



APRIL 2020

IASBABA MONTHLY MAGAZINE

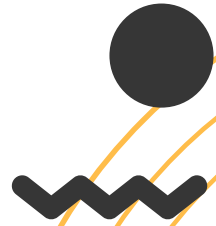
COVID 19 & LOCKDOWN - ANALYSIS

**PRE-RETIREMENT JUDGMENTS AND
POST-RETIREMENT JOBS**

INDIA-GULF ECONOMIC TIES

WAYS AND MEANS ADVANCES

**AFGHAN PEACE AND INDIA'S
CHANCES**



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 **59th edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **APRIL 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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HISTORY/CULTURE/GEOGRAPHY

Tablighi Jamaat

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I - Art and culture

In News:

- Over 200 have tested positive for COVID-19 from among 4,000-odd who had gathered in Delhi's **Markaz Nizamuddin**, the headquarters of the **Tablighi Jamaat**.

Key takeaways:

- Tablighi Jamaat literally means a society for spreading the faith.
- It is a **Sunni Islamic missionary** movement.
- It aims to reach out to ordinary Muslims and **revive their faith**.
- It was launched by Deoband cleric and prominent Islamic scholar **Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Khandhalaw** in 1927 in Mewat to bring back Meo peasants (mostly Muslims who were largely practicing Hindu traditions) into the fold of traditional Islam.

Pattachitra

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I - Art and culture

In News:

- COVID-19 pandemic has **impacted the livelihood** of the Pattachitra artists, residing in Heritage crafts village of Raghurajpur in **Odisha**.
- It is a **picture painted on a piece of cloth**.
- It is based in the states of **West Bengal** and **Odisha**.

Bengal tradition	Odisha tradition
It is centered around Kalighat (in Kolkata).	It is centered around Puri.
Theme is not much devotional.	These paintings are based on Hindu mythology and specially inspired by Jagannath and Vaishnava sect.

Kalaripayattu

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I - Art and culture

The Kerala Tourism has come up with six theme-based microsites, including one on Kalaripayattu for the post-COVID-19 days.

- Kalaripayattu also known as **Kalari**, is an **Indian martial art** and fighting style.
- It **originated** in Kerala.
- It is considered to be **among the oldest** martial arts still in existence.
- Women** in Keralite society **also undergo** training in Kalaripayattu.



Image source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalaripayattu>

Meru Jatra/ Danda Nata

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I - Art and culture

- Odisha's Ganjam district administration recently banned the **Meru Jatra festival** on the occasion of **Mahavishub Sankranti**, which is also start of the **Odia New Year**.
- Meru Jatra marks the end of **21-day-long** festival of **penance** named 'Danda Nata'.
- **Only male** persons take part in this festival.
- The participants of Danda are called **Danduas** (also known as Bhoktas).
- **Goddess Kali** and **Shiva** are worshipped during this period.

Basava Jayanthi: Birth anniversary of Vishwaguru Basaveshwara

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Ancient Indian history; Socio-cultural reform movements

In News:

- Recently, The Prime Minister of India greeted the people on **Global Basava Jayanthi**
- It is celebrated on April 26 to honour the **birth of Vishwaguru Basaveshwara**.

Important value additions:

Basaveshwara

- He was born in Bagevadi (of undivided Bijapur district in Karnataka) during 1131 AD.
- He was the **12th century philosopher and social reformer** who gave a unique spiritual path to mankind.
- He is the **founding saint of the Lingayat sect**.
- His spiritual discipline was based on the principles of:
 - Arivu (true knowledge),
 - Achara (right conduct),
 - Anubhava (divine experience)
- His practical approach and act of establishment of '**Kalyana Rajya**' (Welfare state) brought a new status and position for all the citizens of the society, irrespective of class, caste, creed and sex.
- He established the **Anubhava Mantapa**, which was a **common forum** for all to discuss the prevailing problems of socio, economic and political areas.
- It was the **first and foremost socio-religious Parliament** of India.

- On 14th November 2015, the Prime Minister of India also inaugurated the **statue of Basavanna** along the bank of the **river Thames** at Lambeth in **London**.
-



POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Adaptation of State Laws) Order, 2020

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

In News:

- The Central government passed **Jammu And Kashmir Reorganisation (Adaptation of State Laws) Order, 2020** recently.

Key takeaways:

- The order defined **new domicile rule** for Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) according to which a person **residing** in J&K for **at least 15 years** will now be **eligible** to be a domicile of the Union Territory.
- If a person has **studied** for a period of **7 years** and appeared in **class 10th or 12th examination** in an educational institution located in the UT of J&K will also be considered as the domicile of the UT.
- Tehsildar** shall be the **competent authority** for issuing the domicile certificate, as **opposed to Deputy Commissioner**.
- Section 5-A** states that no person shall be eligible for appointment to a post carrying a pay scale for not more than level 4 **unless he is a domicile of UT of J&K**.
- Through the same order, the Centre has repealed the J&K Civil Services (Special Provisions) Act.

Important value additions:

The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019

- It is an **act** of the Parliament of India.
- It contains provisions to reconstitute the Indian-administered **state of Jammu and Kashmir**, into **two Indian-administered union territories**, one to be called **Jammu and Kashmir**, and the other **Ladakh**.



Image source: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/govt-releases-maps-of-uts-of-jk-ladakh-map-of-india-depicting-new-uts/articleshow/71868357.cms?from=mdr>

Planning institution: Need to Think national and act local

In the event of crisis created by the pandemic, an all-round plan for recovery is much needed. However, there is a general criticism that Planning bodies (erstwhile Planning Commission and present NITI Aayog) has failed to produce all-round development of India's economy.

Some of the drawbacks/criticisms of National Planning Body

- **Short-termism in policymaking:** In electoral democracies like India, governments change in shorter spans whereas national plans need consistent action over decades.
- The disruption caused due to absence of long-term planning is not faced in the case of China, that has been one of the reason for its rapid rise.
- **Compromised Independence:** Lack of constitutional status makes the planning body bend to the will of elected governments thus derailing long term plans
- **Failure to address the constitutional relationship** between the States and Centre - States who are self-sufficient have often questioned the value of guidance (one-size-fits-all approach) from National planning bodies
- **Failure to synergise with Finance Commission** that determines the fund allocation of central resources amongst States.
- **Lack of Holistic plans/policies:** Planning bodies must assist in achieving not just faster GDP growth, but also more socially inclusive, and more environmentally sustainable growth.
- **Lack of insights into systems structures** – In the era of Globalisation, the production factors keeps moving (out of India) to lower cost sources. Neglecting this systemic factors leads to ineffective policies.
- Planning is weak when planners do not have the **powers to allocate money** for national priorities (which NITI Aayog does not have)

Way Ahead

- **Devising a good developmental model** in which inequality, societal and environmental forces are integrated into growth process
- **Decentralised Solutions-** Planning bodies need to promote local solutions to national problems, taking into account the unique conditions of the region.
- If fund allocation powers are granted to NITI Aayog then it must be backed by a constitutional charter, and accountable to Parliament.

Connecting the dots

- National planning bodies must be a force for persuasion, not control centre. Elaborate.
- Three-year action plan of NITI Aayog and the progress made.
- Why did the government adopt Five Year Planning strategy during the early days of Independence? Why was it discontinued after 12th FYP?

Funds allocated to State Disaster Risk Management Fund

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Disaster management; GS-II - Centre - State Relations

In News:

- **Union Minister of Home Affairs (MHA)** approved the release of ₹11,092 crore under the **State Disaster Risk Management Fund (SDRMF)** to **all the States** to take measures for containment of COVID-19 pandemic.
- The funds were allocated to the States on the recommendation of the **15th Finance Commission**.
- It was also reiterated to the State Chief Secretaries to **ensure** that **exceptions** with regard to **farming operations, be allowed** under the 21-day lockdown while maintaining Social Distancing.

Important value additions:

State Disaster Risk Management Fund (SDRF)

- It is the **primary fund** available with State Governments for **responses to notified disasters** to meet expenditure for providing immediate relief to the victims.
- Centre **contributes 75% of SDRF** allocation for **general category States** and **Union Territories** and **90% for special category States** (North East States, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir).

COVID-19: Inter-State Movement (Kerala-Karnataka Case study)

The lockdown imposed by authorities in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic has restricted inter-state movement which has opened up the questions on Federalism in India.

This has been exemplified in the Kerala-Karnataka border issue



Brief Background of the issue

- **NH-66** connects the Kasargod district of Kerala with Mangalore of Karnataka
- Many in Kasargod district of Kerala depend on medical facilities in Mangalore for emergencies, while others **rely on inter-State movement for essential medicines** to reach them
- Karnataka had closed the NH on 21st March, which was opposed by Kerala

- Karnataka's action was based on the fact that **Kasaragod has Kerala's largest number of positive cases of COVID-19**

What has been Judiciary's stand on this?

- The Kerala High court observed that the Mangaluru-Kasaragod stretch was part of the National Highway network and has **directed the Centre** to ensure free vehicle movement on this stretch.
- Karnataka contended that it was not bound to act on an order issued by the Kerala High Court.
- Centre is yet to act on this order

Concerns raised in this issue

- **Article 21:** Denying emergency medical aid amounts to a violation of the **right to life and liberty**
- **Similar actions by Kerala government**
 - Kerala Governor promulgated the 'Kerala Epidemic Diseases Ordinance, 2020' to arm itself with extraordinary powers to deal with the pandemic.
 - One of its clauses says the State can seal its borders for such period as necessary – similar to what Karnataka government has done
 - Another provision empowers Kerala government to restrict the duration of essential or emergency services, including health, food supply and fuel
- **Human Rights Vs State's Public Health Security**
 - Whether legal measures taken by the State to prevent the further spread of an epidemic can extend to a point where there is no exception even for medical needs
- **Division of Power:**
 - Inter-State migration and quarantine are under the Union List
 - While the prevention of infectious diseases moving from one State to another is under the Concurrent List.
 - This means that States have the power to impose border restriction
 - However, the responsibility to prevent a breakdown of inter-State relations over such disputes is on the Centre.

Way Ahead

- The concern of Karnataka is legitimate given that there is a danger of spread of infection from a district which is an hotspot of the COVID-19.
- Nevertheless, its actions should not cause constraints on movement of essential medicinal supplies
- Centre has to broker an agreement between both states at least for the movement of essential items needed for health & survival.

Connecting the dots

- Interstate Council and Zonal Councils

NH-766 between Kerala & Karnataka and its issues

Non-operation of MPLADS fund approved

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

In News:

- The Central government has approved **Non-operation of MPLADS** for two years (2020-21 and 2021-22) for managing COVID 19.

Key takeaways:

- These funds will be used to **strengthen Government's efforts** in managing the challenges and adverse impact of COVID19 in the country.

Important value additions:

MPLADS fund

- 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 annual MPLADS fund entitlement per MP constituency is **Rs. 5 crore**.

Legislators' salary cut by 30%

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Polity

In News:

Union Cabinet has approved an Ordinance amending the **Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act, 1954** for reducing salary by 30% for **one year**.

- It will come into effect from 1st April, 2020.

Key takeaways:

- President, Vice President, Governors of States have also **voluntarily decided** to take a pay cut of 30% as a social responsibility for one year.
- The money will go to **Consolidated Fund of India**.

Important value additions:

Consolidated Fund of India

It includes **revenues**, which are received by the government **through taxes** and **expenses** incurred in the form of **borrowings and loans**.

- All government expenditures are met by consolidated funds except a few.
- It was created under **Article 266** of the Constitution.
- Similar to the Centre, every state has its own Consolidated Fund as well.

Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) : Tenure of chairperson extended

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - II & GS – III – Governance and Economy and related issues

In News:

- The **Supreme Court** has extended the tenure of chairperson of **Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT)** by three months
- The tenure was supposed to end by this month.

Important value additions:

- Mandate: To **adjudicate disputes** and **dispose of appeals** with a view to protect the interests of service providers and consumers of the **telecom sector**.
- Created under: The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act, 1997.
- The **headquarter** is in New Delhi.
- It was **established** in 2000.
- The TDSAT consists of a **Chairperson** and **two Members**.

States asked to invoke Essential Commodities Act, 1955

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

In News:

- States are asked to invoke **Essential Commodities (EC) Act, 1955** by the Ministry of Home Affairs to maintaining smooth supply of essential items at fair prices in the country.
- The measures include fixing of stock limits, capping of prices, enhancing production, etc.

Key takeaways:

- States can now **notify orders** under the EC Act, 1955 **without prior agreement** from the Central Government up to June 30, 2020.
- **Offences** under EC Act are **criminal offences** and may result in imprisonment of 7 years or fine or both.
- Offenders can also be booked under **the Prevention of Black-marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act, 1980**.

Important value additions:

Essential Commodities (EC) Act, 1955

- It is an act of Parliament of India.
- It was established to **prevent hoarding** of the essential commodities and to ensure their **timely delivery** so that the normal life does not get affected.
- This includes **foodstuff, drugs, fuel** (petroleum products) etc.

MPLADS: Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme

Context: The Union Cabinet approved a 30% cut in the salaries of all Members of Parliament and a **two-year suspension of MPLAD scheme** so that the amount saved can go to the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI) to fight COVID-19.

What is MPLADS Scheme or Sansad Nidhi Yojana?

- It is a **central sector scheme** for MPs to recommend works of developmental nature in their constituencies
- It was launched in December, 1993
- The emphasis is on creating durable community assets based on **locally felt needs**.
- Parent Body: **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI)**

- The funds - **Rs. 5 crore/annum/MP** - under the scheme are **non-lapsable**.
- Funds are released in the form of **grants in-aid** directly to the district authorities.
- MPs have only recommendatory role and **the district** authority is empowered to examine the eligibility of works, select the implementing agencies and monitor it.

Criticism of the scheme

- **Against the separation of powers:** It allows individual legislators to encroach on executive role of planning & implementation works
- **Promotes Patronage Politics:** MPLADS gives scope for MPs to utilise the funds as a source of patronage that they can dispense at will.
- **Inefficiency:** Gap between recommendation made by MPs and implementation by the district administration
- **Unused Funds:** Some members do not utilise their full entitlement
- **Weak monitoring** of the scheme has led to allegations of misuse & corruption

Views about the scheme

- **Judiciary:** The Supreme Court has upheld the scheme but called for a robust accountability regime
- **Second ARC:** It recommended its abrogation altogether, highlighting the problems of the legislator stepping into the shoes of the executive

Why MPLADS was suspended for two years?

- It frees up financial resources of about ₹7,900 crore
- It will boost the funding available for the COVID-19 fight
- The funds can be spent on boosting the health infrastructure needed to combat the pandemic.
- **Judicious usage of Funds:** Money will now go into CFI and will be spent based on an assessment of the varying needs in different regions of India.

Challenges ahead due the suspension of scheme

- **Political discontent:** Funding under the scheme was source of much goodwill for elected representatives.
- **Centralising tendency:** The step undermines the decentralised manner of funding local area development
- There are dangers that allocations of freed up funds can be discriminatory.

Connecting the dots

- Parliamentary System – Merits and Challenges
- Other instances where there is breach of Separation of Power

Food grains to be provided to non-NFSA beneficiaries

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Governance

In News:

- Food grains shall be provided to non-NFSA (National Food Security Act) beneficiaries **with ration cards** issued by State governments.

Key takeaways:

- Government of India has directed [Food Corporation of India](#) (FCI) to provide the beneficiaries with food grains at 5 Kg/person per month **for 3 months** at the rates of **Rs. 21/Kg for wheat** and **Rs. 22/Kg for rice**.
- It should be **distributed uniformly** across the country.

Important value additions:

National Food Security Act

- Government of India enacted the National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA).
- The Act covers upto **75%** of the rural population and upto **50%** of the urban population.
- The targeted population shall receive **subsidized foodgrains** under **Targeted Public Distribution System**, thus covering about **two-thirds of the population**.
- Ministry involved: Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution.

[Pradhan Mantri Janaushadhi Kendra \(PMJK\): CoronaWarriors delivering affordable quality medicines](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Governance

In News:

- **Pradhan Mantri Janaushadhi Kendra (PMJK)** people are working as **CoronaWarriors** to serve the nation in order to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Pharmacists at Kendras are delivering **quality generic medicines at affordable prices** to the common citizens of the country amidst the crisis.

Important value additions:

Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)

- It is being run by the **Department of Pharmaceuticals**, Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers, Government of India
- PMBJP is also **generating awareness** through informational posts on their social media platforms.
- Vision: To **bring down the healthcare budget** of every citizen of India through providing “Quality generic Medicines at Affordable Prices”.
- **Pradhan Mantri Janaushadhi Kendra** is a medical outlet opened under the scheme which makes **quality medicines** available at **affordable prices** for all.
- “Jan Aushadhi Sugam” mobile app helps in locating **nearest** Janaushadhi Kendra and **availability of medicines with its price**.

[COVID-19: Critical Analysis on lockdown](#)

India’s present lockdown (to prevent the spread of COVID-19) has been rated as the severest and the most disruptive, impacting a seventh of the world’s population.

The Central government stated that in absence of lockdown, there would have been 800,000 infections by April 15th, 2020

Do You Know?

- Sweden’s strategy to fight the pandemic has been largely non-interventionist and instead dependent on voluntary social distancing.

- Korea has followed a strategy of aggressive, widespread diagnostic testing and isolation coupled with social distancing.

Criticisms on Lockdown

- **Lives vs Livelihoods:** Extended lockdown negatively impacts the livelihoods of poor and vulnerable sections of society -cure should not be worse than disease
- **Criticality of timing of lockdown:**
 - Early lockdowns are known to be suboptimal because they merely postpone the peak, but do not reduce the numbers
 - Many countries have imposed lockdowns only when infections peaked to levels that threatened the capacity of their healthcare systems
- **Effect on Tropical Countries:**
 - There is also fair likelihood to suspect that tropical country like India may be experiencing a **less virulent epidemic** than seen in the west
 - This can be either due to **higher natural immunity**, or vastly different demographics.
 - In such case, all-out lockdown was not an efficient solution
- **Efficient use of intervening time**
 - Failure to train personnel as well as procure the requisite devices, supplies and protective equipment during the lockdown will yield sub-optimal results
- **Alternative Strategy- Herd Immunity**
 - It is believed that viral epidemics abate only when around 60-80% of the population acquires "herd-immunity" — either by vaccination or by acquiring the disease.
- **Projection Models:**
 - Several leading global health experts have questioned the numbers projected in the initial studies and forecasts as being inordinately high.

Way Forward

In place of a one-size-fits-all lockdown, there can be **graded containment strategies** that can be based upon following factors:

- **Geographic-** depending on the varying locational intensity of the disease
- **Vulnerability-**oriented, with differing containment strategies for more vulnerable sections like the aged; and
- **Sectoral** -with a more liberal containment regime in place for essential activities like agriculture

Connecting the dots

- Challenges of using Herd Immunity as a Strategy
- Challenges with regard to calibrated exit to lockdown

State Election Commission: Threat to its Independence

Context: AP government brought in an Ordinance on April 10th 2020 which led to removal of incumbent State Election Commissioner(SEC)

About State Election Commissioner

- Under 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment acts, State Election Commissions were created for every state to conduct elections to panchayats and municipalities
- He/She is **appointed by the Governor**
- His conditions of service and **tenure of office** shall also be determined by the **governor**.
- SEC shall be removed from his office in the same manner & ground as a Judge of a High Court
- A judge of a high court can be removed from his office by the President on the recommendation of the parliament

Brief background of the tussle between AP State Government & SEC

- SEC had postponed the **local body elections** (to be held on March 15th) citing the COVID-19 outbreak.
- AP State government has criticised that SEC **did not consult the government** while postponing elections
- AP State government appealed the decision in SC but the court refused to interfere
- AP CM also alleged that SEC (appointed by previous government) was acting in nexus with the opposition, to prevent the victory of his party in elections, by postponing it.

What were the major changes that was brought through the Ordinance?

- It reduced the SEC's **tenure from five to three years**
- The **criterion for holding SEC office** was amended – Only those who served as a High Court judge could occupy the post (earlier it was an officer of the rank of Principal Secretary & above)

Consequence of the Ordinance:

- Incumbent SEC Mr. Ramesh Kumar – a civil servant and 2016 appointee- was no longer the SEC
- Justice Kanagaraj took charge as new SEC

Criticisms of the Ordinance

- **Misuse of power by AP CM**- with the intention to remove incumbent SEC
- **Against Article 243K** – The article prohibits the variation of any condition of service to the detriment of any incumbent
- The ordinance amounts to encroaching upon the **independence of the Constitutional body**, especially in the light of political accusations made against SEC
- **Due Process of Law** not followed: government did not give reasons for its sudden decision
- **Danger to Democracy**: If the Courts upholds this ordinance then it will be end of free & fair elections
- **Legality of the Ordinance**: State government has no legal right to terminate the SEC's tenure, as the Constitution makes the holder of that post removable only in the same manner as a High Court judge.

What was the basis on which AP issued the ordinance?

- In *Aparmita Prasad Singh vs. State of U.P.* (2007), the Allahabad High Court ruled that cessation of tenure does not amount to removal and upheld the SEC's tenure being cut short.

- The Supreme Court dismissed the appeal of judgment of HC in this case

Critical Analysis of *Aparmita Prasad Singh* Case

- The HC **judgment seems erroneous**, as it gives a complete freedom to the State government to remove an inconvenient SEC by merely changing the tenure or retirement age.
- **Against Legal Principles:** It is a well-settled principle in law that what cannot be done directly cannot be done indirectly.
- **Scope for revision:** Even though SC dismissed the appeal, it has kept open the legal questions arising from the case

Way Forward

- The government should have waited for the COVID-19 crisis to be over for promulgating such Ordinances
- The new norm should only apply to the successor SEC, and not the one currently holding the office.
- Governments should ensure the independence of elections authorities

Connecting the dots

- State Finance Commission
- 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts – Critical Analysis

Accessing justice online

Due to COVID-19 crisis and the ensuing lockdown to courts, citizens' access to justice has been severely restricted

However, the root problem is the inability of the conventional court system to deliver timely justice.

Do You Know?

- As of Nov 2019, 43.55 lakh cases were pending in High court and 58,669 cases were pending in the Supreme Court
- At the district and subordinate court levels, the number of pending cases stand at a 3.14 crore (as of Nov 2019)
- Nearly 40% of the sanctioned judge strength in Higher Courts is pending (2019)

Consequences of Judicial delay in resolving cases

- Justice denied is equivalent to justice denied
- Justice will be accessible only to rich as they can afford to withstand the lengthy process
- Provides scope for emergence of cheaper judicial avenues like Khap Panchayats
- Erosion of Public trust on Judiciary thus threatening Democratic values

However, technology now provides us an opportunity to meet the challenge.

Case Study of Kerala High Court

- On March 30, 2020, it created history by not only **conducting proceedings through video conferencing** but also live streaming the proceedings.
- The judges **conducted the hearing from their homes** and concerned law officers also participated in the proceedings from their respective offices.

A blueprint for e-courts

- **Establishment of task force** consisting of judges, technologists, court administrators, skill developers and system analysts-
- **Objective of Taskforce:** To draw up a blueprint for institutionalising online access to justice.
- **Responsibilities of taskforce:**
 - Establishing hardware, software and IT systems for courts
 - Establishing appropriate e-filing systems and procedures
 - Skill training of involved stakeholders
 - Examining application of **artificial intelligence** benefiting from the data base generated through e-courts projects
- The experience of Kerala High Court can be leveraged to institutionalise the system

Way Ahead:

- Mission mode implementation of e-courts model across the country
- Awareness among citizens about welfare schemes and their rights which can hold governments accountable
- Effective implementation of Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987

Connecting the dots

- National Judicial Data Grid
- National Judicial Appointments Commission – Why SC struck it down?

Bank Sakhi / BC Sakhi plays vital role in financial inclusion

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Governance

In News:

- Self Help Group women working as **BC Sakhis** and **Bank Sakhis** are playing a vital role in **disbursement of Rs.500/-** to women having PMJDY accounts (**Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana**) amidst COVID-19 Lockdown.

Important value additions:

- BC Sakhis are Self-Help Groups (SHGs) women working as **Business Correspondents for banks**.
- A Bank Sakhi is someone who has been an SHG member **involved in conducting banking and book-keeping activities** of the group.
- As a Bank Sakhi, she **provides** a range of financial services **on behalf of the bank** to her community.
- She is **supported by the local SHG federation** which provides capacity development, training, and financial awareness in the community.
- She is **paid a commission** by the bank for different services, which covers her costs and provides her with an income.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana

- It is a financial inclusion program of Government of India.
- It is open to all Indian citizens.
- It aims to **expand** and **make affordable access** to financial services such as bank accounts, remittances, credit, insurance and pensions.

COVID-19 and challenges of Craftspeople

Context: Craftspeople, artisans, weavers, home-based skilled self-employed was not mentioned in the COVID-19 financial packages announced by the government.

Craftspeople of all categories in India are largely ignored and left to fend for themselves.

Some of the challenges which they face in the wake of lockdown are:

- **Essential supplies** have not reached to majority of daily wage craftspeople.
- **Bulk orders were cancelled** impacting their business cycles & meagre incomes
- **Inadequate raw material** left at the start of lockdown, which means that kick starting their activities post the lockdown will be difficult
- **Food insecurity:** In rural areas only some have enough stocks of rations.
 - Those in towns only buy monthly supplies and have no income now to replenish their ration
- **Presence of police** and their brute policing methods impacted their movement even to fetch essential supplies
- **Miseries of weavers:** They have looms in their homes but no yarn and large numbers of very poor weavers working under them are unpaid.
- **e-commerce** platforms have not been of much help during the lockdown
- **Depressed demand:** Collective activity will remain subdued in the aftermath of lockdown impacting their livelihoods

Way ahead

- **Interest-free loans** of Rs 5,000-Rs 10,000 per month per family for two months backed by the government
- **Policy Impetus:** Craftspeople are largely dependent on tourism and hence need a composite plan to stimulate demand so they can look forward to the festival season.
- **The corporate sector** must support with advance payments to order festive season gifts for clients.
- **Special package for weavers:**
 - The textile ministry needs to focus on the specific needs for different areas in the country, avoiding one-size-fits-all schemes
 - Multipurpose handloom gamchas provided by weavers can serve as masks
- **Import Substitution Strategy**
 - Indian Potters can provide clay and even cow dung lamps that could replace Chinese lamps lit during Diwali season
 - More than Rs 400 crore worth of roundly cut bamboo sticks are imported from China and Vietnam by agarbatti manufacturers. This can be substituted by bamboo from Northeastern states
- **Re-energising village industries** through change in developmental strategy (that is currently focused on centralisation in metro-capitals)
 - This will reduce carbon footprints and discourage migration

Connecting the dots

- Impact on lockdown on Livelihood of Tribals
- KVIC – it's possible role in the aftermath of lockdown to kick start crafts industry

COVID-19: Social democracy and dividends for Kerala

Context: Kerala was the first State with a recorded case of coronavirus

Given Kerala's population density, deep connections to the global economy and the high international mobility of its citizens, it was primed to be COVID-19 hotspot.

However, Kerala has been able to effectively contain the pandemic leading to flattened coronavirus curve (refer the image below).

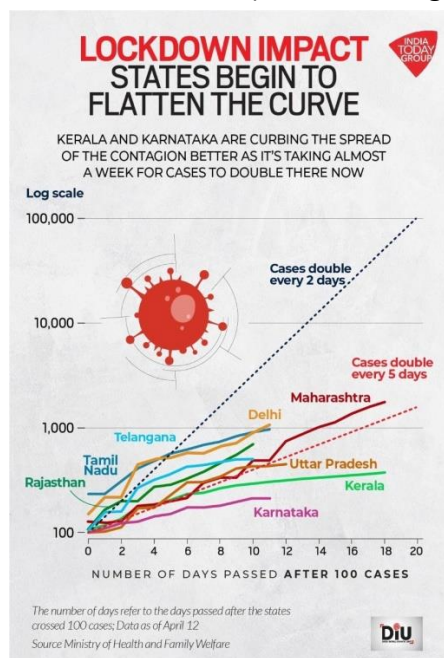


Image Source: [India Today](#)

Kerala's ability to effectively tackle crisis is attributed to its robust Social Democracy

What is Social Democracy and what are its features?

- Social democracies are built on an encompassing social pact with a political commitment to providing basic welfare and broad-based opportunity to all citizens
- It supports practical, progressive reforms of capitalism (free-market economy) and is more concerned to administrate and humanize it -- a key difference with Socialism which detests free-market economy
- The emphasis is on State interventions to promote Social Justice -- a key difference with Capitalism
- Presence of vibrant Civil Society and robust institutions that checks State's actions
- Values of Liberalism, tolerance and decentralisation is promoted
- Treats people not as subjects or clients, but as rights-bearing citizens.
- Social Democracy can thus be considered as mid-path between Socialism and Capitalism.
- Majority of countries in the world have adopted this model with the differing inclination towards free-market economy or State interference

How did Social Democratic Culture emerge in Kerala?

It emerged from recurrent episodes of popular mobilisation

- Temple entry movement of the 1930s
- Peasant and workers' movements in the 1950s and 1960s,
- Mass literacy movement in the 1980s,
- Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP)-led movement for people's decentralised planning in the 1990s
- Recent gender and environmental movements

Advantages of Social Democracy- which is reflected in the state of Kerala

- Nurtures a strong sense of social citizenship
- **Builds Institutions:** Social Democracy drives reforms that strengthens the legal and institutional capacity for public action
- Emphasis on **rights-based welfare** instead of clientele/patronage based welfare
- Reinforces a **vibrant, organised civil society** which demands continuous accountability from authority
- **It pressures all governments**, regardless of the political party in power, to deliver public services and to constantly expand the social safety net.
- Pressurises to **empower local government** - Nowhere in India are local governments as resourced and as capable as in Kerala
- **Generalised Trust on the State**, which enables heightened compliance with State's directives

How was Kerala able to manage the pandemic effectively?

- Due to its strong Social Democratic Culture, the government was able to
 - Convince citizens to comply with State's directives (Enhanced Trust on State)
 - Quickly mobilise financial and societal resources – Announced COVID-19 package much ahead of National relief package
 - Smoothly coordinate across multiple authorities and jurisdictions - Creation of State response team that coordinated 18 different functional teams
- **Effective Communication:** Daily press conferences with the public by CM to ensure the connect with public and to remind the public that virus does not discriminate, destigmatising the pandemic.
- **Social Issue:** Government emphasised lockdown response was less an enforcement issue than about people's participation
- **Leverage a broad and dense health-care system:** Despite the recent growth of private health services, Kerala has maintained a robust public presence.
- **Taking into the confidence the front-line workers:** Kerala's public health-care workers are highly unionised and organised which made the government lay emphasis on protecting the health of first responders.
- **Highly mobilised civil society-** As the cases multiplied, the government called on two lakh volunteers to go door to door, identifying those at risk and those in need.
- **Food Needs taken care of:** Government was able to deliver three lakh meals a day through Kudumbasree (Self-Help group) community kitchens
- **Last Mile Care:** Two decades of empowering local governments in Kerala enabled in focalising containment efforts in hotspots

Conclusion

- The pandemic is a physical exam of the social body, and never has public trust been put to a greater test.
- Kerala has managed the crisis by building on legacies of egalitarianism, social rights and public trust

Connecting the dots

- Socialism with Chinese characteristics
- Delhi model of development (during AAP government's tenure)

Gender in the times of Crisis

Context: The traditional gender role that women play affects them uniquely in global crises and thus requires a measured societal & government response

What is the experience with regard to gender during crisis?

- **Vulnerability to deaths:** Women lack many life skills such as swimming and climbing
- **Gender insensitive Temporary facilities:** Women face hygiene challenges in shelter camps set up post-calamities
- **Difficulties in Post-crisis rehabilitation:** Slowdown leaves women with additional wage cuts post crisis especially when pay disparity between genders is a norm.
- **Loss of livelihoods:** Women are also engaged in post-calamity care, missing job opportunities.

Issues faced by women during this pandemic

- **Increased Disease vulnerability:** According to WHO around 70% of the world's health workers are women, 79% of nurses are women.
- **Attack on women workers:** There are incidents where ASHA workers, who work at the ground level in tracing & tracking epidemic spread, are attacked while on COVID-19 duty, primarily due to fake news/rumours
- **Increased instances of sexual abuse & gender violence** during lockdown when men don't have access to alcohol and thus vent out their frustration on women.
- **Entrenchment of Patriarchy:** Even in households where both partners work, during the lockdown, women not only Work from Home but also have additional household work
- **Psychological anxiety:** The fear of job loss and reduced income can create mental pressure on women
- **Culture of silence:** Hormone-induced depression, Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) pregnancy-related depressive conditions, postpartum depression are some of the health issues that gets intensified during lockdown. This is because both men & women are trained to follow the culture of silence regarding these issues

Way Ahead

- **Assigning ASHA workers** to specifically address women's welfare during this pandemic
- **Grievance redressal platforms:** Setting up exclusive cells to quickly address domestic violence and women's health-related issues,
- **Awareness:** Including men in conversations to make them sensitive about women issues
- **Gender-inclusive helplines:** When only women attend women distress calls, there is reinforcing of stereotypical 'care-giver' role of women.

- Need to develop a culture of including **women's safety in the planning phase** itself irrespective of whatever the nature of the crisis is.

Connecting the dots

- Measures taken by government regarding women welfare
- Gender Budgeting

Online Parliamentary Functioning

Context: In the wake of lockdown imposed due to COVID-19 pandemic and the next session of Parliament a few months away, there is an opportunity for holding an online session should the need so arise.

Do You Know?

- For the very first time, 12 MPs of the **joint committee on salary and allowances met virtually (online)** on 6th April 2020 and recommended 30% reduction in the constituency and office allowances of MPs
- Unlike other Parliamentary Committees, this committee was set up in 1954 under the Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act

Is Parliament mandated to meet physically?

- No, Indian parliamentary rules do not require MPs to meet physically at the Parliament House.
- The only requirement for a duly constituted sitting of a house is that it be presided over by the chairman/speaker or any authorised MP.
- On matters which are not apparent in the rules, Chairman/Speaker have the residuary power to decide on them.

Importance of Parliamentary Committees

- The working of these committees ensure that legislature keeps the executive accountable even when the Parliament is not in session
- These have regained Significance during the lockdown
 - Two committees are scrutinising pending bills on issues related to labour and regulation of personal data.
 - Both these issues are important and have gained prominence during the ongoing pandemic
- The Speaker has the discretion to allow the parliamentary committees to meet outside the House or meet virtually so as to ensure accountability in governance

What has been the trend in other countries?

Across the world, legislatures are using a combination of technology, physical separation and reduced physical presence to continue their work

- **Brazil:** Its parliament passed a resolution to work remotely during the public health emergency.
- **Chile:** The Senate has passed a law to allow it to meet remotely using appropriate video conferencing technology.
- **In Indonesia and Maldives,** a sitting of the parliament has happened remotely.

- **UK has suggested a hybrid model** of virtual and physical presence.
 - Some MPs can participate in certain house proceedings via video conferencing
 - While few of them can be in the house physically under social distancing guidelines.

Merits of Online Parliamentary Proceedings

- Saves travel time for legislators
- Saves financial resources spent on housing & travel allowances
- Works as a role model to adopt digital technologies
- Allows more time for legislators to interact with their constituency

Challenges with regard to Online Parliamentary Proceedings

- Robust technology which works without much interruption
- Need for setting up of protocols for ensuring participation
- Cyber security issues
- Inadequate digital infrastructure especially in Tribal & North-East region

Connecting the dots

- Digital India Programme
- Issue of Net neutrality

Developmental Strategy: The village is still relevant

Context: The COVID-19 crisis should inspire society & governments to review past developmental policies particularly regarding the rural areas

How did the developmental discourse change after 1990s?

- **Changed role:** Government was considered as facilitator in the free-market economy where private sector was considered as growth engine. As a result, state's own infrastructure shrank
- **Impact on Public goods:** Health and education was opened up for private enterprise which was considered as part of the bigger package of economic reforms.
- **Impact on Public employment:** Several States decided to stop giving permanent appointment letters to doctors and teachers in the mid-1990s.
- **Lack of safety nets:** Working on short-term contracts, with little security or dignity, became common

How did the changed developmental discourse (after 1990s) impact villages?

- Villages were no more considered viable as sites of public investment
- Providing basic amenities such as running water, electricity and jobs to rural people was considered easier if they moved to a city
- Hence, emigration from rural areas to cities was both justified and encouraged
- Rural-to-urban emigration was considered natural that happens in the course of economic development
- The village was considered as having no future other than becoming a copy of the urban and eventually dissolving into it.
- This resulted in overall shrinking of rural livelihoods

Consequences on Urban-oriented developmental strategy

- It led to **discriminatory funding** in every sphere, including health and education leading to increased inequality between rural & urban areas
- **Reduced quality of life** in villages as the availability of qualified doctors and teachers willing to work in villages reduced drastically
- **Growth of vast slums** in mega-cities was considered as normal & inevitable
- **Loss of HR in villages:** Emigration led to depletion of working-age people in villages.
- **Agriculture**, the main resource of livelihood in villages, was declared as no longer profitable enough to attract the young which led to its stagnation
- **Decline of village handicrafts:** It was argued that handicrafts were destined to die as it was believed that craftsmen and women cannot survive without state support
- **Loss of Gram Swaraj:** Stuck between state minimalism and commercial entrepreneurship, villages lost the capacity they had for regenerating their economy or intellectual resources.

Impact of Pandemic

- The new urban architecture denied the rural migrants their visibility. This led to their issues being overlooked by administration while declaring the lockdown
- Cities could not offer protection to rural emigrants against such exigencies which led to their mass migration often by foot
- It exposed the weakness of City driven developmental model.
- The crisis has demonstrated the unsustainable socio-economic arrangement of the post-1991 developmental model.

Way Ahead

- Decentralised developmental strategy
- Regenerating rural economic capabilities
- Agriculture to be given prominence in policy making (Ex: separate Agricultural budget)
- Skilling of rural people

Conclusion

As the pandemic crisis shows, villages have a right to flourish as habitations with their own distinctive future

Connecting the dots

- Gandhian Gram Swarajya Model
- Philosophy behind 73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendment Act

Judiciary: Pre-retirement judgments and post-retirement jobs

Context: Post-retirement, former CJI Ranjan Gogoi was nominated to the Rajya Sabha

Independence of the Judiciary is ensured by 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)

Why Former CJI Gogoi's RS nomination caused controversy?

- He had presided over politically sensitive cases (**Assam NRC, Sabarimala, Ayodhya, Rafale, CBI**) where all the decisions went in favour of the government.
- This gave rise to the impression that his nomination was a reward for these 'favours'.

Consequences of such appointments

- The very fact that a judge accepts such an appointment could **cast doubt on his judgements**.
- The desire of a post-retirement job can influence pre-retirement judgments.
- It would signal that the **judiciary is not independent**, but is vulnerable to dictates of the executive
- It will undermine the very constitutional values of impartiality in the dispensation of justice.
- It will also go against the clear demarcation of separation of powers
- Deteriorates the **Public Perception** about the integrity of the Judiciary and thus the functioning of our Democracy

Is it wrong for former CJI to accept RS nomination?

- No, as Article 124(7) of the Indian Constitution restricts post-retirement appointments in Judiciary itself, but not in posts of president, governor, member of parliament, etc
- Former CJI Gogoi has viewed that membership of the Rajya Sabha was not a job but a service and hence there accepting RS nomination is not ethically conflicting
- With regard to judgements, former CJI has said that he did not deliver the judgements alone and that there were other judges also. Hence, there cannot be quid-pro-quo arrangements

A possible Solution

- In constitutional democracy, it is time to have a **law** in place either by way of a constitutional amendment or a parliamentary enactment barring/regulating post-retirement appointments of Judges.
- Judges can be compensated by being given their last drawn salary as pension.
- Also, the age of retirement for judges can be increased by a year or two.
- These will undo the damage caused by post-retirement jobs

Connecting the dots

- Exploring the possibilities of cooling-off period before making such appointments
- Post-retirement prohibitions on Election Commissioners

-19 Crisis

Context: The crisis created by western socio-economic model (based on profits & consumerism) has revived the significance of Gandhian philosophy

Some of the Gandhian principles which hold true in present times are:

1. **Swadeshi** – Which emphasises indigenisation and reduces the dependence on other
 - Global dependence on China has made this pandemic & its recovery difficult for Nations
2. **Swachhata**
 - Gandhi practise and promoted personal hygiene and community sanitation, which has been advocated as Social Vaccine during this pandemic
3. **Sarvodaya**- i.e. development of all
 - Adhering to this would principle would have mitigated the troubles faced by migrants & poor during lockdown
4. **Glocalisation**
 - Gandhi emphasised on learning to experience the entire world within the precincts of our immediate village or neighbourhood
5. **Sustainable Living:**
 - Gandhi advocated to live in harmony with our environment, eschewing exploitative practices as far as possible.
6. **Regenerating our rural economy:**
 - It is the urban areas which are facing the brunt of pandemic and dependence on them endangering rural areas as well.
7. **Emphasis on Ethics:**
 - Gandhi called for integrating economics, politics and technology with ethics.
 - If China was prompt about the initial outbreak of disease in Nov 2019, much of the damage could have been avoided

Conclusion

Gandhi's thoughts and philosophies are more relevant now than ever.

Connecting the dots

- Gandhi's Trusteeship model of economic development
- Difference between Gandhiji and Babasaheb Ambedkar's philosophies

Draft Electricity Act (Amendment) Bill 2020, released

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Governance; GS-III – Infrastructure (Energy)

In News:

- Ministry of Power has released **draft Electricity Act(Amendment) Bill 2020** to amend the Electricity Act, 2003 to introduce **key reforms** in the Power Sector.

Major amendments proposed in the Electricity Act are as follows:

- Direct Benefit Transfer: It is proposed that tariff be determined by Commissions without taking into account the subsidy. Subsidy will be given directly by the government to the consumers.
- Establishment of Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority: A Central Enforcement Authority **headed by a retired Judge of the High Court** is proposed to be set-up with powers of the Civil Court to **enforce** contracts related to purchase or sale or transmission of power **between** a generating, distribution or transmission companies.
- Establishment of adequate Payment Security Mechanism: It is proposed to empower **Load Dispatch Centres** to oversee the establishment of adequate payment security mechanism **before scheduling** dispatch of electricity, as per contracts.
- Strengthening of the Appellate Tribunal (APTEL): It proposes to **increase the strength** of APTEL to 7 members apart from the Chairperson so that **multiple benches** can be set-up to facilitate quick disposal of cases.
- National Renewable Energy Policy: It is proposed to provide for a **policy document** for the development of electricity from renewable sources of energy.
- Cross border trade in Electricity: **Provisions** have been added **to facilitate and develop** trade in electricity with other countries.
- Franchisees and Distribution sub licensees: Distribution Companies **may engage** Franchisees or Sub-Distribution Licensees **to distribute** electricity on its behalf in a particular area.

Central Vigilance Commission: New commissioner appointed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Statutory Bodies

In News:

Retired bureaucrat Sanjay Kothari was sworn in as the next **Central Vigilance Commissioner** by President Ram Nath Kovind at an official oath-taking ceremony, recently.

Important value additions:

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)

- Background: It was set up by the Government in 1964 on the **recommendations** of the **Committee on Prevention of Corruption, headed by K. Santhanam**.
- Status: It is a **statutory body** governed by the **Central Vigilance Commission Act 2003**.
- Mandate: To **inquire into offences** which might have been **committed under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988** by certain categories of public servants.
- Composition: The Commission shall consist of a Central Vigilance Commissioner (**Chairperson**); and not more than **two Vigilance Commissioners (Members)**.

- Appointment: They are **appointed** by the President of India on **recommendation of a Committee** consisting of the Prime Minister (Chairperson), the Minister of Home Affairs and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha.

welfare

Context: The relief package announced by Union Government directed States to provide relief to Construction workers using provisions under Building and Other Construction Workers Act(BOCW), 1996.

What is BOCW Act?

- The Act regulates the employment and conditions of service of building and other construction workers.
- It provides for the levy and collection of cess at 1-2 % of the cost of construction, as the Central government may notify.
- The cess is **collected by the State governments** and UTs.
- It is utilised for the welfare of building and other construction workers by the respective State BOCW Boards.
- Presently **Rs 31,000 crore** of funds is available with such welfare boards

Therefore, the basic framework of the governance is

- States collect a cess from construction projects, register construction workers, and design schemes to use the funds collected for their welfare.

Constraints to provide assistance to casual workers during this pandemic

1. **Dependent on Formalisation:** Only registered construction workers benefit from the welfare schemes
2. **Low worker registrations-** As of end-2018, according to Union Labour Ministry only 3.24 crore workers were registered across India, which represented about 60% of the construction workforce in India
3. **Low Awareness** among the workers and their organisations about the benefits which can be availed through such legislation
4. **Limited State capacity for expenditure**
 - Chhattisgarh's board would go bankrupt if they paid workers the central minimum daily NREGA wage of Rs 202 for the lockdown period
5. **Significant variations across states**
 - Six states—Tamil Nadu, UP, MP, Odisha, Rajasthan and West Bengal—have 54% of the registered workforce, but only 32% of cess funds collected.
6. **Issues of interstate migrants**
 - They constitute 42.7% of the urban construction workforce (Census 2001)
 - State BOCW Boards are reluctant to register migrants due to lack of political incentives

Way Ahead

- Centre can use the expertise of the **Central BOCW Advisory Committee** to play a proactive role in coordinating amongst states

- **Centre can facilitate** sharing beneficiary lists and funds between these states through interstate MoU
- States—labour departments and welfare boards- need to improve the registration process.
- The quarantine camps for migrants are an opportunity to disseminate information, and even register such workers by utilizing the services of Civil Society groups.

Connecting the dots

- Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016
- Farmers distress during Pandemic

COVID-19: Disruption and a new order

Context: Former National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan analyses the geopolitical and geo-economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. These are as follows

Institutions under fire

- UN Security Council is criticised for being slow in dealing with a situation that is far dangerous than any military threat in recent decades.
- WHO has been alleged of bias towards China and of grossly underestimating the nature of the epidemic.

Economic shock

- World Bank has already predicted negative growth for most nations.
- India's growth forecast for the current fiscal year has been put at 1.5% to 2.8%.

Political Management

- Tools used by Democratic governments to tackle COVID-19 are similar to authoritarian regimes such as China and people have welcomed such measures
- The role of the state as an enforcer of public good will become greatly enhanced.
- For instance: Europe has shown a willingness to sacrifice personal liberties in favour of greater state control
- An **omnipotent state** could well become a reality i.e. present everywhere and monitoring people through mass surveillance

China in the spotlight

- China due to its 'early recovery' seeks to take advantage of and benefit from the problems faced by the world in the wake of the epidemic.
- It wants to use its manufacturing capability to its geo-economic advantage.
- **Hostile Takeover:** China intends to acquire stakes in companies across the world, taking advantage of the scaled-down value of their assets
- It wants to **gain soft power** by offering medical aid & supplies to other nations
- China aims to dominate the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), thus enabling it to exploit market access across the S.E. Asia and E. Asia
- Through pushing its Belt & Road Initiative it is trying to achieve **China-centric multilateral globalisation framework.**

A faltering West

- Weakened economically and politically after COVID-19, the U.S.'s capacity to play a critical role in world affairs is certain to diminish.
- United States is already being pronounced by some as a 'failing' state
- Europe, in the short and medium term, will prove incapable of defining and defending its common interests
- Germany, which may still retain some of its present strength, is already turning insular
- Both France and a post-Brexit United Kingdom will be out of the reckoning

West Asia and India

- The oil price meltdown will aggravate an already difficult situation across the region
- Iran is going to face further difficulties due to US sanction
- Israel may be one country that is in a position to exploit this situation to its advantage.
- Indian expatriate community in West Asia region may return back home leading to reduced inflow of foreign funds
- Economic downturn greatly reduces India's room for manoeuvre in South Asian region while China gains new friends through its economic diplomacy

Conclusion

Pandemics have often changed the world and reshaped human society. We can expect the same with COVID-19.

Connecting the dots

- Latin America – Impact of COVID-19
- Sustainable development goals in the post-COVID-19 world

Privacy concerns during a pandemic

Context: In the midst of public health crisis, the measures taken by Union & State governments in India – lockdown, physical distancing norms - has been supported by public.

Nevertheless, there are certain pitfalls which needs to be avoided especially with regard to government's technology solutions to tackle pandemic

Dangers of government actions during Crises times

- **Prone to overreach:** Justice Khanna outlined that "when faced with crises, governments — acting for all the right reasons — are invariably prone to overreach"
- **Threat to Civil Liberties:** If the government so chooses, fundamental rights can be suspended at will stating that the need to save lives takes precedence over all other interests.
- **Continuance of restrictive measures** even after the crises has passed
- **Invasive use of technology** that seeks to utilise people's personal health data.

How has technology been invoked during this pandemic?

Technology has been invoked at three levels.

- First, in creating a **list of persons** suspected to be infected with COVID-19;
- Second, in deploying **geo-fencing** and drone imagery to monitor compliance by quarantined individuals

- Third, through the use of contact-tracing smartphone applications, such as **AarogyaSetu**
- Impact of technologies on privacy**

1. The use of geo-fencing and drone technologies is **unsanctioned**

- Though cell-phone based surveillance is permissible under the Telegraph Act of 1885, until now the orders authorising surveillance have not been published.

2. Indiscriminate usage of modified surveillance drones

- These are equipped with the ability to conduct thermal imaging, night-time reconnaissance, and integrate facial recognition into existing databases such as Aadhaar.
- Some of the drones do not appear to possess any visible registration or licensing.

3. Dangers of contact-tracing applications like ArogyaSetu

- It promises users a deep insight into the movements of a COVID-19 carrier
- **The aim** is to ensure that a person who comes into contact with a carrier can quarantine herself.
- **The efficacy** of such applications have been questioned by some
- **Lack of Transparency:** Details of the application's technical architecture and its source code have not been made public.
- **Lack of accountability:** The programme and its institution is not backed by legislation.
- **Coercive in nature:** Like Aadhaar it seems that the application will be used as an object of coercion (through issuance of e-pass) in spite of making its usage voluntary
- **Invades Privacy:** AarogyaSetu is framed as a necessary technological invasion into personal privacy, in a bid to achieve a larger social purpose
- **Lack of clarity** on how the huge personal data that it will collect will be deployed.

Way Ahead

- A pandemic cannot be a pretext to renounce the Constitution
- Any action by government that infringes on privacy must meet the requirements of legality, necessity and the doctrine of proportionality (*K.S. Puttaswamy Case*)
- Civil Society should pay close attention to rights, not to impede the government's efforts, but to ensure that they are not permanently reduced.

Connecting the dots

- Justice B.N.Srikrishna Committee report on Data protection
- EU Data protection law

Online Education

Context: UGC held a meeting to consider a tentative academic calendar for the current year, and the need to promote online learning

How had India progressed with regard to access to education?

In the last two decades, there has been a conscious effort on the part of the state to improve access to education at all levels with measures like

- Right to Education Act
- OBC reservation in Higher Educational institutions

- Recent EWS reservation
- Online Education an integral part of Digital India programme

Constraints with Online Learning in India

- **Digital divide** in India with poor not having sufficient access to internet
 - 55,000 villages in the country are without mobile network coverage as per Niti Aayog, in its “Strategy for New India@75” report
- **Proper Infrastructure:** Personal computers and phones unequal to professional work
- **Lack of Experience:** Both teachers and students fall back on the communications grammar of the live classroom which produces confusion online.
- **Lack of Capabilities:** Both teachers and students need training in how to operate in the electronic classroom, and how to deal with digital workflows.
- **Increased burden:** Parents have to bear the burden of keeping electronic classrooms in order

Sociological issues with Online Education

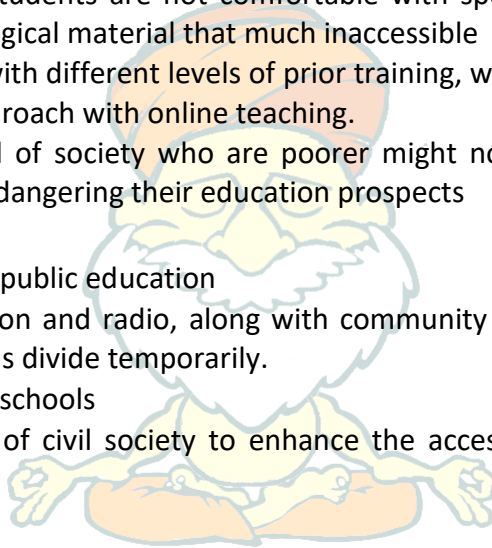
- A large number of students are not comfortable with spoken or written English. This makes online pedagogical material that much inaccessible
- The students come with different levels of prior training, which makes it difficult to have a one-size-fits-all approach with online teaching.
- The bottom pyramid of society who are poorer might not find financial resources to access it and thus endangering their education prospects

Way Ahead

- Increased funding to public education
- State-backed television and radio, along with community radio in underserved places, can help to bridge this divide temporarily.
- Digitisation of public schools
- Leveraging the help of civil society to enhance the access of education, especially in remote places

Connecting the dots

- Operation Digital Board of Gol
- Impact of COVID-19 on telecom sector



SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE

Lessons from COVID-19 shutdown

Many festivals in India attract large gathering and they are held without any mishaps every year. On the other hand, economic announcements are always mired with lots of glitch which affect the common citizens more than the expected.

Lockdown period of 21 days, announced by the central government in the wake of coronavirus pandemic, was done to ensure that the damage that could be caused due to the virus is mitigated. However, there was a lack of contingency plan which affected the migrant workers, construction workers and daily wage labourers the most.

Do you know?

- Total cases globally due to coronavirus are more than 8 lakh.
- Global deaths due to the virus have reached more than 40,000.
- In India, the cases have crossed 1500 mark and 45 people have already lost their lives.

Lessons to be learnt

- The orders or announcements from the Centre take time to be absorbed and implemented at the state and district levels in a federal structure like India. Therefore **the statement should be simultaneously sent** to all states which, in turn, should pass it on immediately to local authorities, of which the police force is the most important.
- **Clear instructions** must be given to the police force about the activities which are banned and which are not banned during a curfew so that the normal business does not get affected and the **common people are not thrashed** without any reason.
- All authorities should assemble after such announcement and **use internal channels** to pass on the information so that life remains normal with the only ban being on movement.
- A list containing **registered and unregistered factories** must be prepared so that it is easy to classify industries and segregate those units which are exempted from those that are not.
- **Proper instructions** must be given to the **factories** so that the orders from the government are not interpreted differently and employees are able to reach their place of work without any harassment at the police check post.
- Requisite passes must be ready and distributed to the concerned units that are allowed to function to prevent any disruptions.
- It must be ensured that any kind of shutdown should not lead to scarcity of essential commodities in the market.

Way forward

- As it is too early to take an informed guess about the extension of the lockdown, the governments at the Centre and the states should make sure that the **issues are sorted out** at the earliest.
- **Sketch** outlining all the instructions and exemptions clearly should be **prepared and disseminated** widely given that the country is well linked through technology and messaging is easy.

- **Measures** should be taken to **prevent unnecessary hoarding**.
- Since, all the food products have their origins with **farmers**, any embargo impacts their sales and income, which has to be **protected at any cost**.

Conclusion

Lockdown, if implemented and co-ordinated properly, doesn't create any mishaps as much as ill-planned announcement does. Thus, every stakeholder must do their part to make sure that this pandemic doesn't make a common man's life more difficult.

Connecting the dots

- Staying at home is a privilege for many. Analyse.

COVID-19: Online schooling: Possibilities and concerns

The lockdown imposed by authorities in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the learning curve of millions of children in India (& across world). This has led to renewal of interest on online learning

Do you know how Technology is aiding the three aspects of schooling?

- **Information** –Google has revolutionised access to information
- **Interaction** - free apps (like Google class rooms, Zoom, Skype, Electa) and customised learning management systems has enabled teacher-student interactions to continue even during these times of lockdown
- **Self-study** – Students now have access to various sources for self-study Ex: Swayam Prabha by Gol, National Digital Library (even IASBaba for UPSC-CSE preparation)

Concerns w.r.t Online Schooling

- **Job Losses:** There is a fear that school managements would use online learning system in downsizing the number of teachers once the Corona-scene is over
- **Digital Infrastructure:** Teachers need to be provided with laptops/tablets and a steady internet connection for such exercises
- **Digital Capabilities:** Teachers should also be equipped with basic operating skills in computers and good typing speed
- **Integration with Learning:** Online schooling process can become ineffective if technological process is not integrated with learning. Thus any online schooling needs to have proper schedule, Lessons, notes, interactions and online tests
- **Digital Access:** School children (especially in rural areas) don't usually have phones, social media accounts or even e-mail IDs and thus require parental guidance.

Way Forward

- Technology should be used to improve the conversation between teachers and students, not to abandon it altogether
- Technology has to be seen as an aid to schooling, not a substitute to it

Connecting the dots

- New National Education Policy
- Teacher Education
- Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan

Infodemic: the new challenge of COVID-19 pandemic

Covid-19, the respiratory disease caused by the new coronavirus, has spread to every continent except Antarctica. The crisis has also created the menace of infodemic.

Infodemic is a situation where there is an “overabundance” of information that makes it difficult for people to identify truthful and trustworthy sources from false or misleading one

How has COVID-19 impacted the use of Social Media?

- **Enhanced Usage:** Suspension of work during quarantine has left people to increasingly use Social media platforms both for entertainment and information.
 - Nearly 400 million turn to a single messaging app- WhatsApp- for sharing news and stories
 - More than 240 million are on Facebook and, often, using it as the predominant source of news,
- **Lack of gate-keepers in Social Media:** Traditional news had quality assurance, and editorial controls before publication and most of the content was created by professionals – which is lacking in social media
- **Breeding ground for rumours:** The above factors have become the perfecting setting for spread of misinformation some of which are- Bioweapons origins of the coronavirus (false); Bill Gates was behind it (false); UNICEF’s recommendations for warding off infection (unauthorised)

What are the consequences of spread of misinformation?

- **Communalisation of Pandemics:** The Tablighi-Jamaat in New Delhi which has emerged as hot spot for the pandemic has made anti-social elements to give the disease communal colour (Corona Jihad)
- **Polarised public sphere:** Increasing distrust among the communities
- **Privileging of faith over science:** Any news which speaks about a cure is believed.
- **Nativist concerns** are prioritised over global anxiety- which has strengthened conservative tendencies
- **Contempt for scientific temper** – where wrong behaviours can further propel the pandemic
- **Spurs Panic behaviour in people** – causing people to rush to markets for stockpiling their essential supplies
- **Enhances anxiety among public:** For instance, a 23-year-old man, suspected to be a patient of novel coronavirus infection, committed suicide by jumping from the seventh floor of Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi
- **Law and order issues:** People have attacked the health inspectors in certain places due to misplaced fears spread through social media

Actions taken by various agencies to fight infodemic

- **Fact checking websites** like Boom Live and Alt News, are continuously checking stories and verifying its truth.
- **WHO has started their own myth busting page** – “Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public: Myth busters”, debunking the myths doing rounds in social media and educating the public with authentic and verified information.
- **Proactive role by Social Media Platforms**
 - **Google** has created an SOS Alert on COVID-19 for the six official UN languages to make sure the first information the public receives is from the WHO website
 - **Facebook** has promised to ban ads that promise “cures” for the Covid-19 virus.

- **The Press Information Bureau** has set up a portal for fact-checking issues related with the pandemic. It will also receive messages by email and send its response.

Way Forward

- **Information Hygiene:** Where people need to verify the information before sharing it to others.
- Information hygiene can be done by verifying it is from an authentic source, double checking with fact checking website, asking a doctor or an expert etc.
- **Inform relevant authorities** of the rumours being spread on social media platforms
- Investing in **training people** to understand the concept of information hygiene.

Connecting the dots

- Do governments need to regulate the Social Media platforms to prevent the spread of misinformation?
- Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee recommendation on data protection framework in India

Rumours: Why it spreads A Sociological analysis

Context: COVID-19 crisis and the ensuing lockdown has led to emergence of unsubstantiated rumours being spread through various media

Do You Know?

- Emergence of Nizamuddin (New Delhi) as the hotspot of Coronavirus led to fake news about the origin of disease leading to communalisation of pandemic
- In 1984, during Delhi Sikhs pogrom, there were rumours entire water supply was poisoned
- During late 18th century Paris, there were rumours that the rich had distributed lethal, contaminated flour to the poor

A rumour is an untested piece of information, opinion, report or story.

Some of the features of rumours are:

- It must have an element of truth that makes it believable for the listener/reader.
- It neglects reason and is loaded with passion/emotion
- Interlinkage between social anxiety & rumours: It occurs in a societal context where there is either an information void or an information overload – usually during a crisis like war, pandemic, social unrest etc.
- It is deliberately planted by few but derives authority largely from a mob

Immediate Consequence of rumours

- Scapegoating a community (usually a minority) leading to a **Polarised society**
- **Social boycott** of individual/groups of people
- Violence and arson which might lead to lynching and murder.

Why rumours circulate?

- Crisis situation leads to anxiety & panic among people.
- **Psychological inclination:** In times of acute crisis, people who are already disturbed often incline towards knee jerk speculation and prejudice.
- **Passion dominates Reason:** An anxious mind neglects all evidence and instead surrenders to rumours, often in the service of emotional need

- **Need for an enemy:** A group consisting of 'outsiders', already distrusted and disliked, becomes an easy target for rumours, ready to be blamed for the crisis.
- **Cascading effect of rumours:** A belief gets entrenched after like-minded people discuss it among themselves leading to easy spread of rumours
- **Group Dynamics:** Rather than face sanction and ostracisation for having different opinion, people find it safer to follow other members of their group.
- **Lack of scientific temper:** A denial by a mistrusted outsider, no matter how great her expertise, only ends up solidifying rumour
- **Inevitable:** Since societies can never be fully informed or secure, rumours are inevitable and in times of acute crisis, they are a menace.
- **Sensationalization of news:** The emergence of commercial news media often sensationalises events for grabbing audience attention.
- **Anonymous nature of Social Media:** The emergence of social media has made the task of spreading fake news by vested interests much easier as they can exploit the open ended nature of internet

Way Ahead

- Regulatory laws to check rumours are needed to create deterrence
- Community leaders and democratically elected office holders must play a crucial role in halting rumours through regular communication
- Long term measures
 - Depolarising society
 - Developing scientific temper so as to loosen the grip of prejudice in society

Connecting the dots

- Infodemics
- Should Social media be regulated?
- Need for a public broadcaster

Unlawful Activities and (Prevention) Act (UAPA)

Context: Civil rights activist Gautam Navlakha and Prof Teltumbde surrendered before the NIA court on orders of Supreme Court.

Brief History of the case

- In 2018, violence broke out at the 200th anniversary celebration of a Bhima-Koregaon battle primarily between Dalits & upper caste people
- Clashes then broke out across the Maharashtra state
- Police have alleged that several activists & academics including Prof Teltumbde(a Dalit) and his organisation Elgar Parishad, as responsible for the violence that erupted in Bhima Koregaon
- They have been charged under UAPA and accused of having Maoist links.

About Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act

- The UAPA, an upgrade on the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act TADA (lapsed in 1995) and the Prevention of Terrorism Act - POTA (repealed in 2004) was passed in the year 1967

- It aims at effective prevention of unlawful activities associations in India.
- Till 2004, "unlawful" activities referred to actions related to secession and cession of territory.
- The **2004** amendment, added "terrorist act" to the list of offences.
- Under the act, the investigating agency can file a charge sheet in maximum 180 days after the arrests and the duration can be extended further after intimating the court.
- **Powers to Union Government:** If Centre deems an activity as unlawful then it may, by way of an Official Gazette, declare it so.
- It has death penalty and life imprisonment as highest punishments.

2019 Amendment of UAPA

- The act was amended to **designate individuals as terrorists** on certain grounds provided in the Act.
 - Earlier only organisations could be declared as such
 - Not designating individuals as terrorists, would give them an **opportunity to circumvent the law** and regroup under different name
- It empowers the Director General of NIA to grant approval of **seizure or attachment of property** when the case is investigated by NIA
 - Earlier it required the consent of State Police which delayed the process
- It empowers the officers of the NIA, of the **rank of Inspector or above**, to investigate cases of terrorism
 - This will help solve the human resource crunch in the NIA.

Criticism of UAPA

- Experiences of Anti-terror laws in India such as POTA and TADA reveals that they are **often misused and abused**.
- The law could also be used against political opponents and civil society activists who speak against the government and **brand them as "terrorists."**
- Critics argue that the law, especially after 2019 amendment gives **unfettered powers to investigating agencies**.
- Some experts feel that it is **against the federal structure**, given that 'Police' is a state subject under 7th schedule of Indian Constitution.

Importance of Civil Society Groups/ Social Activists

- Acts as a conduit between people and authority
- They help in interest articulation and interest aggregation in a Democratic setup
- Collaboration with the government in welfare delivery programmes especially in remote places where administrative machinery is thin
- Constructive criticism of government actions which leads to improvements in governance
- Helps in preventing the excesses of executive through their active civic participation
- Holds the government accountable for their action and ensures transparency in government functioning
- Promotes brotherhood and harmony in society
- Promotes environmental consciousness among people
- Ensures that government keep humans at the centre of development strategy

Way Ahead

- In this contemporary period of decline of Political parties, it is the civil society that cater to people's needs, hence they should not be harassed through draconian laws
- Anti-terror laws should **not be used as tool to silence** the critics of government
- Need to set up **review committee** to examine and supervise the process of designating individuals as terrorists and investigation of cases with objectivity and fairness.
- There is a **greater role for judiciary** here to carefully examine the cases of alleged misuse. Arbitrariness under the law should be checked through Judicial review.
- Drawing the line between individual freedom and state obligation to provide security is a case of classical dilemma. It is up to the officers to ensure professional integrity, follow the principle of objectivity and avoid any misuse.

Connecting the dots

- Foreign Funding and NGOs- Critical Analysis
- Need for active civic participation for vibrant Democracy

India ranks top in the list of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I - Society

In News:

- In a **global compilation of reports of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)** found online, **India** stands on **top** of the list, with 11.7% of the total reports followed by Pakistan, which contributes 6.8% of all reports.

Key takeaways:

- **The National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)** urges people to report CSAM found online across the world annually, on their online platform **CyberTipline**.
- **Three of the top four countries** were in **South Asia**, raising concerns about the online safety of children in the region.
- Bangladesh comes in fourth with a share of 3.3%.

Important value additions:

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)

- It is a **private, nonprofit organization** established in 1984 by the United States Congress.
- NCMEC handles cases of **missing or exploited children** from **infancy to young adults through age 20**.
- The NCMEC operates the **CyberTipline** which was established by Congress to process reports of child sexual exploitation.
- **Anyone can make a report** to the CyberTipline but reporting is required for certain electronic service providers (ESP) who become aware of the presence of child pornography on their systems.

Migrants and their significance in India

Context: The COVID-19 crisis has, for the first time, brought migration & their exodus (mass migration) to the centre stage of public health and disaster response in India.

Changing Nature of Mass Migration

- In the past, a mass migration would take place because of a disaster such as a famine, drought, flood, or regional conflict.
- It would be from the area where such a calamity was unfolding.
- Though, such types of mass migration continue, now there are new narratives of it caused by demonetisation, violence against migrants, and lockdown.
- The decisive role played by the state or the lack of it, is causing such migration

Significance of Migrant Workers in public health and political economy

1. The numbers involved are very high
 - For instance: Bihar which has a population of about 123 million has an estimated inter-state migrant population of 3 million
2. India's economy, particularly of the growth centres, depends on the services of migrant workers. For Instance:
 - Agricultural activities during harvest season
 - Sectors such as construction, garment manufacturing and mining
3. **Economic shock to home States** (Ex. UP, Bihar) when migrants return (from Delhi, Mumbai), as there are no compensatory sources of livelihood to be offered
 - This will impact nutrition, health, education of dependents and the well-being of the older population.
4. In the case of epidemics, exodus of seasonal migrants creates danger of the spread of the disease in rural areas
5. **Loss of Livelihoods**
 - Working from home or getting paid leave is largely a middle-class phenomenon
 - Daily-wage earners do not have the capacity to stay at a destination during lockdown thus causing their exodus
6. **Low Quality of Life**
 - Due to lack of sanitation, hygiene, safe drinking water, health services, social security measures, and affordable housing
7. **Vulnerable to infection**
 - The pathetic living conditions of migrants in slum-like colonies, where people simply cannot practise social distancing, are breeding grounds of communicable diseases

Though, government announced ₹1.7 Lakh crore relief package, there are reasons to believe that it will not benefit seasonal migrants, reasons being

- Those migrants who are not ration cardholders in the cities where they are stationed will not benefit from additional free foodgrains under the PDS.
- They cannot avail of increased MGNREGA wages until they go back home.
- As many seasonal migrants are landless they will not benefit from PM-KISAN component of the package
- They will not get benefits under the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board because of low registration

Conclusion

- The states need to address immediate distress conditions and simultaneously initiate long-term structural changes in the policy towards migrants

Connecting the dots

- Article 19(1)(d) of Indian Constitution
- One Nation- One Ration Card

Supreme Court rules inclusion of deemed universities under Anti-corruption law

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Education

In News:

- In a significant ruling, the Supreme Court has held that **bribery and corruption** in a deemed university **can be tried** under the **Prevention of Corruption Act**.

Key takeaways:

- The judgement was given by a three-judge Bench led by Justice N.V. Ramana.
- As per the judgement,
 - **Individuals, authorities or officials** connected to a deemed university, irrespective of their role or designation, come under the definition of a '**public servant**'.
 - Deemed universities come within the **ambit of the term 'university'** in **Section 2** of the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act, 1988.
 - A deemed institution, under the **University Grants Commission Act of 1956**, has the **same common public duty** like a university to confer academic degrees, which are recognised in the society.

Important value additions:

INSULATING PUBLIC SERVANTS: Lowdown on the significant changes in the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, adopted by both Houses of Parliament				
 <p>Bribery What is new</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving a bribe is now an offence, punishable by a 7-year prison term • Except when one is forced to give a bribe. But it should be reported it to within seven days • Bribe is termed 'undue advantage', defined as 'gratification other than legal remuneration' <p>What it was</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No specific provision, except as abetment <p>It could empower the public to refuse to give a bribe but seven-day limit may not be enough. As to what happens if citizen's report of coercion is not registered by the police is unclear</p>	 <p>Pre-investigation approval What is new</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police officer cannot begin probe without prior approval of relevant authority or govt (except when caught red-handed) <p>What it was</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No such provision in the Act, but a rule similar to it was struck down by Supreme Court <p>Protection formerly available to officials of rank of joint secretary and above (before SC struck it down) is extended to all public servants</p>	 <p>Sanction for prosecution What is new</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanction needed for prosecuting former officials for offences done while in office • Centre may notify guidelines for sanction • Decision on request for sanction within 3 months, which may be extended by a month <p>What it was</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanction was required under PCA for serving officers only <p>Sanction for IPC offences covered both serving and retired officers. Guidelines and time-limit may help make sanction process easier</p>	 <p>Criminal misconduct What is new</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only be two forms of criminal misconduct... • Misappropriation of property entrusted to public servant • Intentionally enriching oneself illicitly <p>What it was</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were five kinds: omitted ones are taking bribe habitually, getting anything free or at a concession, obtaining pecuniary advantage for oneself or for another without public interest <p>This is to protect public servants from being wrongly prosecuted for official decisions. Earlier it was a crime to 'obtain advantage to a private party without public interest'</p>	 <p>Forfeiture of property What is new</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section introduced for Special Court under this Act to attach and confiscate property <p>What it was</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was not done under the Prevention of Corruption Act, but under a 1944 ordinance through civil courts <p>Compiled by K. Venkataramanan</p> <p>This helps avoid a fresh procedure to confiscate property obtained through corruption, enables court conducting trial to do so itself</p>

Image source: <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.thehindu.com/news/national/lok-sabha-passes-anti-graft-amendment-bill/article24506028.ece/amp/>

Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988

- It is an Act of the Parliament of India **enacted to combat corruption** in government agencies and public sector businesses in India.
- In 2018, **Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Bill** was passed under which **punish bribe-givers and bribe-takers** shall be punished.
- The Bill provides for **jail terms of three to seven years**, besides fine, to those convicted of taking or giving bribes to public officials.

Deemed university

- Deemed university, or deemed-to-be-university, is an **accreditation awarded to higher educational institutions** in India, conferring the status of a university.
- It is granted by the **Department of Higher Education**, Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- Institutions that are 'deemed-to-be-university' enjoy the academic status and privileges of a university.



WOMEN ISSUE

COVID-19 and Domestic Violence

The lockdown imposed by authorities in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic has imposed stricter control on one's mobility and put women in abusive relationships at extremely high risk of damage from physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

Do You Know?

- 67% of the world's healthcare workers are women and thus are naturally more prone to infection.
- Women are burdened with three times more unpaid care work than men, which increases during lockdown

Global scenario of Women Violence

- Globally, violence against women affects **one in three women**.
- Of all **female murders**, an overwhelming **82 per cent happen in their marital homes**, and are committed by an intimate partner or a family member.

Women violence in India – findings by the National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16)

- 30% women in India in the age group of 15-49 have experienced physical violence since the age of 15
- About 31 per cent of married women have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence by their spouses.
- 6 per cent women in the age group 15-49 years have experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime

Consequences of lockdown (in the wake of COVID-19) on Women Violence

1. Increases the vulnerability to sexual violence

- Data from west African countries in the wake of the 2014 Ebola outbreak showed that there was a steady increase in rape, sexual assault and violence against women and girls.
- Sexual violence increased in these regions by 40per cent over a period of one year

2. Increases domestic violence on women:

- In the province of Hubei in Wuhan, China, which is the heart of the first outbreak of the Coronavirus, domestic violence reports to police tripled during the February lockdown period
- In Brazil state-run shelters are estimating 40-50 per cent rise in demands from endangered women.
- European countries have reported 20-30 per cent increases in calls to domestic violence helplines

Impact of lockdown on domestic violence in India

- National Commission of Women has recorded 291 complaints of domestic violence in March

- **Closure of Counselling Centres:** Under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), it is these centres and not the police who are first responder for women who experience domestic violence.
- **Non-functional NGOs:** The hotlines run by NGOs (whom women report such cases) are silent – attributed probably to continuous presence of the abuser at home
- Given the above situation there is now **a lack of alternative alert system** for women abuse

Way Forward

- The state governments need to **declare helplines as “essential services”** that should remain open during lockdowns
- **Disseminate information** about gender-based violence and publicise resources and services available.
- Increase resourcing for NGOs that respond to domestic violence and aid — including shelter, counselling, and legal aid — to survivors.
- **Encourage the equitable sharing of domestic tasks** at home.
- Provide for the continued provision of healthcare services based on medical research and tests — unrelated to the virus — for women and girls
- **Ensure women’s timely access** to necessary and comprehensive sexual & reproductive health services during the crisis, such as maternal health services, safe abortion etc.

Examples from other Countries worth emulating

- French government will pay for up to 20,000 hotel nights for survivors and finance **pop-up counselling centres at grocery stores** for easy access to abuse survivors.
- In Spain, **women are being given codewords** such as “Mask-19” in pharmacy stores, which can act as an alarm-response mediator.

Connecting the dots

- Gender wage gap post the crisis
- Intersectional Feminism

HEALTH ISSUE

Medical Devices Notified as Drugs

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In News:

- With effect from 1st April, 2020, all Medical Devices shall be regulated by the Government as Drugs for quality control and price monitoring.

Key takeaways:

- The **Maximum Retail Prices (MPRs)** of all the Medical Devices would be **monitored** by the Government under the provisions of Para 20(1) of the **Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013**.
- This will ensure that **no manufacturer/importer increases the MRP** of a drug more than 10% of MRP during preceding 12 month, failing which penalty shall be fined.

Important value additions:

- **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Policy (NPPP)** - governs price control.
- **Drug Price Control Orders (DPCO)** – enforces price control.
- **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA)** – monitors and controls drug prices.
- **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Policy-2012** - places a **regulatory framework** for pricing of drugs.

Convalescent Plasma Therapy

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In News:

- The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved use of **blood plasma** from recovered patients to **treat severely critical** COVID-19 patients.
- This process is called **convalescent plasma therapy**.

Key takeaways:

- Convalescent plasma therapy seeks to make use of the **antibodies developed in the recovered patient** against the coronavirus.
- The **whole blood or plasma** (the colourless fluid part of blood) is taken from recovered patient.
- The plasma is then **injected** in critically ill patients to **transfer the antibodies** and boost their fight against the virus.

Important value additions:

- A COVID-19 patient usually develops **primary immunity** against the virus in 10-14 days.
- If the plasma is **injected at an early stage**, it can **possibly help fight the virus** and prevent severe illness.

'Hack The Crisis-India' Hackathon: To find solutions to overcome COVID-19

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In News:

- **Minister of State Human Resource Development (HRD)** recently launched **Hack the Crisis - India**.

Key takeaways:

- It is an Online Hackathon to **find working solutions** for overcoming COVID-19 pandemic.
- The **winning ideas** from few top participating teams, as implementable solutions on corona crisis, are expected to **help India and global citizens**.
- It is a part of **global initiative**.
- It is being **organised by** 'Hack A Cause - India' and 'FICCI Ladies Organization Pune'.
- This hackathon is supported by **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology**.

Price Monitoring & Resource Unit (PMRU): Set up in Jammu & Kashmir

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

In News:

- Jammu & Kashmir Union Territory become 12th State where the PMRU has been set up by National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA)
- The unit shall be funded by NPPA for its recurring and non-recurring expenses

Key takeaways:

- The PMRU, a registered society, will function under State **Drug Controller of Jammu & Kashmir**
- PMRU shall help NPPA and State Drug Controller in ensuring availability and accessibility of medicines at affordable prices.
- PMRU will collect samples of medicines, collect and analyse data and make reports with respect to availability & over-pricing of medicines for taking action under DPCO
- It is also expected to organise awareness activities related to affordability of medicines

Important value additions:

- **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Policy (NPPP)** - governs price control.
- **Drug Price Control Orders (DPCO)** – enforces price control.
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Zoonosis: Safe forests, safe people

Zoonosis a disease which can be transmitted from animals to humans.

Diseases of animal Origin include

- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome - from bats and the civet cat
- Nipah Virus – From bats & pigs
- Kyasanur Forest Disease – From Hard ticks or from dead monkeys
- Bird Flu and Swine Flu
- Ebola
- HIV
- COVID-19

These diseases are causing pandemics more often than not in the recent past. Some of the reasons attributed for this are:

- The **destruction of forests** has made these animals come into close contact with humans
- Trapping or **farming of wild species** by humans has increased their vulnerability to transmission
- **Rising economic activity**, such as road building and mining cutting through forests, brings more people in close contact with animals.
- **Increased global trade in wild species** – In Wuhan, the epicentre of COVID-19, wolf pups to rats, civets and foxes were traded which could be the reservoir of viruses.

Way Ahead

- Avoid reckless exploitation of environment
- Maintaining the sanctity of forests:
 - Biodiversity in forests harmlessly retains dangerous viruses and other pathogens among a vast pool of wild animals, away from people.
- Change in the mind-set:
 - Societies & Governments should stop viewing undisturbed landscapes as an impediment to economic growth.
- Increased attention from International actors about the dangers of future pandemic– Governments, Civil Society, International Organisations and Businesses.
- Environmental aspects to be integrated into developmental strategies
- Administrative Changes
 - Roll back the dilution of the environmental clearance system
 - Decentralisation – Empowering local communities to deal with environmental clearances
 - Empowering Scientific community- Leaving protected areas to scientific experts rather than at the hands of bureaucracy
- Creating awareness among the public
 - Common man should be made aware of that environmental protection confers health protection (that is already backed by scientific evidence)

Conclusion

Pristine forests with diverse species keep viruses virtually bottled up, out of man's way. They should be left undisturbed.

Connecting the dots

- Impact of crisis caused by COVID-19 disease (having animal source) on food habits
- US withdrawal from Paris Climate Deal – Will COVID-19 crisis create a rethink on US part?

[Rapid antibody-based tests for COVID-19 hotspots first](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In News:

- According to **The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)**, the **rapid antibody based blood test** for COVID-19 will be deployed in clusters and hot spots showing high incidence of confirmed cases.

Key takeaways:

- Moreover, over all testing for COVID-19 using **real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR)** is also increasing.
- All States/UTs have been **issued guidelines** for implementing Rapid antibody - based tests.
- **Reports** shall be entered into the **ICMR portal** similar to results of real-time RT PCR tests for COVID-19.

Important value additions:

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)

- It is the **apex body** in India for the **formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research**.
- The ICMR is **funded by the Government of India** through the Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health.

Real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR)

- It is a laboratory technique combining reverse transcription of **RNA into DNA**.
- It **detects the virus**.

Rapid antibody - based test

- It uses **blood**.
- It **detects the body's response** to the virus.
- A positive result tells that the body was exposed to the virus.

Pooled sampling

- It means testing samples from **multiple patients** with a **single PCR test**.
- It has been **used** previously in the **early stages of the HIV epidemic**.
- Such tests **reduce** the time, cost, and resources required.
- It identifies infected people in a population and estimates the infection rate.
- This allows medical experts to **identify community clusters** for targeted public health interventions.

Testing, treatment made available for free under Ayushman Bharat scheme

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

In News:

- The Central government has decided to provide free testing and treatment of COVID-19 under the **Ayushman Bharat Scheme**.

Key takeaways:

- The empaneled hospitals can **use their own** authorised testing facilities or **tie up** with an authorised testing facility for the scheme.
- These tests would be carried out **as per the protocol** set by Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR).
- Private labs approved by the ICMR can carry out the tests.
- Private hospitals shall also be covered under Ayushman Bharat Scheme to increase the rate of testing.

Important value additions:**Ayushman Bharat Scheme.**

- It is a flagship scheme of the Indian government's National Health Policy.
- It **aims to provide free health coverage** at the secondary and tertiary level to its bottom 40% poor and vulnerable population.
- It is the **world's largest and fully state sponsored health assurance scheme.**

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health; GS-III - Science and technology

In News:

- The **Railways' Rail Coach Factory (RCF)** in Kapurthala has become the first PSU to develop a **prototype ventilator** that has an **original design** and will cost a fraction of what regular ventilators cost.

Key takeaways:

- The prototype is named **Jeevan**.
- It shall go for **final testing** at the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) before being put to production to aid the country's fight against COVID-19.
- The **heart of the device** is the compressed air container to work the Ambu bag with air.
- It **doesn't have any moving parts** like servo motor or piston or link mechanism.



Image Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/icmr-to-test-prototype-railway-unit-first-psu-to-make-ventilator-6347779/>

Centre For Augmenting War With COVID-19 Health Crisis (CAWACH): A platform for start - ups

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health; GS-III - Science and technology

In News:

- **Department of Science & Technology** has approved setting up of a Centre for Augmenting WAR with COVID-19 Health Crisis (**CAWACH**) to **scout, evaluate** and **support** the innovations and start-ups that address COVID-19 challenges.

Key takeaways:

- The Society for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SINE) shall be the **Implementing Agency** of the CAWACH.
- The CAWACH's **mandate** will be to extend **timely support to potential startups** by providing financial assistance and **fund innovations** that are **deployable** in the market **within next 6 months.**

- It will **identify** upto 50 innovations and startups that are in the area of novel, low cost, safe and effective **ventilators, respiratory aids, protective gears** and any effective interventions to control COVID-19.

India lifts ban on export of hydroxychloroquine

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In News:

- Indian government has ended its earlier **ban on exporting of Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ)**.

Key takeaways:

- India would licence paracetamol and HCQ in **appropriate quantities** to all the neighbouring countries which are **dependent on India's capabilities**.
- These essential drugs shall also be supplied to nations which are **badly affected** by the pandemic.
- Previously HCQ was placed on a **restricted items list**, and its export was **completely banned** in the first week of April.
- **U.S. President** Donald Trump had warned India of **retaliation** from U.S. if it withheld supplies of HCQ.

Important value additions:

Hydroxychloroquine

- It is an **anti-malarial drug**.
- It is now being used by many countries as a **possible line of treatment** for COVID-19.
- It works by diminishing immune system's response to viral infections.
- These dosages are also linked to instances of **cardiac arrhythmia** (Improper beating of the heart) and liver damage.
- A study in France showed that hydroxychloroquine alone or in combination with Azithromycin appeared to reduce virus levels quicker.

Why Hydroxychloroquine was completely banned?

- India imports Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API) from China for the manufacture of drugs at cheaper costs.
- The supply of APIs got affected due to COVID-19 outbreak in China.
- To ensure that India's doesn't fall short of supply for its own citizens, the drug was banned from exporting.

For further information, refer to this link: [Drug Secutity](#)

nCoVSENSEs: Rapid Test device by Pune based Startup

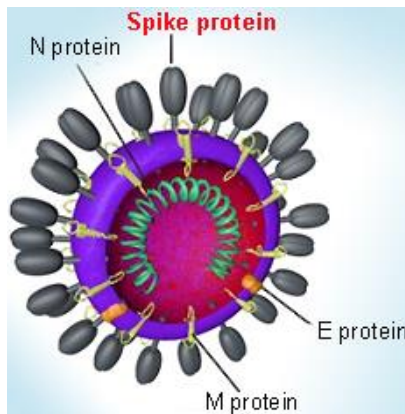
Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In News:

- **Module innovations**, a Pune based healthcare start up, is developing a **testing kit device** to detect COVID-19.
- The project is funded by Department of Science and Technology.

Key takeaways:

- The kit is named nCoVSENSEs
- It is a rapid test device, it can detect COVID-19 in 10-15mins
- It **detects the antibodies** that have been formed against COVID-19 in the human body
- **Antibodies (IgG and IgM)** are formed against any infection in the human body.
- The device is **more efficient** and **less costly**.
- The test is also targeted against the **Spike proteins** making it specific for COVID 19.



Magnified image of coronavirus

Image source: <https://www.sinobiological.com/research/virus/hcov-spike-protein-overview>

Gamosas evolve as protective gear amidst COVID-19 pandemic

- **Gamosas**, a **decorative cotton towel**, are being used as protective gear to fight the coronavirus.
- The Gamosa/Gamusa is an **article of great significance** for the people of **Assam**.
- It is a **white rectangular** piece of cloth.
- It has a **red border** on three sides and **red woven motifs** on the fourth. Other colors may also be used.
- **Cotton yarn** is the **most common** material used for making/weaving gamosa.
- For special occasions, **Pat silk** is used.
- It is valued as a **gift for visitors**, a **scarf**, **anti-dust mask**, as a **turban**.



Image source: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/GAMOSA>

Chitra Acrylosorb Secretion Solidification system: Superabsorbent material for infected respiratory secretions

- Scientists at Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST) have developed a **super absorbent** material titled **Chitra Acrylosorb Secretion Solidification System**.
- SCTIMST is an **autonomous institute** under the Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- The System is a **highly efficient** superabsorbent material for absorbing infected respiratory secretions.
- It can **absorb liquids at least 20 times more** than its dry weight.
- It also contains a **decontaminant** for in situ (at the site) disinfection.
- Containers filled with decontaminant will also **immobilize** the contaminated fluid by **solidifying it** (gel-like), thus avoiding spillage.
- The canister containing the solidified waste can be **decomposed by incineration** (destruction by burning).
- This technology **reduces the risk** for the hospital staff.
- It reduces the **need** for personnel for disinfecting and cleaning the bottles.
- Canisters can be **reused**.
- Disposal is **safer and easier**.



Fig: Suction
canister with
acrylosorb



Fig: Disposable spit
bag with
acrylosorb

Image source: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1612412>

COVID-19: Need for a Social Vaccine

What is a social vaccine?

- A social vaccine is a metaphor for a series of **social and behavioural measures** that governments can use to raise public consciousness about unhealthy situations **through social mobilisation**
- A social vaccine addresses barriers and facilitators of **behaviour change**, whether attitudinal, social, cultural, or economic.
- Social Vaccine supplements **information, education, and communication (IEC)** with targeted social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) strategies.

Advantages of Social Vaccine achieved through Social Mobilization

- Empowers populations to resist unhealthy practices
- Increase resilience
- Foster advocacy for change
- Drive political will to take action in the interests of society
- Hold governments accountable

Lessons from HIV (Human immunodeficiency virus) Pandemic

- HIV that causes AIDS is believed to have made the zoonotic jump from monkeys through chimpanzees to humans in Africa as early as the 1920s
- However, the HIV/AIDS epidemic was detected in 1981 & was a **pandemic by 1985**.
- **Extent of Pandemic:** From 1981 to 2018, around 74.9 million people worldwide were HIV-infected, and around 32.0 million died from AIDS-related illnesses.
- Social vaccine helped “flatten the curve” till effective treatments were discovered that dramatically reduced mortality, viral loads and infection transmission.

How Social Vaccine was used in HIV/AIDS pandemic?

- There were widespread **information campaigns** stating that infection occurred predominantly through sexual transmission and intravenous drug use.
- **IEC and SBCC activities** targeted (and partnered) individuals, community networks, leaders, social & health systems **to change attitudes and behaviours**.
- The core preventive messages involved
 - Being faithful to one sexual partner
 - 100% condom use during sexual intercourse outside stable relationships
 - Resisting peer-pressure for risky behaviours like intravenous drug use
- Religious and community leaders were key change agents
 - For example, the Catholic Church in Uganda did not initially support promoting condoms since its use prevents life.
 - However, later they acknowledged that their religion did not preclude the use of condoms to prevent deaths – which was an important turning point

How Social Vaccine can be adapted for current pandemic?

- Effective IEC and SBCC strategies should contain the persuasive messages of
 - Maintaining physical distancing in social situations
 - Wearing cloth masks in public by 100% of people (and 100% of the time)
 - Regular disinfection of oneself and one's surroundings.

- **Leading by Example:** People are more likely to practise these behaviours if all leaders promote them publicly and consistently
- **Proper information,** support, and materials should be made available and accessible.
- **Re-purposing** and funding relevant industries and small and medium businesses to produce materials such as PPE, hand sanitisers and medical equipment

Challenges Ahead

- The components of the social vaccine should be in place before relaxing or lifting the lockdown.
- A social vaccine also requires people to hold leaders accountable to
 - Invest in rapidly scaling-up testing
 - Meet the basic and economic needs of vulnerable sections
 - Providing psychological support where needed
 - Not communalising or politicising the pandemic
 - Not compromising the privacy and dignity of infected individuals and their families in the interest of public health

Connecting the dots

- Persuasive VS Coercive methods – which is better suited for India? And why?
- Nudge Economics – Example: Give It Up Campaign, Swachh Bharat Mission

Types of Human Coronaviruses

Till date, seven different types of coronaviruses have been identified that infect humans:

- 229E: One of the first coronaviruses strains to be described in the mid-60s, possibly by **D Hamre and JJ Procknow** in 1966
- OC43: It was discovered in 1967 according to the Journal of Virology.
- NL63 and HKU1: It were first identified in the **Netherlands** in 2004, probably after it was isolated from a seven-month-old infant showing respiratory symptoms.
- SARS-CoV: It was identified in 2003 in **China** (animal source is not yet known, bats are thought to have given it to other animals, probably civet cats).
- MERS: It was identified in **2012** in **Saudi Arabia** (transmitted by dromedary camels).
- SARS-CoV-2: It was identified in **2019** in **Wuhan** (source not yet known, possibly bats).

Violence against health-care workers made punishable offence

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

In News:

- The Union Cabinet has **approved promulgation** (put into effect) of **Ordinance** to amend the **Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897** in the light of COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Key takeaways:

- The ordinance makes **acts of violence** against the healthcare workers as **cognizable** and **non-bailable** offences.
- Under it, there is also a provision to provide **compensation for injury** to healthcare service personnel or for causing damage or loss to the property.

- The **investigation** into the cases of attack will be completed **within 30 days** and **judgment** will be pronounced within **one year**.
- **Accused** of the attack can attract a punishment ranging from **3 months to 5 years** and a fine from **50 thousand rupees to 2 lakh rupees**.
- A **compensation** amounting to **twice the market value** of the damaged property will be taken from the accused if damage is done to the vehicles or clinics.

Important value additions:

Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897

- This law enables states to ban public gatherings, ask schools and large institutions to stop functioning, and issue advisories to companies to explore work-from-home models.
- It also gives the state a right to penalise media organisations spreading misinformation.
- For background and features, [click here](#).

[Investments for 'India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package' approved](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In News:

- Union Cabinet has given its post facto approval for significant investments of around Rs.15,000 crore for **'India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package'**.

Key takeaways:

- The funds sanctioned will be **utilized in 3 Phases**.
- For immediate COVID-19 Emergency Response, an amount of Rs. 7,774 Crore, has been provisioned.
- Rest of the amount will be provided under **mission mode approach** for medium-term support (1-4 years).

Important value additions:

'India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package'

- The key objectives of the package include mounting emergency response to slow and limit COVID-19 in India through:
 - the **development** of diagnostics and COVID-19-dedicated treatment facilities,
 - **centralized procurement** of essential medical equipments and drugs required for treatment of infected patients,
 - **strengthen and build** effective National and State health systems to support prevention and preparedness for future disease outbreaks,
- The package is launched under the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.

[Human activities responsible for zoonoses](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In News:

- According to experts, the **coronavirus** outbreak **comes from the animal world**.
- It is **human activity** that **enabled** the virus to jump to people.
- The specialists are also **warning** that if human activities continue at this pace, the world will suffer from **many other pandemics of similar nature** in the future.

Important value additions:

Zoonoses

- Zoonoses is the name given to **diseases transmitted from animals to humans**.
- They are not new.
- **Tuberculosis, rabies, toxoplasmosis, malaria**, etc., are all zoonoses.
- According to the **UN Environment Programme (UNEP)**, **60% of human infectious diseases** originate from animals.
- Also, **75% of emerging diseases** such as Ebola, HIV, avian flu, Zika, or SARS originate from animals.
- The **emergence** of such diseases is often **associated with environmental changes or ecological disturbances**, such as increase in human settlement, encroachments into forests and other habitats, etc.

Plasma therapy

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

- Plasma therapy uses **blood** donated by **recovered patients** to **introduce antibodies** in those under treatment.
- The therapy for COVID-19 is still at an **experimental stage** and the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) is currently studying its efficacy.
- In 2014, **convalescent plasma**, collected from patients who had recovered from **Ebola virus disease**, was recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a **treatment** during the outbreak.
- During the **H1N1 virus** outbreak of 2009 and **SARS epidemic** of 2003, **plasma therapy** was used to treat patients.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Lifeline UDAN flights transport medical cargo

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Welfare schemes; Health; GS-III - Disaster management

In News:

- Hundreds of **Lifeline UDAN** flights are operating these days to **transport** tons of **medical cargo** to various parts of the country.
- The remote and hilly areas are also getting covered.

Important value additions:

Lifeline UDAN

- It was launched by the **Ministry of Civil Aviation** to help India fight against COVID-19.
- Under this initiative, flights are being operated in transporting **essential equipment and medicines** all over the country.
- In order to help public in tracking Lifeline Udan flights, the status of the flights were uploaded in a portal.
- The portal was developed by **National Informatics Centre**.

Minimum Support Price (MSP) to be implemented for Minor Forest Produces (MFP)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Welfare Schemes; Governance & GS-III – Minimum Support Price

In News:

- **Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED)** has asked the State Nodal Departments and Implementing Agencies to **initiate procurement** of Minor Forest Produces (MFPs) under **Minimum Support Price for Minor Forest Produce Scheme**.

Important value additions:

Minimum Support Price for Minor Forest Produce Scheme

- The scheme for forest produce has been started with following **objectives**:
 - To **provide fair price** to the MFP gatherers and **enhance** their income level.
 - To **ensure sustainable harvesting** of MFPs.
 - To ensure **huge social dividend** for MFP gatherers, majority of whom are tribals.
- Earlier, the scheme was only implemented in States having **Schedule areas** as listed in the **Fifth Schedule** of the constitution of India.
- Since 2016, the scheme is applicable in all States.

Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED)

- It came into existence in **1987**.
- It is a **national-level apex organization**.
- The basic **objective** of the **TRIFED** is to provide good price of the 'Minor Forest Produce (MFP) collected by the **tribes** of the country.
- It functions under **Ministry of Tribal Affairs**, Govt. of India.
- TRIFED has its Head Office at **New Delhi**.
- It has a network of 13 Regional Offices located at various places in the country.

Minor Forest Produce (MFP)

- Section 2(i) of the **Forest Rights Act** defines a Minor Forest Produce (MFP) as all **non-timber forest produce** of plant origin and includes bamboo, brushwood, stumps, canes, cocoon, honey, waxes, Lac, tendu/kendu leaves, medicinal plants etc.
- The definition of “minor forest produce” includes bamboo and cane, thereby **changing the categorization of bamboo and cane** as “trees” under the **Indian Forest Act 1927**.

SVAMITVA scheme: a new initiative of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Welfare Schemes

In News:

- Indian Union Minister of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj has issued guidelines regarding the **SVAMITVA scheme**.
- It is a **new initiative** of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

Important value additions:

SVAMITVA scheme

- It is a **collaborative effort** of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Panchayati Raj Departments, State Revenue Departments and Survey of India.
- It is currently being **implemented in six states** -
 - Haryana
 - Karnataka
 - Madhya Pradesh
 - Maharashtra
 - Uttar Pradesh
 - Uttarakhand.
- It aims to provide an **integrated property validation** solution for rural India for **setting the boundaries of the rural lands**.
- Latest drone survey technology shall be used for mapping of rural housing land.
- This scheme will **help in streamlining planning and revenue collection** in rural areas.
- This will also help in **resolving property related disputes**.
- The scheme will enable creation of **better-quality Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs)**.

INTERNATIONAL

Post COVID-19 world

With COVID-19 pandemic spreading to nearly 180 countries and impacting the global economy by bringing it to near standstill, the world order post the crisis could see few changes.

Let us have a look at them.

Political

- Increasing political and policy uncertainties where Nations start erecting barriers
- US power would shift from one of assertion to neutrality in global affairs.
- Acceleration of **retreat of US global leadership** (reflected in [US-Taliban deal](#))
- **Russia dominance** will increase as it is currently more economically and politically stable and an important power broker in West Asia
- Asymmetric capabilities of China and Russia will be further strengthened
- **Strengthening of China and Russia axis** –will have direct impact on the liberal international order
- Increasing influence of China & Russia will be a **boost to authoritarian regimes** and authoritarian trends.

Economical

- China would cease to be the world's biggest exporter of manufactured goods
- With no country in a position to replace China, situation will precipitate a further economic downturn internationally.
- A global recession would be inevitable with vicious downward cycle of decreased demand, closure of firms and reduced income
- Industries will face newer challenges such as having to adjust to a shift from cost efficiencies to innovation and policy uncertainties

Social

- **Psychological issues** caused due to extended lockdown - 'epidemic of despair' - resulting in anxiety, mental problems, depression, alcoholism and suicides
- **Inequality further entrenches** – those without high levels of skills could see job losses due to depressed economic activity & increased labour competition
- **Digital authoritarianism** – China's model of AI-powered facial recognition surveillance system could be duplicated in other countries for social management
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** can cause the next big human catastrophe

Do You Know?

- **In terms of GDP in PPP, China** is the largest economy with GDP of \$25.27 trillion (2019) in comparison to U.S. GDP (PPP) at \$21.44 trillion
- The cost of the lockdown in India is pegged at around \$120 billion or 4% of GDP
- CII has estimated that India would require up to six months - after the COVID-19 epidemic is over - to restore normalcy and business continuity.

Connecting the dots

- Multilateralism post COVID-19 pandemic

- Article 360 of Indian Constitution – Provisions and Utility

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) blames Syria for using nerve gas

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

In News:

- The **Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)** has blamed Syria **explicitly** for the first time for toxic attacks of 2017.
- Syria's President Bashar al-Assad's air force has been accused of using the nerve gas **sarin and chlorine** three times in 2017.
- The attack had **killed** hundreds of people and **caused injuries** to many.
- The use of chemical weapons is **strictly prohibited** by international law.

Important value additions:

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)

- OPCW is an **intergovernmental organisation**.
- It is the **implementing body** for the **Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)** , which entered into force in 1997.
- The Organisation **oversees** the global endeavour to permanently and verifiably eliminate chemical weapons.
- **Headquarter** of the organisation is at The Hague, Netherlands.
- All states who are members of the CWC are automatically members of this organization.
- The organisation was **awarded** the **2013 Nobel Peace Prize** "for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons with most recent being in Syria civil war".

COVID-19: International Law cannot fall silent

In the wake of COVID-19 spreading from Wuhan, China to nearly 180 countries, there has been a debate raging on two fronts

- Need to strengthen the powers of State to handle the crisis effectively
- The projection of the crisis as an opportunity for building a new future for global politics marked by empathy, fraternity, justice, and rights.

UN is a site for discussion of norms and is responsible for the progressive codification of law. However, it has become playground for power politics.

Power Politics, UN and Pandemic

- US President Trump has called the Coronavirus as “Chinese virus”
- Pandemic was not discussed in UN Security Council during the month of March when the presidency of UNSC was held by China.
- Allegation on WHO about delay in declaring the disease as pandemic due to pressures from China

International Principles that Nations need to follow

- The peremptory jus cogens apply to all states - certain international norms like prevention of slavery, racial discrimination etc. hold true even during the fight against pandemic
- The **erga omnes rules** prescribe specifically-determined obligations which states owe to the international community as a whole. This was enunciated by the ICJ in 1970 for four situations
 - Outlawing of acts of aggression
 - Outlawing of genocide
 - Protection from slavery
 - Protection from racial discrimination

Three sets of international law obligations on States

- **Draft Articles on the Prevention of Transboundary Harm (DAPTH)**
 - These are drafted by International Law Commission in 2001 to prevent transboundary harm arising out of country's actions
 - There are carefully **developed norms of due diligence** that can be adapted to contextual exigencies
 - Each state is obliged to observe these standards in the fight against COVID-19 as a matter of international law.
- **Human Rights Obligations:** No law or policy to combat epidemics or pandemic can go against the rights of migrant workers, internally displaced peoples, and refugees and asylum seekers
- **The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) –**
 - This convention gains significance especially when there are conspiracy theories about the origins of COVID-19
 - India has not subscribed to those theories and has instead called for high priority to full and effective implementation of the convention.

Conclusion

- Combating this fearsome pandemic calls for re-dedication to nested international law obligations and frameworks

Connecting the law

- Article 51 of Indian Constitution
- International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court

COVID-19 and the crumbling world order

COVID-19 will fundamentally transform the world especially the following:

- The world order
- International Balance of power
- The future of globalisation
- Traditional conceptions of national security

1. World Order

- COVID-19 has exposed that global institutional framework are:

- Pawn in the hands of the great powers (who created these institutions post WW-II)
- Undemocratic and unrepresentative in its character
- Cash-strapped to fight crisis of this scale
- Its agenda is focused on high-table security issues and are **not designed to serve humanity at large.**
- **Post-national regional arrangements** like EU also stood clueless when the virus spread like wildfire in Europe. Its member states turned inward for solutions and not regional coordination.

Result:

- Credibility of the world institutions has been further eroded
- The global institutional architecture of the 1940s cannot help humanity face the challenges of the 2020s.
- Need for new social contract between states and the international system

2. Balance of Power

- One country that is likely to come out stronger from this crisis is **China**.
- China's industrial production is recovering even as other countries are taking a hit.
- The decline in oil prices will make China's recovery even faster.
- China appears to use its manufacturing power to its geopolitical advantage.
 - Beijing has offered medical aid and expertise to those in need
 - China has increased cooperation with its arch-rival Japan

Result:

- Beijing's claims to global leadership will be aided by its manufacturing power
- It might push Huawei 5G trials as a side bargain
- China might also showcase the Belt and Road Initiative as the future of global connectivity.
- COVID-19 will further push the international system into a world with Chinese characteristics.

3. Future of Globalisation

- Neoliberal economic globalisation will take a major beating as experts have predicted recession worse than 2008 crisis
- The profits of big corporations will reduce, and the demand for stability will increase.
- COVID-19 shock will further catalyse **states' protectionist tendencies** fuelled by hyper nationalism.
- There will be an **increased state intervention** to avoid unpredictable supply sources, avoid geopolitically sensitive zones, and national demands for emergency reserves.

Result:

- **Retreat of LPG:** Licence-quota-permit Raj can return
- **State to become omnipresent and omnipotent:** Governments will gather more power and surveillance technologies to prevent future such shocks
- **State-led models of globalisation** and economic development would be preferred over (big) corporates-led globalisation

- **New-age racism:** Questions are likely to be asked about the source of goods and stringent imposition of phytosanitary measures by advanced states on products coming from developing countries
- **Impact on Indian Society:** Moral claims based on birth & class and the associated notions about hygiene (purity) could become sharper

Conclusion

Globally, societies could become more self-seeking and inward-looking

Connecting the dots

- Perils of Licence raj and Crony Capitalism
- Impact of COVID-19 on India's caste system

WHO and its funding

Context: US has halted the funding to the WHO over its handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

About WHO

- WHO, founded in 1948, is a specialized agency of the United Nations with a broad mandate to act as a coordinating authority on international health issues.
- The main decision-making body at WHO is the annual World Health Assembly (WHA), attended by all member-states.
- There is also the Executive Board (EB) comprising technically qualified persons from 34 countries, elected based on geographic representation from across the globe.

What were the reasons given by US President for stopping the funds to WHO?

- WHO was being too lenient with China in the earliest days of the pandemic
- WHO's delay in declaring COVID-19 as Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and as a result failed to impose a travel ban on China
- WHO must be held accountable for its inefficient working.

Do You Know?

- USA is the biggest overall donor to WHO, contributing more than \$400 million in 2019, roughly 15% of its budget.
- China's contribution to WHO for 2018-2019 was almost \$76 million in assessed contributions and some \$10 million in voluntary funding
- The WHO has been appealing for more than \$1 billion to fund operations against the COVID-19 pandemic

How is the WHO funded?

1. Assessed Contributions

- These are the dues countries pay in order to be a member of the Organization.
- The amount each Member State must pay is calculated **relative** to the **country's wealth and population**.
- These contributions have declined, and now account for **less than one-fourth of its funding**.

2. Voluntary Contributions

- These come from Member States (in addition to their assessed contribution) or from other partners (organisations & individuals)
- They can range from flexible to highly earmarked.
- Top funders include Bill and Melinda Gates (USD 367.7 million), GAVI Vaccine Alliance, World Bank, Rotary International and the European Commission

Consequences of the US decision

- **Politicization** of the Pandemic
- Reduces **WHO's ability to coordinate** the fight against pandemic in coming months
- **WHO's significance will decline** in long run if the shortfall in funding is not addressed
- Impacts the **Public Health prospects of Africa**: Half of all spending of WHO was in Africa.
- **Impacts Health programs of WHO**: A quarter of WHO budget went to polio eradication, 12% on access to healthcare, 5% on outbreak prevention and control
- It provides **further scope for China** to increase its funding and influence in WHO
- Signals US intention of retreating from Global affairs thus creating **vacuum in Global Leadership role**

Trend of US retreating from Global leadership role

Since Trump Presidency (2016 onwards), US has

- Quit the U.N. Human Rights Council and U.N. cultural agency UNESCO
- Pulled out of Paris accord and Iran nuclear deal
- Cut funding for the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) and U.N. agency that helps Palestinian refugees (UNRWA)
- Opposed a U.N. migration pact

Way Ahead

- US should hold WHO accountable not by suspending its funding but by setting up actionable committee to look into lapses in WHO's response during pandemic
- Institutional Reforms in WHO
 - Increase the flexible funding
 - Reduction in bureaucratic complexity to ease the process
 - Reduce reliance on voluntary contributions and instead increase assessed contributions
 - Empowering the Executive board for quick decision making backed by scientific data
 - More Democratic functioning of the body – needs to insulate from global power politics

Connecting the dots

- WTO, UNO - Democratic deficit in their structure and functioning
- Impact of decline in WHO's funding on India's health funding

COVID-19: Eurozone and challenges

Context: EU- the most progressive post-national regional arrangement was not proactive while dealing with the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in its member states turning inward for solutions.

About European Union (EU)

- It is a political and economic union of 27 member states that are located primarily in Europe.
- Objective of EU and its policies
 - Ensure the free movement of people, goods, services and capital within the internal market,
 - Enact legislation in justice and home affairs and maintain common policies on trade, agriculture, fisheries and regional development

Below is the schematic representation of EU

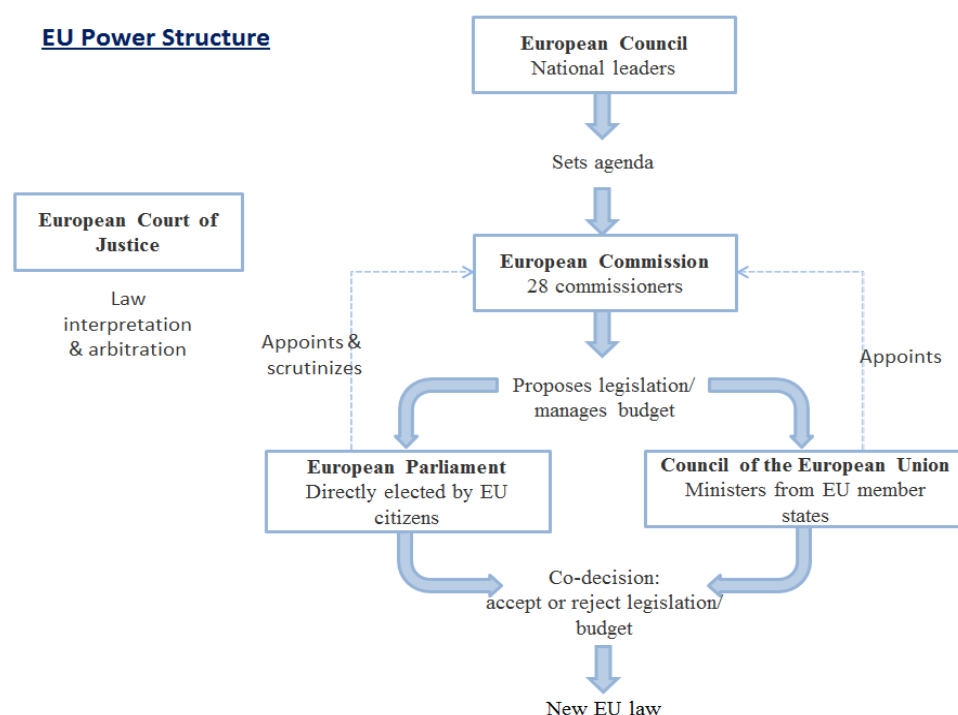


Image Source: [Google](#)

What are the recent steps taken by the EU to fight COVID-19?

- Emergency rescue package amounting to €540-billion
- Opening up of an emergency credit line for member countries
- Raise the lending capacity of the European Investment Bank
- European Commission's €100- billion unemployment insurance scheme
- European Central Bank has decided to expand its asset purchase programme by €750- billion over the next nine months

Challenges ahead

1. Apprehensions about **intrusive EU inspections** with regard to relief package
2. Discontent with regard to **burden-sharing** between the richer members in the north (like Germany & France) and the poorer states in the south (like Greece & Portugal)

3. Demand from Italy (worse affected) that pandemic credit to be issued by the European Stability Mechanism should **not be attached with any conditionalities**.
 - Greece and Ireland had received financial bailouts from EU in 2009 but were accompanied by fiscal austerity measures (reduction in welfare spending)
4. No progress on joint issuance of Eurobonds (dubbed **corona bond**).
 - These are Common debt instrument which would pool borrowing among EU nations to fight the crisis.
5. **Implementation Challenges:** Utilization of relief package would be slowed down by bureaucratic complexities
6. **Unsatisfied pro-European elites:** The support measures by EU is considered as too little and not holistic
7. **Strains in National Coalition governments** over the strategy to be adopted to tackle the pandemic, especially in the backdrop of EU's less-enthusiastic role
 - For instance: Netherlands' ruling coalition unhappy over the government's orthodox fiscal stance, where the opposition parties advocate Eurobonds.
8. **High Stakes:** Failure to tackle the pandemic can **affect European Solidarity** especially after the difficulties faced in the aftermath of 2008 financial crisis and the recent Brexit.

Way Ahead

- When the pandemic hit the continent self-help and not regional coordination, was countries first instinct- which doesn't bode well for EU.
- Therefore, bigger economies like Germany, France & Netherlands need to compromise to ensure sustainability of the grouping

Connecting the dots

- SAARC and India's initiative for collaboration on tackling pandemic
- Difference in structure between EU and ASEAN

IMF proposes to deploy its full 1 trillion US Dollar lending capacity to support countries

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II –Global Groupings; Role of International Organization

In News:

- **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** has proposed to deploy its **full 1 trillion US Dollar lending capacity** to support countries battling COVID-19 outbreak.
- The **IMF Board** has already **approved debt relief** for 25 of its poorest members.

Important value additions:

The International Monetary Fund (IMF)

- It is an organization of 189 countries which has the objectives to:
 - foster global monetary cooperation
 - secure financial stability
 - facilitate international trade
 - promote high employment and sustainable economic growth
 - reduce poverty around the world.
- It was created in 1945.

- It is **governed** by and **accountable** to the 189 member countries.
- Its **primary purpose** is to **ensure the stability** of the international monetary system, that is, the system of exchange rates and international payments that enables countries to transact with each other.
- The IMF provides broad support to low-income countries (LICs) through **surveillance, capacity-building activities** and **concessional financial support**.
- Decisions are made by a **majority of votes** cast.
- The Board of Governors consists of one(1) **governor** and one **alternate governor** for each member country.
- IMF funds come from **two major sources**: quotas and loans.
- **Quotas** are **pooled funds** of member nations. Nations with larger economic importance have larger quotas.
- Wealthier countries that provide **more money** to the IMF have **more influence**.
- Member's quota also determines its relative **voting power**.

Potential missile deals with India approved by the USA

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

In News:

- U.S. State Department has approved **two potential missile deals** with India, for an estimated \$92 million and \$63 million.

Key takeaways:

- The first deal is for **10 AGM-84L Harpoon Block II** air-launched missiles and related equipment.
- These missiles can be fitted onto Boeing's P-8I (Poseidon-Eight India) maritime patrol aircraft.
- The second deal is for:
 - 16 MK 54 All Up Round **Lightweight Torpedoes** (LWT);
 - Three MK 54 Exercise Torpedoes; and
 - Two **Recoverable Exercise Torpedoes** (REXTORP).

Important value additions:

Harpoon missiles

- The Harpoon is an all-weather, over-the-horizon, anti-ship missile air-launched missile.

P-8I

- The P-8s (Poseidon-Eight) **Indian variant** is referred to as P-8I.
- The aircraft plays a crucial role in being the **eyes of the Indian Navy** and carrying out critical maritime operations.
- It gives India's maritime warriors a **significant edge** in the strategically important Indian Ocean region.
- The P-8I is responsible for:
 - coastal patrolling
 - search-and-rescue,
 - anti-piracy,
 - supporting operations of other arms of the military.

Haftar's Forces attack Libya's capital Tripoli

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – International Relations; GS-III - Linkages of Organised crime with terrorism

In News:

- The forces of Libyan military strongman **Khalifa Haftar** Libyan capital Tripoli with rockets.
- The capital was attacked after Haftar's Forces were expelled from multiple towns west of Libya by government loyalists.

Important value additions:

Khalifa Belqasim Haftar

He is the **Commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA)** which is engaged in the **Libyan Civil War**.

- He held a senior position in the forces which **overthrew Gaddafi** in the 2011 Libyan Civil War.
- Libya has suffered almost a **decade of conflict** since longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi was toppled and killed in a 2011 uprising backed by several Western powers.
- Recently, the UN-backed government recaptured the coastal cities of **Sorman** and **Sabratha** and several inland towns.



Image Source: <https://www.dreamstime.com/stock-photo-libya-map-image14306310>

China's one party system vs Democracy

Context: Critics blame **China for unleashing COVID-19** across the world through the lack of transparency inherent in its one-party authoritarian system.

In order to counter this negative perception, China has unleashed a sustained propaganda campaign that is based on two aspects

1. Superiority of Authoritarian System vis-à-vis Democracy

- Chinese system was able to arrest the pandemic within the country through drastic measures on a massive scale (Ex: Lockdown of Wuhan)
- China's strategy was successful than ineffective measures taken in Democratic countries especially in USA

2. Benevolence of China

- China wants to garner goodwill by providing much-needed medical equipment and medical teams to assist affected countries
- The recipients have often been “persuaded” to express praise for China.

What is the Chinese view on the Pandemic?

- The COVID-19 virus did erupt in Wuhan, but it may not have originated in China
- The delay in acknowledging the seriousness of the crisis was due to missteps by the local leadership in Wuhan city and Hubei province
- Once the gravity of the situation was recognised, Chinese leaders promptly informed the WHO and shared the DNA sequence of the virus.
- The unprecedented measures adopted by Chinese authorities imposed great suffering on the Chinese people but bought valuable time for the rest of the world to get prepared to deal with the pandemic.
- China’s economy is beginning to recover and this will contribute to the recovery of the global economy.
- All these reinforces the merits of China’s political System (One-Party rule)

Is China’s one-party system better compared to democracies?

Not necessarily, this is because

- COVID-19 may not have become a pandemic if China were a democracy with a free flow of information through an independent media and accountable political leadership
- **There are democracies** which have done well to contain the Epidemic Ex: Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, India
- **Criticism of China’s assistance** being defective and low-quality
- **Criticism from African Countries** against harsh China’s actions as there were reports from Guangzhou(China) on racial discrimination against stranded African students
- The result of being a democracy is that we have a better chance of
 - Knowing the true dimensions of the crisis i.e. Transparency of government functioning
 - Being able to obtain constant feedback on people’s reactions
 - Access the best advice from multiple sources.

Conclusion

Beijing’s response to Covid underlines that the world needs more democracy, not less

Connecting the dots

- China’s Economic Model
- COVID-19’s impact on Global Political and Economic Structure

At the edge of New Nuclear Arms Race

Context: US State department in its reports have stated that

- Russia has conducted nuclear weapons experiments
- China might be conducting nuclear tests with low yields at its Lop Nur test site

However, both Russia and China have rejected the U.S.’s claims

What does these allegations by US suggest?

- Growing strategic competition between major powers
- Suggests the end of the CTBT that came into being in 1996 but has failed to enter into force even after a quarter century.

What is CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty)?

- CTBT is a global treaty that aims to ban **all nuclear explosions** across the world.
- It provides a **legally binding norm** against nuclear testing and was open for signature from 1996
- However, the **Treaty enters into force** when 44 specific States signs and ratifies it. These States had nuclear facilities at that time & included India
- Till date, 36 have ratified the treaty.
- China, Egypt, Iran, Israel and the U.S. have signed but not ratified.
- India, North Korea and Pakistan have not yet signed the Treaty but all three have undertaken tests after 1996

Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization(CTBTO)

- It was founded in 1996 to promote the Treaty so that it can enter into force.
- It also establishes a verification regime to monitor adherence to the Treaty.
- The CTBT verification includes
 - International Monitoring System (IMS),
 - International Data Centre (IDC)
 - On-site inspections (OSI).

Criticism of the Treaty

- **Defining** the “comprehensive test ban” as a “zero yield” test ban that would prohibit supercritical hydro-nuclear tests but not sub-critical hydrodynamic nuclear tests.
- Anchoring the CTBT in a **disarmament framework**, as proposed by India, was not accepted
- The treaty’s **entry-into-force- provisions**, which listed 44 countries by name, was protested by India as arm-twisting tactic and violation of Sovereign right of India
- CTBTO is largely funded by US and unable to promote the treaty effectively.

Recent trends in Nuclear Arms

- The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) that limits U.S. and Russian arsenals will expire in 2021 and US is not inclined to extend it
- US has embarked on a \$1.2 trillion nuclear modernisation plan spanning 30 years
- China has also embarked on modernisation plan to enhance the lifespan of its smaller nuclear arsenal
- Russia has responded by developing hypersonic delivery systems

Potential for a New Arms race

- US wants to China into some kind of nuclear arms control agreement
- But China is not interested by pointing to the fact that the U.S. and Russia still account for over 90% of global nuclear arsenals.
- China also maintains that it will ratify CTBT only after the U.S.

- This indicates the increasing **divergence between US and China** - trade and technology disputes, militarisation in the South China Sea and coronavirus pandemic.
- U.S. could also be preparing the ground for resuming nuclear testing at Nevada indicating the beginning of new arms race

Conclusion

The developments between US and China could be the signs for a new cold war

Connecting the dots

- India's Nuclear Doctrine
- India's attempt to become a member of Nuclear Supplier Group



INDIA AND THE WORLD

India-Gulf economic ties

The gulf region is facing multiple challenges

- COVID-19 pandemic spreading in this region as well with Iran emerging as hotspot
- Oil price meltdown
- Rising tensions between Iran-US
- Tensions between Russia-Turkey in Syria
- Proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Yemen
- Prospects of US-Taliban deal emboldening other terrorist & extremist groups

All these leads to challenges in India's relationship with the countries in the region which needs to be anticipated and managed well.

Do You Know?

- COVID-19 has lowered the world crude consumption by 28 million bpd.
- OECD has suggested a 20% loss to GDP for India.
- Developing countries' oil and gas revenues may decline by 50% to 85% in 2020, as per estimates by OPEC and IEA

Impact of Oil Prices on Gulf-region's economics

- For **Saudi Arabia**, the fiscal break-even **oil price** is \$85 per barrel
- However, the oil prices have fallen by 55% during March to an 18-year low of \$25
- Even if the countries in Gulf-region (dependent on oil revenues) revives its growth in 2021, the process may be
 - **Slow and less energy-intensive** as importing countries would focus on self-reliance and on strategic goods such as pharmaceuticals deterring oil trade
 - **Tourism and hospitality sectors**, another source of revenue, may take much longer to recover due to erosion of wealth & incomes caused by pandemic

India's economic ties with the Gulf states is based on two dominant verticals

1. Economic symbiosis (Trade) –

- In 2018-19, the India-Gulf trade stood around \$162 billion (crude oil and natural gas worth nearly \$75 billion)
- The India-Gulf trade accounted for nearly a fifth of India's global trade.
- These countries have made (or planned) large investments in India

2. India's expatriate community

- They number at around nine million
- Contribute nearly \$40 billions of remittances to India

Challenges in future vis-à-vis India-Gulf relationship

- In Short run- India being the world's third largest importer of crude, decline in oil prices helps its current account.
- The Gulf's lower oil revenues mean decreased long term investments by Gulf States in India
- Slowing gulf economy means reduction in expatriates' remittances also

- **Impact on Indian diaspora**

- The fresh recruitment stops,
- Salaries are either lowered or stalled and taxes raised
- Localisation drives launched forcing large scale exodus of Indians workers
- This creates a **logistical nightmare** of transporting millions of expatriates back to India
- Return of expatriates has an added complication of the pandemic
- There are also issues of getting these people resettled and re-employed.

Way Forward

- India should **enhance the capacity of gulf states** to handle COVID-19 cases among the Indian expatriates.
- India's missions in these states **need to monitor** the situation and try to **avoid panic** among its nationals.
- Necessary to find **new drivers for the India-Gulf synergy** which could be
 - Pharmaceutical research and production,
 - Petrochemical complexes,
 - Building infrastructure in India and in third countries,
 - Agriculture,
 - Education and skilling
- Creation of bilateral free zones along Arabian Sea coast eventually leading to an India-Gulf Cooperation Council Free Trade Area.

Conclusion

- There is a need to sufficiently diversify the India-Gulf economic ties so as to protect them from such shocks.

Delivery of S-400 air defence missile systems to be on schedule

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations; Bilateral agreements

In News:

- It has been reported that all the major military contracts **between Russia and India**, including the deliveries of **S-400 air defence missile systems**, will be on schedule despite the coronavirus pandemic.

Important value additions:

S-400

- India had signed a **\$5 billion deal** with Russia to buy the S-400 air defence missile systems in 2018.
- The system is also known as the **'Triumf' interceptor-based missile system**.
- It can simultaneously **track** numerous incoming objects — all kinds of aircraft, missiles and UAVs — in a radius of 400km and **launch** appropriate missiles to neutralise them.
- The S-400 is Russia's **most advanced long-range surface-to-air** missile defence system.
- Russia plans to complete the delivery by **2025**.
- The U.S. imposed sanctions on Russia under the stringent **Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act** (CAATSA) for manufacturing S-400.

- The law also provides for **punitive action** against countries purchasing defence hardware from Russia.

Government approval mandatory for FDI from neighbouring countries

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - International Relations & GS-III - Investment

In News:

- In order to restrict Chinese investments, **prior government approval** has been made **mandatory** for foreign direct investments (**FDI**) from countries which **share a land border** with India.

Key takeaways:

- Revised FDI policy has stated that entities from **countries which share a land border** with India will now be permitted to invest **only** under **approval route**.
- Previously, **only investments** from Pakistan and Bangladesh faced such restrictions.
- The revised FDI policy is aimed at **preventing opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions** of Indian companies due to the current COVID-19 pandemic.
- The rules shall apply to fresh as well as existing FDI.
- **Transfer** of ownership of any existing or future FDI where the **direct or indirect beneficiary is from these countries** will also require government approval.
- This restriction will also apply if the **beneficial owner** of the investment is an entity **situated** in or a **citizen** of such countries.

Important value additions:

India's FDI policy

- A **foreign direct investment (FDI)** is an investment in the form of a **controlling ownership** in a business in one country by an entity based in another country.
- **India's FDI policy** allows foreign investment in certain sectors under the **automatic route**.
- **100% FDI** is permitted under the automatic route in manufacturing, oil and gas, greenfield airports, construction, railway infrastructure etc.
- **In other sectors**, FDI is allowed under the automatic route upto a **certain threshold**, say 26% or 49%.
- Such conditions **apply to** defence, broadcast and print media, aviation and other sectors.
- There is also a list of **prohibited sectors**, such as lottery, cigarettes, atomic energy where FDI is not permitted.

India's neighbouring countries

India shares a **land border** with:

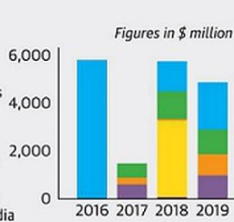
- China
- Pakistan
- Bangladesh
- Nepal
- Myanmar
- Bhutan
- Afghanistan

China's economic footprint in India

Chinese investment in India increased from \$1.6 billion in 2014 to \$8 billion in 2017 according to a Brookings India report. The investments span a range of sectors with a significant share in the start-up space

INVESTMENT VALUE

The chart depicts the estimated value of China's investments in India since 2016 across various sectors such as infrastructure, consumer goods, energy, real estate and automobiles. The chart includes both actual and planned investments. Data sourced from Brookings India



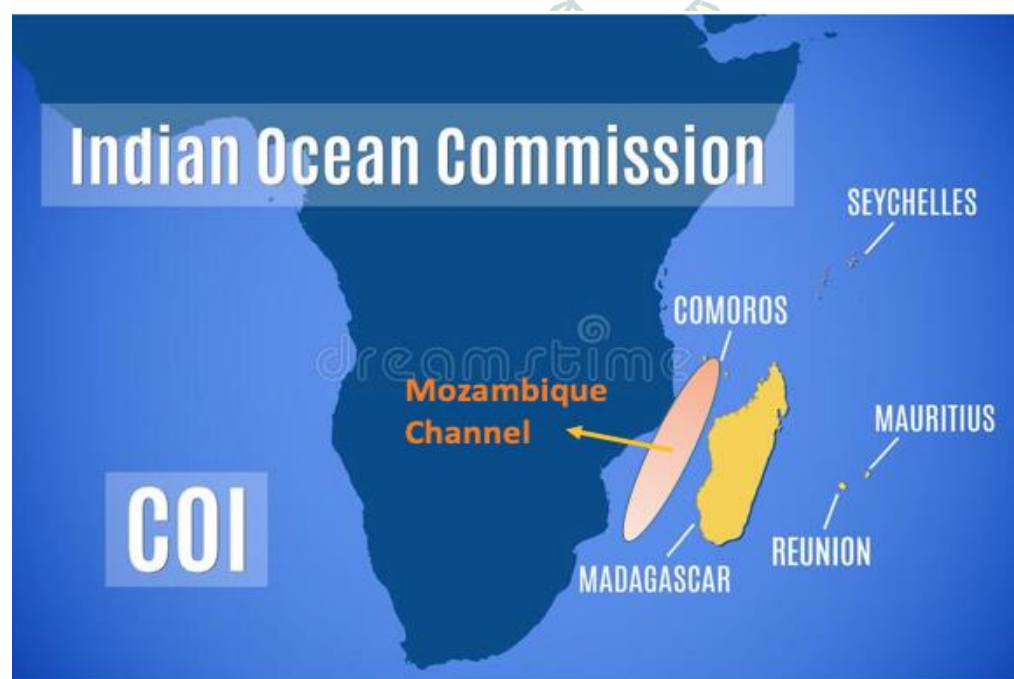
<https://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/government-nod-mandatory-for-fdi-from-neighbouring-countries/article31379229.ece>

Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and India

Context: IOC granted observer status to India on March 6th, 2020.

About IOC

- Founded in 1982, the IOC is an intergovernmental organisation comprising five small-island states in the Western Indian Ocean which are
 - Comoros
 - Madagascar
 - Mauritius
 - Réunion (a French department)
 - Seychelles.
- Decisions in the IOC are consensus-based in spite of the presence of major Power-France (Reunion)
- Significance of IOC:** For its geographical location, as the islands sit around a “key choke-point” in the Indian Ocean — the **Mozambique Channel**



Pic Source

Achievements of IOC

- In 2012, the IOC was one of the four regional organisations to launch the MASE Programme
 - MASE is an EU-funded programme to promote **Maritime Security** in Eastern and Southern Africa and Indian Ocean
- Under MASE, the IOC has established a **mechanism for surveillance and control** of the Western Indian Ocean with two regional centres.
 - The Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (**RMIFC**), based in Madagascar, monitors maritime activities and promotes information sharing
 - The Regional Coordination Operations Centre (**RCOC**), based in Seychelles, will facilitate jointly coordinated interventions at sea based on information gathered through the RMIFC.

What are the merits of maritime security architecture (RMIFC & RCOC) created by IOC?

- These platforms act as deterrent against maritime crime at sea
- Supplements the high-level counter-piracy presence of naval forces from the EU and USA
- It provides sustainable framework to improve maritime control and surveillance while allowing littoral States to shape their own destiny

India and IOC

- **Similar thinking:** IOC is not seeking a 'big brother' partnership which is aligned with India's policy of treating all Nations as equals irrespective of their size
- **Model to be replicated:** The IOC style of 'bottom-up regionalism' has led to regional definition of maritime security problems and local ownership of workable solutions. Such a strategy can be replicated at South Asian level
- **Multiplier effect:** Local successes at curbing maritime threats, through IOC, will have broader security dividends for the Indian Ocean space.
- **Potential Partner:** India's SAGAR vision is intended to be "consultative, democratic and equitable", which syncs with IOC vision of regional security

Way Ahead: How Indian can help IOC?

- Support sub-regional efforts such as those of the IOC.
- Building capacity of IOC countries to patrol their EEZs
- Linking of India's information fusion centres with others in the region
- Providing Technical expertise in maritime monitoring & surveillance
- Providing India's satellite imagery services to RMIFC

Connecting the dots

- Other regional Organisation in the subcontinent
- Importance of Mozambique Channel as the U.S.-Iran tensions threaten the Strait of Hormuz.

[15-billion ADB loan to India to fund COVID-19 emergency](#)

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

In News:

- **The Asian Development Bank (ADB)** has provided \$15 billion loan to the Government of India to **fund its immediate response** to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic
- The loan shall be used to deal with health and socio-economic impacts.

Key takeaways:

- The loan is approved by the ADB under its **COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support (CARES) Programme**.
- The loan is the **bank's largest loan** to India till date.
- The money will be spent to **implement the containment plan** and rapidly increase the **test-track-treatment capacity**.
- It will also be used to provide **social protection** to poor people over the next three months.
- India will also take the ADB's **technical support to strengthen** its implementation framework and capacities to implement Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana.

Important value additions:**Asian Development Bank (ADB)**

- It is a **regional development bank**.
- It was established on 19 December 1966.
- Headquarters: Mandaluyong, Philippines.
- It was established to promote **social and economic development in Asia**.
- Motto: ADB is committed to achieving a **prosperous, inclusive, resilient and sustainable Asia & the Pacific**, while sustaining its efforts to **eradicate extreme poverty**.
- The ADB offers **hard loans** (currency) on commercial terms primarily to **middle income countries** in Asia and
- It provides **soft loans** (loan with a below-market rate of interest) to **poorer countries** in the region.
- Both types of loans are sourced from the bank's ordinary capital resources (OCR).

Five **largest borrowing countries** are China, India, Pakistan, Indonesia and Bangladesh.

[U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom downgrades India's position in 2020 list](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

In News:

- **The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** has downgraded **India** to the **lowest ranking**.
- The report was released in Washington recently by the federal government commission that functions as an advisory body.

Key takeaways:

- It has put India amongst "**countries of particular concern**" (CPC) in its 2020 report.
- The report placed India alongside countries like China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.
- India was categorised as a "**Tier 2 country**" in **last year's** report.

- This is the **first time since 2004** that India has been placed in this category.
- It included **specific concerns** about the Citizenship Amendment Act, the proposed National Register for Citizens, anti-conversion laws and the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The commission also **recommended** that the **U.S. government take stringent action** against India under the “International Religious Freedom Act” (IRFA).
- It recommended the administration to **impose targeted sanctions** on Indian government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom.

Important value additions:

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

- It is a **U.S. federal government commission** created by the **International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA)** of 1998.
- Responsibilities:
 - To **review** the facts and circumstances of **violations of religious freedom internationally**
 - To make **policy recommendations** to the President, the Secretary of State, and the Congress.
- Headquarters: Washington, D.C.
- Functions: USCIRF **researches** and **monitors** international religious freedom issues.
- It issues an **annual report** after its evaluation of the facts and circumstances of religious freedom violations worldwide.

Global Terrorism Index (GTI), 2019: India ranks seventh worst terrorism affected country

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Terrorism

In News:

- India is ranked as **seventh worst terrorism affected country** in **Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2019** report.
- India is even **worse affected than** other conflict-ridden countries like Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Palestine and Lebanon.
- Meanwhile, India's think tank, NITI Aayog has questioned the methodology adopted by the report.

Key takeaways:

- **Deaths from terrorism fell** for the fourth consecutive year, after peaking in 2014.
- **Afghanistan** has replaced Iraq as the **most affected country** by terrorism.
- India has moved to the seventh position from the previous year's eighth in the annual Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2019.
- Other countries ahead of India are:
 - Afghanistan (most affected)
 - Iraq
 - Nigeria

- Syria
- Pakistan
- Somalia

Important value additions:

The Global Terrorism Index (GTI)

- It is a report **published annually** by the **Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP)**, a **global think tank**
- It is headquartered in **Sydney, Australia**.
- The index provides a comprehensive summary of the **key global trends** and patterns in terrorism since 2000.
- GTI scores are **directly used** in the **Global Peace Index**, the **Global Slavery Report**,
- It is also **indirectly used** in reports of World Economic Forum's **Travel and Tourism Competitiveness** and **Global Competitiveness Indices** and compilation of **Safe Cities Index** by the Economist Intelligence Unit.

India remains on U.S. Priority Watch List

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Intellectual Property Rights; GS-II – International Relations

In News:

- According to USTR's Annual **Special 301 Report**, India continues to be on the '**Priority Watch List**' of the **United States Trade Representative (USTR)** for **lack of adequate intellectual property (IP)** rights protection and enforcement.

Key takeaways from the report:

- India remained one of the **most challenging economies** for IP enforcement and protection.
- Though India has made **meaningful progress** to enhance IP protection and enforcement **in some areas** over the past year, it **did not resolve recent and long-standing challenges**, and created new ones.
- These long-standing concerns were about:
 - innovators being able to receive, maintain and enforce patents particularly in the pharmaceutical sector;
 - copyright laws not incentivising the creation and commercialisation of content;
 - an outdated trade secrets framework.
- The report also pointed out **high customs duties** on medical devices and Information and Communications Technology.
- Countries like Algeria, Argentina, Chile, China, Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine and Venezuela are also on the Priority Watch List.

Important value additions:

Special 301 Report

- It is **prepared annually** by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR).
- It **identifies trade barriers to United States** companies and products due to the intellectual property laws, such as copyright, patents and trademarks, in other countries.
- The Special 301 Report was first published in 1989.

Context: On 16th April 2020, UN Secretariat held a meeting, of what it calls the “6+2+1” group on regional efforts to support peace in Afghanistan. This group includes

- Six neighbouring countries: China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan
- Two global players: United States and Russia,
- Afghanistan itself

Did India participate in the meeting?

No and this was not the first time that India was absent in such crucial talks

- In Dec 2001, India was initially not part of talks that led to **Bonn Agreement** – that led to establishment of interim authority to govern Afghanistan, after US invasion led to overthrow of Taliban
 - However, India fought back and was able to build consensus to accept Hamid Karzai as the Chairman of the interim arrangement
- In 2010 London Conference, India left midway when it learnt that meeting had decided to open talks with Taliban
 - Post the talks, India's efforts led to historic Strategic Partnership Agreement, which was Afghanistan's first such agreement with any country.

Why was India kept of 2020 talks?

- The reason given was that India holds no “boundary” with Afghanistan
- However, India was mainly kept out because it never announced its support for the U.S.-Taliban peace process

New Delhi's stand with regard to Afghanistan

- India's position that only an **Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled** process can be allowed is a principled one, but has no takers in reality
- India has supported the Karzai government and later the Ashraf Ghani government, which has been fighting the Taliban
- India enjoys a generous goodwill among Afghans due to various developmental projects undertaken by India

What is the basis of India's goodwill in Afghanistan?

The building blocks of **India's goodwill** are its assistance in infrastructure projects, health care, education, trade and food security,

- Three major projects that have cemented the friendship are:
 - The Afghan Parliament
 - The Zaranj-Delaram Highway,
 - The Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam (Salma Dam)
- The liberal access provided to Afghans to study, train and work in India.
- India has provided assistance of more than \$3 billion in projects
- The bilateral relationship also has trade of about \$1 billion
- India has envisaged \$20 billion projected development expenditure of an alternate route through Chabahar (Iran)

How has India's strategy on its support to Ashraf Ghani backfired?

New Delhi's excessive reliance on Ashraf Ghani has had a two-fold effect:

- India's voice in the reconciliation process has been limited
- It has weakened India's position with other leaders of the deeply divided democratic setup in Kabul such as the former chief executive Abdullah Abdullah.

Difficulties for India's Strategic space in Afghanistan

- The U.S.-Taliban peace deal means that the **Taliban has become more powerful** vis-à-vis Afghan government, which is not in India's interest given the Taliban's close connections with Pakistan
- India's presence inside Afghanistan is being **threatened anew by terror groups** such as the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), backed by Pakistan
- **India's resistance to open talks with the Taliban** has made it an awkward interlocutor at any discussion on Afghanistan Peace process
- **Erosion of India's goodwill** due to controversy surrounding Citizenship Amendment Act

Way Ahead for India

- Union Government must consider the appointment of a **special envoy** to deal with its efforts in Afghanistan
- India must strive to ensure that its **aid and assistance is broad-based**, particularly during the novel coronavirus pandemic, even if some lie in areas held by the Taliban.
- India must make efforts to **bridge the Ghani-Abdullah divide**, and bringing together other major leaders with whom India has built ties for decades. Failure of this will mean a collapsing opposition to Taliban
- An **understanding between Iran and the U.S.** on Afghanistan is necessary for lasting peace, and India could play a mediatory part.

Connecting the dots

- Role of UN in international Conflicts – Critically analyse
- Defeat of ISIS- What led to it and its consequences?

ECONOMY

Ways and Means Advances (WMA) reviewed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has reviewed the Limits of Way and Means Advances for Center and States/UTs.

Key takeaways:

- For central Government: Recently, The Government of India **increased the ceiling** on WMA with RBI by **60%** to Rs 1.20 lakh crore (from Rs 75,000 crore last year) to **tide over the cash flow mismatch** in FY21 expected from higher spending to combat the spread of COVID-19.
- For States/UTs: RBI had constituted an **Advisory Committee** (Chairman: Shri Sudhir Shrivastava) to review the WMA limits for States/UTs. Meanwhile, it has been decided to **increase their WMA limit by 30%**.

Important value additions:

- Under **Section 17(5) of RBI Act, 1934**, the RBI provides Ways and Means Advances (WMA) to the central and State/UT governments.
- It is a **temporary liquidity arrangement** with the central bank.
- It enables the centre and the states to **borrow money up to 90 days** from the RBI to tide over their liquidity mismatch between its inflow of revenues and outflow of expenditure.
- A higher limit would provide the government **flexibility** to raise funds from RBI without borrowing them from the market.
- WMA is not a security as it is **not tradable**.
- Interest rate** for WMA is currently charged at the **repo rate**.
- The limits for WMA are **mutually decided** by the RBI and the Government of India.

Taxation and Other Laws (Relaxation of Certain Provisions) Ordinance, 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- The Government of India promulgated the **Taxation and Other Laws (Relaxation of Certain Provisions) Ordinance, 2020**.
- It was done to bring into effect **various tax compliance related measures** announced in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

Key takeaways:

- Time limits related to **direct and indirect tax filings, passing of order or issuance of notice** by tax authorities have been extended to June 30.
- Taxpayers can also avail the **Sabka Vishwas Legal Dispute Resolution Scheme 2019** till June 30, **giving more time** to settle their **indirect tax disputes**.
- Donations made to PM Cares fund will be **100% exempted** of the income tax.

- The limit on **deduction of 10%** of gross income **shall also not be applicable** for such donations.

Important value additions:

Sabka Vishwas Legal Dispute Resolution Scheme

- The aim of Sabka Vishwas (Legacy Dispute Resolution) Scheme, 2019 is to **help taxpayers**, including small taxpayers, in **clearing the baggage of disputes** under legacy taxes (Service Tax and Central Excise), which are **subsumed** in Goods and Service Tax.

Indian defence Trade: Still no bullseye, in volume and value

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

India's defence sector has been largely dependent on foreign imports that are not in the long term Security interest of the Nation. However, the trend has been changing in recent times. During 2009-18, Indian defence imports reduced even as exports increased as per study by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

Do You Know?

- India has **four companies among the top 100 biggest arms producers** of the world – Indian Ordnance Factories, HAL, BEL and Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL).
- In 2017-18 and 2018-19, exports have increased from ₹7,500 crores to ₹11,000 crores, representing a **40% rise**.
- SMEs until 2016 accounted for a 17.5% share of the Indian defence market.

Reasons for India's reduced imports:

1. Make in India initiative
 - **Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP)** of 2016 lays out measures necessary for building India's defence Industry
 - **A new category** called 'Buy Indian Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured' (IDDM) was created under DPP-2016 which was given highest preference in defence procurement.
 - **For imported defence goods**, its Components & service parts from Indian enterprises (private & public sector) have been prioritised by the government
 - **Simplifying "Make" procedures** especially for MSMEs to encourage indigenous defence production
 - **Technology Transfer:** Relaxed norms that makes private partners eligible for technology transfers so as to boost their capabilities.
 - **Outcome:** In 2018-19, the three armed services sourced 54% of their defence equipment from Indian industry for their combined capital and revenue expenditures
2. Reducing the size (or cancellation) of defence contracts by government has led to significant reduction of import bill
 - Acquisition of Rafale jets reduced from 126 aircrafts to 36 aircrafts
 - Cancellation of Indo-Russian joint venture for development of Su-57 stealth Fighter Aircraft

- Delays in supplying equipment by vendors also led to falling imports. Example: T-90 battle tanks & Su-30 combat aircraft from Russia; Submarines from France

Reasons for rise of defence exports

- Removal of export barrier:** Government has removed several products that were earlier restricted from exports
- Easing regulations:** Government dispensed with the No Objection Certificate (NOC) under the DPP that restricted exports of aerospace products & several dual-use items

Areas that need action by government:

- India's defence production is **largely driven by Public Sector** (no Indian private player in top 100 arms producer of world)
- India's defence model tends to create **disincentives for the private sector** – Despite "Make in India", Defence-PSUs are privileged over private industry
- Inadequate R&D** in defence sector (both Public & Private sector)
- Export of ammunition and arms** still remain low (bulk of India's major defence exports are Small naval crafts)
- Small contribution to overall trade:** Defence-related exports for 2017-18 and 2018-19 were 0.8% and 0.73% of the total trade, respectively, which needs to be substantially increased

Connecting the dots

- Foundational defence agreements signed between India and USA – its impact on India's indigenisation efforts

Foreign Trade policy to be extended

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)** extended the existing **foreign trade policy** (2015-20) for one year till March 2021 amid coronavirus outbreak.

Key takeaways:

- Changes related to extending the date of exemptions and extending validity of **DFIA** and **EPCG** authorisations for import purposes are also being made.

Important value additions:

Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG):

- It is an **export promotion scheme** under which an exporter can import a certain amount of capital goods **at zero duty** for **upgrading technology** related with exports.

Duty Free Import Authorisation (DFIA):

- It is issued to allow **duty free import** of inputs, fuel, oil, energy sources, and catalysts which are required for production of export products.

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)

- It is the **agency of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry** of the Government of India **responsible** for administering laws regarding foreign trade and foreign investment in India.

COVID-19: Opportunity in the crisis

The government's measures to tackle COVID-19 pandemic has been designed to provide immediate relief. Nevertheless, the crisis provides an opportunity to bring in certain reforms that are beneficial to country in the long run.

Some of these long term measures suggested by Arvind Subramanian (Former Chief Economic Advisor) are:

1. Revamping Macro-fiscal Framework
 - a. Fiscal Expenditure in this crisis could entail 4-5% of GDP
 - b. Therefore, relaxation of FRBM limits (including for States) is advised
 - c. Union government's overall deficit could exceed more than 10 per cent
 - d. Thus, there is a need to **overhaul the entire FRBM framework** given that the starting point post the crisis will be different.
2. Remake Finance
 - a. Largescale takeover of bad loans by RBI to support businesses(US Fed model during 2008 financial crisis)
 - b. **Technology-driven lending Model as advocated by Nandan Nilekani** – It uses data rather than collateral, allowing nearly 10 million-odd businesses with deep digital footprints (for example, based on GST invoices), to get loans from the ecosystem of new financial players.
3. Complete JAM:
 - a. Opportunity to fix the last-mile weakness of JAM system – transparency and geographical difficulties in accessing cash
 - b. To be leveraged for welfare policies and eventually Universal Basic Income Re-shape India Agriculture
 - c. Creation of pan-Indian market for agriculture across India.
 - d. Elimination of restrictive legislations like Essential Commodities Act
 - e. Phasing out of subsidies for fertilizer and instead provide for efficient income transfer scheme (PM-KISAN yojana) to farmers using JAM
4. Make in India
 - a. Intelligent industrial policy — incentives, regulatory help, trade policy – to provide direction in the changed scenario post crisis
 - b. Focus on few sectors like pharmaceuticals (Drug Security)
5. Establish migrants as Full citizens
 - a. Need to move from immobile place-based benefits to mobile person-based benefits using JAM infrastructure
 - b. Portability of benefits across States. Example: PDS, Ujjwala and Ayushman Bharat.
6. Upgrade Health:
 - a. Strengthening Disease Surveillance System by Creating an apex institution like the US' Centers for Disease Control with a network across all the states
 - b. Primary Public health and early childhood care to be prioritized over tertiary care
7. Build National Solidarity Fund:

- a. To help the informal poor
- b. Funding can be from Wealth Taxes or elimination of Middle Class Subsidies

Conclusion

The prerequisites for the success of these actions is cooperation between the Centre and states. India should make use of crisis to bring in structural changes in the system (like we did during the 1991 BOP crisis)

Connecting the dots

- Why e-NAM has not taken off?
- Challenges with Central Bank buying off bad loans
- Internal Migration and its consequence on demand for reservation of locals

Oil in Post COVID-19 world

With COVID-19 pandemic spreading to nearly 180 countries and impacting the global economy by bringing it to near standstill combined with the recent oil-market meltdown, can bring changes in Oil Sector post the crisis

Let us have a look at possible changes and what India should do to prepare for an uncertain & contingent future

Do You Know?

- Presently, the price of oil is nearly \$30/bbl. which is at its lowest in a decade, and volatile downwards.
- The average price in 2019 was \$64/bbl (Crude prices had hit a record \$147/bbl in July 2008)
- It is estimated that oil consumption in the current quarter will fall by approx. 25 mbd (nearly that of OPEC's production)

Why has Oil Prices reduced?

The reason is two-fold.

- One, the **Saudis have ramped up production** from 9.8mbd to in excess of 12 mbd to hold on to their market share post the failure of OPEC meeting with Russia (click [here](#) for details)
- Two, the unprecedented COVID-induced **fall in demand**. The two main drivers of oil consumption — transportation and industry — have nearly stopped.

Three consequences now hang over the petroleum market.

1. Budgetary crisis in major oil-exporting country

- Qatar needs an oil price of around \$40/bbl to balance its fiscal activities.
- Algeria needs an excess of \$100/bbl and Saudi Arabia requires around \$80/bbl.
- Reduction in oil prices means lack of adequate financial resources to sustain their social and economic commitments.
- Even though some of these countries have abundant sovereign reserves, the long term outlook (of price rise) doesn't look positive

- This means that countries have to cut back subsidies & increase taxes which may cause political unrest
- **Impact on India:** Political instability in oil supplying nations endangers our supply security

2. The international oil industry will be reconfigured

- Large number of companies are finding it difficult to cover their cash costs and have been forced to shut their operations
- Those that will survive the crisis will have substantially slimmed balance sheets and reduced valuations
- Exxon's market capitalisation has, for instance, halved over the March 2020
- **Impact on India:**
 - International interest in divestment plans of BPCL reduces
 - The \$40-billion Ratnagiri refinery project by Saudi Aramco and UAE may be slowed down
 - A drop in the intensity of domestic exploration.

3. Behaviours will shift that will deepen uncertainties.

- Social distancing may change the dynamics of "shared mobility".
- Teleporting may reduce business travel impacting oil demand
- Increased environmental consciousness may accelerate the push towards decarbonisation
- As a result, the old statistics models used in petroleum sector may not hold true for business & investment projections

Steps that India should take to tackle the post-COVID petroleum order

- India should **build into its oil supply plans** in the likelihood of civil strife in oil producing countries.
- It should fill the oil caverns with strategic reserves.
- It should **increase its imports of gas (LNG)** from Australia, Africa and the US. This will reduce the political risks of dependency on oil supplies from the Middle East.
- **Provide autonomy to Oil-PSUs**, the lack of it has stifled management and operational efficiency of these companies.
- India should create an institutional basis for an **integrated energy policy** – that makes optimum use of renewable & non-renewable sources of energy

Connecting the dots

- Airline industry in Post-COVID world
- India's INDCs pledged in Paris deal

Impact of COVID-19: Cash less Indians -the new normal, and survival

At the end of 21-day lockdown imposed in India in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely that the bottom 47 percentile of India's population (nearly 500 million) **will run out of cash**.

Also, the population between the 47th percentile and up to 87th percentile will have only half the cash they had before the lockdown began.

Do You know?

- World Bank's poverty line is \$3.2/day for a lower middle-income country like India
- Up to the 77th percentile population, Indians just consume what they earn.
- The top 1% in India held 62%, whereas the top 0.1% held 33%, of the total currency of ₹17-lakh crore in circulation at the time of demonetisation (Nov 2016).

Inequality of cash in India

- Various indexes indicate high measures of inequality of cash holding in India:
 - Gini coefficient of cash holding in India is 0.71
 - Atkinson Index [A(1)=0.624]
 - Generalised Entropy Index [GE(1)=3.108]
- **Regional Inequality of Cash holding:**
 - The top 10% districts held 764 times more currency than the bottom 10% districts.
 - The bottom 60 districts, mostly comprising hill and tribal districts, held only 0.2% of all the cash.
 - **Intra-district inequality:** 359 out of 607 districts in India, has a Gini ≥ 0.7 , which means that even within districts, cash is concentrated very unequally

What are the possible impacts of pandemic vis-à-vis Cash economy?

- Further entrenchment of the cash inequality due to depletion of cash reserves of poor people.
- **Loss of Freedom:** No money to payback to lenders meaning high chances of poor people falling into trap of slavery or forced labour
- **Loss of agency:** People engaged in the informal economy (dependent on cash) will also lose their agency to negotiate for fair wages, decent working conditions etc.
- **Forces migration back to Urban areas:**
 - Poor migrants who returned to hometowns in the wake of lockdown will be left with no cash by the end of it, forcing them to migrate back to cash-rich centres again
- **Weakened demand:** Nearly one billion Indians will be starting with zero or near zero cash post the end of crisis that is going to impact the corporate sector

Way Forward

- The ₹1.7-lakh crore stimulus package announced by government is insufficient
- **Remonetise India:** A targeted ₹2.5-lakh crore cash transfer that will put money directly in the pockets and purses of the population up to the 87th percentile
- Government should make cash available through banks, automated teller machines and treasuries.

Connecting the dots

- Impact of the crisis on the cashless payments – is remonetising impacting the governments vision of creating a less-cash economy?

COVID-19: Government should unveil larger stimulus package

Indian Union government had announced the financial package of 1.7 lakh crores. However, there were criticism that the relief measures were repackaging of existing schemes and largely insufficient.

Also, the present investment regime in India is ineffective in dealing with economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis

Do You Know?

- The US announced a \$2.2 trillion stimulus on a \$20 trillion GDP base

- Malaysia has mobilised close to 18% of its GDP
- Japan has announced nearly \$1 trillion stimulus package

What is the present investment regime in Indian economy?

- Due to previous policies the entire structure has been made pro-foreign investor
- Rather than to incentivise new capital building by resident entrepreneurs it makes it difficult to proceed

Three examples which reflect this are:

- The **2020 finance bill amendment** (DDT related change) has resulted in the following scenario of **effective tax rates to entrepreneurs** –
 - 48.52% (for less than Rs. 15 lakh income) to 59.41% (for more than Rs 5 crore income)
 - But for foreigners this rate is capped at 40% and, in fact, comes down to 25.17% for a rich wealth fund
- **Infrastructure:** The exceptions in section 80M results in an effective tax rate between 67.9% -71.2% - terrible for special purpose vehicles and subsidiaries created for infrastructure assets
- **Real Estate Sector:** Section 43CA states that sales of less than 10% of the circle rate price will be dealt with punitive consequences. This will constrain developers from selling their flats at a discount

Consequences of such lopsided investment regime

- **Brain Drain:** Indian entrepreneurs will start looking for greener pastures outside India due to lopsided taxation structure
- **Slows down the creation of infrastructure assets** that are critical for nation building.
- Construction sector which was facing the issue of unsold inventory will be further burdened.
- **Economic Recovery** post the crisis will be difficult

Some of the suggestions to fight COVID-19 pandemic are:

- Government needs to handhold economy by creating a **stimulus of 10% of our GDP**
- **Interest rates** need to be reduced at least 200 basis points from current levels, with additional measures to ensure that banks lend.
- Government should ensure that all workers are paid Rs 5,000-6,000 per month by their employers during the lockdown period
- **Support to Enterprises:** Those employers who support their employees need to be supported and compensated through measures like tax rebates.
- **State governments** should receive their fund allocations so that they do not create a credit crunch.
- **Stimulate spending at an individual level,**
 - Personal income tax rates for the Rs 20 lakh slab & above need to be reduced
 - All GST rates need to be reduced by 50%.
 - All cesses and surcharges need to be eliminated for individual and corporate taxes.

- An interest-free EMI plan needs to be created for purchase of auto, domestic holidays, domestically assembled consumer goods and real estate
- **New deal for Indian entrepreneurs**
 - Ease of starting up and accessing financial resources
 - **Making the structure pro-domestic investor:** The effective tax rate in the hands of residents be brought down- 48.52% tax needs to be reduced to 25% and 59.41% tax to 35%.
 - Measures in financial bill that disincentivises Construction sector should be addressed

Source of the article: Economic Times

Connecting the dots

- Impact of COVID-19 crisis on foreign investment (FDI & FPI)
- Helicopter Money

Financing the Pandemic rescue package

When COVID-19 cases began to increase, the Government of India (GoI) announced a 21-day national lockdown and a ₹1.7-lakh crore rescue package.

Challenges

- There are expectations of further such packages (aimed at businesses & middle class) and the challenges of financing these relief measures.
- Also, the financing strategy should be to raise long-term funds at cost effective rates, with flexible repayment terms.

How can government fund its relief packages?

- Utilizing the availability of unused resources in the state disaster relief fund to the tune of ₹60,000 crore
- Issuing of **GDP-linked bonds**
 - Indian rupee denominated 25-year GDP-linked bonds that are callable from, say, the fifth year
 - The interest on a GDP-linked bond is correlated to the GDP growth rate and is subject to a cap
 - The issuer, the GoI, is liable to pay a lower coupon during years of slower growth and vice-versa.
 - **Precedence:** Costa Rica, Bulgaria and Bosnia-Herzegovina issued such GDP-linked bonds in the 1990s, from whose experience India could learn
 - **Prerequisite:** Publishing reliable and timely GDP data
- **Utilizing the resources of Public Sector Enterprises(PSEs)**
 - **Paying dues to GoI:** The 15 largest non-financial central PSEs (CPSEs) owe the government ₹25,904 crore as of end-March 2019
 - **Using cash and bank deposits of these 15 CPSEs** (₹64,253 crore) that is in excess of their operating requirements, to increase dividend to government
 - **Monetization of non-core assets** of these CPSEs as they generally yield 200 basis points lower than the returns on their core businesses.

- **Forming Public sector bank holding company ('Holdco')** along the lines of Singapore's Temasek Holdings to enable PSEs to monetise their non-core assets at remunerative prices
- **Securitization of ₹30,168 crore loans** that CPSEs have extended to employees, vendors and associates – to ensure that associated businesses remain liquid

Funds that can be tapped

The government can mandate public sector enterprises to transfer their non-core properties to a holding company

Amount as on March 31, 2019 (₹ crore)

Name of the Central PSE	Financial investments	Cash & cash equivalents	Non-operating assets	Statutory payments due
ONGC	33,860	4,106	43,515	5,094
Coal India	2,709	2,276	35,477	6,204
BPCL	6,818	414	17,109	3,881
NTPC	-	244	3,036	501
IOC	32,034	933	36,982	7,681
GAIL	10,626	297	13,544	454
Power Grid	4,858	3,648	16,264	308
Bharat Electronics	834	760	1,850	108
Container Corporation of India	1,172	129	1,475	-
MIDHANI	2	140	200	0
ITES	120	169	1,452	3
SAIL	135	66	1,041	-
BHEL	3	796	7,747	1,311
NMDC	-	46	4,774	154
IRCON International	391	892	3,516	206
Total	93,562	14,914	1,87,983	25,904

Source: CPSEs FY2019 annual reports and analyst calculations

Pic Source: [The Hindu](#)

Should government also tap the RBI resources?

- RBI has allocated ₹1 lakh crore to carry out [long-term repo operations](#) and has reduced the repo rates by 75 basis points to 4.4% to help banks augment their liquidity in the wake of pandemic
- Government already enjoys handsome dividends pay-outs by RBI
 - During the five years ending on June 30, 2019, the RBI paid the GoI 100% of its net disposable income
 - In FY2019 dividends from RBI more than trebled to ₹1.76 lakh crore from ₹50,000 crore in FY2018.
- The Bimal Jalan panel constituted in 2019 to review the RBI's economic capital framework opined that:

- The RBI may pay interim dividends only under exceptional circumstances
- The unrealised gains in the valuation of RBI's assets ought to be used as risk buffers against market risks and may not be paid as dividends
- Therefore, it is in India's self-interest to allow a robust and independent RBI to defend the financial sector's stability

Conclusion

The GoI may finance the COVID-19 rescue package by issuing GDP-linked bonds, tapping PSEs' excess liquidity and monetising non-core assets

Connecting the dots

- Different types of Investment Models
- Impact on the disinvestment plans of GoI

States asked to implement Market Intervention Scheme

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- The Central government has **directed all the States and Union Territories** to implement the **Market Intervention Scheme** to ensure good prices for **perishable crops**.

Important value additions:

The Market Intervention Scheme (MIS)

- It is **meant to protect the growers of perishable commodities** from making distress sales, especially **at times when prices fall** below the cost of production.
- The scheme **can be invoked by a State** if it is **willing to bear half the losses** of procurement.
- The remaining loss is borne by the Centre, whenever there is a **10% fall in ruling market prices** in comparison to the previous normal year.
- The **Department of Agriculture and Cooperation** implements the scheme.
- The Central Government implements MIS for a particular commodity on the request of a state government concerned.

COVID-19: India needs an Emergency Basic Income

India announced 21-day lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and any exit from the lockdown is likely to be partial and provisional.

IMF economist **Gita Gopinath** has argued for a preservation of the economic system while the Great Lockdown lasts.

Do You Know?

- Singapore and Japan, which contained the disease spread initially, have re-introduced harsh lockdown measures to deal with a **second wave of infections**.
- The US announced a \$2.2 trillion stimulus on a \$20 trillion GDP base
- Malaysia has mobilised close to 18% of its GDP

Impact of lockdown

- Lockdown poses a unique challenge of keeping productive capacity intact. Nobel Prize-winning economist **Paul Krugman** termed this the **coronacoma**.

- Coronacoma is the economic equivalent of a medically induced coma, in which some brain functions are deliberately shut down to give the patient time to heal

What should be the economic response to the crisis?

The response should be two-fold

- One, an immediate **disaster relief component** to ensure survival of both firms and workers who have been rendered without work.
- Two, a **stimulus component** that aims to repair and restart production lines during the exit phase of the lockdown.

Challenges

- **Weak response (Economically):** The relief measures by Union & state governments appear to be grossly inadequate to meet the challenges
- **Lack of resources:** Emerging markets, such as India, don't have the luxury of offering generous relief measures like developed countries

Examples of other emerging economies

- **Thailand**, whose per capita income (PPP) is a little more than two times that of India, has announced a package that is 10 times bigger (as a share of GDP) than India.
- **Malaysia**, whose per capita income (PPP) is four times that of India, has announced a package that is 16 times bigger (as a share of GDP) than India.

Alternative Suggested – EBI (Emergency Basic Income)

- EBI will be a generous, but provisional income transfer programme, which is unconditional and universal.
- EBI will be subjected to a rollback when normalcy returns
- It will be a programme with a fixed and **transparent sunset clause** (linked to new infections falling beyond a certain level, or economic growth rising above a certain threshold)
- Funding could be through **special purpose vehicle** as long as the Great Lockdown lasts
- **Challenge with EBI:** Implementation issues because everyone doesn't have a functional bank account or access to mobile or internet (for e-transfers).

Way Forward

- EBI must also include an in-kind transfer component.
- The ratio of cash to in-kind transfers should be left for states to suit their unique needs
- Centre's role should be to enable funding for this programme so that states can focus on its implementation.

Connecting the dots

- Poverty lines –various methods to determine it
- JAM trinity- utility and challenges

[India's economic growth to get affected amidst COVID-19](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy & GS-II – Global groupings

In News:

- According to World Bank's **South Asia Economic Focus** report, India may record its **worst growth performance** this fiscal year (2020-21) since the 1991 liberalisation.
- **Coronavirus outbreak** is the main cause of severely disrupting the economy.

Key takeaways:

- India's economy is expected to **grow at 1.5% to 2.8%** in the 2020-21.
- The World Bank **approved USD 1 billion** to India to fight the COVID-19 pandemic recently.

Important value additions:

The South Asia Economic Focus report

- It is a **biannual economic update** presenting **recent economic developments** and a near-term economic outlook for **South Asia**.
- It covers **South Asian countries** - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.
- It aims at providing important **background information** and **timely analysis** of key indicators and economic and financial developments.

World Bank

- It is an **international financial institution**.
- It **provides loans and grants** to the **poorer countries** for the purpose of pursuing **capital projects**.
- It comprises two institutions: the **International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)**, and the **International Development Association (IDA)**.

Headquarter : Washington D.C

Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act: States demand access to revenue

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In News:

- Recently, majority of the Chief Ministers demanded increasing the State's **access to revenue** under the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act** due to crippling shortage of funds.

Important value additions:

Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act

- The FRBM Act, enacted in 2003 by Parliament **aims to reduce India's fiscal deficit** and improve macroeconomic management.
- Since then, every Budget includes a **Medium Term Fiscal Policy Statement** that specifies the **annual revenue** and **fiscal deficit** goals over a three-year horizon.
- The present target is of **reducing the fiscal deficit** to 3.1% of GDP by March 2023
- The Act **allows** the government to **exceed** the annual **fiscal deficit target** under extraordinary situations like national security, national calamity.
- Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the current **circumstances** would be **apt for suspending** both the Centre's and States' fiscal deficit targets.
- This would **allow** both the Union government and States **to undertake** the **much-needed increases in expenditure** to meet the extraordinary circumstances.

Fiscal deficit

- It is a **shortfall** in a **government's income** compared with its spending.
- The government that has a fiscal deficit is spending beyond its means.

India looks to secure Dollar Swap Line

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations & GS-III – Economy

In News:

- India is working with the United States to **secure a dollar swap line**.
- It would **help in better management of its external account**.
- It would also **provide extra safeguard** in the event of an **abrupt outflow of funds** due to coronavirus-led lockdown.

Important value additions:**Currency swap agreements**

- Such agreements involve **trade in local currencies**, where **countries pay** for imports and exports **at pre-determined rates of exchange without** the involvement of a third country currency like the US dollar.
- India already has a **\$75 billion bilateral currency swap line with Japan**.
- The Reserve Bank of India also offers **similar swap lines to central banks in the SAARC** region within a total corpus of \$2 billion.
- Benefits:
 - These swap operations **carry no exchange rate** or other market risks, as transaction terms are set in advance.
 - It **reduces the risk of volatility** against the third currency.
 - It **does away with the charges involved** in multiple currency exchanges.
 - It would discourage **speculative attacks** on the domestic currency.

COVID-19: Role of Private Sector

Context: COVID-19, has spiralled into a global pandemic in less than 90 days, bringing most of the world to a near standstill.

Do You Know?

- In India, private hospitals, clinics and nursing homes provide over 70% of healthcare.
- Over half of all treatments under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (**AB PM-JAY**) are availed from private providers, accounting for over 60% of total disbursements.

What has been the strategy to tackle COVID-19 till now?

- It has been a **whole-of-government** approach with little role played by private sector
- Much of COVID-19 testing and treatment is being done in public facilities
- However, as the pandemic progresses we might need a whole-of-society response

A case for whole-of-society approach

- **Huge Country:** Government needs to enlist the support of private players to manage the crisis situation in a vast & diverse country like India

- **Effective:** According to the WHO, a critical lesson from the 2014-16 West African Ebola epidemic was that both the public and private sector need to work in tandem in responding to large-scale epidemics.
- **Creating a large and accessible testing infrastructure** as the epidemic spreads means more private sector participation
 - Testing has been included under the AB PM-JAY.
 - India has opened testing up to private labs but need to substantially expand on this.
- Private sector needed to ramp up **production of essential medical products** — from testing kits, masks and other PPEs to oxygen and ventilators – as epidemic spreads
- **Augment Public Healthcare Capacity:** Private hospitals need to be converted into COVID-19-only hospitals as government hospitals in India are limited
- **Treatment of non-COVID-19 patients:** Private sector can pitch in especially when government hospitals are focused heavily on tackling COVID-19
- **Support for community activities** such as night shelters and community kitchens should be strengthened through private sector participation
- **Filling of the knowledge gaps-** Government, private and not-for-profit research institutions need to collaborate to understand the nature of virus and develop necessary cure/vaccines

Way Ahead

- Empanelling additional health facilities under PM-JAY to provide emergency care and treatment for other serious illnesses to all citizens, particularly the poor and vulnerable
- Direct support from banks to private sector to keep production and supply chains running

Connecting the dots

- Gandhiji's Trusteeship Model
- Challenges with respect to NGOs in India

COVID-19: RBI announces second set of measures

Context: After its first relief package, RBI announced second set of measures to combat the lockdown impact on the economy

Relief measures announced by RBI are

- Liquidity infusion of ₹1 lakh crore, of which
 - ₹50,000 crore is exclusively for non-banking finance companies (NBFCs), via banks through **TLTROs**
 - ₹50,000 crore to refinance agencies like NABARD, SIDBI and National Housing Bank.
- **Help for States:** RBI has increased the ways and means advances (WMA) limits of States by 60%, over and above the level as on March 31, 2020.
- **Reserve repo rate** reduced by 25 bps to 3.75%. — while keeping the repo rate unchanged

- **An asset classification** will be on standstill during the moratorium period for accounts that were not already NPAs as of March 1, 2020
- **Accommodative on rates:** RBI has indicated room for reduction in repo rate as inflation softens.

About TLTROs

- These are Targeted Long Term Repo Operations
- Repo rate is the rate at which Banks borrow from RBI. Generally, these loans are for short durations up to 2 weeks
- **LTRO** is a tool that lets banks borrow one to three-year funds from RBI at the repo rate by providing government securities with similar or higher tenure as collateral.
- It is called 'Targeted' LTRO when RBI wants banks opting for funds under this option to be specifically invested in Targeted Sector (Ex: Corporate debt, NBFC, MFI)

Impact of RBI's actions

- Liquidity enhancing measures will ease financial stress and help increase credit flows particularly to NBFC sector
 - The NBFCs have experienced liquidity shortage since banks had not offered them any moratorium for repayment
- **Housing sector:** The soft loan to NHB should help bring down the cost of home loans
- **Small businesses** can hope for some cheap credit from **SIDBI**, and the rural-agrarian community from **NABARD**.
- **Provides comfort to States** to plan market borrowing programmes better and undertake better containment and mitigation efforts.
- **Avoids Lazy Banking:** Reduction in repo rate will discourage banks from parking their excess liquidity with RBI
- **Relief to borrowers** who were worried that opting for the moratorium may turn them into NPAs

Challenges Ahead

- **Implementation Challenges:** With regard to TLTROs into NBFC, investment-grade NBFC assets will be harder to come by now, which will disincentivize the banks from engaging with TLTROs altogether
- **Insufficient:** There is no buy-out of corporate bonds by RBI, and no big largesse for real estate developers
- **Muted demand in Housing sector**, hence soft loans to NHB will not yield dramatic results.
- Consequences of **heightened liquidity** like Inflation which needs to be tackled in future

Way Ahead

- Banks will have to be **liberal in extending help** for working capital loans and overdrafts to their borrowers, including MSMEs.
- The government could help by extending a **scheme of credit assurance cover** that will encourage banks to be more liberal in their lending activity

Connecting the dots

- Priority Sector Lending

- Impact of money supply on exchange rate

-cr. liquidity booster

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has announced a host of measures to provide **liquidity support to non-banking financial companies (NBFCs)**.
- They shall receive ₹50,000 crore worth of liquidity booster.

Key takeaways:

- RBI has also decided to give them certain **benefits for loans** which are being extended to the commercial real estate sector.
- The RBI has also decided to provide **special refinance facility** of ₹50,000 crore to **NABARD, SIDBI and NHB** to enable them to meet sectoral credit needs.

Important value additions:

Reserve Bank of India

- It is India's **central bank**, which **controls** the issue and supply of the Indian rupee.
- RBI is the **regulator** of entire Banking in India.
- RBI plays an **important part** in the Development Strategy of the Government of India.
- RBI was set up in 1935 under the **Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934**.

Non-Banking Financial Company

- It is a **financial institution** that **does not have a full banking license** or is **not supervised** by a national or international banking regulatory agency.
- The most important difference between non-banking financial companies and banks is that **NBFCs don't take demand deposits**.

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)

- It is an **Apex Development Financial Institution** in India.
- It deals with matters concerning **Policy Planning and Operations** in the field of credit for **Agriculture and other Economic activities in Rural areas** in India.
- It is active in **developing Financial Inclusion** policy.
- It was established on the recommendations of **B.Sivaramman Committee**, on 12 July 1982.

Small industrial Development Bank of India (SIDBI)

- It is a development financial institution in India.
- It serves as the **principal financial institution** in the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (**MSME**) sector.
- It was **established** on April 2, 1990, through an Act of Parliament.
- It is **headquartered** in Lucknow.
- It **operates** under the Department of Financial Services, Government of India.

National Housing Bank (NHB)

- It is a Government of India owned entity.
- It was set up on 9 July 1988 under the **National Housing Bank Act, 1987**.
- It is an **apex financial institution for housing**.

Reverse Repo Rate reduced by RBI

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- RBI has reduced the **reverse repo rate** by 25 bps from 4 % to 3.75% recently.

Key takeaways:

- Previously, the RBI used its **repo rate** as the main instrument to adjust the interest rates.
- Presently, it is making change to the reverse repo rate to set the benchmark.
- The idea is to **discourage** banks **from keeping surplus funds** with itself and from **lending their funds** to the RBI to make profits.
- This practice hurts the economy and starves the businesses that genuinely need funds.

Important value additions:

- The **repo rate** is the rate at which the RBI **lends money** to the banks for short durations.
- The **reverse repo rate** is the rate at which banks lend their money to the RBI.
- When the economy is growing, the repo rate is the **benchmark** interest rate in the economy and it also forms the **floor rate** for all other interest rates in the economy.
- Since, India's **economic growth** has **decelerated** sharply since last two years and banks are **not lending to businesses**, because banks are too risk-averse to lend and also, the **overall demand** from the businesses has **decreased**.
- In order to change this trend, the RBI has cut the reverse repo rate more than the repo twice in the spate of the last three weeks.

World economy to contract by 3%: IMF's report

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In News:

- As per the **International Monetary Fund's (IMF) World Economic Outlook (WEO)**, COVID-19 pandemic is having a '**severe**' effect on the world economy.
- The economy is expected to **contract by 3%** in 2020, which will be much worse than the 2008-09 financial crises.

Key takeaways:

- As per the WEO, **India's growth** is expected to dip to 1.9% in 2020 and rebound to 7.4% in 2021.
- Similar observation was made by the World bank's **South Asia Economic Focus report**.
- As countries implement necessary quarantines and social-distancing practices to contain the pandemic, the world has been put in a **great lockdown** due to which all the **economic activities** have been **affected**.
- The **cumulative loss** to global GDP over 2020 and 2021 from the pandemic crisis could be around \$9 trillion, **greater than the economies of Japan and Germany, combined**.

Important value additions:

The World Economic Outlook (WEO)

- It is an IMF report that provides **analysis and forecasts of economic developments** and policies in its member countries.
- It also **projects developments** in the global financial markets and economic systems.
- The WEO is usually prepared **twice a year**.

International Monetary Fund

- It is an **organization** of 189 countries which has the objectives to:
 - foster global monetary cooperation,
 - secure financial stability,
 - facilitate international trade,
 - promote high employment and sustainable economic growth
 - reduce poverty around the world.
- It was **created** in 1945.
- It is **governed** by and **accountable** to the 189 member countries.
- Its **primary purpose** is to ensure the stability of the international monetary system, that is, the system of exchange rates and international payments that enables countries to transact with each other.

COVID-19 and FDI Policy

Context: India amended its FDI policy to put a blanket ban on investments through the automatic route by entities from countries that share a border with India.

India's FDI policy

- A **foreign direct investment (FDI)** is an investment in the form of a **controlling ownership** in a business in one country by an entity based in another country.
- **India's FDI policy** allows foreign investment in certain sectors under the **automatic route**.
- **100% FDI** is permitted under the automatic route in manufacturing, oil and gas, greenfield airports, construction, railway infrastructure etc.
- **In other sectors**, FDI is allowed under the automatic route upto a **certain threshold**, say 26% or 49%.

Most FDI flows into India are under the automatic route, which means companies only need to inform authorities after the investment is made

Critical Analysis of the action taken by government:

1. **Provides safety net** for Indian Companies: Economic slowdown due to COVID-19 has led to decreased valuation of firms making it vulnerable to hostile takeover by other
2. **Aimed at China:** To ward off opportunistic takeover of Indian Companies by China
3. **Prevents Misuse:** The ban also extends to entities where Chinese citizens have "beneficial ownership" to ensure that the restrictions are not circumvented by routing investments via Hong Kong, Singapore or other countries.
4. **Following Global trend:** similar barriers erected by other countries like Germany, Italy, Spain etc. to block predatory capital from China.

5. **Doesn't Extend to all countries:** Government does not want to be seen as having turned protectionist and insular.
6. **Change in government's strategy:** In recent years India courted investments from China to counter the widening trade deficit with it.
7. **Fear of Chinese domination:** The Chinese have already restarted manufacturing when the rest of the world still grappling with coronavirus thus giving them several months' advantage
8. The action signals India's intent of not separating **commerce and security** in dealing with China
9. **Increasing divergence with China:** India opposed China's Belt and Road Initiative and walked out of the RCEP negotiations citing the trade imbalance with China.

Conclusion

Even though foreign investments are needed for country's growth prospects but that should come at the cost of our National Security interests.

Connecting the dots

- Difference between FDI and FII
- G20, FATF and WTO – that deal with foreign flows of funds

COVID-19: Impact on Mutual Funds (Franklin Templeton issue)

Context: Franklin Templeton (FT) Mutual Fund, the ninth largest in India, decided to close its six managed credit funds, which had combined assets under its management of around Rs 28,000 crore (25% of its total assets)

It cited reduced liquidity in the bond markets caused by the COVID-19 pandemic as reason for closure of these MF schemes.

What is Mutual Fund?

- It is a type of financial vehicle made up of a pool of money collected from many investors to invest in securities like stocks, bonds and other assets.
- Mutual funds are operated by professional money managers, who allocate the fund's assets and attempt to produce income for the fund's investors.

Merits of Mutual Funds

- It is professional managed financial vehicle
- The fund managers invest the pooled money in diversified assets which reduces the risk
- They are liquid enabling investors to sell the Mutual Funds in short time.

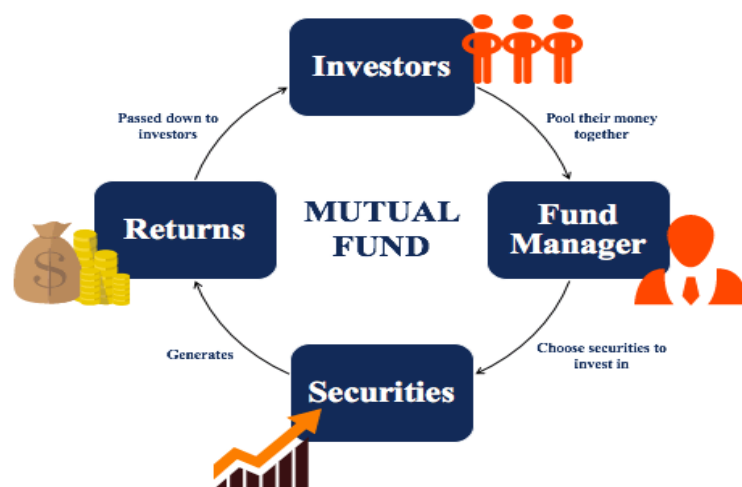
Disadvantages of a Mutual Fund

- High and opaque management fees and operating expenses
- Loss of Control by investors
- Mutual Funds are vulnerable to market volatility

Why did FT announce closure of the MF schemes?

- It was because these MF schemes had 65% of the portfolio investment in bonds that are AA rated or below
- These lower rated bonds offer higher return but also **carry a higher risk.**

- During the times of crisis, these type of bonds are least sought after, meaning their depreciation is quicker
- As a result, the fund managers will not be able to service the interest & principal payment to the investors



Pic Source: [Here](#)

What does the closure of Mutual Fund schemes by FT, mean for investors?

- It essentially means that Franklin Templeton MF will first liquidate the assets in the schemes and then return the money to investors
- However, FT may find it difficult to get a buyer for the low-rated assets in the portfolio, so investors may have to wait
- Additionally, if they find a buyer, the sale will happen at reduced valuation meaning loss for investors on their capital investment

Impact of the Franklin Templeton issue

- It is unprecedented indicating the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on financial system
- **On Fund managers:** They may now prefer the safety of more liquid higher rated paper, leading to further stress in the bond markets
- **On Investors:** It breaks investor confidence in mutual funds.
- **On Saving Habits:** It will push people to adopt informal means of saving Ex: Gold purchases, which is not in the long-term interest of circular economy
- **On Credit availability:** Debt funds are a key source of funding of corporates which might get further squeezed due to such types of stress in system
- **On Society:** It can create a panic among public leading to distrust on such financial instruments

Way Ahead

- Investors need to look at the quality of the companies where their investments
- Monitoring of the situation and timely action on it by fund managers
- RBI and SEBI must ensure adequate liquidity to intermediaries.

- Awareness among citizens that such cases are isolated ones and there is no threat to MF ecosystem

Connecting the dots

- Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative Bank (PMC) Crisis
- IL&FS liquidity crisis

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) survey: Industries struggle amidst the pandemic

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Industries: Economics

In News:

- Companies were surveyed recently regarding the **difficulties being faced** by them due to the lockdown which was imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.
- Almost **half of the industries** which have been allowed to reopen still **face hurdles** in **obtaining permits** to function and **passes** for employees.

Key takeaways:

- Movement:
 - **60%** of surveyed companies faced **disruption** in the **movement** of inputs and finished goods.
 - Only **15%** of them said that **movement** of **raw materials** and **finished goods** was taking place **smoothly**.
 - **23%** said such movement was **not taking place at all**.
- Permits:
 - **19%** of companies said permits were **not available** to them.
 - **27%** said they had **faced delays**.
 - **67%** said the **daily commute** was **problematic**.
- Functioning:
 - Only **10%** of plants were functioning at **more than 50%** of their full capacity.
 - Only **9%** of firms have **more than half their workers** back on site.
- CII **demand**ed that businesses should be allowed to function **without need of permits** in non-containment areas.
- Also, workers should be **allowed to commute to work in their own vehicles** on the basis of a letter issued by the employer without need of a government pass.

Important value additions:

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)

- CII is a **non-government, not-for-profit**, industry-led and industry-managed organization.
- Founded in 1895, it works with the Government on policy issues.

Obstacle course

Excerpts from a Confederation of Indian Industry survey of 180 companies conducted on April 23 and 24:

46% of firms said permits to operate were either not made available or were delayed

42% of firms said passes to workers were either not readily provided or were delayed

62% of firms said transport facilities for inputs and finished goods were either not available at all or were disrupted and delayed

31% firms said daily commute of workers is an issue. 36% said it is somewhat of an issue



Lockdown blues: A worker of an undergarment factory in Kolkata cleaning a machine, which was not in use for weeks following a shutdown to slow the COVID-19 spread. ■ REUTERS

Image source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/coronavirus-lockdown-industries-hobbled-by-curbs-on-mobility-of-men-material/article31440076.ece/amp/>

Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR)

Context: The oil price meltdown provides an opportunity for oil importing country like India to tweak its energy policies to take advantage of the situation

Did You Know?

- Brent Crude Oil is trading around \$25 a barrel (April 2020), the lowest in 18 years.
- In 2019, the average closing price of a barrel of crude was \$57.05. In 2018, it was \$64.90, and in 2017, U\$50.84.

Reduced oil price and India

- Normally, reduced oil prices would translate into surplus oil for the consumers
- It also means a fiscal bonus for the government through increased tax collections (when the reduced price is not fully transferred to consumers)
- However, these gains will not be easy to come by given that the demand for petrol has drastically reduced.

Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) programme

- Objective is to maintain emergency stockpile of oil reserves
- India claims to have 87 days of reserves.
- Out of this, Oil refiners maintain 65 days of oil storage
- The rest of the reserves are held in underground salt caverns maintained by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPR).
- The existing and planned capacity for the underground reserves is 10 and 12 days of import cover for crude oil respectively.

Issue with SPR

- **Lack of transparency** with refinery holdings.
 - The SPR arrangement between the oil refineries and the Union or state governments is not specified well
 - A breakdown of which refineries hold SPR and in what form (crude or refined) or information about where they are located is not publicly available.
- Ambiguity surrounding the **mobilisation process**
 - SPR are meant to be utilized for emergency purposes, where time is crucial.
 - However, there is no definite framework delineating roles for various agencies

Way Ahead

- **Policy Framework:** ISPRL could fill up the reserves each time the price of Brent crude oil falls below a certain price, say \$35 per barrel.
- The procedures, protocols and facts about Indian SPR storage require greater public and parliamentary scrutiny
- Thus, there is a need to introduce transparency and accountability in relation to the SPR
- SPR mobilisation process could be made more efficient by laying out designated roles for different agencies to avoid duplication of work in times of crisis
- India should look to diversify its SPR holdings. Diversification can be based on
 - **Geographical location** - storing oil either domestically or abroad. For instance: Trincomalee in Sri Lanka, Oman (Ras Markaz)
 - **Storage location** - underground or overground
 - **Product type** (oil can be held in either crude or refined form).
 - **Form of ownership** — either publicly owned through ISPRL or by private oil companies, such as ADNOC of Abu Dhabi, which could fill up the SPR when prices are low

Connecting the dots

- Solar Power in the times of reduced Oil Prices
- 1973 Oil Crisis

COVID-19: Opportunity for Energy Sector reforms

Context: The 9-minute event on April 5th was one PM asked to switch-off lights and light lamps to show respect to COVID-19 warriors. It was interesting for the extent of public participation and expert management of National Electricity grid

Pre-Covid, India's power sector has been facing a mounting financial crisis which has made it more prominent in recent times caused by an expected slowdown.

Challenges in Energy Sector

- The trend of low power demand, now furthered in the post-Covid economy
- Idle, old, and inefficient coal plants.
 - Plant load factors of Coal plants for the 2019-20 period are at 56%, down from 78% a decade ago.
- High Industrial Power tariffs —one of the highest in world

- Heavily subsidised agricultural power tariffs leading to Cross-Subsidisation - High industrial power tariffs to lower the cost of agricultural power
- Financial health of the DISCOMs (Power Distribution Companies who purchase power from generators & distribute it consumers).
 - They now owe over Rs 8.8 billion to generators.
- Challenges with Renewable Energy (RE)
 - Difficulties of integrating it with National grid given its peak productions & falls.
 - Uncertainty with RE: Weather patterns change and forecasting is never 100% accurate.
 - Electricity management of RE will be difficult given its fluctuating nature

Way Ahead

- A market-based, automatic mechanism for integration of infirm renewable power into the grid is non-negotiable.
- **Use of Li-ion battery** storage to manage power spikes associated with the 175GW of RE planned by 2022
- **Restructuring of Coal Plants:** Some of these old units could be restructured and shut down, based on their generation costs, remaining plant life & modernisation
- **Improving Efficiency:** Retrofit power units with flue gas desulphurisation (FGD) to improve the environmental efficiency of old power plants
- **Lower industrial power** tariffs to meet the competition. Industrial power in Vietnam is, for example, 40% cheaper than in India
- **Adoption of DBT framework** for providing subsidy to agricultural power consumers
- **Utilize the Crisis:** Now is an opportunity to bring in fresh Covid-influenced industrial investment from Korea and Japan, which are diversifying away from China.
- **New Legislative Framework:** Enactment of proposed Electricity Amendment Bill, 2020 and adoption by States with suitable modifications

Conclusion

The proposed Electricity Amendment Bill, 2020, is an ambitious step in the right direction—with bold moves to

- Institute cost-reflective tariffs,
- Remove subsidies, and
- Strengthen the sanctity of contracts through greater enforcement
- Provision of payment security to generators

Connecting the dots

- UDAY Scheme
- Paris Climate Goals and India's commitment towards it

AGRICULTURE

e-NAM: Features updated in the wake of COVID-19 crisis

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy (Agriculture); Science & Technology

In News:

- Two new features – Warehouse based trading module and FPO Trading module- added on e-NAM platform to reduce the farmer's need to come to wholesale mandis

Important Value Additions

- e-NAM was launched in 2016 as a pan-India electronic agricultural marketing/trade portal linking APMCs across the States.
- It is managed by Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC)
- e-NAM provides for contactless remote bidding and mobile-based any time payment for which traders do not need to either visit mandis or banks for the same.
- Presently, 585 mandis in 16 States and 2 UTs are integrated on e-NAM portal.

Food Corporation of India directed to provide grains to NGOs

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - II – Role of NGOs; GS-III – Marketing of agricultural produce

In News:

- The Government has directed **Food Corporation of India** to provide wheat and rice to NGOs.
- The food grains will be provided at the **Open Market Sale Scheme** (OMSS) rates without going through the e-auction process.

Key takeaways:

- FCI has **network of more than 2000 godowns** in the country.
- Large network of godowns will ensure **smooth supply of food grains** to these organisations in this hour of crisis posed by COVID-19.
- It will **help relief camps** in their philanthropic work of feeding poor and migrant workers.

Important value additions:

The Food Corporation of India (FCI)

- It was setup under the **Food Corporation's Act 1964**.
- The objectives are:
 - Effective price support operations to safeguard the interests of the farmers.
 - Distributing foodgrains throughout the country for Public Distribution system.
 - Maintaining satisfactory level of buffer stocks to ensure National Food Security.
- Since its inception, FCI has played a significant role in maintaining food security in the country.

Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS)

- It refers to **selling of foodgrains** by Government/Government agencies at **predetermined** (decided in advance) **prices** in the open market from time to time.

Biofortified carrot variety benefits local farmers

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Science and Technology

In News:

- **Madhuban Gajar**, a **biofortified carrot variety**, developed by a farmer scientist has benefited hundreds of farmers in Gujarat.
- The carrot has **high β -carotene** (beta-carotene) and **iron content**.

Key takeaways:

- The variety is being cultivated in **Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh** since the last three years.
- The Madhuban Gajar is used for various **value-added products**.
- It was **developed by** Shri Vallabhhai Vasrambhai Marvaniyawas.
- He has received a **National Award** (2017) and a **Padma Shri** (2019) for his extraordinary work.

Important value additions:

Biofortification

- It means breeding crops to **increase their nutritional value**.
- This can be done either through **conventional selective breeding**, or through **genetic engineering**.



Image source: <http://nif.org.in/Innovationofday/madhuban-gajar-a-high-nutritious-carrot-variety/6>

Agricultural Distress

The COVID-19 crisis is affecting rural India especially at a time when agriculture is already in a distress situation.

Agricultural distress Causing Migration

- According to the 2011 census, 3.5 million migrants moved within the last one year due to economic reasons.
- The corresponding numbers for the 2001 and 1991 census, were, respectively, 2.2 and 1.4 million.

Do You Know?

- Majority of the migrant workers send 25 to 50 per cent of their monthly income to their families back home.
- In Bihar, these remittances accounted for 35.6 per cent of gross state domestic product in 2011-12, up from 11.6 per cent in 2004-05

Issues with Agricultural Sector

1. Increasing Rural-Urban gap

- In 2008, the rural-urban **gap was at 45% in terms of average revenue** — versus 10% for China and Indonesia.
- The **rural monthly per capita expenditure declined 8.8%** from Rs 1,430 in 2011-12 to Rs 1,304 in 2017-18
- In 2013-2019, the average **agricultural GDP growth rate (driven by livestock) was 3.1%**, much lower than the average GDP growth rate — 6.7%
- The average **growth of the crop sector**, which accounts for two-thirds of the agricultural sector GDP, was 0.3 per cent.

2. Declining Landholding Size

- Average landholding size of a household has shrunk to 1.1 ha in 2016 (Source: NABARD)
- A farm household needs to have at least 1 ha of land to make ends meet, whereas the proportion of those owning less than one ha is 82.8%
- 37% of farm households owned land parcels of smaller than 0.4 ha
- Another 30% of farm households holdings which between 0.41 and 1.0 ha.
- Only 13% agricultural households owned landholdings bigger than 2 ha.

3. Irrigation has stagnated, with less than half of Indian farmland irrigated.

4. Rural India suffers from **“urban consumer bias”**: Government has kept food prices very low to spare urban consumers of price rise

5. **Budget cuts** have affected key agri-programmes such as the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, the Backward Regions Grant Fund as well as irrigation schemes (Integrated Watershed Management Programme)

6. Degradation in agricultural quality

- Rise of monocultures based on the intensive use of chemical pesticides has reduced soil productivity
- The level of water tables fell by 65 per cent in 10 years.
- Nearly 30 per cent of India's land has been degraded due to deforestation, intensive farming, soil erosion and groundwater depletion.

7. Increasing indebtedness of farmers

- Over half of the farmers are indebted
- The average loan amount outstanding for a farm household in India in 2017 was Rs 47,000.
- More than 3,20,000 farmers committed suicide between 1995 and 2016 (NCRB data)

8. Rural Poverty

- NSS data show that rural poverty rose about 4 percentage points between 2011-12 and 2017-18 to **30 per cent**
- Whereas urban poverty fell 5 percentage points over the same period to 9 per cent.

Way Forward

- The issue of migrant workers during the crisis should open the eyes of policy makers about the need to make agriculture sector a priority
- Agricultural sector should witness more investment to reduce the rural-urban gap
- **Need for agro-ecological transition** as it is more bio-diverse in nature, makes the system more resilient, strengthen food security and provide a safety net for farmers

Connecting the dots

- Ashok Dalwai Committee on doubling of farmers' income
- Zero Budget Natural Farming
- Second Green Revolution

Initiatives of Department of Agriculture to promote farming and allied sectors during lockdown

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Agriculture; Welfare Schemes

In News:

- **Exemptions** have been given by Government of India for agricultural operations keeping in view the harvesting and sowing season.

Key takeaways:

- The **All India Agri Transport Call Centre** has been launched. It is set up for coordination between States for inter-state movement of perishable commodities.
- Under the **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) Scheme** about 8 crores farmers have been benefitted.
- Under the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PM-GKY)** large amount of pulses have been dispatched for delivery to the States/UTs.
- Under the **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)**, around Rs.2000 crores of insurance claims have been disbursed to the beneficiary farmers.
- Decision has been taken for providing 2% **Interest Subvention (IS)** to Banks and 3% **Prompt Repayment Incentive (PRI)** to farmers for the extended period of the lockdown.

Important value additions:

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi

- It is an **initiative** by the government of India in which **all farmers** will get up to **₹6,000** per year as **minimum income support**.

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PM-GKY)

- During the 2020 coronavirus pandemic in India, Finance Minister announced a **₹1.70 Lakh Crore (\$24 billion) relief package** under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana for the poor.

The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)

- It is an **insurance service** for farmers for their yields.
- It was formulated in line with **One Nation–One Scheme** theme by **replacing** earlier two schemes **National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS)** and **Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS)**
- It aims to **reduce the premium burden on farmers** and ensure early settlement of crop assurance claims for the full insured sum.

Interest Subvention

- The interest subvention scheme for farmers aims at providing **short term credit** to farmers at subsidised interest rate.

Kisan Rath mobile application launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Agriculture

In News:

Ministry of Agriculture recently launched **Kisan Rath Mobile App** to **facilitate transportation** of foodgrains and perishables during lockdown.

- This is developed by the **National Informatics Centre**.
- This app shall **facilitate farmers and traders** in **searching** transport vehicles for movement of agricultural and horticultural produce.
- It will also help farmers and traders for **transporting** produce from **farm gate to mandi and mandi to mandi** all over the country.
- The App will also facilitate traders in transportation of **perishable commodities** by Refrigerated vehicles.
- It is ready for **pan-India use** with the app being available in eight Indian languages.
- **National Informatics Centre (NIC)** is an attached office under **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)**, Government of India.



ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

SAFAR

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Environment

In News:

- According to the Centre-run **System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR)**, the measures against COVID-19 have led to a drop in PM2.5 (fine particulate pollutant) to a great extent in major cities like Delhi and Pune.

Key takeaways:

- With a nationwide lockdown in place, over 90 cities, including Delhi, have recorded **minimal air pollution** in the last few days.
- The level of Nitrogen Oxide (NOx) pollution, mainly caused due to a high motor vehicle traffic, has also reduced.
- NOx pollution can increase the risk of respiratory conditions.

Important value additions:

System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR)

- It was indigenously **developed by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune**.
- It is run by **India Meteorological Department (IMD)**.
- The **objective** is to **provide Real-time air quality index** on 24x7 basis with **colour coding** along with 72-hour advance weather forecast.
- Another goal is to **issue health advisory** to prepare citizens well in advance.

Air quality improves due to lockdown

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Environment

In News:

- The ongoing lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic has pushed **pollution levels** in Delhi to a **5-year low**.
- Across India, the number of cities that recorded 'good' on the **air quality index jumped** from 6 to 30 within a fortnight, according to data from the **Central Pollution Control Board**.

Key takeaways:

- Level of particulate matter, **PM 2.5** - the most dangerous pollutant - also **reduced**.
- Overall, up to **44% reduction** in **PM10** levels was observed in Delhi.

Important value additions:

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)

- It is a **statutory organisation** under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (Mo.E.F.C).
- It was **established** in 1974 **under the Water (Prevention and Control of pollution) Act, 1974**.
- It is also **entrusted** with the powers and functions under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.
- It **provides technical services** to the Ministry of Environment and Forests under the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

- It **Co-ordinates** the activities of the State Pollution Control Boards by providing technical assistance and guidance and also **resolves disputes** among them.
- It is the **apex organisation** in country in the field of pollution control.

Air Quality Index (AQI)

- The AQI is an index for **reporting daily air quality**.
- It tells how clean or polluted the air is.
- The higher the AQI value, the greater the level of air pollution and the greater the health Concern.
- Research studies have attributed the **key sources of PM_{2.5}** in summer to be: dust and construction activities (35%), transport sector (20%) and industry (20%).

Third mass bleaching of Great Barrier Reef recorded

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

In News:

- **Australia's Great Barrier Reef** has suffered its **most widespread coral bleaching** on record.
- Record sea temperatures caused the third **mass bleaching** of the 2,300-kilometre reef system in **just five years**.

Key takeaways:

- **For the first time**, severe bleaching has struck **all three regions** of the Great Barrier Reef -- the northern, central and now large parts of the southern sectors.
- The **damage** came as **February brought the highest monthly sea temperatures** on the Great Barrier Reef since Australia began keeping records in 1900.

Important value additions:

Bleaching

- Bleaching occurs when **healthy corals** become **stressed** by **changes in ocean temperatures**, causing them to **expel algae** living in their tissues which drains them of their vibrant colours.
- Bleaching was first seen on the reef in 1998 -- at the time, the hottest year on record -- but as temperature records continue to tumble its frequency has increased, giving coral less time to recover.



Image source:

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.mapsofworld.com/answers/world/where-is-great-barrier-reef-located/amp/>

Amendments made to Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006 amidst COVID-19

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Environment Impact Assessment

In News:

- To ramp up availability/production of various drugs against COVID-19, **Ministry of Environment** has made an amendment to **Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006**.
- All projects or activities in respect of **bulk drugs and intermediates**, manufactured for addressing various ailments, have been **re-categorized** from the existing Category 'A' to 'B2' category.
- The re-categorization of such proposals will lead to **decentralization of appraisal** to State Level, thus helping in fast track the process.
- This amendment is applicable to all proposals received up to 30th September 2020.

Important value additions:

Environment Impact Assessment (EIA)

- It is a **process of evaluating** the likely environmental **impacts** of a proposed project
- It is statutorily backed by the **Environment Protection Act, 1986**.
- **New EIA legislation, 2006** makes it **mandatory** for various projects such as mining, thermal power plants, river valley, infrastructure and industries to get **environment clearance**.
- The onus of clearing projects is on the **state government** depending on the size/capacity of the project.
- Environment Impact Assessment **Notification of 2006** has **decentralized the environmental clearance projects** by categorizing the developmental projects in two categories - **Category A** (national level appraisal) and **Category B** (state level appraisal).
- Category A projects - They require **mandatory environmental clearance** and thus they **do not undergo** the screening process.
- Category B Projects- They undergo screening process and they are classified into two types:
 - Category B1 projects (**Mandatorily require EIA**).
 - Category B2 projects (**Do not require EIA**).

Anthurium flowers: Indoor air purifiers

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Biodiversity and Indigenous Technology

In News:

- **National Innovation Foundation-India (NIF)** has recently boosted new varieties of **Anthurium**, a flower with high market value.
- These flowers which **help to purify air** are cultivated by a lady innovator from Kerala.

Important value additions:

Anthurium

- It is a vast group of **beautiful blooming plants** available in a wide range of colors.

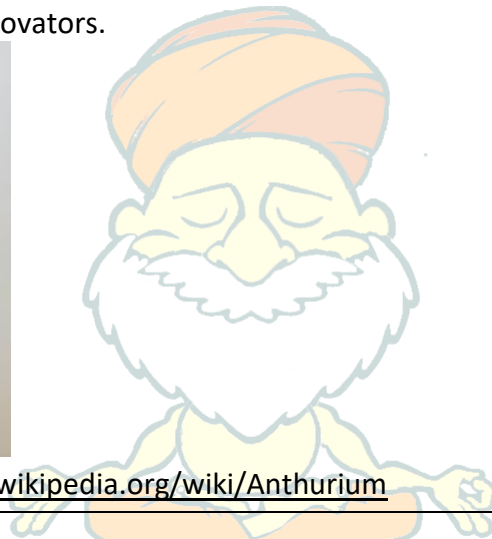
- These are large beautiful flowers.
- These have better shelf life and good market value.
- They **remove harmful airborne chemicals** like formaldehyde, ammonia, toluene, xylene, and allergens.
- Due to its importance of removing toxic substances from the air, **NASA has placed it in the list of air purifier plants.**

National Innovation Foundation-India

- It is India's **national initiative** to **strengthen the grassroots technological innovations** and outstanding traditional knowledge.
- **Mission:** To help India become a **creative and knowledge-based society.**
- It was set up with the support of Honey Bee Network.
- NIF **supports** grassroots innovations which are developed by **individuals and local communities** in **any technological field** without any help from formal sector.
- It also tries to **ensure** that such **innovations spread widely** through commercial and/or non-commercial channels which will help in generating material or non-material incentives for the innovators.



Image source: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthurium>



Hydrogen fuel based buses and cars: Expression of Interest issued by NTPC

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Science and Technology

In News:

- **NTPC Ltd**, has invited Global Expression of Interest (EoI) to provide **Hydrogen Fuel Cell (FC) based electric buses and electric cars** in **Leh and Delhi.**
- NTPC Ltd. Is India's **largest power producer** and a central PSU under **Ministry of Power.**

Key takeaways:

- The move to procure Hydrogen Fuel Cell based vehicles is **first of its kind project** in the country.
- Under this project, a **complete solution** from green energy to the fuel cell vehicle would be developed.
- The initiative has been undertaken with support of **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.**

- The initiative will also **harness renewable energy** for **generation** of hydrogen and **develop** its storage and dispensation facilities at Leh and Delhi.
- The project aims at **reducing carbon emissions** from automobiles.

Important value additions:

Hydrogen Fuel

- Hydrogen **does not occur free** in nature in useful quantities.
 - It can be **made from natural gas** or it can be made **by passing electric current** through water.
 - When hydrogen is burned, it only emits water vapour and **carbon dioxide (CO₂) is not produced.**
 - It is more efficient than internal combustion engine.
 - However, manufacturing hydrogen fuel based vehicle is still expensive.
-



ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS

Human to animal transmission of coronavirus reported

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health; GS-III - Conservation

In News:

- A **Malayan tiger** at New York's Bronx Zoo has been infected with the COVID 19.

Key takeaways:

- Four-year-old Nadia is believed to have caught the virus **from a zoo employee**, who had **not shown** symptoms.
- Till now, humans have been infecting humans.
- It is theoretically possible for the virus to **mutate again** to survive in certain species after being transmitted by humans.

Important value additions:

Malayan tiger

- The Malayan tiger is a *Panthera tigris tigris* population in Peninsular Malaysia.
- This population inhabits the **southern and central parts of the Malay Peninsula**.
- It has been classified as **Critically Endangered** on the IUCN Red List in 2015.



Image source : <https://www.tigers-world.com/malayan-tiger/>

Fall Armyworm attack the standing crops in Assam

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Environment

In News:

- **Fall armyworm attack** on the standing crops in various **districts of Assam** has been reported recently.

Important value additions:

Fall armyworm

- Fall Armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*) is an **insect**.
- It is widely distributed in **Eastern and Central North America** and in **South America**.
- It has spread across the world because of **trade** and its **strong flying ability**.
- **India's tropical climate** could allow the pest to thrive and spread further.
- If not well managed, it can **cause significant damage** to crops in its **larva stage**.
- It can **affect** large variety of species of crops, primarily **maize**.
- It can be **controlled with**:
 - insecticides (like lambda-cyhalothrin)

- through natural predators (such as coccinellid beetles)
- by inter-cropping.

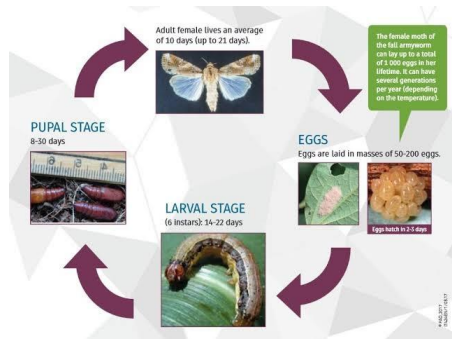


Image source: <https://vikaspedia.in/agriculture/crop-production/integrated-pest-management/fall-armyworm-FAW>

Trimeresurus Salazar: New Species of green pit viper found

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Biodiversity

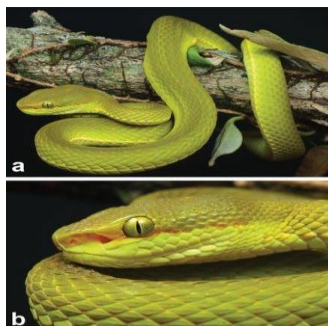
In News:

- A **new species** of **green pit viper** has been discovered in Arunachal Pradesh recently which was named **Trimeresurus Salazar**.
- It has been collected from the **Pakke Tiger Reserve** in Pakke-Kessang district in Arunachal Pradesh.

Important value additions:

Trimeresurus Salazar - Green pit viper

- Green pit viper is a common name for several venomous snakes and may refer to:
 - **Trimeresurus albolabris** (native to southeastern Asia from India to China and Indonesia)
 - **Trimeresurus macrops** (native to Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam)
 - **Trimeresurus trigonocephalus** (endemic to Sri Lanka)
 - And, now, newly discovered **Trimeresurus Salazar** (Arunachal Pradesh)
- Salazar's pit viper belongs to the genus **Trimeresurus Lacépède**.
- They are **morphologically and ecologically diverse** species.
- They are distinguished by their **heat-sensing pit organs** between the eye and the nostril.
- IUCN status of Trimeresurus Salazar: yet to be known.



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ambu Bags

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Science and technology

In News:

- The the government has been urged by IIT - Hyderabad to consider the use of '**bag valve masks**' as an **alternative** to meet any surge in demand for ventilators, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key takeaways:

- Bag valve masks are **small devices** used to deliver **breathing support** in emergency situations.
- They are also known as "**ambu bags**".
- These are **currently hand-powered** and therefore not suitable for continuous use as a ventilator.
- Similar devices can be manufactured which is **powered by an electrical source**, like a car battery or conventional power supply.
- It is a **portable** and **affordable** device **suitable to use** even in villages and other remote areas.
- **Conventional ventilators** are generally **expensive**, hard to produce and not portable.



Image source: <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/bag-valve-masks-pitched-as-alternatives-to-ventilators/article31211951.ece>

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) developed by DRDO

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Science and Technology

In News:

- **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** has developed a **bio suit** to keep the medical, paramedical and other personnel, who engaged in combating COVID-19, **safe** from the deadly virus.
- It has also developed technologies for **sanitising areas** of different sizes.

Key takeaways:

- DRDO has developed this Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) having **specific type of fabric with coating**.
- It has prepared a **special sealant** as an alternative to seam sealing tape based on the sealant used in **submarine applications**.

- For sanitising small area, **Portable Backpack Area Sanitisation Equipment** has been developed.
- **Trolley Mounted Large Area Sanitisation Equipment** is developed for sanitising large areas.

Important value additions:

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)

- It is an agency of the Government of India, charged with the **military's research and development**, headquartered in New Delhi.

[Geo-fencing app: To Locate quarantine violators](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science & Technology

In News:

- The application is called COVID-19 Quarantine Alert System (CQAS).
- CQAS relies on the person's mobile phone's cell tower location
- The app triggers e-mails and SMS alerts to an authorised government agency if a person has jumped quarantine or escaped isolation
- Department of Telecom (DoT) and C-DOT, in coordination with telecom service providers, have developed this application.

Important value additions:

- **The Indian Telegraph Act** empowers the government to seek phone data telecom companies – being utilized to track COVID-19 cases (Due process of Law followed)
- Centre for Development of Telematics (**C-DOT**) established as registered society in 1984 is an autonomous Telecom R&D centre of DoT, Government of India.

[AarogyaSetu App: To assess the risk of catching Coronavirus infection](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science & Technology

In News:

- **Objective of App:** To enable people to assess themselves the risk of catching the Coronavirus infection
- **Working:** The app utilizing Bluetooth technology detects other devices (also having same app) that comes in the proximity of the phone.
- It then calculates the risk of infection based on sophisticated algorithms and artificial intelligence if any of these contacts is tested positive.
- The app helps in quick contact tracing if a person is tested positive
- **Developed by public-private** collaboration involving multiple stakeholders
- **Privacy Upheld:** The personal data collected by the App is encrypted and stays secure on the phone till it is needed for facilitating medical intervention.

[Funding for developing nasal passage gel approved](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health; GS – III – Science and Technology

In News:

- **Department of Science and Technology (DST)** has approved funding for Department of Biosciences and Bioengineering, IIT Bombay.
- The team from the department shall develop a **gel that can be applied to nasal passage**.
- It will **capture** and **inactivate** novel corona virus, the causative agent of COVID-19.
- This solution will **ensure the safety** of health workers.
- It can lead to **reduction in community transmission** of COVID-19.

Walk through Mass sanitizing Tunnel at Ahmedabad station

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Governance; Health; GS-III - Science and technology

In News:

- **Ahmedabad railway station** becomes the first station of Indian Railways to **install a Walk Through Mass Sanitizing Tunnel**.

Key takeaways:

- It is set up to ensure the **safety of staff and passengers** in view of the COVID-19.
- The distance can be covered **within 10 seconds**.
- The tunnel is **fitted with a sensor** so that when a passenger approaches the tunnel entrance, it starts **fogging automatically** with WHO approved sanitizer.
- The system runs on the **principle of Vaporization** process.
- It **converts the sanitizer mixture into vapour** which forms a uniform layer over the surface and dries up quickly.

NAADI: Science - based tool to track COVID-19 patients

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Science and technology

In News:

- The **Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC)** has prepared a Data Science-based tool.
- The tool shall help in **tracking the movements** of COVID -19 patients or quarantined people across the country.

Key takeaways:

- The system has been named **National Analytical Platform for Dealing with Intelligent Tracing, Tracking and Containment (NAADI)**.
- The information generated by the tool would be **accurate up to a metre**.

Important value additions:

- The development of this tool is undertaken by C-DAC under **Supercomputer using Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Healthcare Analytics based Research, Covid-19 (SAMHAR)**.
- The **SAMHAR project** is in partnership with the **National Supercomputing Mission**.
- The mission was established in association with startups and industries to **build a rapid supercomputing system** and research community for India **to fight COVID-19**.

The Centre for Development of Advanced Computing

- It is an Autonomous Scientific Society of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India.

The National Centre for Software Technology, ER&DCI and CEDTI **were merged** into C-DAC in 2003

Two recent innovations by National Chemical Laboratory: Digital Thermometer & Oxygen Enrichment Unit

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Science and technology

In News:

- **Recent innovations** by CSIR-National Chemical Laboratory, Pune, can **help in the mitigation** of the Coronavirus outbreak.
- The innovations are **Hand held digital IR thermometer** and **Oxygen enrichment unit (OEU)**.

Key takeaways:

- **Hand held digital IR thermometer** is an important component of measures to mitigate Coronavirus outbreak.
- Mobile phone or power banks can be used as a power source.
- The design of thermometer is **available open source** wherein software design and mass manufacturing-ready hardware will be available to manufacturers across India for free.
- **Oxygen enrichment unit (OEU)** will **increase the oxygen concentration** from the ambient air of 21-22% to 38-40%.
- OEU is **hollow fiber membrane** bundles which will separate and filtrate ambient air to **produce enriched oxygen** for patients in home and hospital settings.

CovidGyan: Multi-institutional, Multi-lingual science communication initiative created

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

In News:

- A **multi-institutional, multi-lingual science** communication initiative, called 'CovidGyan' has been created to bring the **scientific** and **factual aspects** of this pandemic outbreak on to public domain.

Key takeaways:

- The initiative is the **brainchild** of Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Indian Institute of Science (IISc), and Tata Memorial Centre (TMC).
- A **website** named 'CovidGyan' was also launched under this initiative.
- The website serves as a **hub** to bring together a **collection of resources** in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- The **primary objective** of the website is to **create public awareness** and bring in a **holistic approach** to the understanding of this disease and potential means to mitigate it.

Pooled Testing advisory issued by Indian Council of Medical Research

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Governance & GS-III – Science and Technology

In News:

- **The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** has issued an advisory for using **pooled samples** for testing of COVID-19.

Key takeaways:

- ICMR recommendations:
 - The number of samples **should not exceed five samples** at a time. This is to avoid sample dilution, which can lead to false negatives.
 - This method **can be used** in areas where the **prevalence** of COVID-19 is **low**, which means a positivity rate of less than 2%.
 - In areas with a positivity rate between 2 to 5%, sample pooling of PCR screening may be done among asymptomatic individuals
 - Pooling of sample is **not recommended** in areas or population with **positivity rates of over 5%**.

Important value additions:

- In a pooled testing algorithm, **samples of multiple individuals** are put together in a tube and **screened** through the **PCR test**.
- In case the **pooled test** turns out to be **positive**, individual samples are tested, known as **pool de-convolution**.
- If there's **no positive** result, all **individual samples** in the pool are regarded as **negative**.
- Benefits:
 - Substantial costs and testing kits are saved.
 - Pooled screening can also **help in tracking down** the asymptomatic cases, thereby helps in **tracking community transmission**.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)

- It is the **apex body** in India for the **formulation, coordination** and **promotion of biomedical research**.
- It is **one of the oldest** and **largest** medical research bodies in the world.
- The ICMR is **funded by the Government of India** through the Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Integrated geospatial platform launched for better decisions in COVID-19 outbreak

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II –Governance & GS-III – Science and Technology

In News:

- The Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, has created an **Integrated Geospatial Platform** out of available geospatial datasets to **help decision making** during the current COVID-19 outbreak.
- The platform shall **aid in devising area-specific strategies** to handle the socio-economic impact in the recovery phase.

Key takeaways:

- The mobile application **SAHYOG** and the web portal have been launched for the same objective.
- It is managed by the **Survey of India (Sol)**.
- It is **customized** to collect COVID-19 specific data through community engagement to augment the response activities by Government of India to the pandemic.
- This mobile application will **complement** the “**AAROGYA-SETU**” .
- This integrated geospatial platform **will strengthen the Nation’s health emergency management** due to the COVID-19 outbreak and support the socio-economic recovery process.

Important value additions:

AAROGYA-SETU

- It is a **mobile application** launched by the Government of India for **Contact tracing, Public awareness, and Self-assessment** objectives amidst COVID-19 pandemic.

Solid-state sensor to detect the heavy metal ions developed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

In News:

- Centre for Nano and Soft Matter Sciences (CeNS) has developed a compact solid-state sensor to **detect the heavy metal ions in water**.
- The sensor **can detect** the heavy metal ions, e.g., lead ions (Pb²⁺) down to 0.4 parts per billion (ppb) for **efficient onsite detection**.

Important value additions:

Heavy metal ions

- Heavy metal ions such as lead, mercury and cadmium pose **severe potential threats** to living beings as they can **easily be accumulated** in the body.
- They **cannot be detoxified** by any chemical or biological processes.

Centre for Nano and Soft Matter Sciences (CeNS)

- It is an **autonomous research institute** under Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India.
- DST provides **core support** to the Centre in the form of a **grant-in-aid** for conducting basic and applied research in nano and soft matter sciences.
- CeNS is located at Jalahalli, Bengaluru.
- The **current activities** of the Centre are focussed on a variety of metal and semiconductor nanostructures, liquid crystals, gels, membranes and hybrid materials.
- It is being mentored by **Nano-Mission** of the Government of India.

COVSACK

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

- Defence Research & Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad under DRDO has developed **COVID Sample Collection Kiosk (COVSACK)** to combat Coronavirus (COVID-19).
- It is a **kiosk** for use by healthcare workers **for taking COVID-19 samples** from suspected infected patients.

- Patient under test walks into the Kiosk and a nasal or oral swab is taken by health care professional from outside through the built in gloves.
- The Kiosk is **automatically disinfected** without the need for human involvement.

Chitra GeneLAMP-N

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology, Trivandrum, an **Institute of National Importance**, of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), has developed a **diagnostic test kit** that can confirm COVID19 in **2 hours at low cost**.

- It detects the N Gene of SARS- COV2 using **reverse transcriptase loop-mediated amplification of viral nucleic acid** (RT-LAMP).
- It will be one of the **world's first few** of its kinds in the world.
- It can detect **two regions of the gene**, which will ensure that the test does not fail even if one region of the viral gene undergoes mutation during its current spread.

Anastomosis

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

An anastomosis is a **surgical connection** between two structures.

- It usually means a connection that is created **between tubular structures**, such as blood vessels or loops of intestine.
- Severed hand of an assistant sub inspector in Punjab was recently re-implanted through the process of anastomosis.

Post-Intensive Care Syndrome (PICS)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

- After leaving the ICU, some **Covid-19 patients** may suffer from **post-intensive care syndrome** (PICS).
- PICS is defined as **new or worsening impairment** in:
 - physical (ICU-acquired neuromuscular weakness),
 - cognitive (thinking and judgment),
 - mental health status.
- It **arises after critical illness** and persists even after getting discharged.

Study on the gamma-ray flux variability nature conducted

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Science and technology

In News:

- Researchers from the **Indian Institute of Astrophysics** (IIA), Bangalore, an autonomous institute of the Department of Science & Technology, have conducted the first systematic **study** on the **gamma-ray flux variability nature on different types of blazars**.

Key takeaways:

- At the center of most galaxies, there's a **massive black hole** which can have **mass of millions or even billions of Suns** that gather gas, dust, and stellar debris around it due to the force of gravity.
- As these materials fall towards the black hole, their **gravitational energy gets converted** to light forming **active galactic nuclei (AGN)**.
- A minority of AGN (~15%) **emit accurately parallel charged particles** called jets **travelling** at speeds close to the speed of light. These are known as **Blazars**.

Important value additions:

Blazars

- Blazars are AGN whose jets are **aligned with the observer's line of sight**.
- Some blazars are thought to host **binary black holes** in them.
- They could also be **potential targets** for future gravitational-wave searches.



Image source: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blazar>

Lithium-rich giant stars discovered in space

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Space

In News:

- Researchers at the **Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA)** have discovered hundreds of **Li-rich giant stars in space**.

Key takeaways:

- The discovery indicates that **Lithium (Li)** is **being produced** in the stars.
- The production, thus, accounts for its **abundance** in the interstellar (situated between stars) medium.
- **Lithium enhancement** is also being **associated** with central **Helium (He) burning stars**, also known as **red clump giants**.
- This association could open up **new vistas** in the evolution of the red giant stars.
- This is an **important discovery** that will help to **eliminate** many **proposed theories** such as planet engulfment during the red giant evolution in which helium at the center is not burning.
- Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) is an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology.

Important value additions:

- Lithium (Li), is one of the **three primordial** (from the beginning) elements apart from Hydrogen (H) and Helium (He),

- They were produced in the **big bang nucleosynthesis** (BBN).
- In general, stars are considered as **Li sinks**.
- This means that the original Li, with which stars are born, only gets depleted over stars' life-time.

TIFAC explores best methods to revive Indian economy post COVID-19

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

In News:

- **The Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council** (TIFAC) is preparing a **white paper** to strategize revival of post-COVID 19 Indian economy.

Key takeaways:

- This document would mainly focus on:
 - **strengthening** Make in India initiatives,
 - **commercialization** of Indigenous technology,
 - developing a **technology-driven transparent** Public Distribution System (PDS),
 - **efficient** rural health care delivery,
 - **adoption** of emerging technology domains like AI, Machine Learning and many more.

Important value additions:

TIFAC

- It is an **autonomous technology think tank** under the Department of Science & Technology (DST), Government of India.
- **Thinking for the future** in important socio-economic sectors is one of its mandates.
- It was established in 1986, as per the recommendation of **Technology Policy Implementation Committee** (TPIC) in 1985.
- TIFAC activities comprise of wide array of technology areas and **fill a critical gap** in the overall S&T system of India.

Feluda

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

- Scientists at the **Council of Scientific & Industrial Research — Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology** (CSIR-IGIB) have developed a **low-cost, paper-strip test** which can **detect the new coronavirus within an hour**.
- The test is as named **Feluda**.
- It is named after a **fictional detective character** created by Satyajit Ray.
- It is expected to **cost around Rs 500** against the RT-PCR test that costs Rs 4,500 in private labs.
- The test is **based on a bacterial immune system protein** called **Cas9**.
- It uses cutting-edge gene-editing tool **Crispr-Cas9 system**.
- The technology is **not limited to COVID-19** and can work on any DNA-RNA or single mutations, disease mutations etc.

Role of Nano Mission Programme during COVID-19 pandemic

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

In News:

- As part of **Nano Mission programme**, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) has **approved** support for upscaling an **antiviral nano-coatings** developed by a Professor of IIT, Delhi.
- The nano-coatings will be used as **appropriate material** for producing anti-COVID-19 **Triple Layer Medical masks** and **N-95 respirator** in large quantities.

Key takeaways:

- The **N9 blue nanosilver**, which is a highly potent antimicrobial agent, will be used as nano-material.
- The N9 blue nanosilver will be further modified to form **nanocomplexes with Zinc compounds** to achieve a greater effect.
- Further, these nanomaterials will be applied as **coatings on facemasks** and other **PPEs** so that the **wearer is protected from accidental contamination** from COVID-19 virus droplets.
- The use of highly effective **antimicrobial nanoparticles** on PPEs, masks etc. will provide an **extra layer of protection** for frontline workers who are at greater risk of getting infected with COVID-19, such as the medical workers.

Important value additions:

Nano Mission

- The Government of India launched the Nano Mission in **2007** as an **umbrella capacity-building programme**.
- It is being **implemented by the Department of Science and Technology (DST)** under the Ministry of Science and Technology.
- The **objectives** of the mission are:
 - Basic research promotion
 - Infrastructure development
 - Nano applications and technology development
 - Human Resource development
 - International collaborations
- Today, India is amongst the **top five nations** in the world in terms of scientific publications in nanoscience and technology (3rd position).
- The Nano Mission has led to laying down a **National Regulatory Framework Road-Map for Nanotechnology (NRFR-Nanotech)**.

Sepsivac®: an immunomodulator to enhance innate immunity

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

In News:

- The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has decided to develop/repurpose an approved **immunomodulator**, Sepsivac®,
- It will enhance innate immunity of the body **which will limit the spread** of COVID-19 and **fasten the recovery** of the patients of COVID-19.

Key takeaways:

- **Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI)** has approved the new clinical trials for the immunomodulator.
- The trials will also be held **for evaluating the efficacy of the drug** for reducing mortality (deaths) in critically ill COVID-19 patients.
- The drug is being developed by CSIR through its **flagship New Millennium Indian Technology Leadership Initiative (NMITLI)** program.
- Sepsivac® is expected--
 - to **protect the close contacts** of COVID-19 patients and health care staff by boosting their innate response.
 - to **provide quicker recovery** to the hospitalized COVID-19 patients, who are not critically ill.
- Sepsivac® contains **heat-killed Mycobacterium W (Mw)**.
- **No systemic side effects** are associated with its use.

Important value additions:**Innate immunity**

- **Natural defense mechanism** of the body is known as innate immunity.
- It plays a **key role** in the **fight against viral infections** like COVID-19.
- It is a **fast, first and efficient immune response** for identifying and eliminating viruses.
- Cells of human immune system like **Macrophages, NK cells** offer such protection.

Immunomodulators

- They are medications used to help **regulate or normalize the immune system**.

New Millennium Indian Technology Leadership Initiative (NMITLI)

- It is the **largest public-private-partnership** effort within the Research & Development field in the country.
- NMITLI seeks to act as a catalyst in **innovation-centered scientific and technological developments** and to help Indian industry achieve a global leadership position.

Drugs Controller General of India

- It is responsible for **approval of licences of specified categories of drugs** such as blood and blood products, IV fluids, vaccines, and sera in India.
- It comes under the **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**.
- DCGI **sets standards** for manufacturing, sales, import, and distribution of drugs in India.

NanoBlitz 3D**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology

- It is developed by the scientists from **International Advanced Research Centre for Powder Metallurgy and New Materials (ARCI)**, an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology.
- It is an **advanced tool for mapping nano-mechanical properties** of nano materials like multi-phase alloys, composites, and multi-layered coatings.
- It **enables the performance** of a large array, typically consisting of 1000s high-speed **nano-indentation tests**.
- Each indentation test takes **less than one second** to measure hardness and elastic modulus of a given material.

- It provides capabilities to carry out advanced data analysis.

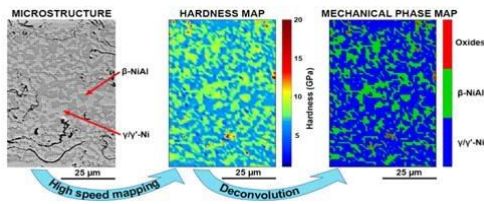


Image source: <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=202482>

GW190412: Merger of two unequal-mass black holes.

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Space

In News:

- The gravitational wave observatories at LIGO scientific collaboration have detected a merger of two unequal-mass black holes for the first time since it started functioning.

Key takeaways:

- The event is dubbed as **GW190412**.
- It was detected nearly a year ago.
- The event involved two black holes of unequal masses combining together.
- One of the black holes was around **30 times the mass of the Sun** and the other had a mass nearly **8 times the sun's mass**.
- The actual merger took place at a distance of **2.5 billion light years away**.

Important value additions:

The Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO)

- It is a **large-scale physics experiment** and **observatory** to detect cosmic gravitational waves and to develop gravitational-wave observations.
- It is the **world's largest gravitational wave observatory**.
- It consists of **two detectors** situated 1,865 miles (3,002 kilometers) apart in isolated regions in the states of **Washington and Louisiana**.

SN 2010kd: a super-luminous supernova that exploded rapidly and decayed slowly

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Space

In News:

- Researchers at the Arayabhatta Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES), Nainital recently carried out study of SN 2010kd
- ARIES is an autonomous research institute under the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Govt. of India.

Key takeaways:

- SN 2010kd is a **super-luminous supernova** which ejected huge amounts of **mass** and **Nickel** during explosion.

- The amount of ejection was much more than seen in case of normal core-collapse supernovae, which **indicates** that the related **star evolution** might be **different**.
- It exploded with a larger velocity but **decayed slower** than other similar supernovae.

Important value additions:

- **Supernovae** are types of **energetic explosions** where the core of massive stars explode, liberating huge amounts of energy.
- These events are visible through very far away distances much beyond our own solar system.
- **Super-luminous supernovae** are a special type of explosions having energy output **10 or more times higher** than that of standard supernovae.



DISASTER MANAGEMENT

initiated

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Disaster management; Defence

In News:

- Ministry of Defence (MoD) has allowed **temporary employment of NCC cadets** under 'Exercise NCC Yogdan'.
- These cadets will give a **helping hand** to state and municipal authorities to augment relief efforts against COVID-19.

Important value additions:

National Cadet Corps

- It is the **youth wing** of **Armed Forces** with its Headquarters at New Delhi.
- It is open to school and college students on **voluntary basis**.
- It engaged in **grooming the youth** of the country into disciplined and patriotic citizens.

National directives for COVID-19 Management issued

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health; GS-III - Disaster management

In News:

- Union Government has recently issued a list of National Directives for COVID-19 management while extending the lockdown period till 3rd May, 2020.

Key takeaways:

- **Spitting** in public is prohibited and punishable with a fine.
- Wearing of **face cover** in work places and public places has been made compulsory.
- No organization and manager of public spaces shall allow **gathering** of five or more persons.
- Gatherings such as **marriages** and **funerals** shall remain **regulated** by the District Magistrate.
- There will be a **strict ban** on sale of items such as liquor, gutka and tobacco.
- All work places must have **adequate arrangements** for temperature screening and provide sanitizers at convenient places.
- Work places should have a **gap** of one hour between shifts and lunch breaks to ensure **social distancing**.
- Both private and public work places are asked to encourage the use of **Arogya Setu** for all employees.

Important value additions:

Arogya Setu

Arogya Setu is a **COVID-19 tracking mobile application**

- It is developed by the **National Informatics Centre** that comes under the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology**, Government of India.
- The **purpose** of this app is to **spread the awareness** and to **connect** essential health services to the people of India.

- It uses smartphone's **GPS** and **Bluetooth** features to track the coronavirus infection.
- It is an **updated version** of an earlier app called **Corona Kavach** (now discontinued).
- Aarogya Setu has **four sections**:
 - Your Status: tells the risk of getting COVID-19 for the user.
 - Self-Assess: lets the user know the risk of being infected.
 - COVID-19 Update: gives update on the local and national COVID-19 cases.

E-pass: yet to go active.

Troughs and crests in the pandemic response

Context: COVID-19 pandemic has proven the ultimate stress test for governance systems across the globe

What are the different stages that governments have adopted to tackle pandemic?

First Stage:

- Early recognition of the threat and the decision to lock down society.
- Lockdown is aimed at buying time, of flattening the epidemic curve, so that public health facilities are not over-burdened
- The period is also used to secure the personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies necessary to save lives

Second Stage

- Measured opening up of lockdown to slowly ease the burden on the economy by permitting restricted business activity
- This ensures that livelihoods and supply chains can be restored.
- This stage can be successful if accompanied by a war-footing expansion of testing capacity so that new infections can be identified and isolated at once

Final Stage

- Mass vaccination programme
- Full rebuilding of economic and social life through fiscal and monetary measures

What are the limitations of contemporary governance systems?

1. Opportunistic and Nationalistic politicking

- This involves xenophobic (dislike against people from other countries) posturing by governments Ex: US President terming virus as Chinese Virus
- This is done to deflect the criticism of government's measures by stirring up emotions of people
- It prevents robust and multidimensional international cooperation between nations.
- It undermines epidemiologists, medical community and research scientists from sharing knowledge about disease & its cure

2. Lack of whole-of-government strategy

- Pandemic response requires political will and legitimate leadership, failure of which results in weak & uncoordinated response to pandemic
- Ex: Germany where States enjoy lot of power, Chancellor Angela Merkel was able to mobilize the entire system which has led to success story in Europe

- However, in US where states also enjoy lot of powers, US President was not forthcoming in mobilization of entire system which led to massive spread of disease

3. Weak public health systems due to policies in recent decades

- Kerala, which has consistently ranked at the top of State rankings for health expenditures, was successful in tackling the pandemic

How has India fared in epidemic response?

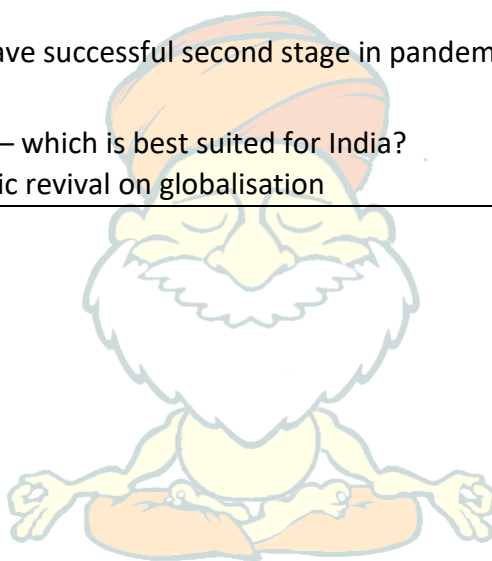
- Being in the first stage of response, India has successfully flattened epidemic curve
- India's outreach to SAARC for a coordinated regional response was appreciated.
- India realises the importance of multilateralism for tackling this global issue and has called for global coordination in vaccine discovery
- There has also been strong political will in mobilising the entire system to tackle the pandemic (PM consultation with all Chief Ministers of States)
- However, the communalisation of pandemic by few is threatening the social fabric of country

Conclusion

It is to be seen if India will have successful second stage in pandemic response

Connecting the dots

- SAARC and BIMSTEC – which is best suited for India?
- Impact of Nationalistic revival on globalisation



DEFENCE/INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY

The National Cyber Coordination Centre issues guidelines against Zoom app

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Cybersecurity

In News:

- **The National Cyber Coordination Centre** (CyCord), under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), issued a set of guidelines for safe usage of Zoom – a web based video conferencing tool.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has issued an advisory that the Zoom is **not a safe platform**.

Key takeaways:

USA based ZOOM video communication has seen an **exponential rise** in usage in India as office-goers remain at home owing to the present lockdown.

- The **software** used in the online platform is said to be **made in China** and some calls were being routed through servers in China.

Important value additions:


The National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC)

- The NCCC was developed in 2017.
- It is an operational **cybersecurity** and **e-surveillance agency** in India.
- It is intended to **screen communication metadata** (little snippets of information hidden inside each communication) and **co-ordinate** the intelligence gathering activities of other agencies.
- Some have expressed **concern** that the body could encroach on Indian citizens' privacy and civil-liberties, given the lack of explicit privacy laws in the country.
- Components of the NCCC include:
 - a cybercrime prevention strategy,
 - cybercrime investigation training and
 - review of outdated laws.
- **Indian and U.S. intelligence agencies** are also working together to **curb misuse of social media platforms** in the virtual world by terror groups


Zoom

- It is a **web-based video conferencing tool** with a local, desktop client and a mobile **app** that allows users to meet online, with or without video.

MISCELLANEOUS


In News	Description
1. Azithromycin - Hydroxychloroquine Combination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Union Health Ministry has allowed the use of Hydroxychloroquine in combination with Azithromycin under severe conditions. The earlier guidelines which included use of Anti-HIV drugs Ritonavir-Lopinavir in high risk patients, now stand repealed. Azithromycin is commonly used as an antibiotic. Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) is used in treatment of autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis. It is also used in treating malaria. The azithromycin-hydroxychloroquine combination is part of an upcoming multi-country trial anchored by the World Health Organization to against COVID-19.
1. Natuna Islands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natuna Islands are within Indonesia's exclusive economic zone but are also claimed by China. Recently, China has sparked a major maritime confrontation with Indonesia near the South China Sea by entering waters along with dozens of Chinese fishing vessels.  <p>Source: United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)</p>
2. GreenCo Rating System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GreenCo Rating system has been acknowledged in India's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) document. It is used as a proactive voluntary action of Indian industry / private sector towards combating climate change. It is developed by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). CII is a non-government, not-for-profit, industry-led and industry-managed organization
3. 'CARUNA' initiative formed by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Associations representing officers of Central Civil Services, including IAS and IPS officers, have formed an initiative called 'Caruna' to support and supplement the government's efforts in fighting

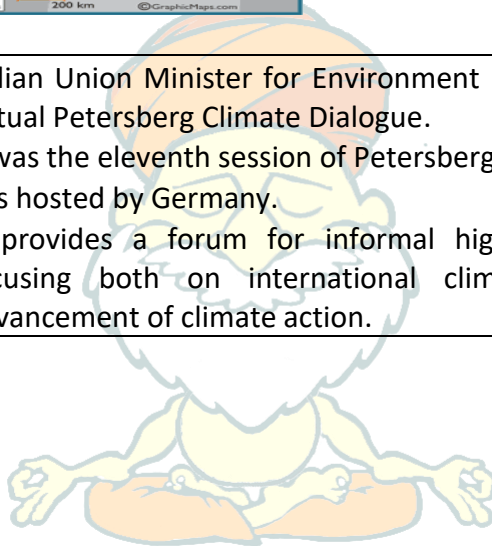
Central Civil Services officers	<p>coronavirus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The acronym 'Caruna' stands for Civil Services Associations Reach to Support in Natural Disasters. It represents a collaborative platform by civil servants, industry leaders, NGO professionals and IT professionals and many others.
4. Operation Sanjeevani	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IAF airlifts essential medicines to Maldives An Indian Air Force (IAF) C-130J transport aircraft delivered essential medicines and hospital consumables to Maldives under Operation Sanjeevani. This is the first such assistance by India in fight against COVID.
5. Project Praana: Indigenous ventilator prototype developed by IISc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In a worst case scenario of COVID-19 crisis, nearly 0.006% of the Indian population (~75,000) will require critical care with access to ventilators Ventilators deliver breaths (oxygen) to a patient who is physically unable to breathe. Challenges to manufacturing ventilators are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited access to pneumatic and electronic hardware, sensors and actuators from the global marketplace Disrupted global supply chain The ventilator prototype will use materials readily available from India The prototype has mass flow sensors and controllers which accurately tell how much oxygen is flowing and what volume the patient is inhaling in one breath
6. National Monitoring Dashboard for COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objective of the dashboard: Monitoring of COVID-19 related grievances on priority basis Developed by Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) of Ministry of Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions The portal will be monitored at senior levels in Government on a daily basis
7. World Health Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The World health day 2020 was celebrated recently with the theme of supporting nurses and midwives. The World Health Day is a global health awareness day celebrated every year on 7 April, under the sponsorship of the World Health Organization (WHO). WHO chose the year 2020 as the "Year of the Nurse and Midwife" because of the contribution made by nurses and midwives in making the world a healthier place.
8. Anak Krakatau volcano eruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indonesia's Anak Krakatau recent volcano eruption is the longest eruption since its explosive collapse in 2018. Anak Krakatoa is an island in the Sunda Strait in the Indonesian province of Lampung. In 1927, Anak Krakatoa emerged from the caldera formed in 1883 by

	<p>the explosive volcanic eruption that destroyed the island of Krakatoa.</p> 
9. Bancassurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insurance regulator Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has allowed the four banks, which emerged from the recent mega bank merger exercise, to continue for a year with existing bancassurance agreements. Bancassurance means selling insurance product through banks. Benefits: On the one hand, the bank earns fee amount and the interest income from the insurance company. On the other hand, the insurance firm increases its market reach and customers. Government of India notification (Banking Regulation Act), 2000, laid out the Bancassurance clearance.
10. CSR Expenditure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Ministry of Commerce has clarified that the Chief Minister's Relief Fund' or 'State Relief Fund for COVID-19' is not included in Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013, and therefore any contribution to such funds shall not qualify as admissible CSR expenditure". Contribution made to State Disaster Management Authority to combat COVID-19 shall qualify as CSR expenditure.
11. Primordial Black Holes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They were born as a result of a tiny bump in the potential energy levels of the universe, at a time when it was expanding rapidly. They were formed during the Hot Big Bang phase. It is believed that they are formed as a result of collapsing radiations. The recent study has confirmed that marginal rise in potential energy resulted in birth of several PBHs and also emitted very powerful gravitational waves. PBH can be massively large or be extremely tiny.
12. Remdesivir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A recent article showed that the drug candidate remdesivir exhibits promising activity against the COVID-19 causing virus. It might work well in retarding virus replication. It was developed by Gilead Sciences as a treatment for Ebola virus disease and Marburg virus infections.
13. Nihang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A group of Nihangs attacked a Punjab police party recently. Nihang is an order of Sikh warriors, characterised by blue robes, antiquated arms such as swords and spears, and decorated turbans surmounted by steel quoits.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any person irrespective of caste, creed or religion can become Nihang provided he has unshorn hair as per the Sikh traditions at the time of entering the sect. Their origin can be traced back to the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. Nihangs had a major role in defending the Sikh panth after the fall of the first Sikh rule (1710-15). Their clout came to an end after the fall of Sikh Empire in 1849. Nihangs today constitute a small community. 		
14. Festivals being celebrated all over India	Vaisakhi	Observed by Sikhs all over the world		
	Vishu	Celebrated in Kerala, Tulu Nadu region in Karnataka, bordering areas of Ta Nadu		
	Rongali Bihu	Celebrated by the people of Assam		
	Naba Barsha	Celebrated in Bengal		
	Puthandu	Tamil Nadu new year		
15. Bharat Padhe Online		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launched by Ministry of Human Resource Development, it is a week long campaign for Crowd sourcing of ideas for improving online education ecosystem of India. 		
16. CollabCAD		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), NITI Aayog and National Informatics Centre (NIC) have jointly launched CollabCAD recently. The aim of this initiative is to provide a great platform to students of Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) across country to create and modify 3D Computer Aided Designs with free flow of creativity and imagination. 		
17. COVID India Seva		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has launched 'COVID India Seva', an interactive platform for citizen engagement on COVID-19. It provided an interactive platform to establish a direct channel of communication with millions of Indians amid the pandemic. This initiative is aimed at enabling transparent e-governance delivery and answering citizen queries swiftly 		
18. Mobile App Saiyam		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mobile App Saiyam, launched by Pune Municipal Corporation, tracks Home Quarantined Citizens. It is developed to ensure they are actually staying in the home. It was developed under Smart Cities Mission (SCM). It has GPS tracking as well. 		
19. Earth Day		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Earth day is observed on April 22 in order to create awareness about pollution and to celebrate the environment of our planet. This year is a special occasion as it marks the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day. The theme of the day this year is 'Climate Action'. 		

20. Noor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iran recently announced that it had successfully launched Noor, the nation's first military satellite. • The satellite, dubbed "Noor" or light, was sent into orbit using a long-range rocket. • Such a launch raised concerns among experts on whether the technology used could help Iran develop intercontinental ballistic missiles. • This is another move in the fight between U.S and Iran over the regime's missile programs.
21. Reliance Jio-Facebook deal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recently, Facebook has acquired a 9.99 % stake in Reliance Industries' Jio Platforms making it the largest FDI for minority investment in India. • Jio Platforms is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Reliance Industries Limited which is responsible for digital apps, digital ecosystems and the mobile service. • It marks Facebook's formal entry into India's telecom sector. • Facebook has also become one of the biggest foreign investors in India's technology space.
22. Kasowal Bridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has constructed and opened a new permanent bridge on the 'Ravi River' connecting Kasowal enclave in Punjab to the rest of the country. • The 484-meter bridge was built by Border Roads Task Force (BRTF) of Project Chetak. • The enclave was previously connected via temporary bridge of limited load capacity which had to be dismantled every year prior to the Monsoon.
23. Benzalkonium Chloride	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the household cleaning agents consist of benzalkonium chloride solution. • It is a chemical with antimicrobial properties acting against pathogens such as bacteria, fungi and viruses. • It is primarily a skin irritant. • The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) classifies benzalkonium chlorides (BACs) in toxicity category II by oral and inhalation routes and category III via the dermal (skin) route.
24. Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many countries, industry groups, and NGOs have committed to join a project called Access to COVID-19 Tools led by the World Health Organization. • It is a global collaboration to accelerate the development, production and equitable access to New COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines.
25. Exercise 'Pitch Black'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pitch Black 2020, Australia's premier multilateral air combat training exercise has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 situation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In its last edition in 2018, the Indian Air Force (IAF) deployed fighter aircraft for the first time. • The bilateral naval exercise AUSINDEX (between Australia and India), early last year, saw participation of the largest Australian contingent ever to India with over 1,000 personnel.
26. Tripoli	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tripoli is the capital city and the largest city of Libya. • Violent protests have erupted in the city recently over a spiralling economic crisis despite a coronavirus lockdown. 
27. Petersberg Climate Dialogue XI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indian Union Minister for Environment represented India in the first virtual Petersberg Climate Dialogue. • It was the eleventh session of Petersberg Climate Dialogue. • It is hosted by Germany. • It provides a forum for informal high-level political discussions, focusing both on international climate negotiations and the advancement of climate action.



(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)

Q.1 Consider the following statements regarding Jammu And Kashmir Reorganisation (Adaptation of State Laws) Order, 2020:

1. Under new domicile rule, a person residing in J&K for at least 15 years will now be eligible to be a domicile of the UT.
2. Tehsildar shall be the competent authority for issuing the domicile certificate.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.2 Consider the following statements regarding Ways and Means Advances:

1. It is a temporary liquidity arrangement with the Reserve Bank of India.
2. The government can borrow money only up to 50 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.3 Consider the following statements:

1. Taxpayers avail the Sabka Vishwas Legal Dispute Resolution Scheme to settle their indirect tax disputes.
2. Donations made to PM Cares fund will be 100% exempted of the income tax.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.4 Consider the following statements:

1. National Pharmaceutical Pricing Policy (NPPP) is the policy governing price control.
2. Drug Price Control Orders (DPCO) is the order by which price control is enforced.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.5 Consider the following statements:

1. Under Export Promotion Capital Goods, an exporter can import certain amount of capital goods at zero duty.
2. Directorate General of Foreign Trade is the agency of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.6 The headquarter of Tablighi Jamaat is located at which of the following?

- a) Delhi
- b) Lucknow

- c) Ajmer
- d) Bhopal

Q.7 Consider the following differences between Ambu bags and conventional ventilators:

1. Ambu bags are inexpensive to produce while conventional ventilators are not.
2. Both required continuous power supply to operate.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.8 Consider the following statements:

1. Convalescent plasma therapy was recently approved by World Health Organisation.
2. Antibodies from the recovered coronavirus patient are transferred to critically ill patient in this therapy.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.9 Consider the following statements regarding SAFAR:

1. It provides Real-time air quality index on 24x7 bases with colour coding.
2. It issues health advisory to prepare citizens well in advance.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.10 Consider the following statements:

1. Minister of State Human Resource Development (HRD) recently launched Hack the Crisis - India.
2. It is a part of global initiative.

Which of the 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:

1. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) developed by DRDO has specific type of fabric with coating.
2. It has prepared a special sealant based on the sealant used in submarine applications.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.12 Consider the following statements regarding State Disaster Risk Management Fund (SDRF):

1. It is the primary fund available with State Governments for responses to notified disasters.
2. Centre contributes 75% of SDRF allocation to general category States and Union Territories.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.13 Consider the following statements:

1. PM 2.5 is the most dangerous pollutant.
2. Key sources of PM2.5 are dust and construction activities, transport sector and industry.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.14 Consider the following statements regarding AarogyaSetu App

3. It is developed by NASSCOM
4. It will enable people to assess themselves the risk of catching the Coronavirus infection

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.15 Consider the following statements about e-NAM

1. It is an online agricultural trading platform managed by Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC)
2. All Agricultural Marketing Produce Committees (APMC) in India have been linked in this platform

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.16 Project Praana recently seen in news is related to

- a) Ensuring Clean drinking water

- b) Development of Indigenous ventilators
- c) Tracking COVID-19 cases
- d) None of the above

Q.17 Consider the following statements about Price Monitoring & Resource Unit (PMRU)

1. It was recently set up in Jammu & Kashmir
2. It helps authorities in checking overpricing and addressing local issues of shortages/hoarding in the current situation when country is fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Which of the 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:

1. Real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction detects the virus.
2. Rapid antibody - based test detects the body's response to the virus.

Which of the 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:

1. Free testing and treatment of COVID-19 shall be available under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme.
2. The testing can be done only by the government hospitals.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only

- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.20 Consider the following statements

1. Prototype ventilator named Jeevan is developed by Ministry of Health and welfare.
2. The heart of the device is compressed air container.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.21 Centre for Augmenting War with COVID-19 Health Crisis is a platform for which of the following?

- a) Medical Health professionals
- b) NGOs
- c) Startups and innovations
- d) Various government ministries

Q.22 Consider the following statements:

1. The Central government has approved Non-operation of MPLADS for one year
2. Funds will be used to strengthen Government's efforts in managing COVID19 in the country.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.23 Consider the following statements:

1. Union Cabinet has approved an Ordinance for reducing salary by 30% for one year.

2. Consolidated Fund of India was created under Article 266 of the Constitution.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.24 Consider the following statements:

1. Lifeline UDAN was launched by the Ministry of Civil Aviation.
2. The portal to track their flights is developed by National Informatics Centre.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.25 Consider the following statements:

1. Temporary employment of NCC cadets is being allowed under 'Exercise NCC Yogdan'.
2. National Cadet Corps is the youth wing of Indian Navy.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.26 Consider the following statements:

1. Malayan tiger inhabits the southern and central parts of the Malay Peninsula.

2. It has been classified as Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.27 Consider the following statements regarding Hydroxychloroquine:

- 1. It is an anti-malarial drug.
- 2. It may cause liver damage.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.28 Consider the following statements:

- 1. nCoVSENSEs is a rapid test device approved by Department of Science & Technology.
- 2. The device is costlier than RT-PCR

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.29 Consider the following Statements regarding Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal:

- 1. It adjudicates disputes and disposes off appeals related to telecom sector.
- 2. Its headquarter is in Mumbai.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.30 The Great Barrier Reef is located in which of the following countries?

- a) Japan
- b) Australia
- c) United States
- d) India

Q.31 Consider the following statements:

- 1. Essential Commodities (EC) Act was established to prevent hoarding of the essential commodities.
- 2. Recently the states are being asked by the Government of India to invoke EC Act amidst COVID-19 pandemic.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.32 Consider the following statements regarding Food Corporation of India:

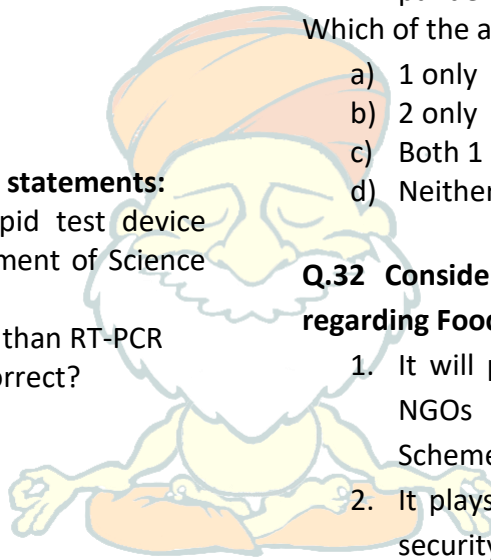
- 1. It will provide major food grains to NGOs at the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) rates.
- 2. It plays major role in ensuring food security in India.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.33 The nasal passage gel is being developed by which of the following?

- a) IIT Bombay
- b) Department of Science and Technology
- c) Indian Council of Medical Research
- d) Ministry of Health and welfare



Q.34 Consider the following statements:

1. Madhuban gajar is a biofortified tomato variety.
2. It is high in beta-carotene.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.35 Walk through mass sanitization tunnel has been developed by which of the following railway stations in India?

- a) Ahmedabad
- b) Mumbai
- c) Bhopal
- d) New Delhi

Q.36 Consider the following statements:

1. Data Science based tool NAADI is developed by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC).
2. CDAC is an autonomous scientific society.

Which of the 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:

1. Sarin and chlorine were used for chemical attacks in Palestine in 2017.
2. Use of chemicals is completely prohibited by international law.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only

- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.38 Consider the following statements:

1. Oxygen enrichment unit will increase the oxygen concentration.
2. Mobile phone or Power Banks can be used as a power source for handheld digital IR thermometer.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.39 The Gamosa/Gamusa is an article of great significance for the people of which of the following state?

- a) Arunachal Pradesh
- b) Assam
- c) Mizoram
- d) Nagaland

Q.40 Consider the following statements regarding Chitra Acrylosorb Secretion Solidification System:

1. It has a superabsorbent material for absorbing infected respiratory secretions.
2. Canister containing the solidified waste cannot be reused.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.41 Consider the following statements regarding fall armyworm:

1. It is native to Africa.
2. It can cause significant damage to crops when it is in its pupal stage.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.42 Consider the following statements:

1. Food grains shall be provided to non-NFSA beneficiaries with ration cards only.
2. They shall receive the benefit of food grains at subsidised rates for five months.

Which of the 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 regarding Market Intervention Scheme:

Scheme:

1. It is meant to protect the growers of perishable commodities
2. The state bears half the loss of procurement.

Which of the 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:

1. Minimum Support Price for Minor Forest Produce Scheme is applicable to all states.
2. The basic objective of the TRIFED is to provide good price for all forest produce collected by the tribes of the country.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2

- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.45 Consider the following statements regarding S-400 air defence missile systems:

1. It can simultaneously track numerous incoming objects and launch appropriate missiles to neutralise them.
2. It is long-range surface-to-air missile defence system.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.46 Anak Krakatoa island is located in which of the following country?

- a) Indonesia
- b) Vietnam
- c) Japan
- d) South Korea

Q.47 Consider the following statements regarding Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana:

1. Its objective is to bring down the healthcare budget of every citizen of India.
2. Jan Aushadhi Sugam mobile app helps in locating nearest Janaushadhi Kendra.

Which of the 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 regarding CovidGyan:

1. It is a government initiative.

2. Primary objective of the website is to create public awareness.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.49 Consider the following statements regarding FRBM act:

- 1. The present target of reducing the fiscal deficit is 3.1 %
- 2. The government may exceed the fiscal deficit target under extraordinary circumstances.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.50 Puthandu is celebrated in which of the following state?

- a) Tamil Nadu
- b) Kerala
- c) Karnataka
- d) Andhra Pradesh

Q.51 Consider the following statements regarding Nihang:

- 1. Any person can become Nihang.
- 2. Their origin can be traced back to the creation of Khalsa.

Which of the 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:

- 1. According to ICMR recommendations, no more than

five samples are allowed for pooled sampling.

- 2. ICMR is one of the oldest and largest Medical Research bodies in the world.

Which of the 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:

- 1. BC Sakhi has been involved in conducting banking and financial services for her Self Help Group.
- 2. Bank Sakhis are business correspondents for the banks.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.54 CollabCAD was recently launched by which of the following?

- a) IIT Mumbai
- b) IIM Ahmedabad
- c) All India Institute of Medical Sciences
- d) Niti Aayog

Q.55 Consider the following statements regarding pattachitra?

- 1. In Bengal tradition, it is centred around Kalighat
- 2. Theme is based on Hindu mythology.

Which of the 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:

1. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana aims to reduce the premium burden on farmers.
2. Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi initiative provides rupees 10,000 per year to all farmers.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.57 Mobile application Sahyog is launched by which of the following?

- a) Department of Science and Technology
- b) Niti Aayog
- c) Ministry of Family, Health and Welfare
- d) Ministry of Agriculture

Q.58 Consider the following statements regarding International Monetary Fund?

1. It is governed by and accountable to the 189 member countries
2. Its primary purpose is to ensure the stability of the International Monetary system.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.59 Kalaripayattu originated in which of the following state of India?

- a) Kerala
- b) Andhra Pradesh
- c) Telangana
- d) Tamil Nadu

Q.60 Meru Jatra festival is celebrated in which of the following state of India?

- a) Orissa

- b) Chhattisgarh
- c) Jharkhand
- d) Madhya Pradesh

Q.61 Consider the following statements regarding Arogya Setu:

1. It is developed by National Informatics centre.
2. The E-pass feature is yet to go active on the app.

Which of the 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 regarding environmental impact assessment categories:

1. Category A projects need to undergo the screening process.
2. Category B projects do not undergo the screening process.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.63 Recently, which of the following country approved potential missile deal with India?

- a) USA
- b) Israel
- c) France
- d) Russia

Q.64 Tripoli is the capital of which of the following country?

- a) Libya
- b) Algeria
- c) Tunisia

d) Lebanon

Q.65 Consider the following statements:

1. The National Cyber Coordination Centre is an e-surveillance agency in India.
2. It works under Ministry of Defence.

Which of the 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:

1. Heavy metal ions cannot easily be accumulated in the body.
2. They can be detoxified by any chemical or biological processes.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.67 A new species of green pit viper has been found in which of the following tiger reserve?

- a) Manas Tiger Reserve
- b) Pakke Tiger Reserve
- c) Panna Tiger Reserve
- d) Kaziranga Tiger Reserve

Q.68 Consider the following statements regarding Chitra GeneLAMP-N:

1. It detects the N Gene of SARS-COV2.
2. It can detect two regions of the gene.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.69 Consider the following statements regarding Kisan Rath App:

1. Kisan Rath App has been launched by Ministry of Agriculture.
2. It will facilitate farmers in searching the transport vehicles for their produce.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.70 Consider the following statements with regards to financial institutions:

1. National housing Bank is an apex financial institution for housing.
2. The most important difference between non-banking financial companies and banks is that NBFCs don't give loans.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.71 India shares a land border with which of the following countries?

1. Bangladesh
2. Myanmar
3. Bhutan
4. Afghanistan

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- c) 2 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.72 Consider the following statements regarding Foreign Direct Investment:

- 100% FDI is permitted under the automatic route in oil and gas.
- FDI is completely prohibited in atomic energy sector.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.73 With regard to Indian economy consider the following statements:

- The repo rate is the rate at which the RBI borrows money from the banks for short durations.
- The reverse repo rate is the rate at which RBI lends money to the banks.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.74 Consider the following statements regarding blazars:

- Blazars are AGN whose jets are aligned with the observer's line of sight.
- Some blazars are thought to host binary black holes in them.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.75 Which of the following South Asian country tops the list of recently-released global compilation of Child Sexual Abuse Material?

- India
- Bangladesh

- Pakistan
- Sri Lanka

Q.76 With regard to human coronaviruses, which of the following statement(s) is/are correct?

- NL63 and HKU1 were first identified in Netherland.
- Middle East Respiratory Syndrome was transmitted to humans from dromedary Camels.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.77 Consider the following statements regarding world economic Outlook report:

- It is published by International Monetary Fund
- The report is released twice a year.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.78 Which of the following are the primordial elements?

- Helium and Hydrogen
- Helium Lithium Hydrogen
- Lithium and Helium
- Lithium and hydrogen

Q.79 Consider the following statements regarding The Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC):

- It is a statutory body.
- It was established as per the recommendation of Technology policy implementation committee.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.80 COVID-19 India Seva is launched by which of the following ministry?

- a) Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- b) Ministry of Agriculture
- c) Ministry of Defence
- d) Ministry of Railways

Q.81 Consider the following statements regarding Ordinance to amend Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897:

1. The acts of violence against Healthcare workers have been made bailable offence.
2. The compensation for the damage to the vehicles of the Healthcare workers shall be made by the state government

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.82 'India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package' has been launched under which of the following ministry?

- a) Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- b) Ministry of Defence
- c) Ministry of Agriculture
- d) Ministry of Science and Technology

Q.83 Which of the following diseases can be regarded as zoonoses?

1. HIV

2. Malaria
3. Avian flu
4. Typhoid

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 1 and 4
- c) 2, 3 and 4
- d) 1,2 and 3

Q.84 Consider the following statements regarding the test Feluda:

1. It uses cutting-edge gene editing tool Crispr-Cas9 system.
2. The test is limited only to covid 19 diseases.

Which of the 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. N9 blue nanosilver is a highly potent antimicrobial agent.
2. India is at the 3rd position in terms of scientific publications in nanoscience and Technology.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.86 Consider the following statements:

1. Drugs Controller General of India comes under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
2. Natural defence mechanism of the body is known as acquired immunity

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.87 Which company recently made the largest FDI in Reliance Jio platform?

- a) Facebook
- b) Amazon
- c) Alibaba
- d) Netflix

Q.88 Which of the following nation recently launched its first military satellite, Noor?

- a) Saudi Arabia
- b) Iraq
- c) Iran
- d) UAE

Q.89 Consider the following statements regarding Anthurium:

1. It removes harmful airborne chemicals.
2. NASA has placed it in the list of air purifier plants.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.90 With regard to recently released Draft Electricity Act (Amendment) Bill, 2020, consider the following statements:

1. Central Enforcement Authority headed by a retired Judge of the Supreme Court.
2. There are no provisions to facilitate trade in electricity with other countries.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.91 NanoBlitz 3D has been recently developed by which of the following?

- a) An autonomous Institute under Department of Science and Technology
- b) Ministry of Defence
- c) Defence Research and Development Organisation
- d) NASA

Q.92 Kasowal Bridge was constructed recently on which of the following river?

- a) Ravi
- b) Sutlej
- c) Chenab
- d) Jhelum

Q.93 The event GW190412 is associated with which of the following?

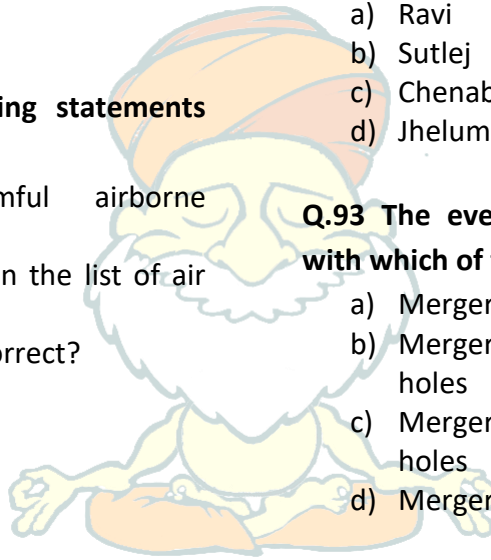
- a) Merger of two galaxies
- b) Merger of two equal-mass black holes
- c) Merger of two unequal-mass black holes
- d) Merger of two dwarf planets

Q.94 Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerators is led by which of the following?

- a) World Health Organisation
- b) United Nations Human Rights Commission
- c) Bill Gates Foundation
- d) UNICEF

Q.95 Consider the following statements regarding Benzalkonium Chloride?

1. It acts only against the bacteria.
2. It is a skin irritant.



Which of the 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 regarding Central Vigilance Commission?

1. The Commissioner is appointed by the President of India.
2. It is a non-statutory body.

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 regarding hydrogen fuel?

1. It is less efficient than internal combustion engine.
2. The manufacture of hydrogen fuel is expensive.

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 With regard to the survey carried out recently by Confederation of Indian Industry, consider the following statements:

1. 15% of them said that movement of raw materials and finished goods was taking place smoothly.
2. Only 10% of plants were functioning at more than 50% of their full capacity.

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 SN 2010kd, recently seen in news, is associated with which of the following?

- a) Super- Luminous Supernova
- b) Discovery of a new Galaxy
- c) Discovery of a new planet
- d) A comet which could hit the planet earth

Q.100 Consider the following statements regarding Basaveshwara:

1. He is the founding saint of Lingayat sect.
2. He established Anubhava Mantapa which is considered as the first Socio-religious Parliament of India.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

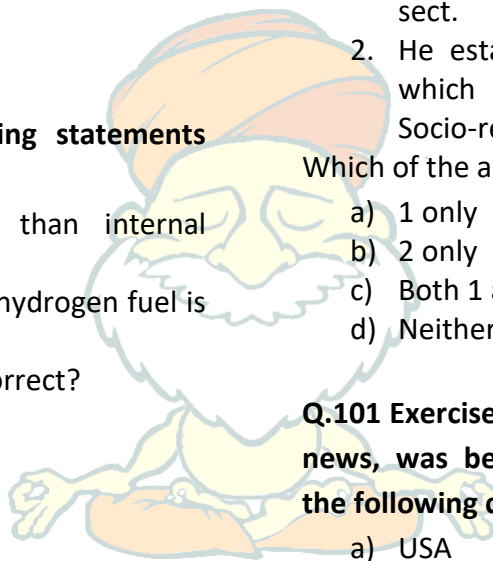
Q.101 Exercise Pitch Black, recently seen in news, was being conducted by which of the following country?

- a) USA
- a) Japan
- b) Australia
- c) Russia

Q.102 Headquarter of Asian Development Bank is located at which of the following?

- a) Philippines
- b) China
- c) Indonesia
- d) Pakistan

Q.103 With regard to recently released report by The United States Commission



on International Religious Freedom, consider the following statements:

1. It has placed India amongst countries of particular concern (CPC) in its 2020 report.
2. This is the first time since 2004 that India has been placed in this category.

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 As per the recent judgement by the Supreme Court, consider the following statements?

1. Individuals authorities or officials connected to a deemed university come under the definition of a 'public servant'.
2. Deemed universities come within the ambit of the term 'university' in Section 2 of the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act, 1988.

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 Tripoli is the capital city of which of the following country?

- a) Tunisia
- b) Chad
- c) Niger
- d) Libya

Q.106 Global terrorism index is published by which of the following?

- a) Amnesty International
- b) Bill Gates Foundation

- c) Institute for Economics and Peace
- d) UN Security Council

Q.107 SVAMITVA scheme is a new initiative of which of the following ministry?

- a) Ministry of Panchayati Raj
- b) Ministry of Agriculture
- c) Ministry of Urban development
- d) Ministry of Finance

Q.108 Special 301 Report is published by which of the following?

- a) United States Trade Representative
- b) World Economic Forum
- c) International Monetary Fund
- d) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Q.109 With regard to Special 301 Report, consider the following statements:

1. India is placed in US priority watch list.
2. High custom duties on medical devices and Information and Communications Technology were one of the highlights of the report.

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 Where is Petersberg located?

- a) Germany
- b) Russia
- c) France
- d) Italy

2020 APRIL MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS

1	C	29	A	57	A	85	C
2	A	30	B	58	C	86	A
3	A	31	C	59	A	87	A
4	B	32	C	60	A	88	C
5	C	33	A	61	C	89	C
6	C	34	B	62	D	90	D
7	A	35	A	63	A	91	A
8	C	36	C	64	A	92	A
9	C	37	B	65	A	93	C
10	C	38	C	66	D	94	A
11	C	39	B	67	B	95	B
12	C	40	A	68	C	96	A
13	c	41	D	69	C	97	B
14	B	42	A	70	A	98	C
15	A	43	C	71	D	99	A
16	B	44	A	72	C	100	C
17	C	45	C	73	D	101	C
18	C	46	A	74	C	102	A
19	A	47	C	75	A	103	C
20	B	48	B	76	C	104	C
21	C	49	C	77	C	105	D
22	B	50	A	78	B	106	C
23	C	51	C	79	B	107	A
24	C	52	C	80	A	108	A
25	A	53	D	81	D	109	C
26	A	54	D	82	A	110	A
27	C	55	A	83	D		
28	A	56	A	84	A		