fewer women at the gazetted ranks at the State level (assistant sub-inspector to deputy superintendent of police) than those at the constabulary level.
 - This means that women are **most prominent in the most junior ranks.**
 - Women remain in large numbers at the bottom of the ladder without moving up.
- **Inefficient Policing:** As a consequence, there are **not enough women personnel** to perform exclusive functions **when gender-based crimes are reported**
 - For instance, in 2013, the Home Ministry said that at least three women sub-inspectors should be available in a police station as investigating officers.
 - Tamil Nadu, which has the highest percentage of women personnel (17.46%), requires 6,057 women sub-inspectors to meet this standard across its 2,019 police stations.
 - At present, it has barely one-fourth of that requirement.

Other Challenges for Women Police Officers

- Women are typecast — for example, they are asked to deal with crimes against women, while they are kept outside the mainstream of varied experiences

- As a result, new recruits will become increasingly ghettoised in the absence of a framework to guide their career path.
- Frequent inter-district transfers
- Disallowing postings in home districts for specified periods of time
- Poor childcare support systems
- Lack of basic amenities like toilets, uncomfortable duty gear (designed mainly for men) and inadequate privacy.
- **Policing sub-culture**, with its association with “masculinity” and coercive force, has impacted the mental pressure on women police officers

Way Forward

- Effective implementation of Reservation Policy at all levels to increase the number of women in Police department
- Gender sensitization among the Police Personnel and also among the public
- Gender-friendly gadgets and clothes.
- State- funded special health checkup for women personnel like pap smear tests (for cervical cancer), mammography (for breast cancer) and tests for estimation of bone density,
- Sanitary pad dispensers should be installed at all women posts and portable toilets be provided to them under the 'Swachh Bharat' mission.
- More creches, school pickup and drop facilities for children and clean living quarters and toilet facilities

Conclusion

- Increasing the number of recruits alone will not be enough; institutional changes embedded in principles of diversity, inclusion and equality of opportunities are as important. Otherwise, discrimination and exclusion will continue to persist even as the numbers of women increase.

Connecting the dots

- Women in Judiciary
- 33% Reservation for Women in Parliament and State legislature

Fears rise as COVID-19 cases, deaths hit new high

Part of: GS Prelims – Health and GS Mains II- Health

In news:

The number of countries hit by the COVID-19 outbreak climbed past 60

Coronavirus

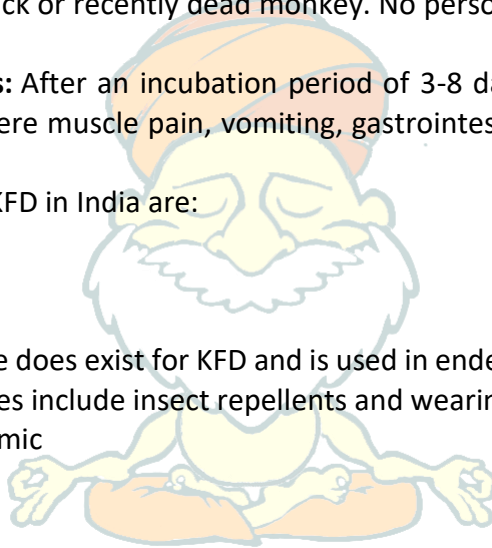
- Coronaviruses are a specific family of viruses, with some of them causing less-severe damage, such as the common cold, and others causing respiratory and intestinal diseases.
- A coronavirus has many “regularly arranged” protrusions on its surface, because of which the entire virus particle looks like an emperor’s crown, hence the name “coronavirus”.
- Apart from human beings, coronaviruses can affect mammals including pigs, cattle, cats, dogs, martens, camels, hedgehogs and some birds.
- So far, there are four known disease-causing coronaviruses, among which the best known are the SARS coronavirus and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) coronavirus, both of which can cause severe respiratory diseases.

Kyasanur Forest Disease

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Health

In News:

- There is a proposal to set up a study & research centre on Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) in Sagar, Karnataka.
- It is caused by Kyasanur Forest disease Virus (KFDV), a member of the virus family Flaviviridae.
- It was first identified in 1957 in a sick monkey from the Kyasanur Forest in Karnataka. Since then, between 400-500 human cases per year have been reported.
- Hard ticks (*Hemaphysalis spinigera*) are the reservoir of KFD virus. Rodents, shrews, and monkeys are common hosts for KFDV after being bitten by an infected tick.
- Larger animals such as cattle, goats or sheep may become infected with KFD but play a limited role in transmission of disease to humans
- Transmission to humans may occur after a tick bite or contact with an infected animal, most importantly a sick or recently dead monkey. No person-to-person transmission has been described
- **Signs and Symptoms:** After an incubation period of 3-8 days, the symptoms like chills, fever, headache, severe muscle pain, vomiting, gastrointestinal symptoms and bleeding may occur.
- **Endemic Regions of KFD in India are:**
 - Karnataka
 - Tamil Nadu
 - Kerala states
- **Prevention:** A vaccine does exist for KFD and is used in endemic areas of India. Additional preventative measures include insect repellents and wearing protective clothing in areas where ticks are endemic



Places in News:

- Kali Tiger Reserve and Bedthi Conservation Reserve - Karnataka

COVID-19 Now Pandemic: WHO

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Health

In News:

- WHO noted with concern that 1,18,000 positive cases have been reported globally in 114 countries and more than 90% of cases are in just four countries.
- **OUTBREAK:** A sudden rise in cases of a disease in a particular place.
- **EPIDEMIC:** A large outbreak, one that spreads among a population or region. The current outbreak of a flu-like illness caused by a new virus in China is considered an epidemic.
- **PANDEMIC:** Generally refers to an epidemic that has spread on a more global scale, affecting large numbers of people. A pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease.

A COVID-19 control plan made simple

The COVID-19 outbreak is not yet an epidemic in India as of March 11th 2020.

However, a crisis is looming over horizon which may turn out to be disaster of unprecedented proportion if not handled properly

The track record

So far we have stoically confronted all the new and resurgent communicable diseases that appeared in recent decades.

- There was surge capacity of crisis management during the **2018 Nipah epidemic** in Kerala.
- Government handled the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (**SARS**) **scare of 2003** extremely efficiently.
- The **2009 pandemic influenza H1N1** was also confronted reasonably well.
- However, India's weakness in dealing with **seasonal influenza** is embarrassing as there is no national policy to control seasonal flu
- With high flu deaths reported annually, it can be said that India manages short-term crisis very well but fails on long-term disease control

Existing Administrative Set-up

- **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** – which coordinates with State Health Departments to deal with Health issues of the country
- **National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)** - functions well only when smaller problems erupt in various States.
- **Director General of Health Services (DGHS)** – It has limited executive powers and there is no competent public health infrastructure under the Directorate to deal with epidemics
- **Department of Health Research** and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) – whose primary job is on the research of pathogens that cause epidemics but they are not equipped to deal with control of epidemics

Need for dedicated body/operation

- The Minister for Health is a key person but COVID-19 epidemic is **more than a medical problem**.
- Many ministries such as those of travel, tourism, industry, education, economics, railways and local governments are all being affected.
- India needs a dedicated **disaster management operation** headed by Prime Minister.
- PM should **declare a national emergency and** establish a 'war-machinery', with a '**task force**' of the best experts in the country, of proven capability and track record against communicable diseases.
- The **war room** should have all necessary facilities and should run a 24-hour control room.
- The **job of the task force** ought to have one goal: manage the epidemic, to minimise the spread and damage of the virus, and to mitigate the sufferings of all people everywhere.
- The terms of reference of the task force must include the **design of immediate, short-term, medium-term and long-term responses**.
- Once the task force designs a strategy with tactics, the Ministry of Health as well as all Ministries must implement them.

Preventive Measures taken by India

- The Union Home Ministry has **transferred some of its power to the Union Health Ministry** for tackling the COVID-19 if the outbreak turns out to be a disaster of national proportions.
- The Indian government has issued a **new travel advisory** stating that all existing visas, except diplomatic, official, U.N./International Organisations, employment, project visas, stand suspended till 15th April, beginning from 13th March.
- Visa-free travel facility granted to **OCI cardholders** is also suspended for the same duration.
- All incoming travellers, including Indian nationals, arriving from or having visited China, Italy, Iran, Republic of Korea, France, Spain and Germany after 15th Feb shall be quarantined for a minimum period of 14 days.
- International traffic through land borders will be restricted as well.
- The **Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways** has issued an **advisory** to take all necessary steps in public transport vehicles to ensure sanitation of seats, handles and bars.
- India will **send a team of doctors to Italy** and Iran for testing its nationals for coronavirus and bring them back

Conclusion

An agency exclusively for managing a constant and continuous watch on all developments — biomedical and sociological — and to recommend remedial and containment measures is essential in order to face this epidemic.

Connecting the dots

- Impact of epidemic on pharmaceuticals & pesticide sector
- Health Emergency

COVID-19: The perils of an all-out lockdown

Context: Impending health and economic crisis in the face of COVID-19 spreading in India.

Staying at home (shutdown) has two motives:

- Self-protection motive, where a person acts out of fear of being infected
- A public-purpose motive, where a person participates in collective efforts to stop the spread of the virus.

Unlike the health crisis, the economic crisis is not class-neutral but hurts poor people the most.

Impact on Lockdown on Poor

- **Informal Sector:** India's Informal sector employs approximately 85% of all workers (Source: Niti Aayog 's Strategy for New India at 75, released in 2018). This sector whose earnings is usually on daily basis will be severely hit due to economic standstill caused by the lock-down.
- **Internal Migration:** Mass-layoffs in informal sector & factories have forced migrant workers to head back home, some without being paid.

- **Shut down of essential services** like Public transport, administrative offices, court hearings and immunization drives to varying degrees in many states – has lead to aggravation of hardships faced by poor people who are heavily dependent on them.
- **Transport Sector dislocated:** Essential commodities like wheat & food grains which were transported by road transport are facing the brunt because of the disruption caused due to lack of private sector participation.
- **Lack of Social Security to the poor in India:** Unlike in developed countries, the insurance & pension coverage in India is meagre. This lack of social security will make poor man's life difficult during these times of shutdown.

If the Poor are asked to stay at home, they will need help which can be offered by the government through the following ways:

- **Public services** that help poor people without creating a major health hazard should continue to function as far as possible. For example: PDS, administrative offices at district & local levels
- **Utilizing Existing Social Schemes** to support the poor:
 - Advance payment of pensions
 - Enhanced PDS rations
 - Immediate payment of MGNREGA wage arrears
 - Expanded distribution of take-home rations at schools and anganwadis.
- **Displaying creativity:** An explicit list of essential services and official guidelines on coronavirus readiness at the workplace needs to be drafted & advertised by the governments.
 - For instance, anganwadis could play a vital role of public-health outreach at this time, even if children have to be kept away.
 - Many public spaces could be used, with due safeguards, to disseminate information or to impart good habits such as distancing and washing hands
- **Increase resources and labs** for testing along with **enhanced awareness** about the disease so that people don't go for testing without solid grounds.
 - For instance: The 'Break the Chain' campaign started by Kerala government advocates ideas of basic cleanliness and hygiene

Conclusion

If the poor must stay at home, they need income support and essential services. Government should hence come up with economic blueprint to tackle the economic challenges posed by the pandemic. The constitution of task force headed by the Union Finance Minister is a step in the right direction.

Connecting the dots

- Universal Basic Income – its utility and challenges

[COVID-19 task force recommends use of hydroxychloroquine for prevention of infection](#)

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-II- Health

- Hydroxychloroquine (not to be confused with anti-malaria drug chloroquine) is an oral drug used in the treatment of autoimmune diseases such as arthritis.
- Hydroxychloroquine is advised as **prophylactic** (preventive medicine) only for following groups of people
 - Asymptomatic healthcare workers involved in the care of suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19
 - Asymptomatic household contacts of laboratory confirmed cases
- The drug (approved by Drug Controller General of India) has to be given only on the prescription of a registered medical practitioner.

Did You Know?

- The National Task Force for COVID-19 is constituted by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to provide medical guidance/measures on fighting the pandemic
- **Azithromycin (antibiotic) & hydroxychloroquine** combination is part of multicountry trial planned by the WHO in the fight against COVID-19.

COVID-19: The race to find a cure

Context: The novel coronavirus has infected more than 4 lakh people worldwide and has led to the deaths of more than 17,000.

- The epicentre of the pandemic has now shifted from China to Western Developed countries
- With no specific therapy available at present, there is an increased pressure on world scientific community to fast-forward the development of vaccine

Encouraging Developments

- As per WHO reports, nearly 20 vaccine candidates are in advanced stages of development and will be ready for Phase-I safety trials.
- **In USA:** Phase-I safety trials of an experimental vaccine (mRNA-1273) has already been administered to healthy volunteers for its safety and immunogenicity.
- **In China:** Another vaccine jointly developed by China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences and CanSino Biologics has reportedly been cleared for early-stage clinical trials on more than 100 healthy volunteers
- **The Serum Institute of India** has also announced its readiness to start safety trials of a drug following animal experiments

Challenges of Vaccine Discovery

- **Side Effects:** The immune response induced by experimental vaccination may lead to any disease enhancements.
- **Duration of immunity:** If the immunity induced due to vaccination is transient, then humans will be susceptible to reinfections. Thus, a longer test period is required

- **Lengthy Process:** It will not be possible to roll-out any efficacious vaccine for at least another year, considering the complexity and the lengthy regulatory process involved in vaccine development

Alternative Way

- Scientists and pharmaceutical companies have thus rushed to investigate and **use drugs that have already been approved** by regulatory authorities.
- With the available biological information about the virus protein & its mechanism of infection, the **re-purposing of existing drugs to treat COVID-19 patients** has already been started in many countries
- However, without any appropriate controls, careful dosing and safety concerns, such small experiments can do more harm than good

Controlled randomised trials

- It is a study in which people are allocated at random (by chance alone) to receive one of several clinical interventions (in this case the experimental vaccine)
- Randomization reduces bias and provides a rigorous tool to examine cause-effect relationships between an intervention and outcome. This speeds up the process to understand the drug's efficacy without undermining safety standards.
- **Solidarity Project:** It is an initiative by WHO whereby four drugs or drug combinations will be tested randomly in many countries around the world.
 - It includes the anti-Ebola drug, Remdesivir, Chloroquine, anti-HIV drugs, and the Ritonavir/Lopinavir combination, with or without Interferon-beta.
- The European counterpart of the trial, **Discovery**, will also conduct such trials in countries including France, Spain, Germany and the U.K.
- The pharma company Roche has also decided to initiate large, randomised Phase-III trials of its arthritis drug Actemra for its safety and efficacy in adult patients with severe COVID-19 pneumonia.

Conclusion

Hopefully, these trials will lead to tangible drug therapies against COVID-19.

Connecting the dots

- Generic drugs and Branded drugs

R-naught

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Health

In News:

- The R-naught, or R_0 , is a virus's basic reproductive number — an epidemiologic metric used to describe the **contagiousness of infectious agents**.
- At its simplest, the basic reproductive number can show us how worried we should be about infection

- If the R_0 is above one, each case is expected to infect at least one other person on average, and the virus is likely to keep spreading.
 - If it's less than one, a group of infected people are less likely to spread the infection.
-

Sepsis

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Health

In News:

- Sepsis is a common cause of death from Coronavirus
 - Sepsis is a life-threatening **organ dysfunction** caused by the body's immune system overreacting in response to an infection.
 - This overactive, toxic response can lead to tissue damage, **multiple organ failure** and death.
 - **Cause:** Sepsis can be triggered by a variety of pathogens- Viruses, bacteria, fungi or parasites
 - **Treatment:** The blood is examined, a broad-spectrum antibiotic is administered, and sufficient blood circulation and ventilation are ensured.
-

Herd Immunity

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Health

In News:

- Chief scientific adviser to the UK government had suggested to UK that authorities need to contain the spread of the virus but would “not suppress it completely”.
- Elaborating further it was suggested that a 60 per cent infection rate would help build up a degree of ‘herd immunity’.
- Herd immunity is a **form of indirect protection from infectious disease** that occurs when a large percentage of a population has become immune to an infection, thereby providing a measure of protection for individuals who are not immune

What happens in the case of coronavirus where there is no vaccine?

- The approach would require those exposed to the virus to build natural immunity and stop the human-to-human transmission.
- If a high enough proportion of individuals in a population are immune, the majority will protect the few susceptible people because the **pathogen** is less likely to find a susceptible person

Is it the model which UK is planning to fight coronavirus?

- On the face of criticism of such soft approach and high human cost involved, UK government stated that herd immunity was not the government's policy or goal.
-

Indian Council of Medical Research and COVID-19 Testing

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Health

In News:

- ICMR has decided to monitor community transmission by random sampling rather than expanding testing.

- This decision has been taken to avoid “futile testing” as well as hospitalisation for mildly symptomatic, positive patients.

Four Stages of Transmission of COVID-19

- **Stage 1-Imported Transmission**
- **Stage 2-Local Transmission**
 - Transmission through direct contact with an infected person within the country.
- **Stage 3-Community Transmission**
 - It signifies that a virus is circulating in the community and can affect people with no history of travel to affected areas or of contact with an infected person.
 - India’s strategy on social distancing and isolation is aimed at checking community transmission.
- **Stage 4- Epidemic**
 - An epidemic is a large outbreak, one that spreads among a population or region.
 - It is less severe than pandemic due to a limited area of spread.

Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Health

In News:

- BIS is working to incorporate maximum permissible limit of Uranium as 0.03 mg/l (as per WHO provisional guidelines) in all drinking water standards
- Elevated uranium level in drinking water may be associated with **kidney toxicity**
- BIS is the **National Standard Body** of India established under the BIS Act 2016 for the harmonious development of the activities of standardization, marking and quality certification of goods

Lopinavir and Ritonavir

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Health

In News:

- These are **anti-HIV drugs**
- This drug combination is recommended by Union Health Ministry to be used on a case-to-case basis depending upon the severity of the condition of a person having **coronavirus infection**.

Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Health

In News:

- Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) is a **zoonotic** disease (spreads from animals to humans - just like COVID-19, Ebola, HIV, Anthrax, SARS)
- **KFD** is a tick-borne viral haemorrhagic fever endemic to South India.
- It was first identified in 1957 in a sick monkey from the Kyasanur Forest in Karnataka
- **Hard ticks** (*Hemaphysalis spinigera*) are the reservoir of KFD virus. Rodents, shrews, and monkeys are common hosts for KFDV after being bitten by an infected tick

- **Transmission to humans** may occur after a tick bite or contact with an infected animal, most importantly a sick or recently dead monkey. No person-to-person transmission has been described
- **Larger animals** such as cattle, goats or sheep may become infected with KFD but play a limited role in transmission of disease to humans
- **Signs and Symptoms:** After an incubation period of 3-8 days, the symptoms like chills, fever, headache, severe muscle pain, vomiting, gastrointestinal symptoms and bleeding may occur.
- Endemic Regions of KFD in India are:
 - Karnataka
 - Tamil Nadu
 - Kerala states

Prevention: A vaccine does exist for KFD and is used in endemic areas of India. Additional preventative measures include insect repellents and wearing protective clothing in areas where ticks are endemic

Ibuprofen

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- health

In News:

- WHO advised patients suffering from COVID-19-like symptoms to avoid the drug ibuprofen, unless prescribed by doctors.
- It is an **anti-inflammatory drug** that is easily available with chemists in India, and can be purchased without a doctor's prescription.
- Ibuprofen, a **non-steroid**, is used for relief from joint pain, migraine, fever, body ache, and even pain during the menstrual cycle.
- Its function is to **reduce pain**, swelling, and fever by suppressing substances that produce swelling in the body.
- Other non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs include aspirin, cortisone, naproxen and diclofenac.

Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Health & Governance

- **In News:** All pneumonia patients must be notified to the IDSP so that they can be tested for COVID-19
- IDSP is an initiative by the **Ministry of Health and Family Affairs** started in 2004 with the assistance of World Bank.
- **Objective:**
 - To strengthen/maintain decentralized laboratory based IT enabled disease surveillance system for epidemic prone diseases to monitor disease trends
 - To detect and respond to outbreaks in early rising phase through trained Rapid Response Team (RRTs)
- **Programme Components**

- Integration and decentralization of surveillance activities through establishment of **surveillance units at Centre, State and District level.**
- **Human Resource Development** – Training of State and District Surveillance Officers, Rapid Response Team and other Medical & Paramedical staff on principles of disease surveillance.
- Use of ICT for collection, collation, compilation, analysis and dissemination of data.
- Strengthening of public health laboratories.
- Inter sectoral Co-ordination for zoonotic diseases

Huntington disease

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Health

- Huntington disease (HD) is a progressive **genetic disorder affecting the brain**
- It causes uncontrolled movements, impaired coordination of balance and movement, a decline in cognitive abilities, difficulty in concentrating and memory lapses, mood swings and personality changes

How is the disease caused?

- A gene called HTT are involved in the production of a **protein called huntingtin.**
- When these **genes mutate**, they provide faulty instructions leading to production of abnormal huntingtin proteins and these **form into clumps.**
- The clumps disrupt the normal functioning of the brain cells, which eventually leads to **death of neurons in the brain**, resulting in Huntington disease.

World Tuberculosis Day

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-II- Health

- It is observed every year on **24th March**, to commemorate the anniversary **discovery of the TB bacteria** by Dr. Robert Koch in 1882.
- **Objective:** To build public awareness about the global epidemic of tuberculosis (TB).
- UN has marked 2030 as a global target to eliminate TB worldwide
- National Strategic Plan for Tuberculosis Elimination (2017-2025) by Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare aims to eliminate the prevalence of TB by 2025

Prelims Value Addition

- **Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY)** is a direct benefit transfer (DBT) scheme for nutritional support to TB patients rolled out in April 2018 by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Under the Yojana, **financial incentive of Rs.500/month** is to be provided for each notified TB patient (registered on NIKSHAY portal) for duration during which the patient is on anti-TB treatment.
- NPY is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** under National Health Mission
- **'TB Harega Desh Jeetega' Campaign** was launched in Sep 2019 consisting of three pillars - clinical approach, public health component and active community participation – as a part of strategy to eliminate TB by 2025

Drug Security: COVID-

Do you know?

- All drugs are made up of two core components: API & Excipients
- Indian pharmaceutical industry is the 3rd largest in the world by volume but is largely dependent on China
- India imports 80% of the APIs used for drug manufacturing from China

What is Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API)?

- Part of any drug that produces its effects.
- Intended to furnish pharmacological activity or other direct effect in the diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment, or prevention of disease

What are Excipients?

- Substances other than the drug that helps deliver the medication to your system.
- Excipients are **chemically inactive substances**, such as lactose or mineral oil.
- Example: for headache, acetaminophen is the API, while the liquid in the gel-capsule or the bulk of a pill is the excipient.

Why India is poor in APIs?

- Weak Domestic Manufacturing sector
- Inadequate government support
- Lack of Central-State cooperation in effective policy making

Impact on COVID-19 on India's API sector

- Hostage to Supply Side disruption due to high dependence on China on APIs thus endangering the drug security in India
- Price Rise of pharmaceutical drugs
- Impacts the affordable healthcare services
- Disproportionately impacts the poor

Measures taken by the government (on 21st March 2020)

1. Production Linked Incentive Scheme

- **Objective:** To encourage domestic manufacture of key starting materials (raw material used in manufacture of APIs), drug intermediates, and APIs.
- Financial incentive will be given to eligible manufacturers of identified 53 critical bulk drugs on their incremental sales over the base year (2019-20) for a period of 6 years.
- A sum of Rs. 6,940 crore has been approved for this scheme

2. Promotion of Bulk Drug Parks

- 3 mega Bulk Drug parks will be developed in India in partnership with States.
- Parks will have common facilities such as solvent recovery plant, distillation plant, power & steam units, common effluent treatment plant etc.
- A sum of Rs. 3,000 crore has been approved for this scheme for next 5 years.

Impact of the above two initiatives:

- Reduces manufacturing cost of bulk drugs in the country
- Reduces dependency on other countries for bulk drugs

- Attracts private sector and foreign investment into the sector
- Creates additional employment

Challenges ahead

- Issues with **Government's price-capping policy** – so less private player participation
- Drug makers are forced to cut costs to maximise profits - favour cheap Chinese APIs with basic minimum quality, Indian made APIs
- Also capping prices doesn't really succeed (study from different countries)
- Drug price control Order (DPCO) needs reforms and amendments

Connecting the dots

- Medical Devices Amendment Rules
- How India can attain self-sufficiency in manufacturing drugs

Pandemics of the world

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Health; GS III – Economy; Disaster Management

In News:

- COVID-19 is the **most recent disease** which was declared as **pandemic** by the World Health Organization.

A glimpse through major pandemics of the world which caused huge loss to life:

The Plague of Justinian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It killed between 30 million and 50 million people. • The cause of the Plague of Justinian was infectious fever caused by Yersinia pestis.
Black death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 1347 and 1351, it spread throughout Europe, killing approximately 25 million people. • It is believed to have been the result of plague - an infectious fever caused by bacterium Yersinia pestis. • It was likely transmitted from rodents to humans by the bite of infected fleas.
Smallpox (15th - 17th centuries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smallpox claimed the lives of approximately 20 million people, close to 90% of the population, in the Americas. • The pandemic helped Europeans colonize and develop the newly vacated areas.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smallpox is caused by infection with the variola virus transmitted through various ways.
Cholera (1817 - 1823)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first cholera pandemic began in Jessore, India. It was the first of 7 major cholera pandemics that have killed millions of people. The World Health Organization has called cholera "the forgotten pandemic". Its seventh outbreak, which began in 1961, continues to this day. It is caused by eating food or drinking water contaminated with a bacterium called Vibrio cholera.
Spanish Flu or H1N1 (1918 - 1919)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is caused due to H1N1 virus. It infected around 500 million people, or a third of the world's population, of that time. The pandemic was responsible for killing over 50 million people globally.
Hong Kong Flu or H3N2 (1968 - 1970)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Global fatalities were around one million. It was caused by an H3N2 strain of the influenza A virus. It is believed that the virus responsible for the Asian flu evolved and re-emerged 10 years later into this so-called "Hong Kong flu". H3N2 was exceptionally contagious.
HIV/AIDS (1981 - present)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since 1981, 75 million people have had the HIV virus and approximately 32 million have died as a result. HIV/AIDS is a persistent epidemic that continues to impact millions of people every year.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HIV infection is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). • The virus can be transmitted through contact with infected blood, semen or vaginal fluids.
SARS (2002 - 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome, is an illness caused by one of the 7 coronaviruses that can infect humans. • In 2003, an outbreak that originated in the Guangdong province of China became a global pandemic. • It infected around 8,000 people and killing 774 of them. • The consequences of the 2003 SARS pandemic were largely limited due to an intense public health response by global authorities.
Swine Flu or H1N1 (2009 - 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was a new form of the influenza virus which emerged in 2009. • It infected approximately millions of people with global deaths in the range of 151,700 to 575,400. • It is called the "swine flu" because it appeared to cross over from pigs to humans in transmission. • 80% of the virus-related deaths occurred in people younger than 65.
Ebola (2014 - 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It began in a small village in Guinea in 2014 and spread to a handful of neighbouring countries in West Africa. • It is caused by infection with a virus of the Filoviridae family, genus Ebolavirus. • The virus killed 11,325 of the 28,600 infected people, with most cases occurring in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

Coronavirus, or COVID-19 (2019 - present)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. • Worldwide cases have surpassed 500,000 with more than 24,000 deaths globally. • It is believed to be transmitted from animals to humans. • The vast majority of cases are reported from USA now. • On March 11, the WHO characterized the outbreak as a pandemic. • Estimates indicate that Coronavirus could eventually infect 40% to 70% of the global population. • Practicing social distancing is recommended. • The damage to the world economy threaten the worst recession since the Great Depression or the "panics" of the 1800s, depending on the scale of government responses.
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Corona kavach

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance; Health

In News:

- Recently, the **details of air travellers were leaked online** raising privacy concerns.

Key takeaways:

- A forward of a list containing **details** of the passengers was received on number of **social media platforms**, which were forwarded further.
- The list included names, passport numbers, flight details, mobile phone numbers and addresses of all travellers.
- Apart from the **threat of violence**, each person on the list may be vulnerable to a number of crimes, like **online fraud**, **electronic impersonation** or **identity theft**.
- Beta app **Corona Kavach** has raised some red flags due to this leak.

Important value additions:

Corona Kavach

- It is a beta-version app by the **Ministry of Electronic and Information Technology**.
- It is an app **designed to track** the location of COVID-19 infected people and **alert subscribers** when they come near their locations.
- It has already been **downloaded** by more than 100,000 people.

- It is **mandatory** for all COVID-19 patients to download the app to track their whereabouts.

CoNTeC

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health; Governance

In News:

- The Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare launched the **National Teleconsultation Centre (CoNTeC)** recently.

Key takeaways:

- The project is **conceptualised** by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- It will be **implemented** by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi.
- The doctors across the country will be able to **connect to AIIMS in real time** for treatment of the COVID-19 patients.
- This facility shall be available 24X7.
- The **goal** of the facility is to at least **connect the doctors** in the country together to discuss amongst themselves the **protocols undertaken** and provide the **best treatment** accordingly.
- Small states** will be able to make use of the **vast experience of the doctors at AIIMS**.

Important value additions:

National Teleconsultation Centre (CoNTeC)

- It is a **Telemedicine Hub**.
- Expert doctors from **various clinical domains** shall answer the **multifaceted questions** from specialists from all over the country.
- It is a **multi-modal telecommunications hub**.
- 2 way audio-video** and **text communications** can be undertaken from any part of the **country** as well as the **world** at large.
- The **modes of communication** will include simple **mobile telephony** and two way **video communications** through WhatsApp, Skype and Google Duo.

Force Majeure

Part of: GS Prelims

In News:

- The Ministry of Railways has decided that the **period from 22.03.2020 to 14.04.2020** shall be treated under **force majeure**.

Key takeaways:

- The Ministry of Railways clarified that **spread of coronavirus** should be considered as a natural calamity and **Force Majeure** clause may be invoked.
- Charges like **demurrage, wharfage** won't be applicable during this period.

Important value additions:

Force Majeure

- Force majeure (FM) means **extraordinary events or circumstances beyond human control** such as an event described as an Act of God (like a natural calamity).

- Demurrage - A charge payable to the owner of a chartered ship on failure to load or discharge the ship within the time agreed.
- Wharfage - Accommodation provided at a wharf for the loading, unloading, or storage of goods.

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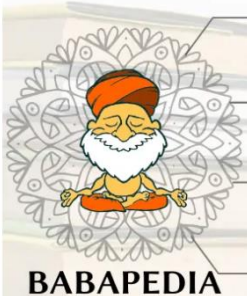
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Solar Charkha Mission

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Polity & Governance

In News:

- It was launched by Ministry of Micro Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) in 2018.
- Solar Charkha units are an innovative way of cotton production by using solar energy. They have been classified as Village Industries.
- The mission will oversee the implementation of 50 Solar Charkha Clusters across the country with a budget of Rs.550 crore for the year 2018-19 and 2019-20.
- The scheme is envisaged to generate direct employment nearly to one lakh persons in the approved clusters.

Objectives of the scheme

- To create awareness about Khadi by bringing up the sales from Rs. 26,000 crores to Rs. 1 lakh crores.
- To have an eco-friendly environment.
- To revitalize the cotton industry.
- To extend self-employment in rural and urban areas.
- To make cotton generation a reliable and profitable business.



- Pic Source: India.Com

Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana (MGBBY)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

- The scheme aims at providing **social security benefits** like life, accidental & disability insurance coverage **to handloom weavers/workers**.
- **Age group:** 51-59 years
- **Coverage:** Across the country
- **Implementing Body:** Ministry of Textiles

- The claim benefits are provided by **LIC** directly into the bank account of beneficiaries through **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)**.

Tech for Tribal

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II-Governance

- It is an initiative of **TRIFED** supported by **Ministry of MSME**
- The project aims at **capacity building and imparting entrepreneurship skills** to tribal forest produce gatherers enrolled under the Pradhan Mantri VanDhan Yojana(PMVDY).
- The trainees will undergo a 30 days program over six weeks comprising 120 sessions.
- **Partnering Institutions:** IIT-Kanpur, IIT-Roorkee, IIM Indore, Kalinga Institute of Social Science, Bhubaneshwar and SRIJAN, Jaipur

Prelims Value Addition

About Pradhan Mantri VanDhan Yojana(PMVDY).

- It is an initiative of the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED**, launched in 2018, to improve tribal incomes through the value addition of tribal products.
- It is a **Market Linked Tribal Entrepreneurship Development Program** for forming clusters of **tribal Self-Help-Groups (SHGs)** and strengthening them into Tribal Producer Companies
- It aims to set-up tribal community owned Minor Forest Produce (MFP)-centric multi-purpose Van Dhan Vikas Kendras.
- The Kendras would act as **common facility centres for procurement cum value addition to locally available MFPs**.
- One typical Van Dhan Vikas Kendra comprises of 15 Self Help Groups, each consisting of 20 Tribal gatherers.
- These SHGs will get training on sustainable harvesting/collection, primary processing & value addition and also provided with working capital to conduct their business.

CM announces loan waiver under Badavara Bandhu

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Welfare schemes; Governance

In News:

1. Karnataka Chief Minister recently announced waiver of loans under the **Badavara Bandhu scheme**, to provide relief to the poor due to COVID -19 pandemic.

Important value additions:

Badavara Bandhu scheme

2. Under the scheme, **mobile banks** were launched to disburse interest-free loans to street vendors and small traders.
3. Small traders will get **loans** of up to Rs.10,000 **without any interest and collateral**.
4. The beneficiaries will have the flexibility of repaying the loan on **daily instalments** of Rs.100 or **one-time repayment** within three months.
5. If they repay within the stipulated time, they are eligible for a fresh loan of up to Rs.15,000.

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance; Welfare schemes

In News:

- The **₹1.7 Lakh Crore** relief package – named PMGKY- was announced by Union government to alleviate the distress caused by COVID-19 pandemic.
- The **Prime Minister's Garib Kalyan (PMGK) package** was recently unveiled amidst COVID-19 pandemic and the 21-day associated lockdown to combat the disease.
- It mainly targets **poor people** and people working in **unorganised sector** of the country.
- It consists of a **range of measures** that the Government of India will take to alleviate the economic, health, and food-related distress.

Do You Know?

- The cost of the COVID-19 lockdown in India is pegged at nearly ₹9 lakh crore
- This is the third shock that the informal economy faces, after demonetisation and GST.
- US announced 2 trillion USD (Rs 148 Lakh crore) stimulus package to fight COVID-19

Key takeaways:

- Reliefs/Schemes under PMGK package:

1. For farmers –

- **Rs 2,000 per farmer** will be provided under the **PM-KISAN** scheme.

2. For pensioners –

- An additional **Rs 1,000 per month** pension for the next 3 months for those receiving **old age, widow or disability pensions**.

3. For women –

- **Rs 500 per month** will be transferred for the next 3 months to women holding a **Jan Dhan** bank account.
- Registered beneficiaries under **Ujjwala Yojana** will get **one LPG cylinder per month free of cost** for the next three months.
- Women Self Help Groups can now take collateral-free loans up to Rs 20 lakh instead of the existing limit of Rs 10 lakh under **National Rural Livelihood Mission**.

4. For labourers –

- Wages paid for manual labour under **MGNREGA** have been increased from Rs 180 per day to Rs 202 per day.

5. For BPL families –

- Over the next 3 months, each person who is covered under the **National Food Security Act** would get an **additional five kg wheat or rice** for free, in addition to the 5 kg of subsidised food grains already provided through the **Public Distribution System (PDS)**.

- **One kg of pulse** per household would also be provided for free.
- 6. For companies –
 - **For small companies** with 100 employees or less, of whom 90% earn less than Rs. 15,000 a month, the **Centre will bear the cost** of both employer and employee contribution to the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) for the next three months.
 - The scheme's regulations will also be amended to allow non-refundable advance of **75% of the amount** standing to the credit of the EPF member, **or 3 months' worth of wages**, whichever is lower.
- 7. For construction workers –
 - The Centre also directed the States to use the Rs. 31,000 crore available under Building and Other **Construction Workers Welfare Boards** to provide support to the workers registered under the scheme.
 - The money already available in the "**district (-level) mineral fund**" to pay for medical testing and screening for the coronavirus shall also be utilised under PMGK package.

The Key features of PMGKY are:

- **Healthcare Workers:** Insurance cover of ₹50 lakh
- **Food grains to Poor:** 80 crore poor people under National Food Security Act will receive five extra kg of wheat or rice and 1 kg of pulses
- **MGNREGA workers** (13.63 crore): Wage increased from ₹182/day to ₹202/day
- **Jan Dhan Women Account holders** (20.4 crore): DBT of ₹500/ month for next three months
- **Senior Citizens, disabled & Poor widows** (3 crore): Ex-gratia of ₹1000 (through existing pension schemes)
- **Farmers** (8.7 crore): Front loading of ₹2000 to them under existing PM Kisan Yojana
- **Ujjwala Beneficiaries** (8.3 crore): Free cylinders for next three months
- **Wage earners:** Those earning below ₹15000/month in firms having less than 100 workers will receive 24% of their monthly wages into their PF accounts for next three months
- **Construction workers:** Centre has directed States to use Construction worker's welfare fund to give relief to 3.5 crore registered workers

Is there a specific strategy used by government in this relief package?

1. Government has followed **two-pronged approach**
 - Ensuring a steady supply of food and cooking gas to poor people
 - Easing cash woes of the vulnerable sections of society
2. **Fiscally prudent:** By utilizing existing schemes funding for the package is kept within the budget so as to retain control over the deficit
3. **Preserving Financial resources** -Given the uncertainty over the length of crisis – government may announce future relief packages to adapt with changing situation

Challenges:

- **Modest cash transfer** might not be enough given the drying up of incomes for the vulnerable sections of society

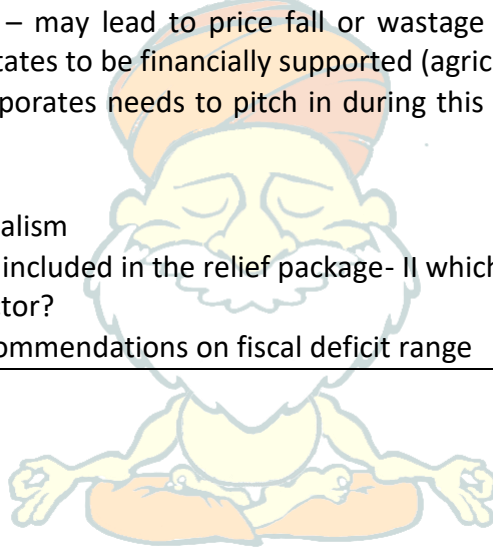
- **Implementation issues:** People may face difficulties to draw money from their accounts during the lockdown
- **Migrant labourers** may find difficulties to access the extra food grain announced
- Package does not address the challenges being faced by **Informal MSMEs** and other hard-hit sectors.

Way ahead:

- **Intervention by RBI** like providing regulatory forbearance, moratorium on interest payments, changing classification norms, and ensuring easy access to credit.
- **Centre needs to enhance the resources of State** through measures like
 - Releasing all the pending dues owed to the state governments on account of GST compensation.
 - Assist states in raising finances from markets (by giving sovereign guarantees)
 - Sharing bonanza from fall in Crude Oil Prices
 - Consult States to ensure that supply chain, spread across multiple states, of essential commodities is not disrupted
 - Harvest time – may lead to price fall or wastage due to disruption caused by lockdown – States to be financially supported (agriculture is a State subject)
- Civil Society and Corporates needs to pitch in during this crisis with their financial and human resources

Connecting the dots

- Compassionate Capitalism
- What all needs to be included in the relief package- II which would be focused on middle class & corporate sector?
- N. K. Singh Panel recommendations on fiscal deficit range



US-Taliban pact (Doha Agreement)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- International Affairs

In News

After nearly a year long negotiation, USA has signed a peace agreement with Taliban (Afghan government not a signatory). **India attended the signing ceremony in Doha**, and was represented by Ambassador to Qatar.

Separately, a joint declaration between the Afghan government (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan) and the US was issued in Kabul.

Brief background to the deal

- USA went into Afghanistan in October 2001, a few weeks after the 9/11 terror attacks, with the goals of defeating terrorists (particularly Al-Qaeda) and rebuilding and stabilising the country.
- USA's war in Afghanistan is said to be the longest war (19 years) in its history.
- The Afghan war is estimated to have cost \$2-trillion, with more than 3,500 American and coalition soldiers killed.
- Afghanistan lost hundreds of thousands of people, both civilians and soldiers.
- After all these, the Taliban is at its strongest moment since the U.S. launched the war. It now controls half of the country, mainly in its hinterlands.
- The war had entered into a stalemate long ago and the U.S. failed to turn it around despite both American Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump having sent additional troops.
- Faced with no other way, the U.S. just wants to leave Afghanistan.

Key elements of the US-Taliban Pact:

1. Troops Withdrawal: The US will draw down to 8,600 troops in 135 days from the present 14000 troops. And **all troops will be out within 14 months.**

The alliance and its partners in Afghan security mission, known as "Resolute", would reduce their military presence in the country in recognition of the new agreement. At present, resolute consists of 17000 troops from 39 countries

2. Taliban Commitment: Taliban will not allow any of its members, other individuals or groups, including al-Qaeda, to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies (**does not include India**)

3. Intra-Afghan Negotiations: Taliban would engage with Kabul government directly from March 10th to find a lasting solution to the civil war

4. Sanctions Removal: UN sanctions on Taliban leaders to be removed by three months (by May 29) and US sanctions by August 27.

Pakistan has been accused of giving refugee to some these sanctioned persons and this has been one of the reasons for Pakistan being in FATF grey list (supporting terrorists)

5. Prisoner Release: Up to 5,000 imprisoned Taliban and up to 1,000 prisoners from “the other side” held by Taliban “will be released” by March 10 — which is when intra-Afghan negotiations are supposed to start, in Oslo

6. Ceasefire: The agreement states ceasefire will be simply “an item on the agenda” when intra-Afghan talks start, and indicates actual ceasefire will come with the “completion” of an Afghan political agreement.

Part II of the article - will deal with Challenges w.r.t the deal and Implications of deal on India

Connecting the dots

- P5+1 deal with Iran
- Impact of Taliban’s victory on the other extremists in the region

Challenges Ahead for the Deal:

- The deal deliberately **excluded the Afghan government** because the Taliban do not see the government as legitimate rulers. By giving in to the Taliban’s demand, the U.S. has practically called into question the legitimacy of the government it backs.
- U.S. has made **several concessions** to the Taliban in the agreement. The Taliban was not pressed enough to declare a ceasefire. Both sides settled for a seven-day “reduction of violence” period before signing the deal.
- **Disunity within Afghan Government:**
 - President **Ashraf Ghani** (belongs to Pashtun- largest ethnic group) and his primary challenger Chief Executive **Abdullah Abdullah** (Tajiks- second largest ethnic group) threatening to set up parallel governments after conflict over 2019 election results.
 - Concessions made by Mr. Ghani’s government to the Taliban will likely be interpreted by Mr. Abdullah’s supporters as an intra-Pashtun deal reached at the expense of other ethnic groups, especially the Tajiks and the Uzbeks, who formed the bulk of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance from 1996 to 2001.
 - Consequently, ethnic fissures may descend into open conflict.
- **Disunity within Taliban**
 - Taliban is composed of various regional and tribal groups acting semi-autonomously.
 - All of them may not be amenable to following the directions of its top leadership.
 - It is, therefore, possible that some of them may continue to engage in assaults on government troops and even American forces during the withdrawal process thus threatening the deal
- **Prisoner release:** Afghan government is not on the same page with USA on the release of Taliban prisoners. It has stated the prisoners release can be on the agenda of Intra-Afghan talks and not a precondition to the talks.
- **No promises on Civil Liberties and Democracy:** Taliban, whose rule is known for strict religious laws, banishing women from public life, shutting down schools and unleashing systemic discrimination on religious and ethnic minorities, has not made any promises on whether it would respect civil liberties or accept the Afghan Constitution.

Taliban and India

- India and the Taliban have had a bitter past- IC-814 hijack in 1999,
- The Taliban perceived India as a hostile country, as India had supported the anti-Taliban force Northern Alliance in the 1990s.
- India never gave diplomatic and official recognition to the Taliban when it was in power during 1996-2001
- India has been backing the Ghani-led government and was among very few countries to congratulate Ghani on his 2019 contested victory.
- Indian foreign policy establishment has shied away from engaging with the Taliban directly, as it is viewed as a proxy of Pakistan. India has supported for enduring and inclusive peace and reconciliation which is “**Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled**”.
- India has consistently supported for an “independent, sovereign, democratic, pluralistic and inclusive” Afghanistan in which interests of all sections of society are preserved.

Implications of the deal on India

- The deal legitimises Taliban and its actions. This weakens India’s fight against all sorts of terrorism and violence adopted by such extremist groups.
- India has a major stake in the continuation of the current **Afghanistan government** in power, which it considers a **strategic asset vis-à-vis Pakistan**.
- As a result of the deal, Pakistan military (through its ally Taliban) will become dominant players in Kabul’s power circles, which is not aligned with India’s interests
- Although the pact mentions al-Qaeda, it is silent on other terrorist groups — such as anti-India groups Lashkar-e-Toiba or Jaish-e-Mohammed. India, not being an US ally, is not covered under this pact.
- Ghani government, which India has recognised as winner of the 2019 election, will only serve for an interim period as a result of this deal
- India will have to **engage more directly with Taliban** which already controls half of Afghanistan’s territory
- As Afghanistan is the gateway to Central Asia, the deal might dampen India’s interest in Central Asia.
- “The bottomline is that India cannot look at the agreements or the route to Kabul via Washington’s view” - Anand Arni (former Special Secretary in RAW)

Connecting the dots

- India’s projects in Afghanistan - Salma Dam

Moral impact of deal on anti-India terrorist groups

Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) :A dam of contention in Africa

About GERD

- It was formerly known as the **Millennium Dam** and sometimes referred to as **Hidase Dam**
- It will be **Africa’s biggest hydropower project (6.45 GW)** when completed as well as the seventh largest in the world
- The **hydroelectric dam** is being built on the world’s longest river **Nile (north-flowing river in Africa)**, in the lowlands of Ethiopia.

- GERD's storage capacity of **74 billion cubic meters of water** (Bhakra Dam in India on Sutlej river has maximum capacity of 9 billion cubic meters of water)
- Ethiopia began construction in 2011 (*think political turmoil in Egypt at that time!*) at a cost of \$4 billion and is approximately 70% complete as of Nov 2019
- Ethiopia wants to fill up the gigantic reservoir in 6 years

However, the mega dam has caused a row between Egypt and Ethiopia, with Sudan caught in between, which some fear could lead to war, and the US is now helping to mediate.



Pic [Source](#)

Significance of the dam for Ethiopia

- Ethiopia, Africa's second-most populated country and a manufacturing hub, views the mega dam as a symbol of its sovereignty.
- **Bridges Infrastructure Gap:** Ethiopia has an acute shortage of electricity, with 60% of its population not connected to the grid.
- **Export Potential:** The energy generated will be enough to have its citizens connected and sell the surplus power to neighbouring countries.
- **Economic Resurgence:** There is an element of national pride in the timely completion of the GERD, as Ethiopia's recent economic resurgence has revived the old vision of Great Ethiopia.
- **Politically Important:** There is also a lot at stake for the government of Mr. Ahmed (PM of Ethiopia), who faces a difficult general election this year after the euphoria of the 2018 peace process with Eritrea has largely faded.

Does anyone else benefit?

- Yes. Neighbouring countries including Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Djibouti and Eritrea are likely to benefit from the power generated by the dam.
- Many of these countries have huge power deficits.
- For Sudan there is the added advantage that the flow of the river would be regulated by the dam - meaning it would be the same all-year round.
- Usually the country suffers from serious flooding in August and September.

Concerns Raised by Egypt

- Egypt fears the project will allow Ethiopia to **control the flow of Africa's longest river**
- Hydroelectric power stations do not consume water, but the speed with which Ethiopia fills up the dam's reservoir will affect the flow downstream.
- **The longer it takes to fill the reservoir, the less impact there will be on the level of the river.**
- **Heart of the dispute:** Ethiopia wants to fill the reservoir in 6 years whereas Egypt wants to fill the reservoir, between 10 and 21 years, and for the release of a minimum of 40 billion cubic metres annually.
- Egypt, which relies on the Nile for 90% of its freshwater supply, is apprehensive that a rapid filling of the reservoir in upstream Ethiopia would cause a drastic reduction in supplies.
- Egypt perceives that the project would lead to diversion of waters to its own High **Aswan Dam**.
- Resistance by Egypt is rooted in History and Geopolitics:
 - A 1929 treaty (and a subsequent one in 1959) gave Egypt and Sudan rights to nearly all of the Nile waters.
 - The colonial-era document also gave Egypt veto powers over any projects by upstream countries that would affect its share of the waters.
 - Neither agreement made any allowance for the water needs of the other riparian states that were not parties to the deal, including Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda.

- **Lack of Consultation:** Ethiopia has said it should not be bound by the decades-old treaty and went ahead and started building its dam at the start of the Arab Spring in March 2011 without consulting Egypt.

Challenges Ahead

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

Way forward

- An agreement involving Egypt, Ethiopia and others river basin countries for equitable sharing of water
- Sustainable use of river water given the ever increasing problem of pollution and climate change.
- These countries can **take inspiration from Indus Water Treaty** signed between India and Pakistan brokered by World Bank in 1960. The treaty has been functioning smoothly and has endured three wars over nearly six decades.

Conclusion

- The challenges for the fair utilisation of waters among the riparian states have only been compounded by the pressures of population growth and the effects of global warming
- While the parties have sought international mediation they also need to rely on regional cooperation for long enduring solution.

Windrush Scandal

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- International Affairs

In News:

- The British government apologised for Windrush scandal i.e. its treatment of Britons of Caribbean origin, who were wrongly detained or deported for being illegal immigrants
- Windrush generation refers to **migrants from the Caribbean Commonwealth who had come to the U.K.** at a time when they had the right to remain indefinitely in Britain, but had had their rights questioned under a toughened immigration regime.

- The Windrush generation is **named after one of the many vessels** that ferried some half a million people from the Caribbean islands to the U.K. in the late 1940s.

G7

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- International Affairs

- **In News:** US is scrapping 2020's G7 summit at Camp David near Washington due to the COVID-19 crisis and will instead hold the event by videoconference.
- The Group of Seven (G7) is a forum of the **world's seven largest developed economies** whose government leaders meet annually to discuss international economic and monetary issues.
- G7 countries are— Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States
- The G-7 has its roots in an **informal meeting** of the finance ministers of France, West Germany, the U.S, Great Britain, and Japan (the Group of Five) in the wake of the **1973 oil crisis**.
- In 2019, the 45th G7 summit was hosted by France
- As of 2018, the seven countries involved represent 58% of the global net wealth (\$317 trillion) and more than 46% of the global GDP based on nominal values

G20 virtual summit

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Global groupings

In News:

- **G20 leaders** are likely to hold a video conference on 25th March, 2020 to discuss the **coronavirus pandemic**.

Key takeaways:

- **Saudi Arabia**, the current president of the forum, declared that it would convene a **virtual summit** on the extraordinary threat posed by the virus that has **killed thousands** across the world.

Important value additions:

G20

- The G20 (or Group of Twenty) is an **international forum** for the governments and central bank governors from 19 countries and the European Union (EU).
- It was **founded** in 1999.
- Its **aim** is to discuss policy pertaining to the promotion of **international financial stability**.
- The **G20 members** are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Republic of Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union (EU).

Coronavirus pandemic

- It is an on-going pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by **severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)**.

G20 virtual summit second time

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Global groupings

In News:

- Amidst COVID-19 pandemic, G20 summit was held through video conferencing, recently.

Key takeaways:

- G20 nations **pledged** a united front in the fight against coronavirus.
- They also committed to inject **\$5 trillion** into the global economy to ensure the situation of deep recession doesn't arise.
- G20 leaders also **pledged to work** with bodies such as the **International Monetary Fund** to deploy a **robust financial package** to support the **developing nations** which **do not have access** to capital markets or adequate health facilities.
- Other **affected countries also joined** the virtual summit including Spain, Jordan, Singapore and Switzerland.
- Leaders also **agreed to contribute** to the WHO-led **COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund** on a voluntary basis.
- G20 was criticised recently for being slow to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

Important value additions:

COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund

- It is a global fund for supporting the work of the World Health Organization in containing the 2019-20 coronavirus pandemic.
- It was launched in Geneva, Switzerland.

International Monetary Fund

- It is an **international organization** headquartered in Washington, D.C.
- It works to foster global **monetary cooperation**, secure **financial stability**, facilitate **international trade**, promote **high employment** and sustainable **economic growth**, and **reduce poverty** around the world.

[United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund \(UNICEF\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Global groupings

In News:

- The UNICEF recently appealed to the governments worldwide to **not to ignore life-saving health interventions** such as immunisation in their efforts to contain the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Key takeaways:

- The children from the poorest families in **countries affected by conflicts and natural disasters** will be at the greatest risk.

- It is also feared that **critical life-saving services**, including immunisation may be **disrupted**, especially in **Africa, Asia and the Middle East** where they are essentially needed.
- The UNICEF also **announced that** it would **increase support** to all countries so that **children continue their learning** despite schools being shut.
- Initial sum of **\$9 million** had already been allocated to help governments and education partners **develop plans for alternative learning programmes** and **ensure access to remote learning**.

Important value additions:

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

- It is a United Nations agency **responsible for providing** humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide.
- It is among **the most widespread and recognizable social welfare organizations** in the world.
- UNICEF's activities include:
 - Immunizations and disease prevention
 - Administering treatment for children and mothers with HIV
 - Enhancing childhood and maternal nutrition
 - Improving sanitation
 - Promoting education
 - Providing emergency relief in response to disasters
- UNICEF relies **entirely on contributions** from governments and private donors.
- Its Headquarter is in New York City, US.

COVID-19: A threat to food security

The economic disruption caused by pandemic & the lockdown is still unfolding (IMF has already declared global recession). Supply chains are disrupted – especially the ones related to food. If not cooperated at global level, this could lead to shortage of food for millions

Do You Know?

- Currently 113 million people experience acute hunger in the world
- One in every 9 people in the world is undernourished.
- Goal 2 of SDGs seeks to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030

Has the pandemic led to food insecurity?

- No, as of now the countries have sufficient stocks to deal with food needs of people
- Essentials like milk (Amul Cooperative) and food grains supply chains are working fine
- However, there has been anecdotal reports of crowded supermarket sieges from some parts of the world

What can be the future problems associated with global food security?

- **Labour shortages** may impact the harvest of upcoming produce leading to shortages

- **Shortage of fertilizers**, veterinary medicines and other input could also affect agricultural production.
- **Closures of restaurants** diminishes the demand for fresh produce and fisheries products, impacting small & marginal farmers that has long term consequences on Urban areas
- **Food processing sector** will face difficulties due to shortage of working capital and workers
- Countries adopt **restrictive trade measures** to safeguard their own national food security
- Restricted trade practices will lead serious **disruptions in the world food market** resulting in increased price volatility & price hikes.
- **Low-income food-deficit countries** will be the worst hit in case of restrictive global food markets, thus precipitating humanitarian crisis (hunger deaths)

Way forward:

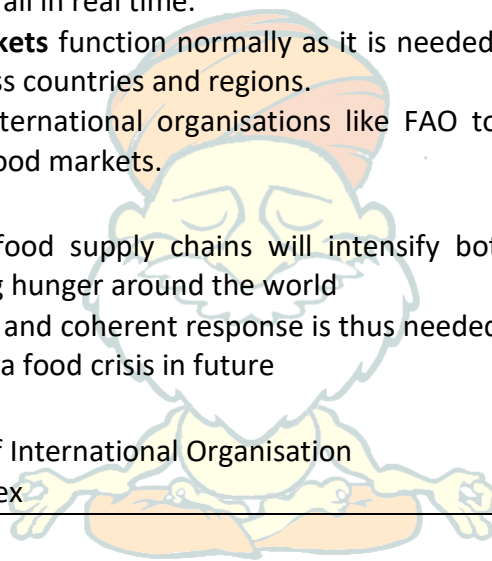
- Avoid restrictive trade practices by National governments
- **Transparency:** Information on prices, production, consumption and stocks of food should be made available to all in real time.
- **Ensuring global markets** function normally as it is needed for smoothening supply and demand shocks across countries and regions.
- **Proactive role** by international organisations like FAO to contain unwarranted panic behaviour in global food markets.

Conclusion

- Any disruptions to food supply chains will intensify both human suffering and the challenge of reducing hunger around the world
- Globally coordinated and coherent response is thus needed to prevent this public health crisis from triggering a food crisis in future

Connecting the dots

- Democratic nature of International Organisation
- FAO's Food Price Index



Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- International Affairs

In News:

- India joined IOC as an Observer State
- IOC is five-nation grouping in the Western Indian Ocean, which includes Madagascar, Comoros, Seychelles, Mauritius and French Reunion.
- Significance of IOC: For its geographical location, as the islands sit around a “key choke-point” in the Indian Ocean — the Mozambique Channel
- This channel is being watched more closely as the U.S.-Iran tensions threaten the Strait of Hormuz.



Pic [Source](#)

Did You Know?

- In December 2019, the Ministry of External Affairs decided to include Madagascar, Comoros and Reunion as part of the IOR (Indian Ocean Region) desk along with Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles
- China was made an observer of IOC in 2016
- International Organization of the Francophonie (the 54-nation French-speaking collective), the European Union (EU) and Malta became observers of IOC in 2017

PM calls for SAARC videoconference on COVID-19

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- International Affairs

In News:

- The aim of the conference to discuss a common strategy to tackle COVID-19.
- SAARC has had no summit level meeting since 2014, and has been shelved since then due to India-Pakistan tensions
- Set up in 1985, SAARC was the first such grouping for the South Asian region.
- SAARC members include: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka
- While SAARC member-states occupy just 3% of the world's landmass, they account for 21% of its population.
- SAARC secretariat is based in Kathmandu

Back to SAARC

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's convened a **video conference** of leaders of the **SAARC** to collaborate on tackling COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic.

The virtual summit is the first high-level SAARC meet since 2014, and comes after India's pulling out of the 2016 summit following the Uri attack;

The virtual summit led to the setting up of a

- **SAARC COVID-19 emergency fund** — India will contribute \$10-million
- **Rapid Response Team** (of doctors, specialists, testing equipment and attendant infrastructure) to be put at the disposal of the SAARC,

About South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

- It was established on 8 December 1985.
- Its member countries are—Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan (2005)
- The **Headquarters and Secretariat** of the Association are at **Kathmandu, Nepal**.
- SAARC comprises 3% of the world's area, 21% of the world's population and 3.8% (2018) of the global economy

Significance of SAARC for India

- **Neighbourhood first:** Primacy to the country's immediate neighbours.
- **Geostrategic significance:** Can counter China (OBOR initiative) through engaging our neighbours in development process and economic cooperation.
- **Regional stability:** These regional organisations can help in creation of mutual trust (India & Pakistan) and ensure that regional interest over ride bilateral disputes
- **Global leadership role:** It offers India a platform to showcase its leadership in the region by taking up extra responsibilities.
- **Game changer for India's Act East Policy:** Linking of South Asian economies with South East Asian region will bring further economic integration and prosperity to India particularly in its under-developed Eastern region
- **Potential for India's export:** With closer economic integration of economies in the region, India's domestic companies will get access to much bigger market thus boosting their revenues

Challenges of SAARC

- **Broad area of cooperation** leads to diversion of energy and resources.
- **Low Intra-regional trade:** South Asia is the world's least integrated region; less than 5% of the trade of SAARC countries is within.
- **Inadequate Political Will:** India's inclination towards Big powers which leads to neglecting its relationship with its neighbours
- **Bilateral tensions**, especially between India and Pakistan, spilling over into SAARC meetings.
- **Perception of India being a Big Brother** vis-à-vis its neighbours whereby India enforces its own agenda on small neighbouring countries through these groupings
- **Slow implementation** of the projects announced by India - declines India's credibility to deliver on its promises thus pushing Nations to seek help from China or West.
- **Rising China** in the region with its overarching Belt & Road initiative (Cheque book Diplomacy of China)

Impact of COVID-19 on SAARC

- Major concern is of an **escalation in the virus's spread in the subcontinent**.
- With close to 300 positive cases, South Asia has seen a much lower incidence globally, but given its much **higher population density**, it is clear that any outbreak will lead to far more casualties.
- **Afghanistan and Pakistan** have specific challenges as they share long **borders with Iran**, which has emerged, after China and Italy, as a major hub of the virus.
- Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka worry about the **impact on tourism**, which is a mainstay of their economies.
- Other concerns are about **under-reporting**, as fewer people are being tested in much of South Asia
- **Inadequate public health service infrastructure** to cope with rising cases, as all SAARC members are developing nations with sub-standard public health infrastructure.

Conclusion

- India's assertive expression of its new willingness to stabilise the region through cooperative mechanisms, without being distracted by short-sighted disingenuous ploys of a troubled Pakistan, is a welcome step for regional cooperation in tackling the pandemic
- India cannot afford to not to harvest this opportunity, after having sowed the seeds of a New South Asia.

Naval Exercise - MILAN 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- International Affairs

In News:

- The Indian Navy has postponed its multi-nation mega naval exercise 'MILAN' due to continuing spread of the coronavirus.
- Navies of about 30 friendly foreign countries were to participate in the exercise, which was to be hosted by India in Vishakapatnam from 18th - 28th March 2020.
- It is a **biennial, multilateral naval exercise** which started in **1995**.

- The Navy has held 10 editions of the Milan exercise to enhance professional interactions between friendly foreign navies and learn best practices from each other.

Sir Creek

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Bilateral Relations

In News:

- Former Pakistan Minister recalls plan for Sir Creek pact
- Sir Creek is a 96 km (60 mi) tidal estuary in uninhabited marshlands of Indus river delta on the border of India and Pakistan
- The Creek opens up in the Arabian Sea and roughly divides the Kutch region of Gujarat from the Sindh Province of Pakistan
- It was originally named Ban Ganga, but was later renamed after a British representative
- Sir Creek dispute between India & Pakistan lies in the interpretation of the maritime boundary line between Kutch and Sindh
- India claims that the boundary lies mid-channel according to international law and the Thalweg principle, while Pakistan claims that the boundary lines to the east of the creek
- Thalweg Principle states that river boundaries between two Countries may be divided by the mid-channel if the water-body is navigable



Pic Source: [India Today](#)

A revival of Multilateralism, steered by India

The COVID-19 pandemic which has confronted the world has two aspects:

- The disease is **cross-national in character**- it respects no national boundaries and are not amenable to national solutions
- **Cross-domain in nature**: The diseases has strong feedback loops. A disruption in one domain often cascades into parallel disruptions in other domains.

What should be the underlying principle to tackle COVID-19 pandemic?

- The intersection of cross-national and cross-domain challenges demand multilateral approaches.
- They require empowered international institutions of governance.

- Underlying these must be a spirit of internationalism and solidarity, a sense of belonging to a common humanity.

Rise of Nationalism

- Over the past decade and more, the world has been moving in direction opposite to that of multilateralism
- There has been an upsurge in narrow nationalism, an assertion of parochial interests over pursuit of shared interests
- There has been increased competition among states rather than embracing collaboration.
- US-China Trade war, BREXIT, US coming out of Paris Climate deal, Rise of right wing parties in Europe and decline in WTO are reflection of this trend

The Present State of Play vis-à-vis COVID-19 Pandemic

- COVID-19 has brought these deepening contradictions (need for multilateralism to combat the challenges vs rise of nationalism) into very sharp relief.
- COVID-19 pandemic is a global challenge which recognises no political boundaries It is a health crisis but is also spawning an economic crisis through disrupting global value chains and creating a simultaneous demand shock
- But **interventions to deal** with the COVID-19 crisis are so far almost entirely at the **national level**, relying on quarantine and social distancing
- There is virtually **no coordination at the international level**.
- There is also **blame game that has erupted between China and the USA** which does not augur well for international cooperation and leadership.

The long-term impact of the pandemic could follow alternative pathways.

1. **Revival of Multilateralism:** The more hopeful outcome would be for countries to finally realise that there is no option but to move away from nationalistic urges and embrace the logic of international cooperation through revived and strengthened multilateral institutions and processes.
2. **Intensification of Nationalist trends:**
 - Countries could begin to build walls around themselves
 - Existing multilateralism gets further weakened.
 - Institutions such as UN and WHO which are already marginalised may become increasingly irrelevant.
 - There could be a return to autarkic economic and trade policies and an even deeper and more pervasive anti-globalisation sentiment.

An Opportunity for India

- This is when the world needs leadership and statesmanship
- **Success of 2008 response:** U.S.-led response to the global financial and economic crisis of 2008 lead to the birth of G-20 summit and a coordinated response prevented catastrophic damage to the global economy.
- Since US and West have adopted nationalistic leaning, India which is a key G-20 country, the world's fifth largest economy and with a long tradition of international activism should step into the leadership role by advocating the multilateral approach of tackling the pandemic

- A **leadership role in mobilising global collaboration** would be in keeping with India's traditional activism on the international stage.
- India's recent **video conferencing with SAARC** nation to collaborate on tackling the pandemic in the subcontinent is a step in right direction
- This should be followed by an international initiative, either through the G-20 or through the U.N.
- India should reaffirm its policy of seeking friendship with all countries – which is the underlying principle followed in our non-alignment foreign policy practised since Nehru time.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic presents India with an opportunity to revive multilateralism, become a strong and credible champion of internationalism and assume a leadership role in a world that is adrift – Shyam Saran (former Foreign Secretary)

Connecting the dots

- India's recent initiatives in Solar energy
- BIMSTEC and SAARC – Which one should India focus on?

Terrorism and Afghanistan

Context: The terrorist attack on a gurudwara in Kabul, claimed by Islamic State (IS), has killed 25 people, mostly members of Afghanistan's persecuted Sikh minority.

Afghanistan is notorious for violence against its minority communities.

- The Hazara Shias were brutally attacked during the Taliban regime in 1996-2001.
- Most Hindus and Sikhs, once spread across the country in hundreds of thousands, have fled the country in past three decades

Do You Know?

- Post 9/11 attacks, US invaded Afghanistan with the aim to destroy Al-Qaeda terrorist group.
- For past two decades, there is a Civil War going on in Afghanistan between Taliban (Fundamentalist group supported by Pakistan) and the Afghan government (supported by USA).
- US and Taliban signed a peace deal in March 2020
- One of the provisions of peace deal was that the Taliban had committed themselves to eliminating the Islamic State from Afghanistan

Why Islamic State (IS) has attacked now?

- To send a message to its rivals that it continues to be a potent force
- Increasing influence of Taliban (reflected through peace deal with US) is clashing with IS's own interest to control vast territory & spread its own ideology
- Hence, it wants to revive its own importance vis-à-vis Taliban
- IS wants to exploit the clashes between Taliban and Afghan government – unable to finalize on the prisoner swap part of the peace deal – to increase its own influence

- Division in Afghan Political leadership –Afghanistan now has two Presidents – meaning weak coordinated response on the perpetrators of attack

What are the consequences of the attack?

- Less focus on fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in Afghanistan – Iran (epicentre of the pandemic) borders the country => dangers of Afghanistan becoming a new epicentre.
- Abandonment of minorities in the country may lead to refugee crisis
- Derails the peace deal signed between Taliban and USA
- Increased instability in the region

What is the Impact on India?

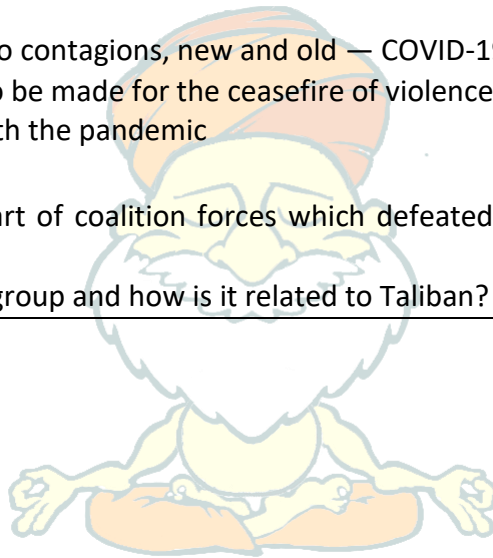
- **Internationalization of Kashmir Issue:** IS has stated that it had carried out the attack in revenge for Kashmir.
- Doubts over Pakistan's involvement in this attack shows that there is increased security threat to Indians (workers & Officials) in Afghanistan
- Increased terrorism in the region is not in the Economic & Strategic interest of India

Conclusion

- Afghanistan faces two contagions, new and old — COVID-19 and the relentless violence.
- A united effort has to be made for the ceasefire of violence so as to enable humanitarian assistance to deal with the pandemic

Connecting the dots

- Who were all the part of coalition forces which defeated Islamic State in Iraq & Syria (ISIS)?
- Who is the Haqqani group and how is it related to Taliban?



Per Capita Availability of Water

Part of: Prelims and GS-III- Economy

In news-

- The average annual per capita water availability in the years 2001 was 1816 cubic meters while it reduced to 1545 cubic meters in 2011
- This may further reduce to 1486 cubic meters in 2021 and 1367 cubic meters in 2031
- As per Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 135 litre per capita per day (lpcd) has been suggested as the benchmark for urban water supply.
- For rural areas, a minimum service delivery of 55 lpcd has been fixed under Jal Jeevan Mission, which may be enhanced to higher level by states
- As per NCIWRD percentage of water used for irrigation out of the total water use for the year 1997-98 was 83.30%. The same is estimated to decrease to 72.48% by 2025.
- NCIWRD= National Commission for Integrated Water Resources Development.

Coronavirus and its impact on Global Economy

Part of: Prelims and GS-III- Economy

Context: The Coronavirus, which began as an epidemic across China, has affected more than 92,000 people out of which 80,000 confirmed cases are in mainland China alone, with the death toll reaching 3,130 people.

The situation is a public health emergency and also an increasing fear that the pandemic will spread across other regions.

Chinese Slowdown due to Coronavirus

- China is the second-biggest economy in the world.
- China is not only the world's factory but also a huge market
- The Slowdown in China would impact world growth **through trade routes and the shock to the global value chain** i.e.
- China's share in world trade is around 12.5 per cent —
 - Its imports are \$2.1 trillion (11.7% of global imports) and
 - Its exports \$2.4 trillion (13.4% of global exports)
- Almost 45% of China's exports comprise of electrical machinery and equipment, including computers.
- Any slip in its growth — the conservative estimate is 0.5 per cent as of now — would affect the global economy. The **OECD has forecast growth of just 2.4% in 2020**, down from 2.9% in November 2019

Australia, Singapore and South East Asian countries

- These will be the worst affected, given the economic and market exposure to China.
- Australia and Singapore could face not just **disruptions in the flow of goods** and services but also a **loss in revenue from tourists** and students from China.

Oil Producing Countries: Due to falling demand from China and also from across the globe due to ripple effect caused by Chinese slowdown, **crude oil prices is down by 15 per cent**

Commodity driven countries like Peru, Chile and Indonesia – are also going to face slowdown. China is the biggest consumer of these products like Copper, Aluminium etc

Impact on India

- China is India's largest trading partner, accounting for 5% of the country's exports and 14 % of imports.
- India is dependent on **Chinese imports** in
 - Healthcare and pharmaceuticals (active pharma ingredients)
 - Smartphones and accessories
 - Solar cells modules - India's solar power plants import about 80 per cent of components from China
- A supply crunch in components and finished products from China **will increase the cost of production** and general price level.
- This comes at a time when the Indian economy is sluggish.
- **Indian exports to China** will also be hit significantly in organic chemicals (17%), yarn (21%), metal ores (68%), building material (31%).
- India accounts for nearly **16% of China's cotton imports** and 13% of its construction material imports.

Critical Analysis of India's Situation

- There is a belief that this episode provides an opportunity for India to replace Chinese exports, similar to the argument that India would benefit from the tariff war between the US and China
- However, it's **not easy to improve export competitiveness** and manufacturing in a short time
- Many small businesses in India have been impacted due to their dependence on Chinese imports and also because they export components to Chinese factories
- At present, the Indian economy, which is grappling with high inflation, would get an immediate respite from the falling crude prices.

Conclusion

- India has been grappling with demand-side problems and corona is a supply-side shock

Connecting the dots

Comparison of Corona Virus outbreak to SARS epidemic in 2003 – Changes in China's overall economic significance in Global Economy

[New Space India Ltd.](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy

In News:

- It is the Department of Space's **second** commercial arm (after Antrix) that was announced in Budget **2019**.

- Its objective is to use research and development carried out by ISRO over the years for commercial purposes through **Indian industry partners**.
- One of the mandates of NSIL aims to mass-produce and manufacture the SSLV and the more powerful PSLV in partnership with the private sector in India **through technology transfers**.
- It differs from ISRO's existing commercial arm Antrix Corporation:
 - Antrix will handle ISRO's commercial deals for satellites and launch vehicles with foreign customers.
 - NSIL will deal with capacity building of local industry for space manufacturing.

Yes Bank Crisis

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy

Story so far:

- The government has put private sector lender Yes Bank under moratorium till April 3rd 2020 and capped deposit withdrawal at ₹50,000/month
- Subsequently, the RBI superseded the Yes Banks board and appointed Prashant Kumar (Dy. MD of SBI) as an administrator.
- The RBI has also proposed a reconstruction scheme under which SBI could take a maximum 49% stake in the restructured capital of the bank.

Why was the moratorium imposed?

- **Decline in Yes Bank's financial position** mainly due to the lender's inability to raise adequate capital to make provisions for potential non-performing assets.
- This failing resulted in downgrades by credit rating agencies, which in turn made capital raising even more difficult — a vicious cycle that further worsened its financials.
- Also, there were serious lapses in corporate governance.
- RBI's even tried to facilitate a regulatory restructuring process and gave adequate opportunity to the bank's management to draw up a credible revival plan, which did not materialise.

When did it all start?

	Bank Loans	Deposit
31 st March 2014	₹55,633 crore	₹74,192 crore.
30 th Sep 2019	₹2.24 Lakh crore	₹2.09 Lakh crore

- The above table indicates that Bank loans increased without substantial increase in Bank deposits.
- **Asset quality also worsened** during the period with gross non-performing assets sharply rising from 0.31% as on March 31, 2014, to 7.39% at the end of September 2019.
- Seeing the rapid rise in bank's exposure to troubled borrowers, RBI had refused to grant its then MD and CEO Rana Kapoor (also Banks's co-founder) another three-year term after his tenure ended in August 2018.
- RBI did not make the decision public but finally agreed to give extension till end-January 2019.

- The tipping point probably came earlier this year when one of the bank's independent directors and chairman of the board's audit committee, Uttam Prakash Agarwal, resigned from the board in January citing governance issues.

What will be the likely impact on depositors?

- While deposit withdrawals have been capped at ₹50,000, there are exceptions (like medical emergency, marriages) under which a higher amount can be withdrawn, with the permission of the RBI.
- While the deposit insurance cover was ₹1 lakh till recently, this was increased to ₹5 lakh in the aftermath of the crisis at the PMC Bank crisis
- Confidence in the banking system will take a hit especially with previous Nirav Modi fiasco and PMC Bank crisis

Will the developments at Yes Bank pose a systemic risk?

- Ratings agency Fitch Ratings said the latest developments spotlight the governance risks in India's banking sector.
- However, the government and the regulator have asserted that the problem is solely related to this particular bank.

Way Forward:

- **Depositors:** RBI has come up with a draft reconstruction plan for Yes Bank which proposes that depositors' funds would be protected.
- **Employees** – They would have the same service conditions, including remuneration, at least for one year.
- **Key managerial personnel** - the new board would be empowered to take a call.
- **Restructuring:** The SBI, which has received board approval to invest in Yes Bank, will have to pick up to 49% stake, according to the scheme, at a price that is not less than ₹10 for each share having a face value of ₹2.
- **Conditions:** The investor bank (SBI) also cannot reduce its holding below 26% before the completion of three years from the date of infusion of the capital.

Connecting the dots

- PMC Bank Crisis
- 2008 US Financial Crisis

AT1 Bonds

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy

In News:

- YES Bank's AT-1 bond-holders are said to have invested **₹10,800 crore** and RBI's restructuring plan proposes to completely write off the dues on these bonds
- AT-1, short for Additional Tier-1 bonds, are a type of **unsecured**, perpetual bonds that banks issue to shore up their core capital base to meet the Basel-III norms
- AT-1 bonds have several unusual features like
 - One, these bonds are **perpetual and carry no maturity date**. Instead, they carry call options that allow banks to redeem them after five or 10 years.

- But banks are not obliged to use this call option and can opt to pay only interest on these bonds for eternity
- Two, banks issuing AT-1 bonds **can skip interest payouts for a particular year** or even reduce the bonds' face value provided their capital ratios fall below certain threshold levels specified in the offer terms
- Three, if the RBI feels that a bank is tottering on the brink and needs a rescue, **RBI can simply ask the bank to cancel its outstanding AT-1 bonds** without consulting its investors.
- The Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) has requested RBI and SEBI for a **temporary write down** of AT1 Bonds of Yes Bank instead of completely writing it off
- **Why temporary write down?**
 - These bonds typically have a call option after five years and hence if the central bank allows a temporary write down, the fund houses may still be able to stem the potential losses if the valuation of the bank improves after restructuring.

Long Term Repo Operations(LTROs)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy

In News:

- Repo rate is the rate at which Banks borrow from RBI. Generally, these loans are for short durations up to 2 weeks.
- Also, loans with higher maturity period (here like 1 year and 3 year) will have higher interest rate compared to short term (repo) loans
- The LTRO is a tool under which the RBI provides one-year to three-year money to banks at the prevailing repo rate, accepting government securities with matching or higher tenure as the collateral
- RBI has announced injection of Rs. 1 Lakh Crore into the system through LTRO auctions.
- Therefore, LTRO supplies Banking system with liquidity for their 1- to 3-year needs.
- LTRO operations are also intended to prevent short-term interest rates in the market from drifting a long way away from the policy rate (i.e. repo rate)
- The LTRO will also help bring down the yields for shorter-term securities (in the 1-3-year tenor) in the bond market.

Oil Market meltdown

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy

Context: Saudi Arabia cut oil prices and declared its intention to increase output well beyond what the oil market can absorb currently.

As a result, Oil prices fell (almost one-third) by the most in one day since the 1991 Gulf War. The price of U.S. crude fell as much as 34% to \$27.34 a barrel.

The oil market is now set to witness the rare conjunction of a demand and a supply shock which is bad news for prices.

Why Are Oil Prices Falling?

- First came the coronavirus outbreak, which reduced travel and transport, sharply reducing demand for fuel.
- China, a major importer, has cut its imports by a third from Saudi Arabia, its biggest supplier
- The international Brent benchmark had fallen from \$69 at the start of the year to around \$50 during Feb Last Week

Why sudden fall in prices within a day?

- There was meeting between OPEC and non-member countries in first week of March. On the agenda was a production cut of 1.5 million barrels a day, or about 1.5% of global production
- The idea was to keep prices from declining further as demand was expected to fall in 2020
- Saudi Arabia, the world's No. 2 oil producer, wanted No. 3 Russia and other nonmembers to take 500,000 barrels per day of the cuts.
- Since 2016, the Saudis and the Russians have worked together on production issues.
- But this time Russia refused to join new cuts, or even to extend previous production cuts that were due to expire at the end of March, 2020.
- And the Saudis hit back, by announcing that they were going to ramp up production and slash prices for Asian customers.

What Is Saudi Arabia's Goal?

- First, protecting market share. Both Saudi Arabia and Russia have seen U.S. producers (No 1 producer of Oil in world) take a chunk of their market, and falling prices help keep customers on board.
- Second, Saudi Arabia may hope that the pain of low prices will force a Russian rethink.

What Is Russia's Goal?

- Russia may have a longer-term target: the U.S. oil industry.
- There is a view that Russia's action can damage the financial health of U.S. shale-oil producers (highly leveraged & running on low margins) and that by doing this they can take a lot of U.S. capacity offline and thereby remove U.S. producers as a source of competition.
- Russia may also have decided to hit back at the U.S. industry after Washington placed sanctions on Russian state oil company Rosneft for marketing Venezuela's oil.

What does this mean for US Producers?

- According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, \$50 per barrel is the price at which it becomes profitable to drill a new well in the U.S.
- The current low prices could constrain activity in the American shale oil industry.
- A downturn in oil prices in 2014-2016 hurt companies in places like the Permian Basin in west Texas and eastern New Mexico.
- In Texas, the number of active rigs fell from 553 in October 2018 to 398 in January 2020. Around the same time, the oil industry in Texas shed about 14,000 jobs
- U.S. shale oil industry could find itself into unviable financial position and the industry can come to a halt due to the lack of further investment in the industry

Impact on the world

- Price fall is a bad news for the big oil companies and the smaller shale oil players who are highly leveraged
- A collapse of these shale oil producers may set off defaults in the bond markets
- With stock and bond markets already in turmoil, the price war now set off in oil is only going to make the markets more volatile and murkier.

Impact on India

- A fall in prices is good news for major consumers such as India, where nearly 85% of India's oil needs are met by import
- This will reduce the oil import bill at a time when merchandise exports are likely to suffer due to the freeze in the developed economies
- This will keep the current account deficit balanced.
- The fall in fuel prices will also drag down headline inflation giving the RBI elbow room to cut rates.
- But the oil price fall may be bad news for the Centre's disinvestment programme as the sale of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) could run into difficulties.
- Big oil companies, which are widely expected to bid for BPCL, may either shy away from it or their bids may be much lower than expected as the company's valuation may drop
- In such an eventuality, it is quite possible that the government may step in to grab a slice of the windfall from falling prices, through higher excise duties to compensate for the loss from disinvestment proceeds.

Connecting the dots

- Impact of fall in oil prices on Europe
- Strategic Oil Reserves in India

[Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana\(PMUY\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims – Government Schemes and GS-III- Economy

In News:

- LPG scheme PM Ujjwala Yojana closed, but only 3 States have become kerosene-free
- PMUY is a scheme of the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas for providing LPG connections to women from Below Poverty Line (BPL) households.
- Under the scheme, an adult woman member of a below poverty line family identified through the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) is given a deposit-free LPG connection with financial assistance of Rs 1,600 per connection by the Centre.
- The Petroleum Ministry informed the Parliamentary committee on Petroleum that
 - The government had met the target of eight crore LPG connections on September 7, 2019,
 - The scheme was no longer running, and the present allocation (₹1,118 crore during 2020-21) was meant to meet the arrears in the reimbursement of expenditure
 - 97% LPG coverage nationwide- calculated by dividing the number of households — it stand at 2850.5 lakh as on February 1 this year — and the domestic LPG consumers, at 2772.2 lakh.

- The committee, therefore, recommended that the scheme be extended to poor households in urban and semi-urban slum areas

Shared Economy

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy

In News:

- Shared economy in India is estimated to be an about \$2 billion industry by end of 2020
- In the sharing economy, individuals are said to rent or "share" things like their cars, homes and personal time to other individuals in a peer-to-peer fashion
- By making it easier to exchange resources on demand, the sharing economy increases efficiency.
- In many circumstances, it allows participants to get by without owning valuable items, such as cars, while creating opportunities for others to extract value from idle possessions or talents.
- The sharing economy often involves some type of online platform that connects buyers and seller.
- The 'shared economy' includes segments such as **co-working** (Awfis, WeWork India), **co-living** (Stanza Living, OYO Life, Oxford Caps), **shared mobility** (Uber, Ola, Shuttl) and **furniture rental** (Furlenco, Rentomojo.)

Government to Launch Mahua-based Alcoholic Drink

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy

In News:

- Mahuwa (Madhuca indica) is a prominent forest tree in tribal areas of Bastar, Chhattisgarh and plays an important role in the rural economy.
- The mahuwa flowers are a rich source of sugars and are said to contain vitamins, minerals and calcium.
- The flowers are fermented and distilled yielding spirituous liquor also known as 'country beer'
- The beverage - Called Mahua Nutribeverage - has a high nutritional value and relatively low alcohol content (5 %)
- It has been developed by IIT-Delhi after two years of research in collaboration with TRIFED (Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India).
- The marketing is being undertaken under the Tribal Affairs Ministry's value-addition scheme called the Van Dhan Vikas Karyakram.

About Van Dhan Vikas Karyakram

- It is nation-wide programme for training tribal clusters to add value to their produce and sell it in a packaged format, aiming to increase their income manifold.
- The products marketed under the scheme include only those that need primary-level processing, including handicrafts, textiles, food items, jams and pulps, and jewellery
- Implementing Agency: TRIFED

Dollar Swap Window

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy

In News:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has opened a six-month dollar sell-buy swap window to pump liquidity in the foreign exchange market
- Financial markets worldwide are facing intense selling pressures on extreme risk aversion due to the spread of **COVID-19 infections**, compounded by the slump in international crude prices.
- Investors dump assets in their flight to safety and thus the demand for the US dollar has been surging across the world **resulting in USD shortage**.
- As a result, several emerging market currencies including INR experiencing **downside pressures**.
- The central bank is set to auction **\$2 billion** where banks can deposit Indian rupees to get US dollar for a price. These funds would be **available for six months**

Did You Know?

- The Indian rupee has fallen 4.07% this year as foreign investors sell domestic securities aggregating Rs. Rs. 23,237 crores. It has aggravated in the past two weeks as the pandemic panic spread.

The current account is expected to move to surplus in the March quarter due to a plunge in crude oil prices

NIDHI COMPANY

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy

In News:

- The government has given up to one-year time for Nidhi companies to update their details as per the updated rules.
- A Nidhi company is a type of company in the Indian non-banking finance sector, recognized under section 406 of the Companies Act, 2013.
- Their core business is borrowing and lending money between their members.
- They are regulated by Ministry of Corporate Affairs.
- They have to **comply with two set of norms**, one of Public limited company as per Companies Act, 2013 and another is for Nidhi rules, 2014.

Insolvency Code: Debtors now resolve defaults in early stages

About Insolvency & Bankruptcy

- Insolvency is the situation where the debtor is not in a position to pay back the creditor.
- For a corporate firm, the signs of this could be a slow-down in sales, missing of payment deadlines etc.
- Bankruptcy is the legal declaration of Insolvency.

Need of Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC)

- A unified code is essential because earlier the issue was handled under at least 13 different laws.
- Earlier, if a company defaults, there were at least four different legal routes available to the debtors and creditors - the high courts, the Company Law Board, the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (**BIFR**), and the Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs)
- This could lead to multiple negotiations, multiple penalties etc. for the debtor, compounding his plight.
- The present morass of laws doesn't help in easing the exit of trouble-prone entities, which made Chief Economic Adviser to Govt to compare the situation to Chakravyuh (where companies can easily enter but difficult to exit)
- In the background of rising NPAs, the easing of liquidation process can help the banks recover a lot of bad debts

Salient features of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code:

- IBC was thus enacted in 2016 for reorganization and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals in a time bound manner for maximization of the value of assets of such persons
- IBC Code 2016 covers all individuals, companies, Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs) and partnership firms.
- The adjudicating authority is **National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)** for companies and LLPs and **Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT)** for individuals and partnership firms.
- **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 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.

Working of IBC

- 200 companies who cumulatively owed Rs 4 lakh crore to creditors, had been rescued till December 2019 through resolution plans.
- However, the **realisable value of the assets** available with them, when they entered the IBC process, was only **Rs 0.8 lakh crore**
- The IBC **maximises the value of the existing assets**, not of the assets which do not exist.
- Under the IBC, the creditors recovered Rs 1.6 lakh crore, about 200 per cent of the realisable value of these companies
- Despite the recovery of 200% of the realisable value, the financial creditors had to take a haircut of 57 per cent as compared to their claims.
- As compared to other options, bank are recovering much better through IBC

Criticism of IBC

- Although the IBC process has rescued 200 companies, it has sent **800 companies for liquidation**.
- The number of companies getting into liquidation is thus four times that of the companies being rescued.

Counter Arguments:

- Recovery is incidental under the IBC. Its primary objective is rescuing companies in distress
- The companies rescued had assets valued at Rs 0.8 lakh crore, while the companies referred for liquidation had assets valued at Rs 0.2 lakh crore when they entered the IBC process.
- Thus, in value terms, assets that have been rescued are four times those sent for liquidation.
- It is important to note that of the companies rescued, one-third were either defunct or under BIFR, and of the companies sent for liquidation, three-fourths were either defunct or under BIFR.

Real success of IBC

- The credible threat of the IBC process, that a company may change hands, has **changed the behaviour of debtors**.
- Thousands of debtors are settling defaults at the early stages of the life cycle of a distressed asset.
- They are settling when default is imminent, on receipt of a notice for repayment
- Only a few companies, who fail to address the distress in any of these stages, reach the liquidation stage
- At this stage, the value of the company is substantially eroded, and hence some of them would be rescued, while others are liquidated.

Conclusion

The 25,000 applications filed so far under IBC indicate the value and trust that stakeholders place on the law — the ultimate test of its efficacy.

Is the global economy headed for recession? Businesses impacted

Context: How deep has the impact of COVID-19 been on businesses around the world? And which are the ones that have been hit the hardest?

- The global death toll due to COVID-19 has crossed the 5,300 mark, with over 1.42 lakh people infected.
- India, where 88 people have been infected, saw two casualties as of March 15th 2020

What does it mean to the global economy?

- Analysts fear that the global economy may tip into a recession unless the virus turns out to be seasonal.
- A recession sets in when the economy shows **two consecutive quarters of contraction**
- The problem with current predictions is no one knows how long the virus will remain potent
- Rabobank has stated that a global recession now is all but certain. It has predicted **global GDP growth to be 1.6% for 2020**, a figure that was 2.9% the last year, as per IMF estimates.

- the Institute for International Finance had said that global economic growth could turn out to be as low as 1%, and this was even before the OPEC club and Russia fell out on production agreements to maintain stable oil prices
- The UN's United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), said the virus outbreak could cost the **global economy up to \$2-trillion this year**

Why should the economy be affected?

- If we engage less with the outer world, and avoid work, education, fitness and entertainment, a lot less economic activity would occur.
- Businesses face the challenge of disrupted supply of components to make products, or of having to shut some of their factories temporarily

Which are the industries impacted?

- When China was faced the COVID-19 outbreak, the Indian **pharmaceutical, automobile and mobile phone industries** were immediately impacted.
- India depends on China for supplies of components for products that these sectors make.
- The Indian pharma industry, which depends on China for 70% of raw materials needed to manufacture drugs here, has seen input costs go up by 50% as of February 2020
- The **pesticides sector** is another that has been affected as manufacturers depend on China for raw materials. While there are comforting stock levels for now in India, farmers may soon face pesticide availability issues unless the situation resolves quickly.
- The **Indian gem and jewellery makers** are impacted due to the partial closure of the Chinese and Hong Kong markets (which accounts for 70% of India's exports), which is likely to result in a loss of about \$1-billion by April 2020.
- **Software Services:** Decision-making in the West, a key market for software services, may have been hit, with in-bound travel restricted and the U.S. declaring emergency.
- Security and safe health of employees have been at the top of priorities rather than the pricing of a technology contract
- **Entertainment and Sport:** The very popular Indian Premier League has been postponed. In football, all Union of European Football Association (UEFA) competitions have been postponed. Same is with US sports.

How will it hit the travel sector?

- Travel has been hit severely as countries issue advisories to eliminate unnecessary travel and go into lockdown mode.
- The U.S., for instance, has halted all in-bound travel from Europe.
- India has temporarily stopped grant of visas except for emergency situations.
- The impact on profits of — and jobs at — airlines, airport authorities and oil marketing companies is obvious and immediate
- It has also impacted the economy around air travel — the vendor of shops and outlets in the Airport & surrounding region.
- Boeing executives have indicated there had been a 50% reduction in daily flight count in the Asia-Pacific region.

Is there a silver lining at all?

- **Sales of medical supplies**, soaps, hand sanitisers and essentials to be stocked up at home will evidently rise.
- **Digital shopping** may see even more traction.
- It is said that after the SARS epidemic in China in 2003, shoppers began to prefer buying online, to avoid crowded spaces and that e-commerce major Alibaba's fortunes zoomed after this.
- With schools shutting down temporarily, **online learning platforms** are likely to get a boost.

When normalcy returns, wouldn't pent-up demand make up for lack of economic activity now?

- Only some of the expenses that are being held back by consumers can be made up for later when pent-up demand is unleashed after the situation returns to normal. Ex: Postponing a vacation
- But micro-expenses, which contribute significantly to an economy, such as a cab fare or buying snacks for a commute, can never be made up for during this slowdown
- For instance: cab drivers cannot quite afford to have their cabs out of circulation for even as short a period as a week, if they have to put food on the table for their families. Curtailed travel and commutes can be devastating for them unless the situation resolves quickly.

Has the Central Banks done anything?

- **U.S. Federal Reserve** held an emergency meeting and **cut interest rates** by a half percentage point.
- The stock markets reacted favourably for a short while before losing steam and spiralling downwards.
- Nevertheless, the U.S. declaring a state of emergency over the spread of the virus will help allocate the significant quantum of funds needed to deal with a health-care requirement of this magnitude.
- Likewise, the Euro markets remained unmoved even after the **European Central Bank announced fresh stimulus** measures to help the economy cope with the growing cost of the COVID-19 epidemic

New definition of MSMEs soon

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy

In News:

- The government would come out with a new definition of MSMEs, which are currently defined on the basis of investment in plant and machinery
- Government has accepted 39 suggestions by the **U.K. Sinha committee** appointed by RBI, including the setting up a "fund of funds" for MSME sector.
- The MSME sector currently contributed **24% of the GDP growth and 48% of exports**, with an annual turnover of ₹1 lakh crore in FY20.

India VIX index

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III-Economy

- **In News:** The India VIX index, a barometer for volatility, fell a little over 7%
- Volatility is often described as the "rate and magnitude of changes in prices" and in finance often referred to as risk.
- Volatility Index is a measure, of the amount by which an underlying Index is expected to fluctuate, in the near term.
- India VIX is the short name for the India Volatility Index, an **index disseminated by the NSE (National Stock Exchange)**
- It measures the degree of volatility or fluctuation that active traders expect in the Nifty50 over the next 30 days

COVID-19: Blunting the economic impact of a pandemic

Context: Prime Minister Modi constituted the task force under Finance Minister to assess the economic impact of the pandemic and suggest palliative measures.

The following are some suggestions for the task force

1. Cash transfers

- Casual Job workers like construction workers, cab drivers, restaurant waiters, mall workers, domestic help, itinerant retailers are either already without jobs & incomes or will soon find themselves in that position.
- Cash transfers of a fixed amount to these vulnerable sections would be useful.
- There are 33 crore accounts under the **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana** that can be leveraged for this purpose.
- There is also an efficient Public Distribution System prevalent in most States through which the beneficiaries can be identified for a cash handout.
- **Cost Estimation:** A transfer of ₹1,000 to a total of 23.53 crore ration card holders will cost the Centre over ₹23,500 crore
- **Hong Kong** announced a cash handout of HK\$10,000 to every permanent resident as a supportive measure.
- The **United States** is also weighing the option of a cash handout totalling \$250 billion to its citizens.

2. Loan guarantee

- Service industries such as airlines, hotels and restaurants and tourism have begun to feel the impact of COVID-19 and in course of time it will extend to the manufacturing sector as well.
- There will be revenue and profit issues to deal with later but the **immediate crisis is one of cash flows.**
- **Banks** are also not going to offer any accommodation to these businesses given their **own issues with NPAs.**
- This is where the government can offer loan guarantees to affected businesses.
- For a start, government can provide guarantees to working capital loans and link it with assurances from the borrowers concerned that they will secure the jobs in their companies.

- **Britain** has pledged £330 billion of government-backed loans and guarantees, France and Spain have announced €300 billion and €100 billion aid, respectively.

3. Mortgage holiday

- An equated monthly instalment (EMI) holiday can be a huge blessing for individuals and businesses when faced with a job loss, salary cut or loss of revenue.
- A **three-month mortgage holiday** should be coaxed out of lenders by the government for businesses in obvious trouble and to those employed by such businesses.
- RBI should show regulatory forbearance in the matter of asset recognition for banks when it comes to these industries.

There are other helpful actions that the government can take such as

- Promptly discharging its bills
- Refunding taxes without delay
- Promptly carrying out direct benefit transfers already budgeted for
- If necessary, even permitting affected businesses to temporarily delay payment of statutory dues such as provident fund and ESI.

How to finance?

- **Cooperative Federalism:** The resources of the Centre and the States have to be pooled to develop a national response to economic challenge posed by COVID-19 pandemic
- Kerala, for example, has already announced a ₹20,000 crore package and other States may follow suit
- **Leverage Private Expertise:** The government will have to engage with the private sector while devising assistance measures.
- **Bonds:** A well-structured, tax-efficient bond issue can be an option to tap into the large pool of domestic savings. The large Indian diaspora can also be tapped into.

Conclusion

The government needs to come up with financial action plan involving all stakeholders (States & private sector) so as to tide over the crisis caused by the pandemic

Did You Know?

- **Resurgent India Bonds of 1998 post-Pokhran** - SBI raised about \$4 billion from NRIs against all odds to help India tide over the immediate impact of sanctions

COVID-19: A pandemic, an economic blow and the big fix

Context: Impending economic crisis due to COVID-19 pandemic

India is lagging when compared to other countries in announcing economic package:

- US has announced a trillion-dollar economic recovery package.
- U.K. announced biggest economic recovery package in its history, as an antidote to the crisis with no fixed cost to it.
- Germany too announced 'unlimited government financing' for the disruptions due to the outbreak
- France, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands have all launched a half-a-trillion dollars combined in recovery measures.

Impending Crisis in Indian Economy:

- **One-third of all restaurants** could shut down in the formal sector alone and shed more than 20 lakh jobs, in the coming months.
- **Entire automotive sector** is in the danger of complete halt, putting at risk the incomes of a million people employed in this sector.
- **Banking Crisis:** When businesses close down, they default on their commercial obligations to their financiers which leads to increase in Bank NPAs
- **Vicious Cycle:** Rising NPAs will further freeze up credit flow to the businesses further leading to halting of production. This leads to job losses and drying up of incomes and decreased demand in the economy pulling into recession.
- **No Scope for recovery in exports** because this is now a global crisis and the condition is similar in other countries as well

India thus needs a comprehensive recovery package that will first cushion the shock and then help the economy recover. Some of the key suggestions are:

1. COVID-19 Economic Recovery Package for India

Government should soon announce an economic package which is based on four pillar:

- **Providing a safety net for the affected** - Through a direct cash transfer of ₹3,000 a month, for six months, to the 12 crore, bottom half of all Indian households. This will cost nearly ₹2.2-lakh crore
- Addressing **disruptions in the real economy** – Especially the provision of essential services and announcing sector specific packages ex: Textiles, Construction, Automobiles, MSMEs.
- Unclogging the impending **liquidity squeeze** in the financial system – Nudging the RBI to announce easy monetary Policy. RBI needs to set up a credit guarantee fund for distressed borrowers for credit rollover and deferred loan obligation.
- **Incentivising the external sector of trade and commerce** – through reduced export taxes and forging better trade treaties with other nations, especially in the neighbourhood

2. Reforming the Right to Work framework

- MGNREGA to be expanded and retooled into a public works programme, to build hospitals, clinics, rural roads and other infrastructure.
- One possible way is by integrating MGNREGA with the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana and the roads and bridges programme.
- These three programmes together have a budget of nearly ₹1.5 lakh crore.
- This must be doubled to ₹3 lakh crore so as to serve as a true 'Right to Work' scheme for every Indian.

3. Provision of Foodgrains

- The Food Corporation of India is currently overflowing with excess rice, wheat and unmilled paddy stocks
- This excess stock can be used to provide 10kg rice and wheat to every Indian family, free of cost, through the Public Distribution System.

4. Expansion of COVID testing Infrastructure:

- COVID-19 testing, treatment, medical equipment and supplies capacity to be expanded through the private sector and be reimbursed directly for patient care
- This will need a budget of ₹1.5- lakh crore
- This will help create a large number of jobs in the private health-care sector, with trickle-down benefits.

In sum, the total incremental expenditure for the recovery package will be between ₹5-lakh crore to ₹6-lakh crore for FY2021.

The package can be funded largely through three sources —

- Reallocation of some of the budgeted capital expenditure,
- Expenditure rationalisation
- Utilizing the oil bonanza.

Conclusion

It is time for India to think big, bold and radical to pull the economy out of this crisis.

Connecting the dots

- Universal Basic Income – pros & cons

COVID-19: Possibility of Biggest Depression

World had witnessed two great depressions- The Great Depression (GD) of 1930s and 2008 global financial crisis (GFC). There is high possibility that COVID-19 could cause the history's biggest economic depression given the number of people and economies it has affected

What is depression?

- It is a sustained, long-term downturn in economic activity in one or more economies

Impact of the previous two depressions – GFC & GD of 1930s

- Stock markets collapsed by 50% or more
- Credit markets froze up
- Massive bankruptcies of firms followed
- Unemployment rates soared above 10%
- GDP contracted at an annualized rate of 10% or more

How COVID-19 induced depression can be different from previous depression?

- The above mentioned macroeconomic and financial outcomes of depression took around three years to play out for 2008-GFC & 1930-GD
- In the current COVID-19 crisis, similar outcomes have materialized **in three weeks**- thus exacerbating the possibility of Depression.
- COVID induced depression is more severe & faster.

Measures needed by countries

1. Containing the epidemic

- All countries need to roll out widespread Covid-19 testing, tracing and treatment measures, enforce quarantines, and a full-scale lockdown (China model)
- Antivirals and other therapeutics need to be deployed on a massive scale as it could take 18 months for a vaccine to be developed and produced at global scale

2. Easy Monetary Policy by Central Banks

- Zero or negative interest rates
- Quantitative easing –large-scale asset purchases by Central Bank to induce liquidity into system
- Credit easing to banks, non-banks, money market funds, and even large corporations.

3. Massive Fiscal Stimulus

- Direct cash disbursements to households
- Monetizing the increased fiscal deficits – so that interest rates are kept low

Challenges

- Monetization of massive deficits starts can lead to high inflation.
- Geopolitical white swans that could **derail recovery of global economy**
 - The crisis can give way to renewed conflicts between the West and at least four revisionist powers: China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea.
 - The possibility of cyber-attacks on the US election process may lead to a contested final result which will have a spillover effect on International Institutions (causes disorder & chaos)
 - Risk of a war between the US and Iran

Conclusion

The trifecta of risks—uncontained pandemics, insufficient economic policy arsenals, and geopolitical white swans—will be enough to tip the global economy into persistent depression and a runaway financial-market meltdown. Thus, above measures needs to be taken.

Connecting the dots

- Difference between Earlier depression and Depression that can be caused by COVID-19
- How should world countries work together after COVID-19 to bring back the economy
- Keynesian Economics

OTT platforms: Telecoms ask OTTs to reduce video quality to reduce load on networks

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-III – Economy (Infrastructure)

- An over-the-top (OTT) media service is a streaming media service offered directly to viewers **via the Internet i.e.** they deliver content to customers on top of network infrastructure that is owned and maintained by internet service providers (ISPs)
- OTT bypasses cable, broadcast, and satellite television platforms, the companies that traditionally act as a controller or distributor of such content.
- OTT is commonly applied to **video-on-demand platforms (NETFLIX, HOTSTAR)**, but also refers to audio streaming, messaging services or internet-based voice calling solutions (WHATSAPP).

Excise Duty Cap Raised On Fuel

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-III- Economy

In News:

- The government raised the cap on special additional excise duty on petrol to Rs 18/litre (earlier cap was Rs 10) and diesel to Rs 12/litre (earlier cap was Rs 4) through amendments in the Finance Bill passed by the Parliament.
- **Why it is being done?**
 - There is a fall in global oil prices that allows government the space to increase taxes without putting the burden on the consumer
 - The shutdown imposed due to COVID-19 pandemic has forced the government to look for avenues to raise revenues so as to support growth
- **Downside of the measure:** The fall in crude oil prices is not passed on to consumers

Do You Know?

- The excise duties on petrol and diesel include basic excise duty, special additional excise duty, and road and infrastructure cess, which is levied as additional excise duty.
- Central and state taxes account for nearly 50 per cent of the price of petrol & diesel

The promotion of competition is vital to Indian Economy

Context: Draft Competition (Amendment) Bill, 2020 proposed by the government

Competition Act, 2002, which replaced “The Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act of 1969, provided for the establishment of a Competition Commission so as

- To prevent practices having adverse effect on competition
- To promote and sustain competition in markets
- To protect the interests of consumers and
- To ensure freedom of trade carried on by other participants in markets

Key institutional challenges that competition authorities around the world face are:

- Preserving their **independence**, which is considered necessary to perform core policymaking functions
- **Diagnosing** problems of competition accurately and fixing them
- Displaying **legitimacy** and effectiveness in the face of public doubts about the value of fair markets
- The quality of **public administration**

In Oct 2018, Competition Law Review Committee (CLRC) headed by Injeti Srinivas was set up by Ministry of Corporate Affairs, to comprehensively review the Competition Act and suggest substantive and procedural amendments for a robust competition regime.

Majority of the recommendation of the committee was accepted in the draft amendment bill.

Some of the key features of the Bill are:

1. Change in the regulatory structure of the CCI

- CCI had been wearing many hats since its inception. It had been vested with adjudicatory, advisory, investigative, quasi-legislative, and advocacy functions
- The bill proposes an overarching governing board that would have general superintendence, direction and management powers over the CCI.
- The Governing Board will consist of 13 members including
 - A Chairperson

- Six whole-time members
- Two government representatives (from the Ministries of Finance and Corporate Affairs) as ex-officio members
- Four part-time members appointed by the government
- The rationale for such a composition of Board:
 - To enable better coordination between the CCI and the government,
 - Enable expert external assistance to the commission in undertaking key functions,
 - Have structural consistency with other regulators like SEBI & RBI

Criticism of the Board:

- Members of the commission together effectively act as its board even without the explicit nomenclature.
- There is no such precedent anywhere in the world.
- Given that ex-officio and part-time members of the governing board will be appointed by the government, unnecessary state intervention in its functioning is expected

2. Definition of a cartel:

- Presently, the Competition Act defines cartels as an association of producers, sellers, or service providers who limit or control the production, distribution or price of goods and services.
- The Draft Bill amends this definition of cartels to include buyer cartels.

3. New thresholds for merger control:

- The Bill empowers the CCI and Central Government to define new thresholds (other than those based on turnover or value of assets) for merger notifications.
- It will now enable the CCI to make sector specific thresholds based on deal value or size of transaction or any other criterion
- This provision is in furtherance of the CLRC's recommendation to capture transactions in the digital market.

Concerns with this provision:

- Given the dynamic nature of the digital markets, application of this power requires exercise of caution.
- This may result in increasing compliance costs for businesses and impact the ease of doing business.
- The sector specific thresholds should be backed with proper data & logic and needs to be put out in the public domain

4. The regime of settlements and commitments:

- The Bill introduces a system for settlements and commitments permitting the CCI to close the investigation on basis of such an application by the investigated party.
- Such an application will have to be made after the Director General (appointed for inquiries under the Act) has submitted the investigation report to the CCI and before the CCI has passed the final order.

5. CCI will now issue guidelines on imposition of penalty

- Earlier penalty system was left to the discretion of CCI member and was ambiguous in its character.

- The new guidelines which will be released by CCI will ensure more transparency and faster decision making that encourages compliance by businesses.

However, there were additional provisions, suggested by the CLRC, that has been left out in the draft bill

- Introducing a **dedicated bench in NCLAT** for hearing appeals under the Competition Act. This would have greatly assisted in faster disposal of competition cases.
- Greater emphasis on **awareness generation** and capacity creation to foster competition.
- **A national competition policy** that could help fix policy-induced market distortions which hampers fair rivalry in the market

Conclusion

- The CCI is engaged in assessing many policies and laws on competition principles, but for the desired outcomes to materialize, the exercise needs the backing of government policy.

Connecting the dots

- IPR Policy and India

Emergence of Duopolies in Online marketplace & Telecom sector – Impact on market Competition

[Recapitalisation plan for regional rural banks approved](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- The Centre has approved Rs.1.304 crore recapitalisation plan for **regional rural banks**.

Key takeaways:

- It is done to improve their **capital-to-risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR)**.
- These institutions that play major role in **provision of credit in rural areas** shall be strengthened.

Important value additions:

Regional Rural Banks:

- Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) are Indian Scheduled Commercial Banks (Government Banks)
- They operate at regional level in different states of India.
- They have been created with a view to serve primarily the rural areas of India with basic banking and financial services.

Capital-to-Risk weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR)

- The **CRAR** is the **capital** needed for a bank measured in terms of the **assets** (mostly loans) disbursed by the banks.
- Higher the **assets**, higher should be the **capital** by the bank.

COVID-19: RBI announces measures

After Finance Ministry announced the 1.7 Lakh Crore relief package, the RBI also has come up a slew of measure to help the economy tide over distress caused by COVID-19 pandemic.

Do You Know?

- Since February 2020, RBI has pumped in ₹2.8-lakh crore in the system through various market interventions (like LTRO, OMO)
- US Federal bank has reduced its interest rates to **near zero** to shore up liquidity in its financial system

Relief measures announced by RBI are:

- **Repo Rate:** cut by 75 basis points to 4.4% - To ease credit lending in the economy
- **Reverse Repo rate:** Reduced by 90 basis points to 4%
- **Cash Reserve Ratio(CRR):** Reduced by 100 basis points to 3% of net demands and time liabilities – will inject ₹1.37-lakh crore into the system
- Accommodation under **Marginal Standing Facility** to be increased from 2% to 3% of SLR. This will release Rs 1.37 lakh crore into the system.
- **All term Loan repayment:** Moratorium i.e. Temporary halt of three months on payment of instalments
- Long term repo operations will be carried out by RBI to inject liquidity to the tune of ₹1 lakh crore
- The cumulative liquidity boost provided by RBI through above measures amounts to ₹3.74-lakh crore

Impact of RBI's actions

- Compliments the efforts of government to address the economic upheaval caused by COVID-19 pandemic
- Reduction of Repo rate lowers the cost of capital
- Reduction of Reverse Repo will disincentivise banks from parking their funds with the RBI
- Prevent credit market dislocation
- Relief to all retail & corporate borrowers who are finding it difficult to service their loans during this crisis period
- Protects against defaults & banks' rising NPAs
- Ensures ample liquidity and narrows the credit spreads of corporates
- It reflects the RBI's willingness to listen to problems faced at ground level and its effort to resolve them.
- **Adaptability:** RBI has stated that it will not shy away from using both conventional and unconventional measures in future to adapt to the evolving situation
- Helps in reassuring **Public trust** in the Banking system during this crisis period

Challenges

- **Monetary Transmission:** To ensure quick liquidity transmission to the larger economy and not just to investment grade companies.
- Consequences of **heightened liquidity** like Inflation which needs to be tackled in future
- Fresh investment will be the last thing on the minds of businessmen who are currently grappling with **unsold inventory** & disrupted supply chain

- Inadequate action by RBI to ease the **corporate securities market** (suggestion is direct buying of Corporate Bonds like US Fed)
- There could be a **sharp rise in bad loans** a few quarters after the end of the moratorium
- RBI has stopped short of providing material relief measures for **medium and small enterprises**, which are likely to bear the brunt of shutdown

Connecting the dots

- Abenomics that includes Negative Interest rates
- How central banks can ensure smoother & quicker monetary transmission?

Important value additions:

Monetary Policy Committee

- It is responsible for fixing the **benchmark interest rate** in India.
- The meetings are held **at least 4 times** a year.
- The committee **comprises six members** - three **officials** of the Reserve Bank of India and three external members **nominated** by the Government of India.

Repo Rate

- It is the rate at which the Reserve Bank of India **lends money** to commercial banks in the event of any shortfall of funds.
- It is used by monetary authorities **to control inflation**.

Reverse Repo Rate

- It is the rate at which the Reserve Bank of India **borrow money** from commercial banks of the country.
- It can be used to **control the money supply** in the country.

Cash Reserve Ratio

- It is the **share of a bank's total deposit** that is mandated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to be maintained with the latter in the **form of liquid cash**.

FRBM Act

In order to deal with crisis created by COVID-19 pandemic, Kerala government announced a package of ₹20,000 crores and urged the centre to provide flexibility under the FRBM Act.

What is Fiscal responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act?

- It was enacted by Parliament in 2003.
- **Background:** Reckless borrowing by government to finance its programmes had led to high Fiscal Deficit, high Revenue Deficit, and high Debt-to-GDP ratio.
- The objectives of the act are
 - To ensure fiscal discipline in government finances
 - Inter-generational equity in fiscal management
 - Long-term macro-economic stability.
- Following documents were supposed to be placed in the Parliament annually along with the Budget, to ensure **transparency & accountability in fiscal operations**:
 - Macroeconomic Framework Statement
 - Fiscal Policy Strategy Statement
 - Medium Term Fiscal Policy Statement
 - Medium Term Expenditure Framework Statement

- Among other targets, the act mandated the **reduction of the fiscal deficit** to 3% of GDP – Initial goal was March 31, 2009 but it has been postponed since 2008 to the most recent target of 3.1% for March 2023.

FRBM Act and State government

- To ensure that the States too are financially prudent, the **12th Finance Commission's** recommendations in 2004 **linked debt relief to States with their enactment of similar laws.**
- The States have since enacted their own respective Financial Responsibility Legislation, which sets the same 3% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) cap on their annual budget deficits.

Why is Kerala seeking flexibility under the FRBM?

- Kerala's current fiscal position means that it can borrow about ₹25,000 crores during the financial year 2020-21.
- As per its COVID relief package, it plans to borrow ₹12,000 crore in April 2020 itself.
- FRBM limitations means constraints on its borrowing and spending ability over the remaining 11 months of the fiscal year.
- Thus, it has asked for relaxation of the FRBM act

How does a relaxation of the FRBM work?

- The law does contain an '**escape clause**' (section 4(2) of act) whereby the Centre can exceed the annual fiscal deficit target **citing grounds** that include national security, war, national calamity, structural reforms, decline in real output etc.
- The ongoing pandemic could be **considered as a national calamity** which is apt for suspending both the Centre's and States' fiscal deficit targets.
- This would allow both the Union government and States including Kerala to undertake the much-needed increases in expenditure to fight COVID pandemic.

When have the FRBM norms been relaxed in the past?

- Most significant one was in **2008-09** – during the global financial crisis, when the Centre resorted to fiscal stimulus – led to fiscal deficit climbing to 6.2% of GDP, from a budgeted goal of 2.7%.
- Simultaneously, the deficit goals for the States too were relaxed to 3.5% of GSDP for 2008-09 and 4% of GSDP for fiscal 2009-10.
- In the **recent Union Budget for 2020-21** - Reductions in corporate tax was considered as structural reforms so as to trigger the escape clause - fiscal deficit target for 2019-20 was recalibrated to 3.8%, from the earlier 3.3%

Connecting the dots

- N K Singh Panel on review of FRBM act
- Impact on economy due to relaxation of Fiscal Deficit

[Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India \(IBBI\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- To address the difficulty faced by the lockdown due to COVID-19, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) **amended the CIRP Regulations.**

Key takeaways:

- The Board provided that the **period of lockdown** imposed by the Central Government in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak **shall not be counted** for the purposes of the time-line for **any activity that could not be completed** due to the lockdown, in relation to a corporate insolvency resolution process.
- This would be **subject to the overall time-limit** provided in the Code.

Important value additions:

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India

- It was established on 1st October, 2016 under **the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.**
- It is a **key pillar** of the ecosystem.
- It is **responsible for implementation** of the Code.
- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code consolidates and amends** the laws relating to reorganization and insolvency resolution of **corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals** in a time bound manner.

Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP)

- It is a **recovery mechanism** for creditors.
- If a corporate becomes insolvent, a **financial creditor**, an **operational creditor**, or the **corporate** itself may **initiate CIRP.**
- The CIRP may **include necessary steps** to revive the company.
- CIRP in a case under Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC) needs to be **completed in 330 days** including time taken for litigation.

Government bonds for NRIs

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) shall issue certain series of government securities (G-secs) under the “fully accessible route” for Non-resident Indians.

Key takeaways:

- These special securities will attract **no foreign portfolio investor (FPI) limits.**
- These are first step towards Indian G-Secs being **listed on global bond indices.**
- These shall also **attract access cheap liquidity** in the overseas markets.
- This would **facilitate** the inflow of stable foreign investment in Indian bonds.
- All new issuances of G-secs of 5-year, 10-year, and 30-year tenors from FY21 **will be eligible** for investment as specified securities.
- The RBI also raised upwards the FPI limits **for corporate bonds** to 15%, from 9%, for 2020-21.
- This scheme shall operate along with the two existing routes - the **Medium Term Framework (MTF)** and the **Voluntary Retention Route (VRR).**

Important value additions:

Foreign portfolio investment

- Foreign portfolio investment (FPI) consists of securities and other financial assets **held by investors in another country**.
- Along with foreign direct investment (FDI), FPI is one of the **common ways to invest** in an overseas economy.
- FDI and FPI are both **important sources of funding** for most economies.

The Medium-term Expenditure Framework

- It is a statement presented to the Parliament under **Section 3** of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (**FRBM**) Act, 2003 and
- It sets forth a **three-year rolling target** for the expenditure indicators with specification of underlying assumptions and risks involved.

Voluntary Retention Route

- Under this route, FPIs have been given **greater operational flexibility** in terms of instrument choices besides exemptions from certain regulatory requirements.



Water crisis looms large in Himalayan regions

Part of: GS Prelims – Geography and GS Mains I- Climate change

In news:

- Eight towns in the Himalayan region of Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Pakistan were nearly 20%-70% deficient in their water supply,
- Unplanned urbanization and climate change are the key factors responsible for the state of affairs,
- The places surveyed are extremely dependent on springs (ranging between 50% and 100%) for their water, and three-fourths were in urban areas
- Under current trends, the demand-supply gap may double by 2050
- only 3% of the total Hindu Kush Himalayan population lives in larger cities and 8% in smaller towns, projections show that over 50% of the population will be living in cities by 2050

From Prelims Point of View

Hindu-Kush-Himalayan (HKH) Region

- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- 5 million square kilometers considered the Third Pole (after the North and South Poles)
- Significant implications for climate. Vast cryosphere zones and is also the world's largest store of snow and ice outside the polar region.

Puttenahalli lake under threat

Part of: GS Prelims – Environment and GS Mains III- Conservation

In news:

- Puttenahalli lake is a small, restored freshwater lake located in Bangalore.
- The primary water sources are rain and surface water diverted to the lake through channels.
- The lake is currently maintained by Puttenahalli Neighbourhood Lake Improvement Trust (PNLIT)
- The lake was on the brink of extinction, but due to the efforts of PNLIT, is now a haven for bird-watchers and on its way to being completely restored.

World Wildlife Day

Part of: Prelims and GS-III-Environment

In news-

- The day is being celebrated on the 3rd of March every year to create awareness about the importance of protecting wildlife.

- In December 2013, UN General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed 3 March – **the day of signature of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1973** – as UN World Wildlife Day.
- The UNGA resolution also designated the **CITES Secretariat** as the facilitator for the global observance of this special day for wildlife on the UN calendar.

About CITES

- It came into force in July 1975 and currently has 183 signatories
- **Aim:** Ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.
- The CITES Secretariat is administered by UNEP and is **located at Geneva, Switzerland**.
- Although CITES is **legally binding on the Parties**, it does not take **the place of national laws**.
- Rather, it provides a framework to be respected by each Party, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level.
- The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC), a consortium of the CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, World Bank and the World Customs Organization has been established to tackle illegal wildlife trade.

Black carbon levels spike at Himalayan glaciers

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Environment

In News:

- The Black carbon concentrations near the Gangotri glacier rose 400 times in summer due to forest fires and stubble burning from agricultural waste and triggered melting
- Black carbon results from the incomplete combustion of fossil fuels and biomass.
- The fine particles absorb light and about a million times more energy than carbon dioxide.
- It is said to be the second largest contributor to climate change after CO₂.
- But unlike CO₂, which can stay in the atmosphere for years together, black carbon is short-lived and remains in the atmosphere only for days to weeks before it descends as rain or snow.
- Black carbon absorbs solar energy and warms the atmosphere.
- When it falls to earth with precipitation, it darkens the surface of snow and ice, reducing their albedo (the reflecting power of a surface), warming the snow, and hastening melting.

GreenCo Rating System

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Environment Conservation

In News:

- GreenCo Rating, developed by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), has been acknowledged in India's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) document, submitted UNFCCC in 2015
- It is being used as a proactive voluntary action of Indian industry / private sector towards combating climate change.

- The GreenCo rating assesses the firms on their environmental performance and thus aligns them to national priorities towards environment such as energy efficiency, water conservation, renewable energy, waste management, etc

Carissa kopilii: A new Plant Species found in Assam

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-I- Environment

- It is a wider variety of the more familiar Carissa carandas (also known as karonda in Hindi, kalakkai in Tamil, koromcha in Bengali and karja tenga in Assamese)
- Carissa kopilii is distributed sparsely along the **Kopili riverbed** at altitudes ranging from 85-600 metres above sea level.
- **Kopili River** is an interstate river that flows through the states of **Meghalaya and Assam** and is the largest south bank **tributary of the Brahmaputra** in Assam
- The plant is threatened by a hydroelectric project on the river and water turned acidic because of coal mining in Meghalaya upstream.

Did You Know?

- The Carissa carandas was among several thorny plants the British used for a 1,100-mile barrier – called Great Hedge of India- apparently to enforce taxes and stop the smuggling of salt.
- Carissa carandas has been used as a traditional herbal medicine for a number of ailments such as diarrhoea, anaemia, constipation, indigestion, skin infections and urinary disorders.

Places in News

- **Golden Triangle** - the opium-producing area where the borders of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos meet
- **Helmand, Ghazni and Wardak** – Afghan regions where a shrub known as Oman (Ephedra) is grown which is used in production of “Meth” (drug)
- **Guinea**- Formerly known as French Guinea, it is a coastal country in West Africa which is one of the largest producers of Bauxite and was at the core of 2014 Ebola Outbreak.
- **Croatia** – part of NATO and latest member to Join EU in 2013

Environment Ministry orders relocation of desalination plant project

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Environment

In News:

- The Ministry of Environment and Forests’ **Expert Appraisal Committee** (EAC) has directed the Tamil Nadu Water and Drainage Board (TWAD) to shift its project site.
- The project site was for setting up a 60 MLD Sea and Brackish Water Reverse Osmosis (SWRO) plant near the **Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park**.

According to the EAC,

- The project site is **within the eco-sensitive zone** of the Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park.

- The release of brine will certainly **impact the fish catch** affecting the fishermen.
- Reefs, seaweeds, seagrass and the overall **ecosystem** of the area will also be affected.
- No detailed marine **environmental impact assessment** had been carried out for the project.

Important value additions:

The Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park

- It is a **protected area** of India.
- It consists of 21 small islands and adjacent coral reefs in the **Gulf of Mannar** in the Indian Ocean.
- It is the core area of the **Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve**.
- Public access inside the Park is limited to **glass bottom boat rides**.

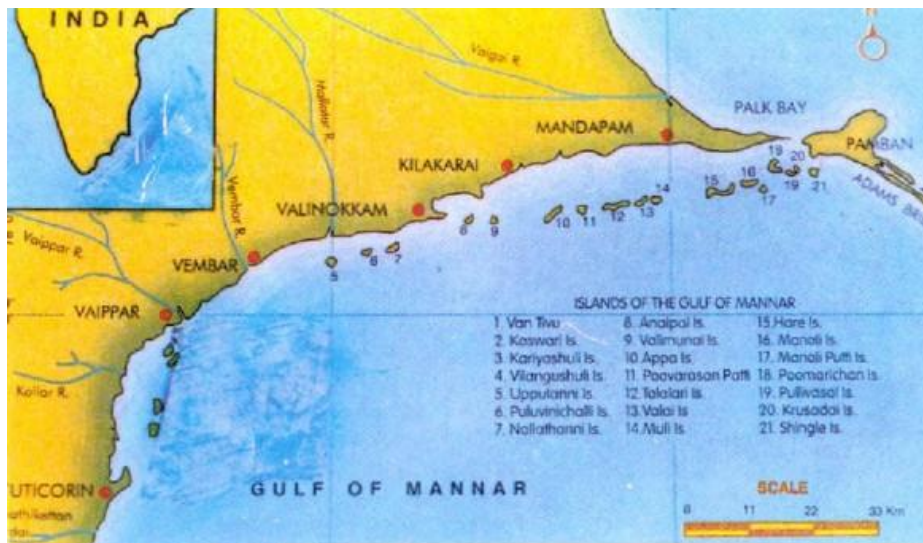


Image source: <https://tvaraj.com/tag/gulf-of-mannar-marine-national-park/>

Expert appraisal committee

- It exists at the Union as well as state levels (state expert appraisal committee or SEAC)
- It is formed **to advise** the government on environmental clearance of development projects.
- They are involved at all the stages, **except for public hearing**.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

- It is a process of evaluating the likely environmental impacts of a proposed project or development.
- Both EPA and EIA are provided under Environment Protection Act 1980.

India is host to 457 migratory fauna

Part of: GS Prelims – Environment and GS Mains III- Conservation

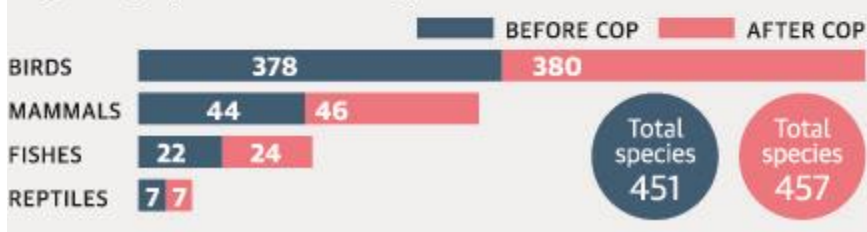
In news:

- The total number of migratory fauna from India comes to 457 species
- Birds comprise 83% (380 species)
- Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) had for the first time compiled the list of migratory species of India under the CMS before the Conference of Parties (COP 13)
- The Asian elephant was added to Appendix I and the urial to Appendix II.
- The largest group of mammals is definitely bats belonging to the Family Vespertilionidae.
- Dolphins are the second highest group of mammals with nine migratory species of dolphins listed

The roving lot



List of migratory species in India as per Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) Appendices



From Prelims Point of View

Convention for the conservation of migratory species or Bonn Convention

- Signed in 1979 in Germany and is known as the Bonn Convention
- Environmental treaty of the UN that provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats
- Only global convention specialising in the conservation of migratory species, their habitats and migration routes.
- Appendix I of the Convention lists 'Threatened Migratory Species'.
- Appendix II lists 'Migratory Species requiring international cooperation'

Pakke Tiger Reserve

Part of: GS Prelims – Environment and GS Mains III- Conservation

In news:

Recently there was an opposition to not to pursue a proposed highway through the 'nationally important' Pakke Tiger Reserve.

From Prelims Point of View:

Background:

- Lies in the foothills of the eastern Himalaya in the East Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. It is also known as Pakhui Tiger Reserve.
- Falls within the Eastern Himalaya Biodiversity Hotspot.
- Known for its amazing sightings of four resident hornbill species.
- India is home to nine species of hornbills. three of them, the wreathed hornbill (*Aceros undulatus*), the brown hornbill (*Anorrhinus austeni*) and the Rufous-necked hornbill (*Aceros nipalensis*) great hornbill is the state bird of Arunachal Pradesh and Kerala.
- It is 'vulnerable' under the IUCN Red list.
- Hornbill festival celebrated in Nagaland is named after the bird – Hornbill which is the most revered and admired bird for the Nagas.

Swamp Wallaby

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Environment

In News:

- Swamp wallaby is a marsupial (young are carried in a pouch) related to the kangaroo, is pregnant throughout its adult life.
- It typically conceives a new embryo day before delivering the new-born from its previous pregnancy.
- Female wallabies have two uteri and two separate ovaries. At the end of a pregnancy in one uterus, a new embryo develops in the other uterus.
- Wallabies regularly have an embryo in the uterus, a young joey in the pouch, and some third semi-dependent young at foot, still drinking its mother's milk.

Red Panda

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Environment

In News:

- Hunting of Red Panda has decreased as per study by wildlife trade monitoring network TRAFFIC, indicative of the success of awareness campaigns.
- Red panda is endemic to the temperate forests of the Himalayas.
- Native to the eastern Himalayas and southwestern China.
- It is arboreal, feeds mainly on bamboo, but also eats eggs, birds, and insects
- Habitat: Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal and northern Arunachal Pradesh.
- Threat: Hunted for meat and fur, besides illegal capture for the pet trade.
- IUCN Status: Endangered

- Significance: Red panda's survival is crucial for the eastern and north-eastern Himalayan subalpine conifer forests and the eastern Himalayan broadleaf forests
- Estimated Population: 14,500 animals in the wild across Nepal, Bhutan, India, China and Myanmar.
- It is the state animal of Sikkim

Protected areas

- Kanchendzonga National Park (NP) — Sikkim
- Neora Valley NP – West Bengal
- Namdapha National Park – Arunachal Pradesh
- Singalila National Park – West Bengal

Mass nesting of Olive Ridleys

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Conservation

In News:

- Vulnerable **Olive Ridley** sea turtles have returned to Odisha's Rushikulya river in lakhs for mass nesting.

Key takeaways:

- The animals had skipped Rushikulya in 2019 which became a cause of concern for turtle researchers.
- Tourists have been barred from visiting Rushikulya due to the countrywide lockdown in place since March 24.
- Thousands of turtles also laid eggs at **Gahiramatha marine sanctuary** recently.

Important value additions:

Olive Ridley

- The Olive Ridley sea turtle is the most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.
- It is found in warm and tropical waters, primarily in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.
- It is best known for their unique mass nesting called **arribada**, where thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs.
- IUCN status: Vulnerable.

Marine Turtles

- Five species of sea turtles are known to inhabit **Indian coastal waters and islands**.
 - Olive Ridley turtle
 - Green turtle
 - Hawksbill turtle
 - Loggerhead turtle
 - Leatherback turtle
- Except the Loggerhead, the remaining four species nest along the Indian coast

Himalayan Ibex

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Conservation

In News:

- A recent study by scientists of the **Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)** has proved that **Himalayan Ibex** is a **distinct species** from the **Siberian Ibex**.

Key takeaways:

- The scientists assumed that the '**montane systems**' which are formed due to **climatic oscillations** and **temporal topographic metamorphosis** might have broken up the adjoining distribution of widespread species.
- This might have also led to the accelerated **allopatric speciation** (speciation because of geographic and reproductive isolation).
- Study will help in the global understanding of the **Ibex distribution and evolution**.

Important value additions:

Ibex

- **Siberian Ibex** is a species of wild goat.
- It is **distributed in diverse habitats**, ranging from cold deserts, rocky outcrops, steep terrain, high-land flats and mountain ridges to low mountains and foothills.
- **Himalayan Ibex** is distributed in the **trans-Himalayan ranges** of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh.
- **IUCN status** of Ibex - **Least concern**.



Image Source : <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/himalayan-ibex-a-distinct-species/article31201581.ece>

Zoological Survey of India

- It was founded by the Government of India, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, as the **premier Indian organisation in zoological research** and studies to promote the survey, exploration and research of the fauna in the country.
- **ZSI** (zoology) as well as **ASI** (archaeology), **BSI** (botany), **FSI** (forests), **FiSI** (fisheries), **GSI** (geology), **IIEE** (ecology), **NIO** (oceanography), **RGCCI** (Census of India) and **SI** (cartography) are **key national survey organisations** of India.

Special Economic zone

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Infrastructure

In News:

- The **Department of Commerce** has decided to provide suitable relaxations on compliances to be met by units / developers / co-developers of **Special Economic Zones (SEZs)** in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

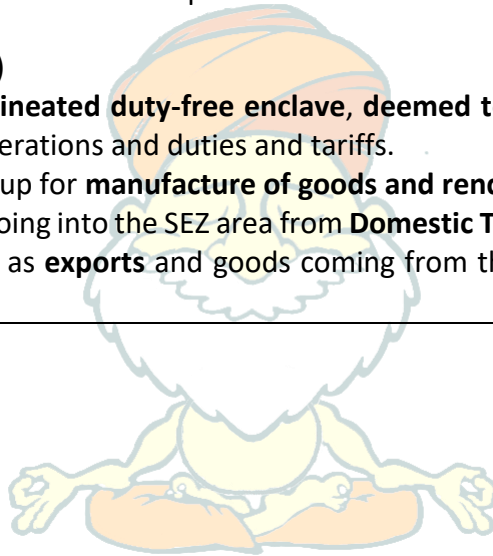
Key takeaways:

- Development Commissioners of SEZs have been directed to **ensure that no hardship is caused** to Developers / Co-Developer / Units and
- **No punitive action** must be taken in cases where any compliance is not met during this period impacted by the above disruption.

Important value additions:

Special Economic Zone (SEZ)

- It is a specifically **delineated duty-free enclave, deemed to be foreign territory** for the purposes of trade operations and duties and tariffs.
- SEZ units may be set up for **manufacture of goods and rendering of services**.
- Goods and services going into the SEZ area from **Domestic Tariff Area** (whole India except SEZ) shall be treated as **exports** and goods coming from the SEZ area into DTA shall be treated as imports.



Space sector: India needs urgent and radical reforms

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Science and technology

Context: Saudi Arabia and Luxemburg plans for Outer space which demonstrates that outer space need not be the playing ground for big powers alone.

Space programmes have for long been viewed as either strategic or symbols of national prestige for big countries that are prepared to invest significant resources in the pursuit of a credible presence in outer space.

UAE:

- A country with a population of barely one million plans to launch its Mars mission, “Hope”, in 2020 in partnership with a range of organisations across the world — including three universities in the US.
- Japan is scheduled to launch the UAE Mars probe this year.
- India’s own ISRO is also working with the UAE on its Mars mission.
- In 2019, the first Emirati Astronaut, Hazza al-Mansouri spent more than a week in the US-Russian space station.
- UAE’s space strategy- is about cornering a slice of the rapidly growing commercial space industry — part of a major effort to diversify the UAE economy away from its reliance on hydrocarbons

Luxembourg

- It too entered the space sector only in the middle of the last decade.
- It is also driven by the need for economic diversification, the space sector accounts for nearly 2% of Luxembourg’s GDP.
- Over the years, Luxembourg moved away from its past reliance on the steel industry to become a centre of European banking and finance. It is now looking at commercial space as a major opportunity.
- Luxembourg has taken a number of regulatory steps to create a vibrant ecosystem for space companies ranging from satellite operations to future extraction of resources from asteroids and other space objects
- There are more than 50 companies and two public research organisations that are driving the expansion of space sector in Luxembourg.

Structural changes that are reshaping the global space activity.

- Through the second half of the 20th century, outer space was the sole preserve of national space programmes driven by government-funding, direction and management
- As military uses of space and prestige projects like Moon-landing emerged, major private sector entities already in the aviation industry won space contracts in the US but under overall guidance & control of NASA & Pentagon
- The last decades of the 20th century saw significant expansion of satellite-based telecommunication, navigation, broadcasting and mapping, and lent a significant commercial dimension to the space sector.

- As a result, private sector companies (Ex: Space X) started playing major role in the sector like independent Space launches. Hired for a resupply mission for the space station, Space X now launches more rockets every year than NASA
- The entry of private sector has begun to drive down the cost-per-launch through innovations such as reusable rockets.
- As the digital revolution in the 21st century transformed the world economy, the commercial space sector has begun to grow in leaps and bounds.
- The global space business is now estimated to be around \$ 400 billion and is expected easily rise to at least trillion dollars by 2040. This has made private sector participation attractive and inevitable.

India's Space Sector:

- India, however, is quite some distance away from adapting to the unfolding changes in the global space business.
- Although the ISRO encourages private sector participation in the national space programme, its model is still very 20th century — in terms of governmental domination
- As it looks at the growing role of the private sector and the effort by nations like the UAE and Luxembourg, Delhi needs to move quickly towards a new model for India's space activity.

Conclusion

India needs a regulatory environment that encourages a more dynamic role for the private sector and promotes innovation. It will be a pity if India squanders the many advantages of its early start in space by delaying the much-needed reform and reorganisation of its space sector.

Do You Know?

- **Startlink project of SpaceX** aims to launch thousands of satellites into the low-earth orbit to provide internet services.
- Amazon also has plans to build a network of more than 3,000 satellites in the low-earth orbit
- Companies also have plans to develop **space tourism** and build human settlements on the Moon and on Mars.

Connecting the dots

- **Project Loon of Google** uses high-altitude balloons in the stratosphere to provide connectivity to people in unserved and underserved communities around the world.
- LiFi - is a mobile wireless technology that uses light rather than radio frequencies to transmit data.

Mac-binding

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Awareness in IT

In News:

- Use of Social media was allowed in Jammu & Kashmir but Internet connectivity is made available "with mac-binding".
- Every device has a **Media Access Control (MAC) address**, a hardware identification number that is unique to it.

- While accessing the Internet, every device is assigned an IP address.
- Mac-binding essentially means **binding together the MAC and IP addresses**, so that all requests from that IP address are served only by the computer having that particular MAC address
- In effect, it means that if the IP address or the MAC address changes, the device can no longer access the Internet
- Also, monitoring authorities can trace the specific system from which a particular online activity was carried out

Virtual Currency: SC lifts Ban on its trading

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Awareness in IT; GS-II- Governance

In News:

- The ban on trading in Virtual Currencies was imposed by RBI
- There is no globally accepted definition of what exactly is virtual currency.
- Basically, virtual currency is the larger umbrella term for all forms of non-fiat currency being traded online.
- Virtual Currencies are mostly created, distributed and accepted in local virtual networks.
- Virtual currency also includes Cryptocurrencies that have an extra layer of security, in the form of encryption algorithms
- Most cryptocurrencies now operate on the blockchain or distributed ledger technology, which allows everyone on the network to keep track of the transactions occurring globally.

Key Highlights of the Judgement

- The court found the ban did not pass the “proportionality” test.
- The test of proportionality of any action by the government must pass the test of Article 19(1)(g), which states that all citizens of the country will have the right to practise any profession, or carry on any occupation or trade and business.
- Besides, RBI had not considered the availability of alternatives before issuing the order i.e. achieving the same objective by imposing a less drastic restraint.
- Till date, the RBI has not come out with a stand that any of the entities regulated by it have suffered any loss or adverse effect directly or indirectly, on account of VC exchanges.

Cryptocurrencies, Blockchain and Regulations

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Awareness in IT; GS-II- Governance

Context: SC lifts Ban on virtual currencies that was imposed by RBI

Virtual Currency

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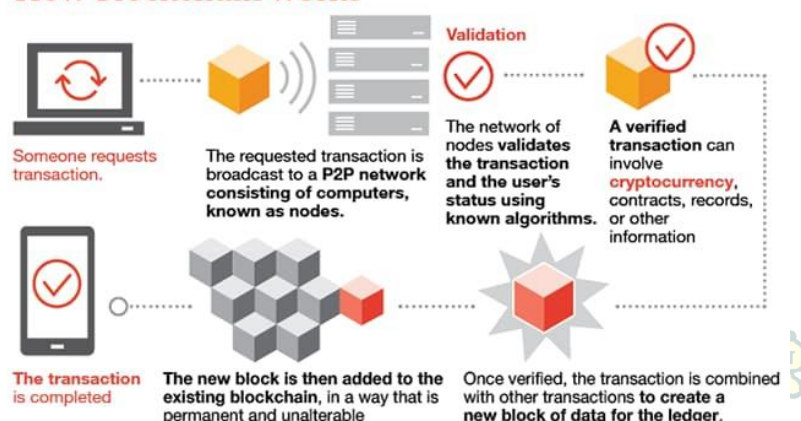
CryptoCurrency

- It is a digital asset designed to work as a medium of exchange that uses strong cryptography to control the creation of additional units, to secure financial transactions and verify the transfer of assets
- These transactions are verified by network nodes and recorded in public distributed ledger called blockchain
- They are being transferred, stored or traded electronically.
- Thus, Crypto Currencies are type of unregulated digital money.
- They are neither issued by central bank/public authority, nor is necessarily attached to fiat currency, but is used and accepted among the members of a specific virtual community

Blockchain Technology:

- Block chain is a decentralised digital ledger
- It was invented by Satoshi Nakamoto in 2008 for use in the cryptocurrency bitcoin
- Blockchains achieve consensus among distributed nodes, allowing the transfer of digital goods without the need for centralized authorisation of transactions.
- Its working can be represented through the below diagram.

How blockchain works



- The Internet allows computers to exchange information; Block chain allows computers to record information. Both use a lot of computers (nodes).
- The technology thus allows transactions to be simultaneously anonymous and secure, peer-to-peer, instant and frictionless.

Dinesh Sharma Committee

- It was an inter-disciplinary committee set up in April 2017 by Finance Ministry to look into cryptocurrency legitimacy.
- The committee recommended a total ban on cryptocurrency in India

Subhash Chandra Garg committee

- It was formed in Nov 2017 to draft regulations for cryptocurrencies.
- It also recommended banning cryptocurrencies in India, citing risks and volatility in prices
- It recommended heavy penalties of up to Rs 25 crore and a jail term up to 10 years for anyone who mines, generates, holds, sells, transfers or issues cryptocurrency.

Criticism of Crypto Currencies:

- Highly speculative nature of assessing their value. For ex: the cryptocurrency traded at a peak of \$20,000 in mid-2018 before crashing to \$3,000 by the end of the year.
- It is not backed by any central institution but derives trust from its intricate block chain ledger system.
- Bitcoins, with their assured anonymity is used in illicit transactions over the “dark web”.

Merits of cryptocurrencies

- Cryptocurrencies have now been adopted by international trading firms for use in lending, raising funds for other crypto projects
- It facilitates easier cross-border payments
- European Union has not outrightly banned the instrument but has sought to regulate its functioning.
- The 2019 Bill on Cryptocurrency even proposed the creation of a “digital rupee” as official currency.

Arguments made by Petitioners in SC against RBI ban

- The ban choked the agencies that sought to provide a platform to facilitate trading in cryptocurrencies by cutting them off from banks.
- This had a chilling effect on the fledgling cryptocurrency exchanges industry in India and went against their entrepreneurial right to operate a business enshrined in Article 19(1)(g).
- **Article 19(1)(g)** states that all citizens of the country will have the right to practice any profession, or carry on any occupation or trade and business.

Key Highlights of the Supreme Court Judgement

- The court found the ban did not pass the “proportionality” test as mentioned in Article 19(2)
- Besides, RBI had not considered the availability of alternatives before issuing the order i.e. achieving the same objective by imposing a less drastic restraint.
- Till date, the RBI has not come out with a stand that any of the entities regulated by it have suffered any loss or adverse effect directly or indirectly, on account of VC exchanges.

Conclusion

It is now imperative on authorities to find the right “regulatory balance” on cryptocurrencies, task that is easier thought than done, considering their ever-evolving nature due to technological innovation.

Connecting the dots

- Applications of Block Chain Technology in other sectors

Quantum Technology

Context: India’s slow progress of research in Quantum technology whereby serious experimental work has been under way for only about five years, and in few locations.

In contrast countries like US, Europe & China have focused on the field since past two decades and are on the verge of major breakthroughs

Constraints on India's progress

- Lack of sufficient resources
- Inadequate high quality manpower
- Lack of timeliness and flexibility
- Slow Implementation: A programme called Quantum Enabled Science and Technology has been fully rolled out now, more than two years after the call for proposals.

What is Quantum Technology?

It is a class of technology that works by using the principles of **quantum mechanics (the physics of sub-atomic particles)**, including quantum entanglement and quantum superposition.

- **Quantum entanglement** is when two atoms are connected, or entangled, despite being separated.
- **Quantum superposition** is the theory that sub-atomic particles exist in multiple states simultaneously.

A timeline of Quantum Mechanics

- It was developed in the early 20th century to **describe nature in the small** — at the scale of atoms and elementary particles.
- It helped in understanding of the physical world, including the interaction of light and matter and on subjects such as gravity and black holes.
- It led to ubiquitous **inventions such as lasers and semiconductor transistors**
- A **second revolution** is currently under way with the goal of controlling and harnessing the properties of quantum mechanics.

Quantum field has not yet matured for commercialization, due to the **extreme scientific challenges** involved some of which are:

- **Technical Difficulties:** The challenge lies in harnessing the properties of quantum superposition and entanglement in a highly controlled manner by building a system composed of carefully designed building blocks called quantum bits or qubits.
- **Fragility of Qubits:** A qubit or quantum bit is the basic unit of quantum information—the quantum version of the binary bit (0 and 1) in classical computing
- These qubits tend to be very fragile and lose their “quantumness” if not controlled properly, and a careful choice of materials, design and engineering is required to get them to work.
- **Theoretical Challenges** of creating the algorithms and applications for quantum computers

Recent Developments:

- Google's Sycamore demonstrated the quantum supremacy
- China demonstrated secure quantum communication links between terrestrial stations and satellites.

About National Mission on Quantum Technologies & Applications (NM-QTA)

- The mission will oversee the development of quantum technologies for communications, computing, materials development and cryptography.
- The mission addresses the constraints (listed above) that led to slow progression of country in quantum field, through adoption of holistic approach.

- Announced in Budget 2020
- Period: Five years (2020-25)
- Total Funds: Rs 8000 years
- Implementing Body: Department of Science & Technology (DST)

Significance of the mission:

- The mission may eventually lead to the creation of a **super-secure communication network**
- It will help prepare next generation **skilled manpower**, boost translational research and also encourage entrepreneurship and start-up ecosystem development.
- It will find utility in finding **solution for complex problems** in fields of computing, communications, sensing, chemistry, cryptography, imaging and mechanic
- The mission will enable **India to emerge as Global leader** in the field through increased investment & focus in Quantum Technologies

Way Forward

- **Increase private funding**, both via industry and philanthropy, as they can play an outsized role even with much smaller amounts and compliment the efforts of government
- **Institutional Autonomy** as there is a need to create a vibrant intellectual environment to help attract top researchers.
- **Industry- Academia Collaboration**: Connections with Indian industry from the start would help quantum technologies become commercialised successfully.

Connecting the dots

- Cryptography- utility & challenges
- Artificial Intelligence – its utility and challenges

Cord Blood Banking

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Science & Technology

In News:

- Cord blood banking involves taking the umbilical cord blood, which is a rich source of stem cells, and preserving it for future use.
- Stem cells are special human cells that have the ability to develop into many different cell types, from muscle cells to brain cells
- Globally, cord blood banking is recommended as a source of hematopoietic stem cell (derived from bone marrow, peripheral blood, or umbilical cord blood) transplantation for haematological cancers and disorders where its use is recommended.
- For all other conditions, the use of cord blood as a source of stem cells is not yet established.

Plants dissipate excess sunlight as heat

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Science & Technology

In News:

- Photosynthesis is a life-sustaining process by which plants store solar energy as sugar molecules.

- However, if sunlight (solar energy) is in excess, it can lead to leaves being dehydrated and damaged
- The excess solar energy is transferred from the pigment chlorophyll, which gives leaves their green colour, to other pigments called carotenoids.
- The carotenoids then release the energy as heat
- The heat dissipation phenomenon occurs on a very fast time scale, in femtoseconds or quadrillionths of a second.
- The excess energy, if not released, leads to the creation of free radicals that can damage proteins and other important cellular molecules.

National Supercomputing Mission (NSM)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Awareness in IT

In News:

- India has produced just three supercomputers since 2015 under NSM
 - PARAM Shivay installed in IIT-BHU, Varanasi with 837 TeraFlop capacity
 - Second one at IIT-Kharagpur with 1.66 PetaFlop capacity
 - PARAM Brahma at ISER-Pune, has a capacity of 797 TeraFlop
- NSM envisaged setting up a network of **70 high-performance computing facilities** with an aim to connect national academic and R&D institutions across India over a seven-year period at an estimated cost of Rs 4500 Crores.
- **Parent Body:** Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) and Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- **Nodal Agencies of NSM-** Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Pune, and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.

Did You Know?

- Just 16.67% of the total budget of Rs 4,500 crore, was disbursed during the last four-and-a-half years to two nodal agencies of NSM
- Globally, China continues to lead the supercomputer race. It added eight more supercomputers in the last six months taking its existing numbers to 227.

Circuit breaker

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy & Science & Technology

In News:

- It was introduced by SEBI in 2001 to prevent crashes in Stock Exchange Market
- Circuit breakers are triggered to prevent markets from crashing, which happens when market participants start to panic induced by fears that their stocks are overvalued and decide to sell their stocks.
- This index-based market-wide circuit breaker system applies at three stages of the index movement, at 10, 15 and 20%
- When triggered, these circuit breakers bring about a coordinated trading halt in all equity and equity derivative markets nationwide.

Becquerels

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Science & Technology

In News:

- The SI unit for measuring the amount of radioactivity is the **becquerel** (symbol **Bq**).
- **One becquerel** (1Bq) is equal to **1 disintegration per second**.
- An older unit of radioactivity is the **curie**. The curie was originally defined as equivalent to the number of disintegrations that one gram of radium-226 will undergo in one second.

Currently, a curie is defined using becquerels as $1\text{Ci} = 3.7 \times 10^{10}$ disintegrations per second.

LiDAR

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Science & Technology

In News:

- In simple terms, LiDAR stands for **light detection and ranging**.
- It is basically a **remote sensing method** that uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure distances to the subject.
- These light pulses – when combined with other data, generate accurate, high-resolution three-dimensional information of the object.
- This technology is mostly used for **ground-based surveys**.
- LiDAR was first used on a spacecraft during the **Apollo 15 mission in 1971**, when astronauts mapped the surface of the moon.
- Apart from aerial surveys, the LiDAR sensor is the most important component in **self-driving cars**. The LiDAR sensor provides continuous 360 degrees of visibility and accurate depth information.

Challenges with LiDAR

- LiDAR can measure the distance to surrounding objects up to 5 meters away, but won't fare well in identifying objects in the vicinity.
- Also, it can't perform well in fog, rain, snow and dusty weather.
- LiDAR also struggles to detect a glass wall or door, which is why smartphone manufacturers and self-driving cars makers use LiDAR along with secondary cameras and sensors.

Do You Know?

- **Sonar** (short for sound navigation and ranging) relies on sound waves to detect objects and hence is usually used to detect objects underwater.
- Meanwhile, **Radar** (short for radio detection and ranging) uses radio waves to determine an object's distance or range. Radio waves can work over a long distance and perform better in dusty conditions.

COVID-19: IITD develops Cheaper test kits

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-III- Science & technology

- **Comparative sequence analysis** was used to identify unique regions in COVID-19, which are not present in other human coronaviruses, providing an opportunity to specifically detect COVID-19
- The **primers targeting unique regions** in the spike protein of COVID-19, were designed to be used in using real time polymerase chain reaction in an assay.
- This assay can be used as a qualitative (yes or no) assay without the need for extensive instrumentation.
- In addition, it can also **quantitatively assess virus loads**
- The **probe-free detection assay** (current testing methods are probe-based) reduces the testing cost without compromising on accuracy.

Scitech Airon

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Science and technology

In News:

- **A technology**, titled Scitech Airon, has been developed by an incubatee company of Scitech Park, Pune.
- It offers an **effective solution** for India's fight against COVID-19.

Key takeaways:

- The technology **reduces the viral load** of infected areas within a room significantly within an hour.
- It has been developed under the **NIDHI PRAYAS program** initiated by the Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- It **helps to control** the virus, bacteria, and fungal infections in a closed environment.
- It would help in ensuring **wellbeing** of the staff, doctors, and nurses working in the quarantine facilities **by enhancing their disease resistance power** and ability to fight the virus.
- DST has **released Rs 1 crore** to manufacture and scale up the product.
- The technology has been **scientifically tested** by various globally renowned labs in different types of closed environments.

Important value additions:

NIDHI PRAYAS program

- National Initiative for **Developing and Harnessing Innovations (NIDHI)** is an **umbrella programme** conceived and developed by the **Department of Science & Technology (DST)**, Government of India, **for nurturing ideas and innovations** (knowledge-based and technology-driven) into successful start-ups.
- **Under this initiative**, DST has launched **NIDHI- Promoting and Accelerating Young and ASpiring innovators & startups (NIDHI-PRAYAS)** program.
- The program caters to **idea-stage entrepreneurs** with a physical product offering.
- It would also facilitate the innovators with the Physical infrastructure, Technical Guidance, Business Mentorship etc.

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Notified disaster and State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Disaster Management

In News:

- Ministry of Home Affairs decided to treat COVID-19 as a notified disaster for the purpose of providing assistance under SDRF.
- The **SDRF is constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005** and is the primary fund available with state governments for responses to notified disasters.
- The Central government contributes
 - 75% towards the SDRF allocation for general category states and UTs.
 - 90% for special category states/UTs, which includes north-eastern states, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand).

Value Addition for Prelims

- For SDRF, the Centre releases funds in two equal instalments as per the recommendation of the Finance Commission.
- On the other hand, the **National Disaster Response Fund**, which is also constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 supplements the SDRF of a state, in case of a disaster of severe nature, provided adequate funds are not available in the SDRF.

Did You Know?

- In a similar move, US President also declared a national emergency in the country invoking the Stafford Act, as per which, the federal government contributes about 75% to the cost of relief for states.

National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) puts contingency plans in place to fight COVID-19

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Disaster Management

In News:

- NDRF was established in 2006 under **The Disaster Management Act, 2005**
- It comes under **Ministry of Home Affairs**
- It is the only dedicated disaster response force in the world
- It **works under National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** which lays down policies, plans and guidelines for disaster management.
- Capabilities for undertaking disaster response, prevention, mitigation and capacity building
- At present there are 12 battalions in NDRF (three each from the BSF and CRPF and two each from CISF, ITBP and SSB) which are deployed strategically across country to provide immediate response.
- All battalions have been equipped and trained to **respond natural and man-made disasters** including chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) emergencies.

Death by fireworks

Context: Frequent accidents in fireworks units in Sivakasi, Tamilnadu

In news:

- In the past decade 239 people have been killed and over 265 injured in 142 accidents in fireworks units.
- The fireworks sector has currently grown to 1,070 licensed units employing an estimated 10 lakh workers.

Some of the major causes of accidents are:

- **Illegal Functioning:** Unlicensed units manufacturing firecrackers have increased, which don't adhere to the safety guidelines provided by State authorities.
- **Sub-leasing of works** who often neglect safety measures so as to maximise their profit.
- **Mishandling of Chemicals:** Rough handling of chemicals by untrained and unskilled workers often leads to fire mishaps
- Spillage or overloading of chemicals during the filling process
- Working outside permitted areas which puts the safety of the neighbourhood in danger.
- Lack of adequate monitoring by the state authorities

The Chaitanya Prasad Committee

It examined, among other things, statutory and administrative shortcomings that led to the death of 40 workers at Om Shakti Fireworks Industries in 2012.

Some of the committee's key findings are:

- Conspicuous **absence of proper inspection mechanisms** at various government departments.
- Lack of **coordination between Central and State authorities** dealing with the regulation of fireworks industries.
- It recommended making **sub-leasing** of works by licensed units **a cognisable penal offence**
- As part of industrial safety measures, it mandated inter-safety distances between sheds to be covered with earthen mounds.

Way Ahead

- Adopting safe work practices
- Comprehensive monitoring by Central and State licensing
- Strict enforcement of the safety guidelines by authorities.
- Increased manpower in such enforcement & regulatory authorities
- Implementing the recommendation of Chaitanya Prasad Committee
- Awareness among stakeholders involved in the sector about the significance of safety in manufacturing process.

Connecting the dots

- Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO)
- Green Crackers

Significance of 21-day lockdown period

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance; Health; GS III – Disaster Management; Science and Technology

In News:

- Indian Prime Minister recently announced 21-day lockdown period in the entire country to contain the COVID- 19 pandemic.

Key Takeaways:

- 21-day quarantine** was encouraged extensively during **Ebola crisis** as well.
- The calculations are based on the estimated incubation period of the virus in the human host.
- Usually, **incubation period** for any infection is 14 days epidemiologically.
- Another week is added to ensure that the infection dies out and the host is entirely safe.
- Since, this is a novel corona virus, the scientists have estimated the time between entry of virus to the onset of infection, falls within this period, known as **median incubation period**.
- It was also recently reported that the median incubation period for **COVID-19 is just over five days**.
- 97.5% of people who develop symptoms do so within 11.5 days of infection.
- This is the **most effective way** of preventing the spread of infection.
- Maintaining **personal hygiene and practising personal distancing** are other ways of prevention.

Important value additions:

Ebola

- Ebola virus disease (EVD) is also known as **Ebola haemorrhagic fever**.
- It is viral haemorrhagic fever of humans and other primates caused by **ebolaviruses**.
- The virus causes severe **bleeding, organ failure and can lead to death**.
- Humans may spread the virus to other humans through contact with **bodily fluids** such as blood.

Quarantine

- Quarantine is a restriction on the movement of people and goods which is intended to prevent the spread of disease or pests.

Addendum to the Guidelines regarding Nationwide Lockdown issued

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance; GS III – Disaster Management

In News:

- Addendum to the guidelines regarding nationwide lockdown was issued recently by Ministry of Home Affairs.

- This addendum lays down **additional categories** of essential goods and services exempted under **the Disaster Management Act**, with respect to the 21- day lockdown.

Important value additions:

Disaster Management Act

- The Disaster Management Act, 2005 provides for the legal and institutional framework for disaster management in India **at the national, state and district levels**.
- The **primary responsibility** of Disaster Management vests with the state government.
- The central government **lays down** the plans, policies and guidelines and provides support.
- Recently, the Home Ministry declared the **coronavirus outbreak as a "notified disaster"**, thus bringing into play the provisions of the Disaster Management Act.
- The Act allows the **National Executive Committee** to give directions to governments regarding measures to be taken by them.
- The Disaster Management Act is also being **used to rein in the circulation of fake news**.
- The Act is being used in tandem with the **Epidemic Diseases Act**.

Humanoid robot tested

Part of: GS Prelims and GS III – Disaster Management; Science and Technology

In News:

- A series of trials were conducted on a **humanoid robot** at a government hospital in Jaipur.

Key takeaways:

- The trials were carried out to check if robot could be **used for delivering medicines and food** to the COVID-19 patients admitted there.
- If approved, the robot would help in keeping the **doctors and nursing staff at a safe distance** to protect them against the dreaded **coronavirus**.
- The medicos and paramedical staff are at **higher risk** of being infected with the virus despite wearing protective gear.
- It is battery-operated humanoid robot with a lifespan of four to five years
- It uses **artificial intelligence and Internet of Things (IoT)**.
- It can **navigate its own way without the instructions** to follow lines on the floor.
- The robots could also be **easily disinfected** and **used multiple times** inside the high-risk isolation ward.

Important value additions:

Humanoid robot

- It is a robot with its body shape built to resemble the human body.
- The design may be for functional purposes.

COVID-19: Centre- State relations

To effectively tide over the crisis created by COVID-19 pandemic there is a need for a robust Centre-State cooperation in sharing of best practices & resources.

Let us have a look at two States which have adopted good measures in their fight against Pandemic:

Kerala

- **Draft policy** on dealing with COVID-19 pandemic was ready by January last week showing urgency of preparedness.
- Declaration of COVID-19 as **State disaster** on February first week itself indicated a comprehensive response to be taken by authorities
- Constitution of **State response team** and District response team– to ensure inter-ministry coordination, quick response & regular monitoring of the actions taken
- Digital System to maintain data of all people under home quarantine (nearly 1.5 lakh people)
- **Everyday press conference** by State Health Minister & CM to educate citizens and quell rumours
- Shut down of anganwadis and schools was followed up by **dry ration supplies** to their homes.
- Utilizing **Community kitchens** to provide food for the poor
- **Suspension of Biometric authentication** at PDS shops as a precautionary measure to reduce the risk of community transmission.
- Advance payment of social security pensions

Karnataka

- Multi-pronged strategy that involves Technical strategy, Humanitarian approach and Economic assistance
- Setting up of **high-tech war rooms** to exchange information & monitor the spread of disease
- **Tracking the mobile phones** of quarantined people through their GPS location and tacking necessary action if they violate the norms
- **Corona Watch app** – to inform people about places where infected persons had travelled – helps people to avoid such places
- **Dedicated Helpline**, Telegram group and COVID Awareness and Response centre – to spread awareness, respond to people's queries and fight the menace of rumours/fake news
- **'Dasoha line'** (155214) – to handle the demand for food during this crisis
- **Construction labourers and migrant workers** -One convention centre or wedding hall in every ward will be taken over by District administration to house them & prevent their migration to home towns

Way Ahead

- Central government can adopt the best practices followed by some states and scale it up to national level
- Mission mode implementation of relief package announced by Centre

- Setting up **sector-specific committees** to facilitate prompt responses.
- **Centre also needs to enhance the resources of State** through measures like
 - Releasing all the pending dues owed to the state governments on account of GST compensation.
 - Relaxation of FRBM limits
 - Assist states in raising finances from markets (by giving sovereign guarantees)
 - Sharing bonanza from fall in Crude Oil Prices
 - Consult States to ensure that supply chain, spread across multiple states, of essential commodities is not disrupted
 - Harvest time – may lead to price fall or wastage due to disruption caused by lockdown – States to be financially supported (agriculture is a State subject)

Connecting the dots

- Inter-State Council

Governing Council of NITI Aayog



Swathi Weapon Locating radar

Part of: Prelims and GS-III-Security

In news-

- Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) bags \$40mn defence deal from Armenia for supplying four Swathi Weapon Locating Radars (WLR)
- Swathi WLR was indigenously developed by DRDO and manufactured by BEL.
- It is an electronically scanned phased array radar
- It automatically locates hostile artillery, mortars and rocket launchers and tracks friendly fire to locate the impact point of friendly artillery fire to issue necessary corrections.
- The radar is designed to detect projectiles with small cross section across the battle space horizon, and has the capability to handle simultaneous fire from weapons deployed at multiple locations.

The radar uses advanced signal processing techniques for detection and tracking projectiles in the presence of ground, weather clutter and other forms of interference in Electronic Warfare scenario.

Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Security

In News:

- **LCA Tejas is a single-engine multirole light combat aircraft.**
- It replaced the aging Mig 21 fighter planes.
- It is the second supersonic fighter jet that was developed by HAL (the first one being HAL HF-24 Marut).
- **Bodies involved:** Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA), the autonomous society of DRDO is the design agency and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) as the manufacturer
- It is the **lightest and smallest** multirole supersonic fighter aircraft in its class.
- It can attain the maximum **speed of Mach 1.8**.
- It is designed to carry a range of air-to-air, air-to-surface, precision-guided and standoff weaponry.
- It is a single pilot aircraft that has a maximum takeoff weight of 13,300 kg.
- It has a general range of 850 km and a **combat range of 500 km**.

Paramilitary forces: Movement suspended in wake of COVID-19 outbreak

Part of: GS-Prelims and Mains GS-III - Security

- A paramilitary organization is organized like an army and performs either civil or military functions in a country
- **Parent Body:** Ministry of Home Affairs
- Over 10 lakh personnel serve in seven paramilitary
 - Assam Rifles (AR)
 - Border Security Force (BSF)

- Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)
- Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)
- Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)
- National Security Guard (NSG)
- Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)

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In News


Description

1. National Lalit Kala Akademi awards	<p>In News:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The President of India conferred the 61st annual Lalit Kala Akademi Awards on 15 meritorious artists in New Delhi Lalit Kala Akademi also called National Academy of Art was set up by the Government of India in New Delhi as an autonomous body, in 1954. The Akademi was given statutory authority in 1957, under the Societies Registration Act 1860. It is funded by the Ministry of Culture.
2. QS Rankings	<p>In News:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The QS World University Subject Rankings 2020 has been released from London by Quacquarelli Symonds. Quacquarelli Symonds is the world's leading provider of services, analytics, and insight to the global higher education sector. QS uses four key metrics to compile the rankings including academic reputation, employer reputation, citations per paper and the h-index which measures how productive an institution's research faculty are. The highest ranking an Indian institute has got this year is the 41st rank globally. This is shared by both Delhi University's School for Developmental Studies and IIT Bombay's Mining and Minerals Department. IIT Bombay has topped the list in the Engineering and Technology subjects with the 44th rank, followed by IIT Delhi (47), IIT Kharagpur (86) and IIT Madras (88).
3. Freedom in the World 2020 report	<p>In News:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is released by Freedom House, a US-based NGO which has been tracking global political and civil liberties for almost half a century The report derives its methodology from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1948. The 2020 report has ranked India at the 83rd position along with Timor-Leste and Senegal. India is near the bottom of the pile among the countries categorised as "Free", with only Tunisia receiving a lower score.
4. Gairsain	<p>In News:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uttarakhand Chief Minister named Gairsain as the new summer capital of the state Gairsain is situated at the eastern edge of the Dudhatoli mountain range. Uttarakhand was carved out as a separate state from Uttar Pradesh in 1998

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statehood activists had long contended that Gairsain, a tehsil in Chamoli district, was best suited to be the capital of the mountainous state as it was a hilly region falling on the border of Kumaon and Garhwal regions. The state Assembly is located in Dehradun, but sessions are held in Gairsain as well.
5. Gender Parity Index	<p>In News:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender Parity Index in education is the ratio of the number of female students enrolled to the number of male students in each level of education. In short, GPI at various levels reflect equitable participation of girls in the School system. GPI is released by UNESCO as a part of its Global Education Monitoring Report. A GPI of 1 indicates parity between the sexes; GPI below 1 indicated disparity in favour of males and GPI above 1 indicated disparity in favour of females India's GPI for the year 2018-19 at different levels of School Education is as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary Education: 1.03 Upper Primary Education: 1.12 Secondary Education: 1.04 Higher Secondary Education: 1.04 India's GPI indicates that the number of girls is more than the number of boys at all levels of school Education.
6. Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS)	<p>In News:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> INCOIS is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES). It is located in Hyderabad & was established in 1999. It is mandated to provide the best possible ocean information and advisory services to society, industry, government agencies and the scientific community through sustained ocean observations and constant improvement through systematic and focused research. It is a unit of the Earth System Science Organization (ESSO), New Delhi. ESSO operates as an executive arm of MoES
7. SAWEN (South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network)	<p>In News:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a Regional network comprised of eight countries in South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It aims at working as a strong regional inter-governmental body for combating wildlife crime by attempting common goals and approaches for combating illegal trade in the region.
8. Nari Shakti Puraskar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This award is instituted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, are "National Award in recognition of exceptional work for women empowerment." The National Award is given annually on March 8th to individuals, groups, institutions in recognition of their exceptional work towards the cause of

	women empowerment, especially for vulnerable and marginalized women.
9. Pyramid of Djoser	In News: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Egypt reopened the Pyramid of Djoser, the first pyramid ever built, after a 14-year restoration costing nearly \$6.6 million. • The pyramid was constructed during the era of Pharaoh Djoser, the second king of Ancient Egypt's Third Dynasty (2650 BC– 2575 BC). • The 4,700-year-old pyramid is 60 metres tall, and consists of six stacked steps over a burial shaft tomb 28 metres deep and seven metres wide. • It is located at the Saqqara archaeological site, 24 km southwest of Cairo, outside the royal capital of Memphis • It is a UNESCO world heritage site
10. Divya Kala Shakti	In News: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divya Kala Shakti is a cultural event which provides a wider and unique platform to showcase the potential of Persons with Differently Abled in the field of performing art, music, dance, acrobatics etc. • It is organised by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
11. Crime Multi Agency Centre (Cri-MAC)	In News: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Crime Multi Agency Centre (Cri-MAC) aims to share information between various police forces on heinous crimes. • The Cri-MAC is meant to share information on heinous crimes and other issues related to inter-state coordination.
12. COVID-19 Economic Response Task Force	In News: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To deal with the economic challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, 'COVID-19 Economic Response Task Force' will be created • It will be headed by Union Finance Minister. • The Task Force will consult stakeholders, take feedback, on the basis of which decisions will be taken to meet the challenges.
13. Electricity Production	In News: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As per the latest world energy statistics published by the IEA in 2019, India is the 3rd largest producer of electricity in the world. • India also ranks 106th in terms of per capita consumption in 2017. • The International Energy Agency (IEA) is a Paris-based autonomous intergovernmental organization established in the framework of the OECD in 1974
14. Abel Prize	In News: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abel prize was established by the Norwegian government in 2002 on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Neil Henrik's birth (Norwegian Mathematician) • The purpose is to award the Abel Prize for outstanding scientific work in the field of mathematics.
15. World Happiness Report	In News: <p>For the third year in a row, Finland (score of 7.8) has placed at the top of the list, with Denmark coming in second, followed by Switzerland</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an annual survey (originally launched in 2012) by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network for the United Nations. It looks at the state of global happiness in 156 countries, ranking countries based on six factors: levels of GDP, life expectancy, generosity, social support, freedom and corruption income. India has been ranked 144th with a score of 3.573(Pakistan, on the other hand, has been ranked 66 with a score of 5.693)
16. Earth Hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earth Hour 2020 was held on March 28, from 8:30 pm to 9:30 pm. It is a global grassroots movement uniting people to take action on environmental issues and protect the planet. Organized by - World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). The annual Earth Hour lights out event is held worldwide toward the end of March to encourage individuals, households, communities and businesses to turn off their non-essential lights for one hour as a symbol for their commitment to the planet. Why is Earth Hour event held in late March? The second-to-last and last weekend of March is around the time of the spring and autumn equinoxes in the northern and southern hemispheres respectively, which allows for near coincidental sunset times in both hemispheres, thereby ensuring the greatest visual impact for a global 'lights out' event. Earth Hour logo: Earlier it was 60 (60 symbolize 60 minutes). But since 2011 it is 60+. Here + represents the commitment to go beyond the earth hour (i.e. switching off non – essential lights in day to day life).
17. Sections 269 and 270 of the IPC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the coronavirus outbreak, penal provisions, such as Sections 269 and 270 of the IPC, are being invoked to enforce the lockdown orders. Sections 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) provides for a jail term of six months and/or fine. Section 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) provides for a jail term of two years and/or fine. In Section 270, the word 'malignantly' indicates indicates a deliberate intention on the part of the accused.
18. Sodium Hypochlorite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently, migrant workers travelling to their home states, were sprayed with a disinfectant, apparently to sanitise them. The chemical in the spray was a sodium hypochlorite solution. It is commonly used as a bleaching agent, and also to sanitise swimming pools. It releases chlorine, which is a disinfectant. The World Health Organization, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, recommend homemade bleach solutions of about 2-10% concentration to clean hard surfaces to clear them of any presence of the novel coronavirus. Sodium hypochlorite is corrosive. A 1% solution can cause damage to the skin of anyone who comes in contact with it. If it gets inside the body, it can cause serious harm to lungs.



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Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)

Q.1) Which one of the following is not essentially a species of the Himalayan vegetation?

- a) Juniper
- b) Mahogany
- c) Silver fir
- d) Spruce

Q.2) Consider the following protected areas:

- 1. Bandipur
- 2. Bhitarkanika
- 3. Manas
- 4. Sunderbans

Which of the above are declared Tiger Reserves?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.3) The term M-STRIPES' is in the context of

- a) Captive breeding of Leopards
- b) Maintenance of Tiger Reserves
- c) Indigenous Satellite Navigation System
- d) Security of National Highways

Q.4) In which of the following regions of India are you most likely to come across the 'Great Indian Hornbill' in its natural habitat?

- a) Sand deserts of northwest India
- b) Higher Himalayas of Jammu and Kashmir

- c) Salt marshes of western Gujarat
- d) Western Ghats

Q.5) Consider the following statements about Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

- 1. It is legally binding on the Parties but it does not take the place of national laws
- 2. India is a NOT a signatory to this convention

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.6) Consider the following statements about Swathi Weapon Locating Radars (WLR)

- 1. It is designed and developed by HAL in collaboration with USA post 1999 Kargil Conflict.
- 2. The radar has the capability to handle simultaneous fire from weapons deployed at multiple locations.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.7) Consider the following statements about National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA)

1. It is a statutory body established by NFRA Act, 2018
2. It is an independent regulator to oversee the auditing profession and accounting standards in India

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.8) Central Fraud Registry was set up in 2016 by which body?

- a) Indian Banks Association
- b) Finance Ministry
- c) Reserve Bank of India
- d) NITI Aayog

Q.9) Dholavira, an Harappan Site, is located in which state of India?

- a) Rajasthan
- b) Gujarat
- c) Bihar
- d) Uttar Pradesh

Q.10) Consider the following statements about National Interlinking of Rivers Authority (NIRA)

1. It is a statutory body established in 2013 for the implementation of inter-linking of rivers
2. Both inter-State and intra-State river linking projects will be taken by NIRA

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.11) Consider the following statements about Black Carbon

1. Black carbon results from the incomplete combustion of fossil fuels and biomass.
2. It is the second largest contributor to climate change after CO₂.
3. India is the second largest emitter of black carbon in the world, with emissions expected to increase dramatically in the coming decades.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1,2 and 3

Q.12) Sukna Lake recently in news is located in which State/UT of India?

- a) Rajasthan
- b) Andhra Pradesh
- c) Karnataka
- d) Chandigarh

Q.13) Schemes like Shilpagram, Octave, and Guru-Shishya Parampara are launched by Government of India for what purpose?

- a) To promote Classical Music in foreign Lands
- b) To encourage career prospects in Music
- c) To preserve and promote the Culture of Tribals
- d) None of the above

Q.14) Consider the following statements about Swamp Wallaby

1. It is a marsupial related to Kangaroo
2. The swamp wallaby is likely the only mammal pregnant and lactating all life long

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- b) 1 only

- c) 2 only
- d) Both 1 and 2
- e) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.15) Consider the following statements

Lalit Kala Academy

1. The Akademi was given **statutory authority in 1957**, under the Societies Registration Act 1860
2. It is located in Kolkata

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.16) Mac-Binding recently in news is related to which area/field?

- a) Biodegradation process
- b) Air purification technology
- c) Cyber Monitoring
- d) None of the above

Q.17) Consider the following statements about QS Rankings

1. It is released by World Bank in collaboration with UNICEF
2. It is an international ranking of Universities

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.18) Consider the following statements about Chief Information Commissioner (CIC)

1. CIC is appointed by Prime Minister after clearance from Cabinet Committee on Appointment

2. Salaries and allowances payable to and other terms and conditions of service of the CIC shall be the same as that of the Chief Election Commissioner

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.19) Consider the following statements Information Commissioner(IC)

1. Salaries and allowances payable to and other terms and conditions of service of the IC shall be the same as that of Election Commissioner
2. When IC is appointed as Chief Information Commissioner his/her term of office shall not be more than five years in aggregate as the Information Commissioner and the Chief Information Commissioner

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.20) Article 324 of the Indian Constitution deals with which of the following?

- a) Comptroller and Auditor-General of India
- b) Special Provision related to National Capital Territory of Delhi
- c) Imposition of President's rule in State upon recommendation by concerned Governor
- d) None of the above

Q.21) Freedom in the World report is released by which body/organisation?

- World Economic Forum
- Transparency International
- Amnesty International
- Freedom House

Q.22) Consider the following statements about 126th Constitutional Amendment Bill

- It deals with reservation of SC & ST in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies
- It falls within the purview of Article 368 of the Constitution and is hence required to be ratified by the Legislature of not less than half of the States by simple majority.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.23) Consider the following statements about Gender Parity Index (GPI)

- It is released by UNICEF in collaboration with NITI Aayog
- India's GPI indicates that the number of girls is more than the number of boys at all levels of school Education.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.24) Consider the following statements about suspension of MP

- The Speaker of Lok Sabha is empowered to place a Member under suspension, however, the authority for revocation of this order is not vested in her
- Unlike the Speaker, however, the Rajya Sabha Chairman does not have the power to suspend a Member

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.25) Consider the following statements about Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS)

- INCOIS is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).
- It is located in Hyderabad & was established in 1999

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.26) Solar Charka Mission is a scheme by which Ministry?

- Ministry of Textiles
- Ministry of Power
- Ministry of Micro Small & Medium Enterprises
- Ministry of New and Renewable Energy

Q.27) Which of the following are the member countries of Indian Ocean Commission?

1. Madagascar
2. Reunion Island
3. Mauritius
4. India
5. Seychelles

Select the correct answer from the codes given below

- a) 1,2 and 3 Only
- b) 1,2,3 and 4 Only
- c) 1,2,3 and 5 Only
- d) 1,2,3,4 and 5

Q.28) Consider the following statements about suspension of MP

1. The Speaker of Lok Sabha is empowered to place a Member under suspension, however, the authority for revocation of this order is not vested in her
2. Unlike the Speaker, however, the Rajya Sabha Chairman does not have the power to suspend a Member

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.29) Nari Shakti Puraskar is instituted by which Union Ministry/Body?

- a) NITI Aayog
- b) Ministry of Finance
- c) Ministry of Women & Child Development
- d) President's Office

Q.30) Namda is a traditional craft of which region of the country?

- a) Andaman & Nicobar Islands
- b) Arunachal Pradesh
- c) Kashmir
- d) None of the above

Q.31) Which of the following are the member countries of SAWEN (South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network)?

1. India
2. Afghanistan
3. Myanmar
4. Sri Lanka
5. Bhutan

Select the correct answer from the codes given below

- a) 1,2 and 3 Only
- b) 1,2,3 and 4 Only
- c) 1,2,4 and 5 Only
- d) 1,2,3,4 and 5

Q.32) Consider the following statements about New Space India Limited (NSIL)

1. It is the Department of Space's second commercial arm.
2. NSIL will deal with capacity building of local industry for space manufacturing.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.33) Consider the following statements about Cord Blood Banking

1. It involves taking the umbilical cord blood, which is a rich source of stem cells, and preserving it for future use.
2. Cord blood banking is recommended as a source of stem cells for all types of cancers and disorders.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.34) Kali Tiger Reserve is located in which State of India?

- a) Karnataka
- b) Maharashtra
- c) Uttar Pradesh
- d) Madhya Pradesh

Q.35) Consider the following statements about Djoser pyramid

1. It is considered as the world's oldest monumental stone building.
2. It is a UNESCO world heritage site

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.36) Consider the following statements about Kyasanur Forest Disease

1. It is caused by a bacteria transmitted through mosquito bites
2. It was first identified in 1957 in a sick monkey from the Kyasanur Forest in Karnataka

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.37) Consider the following statements about Muhawa trees

1. It is a prominent forest tree in tribal areas of Bastar, Chhattisgarh
2. The mahuwa flowers are a rich source of proteins and are said to contain vitamins, minerals and calcium.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.38) Attukal Pongala is a festival that is predominantly celebrated in which State of India?

- a) Karnataka
- b) Kerala
- c) Tamil Nadu
- d) Andhra Pradesh

Q.39) Consider the following statements

Assertion (A): Plants dissipate excess sunlight as heat

Reasoning (R): The excess energy, if not released, leads to the creation of free radicals that can damage proteins and other important cellular molecules of plant.

Select the correct answer from codes given below

- a) Both A & R is correct and R is the correct explanation of A
- b) Both A & R is correct but R is NOT the correct explanation of A
- c) A is correct but R is Incorrect
- d) A is incorrect but R is correct

Q.40) Consider the following statements about Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)

1. It is a statutory body of Ministry of Home Affairs, established under Juvenile Justice Act, 2015
2. It deals with inter-country adoptions according to Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 1993 ratified by India in 2003

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.41) Thalweg Principle often seen in news is related to which field?

- a) Estimation of Pollution in Arctic region
- b) Carbon Trading
- c) Maritime Boundary determination
- d) Voting power in IMF & World Bank

Q.42) Consider the following statements about Article 300A

1. It was inserted in Constitution by 42th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976
2. Article 300 A does not confine to land alone but includes intangible property like copyright, intellectual property rights, mortgage, money, any interest in the property, lease, license.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.43) Consider the following statements about AT1 Bonds

1. They are unsecured and long term bonds with maturity periods like 5 years or 10 years
2. Banks issue these bonds to shore up their core capital base to meet the Basel-III norms

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only

- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.44) Consider the following statements about National Supercomputing Mission (NSM)

1. It envisaged setting up a network of 70 high-performance computing facilities in the country
2. The mission is being implemented by the Department of Science and Technology and NITI Aayog

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.45) Yuva Vigyani Karyakram is an initiative by which body/ministry?

- a) Ministry of Science & Technology
- b) NITI Aayog
- c) ISRO
- d) DRDO

Q.46) Consider the following statements about India Meteorological Department

1. It is an agency of the Ministry of Science & Technology of the Government of India.
2. It is the principal agency responsible for meteorological observations, weather forecasting and seismology

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.47) Consider the following statements about Nidhi Companies

1. Their core business is borrowing and lending money between their members.
2. They are regulated by Ministry of Corporate Affairs.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.48) Consider the following statements about National Population Register (NPR)

1. It is applicable only for citizens and not for foreigners
2. NPR exercise will be conducted by office of the Registrar General of India (RGI) under the Union Home Ministry.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.49) R-naught often seen in news is related to which area?

- a) Earthquake measurement
- b) Contagiousness of infectious agents.
- c) Marine pollution metric by ships
- d) None of the above

Q.50) Consider the following statements about Essential Commodities Act, 1955

1. It protects consumers against irrational spikes in prices of essential commodities.

2. States are the implementing agencies to EC Act, 1955

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.51) Consider the following statements about the proposed Common eligibility test (CET)

1. The CET will replace the first level tests conducted by the Staff Selection Commission (SSC), the Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) and the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS).
2. It will be conducted by National Testing Agency.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.52) Consider the following statements about Circuit Breakers in Stock Exchanges

1. In India, it was introduced by SEBI in 2009 in the wake of 2008 Global Financial crisis
2. When triggered, these circuit breakers bring about a coordinated trading halt in all equity and equity derivative markets nationwide.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.53) Consider the following statements about Vivad Se Vishwas Scheme

1. It is an indirect tax dispute resolution scheme that offers a fair deal to settle pending tax disputes
2. Under this scheme, taxpayers whose tax demands are locked in dispute in multiple forums can pay due taxes by March 31, 2020, and get a complete waiver of interest and penalty.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.54) Consider the following statements about SAARC

1. SAARC member-states occupy just 3% of the world's landmass, they account for 21% of its population.
2. SAARC secretariat is based in New Delhi

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.55) Consider the following statements about State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF)

1. It is a statutory body constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005
2. National Disaster Response Fund supplements the SDRF of a state, in case of a disaster of severe nature, provided adequate funds are not available in the SDRF.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.56) Consider the following statements about Rushikulya River

1. It originates from Daringbadi hills of the Eastern Ghats range and flows into Bay of Bengal
2. Rushikulya river mouth has emerged as India's second largest nesting site of the endangered olive ridley turtles.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.57) Consider the following statements about Circuit Breakers in Stock Exchanges

1. Gujarat, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Karnataka are among the few states who enjoy special provisions under Article 371
2. One of the main objectives behind the Article 371 granting special provisions to some states is to meet the unique needs of the backward regions of these states

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.58) Consider the following statements about National Creche Scheme

1. It is Centrally Sponsored Scheme implemented by Ministry of Women and Child Development
2. It aims to provide day care facilities to children (age group of 6 months to 6 years) of working mothers.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.59) Global Migration report 2020 is released by which body?

- a) International Organisation for Migration
- b) World Economic Forum
- c) Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- d) Amnesty International

Q.60) Consider the following statements about State Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)

1. It is a statutory body constituted under the BIS Act 2016
2. Its mandate is harmonious development of the activities of standardization, marking and quality certification of goods

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.61) Consider the following statements about Classical Languages

1. All Scheduled Eight Languages having an history of more than 700 years are declared as Classical languages of India
2. The Ministry of Culture provides the guidelines regarding Classical languages.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.62) Consider the following statements about Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)

1. It was established in 1911 as Indian Research Fund Association (IRFA) making it one of oldest and largest medical research bodies in the world.
2. It is funded by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.63) Consider the following statements about nominated member of Rajya Sabha

1. Nominated members enjoy all powers, privileges and immunities available to an elected member of Parliament including their right to vote in the election of the President of India.
2. A nominated member has been exempted from filing his assets and liabilities under Section 75A of the Representation of the Peoples Act, 1951 which requires the elected

member to do so within 90 days of his making or subscribing oath/affirmation

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.64) Pakke Tiger Reserve is located in which state of India?

- a) Arunachal Pradesh
- b) Mizoram
- c) Nagaland
- d) Assam

Q.65) Consider the following statements about Quality Council of India (QCI)

1. It is a statutory body set up in 1997 to promote quality through National Quality Campaign.
2. Its Chairman of QCI is appointed by the Prime Minister and the nodal ministry of the body is Ministry of Commerce & Industry

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.66) Consider the following statements about Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD)

1. It is a zoonotic disease that is endemic to North-Eastern India
2. There is no vaccination for the disease and can only be prevented by taking precautionary measures such as using insect repellents and

wearing protective clothing in areas where ticks are endemic

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.67) Consider the following statements

1. Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was established under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution
2. Governor is the constitutional head of areas under the Sixth Schedule.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.68) Consider the following statements about Tejas Aircraft

1. It is manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited in collaboration with USA's Boeing Company
2. It is the lightest and smallest multirole supersonic fighter aircraft in its class.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.69) Becquerels often seen in news_is related to which of the following?

- a) Radioactivity
- b) Music
- c) Marine Pollution

d) Air Pollution

Q.70) Consider the following statements about State Human Rights Commission (SHRC)

1. The tenure of the chairperson and members is five years or until they attain the age of 70 years, whichever is earlier.
2. The recommendations of SHRC are binding on the state government or authority.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.71) Which of the following is true regarding State Human Rights Commission (SHRC)?

- a) The commission has the power of a civil court and can take cognizance of cases if received within one year of occurrence.
- b) It can recommend compensation to victim, prosecution of accused. But such recommendations aren't binding.
- c) It submits special or annual reports to state legislatures along with action taken on their recommendations and reasons for non-acceptance of advice.
- d) All

Q.72) Consider the following statements about National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)

1. It comes under Ministry of Home Affairs

2. It is the only dedicated disaster response force in the world

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.73) Consider the following statements about National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation (NBCFDC)

1. It is a Government of India Undertaking under the aegis of Ministry of Finance
2. Its objective is to promote economic and developmental activities for the benefit of Backward Classes and to assist the poorer section of these classes in skill development and self-employment ventures

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.74) Hyogo Framework and Sendai Framework often seen in news is related to which of the following?

- a) Disaster Management
- b) Prevention of trade in wildlife
- c) Money Laundering and Terrorism funding
- d) Conservation of Biodiversity

Q.75) Consider the following statements

1. India is the 3rd largest producer of electricity in the world.
2. India ranks 106th in terms of per capita consumption in 2017

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.76) Consider the following statements about LiDAR

- 1. It is basically a remote sensing method that uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure distances to the subject.
- 2. LiDAR was first used on a spacecraft during the Apollo 15 mission in 1971, when astronauts mapped the surface of the moon.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.77) U.K. Sinha committee appointed by RBI dealt with which of the following sector?

- a) Digital Payments
- b) Retail Payments
- c) MSME Sector
- d) None of the above

Q.78) Windrush Scandal seen in news_is related to which of the following country?

- a) United States of America
- b) Britain
- c) India
- d) Canada

Q.79) Consider the following statements about Puri Jagannath Temple

- 1. The temple is believed to be constructed in the 12th century by

King Anatavarman Chodaganga Deva of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty.

- 2. The temple is famous for its annual Ratha Yatra or Chariot festival, in which the three principal deities (Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra) are pulled on huge and elaborately decorated temple cars

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.80) Consider the following statements about Sixth Schedule

- 1. It contains provisions as to the Administration of Tribal Areas in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram
- 2. Governor is the constitutional head of areas under the Sixth Schedule.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.81) Which of the following countries are a part of G7 grouping?

- 1. USA
- 2. China
- 3. Italy
- 4. India

Select the correct answer from the codes given below

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1 and 3 only
- c) 1,2 and 4 only
- d) 1,2,3 and 4

Q.82) Consider the following statements about TRIFED

1. It is a statutory body established by TRIFED Act of 1987
2. The objective of TRIFED is to empower tribal people with necessary knowledge & tools which help increase their income.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.83) Consider the following statements about Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana

1. It is an initiative of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED
2. It is a Market Linked Tribal Entrepreneurship Development Program for forming clusters of tribal Self-Help-Groups (SHGs) and strengthening them into Tribal Producer Companies

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.84) Consider the following statements about Colour Coded Weather Warning System

1. It is released weekly by ISRO in collaboration with Ministry of Science & Technology
2. Its Objective is to alert people ahead of severe or hazardous weather which has the potential to cause

damage, widespread disruption or danger to life

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.85) Consider the following statements:

1. National Population Register will be prepared at national level
2. Census is held after every 15 years.

Which of the above statement is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.86) Dandeli Hornbill Conservation Reserve is located in which of the following states?

- a) Andhra Pradesh
- b) Karnataka
- c) Telangana
- d) Kerala

Q.87) India and France conducted joint patrols from which of the following islands recently?

- a) Reunion Island
- b) Maldives
- c) Seychelles
- d) Rodrigues

Q.88) Consider the following statements:

1. Bulk drugs are known as active pharmaceutical ingredients (API).

2. Bulk drugs parks scheme is expected to reduce the manufacturing cost.

Which of the above statement is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.89) Consider the following statements:

1. National AYUSH Mission is a centrally sponsored scheme.
2. Ayushman Bharat is the world's largest health assurance scheme.

Which of the above statement is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.90) Consider the following statements about The Great Hedge of India

1. It was built by British during 19th Century
2. It was a wall of thorny shrubs that ran from the Indus in the Punjab to the Mahanadi in Odisha, cutting across Northern India
3. It was built to enforce taxes and stop the smuggling of salt.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1,2 and 3

Q.91) Consider the following statements about Kopili River

1. It is a tributary of Brahmaputra river

2. It is an inter-state river between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.92) Consider the following statements about Rushikulya River

1. It is one of the major rivers of Andhra Pradesh
2. Its river mouth is one of the largest nesting sites of the endangered olive ridley turtles.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.93) Consider the following statements

1. The Finance Bill is introduced in the Lok Sabha immediately after the presentation of the annual budget, as directed by Article 110 (a) of the Constitution of India.
2. Since the introduction of GST, there is no amendment to indirect taxes in the Union Budget as that is under the purview of the GST Council.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.94) Yakshagana is associated with which State of India?

- a) Karnataka

- b) Kerala
- c) Tamil Nadu
- d) Telangana

Q.95) Consider the following statements about Nikshay Poshan Abhiyan

1. It is a direct benefit transfer (DBT) scheme for nutritional support to TB patients
2. It is a Central Sector Scheme by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.96) Consider the following statements:

1. Open market operations (OMO) are the sale and purchase of government securities.
2. OMO is carried out by RBI through public directly.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.97) Consider the following statements:

1. Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park is the core area of the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve.
2. Public access inside the Park is limited.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.98) Consider the following statements regarding Expert appraisal committee:

1. It exists at the Union level only.
2. The committee is involved at all the stages of environmental clearance.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.99) Which of the following country is not the part of G20 Summit?

- a) Argentina
- b) Australia
- c) Brazil
- d) Venezuela

Q.100) Consider the following statements:

1. Yugadi is celebrated in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana states of India.
2. Gudhi Padwa is celebrated in and near Maharashtra and Goa.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.101) Consider the following statements:

1. The time between entry of virus to the onset of infection is known as Median incubation period.
2. Median incubation period for COVID-19 is five days.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only

- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.102) Consider the following statements:

- a) Under preventive detention, protection against arrest and detention under Article 22 (1) and 22(2) shall be available.
- b) Detention can be upto 3 years under Public Safety Act.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.103) Consider the following statements:

- 1. #stayhomeindiawithbooks initiative was launched recently by Human Resource Development Ministry.
- 2. The books are available for download only in Hindi and English.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.104) Consider the following statements:

- 1. Disaster management is the prime responsibility of state government.
- 2. Recently coronavirus pandemic was notified as a disaster.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.105) Consider the following statements regarding UNICEF:

- 1. UNICEF relies partially on contributions from governments and private donors.
- 2. Its headquarter is in Geneva, Switzerland.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q106) Consider the following statements regarding Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan package:

- 1. Rs 2,000 per farmer will be provided under the PM-KISAN scheme.
- 2. Rs 500 per month will be transferred for the next 3 months to women holding a Jan Dhan bank account.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.107) Consider the following statements regarding recently held G20 summit:

- 1. It has committed to inject \$10 trillion into the global economy to ensure the situation of deep recession doesn't arise.
- 2. Leaders also agreed to contribute to the WHO-led COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund on a voluntary basis.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.108) Which of the following disease is caused by Coronavirus?

- a) SARS
- b) Ebola
- c) COVID-19
- d) Both (a) and (c)

Q.109) Consider the following statements:

1. Monetary Policy Committee fixes the benchmark interest rate in India.
2. The meetings are held at least two times a year.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.110) Consider the following statements:

1. Kavutheendal ritual is considered as largest congregation of auricles in the world.
2. The ceremony is performed by the representative of Velan community.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.111) Which is the largest ethnic group in Arunachal Pradesh?

- a) Adi
- b) Nishi
- c) Galos
- d) Ahom

Q.112) Consider the following statements

1. Srikalahastheeswara Devasthanam is famous for performing 'Rahu Ketu Puja'.
2. This is the only Saivite shrine in the country which remains open during the solar and lunar eclipse.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.113) Consider the following statements regarding MPLADS funds:

1. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) looks into its working.
2. The MPs have a recommendatory role under the scheme.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.114) Consider the following statements regarding PM CARES Fund:

1. The President is the chairman of the fund.
2. Contributions made by the corporates to this fund will be considered as CSR expenditure.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.115) The National Teleconsultation Centre project shall be implemented by which of the following?

- a) Ministry of Health and Welfare
- b) All India Institute of Medical Sciences
- c) National Disaster Management Authority
- d) Ministry of Home Affairs

Q.116) Invocation of Force Majeure was being considered by which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Railways
- b) Ministry of Defence
- c) Ministry of Civil Aviation
- d) Ministry of Communications and Information Technology.

Q.117) Consider the following statements regarding Scitech Airon:

- 1. It has been developed under the NIDHI PRAYAS program.
- 2. It helps to control the viral infections only in a closed environment.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.118) Consider the following statements regarding SEZ?

- 1. It is set up for manufacture of goods and rendering of services.
- 2. It is free from any duties.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only

- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.119) Consider the following statements:

- 1. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code relates to reorganization and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals.
- 2. Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process is a recovery mechanism for creditors.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.120) Consider the following statements:

- 1. The Reserve Bank of India shall issue certain series of government securities under the fully accessible route for Non-resident Indians only.
- 2. FPI is one of the common ways of funding.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

2019 MARCH MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS

1	b	31	c	61	b	91	a
2	b	32	c	62	c	92	b
3	b	33	a	63	b	93	c
4	d	34	a	64	a	94	a
5	a	35	c	65	b	95	a
6	b	36	b	66	d	96	a
7	b	37	a	67	c	97	c
8	c	38	b	68	b	98	d
9	b	39	a	69	a	99	d
10	b	40	b	70	a	100	b
11	d	41	c	71	d	101	c
12	d	42	b	72	c	102	d
13	c	43	b	73	b	103	a
14	c	44	a	74	a	104	c
15	a	45	c	75	c	105	d
16	c	46	b	76	c	106	c
17	b	47	c	77	c	107	b
18	b	48	b	78	b	108	d
19	c	49	b	79	c	109	a
20	d	50	c	80	c	110	c
21	c	51	a	81	b	111	b
22	c	52	b	82	b	112	c
23	b	53	b	83	c	113	c
24	c	54	a	84	b	114	b
25	c	55	c	85	d	115	b
26	c	56	c	86	b	116	a
27	c	57	c	87	a	117	a
28	c	58	c	88	c	118	c
29	c	59	a	89	c	119	c
30	c	60	c	90	d	120	c