IASbaba

JULY 2020

IASBABA'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Tenth Schedule: Anti-Defection Law

Need for IPC Reforms

Missing Females

Social inequity in online education

PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana

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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 **62nd edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **JULY 2020** which can be accessed from - https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/

VALUE ADDITIONS FROM IASBABA

- **Integrated Value Addition Content** - covers both Static and Dynamic aspects.
- **Think** and **Connecting the dots** - facilitates your thinking to connect and ponder over various aspects of an issue.
- Prelims and Mains focused snippets - Crisp and Precise Pointers.
- **Test Your Knowledge** (Prelims MCQs based on daily current affairs) - For better Revision.
- "**Do You Know?**" section - Satisfies your curiosity for extra knowledge.

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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MISCELLANEOUS

Padmanabhaswamy temple issue
Culture; Fundamental Right; Secularism

In news:
• In its recent judgment, the Supreme Court upheld the **Shebait rights** of the Travancore royal family in the administration of Shree Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Kerala.
• SC bench held that the erstwhile Travancore royal family will have **rights to manage properties** belonging to Lord Vishnu, worshipped in 'Anantha Shayana' posture.

Do you know?
• There was dispute whether the temple and its considerable assets should devolve to the Kerala government following the death of Travancore ruler Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma in July 1991.
• Kerala High Court, in 2011, had directed the State to take over the temple and exhibit its treasures for public viewing in a museum.
• Article 25 and 26 deals with this issue.
• The temple is built in the unique **Chera style of architecture**, and its main deity is Lord Vishnu who is found in the Anantha Shayana posture (reclined posture of eternal yoga) on Adishesha or king of all serpents.

About Shebait
• A Shebait is any person who serves and supports the deity and works as a manager of the debuttar property.
• The properties like the temple or any other land or property which is vested with the deity are managed by the Shebait. Shebait is the only person who has the power to talk on behalf of the deity that is the god or goddess. He has the power to deal with all the

Article 25 - Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion

Article 26 - Freedom to manage religious affairs Subject to public order, morality and health, every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have the right
(1) to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes;
(2) to manage its own affairs in matters of religion;
(3) to own and acquire movable and immovable property; and
(4) to administer such property in accordance with law

Significance of the Judgement

• The judgment makes it clear that the temple is a public temple and needs to be administered with due consideration of the interests of the devotees.
• It has brought public attention to the larger socio-political dimensions that have always affected administration and ownership of places of worship
• The present judgment is an indicator that the coming together of individuals of integrity, devotion and professional commitment to administer places of worship could be a preferred mechanism
• The verdict raises the need for moral cleansing, professionalising the administration of places of worship.

Conclusion
The mixing up of politics and other considerations with worship can be deleterious for both politics and faith and ominous for society at large.

Hagia Sophia
International Affairs; World History; Culture

Context:
• Recently, Turkey's highest court allowed for the conversion of the nearly **1,500 year-old Hagia Sophia** from a museum into a mosque.

• The centuries-old structure, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, was originally a cathedral in the Byzantine empire before it was turned into a mosque in 1453, when Constantinople fell to Sultan Mehmet II's Ottoman forces.

• In the 1930s, however, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, shut down the mosque and turned it into a museum in an attempt to make the country more secular.

• The change in status of the Hagia Sophia comes after repeated warnings from the international community, including UNESCO, to ensure that Turkey did not proceed with these plans.

History: Hagia Sophia

• The construction of this iconic structure in Istanbul started in 532 AD during the reign of Justinian I, the ruler of the Byzantine Empire, when the city was known as Constantinople. The structure was originally built to become the seat of the Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church and remained so for approximately 900 years.

• In 1453, when Constantinople fell to Sultan Mehmet II's Ottoman forces, the Hagia Sophia was ransacked by the invading forces and turned into a mosque shortly after. The structure of the monument was then subjected to several interior and exterior changes where Orthodox symbols were removed or plastered upon and minarets were added to the exterior of the structure. For a long time, the Hagia Sophia was Istanbul's most important mosque.

• In 1934, Atartuk ordered that the Hagia Sophia be converted into a museum. It opened to the public in 1935.

Madhubani painting
Art and Culture; Paintings

Key pointers and features:
• Madhubani literally means "forests of honey". It is a traditional Indian painting.

• Madhubani belongs to Mithila region in the areas of Indo-Nepal border across Bihar.

• Madhubani paintings include both mythology and natural objects like sun, moon, plants etc. Mostly done by women.

• In Madhubani paintings, a cotton wrapped around bamboo stick is used as brush.

• In Madhubani paintings, the work is done on freshly plastered mud walls. Now a days, for commercial purposes, it is done on cloth and paper also.

• In Madhubani, different colours are obtained in different ways. For e.g. black from mixture of soot and cow dung, white from mixture of rice powder etc. t has got GI tag.

GEOGRAPHY/MAP BASED

Mizoram quakes
Physical Geography; Natural Hazards and Disaster

In news:
• Mizoram experienced at least eight moderate earthquakes between June 21 and July 9.
• The epicentre of most of these quakes was beneath Champhai district bordering Myanmar.
• What is important here is – the Mizoram quake zone was caught between two geological faults - Churachandpur Mao Fault and the Mat Fault.

Do you know?
• Faults are discontinuities or cracks that are the result of differential motion within the earth's crust.
• Vertical or lateral slippage of the crust along the faults causes an earthquake.
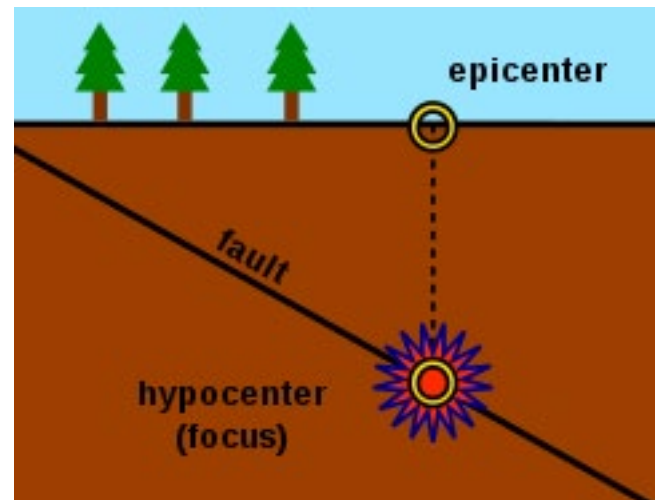
Place in news: Mont Blanc

About:
• Mont Blanc is the second-highest mountain in Europe after Mount Elbrus.
• It is the highest mountain in the Alps and Western Europe.
• The mountain stands in a range called the Graian Alps, between the regions of Aosta Valley, Italy, and Savoie and Haute-Savoie, France.

GEOGRAPHY/MAP BASED

Tribe/Community in news: Kayapo people and Uighars
Human Geography; International

About:

- Kayapo people are indigenous peoples in Brazil who inhabit a vast area spreading across the Amazon River and along Xingu River and its tributaries.
- The Kayapo use intricate black body paint covering their entire bodies. They believe that their ancestors learned their social skills from insects, so they paint their bodies to mimic them and to better communicate with the Spirit that exists everywhere.
- The black body paint also allows them to blend into their surroundings when hunting in the forests.

Who are the Uighurs?

- Uigurs, are a minority Turkic ethnic group originating from and culturally affiliated with the general region of Central and East Asia.
- The Uyghurs are recognized as native to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China.
- China rejects the idea of them being an indigenous group.
- Uighur communities are also found in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, and several thousand live in Australia.

Do you know?
- In the early part of the 20th Century, Uighurs briefly declared independence, but the region was brought under the complete control of communist China in 1949.

Why Lonar lake is pink?
Geography; Science

In news:
- Recent study revealed that the colour of water in Lonar lake in Maharashtra is due to a large presence of the salt-loving Haloarchaea microbes.
- Haloarchaea or halophilic archaea is a bacteria culture, which produces pink pigment, and found in water saturated with salt.
- Absence of rain, less human interference and high temperature could have resulted in the evaporation of water, increasing salinity and pH levels in the lake.

About Lonar

- The 56,000-year-old Lonar crater sanctuary lake in Buldhana district, Maharashtra has turned red/pink, most probably due to salinity and presence of halophilic archaea bacteria in the water body.
- Lonar Lake was created by a meteor impact during the Pleistocene Epoch.
- It is the only known hyper velocity meteorite crater in basaltic rock anywhere on Earth.
- It was notified as a National Geo-heritage Monument in 1979 by Geological Survey of India (GSI).

Lonar Lake

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Tenth Schedule: Anti-Defection Law
Polity - Schedules

Context:

We have come across news articles dealing with political crisis in different states, rebel MLAs defying whip's order or abstains from attending its legislature party meetings; Rebel MLAs getting disqualification notices from the Speaker.

Do you know?

- Tenth Schedule lays down the process by which **legislators may be disqualified on grounds of defection** by the Presiding Officer of a legislature based on a petition by any other member of the House.
- A legislator is deemed to have defected if he either voluntarily gives up the membership of his party or disobeys the directives of the party leadership on a vote.
- This implies that a legislator defying (abstaining or voting against) the party whip on any issue can lose his membership of the House.
- The law applies to both Parliament and state assemblies.

Deciding Authority

- Any question regarding disqualification arising out of defection is to be decided by the presiding officer of the House.
- Originally, the decision of the presiding officer was final and could not be questioned in any court. However, in **1993 Kihoto Hollohan case**, the Supreme Court declared this provision as unconstitutional on the ground that it seeks to take away the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and the high courts.
- It held that the presiding officer, while deciding a question under the Tenth Schedule, **function as a tribunal.** Hence, his decision like that of any other tribunal, is **subject to judicial review** on the grounds of mala fides, perversity, etc

Anti-Defection, Judicial Review and Article 212
Governance issues; Role of Judiciary; Constitution

Context:
We already have learnt about - **Tenth Schedule and Kihoto Hollohan case**

Additional information:
- SC in the Kihoto Hollohan case specifically barred any judicial intervention prior to the decision-making stage.
- SC had held that no interference is permissible at interim stage of proceedings and judicial review of final decision is available only on limited grounds.
- Courts cannot interfere to decide questions of disqualification under the anti-defection law.
- Judicial Review cannot cover proceedings of the legislature under Article 212 of the Constitution.

Article 212 of the Constitution provides for Courts not to inquire into proceedings of the Legislature -

1. The validity of any proceedings in the Legislature of a State shall not be called in question on the ground of any alleged irregularity of procedure
2. No officer or member of the Legislature of a State in whom powers are vested by or under this Constitution for regulating procedure or the conduct of business, or for maintaining order, in the Legislature shall be subject to the jurisdiction of any court in respect of the exercise by him of those powers

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

No postal ballot for those above 65
Polity - Elections

In news:
- The EC had earlier recommended extending the postal ballot facility to electors over 65 years as the age group had been termed most vulnerable to COVID-19.
- The Law Ministry also notified the change to the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 on June 19, extending the facility to electors above 65 years, as opposed to the existing provision for above 80 years.
- However, on July 16, the EC announced that it would not be extending the facility to electors of age 65 and above due to logistical, staff and safety protocol related constraints.

About:
- Postal voting is voting in an election where ballot papers are distributed to electors (and typically returned) by post, in contrast to electors voting in person at a polling station via an electronic voting system (EVM).
- Through postal ballot facility, a voter can cast his/her vote remotely by recording his/her preference on the ballot paper and sends it back to the election officer before counting.
- When the counting of votes commences, these postal votes are counted first before the counting of votes from the EVMs of all other voters.

Who can avail postal ballot facility?

Only certain categories of people are eligible to register as postal voters.
- Members of the armed forces like the Army, Navy and Air Force.
- Members of the armed police force of a state (serving outside the state)
- Government employees posted outside India and their spouses are entitled to vote only by post.
- Voters under preventive detention can also vote only by post.

Do you know?
- Special voters such as the President of India, Vice President, Governors, Union Cabinet ministers, Speaker of the House and government officers on poll duty have the option to vote by post. But they have to apply through a prescribed form to avail this facility.
- Recently, a new category of 'absentee voters' were introduced who can now also opt for postal voting.

Absentee voters:
- These are voters employed in essential services and unable to cast their vote due to their service conditions.
- Currently, officials of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, Northern Railway (Passenger and Freight) Services and media persons are notified as absentee voters.

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Re-enfranchise the forgotten voter
Free and Fair Election

Context: In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has made it possible for senior citizens above the age of 65 to vote by postal ballot, given that they are at greater risk from exposure to the novel coronavirus

Hitherto, this option was available only to disabled citizens and those above 80 years.

Significance of the move
• Facilitates voting and remove obstacles to voters exercising their franchise
• Indicates the efforts of ECI to ensure that no one is left out of

Voting Scenario in India
• India currently has over 91.05 crore registered voters and in the 2019 general election, a record 67.4%, i.e., 61.36 crore voters, cast their vote.
• The ECI would do well to focus attention on the one-third, a substantial 29.68 crore, who did not cast their vote.
• About 10% of registered voters refrain from voting due to a lack of interest in politics.
• That leaves approximately 20 crore voters who want to vote but are unable to do so
• Of these there are about three crore Non Resident Indians (NRIs). Only about one lakh NRIs have registered to vote, presumably because voting requires their physical presence in India.

Do you know?
• About 25,000 NRIs voted in the 2019 elections.
• To enable NRIs to exercise their franchise, the government brought in legislation to enable voting through authorised proxies. However, the legislation has lapsed
• Service voters (government employees) posted away from home can vote through the Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS). Classified service voters (e.g., military personnel) can do so through their proxies.

Migrants and difficulties they face while exercising their franchise

1. Constitute major chunk of labour force: As per Economic Survey of 2017, Internal migrant workers constitute about 13.9 crore - nearly a third of India's labour force

2. Temporary Settlements: Many migrants never intend to settle down and wish to return to their native villages and towns once their work is completed or the working season ends.

3. Loss of Dignified Life: They toil in exploitative low-wage jobs, lacking identity and proper living conditions, without access to welfare and unable to exercise their voting rights

4. Politically powerless:
• Migrant workers become quasi-disenfranchised, forgotten voters because they cannot afford to return home on election day to choose their representatives.
• Internal migrant workers do not enrol as voters in their place of employment since they find proof of residence hard to provide.
• Also, host State governments ignore them as they do not constitute a vote bank worthy of attention and sometimes target them for allegedly taking jobs away from the local population.

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Way Ahead- re-enfranchising migrant workers
• To facilitate voting by migrant workers, the ECI could undertake substantial outreach measures using the network of District Collectorates.
• Migrants should be able to physically vote in their city of work based on the address on their existing voter IDs and duration of their temporary stay.
• Voting must be viewed not just as a civic duty but as a civic right.
• There must be the political will to usher in a 'One Nation One Voter ID' to ensure ballot portability and empower the forgotten migrant voter.
• ECI must fast track its testing an Aadhaar-linked voter-ID based solution to enable electors to cast their votes digitally from anywhere in the country.

Connecting the dots
• One Nation- One Ration Card Scheme
• VVPAT – Why was it needed?

Need for IPC Reforms
Governance issues; Polity - Rights/Policy issues

Context: The committee on reforms in criminal law, set up by the Union home ministry, has started registrations for expert and public consultations on the changes to the criminal law system in India.

Why there is a need to reform Criminal Laws?
• **Long Pending:** The Indian Penal Code and its corollary laws, the Indian Evidence Act and the Code of Criminal Procedure, were all first enacted in the late 19th-century that have not undergone comprehensive revision
• **Colonial Hangover:** IPC & CrPC were largely formalised to aid the colonial government in India, over 150 years ago. They are still rooted in colonial ideas despite amendments & judgements
• **Lacks Adequate recognition of Individual agency:** IPC do not reflect the aspirations of a Constitution that gives primacy to liberty and equality.
• **Still represent Victorian Morality:** While it took 158 years for the courts to decriminalise homosexuality (section 377 of IPC) and adultery, there exists many provisions in the IPC that still echoes Victorian morality, which is especially true for women.
• **Ignorant of modern-age crimes:** New crimes need to be defined and addressed in IPC, especially concerning technology and sexual offences.Ex: digital technology facilitating gambling and betting

Way Ahead/Conclusion
• The committee must cover a large and diverse landscape of 'offences' and criminal procedure to craft a criminal law system that is truly in tune with the times.Ex: Contempt of Court, marital rape, acid attacks, hate crimes etc
• Government should not give in to populist demands and run the risk of excessive policing and over-criminalising
• Death Penalty needs a legislative approach and not just passing the buck to the judiciary.
• On procedural aspects of criminal law, there is a need to harmonise the statute books with court rulings
• Victim who are often on the margins of the justice process should not be burdened with institutional delays
• Accountability, above all, must guide the balance between the rights of the citizen and imperatives of state.

Conclusion
There is a need to weed out outdated provisions, and update IPC to include modern day/hitherto excluded offences

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Enabling people to govern themselves
Governance

Context: Governance systems at all levels, i.e. global, national, and local, have experienced stress as a fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic

Challenges of Governance during COVID-19 time

• **Simultaneous issues:** Breakdowns in many subsystems had to be managed at the same time — in health care, logistics, business, finance, and administration.
• **Contradictions:** Solutions for one subsystem backfired on other subsystems.
• **For example,** lockdowns to make it easier to manage the health crisis have made it harder to manage economic distress simultaneously.
• **Lost Focus on other health issues:** Diversion of resources to focus on the threat to life posed by COVID-19 had increased vulnerabilities to death from other diseases, and even from malnutrition in many parts of India.
• **Exposed Weakness of International Institutions:** There is a mismatch in the design of governance institutions at the global level (and also in India) with the challenges they are required to manage.

Weakness of present Governance Systems

• **Lacks integrated approach:** The global challenges listed in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of UN are systemic challenges interconnected with each other, which must be addressed urgently by UN
• **Silo-ed approach:** Environmental, economic, and social issues cannot be separated from each other and solved by experts in silos or by agencies focused only on their own problems.
• **Neglects local conditions:** Solutions for environmental sustainability along with sustainable livelihoods cannot be the same in Kerala and Ladakh and Tokyo
• **Lacks Public Participation:** For the local people to support the implementation of solutions, they must believe the solution is the right one for them, and not a solution thrust upon them by outside experts

Way Ahead- A case for local systems

1. Governance of the people must be not only for the people. It must be by the people too. Government must devolve power to citizens in villages and towns in India for them to govern their own affairs

2. Changing the mindset and approach towards Governance
• The dominant theory in practice of good government has become 'government of the people, by the government, for the political party in power'.
• Administrative officers see their role as 'deliverers of good government' rather than as 'enablers of governance'. This has strengthened the image of a paternalist government taking care of its wards
• The administrator's task has become complicated when the numbers of government schemes multiplied — some designed by the central government, and others by State government.
• This has resulted into redundancy and inefficiency of work
• The government has to support and enable people to govern themselves, to realise the vision of 'government of the people, for the people, by the people'.

Conclusion
• Those States and countries in which local governance was stronger have done much better than others. This shows that there is need to relook at governance models, preferably the Gandhian way of decentralisation of power.

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Owning up to criminalisation in politics
Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies; Elections: Salient features of the RPA Act

Context:
• A February 2020 Supreme Court judgment on criminalisation in politics will first be implemented in the Bihar elections in October 2020.

Increase in the incidence of criminals in politics - An ever-present silent crisis

Year	Percentage of MPs with Criminal Cases pending against them
2004	24%
2009	30%
2014	34%
2019	43%

Impact of Criminalisation of Politics
• Mockery of election outcomes
• Deterioration in Politics Whereby Values are compromised for winnability of candidate
• Politicization of Bureaucracy
• Bad governance leading to Corruption
• Dominance of Politics over civil society & business – restricts rights & freedom
• Institutional (legislature & executive) decline of Democracy

What were the key pronouncement of Feb 2020 SC Judgement?
• It shall be mandatory for political parties to upload on their respective websites and print as well as electronic media, detailed information regarding individuals with pending criminal cases, who have been selected as candidates.
• They also have to mention reasons for such selection over people with clean background
• The reasons as to selection of candidates shall be with reference to the qualifications, achievements and merit of the candidate concerned, and not mere "winnability" at the polls
• These details shall be published within 48 hours of the selection of the candidate or not less than two weeks before the first date for filing of nominations.
• The political party concerned shall then submit a report of compliance with these directions with the Election Commission within 72 hours of the selection of the said candidate.
• Non-compliance of these directions shall be brought to notice of SC by Election Commission on the grounds of **Contempt of Court**

What are the challenges w.r.t the above judgement?
• **Enforcement Challenges:** Several laws and court judgments have not helped much, the reason being lack of enforcement of laws and judgments
• **Unclear on punishment for violations:** It is also not clear what penalty would be imposed if the recent orders are not followed. It is not clear if top political leaders will be guilty or election be set aside.
• **Menace of Fake News:** Misinformation, trolling, and fanciful claims may drown out the little that citizens can do with actual information given out. Campaigns may continue to be more and more personal and even abusive
• **Inadequate deterrence:** The election & judicial system is still unable to ban people with serious criminal charges from contesting elections, due to legal and technical constraints. The judgement puts onus on voters to make better choices with newly available information.

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Merits of the Judgement

- **Accountability:** The political party and its leadership would for the first time have to publicly own up to criminalisation of politics
- **Electoral Reforms:** It is in line with a series of judgments aimed at preserving the purity of the election process: Asset disclosure, NOTA option, Special courts for quick disposal of cases involving elected representatives
- **Informed Citizenry:** It increases the information available for Citizens which enables him to take well thought-out decision while choosing his representative.

Way Ahead

- Effective monitoring the affidavits of candidates by Civil Society and working with ECI to ensure that information is promptly available on their websites, and widely circulating this information to voters
- Voters also need to be vigilant about misuse of money, gifts and other inducements during elections.

Connecting the dots
- Internal Democracy of the Political Parties
- Decline in the institution of Parliament

ASEEM portal
Economy; Governance

About:
- Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has launched 'Aatamanirbhar Skilled Employee Employer Mapping (ASEEM)' portal to help skilled people find sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Key Takeaways

- ASEEM portal will provide employers a platform to assess the availability of skilled workforce and formulate their hiring plans.
- The portal will map details of workers based on regions and local industry demands and will bridge demand-supply gap of skilled workforce across sectors.
- The Artificial Intelligence-based platform will also provide real-time granular information by identifying relevant skilling requirements and employment prospects.

Also available as an application (app), it consists of three IT based interfaces:
1. **Employer Portal:** Employer onboarding, demand aggregation, candidate selection.
2. **Dashboard:** Reports, trends, analytics, and high-light gaps.
3. **Candidate Application:** Create & track candidate profile, share job suggestions.

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POLITY/GOVERNANCE

NATGRID and NCRB
Govt schemes; Polity - Statutory and Non-statutory bodies; Security issues

In news:
• National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID) has signed an MoU with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) to access the centralised online database on FIRs and stolen vehicles.
• The MoU will give NATGRID access to the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) database.

About NATGRID:

• NATGRID is a post Mumbai 26/11 attack measure.
• It aims to mitigate a vital deficiency — lack of real time information, which was considered to be one of the major hurdles in detecting US terror suspect David Headley's movement across the country during his multiple visits between 2006 and 2009.
• NATGRID is an ambitious counter terrorism programme, which will utilise technologies like Big Data and analytics to study and analyse the huge amounts of data from various intelligence and enforcement agencies to help track suspected terrorists and prevent terrorist attacks.
• NATGRID is an online database for collating scattered pieces of information from more than 20 organisations in the field of telecom, tax records, bank, immigration, etc. to enable the generation of intelligence inputs.
• At least 10 central agencies like IB, R&AW and others will have access to the data on a secured platform for counter-terror investigations.

About NCRB

• NCRB was set-up in 1986 to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals so as to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators, based on the recommendations of the National Police Commission (1977-1981)
• It was set up by merging the Directorate of Coordination and Police Computer (DCPC), Inter State Criminals Data Branch of CBI, Central Finger Print Bureau of CBI, and Statistical Branch of BPR&D.
• NCRB was entrusted with the responsibility for monitoring, coordinating and implementing the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) project in the year 2009.
• CCTNS connects 15000+ police stations and 6000 higher offices of police in the country.
• In 2017, NCRB launched National Digital Police Portal- It allows search for a criminal/suspect on the CCTNS database apart from providing various services to citizens like filing of complaints online and seeking antecedent verification of tenants, domestic helps, drivers.

Do you know?
• NATGRID is exempted from the Right to Information Act, 2005 under sub-section (2) of Section 24.
• The project aims to go live by December 31 and all State police are mandated to file FIRs in the CCTNS.

Police Brutality and Accountability
Police Brutality and Accountability

Context:
• We have dealt with many articles dealing with Police brutality – Custodial deaths, Fake encounters; Torturing and harassing innocent people or vulnerable people.
• Another example where the protectors turned perpetrators – 1985 murder of Raja Man Singh.

Policemen fired indiscriminately at Raja Man Singh as part of a well-planned conspiracy.

Values like - honesty, compassion, yearning for truth and justice, commitment to the law and the Constitution - should always be constant and should hold the first spot in civil servant's decision and final action.

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Lynchings and rule of law
Governance issues; Social issue; Rule of law

In news:
• Three people were lynched, alleged cattle thieves suspected to be Bangladeshi nationals, in Assam on July 18th.
• According to the National Crime Records Bureau's 2017 data which was released in October 2019, Assam has one of the highest crime rates in the country.
• Anecdotal trends suggest a spike in mob lynchings in recent years, often incited by malicious dissemination of false accusations of cow slaughter, kidnapping of children and theft, through social media.

Key points for Mains:
• Suppressing of data: The NCRB did collect data on lynchings in 2017 but did not publish.
• The victims are invariably from vulnerable groups.
• Lynchings must have no place in a democratic society.
• Lynchings are a uniquely unsettling derailment of governance.
• Act of mob violence is a sign of failure of law enforcement.

What is lynching?
• Lynching is defined as an act or series of acts of violence or aiding, abetting or attempting an act of violence, whether spontaneous or planned, by a mob (two or more persons) on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, language, dietary practices, sexual orientation, political affiliation and ethnicity.
• Lynching is an egregious manifestation of prejudice, intolerance, and contempt towards the rule of law.
• There have been many incidences of Mob Lynching for issues with respect to cow, children kidnappers , etc and not only common people but also the police personnel became victims of it.
• Amnesty International India documented 721 such incidents between 2015 and 2018.

Causes of mob lynching
• **Prejudices in Indian society** are age old and deep rooted. These prejudices are based on various identities like race, gender, caste, class, religion, etc.
• **Social media** or technological advances help in the process of 'confirmation bias' – it is the confirmation of a prejudice or a bias
• **The strategic silence of the State** and the ineffective law and order machinery has further given legitimacy to mob lynching.
• **Political mobilization of fringe groups** and Politicization of lynching and strategic silence.
• Lack of digital literacy among common people.

Supreme Court direction
• Supreme Court has described lynching as a "horrendous act of mobocracy"
• Supreme Court in the case of Tehseen Poonawala v Union of India, has provided a 11-point prescription for preventive, remedial and punitive measures and has asked Parliament to legislate a separate offence for lynching and provide adequate punishment for the same.

Is there any separate legislation on lynching?
There isn't any Parliamentary law on it but Manipur state has enacted a separate law on lynching. The Manipur Law is in sync with the Supreme Court guidelines.
• The Manipur Law has defined mob lynchings
• The Law specified that there would be nodal officers in each district to control such crimes.
• It is the first in the country dealing with the protection and rights of vulnerable populations which defines a new crime of dereliction of duty of public officials.
• It states that Police officers who fail to prevent the crime of lynching in their jurisdiction are liable to be imprisoned for a term that may extend from one to three years with a fine limit of ₹50,000.
• The Law requires the state to formulate a scheme for relief camps and rehabilitation in case of displacement of victims, and death compensation.
• Inspired by this Rajasthan and West Bengal have formulated their version of laws to curb mob lynching

Way Forward
Mob violence defames the country and there must be stringent intervention by the police to bring an end to this. The centre should come with the law to deal with it.

<mark>**SOCIAL/WELFARE ISSUES**</mark>

Reset rural job policies, recognise women's work
Social/Welfare issues; Women empowerment; Rural Development

Context: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on women's work

The pre-COVID-19 situation (for rural women)

1. Rural women faced crisis of regular employment
• According to national labour force surveys, a quarter of adult rural women were in the labour force (or counted as "workers" in official data) in 2017-18
• However, time-use surveys from rural Karnataka by NGOs show that, although there were seasonal variations in work participation, almost all rural women came within the definition of "worker" in the harvest season.
• The above data suggests that rural women face a crisis of regular employment.
• In other words, when women are not reported as workers, it is because of the lack of employment opportunities rather than it being on account of any "withdrawal" from the labour force

2. Paid work outside home
• Another feature of rural women's work, is that women from all sections of the peasantry, with some regional exceptions, participate in paid work outside the home
• Thus, while thinking of the potential workforce, we need to include women from almost all sections of rural households and not just women from rural labour or manual worker households.

3. Age differentiated aspiration amongst rural women
• A third feature is that younger and more educated women are often not seeking work because they aspire to skilled non-agricultural work, whereas older women are more willing to engage in manual labour.

4. Wage Inequality
• A fourth feature of rural India is that women's wages are rarely equal to men's wages, with a few exceptions. The gap between female and male wages is highest for non-agricultural tasks — the new and growing source of employment.

5. Underestimation of women's work
• Counting all forms of work — economic activity and care work or work in cooking, cleaning, child care, elderly care — a woman's work day is exceedingly long
• It is estimated that the total hours worked by women (in economic activity and care) ranged from 61- 88 hours in the lean season, with a maximum of 91 hours (or 13 hours a day) in the peak season.
• No woman puts in less than a 60-hour work-week.

Impact of Pandemic and lockdown on rural women

1. Limited agricultural activity for women:
• There was increased tendency to use more family labour and less hired labour on account of fears of infection.
• Therefore, though agricultural activity continued during lockdown employment available to women was limited.

2. Reduced income from agriculturally allied sectors
• For women across the country, incomes from the sale of milk to dairy cooperatives shrank because the demand for milk fell by at least 25% (as hotels and restaurants closed)
• Among fishers, men could not go to sea, and women could not process or sell fish and fish products

3. Collapse of non-agricultural employment for women.
• Non-agricultural jobs came to a sudden halt as construction sites, brick kilns, petty stores and other enterprises shut down completely
• Women have accounted for more than one-half of workers in public works, but no employment was available through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) till late in April
• Accredited Social Health Activists or ASHAs, 90% of whom are women, have become frontline health workers, although they are not recognised as "workers" or paid a regular wage.

SOCIAL/WELFARE ISSUES

Impact of Pandemic and lockdown on rural women

4. Effect on Women's health & nutrition

• During the lockdown period the burden of care work mounted.

• With all members of the family at home, and children out of school, the tasks of cooking, cleaning, child care and elderly care increased

5. Disproportionate impact of lockdown on rural women jobs

• Among rural casual workers 71% of women lost their jobs after the lockdown; the figure was 59% for men.

• Data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) also suggest that job losses in April 2020, as compared to April 2019, were larger for rural women than men.

6. Inadequate attention has been paid to the consequences of the pandemic for women workers and on the design of specific policies and programmes to assist women workers

Way Ahead

• Short term goal should be the expansion of the NREGS

• A medium and longer term plan needs to generate women-specific employment in skilled occupations and in businesses and new enterprises

• ASHA workers must be recognised as workers and paid a fair wage.

• Specific attention must be paid to safe and easy transport for women from their homes to workplaces

• Healthy meals for schoolchildren as well as the elderly and the sick can reduce the tasks of home cooking, which reduces care burden of women

Conclusion

It is time for women to be seen as equal partners in the task of transforming the rural economy.

Connecting the dots

• Feminism and its challenges
• Gender Budgeting

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46 million girls went missing in India
Social/Welfare issues; Women and Children

Context:

According to the **UNFPA's State of the World Population 2020 report** -

• One in three girls missing globally due to sex selection, both pre- and post-natal, is from India.

• 46 million girls of the total 142 million went missing in India.

• The number of missing women has more than doubled over the past 50 years.

• India has the highest rate of excess female deaths at 13.5 per 1,000 female births or one in nine deaths of females below the age of 5 due to postnatal sex selection. (as per 2014 study)

• The main reasons for sex ratio imbalances at birth - due to gender-biased sex selection and excess female mortality due to deliberate neglect of girls because of a culture of son preference.

SOCIAL/WELFARE ISSUES

Missing Females
Social/Welfare issues; Women and Children

Context:
• Recently, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has released the State of the World Population 2020 report, titled 'Against my will: defying the practices that harm women and girls and undermine equality'.

What do you mean by Missing females?
• The term "missing women" indicates a shortfall in the number of women relative to the expected number of women in a region or country
• It is generally caused by sex-selective abortions, female infanticide, and inadequate healthcare and nutrition for female children.
• It is argued that technologies that enable prenatal sex selection, which have been commercially available since the 1970s, are a large impetus for missing female children
• The phenomenon was first noted by the Indian Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen.

OUT OF THE 56 MILLION MISSING GIRLS, 46 MILLION FROM INDIA

Around 4.6 lakh girls went missing at birth in India between 2013-17, says latest UNFPA report.

State of World Population 2020 report by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
• The number of "missing women" has more than doubled over the past 50 years - from 61 million in 1970 to a cumulative 142.6 million in 2020.
• India accounted for **45.8 million** missing females as of 2020
• According to one analysis, gender-biased sex selection accounts for about two-thirds of the total missing girls, and post-birth female mortality accounts for about one-third
• **India has the highest rate of excess female deaths,** 13.5 per 1,000 female births, which suggests that an estimated one in nine deaths of females below the age of 5 may be attributed to postnatal sex selection.
• In India, around 460,000 girls went missing at birth, which means they were not born due to sex-selection biases, each year between 2013 and 2017.
• India (40%) along with China (50%) account for around 90% of the estimated 1.2 million girls lost annually to female foeticide.
• Preference to boy child often leads to **"marriage squeeze"**, where prospective grooms outnumber prospective brides > Will lead to child marriages
• Harmful practices against girls cause profound and lasting trauma - female genital mutilation, child marriage, and extreme bias against daughters in favour of sons.

Covid-19 Induced Challenges:
• The economic disruptions and income-loss because of the Covid-19 pandemic are likely to increase violence against girls and women due to intensified unwantedness of daughters and gender discrimination.
• The Covid-19 pandemic threatens to reverse the progress made in ending some harmful practices worldwide.
• In India, Covid-19 has reduced access to contraception and abortion services, which is likely to lead to an increase in unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions.

SOCIAL/WELFARE ISSUES

...Continued

Way Ahead

• The problem should be tackled by eliminating the root causes, especially gender-biased norms.

• Focus on keeping girls in school longer and teach them life skills and to engage men and boys in social change.

• Provision of cash transfers conditional on school attendance; or support to cover the costs of school fees, books, uniforms and supplies.

• Successful cash-transfer initiatives such as 'Apni Beti Apna Dhan' should be widened in its reach & capacity

• Campaigns that celebrate women's progress and achievements may resonate more where daughter-only families can be shown to be prospering

• Countries that have ratified international treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, have a duty to end the harm, whether it's inflicted on girls by family members, religious communities or by States themselves

Connecting the dots

• Sustainable development Goals
• PCPNDT Act, 1994

Prelims Focus:

About United Nations Population Fund

• It is a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly and works as a sexual and reproductive health agency.

• The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) establishes its mandate.

• It was established as a trust fund in 1967 and began operations in 1969.

• In 1987, it was officially renamed the United Nations Population Fund but the original abbreviation, 'UNFPA' for the United Nations Fund for Population Activities was retained.

• UNFPA is not supported by the UN budget, instead, it is entirely supported by voluntary contributions of donor governments, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, foundations and individuals.

• UNFPA works directly to tackle Sustainable Development Goal on health(SDG3), Education (SDG4) and gender equality (SDG5)

World Population Day
Society

About:

• Every year, 11th July is celebrated as the World Population Day

• **Theme for 2020:** How to safeguard the health and rights of women and girls amid the Covid-19 pandemic

• It was established by the then-Governing Council of the UN Development Programme in 1989, an outgrowth of the interest generated by the "Day of Five Billion" which was observed on 11 July 1987

Value Addition

• Current estimates indicate that roughly 83 million people are being added to the world's population every year.

• India has just 2% of the world's landmass and 16% of the global population.

• Although the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is declining in India, poorer states like Bihar (3.2), Uttar Pradesh (3.0), Rajasthan (2.6) and Jharkhand (2.5) still have TFRs above the national average of 2.2.

• Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is the average number of children born to women during their reproductive years. For the population to remain stable, an overall total fertility rate of 2.1 is needed.

SOCIAL/WELFARE ISSUES

MGNREGA: a ray of hope to secure livelihoods
Govt schemes and policies; Welfare schemes; Economy and Unemployment issues

Context:

• Lakhs of poor rural households have already completed their quota of 100 days of work under the MGNREGA and will not be eligible for further benefits under the scheme for the rest of the year.

• Therefore, activists are urging the government to increase the quota of work to at least 200 days per household.

• Thousands of unemployed migrant workers have also returned to their villages and now dependent on MGNREGA wages.

• Given that COVID-19 was declared a national disaster, activists have demanded to reorient MGNREGA.

Important Value Additions
About MGNREGA

• Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was notified in 2005.

• Goal - to improve the livelihood security of people in rural areas.

• It is a universal scheme guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment in a year to every rural household that expresses a demand.

• This is labour law and social security measure that aims to guarantee the 'Right to Work'.

• Every registered households receives a Job Card (JC) to track their work completed.

• Demand for work is aggregated at the village level and the scheme is implemented by the gram panchayat.

• The act was first proposed in 1991 by P.V. Narasimha Rao.

• The failure of provision for employment within 15 days of the receipt of job application from a prospective household will result in the payment of unemployment allowance to the job seekers.

• Employment is to be provided within 5 km of an applicant's residence, and minimum wages are to be paid.

• Thus, employment under MGNREGA is a legal entitlement.

SOCIAL/WELFARE ISSUES

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs calls for database on migrants
Social and Welfare schemes; Parliamentary Committees

About:
• Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs advised the government to **set up a national database of migrant workers** so that they don't fall out of the social security cover.
• The Committee observed that **better coordination between States and districts** could have prevented the massive exodus of migrant workers.
• According to the Committee, lessons should be learnt from the COVID19 pandemic which saw **unprecedented reverse migration.**

SOFI 2020 Report on Food Security
Poverty; Social/Welfare issues; Food Security

According to **State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2020** report -
• The world is not on track to meet the goal of zero hunger by 2030.
• Around 8-13 crore people globally are likely to go hungry this year due to the economic recession triggered by COVID19.
• Almost 690 million people around the world went hungry in 2019. (up by 1 crore in 2018)
• Hunger continues to be on the rise since 2014 and the global prevalence of undernourishment, or overall percentage of hungry people, is 8.9%.
• Asia remains home to the greatest number of under nourished (38 crore). Africa is second (25 crore), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (4.8 crore).

Do you know?
• SOFI report is a join report issued annually by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, UNICEF, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization.
• It presents the latest estimates on food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition at the global and regional levels.
• The 2020 edition continues to signal that significant challenges remain in the fight against food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms.

Lancet study on Population
Population issues; Social/Welfare issues

According to Lancet study -

• At the current rate of growth, India's population is likely to peak by 2047 at about 1.61 billion and then decline to 1.03 billion by 2100.
• Population decline in India is expected only around 2046.
• India will remain the most populous country.
• The five largest countries in 2100 (are projected) to be India, Nigeria, China, the U.S. and Pakistan.

Do you know?

• World population is expected to peak by 2061 at 9.73 billion and by 2100 dip to 8.79 billion.
• Fall in population can be attributed to the assumption that all women globally will have much higher access to contraception and education.
• A Total Fertility Rate (TFR) lower than 2.1 leads to

Other facts:
According to current estimates, in 2019,
• 21.3% (14.4.crore) of children under 5 years were stunted,
• 6.9% (4.7 crore) wasted and
• 5.6% (3.8 million) overweight
• A healthy diet costs more than ₹143 (or $1.90/ day) which is the international poverty threshold.

SOCIAL/WELFARE ISSUES

For equal treatment: On upholding rights of the disabled
Social empowerment; vulnerable sections

Context:
• Supreme Court recent judgement about disabled persons in ARYAN RAJ vs. CHANDIGARH ADMINISTRATION case.

What was the case?

•   A petition filed by Aryan Raj, a special needs person against the Government College of Arts, Chandigarh.
•   The college denied Mr. Raj relaxation in minimum qualifying marks in the Painting and Applied Art course.
•   The college insisted that disabled persons too need to meet the general qualifying standard of 40% in the aptitude test, whereas SC/ST candidates were given a relaxation to 35%.

What was the judgment?

1.   Setting aside the college decision, SC noted that SC/ST require 35% to pass in the aptitude test, the same shall apply so far as the disabled are concerned in future
2.   The Supreme Court, in a significant decision, confirmed that -
      •   Persons suffering from disabilities are also socially backward
      •   Disabled are entitled to the same benefits of relaxation as Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe candidates in public employment and education

3. Supreme Court said that it is following the principle laid down in the Delhi High Court's judgment in Anamol Bhandari case of 2012

      •   The Delhi High Court had held that people suffering from disabilities are also socially backward, and are therefore, at the very least, entitled to the same benefits as given to SC/ST candidates.
      •   Delhi High Court noted that Intellectually/mentally challenged persons have certain limitations, which are not there in physically challenged persons.
      •   Thus, the Court had advised the subject experts to examine the feasibility of creating a course which caters to the specific needs of such persons.

RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Significance of the Supreme Court judgement

•   **Recognition of difficulties:** The apex court has recognised the travails of the disabled in accessing education or employment, regardless of their social status.
•   **Disabled will be able to reap the benefits of reservation:** Hitherto, candidates with disabilities were often not able to get the benefit of reservation in education and employment because of not meeting the general standards
•   **Education as enabler of empowerment:** The larger principle behind the judgement was that without imparting proper education to those suffering from disabilities, there cannot be any meaningful enforcement of their rights

Is there any criticism of the Judgement?
•   The judgement is seen as eliminating the distinction between the disabled and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
•   It is seen as an attempt to equate physical/mental disability with the social disability and experience of untouchability suffered by marginalised sections for centuries

SOCIAL/WELFARE ISSUES

What is overarching legislative framework for protection of Disabled persons?

It is the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Some of the key features of the act are:

- The Act replaces the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995.
- It fulfills the obligations to the United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which India is a signatory.
- Following reservation benefits have been provided for persons with benchmark disabilities and those with high support needs

    --- Reservation in higher education (not less than 5%),
    --- Reservation in government jobs (not less than 4 %),
    --- Reservation in allocation of land, poverty alleviation schemes (5% allotment)

- Every child with benchmark disability between the age group of 6 and 18 years shall have the right to free education.
- Broad based Central & State Advisory Boards on Disability are to be set up to serve as apex policy making bodies at the Central and State level.
- National and State Fund will be created to provide financial support to the persons with disabilities.
- The Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities and the State Commissioners will act as regulatory bodies and Grievance Redressal agencies and also monitor implementation of the Act.
- Punishments: Whoever intentionally insults or intimidates a person with disability, or sexually exploits a woman or child with disability, shall be punishable with imprisonment between six months to five years and fine.
- Special Courts will be designated in each district to handle cases concerning violation of rights of PwDs.

Did You Know?
- Reservation for disabled is called horizontal reservation which cuts across all vertical categories such as SC, ST, OBC & General

Conclusion
It is vital that the 2016 act & recent SC judgement be fully given effect to so that this significant segment of the population is not left out of social and economic advancement.

Connecting the dots

- Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan
- National Handicapped Finance Development Corporation (NHFDC)
- Articles 15(4), 16(4A) and 46

Social security numbers for Migrants
Social/Welfare issues; Labour issues

Context:
- Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour has recommended that the government introduce a social security number for migrant workers (especially those in unorganised sectors who are beyond the purview of labour laws).
- Government should set up a website to register migrant workers.

Benefits:

- Social security numbers can avert difficult situations which the Migrants faced during the lockdown.
- A social security number will help in mapping the number of migrant workers and their migration patterns.

SOCIAL/WELFARE ISSUES

270 mn Indians lifted out of poverty by UPA

According to the **Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI)** study -

- 270 million Indians were lifted out of poverty by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA)
- The poverty data released by the United Nations Development Programme and OPHI pointed out that 65 out of 75 countries significantly reduced their multidimensional poverty levels between 2000 and 2019.
- About 273 million Indians moved out of multi-dimensional poverty between 2005-6 and 2015-16.

About Multidimensional Poverty Index

The Multidimensional Poverty Index was launched by the UNDP and the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) in 2010. Basic philosophy and significance of MPI is that it is based on the idea that poverty is not unidimensional (not just depends on income and one individual may lack several basic needs like education, health etc.), rather it is multidimensional.

The MPI measures overlapping deprivations at the household level across the same three dimensions as the Human Development Index (health, education and living standards). The index shows the proportion of poor people and the average number of deprivations each poor person experiences at the same time.

For the estimation of deprivation or poverty from different dimensions, the MPI uses three dimensions and ten indicators. The three dimensions are health, education and standard of living. Deprivations are measured for the household and individual levels. The household data are aggregated to derive the national measure of multidimensional poverty.

The dimensions and the respective indicators used are:
- **Education:** Years of schooling and child enrollment (1/6 weightage each, total 2/6);
- **Health:** Child mortality and nutrition (1/6 weightage each, total 2/6);
- **Standard of living:** Electricity, flooring, drinking water, sanitation, cooking fuel and assets (1/18 weightage each, total 2/6)
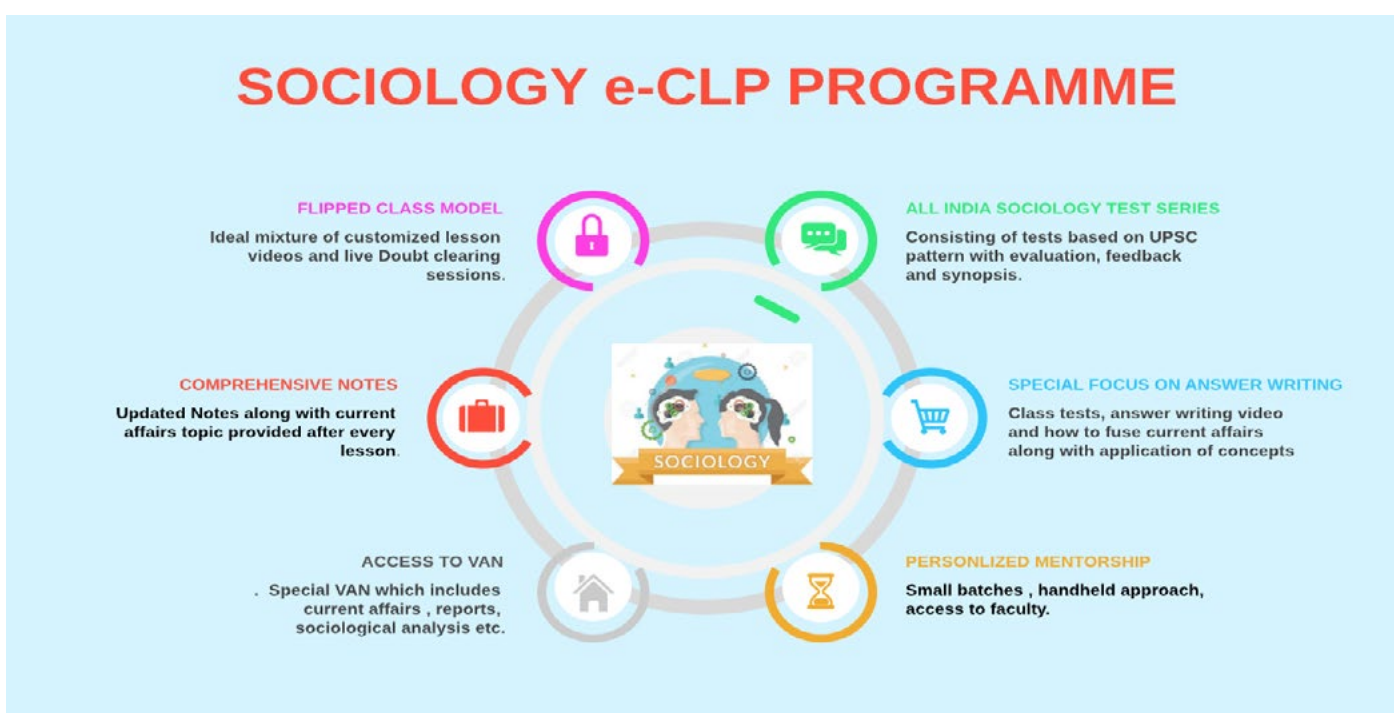
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UPSC PRELIMS TEST SERIES-2021

ENGLISH & हिन्दी (VIDEO DISCUSSION)

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WHO alert on airborne spread of virus
Health issue; Role of international organizations

In news:

After earlier denials, the WHO now said there is evidence emerging of the airborne transmission of the coronavirus.

WHO indicated that the virus may be airborne, after over 230 scientists across the world urged the global body to update its guidance.

Note: From the image below, try to know the difference between Droplet Transmission and Airborne Transmission

Airborne transmission is defined as the spread of an infectious agent caused by the dissemination of droplet nuclei or aerosols that remain i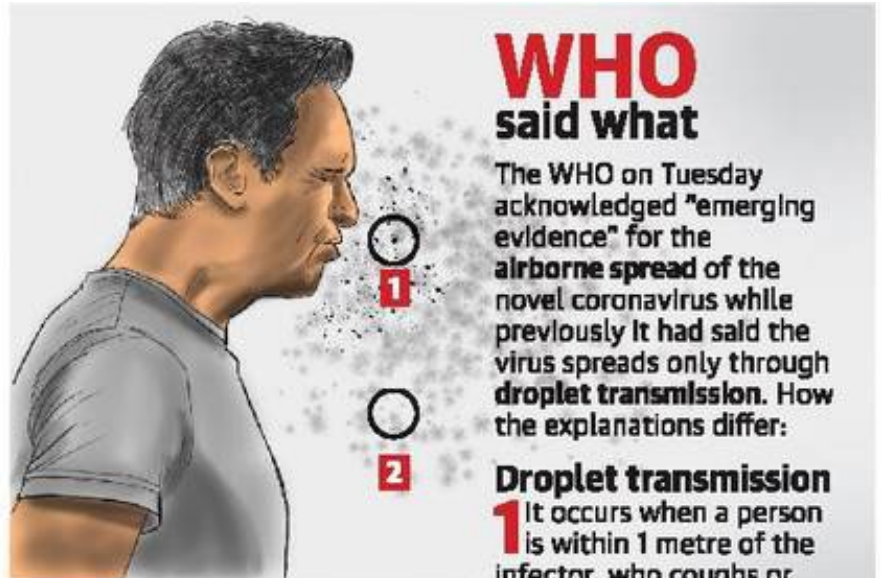nfectious when suspended in air over long distances and time. Aerosols are less than 5 micrometers or five-thousandth of a millimetre in size.

Do you know?
• WHO has set up an Independent panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response – which will be headed by former New Zealand Prime Minister and former Liberian president.
• The panel will probe WHO's virus response.

India registers a steep decline in MMR
Health issue; Social/Welfare issue

About MMR:
• Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) is defined as the number of maternal deaths per 1,00,000 live births.
• As per the World Health Organization, maternal death is the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management.

According to data released by the Office of the Registrar General's Sample Registration System (SRS)
• Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in India has declined to 113 in 2016-18 from 122 in 2015-17 and 130 in 2014-2016.
• The target 3.1 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) set by the United Nations aims to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 1,00,000 live births.

WHO said what

The WHO on Tuesday acknowledged "emerging evidence" for the **airborne spread** of the novel coronavirus while previously it had said the virus spreads only through **droplet transmission.** How the explanations differ:

Droplet transmission
1 It occurs when a person is within 1 metre of the infector, who coughs or sneezes and so is exposing their mouth, nose or eyes to potentially infective respiratory droplets. Such droplets are >5-10 μm in diameter. Being heavy, droplets fall to the floor soon

Airborne transmission
2 It refers to transmission via aerosols (smaller droplets <5 μm) which can linger in the air for longer periods before falling to the floor and can be transmitted to others over distances greater than 1 m. Aerosols may get released when infectors breathe heavily, talk or sing loudly apart from coughing and sneezing. Aerosols contain fewer virus particles than larger droplets

A human hair is about 50 μm wide

50

5 μm

HEALTH

Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM)
Health; Role of international organizations and initiatives

In news:

• Sex workers and people living with AIDS wrote to Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) and sought assistance to meet survival needs.

• They raised concerns that they were being ignored by government and multilateral agencies in COVID-19related emergency relief efforts.

GFATM had approved a $20million COVID response fund for India that has no direct support for at least 1.5 million [persons from these vulnerable groups], despite repeated, evidence-based demands by civil society.

About GFATM

• GFTAM is an international financing and partnership organization that aims to "attract, leverage and invest additional resources to end the epidemics of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria to support attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations".

• Global Fund was created in 2002 to pool the world's resources & invest them strategically in programs to end Tuberculosis (TB), Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), and Malaria as epidemics.

• The G8 formally endorsed the call for the creation of the Global Fund at its summit in July 2001.

• The Global Fund is the world's largest financier of AIDS, TB, and malaria prevention, treatment, and care programs. As of June 2019, the organization had disbursed more than US$41.6 billion to support these programs.

Ministry cautions against use of N95 valved mask
Health and Medicine

Context:

Health Ministry cautioned against the use of N95 valved respirator/ masks, stating that it does not offer the desired protection against the spread of COVID19.

The use of valved respirator N95 masks is detrimental to the measures adopted for preventing the spread of coronavirus as they do not prevent the virus from escaping out of the mask.

The mask conundrum

The Centre has written to all States and Union Territories warning against the use of N-95 masks with valved respirators, saying these do not prevent the virus from spreading

What is an N-95 respirator?
It is a respiratory protective device designed to achieve a very close facial fit and a very efficient filtration of airborne particles

N - stands for 'Non-Oil', meaning it can be used if oil-based particulates are not present

95 - means it has a 95% efficiency to filter airborne particles

The valve effect
As users of N-95 masks may find it difficult to breathe, some models come with an exhalation valve that can make breathing out easier and help reduce heat build-up
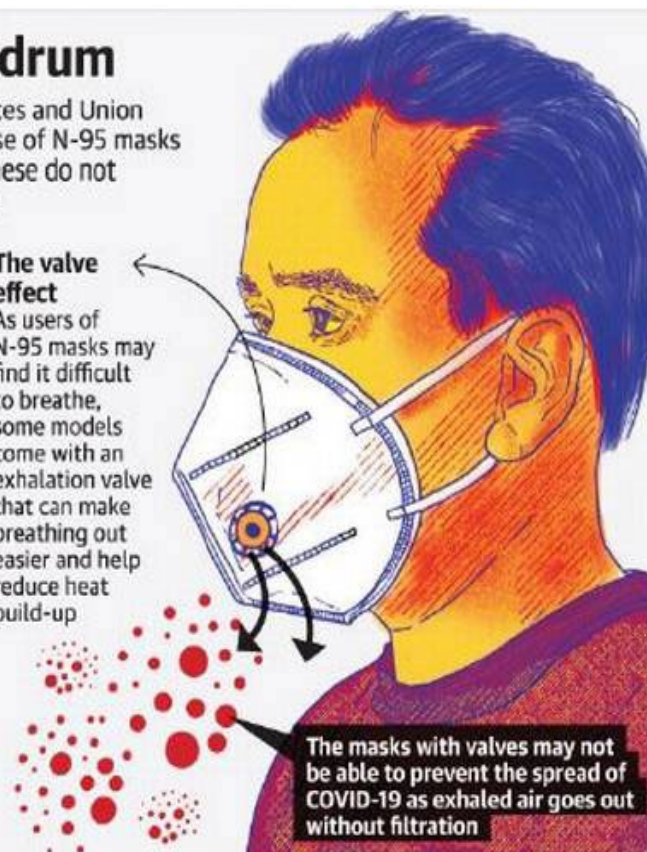
The masks with valves may not be able to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as exhaled air goes out without filtration

HEALTH

Medical devices at affordable prices
Govt schemes and policies; Welfare; Ethics

Context:
• All the medical devices in India are notified as drugs and came under the regulatory regime of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013, with effect from April 1.
• Union Health Ministry has identified a list of critical medical equipment and has requested the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) to ensure its availability at affordable prices.

Role of NPPA
• NPPA, in exercise of powers conferred under DPCO, 2013, has called for price-related data from manufacturers/importers of critical medical equipments such as Pulse Oximeter and Oxygen Concentrators.
• NPPA to ensure that the prices existing as on 1st April, 2020 should not be increased more than 10% in a year.
• The NPPA told the Industry Associations that it was not "business as usual" and not the time to profiteer.

Sero Surveillance Analysis
Health issue; Science – Health and Medicine

In news:
• Delhi High Court directed the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to submit a report and analysis of the serological survey that was recently conducted in the national capital.
• Blood samples were taken from randomly selected people as part of the survey, which involves rapid tests for antibodies, to study the scale of undetected infections.

About:
• **Sero Surveillance is an antibodies detection test** which was done to assess the prevalence of infection at the community level and primarily used for evidence-based public health response.
• Antibodies, also referred to as **immunoglobulins,** are glycoproteins naturally produced in response to invading foreign particles (antigens) such as microorganisms and viruses. As such, they play a **critical role in the immune system's defense** against infection and disease.
• In simple terms, antibodies are specialized, **Y-shaped proteins** that bind like a lock-and-key to the body's foreign invaders — whether they are viruses, bacteria, fungi or parasites.

EDUCATION

Social inequity in online education

Education; Social issues

About:

• In June month, we read about **2020 Global Education Monitoring Report** released by UNESCO

• The report had highlighted that COVID-19 pandemic has increased inequalities in education systems.

• Therefore, to tackle social inequity in online education the Centre has proposed long-term measures to bridge the divide.

According to **2020 Global Education Monitoring Report** released by UNESCO

• COVID-19 pandemic has increased inequalities in education systems across the world.

• About 40% of low- and lower-middle-income countries have not supported learners at risk of exclusion during this crisis.

• In April 2020, almost 91% of students around the world were out of school.

• Poor, linguistic minorities and learners with disabilities were affected more as resources for such persons may not be available outside schools.

• For poor students who depend on school for free meals or even free sanitary napkins, closures have been a major blow.

Measures proposed by the Centre

• It plans to distribute laptops or tablets to 40% of all college and university students over the next five years. (at a total cost of Rs. 60,900 crore)

• The Centre and States are to share the cost of making devices available, in a 60:40 ratio.

• The Centre aims to equip all government schools with information and communication technology (ICT).

• For the 3.1 lakh government schools above upper primary level, Centre has proposed a budget of Rs. 55,840 crore to equip them with ICT facilities.

• For college and university students, the Human Resource Development Ministry proposed to spend Rs. 2,306 crore on developing and translating digital course content and resources over the next five years.

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ILP Toppers

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EDUCATION

University examination guidelines

Education; Governance

Context: The University Grants Commission's (UGC) guidelines of July 6, 2020 on conducting final-year examinations for university students have created debate on exams

What were the guidelines?

- Final Year Examinations to be conducted by the universities/ institutions by end of September
- Universities/ Institutions may choose any of mode – pen and paper, online or a combination of both as per the feasibility and suitability
- Students who not in their final year can be promoted on the basis of a combination of internal evaluation and marks/grades in previous semesters i.e. cancellation of intermediate semester examinations

What was idea behind conducting exams only for final year students?

- UGC stated that performance in examinations is necessary for "reflection of competence, performance and credibility that is necessary for global acceptability"
- These guidelines state that the decision has been taken keeping in view the future of the students — jobs and higher education
- The new guidelines are also in sync with the decision taken by NTA to further postpone the national level examinations - JEE and NEET in the month of September
- Centre is legally empowered to order the conduct of examinations by September-end, because higher education is in the concurrent list

Criticism of UGC
- There is nothing like the UGC in the United States.
- The UGC was fundamentally meant to be the fund granting institution as is clear from its nomenclature.
- But the UGC Act 1956 does confer on it the power of 'coordination and determination of standards' in universities as well and, therefore, it has become the regulator of higher education.
- Today, the higher education sector is overregulated and underfunded

Criticism of UGC decision
- **Logistical Difficulties:** There will be challenges in conducting a physical exam during the COVID-19 pandemic especially when States are empowered to impose lockdown based on local conditions
- **Learning Process affected:** When the coronavirus disrupted the teaching-learning process, the very basis of conducting exams is being questioned
- **Not aligned with Global practice:** The world's finest educational institutions have cancelled exams during the pandemic and chosen to conduct internal assessments.
- **Objection from States:** Given the incalculable risks involved, States such as Punjab, Maharashtra, Odisha, West Bengal and later Delhi decided against holding final year examinations.
- **Credibility of Exams:** India's education system continues to be examination-centric and these guidelines fail to take into account the fact that the validity of examinations fundamentally depends on their reliability.
- **Institutional Challenges:** Most teachers too are not trained in setting good papers particularly for online open-book examinations.
- **Discriminatory:** Flexibility provided to intermediate year students (not conducting exams) was not extended to final-year students.
- **Uncertainty:** In case the infection does not subside, it would mean that the UGC either extends the deadline further or universities are forced to conduct online exams. In latter case there would issue of digital divide favouring the elites over poor

Way Ahead
- UGC should eventually take the decision that would be equitable, fair, pragmatic and beneficial and not one that is risky and exclusionary of any set of students.
- Results should be declared taking into account student performance in earlier semesters and internal evaluation of the final semester.

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GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana to be extended
Welfare Schemes; Poverty; Food Security

Context:
• PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana will be extended by five months till the end of November.
• The scheme was announced as part of the first relief package during the COVID-19 pandemic for a three-month period.

Rationale behind the scheme –
• To ensure that the poorest of the poor were not left hungry.
• Under this scheme, for the next five months, 5 kg of free rice or wheat, and 1 kg of chana will be provided free.
• 80 crore individuals would be covered under this scheme.
• It is a Rs 1.7-lakh crore financial package announced by the government to minimise the impact of Covid-19 lockdown on economy and poor.

Do you know?
• The existing National Food Security Act provides 5kg of foodgrain per person monthly at a subsidised rate of Rs 2-3 per kg to the country's poor.
• Under the PMGKY, the ration quota was enhanced by another 5 kg for free for the next three months in March. (and now extended till November)

CABINET DECISIONS
8 JULY, 2020

Addressing Food Security for All

Extension of PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana Providing Foodgrain for Five Months Approved

5 — PMGKAY scheme extended further for a **period of next 5 months from July-Nov. 2020** as part of Economic Response to COVID-19

Additional free-of-cost foodgrains (Rice/Wheat) at a scale of **5 Kg per person per month to 81 crore beneficiaries**

Additional estimated expenditure of **₹76062 crore** on by central government

107 LMT (89% of allocated food-grain) distributed by States/UTs for April-June, 2020 under PMGKAY

> **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.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission extended
Welfare Schemes; Poverty; Food Security
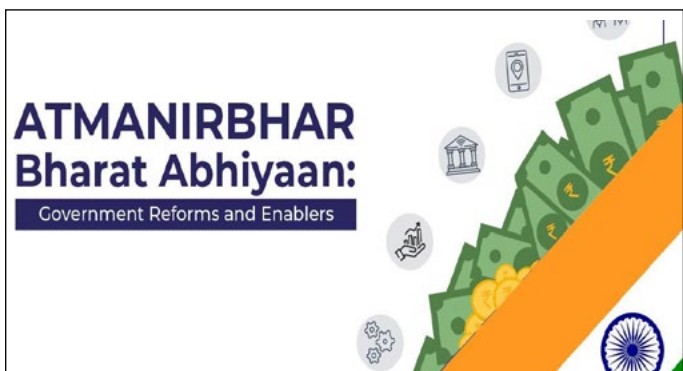
Context:

• Central government has extended the deadline for distribution of free food grains under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission allocated to State governments till August 31.

About Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission

• Under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Package, 5 kg of free food grains per person and 1 kg of free whole gram per family has been distributed to migrant labourers, stranded and needy families, who are not covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) or State scheme PDS cards.

About Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)

• Under this scheme, free distribution of food grains is meant to be given as additional entitlement to the beneficiaries at the rate of five kg per month for five months — July to November.

• Beneficiaries include Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Priority Household (PHH) cardholders.

Godhan Nyay Yojana
Govt schemes and initiatives; Animal Husbandry; Rural development

In news:

• **Godhan Nyay Yojana** was launched by Chhattisgarh government.
• Under the scheme, government will procure cow dung at **Rs 2 per kilogram** from livestock owners and use it to prepare organic fertilizers.

Benefits of the scheme:

• With implementation of this scheme, government aims to give a **boost to rural economy** and to **create employment opportunities** in the rural areas.
• Gives boost to organic farming.
• Proper disposal of waste produced by cattle, hence keeps the city and roads clean.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Indian Railways opening doors for Private Players
Government policies and interventions for development

Context: Indian Railways has launched the process of opening up train operations to private entities on 109 origin destination(OD) pairs of routes using 151 modern trains.

Do you know?

• The IRCTC, in which the government is the majority shareholder, was given pilot Tejas operations in the New Delhi-Lucknow, and Mumbai-Ahmedabad sectors.

• These were the first trains allowed to be run by a 'non-Railway' operator.

• In 2018 India had 68,443 route kilometres of railways. It is among the four largest rail networks in the world, along with the USA, China, and Russia.

Background to the decision

• In 2015, Bibek Debroy Committee recommended that the way forward for the railways was "liberalisation and not privatisation" in order to allow entry of new operators "to encourage growth and improve services."

• From a passenger perspective, there is a need for more train services, particularly between big cities. The Railway Board says five crore intending passengers could not be accommodated during 2019-20 for want of capacity

• Without an expansion, and with growth of road travel, the share of the Railways would steadily decline in coming years.

Why is the move significant for Railways?

• **Better Service:** The overall objective is to introduce a new train travel experience for passengers who are used to travelling by aircraft and air-conditioned buses.

• **Augments Capacity:** Every kilometre of track in India covers geographical area much less than Germany, Russia, China or Canada, indicating scope for expansion, which can be accelerated by private participation

• **Attracts Investments:** The move is estimated to attract investments of nearly ₹30,000 crore

• **Multiplier Effect:** It is estimated that a one-rupee push in the railway sector would have a forward linkage effect of increasing output in other sectors by ₹2.50.

• **Reverses the trend of Inefficiency:** An analysis of passenger and freight operations in the Railways, showed that a steady shift to other modes of travel for both categories was affecting economic growth: by as much as 4.5% of GDP-equivalent

• **Catering to Market:** Bibek Debroy panel had noted that passengers were willing to pay more, if they had guaranteed and better quality of travel and ease of access.

• **Monetization of expensive fixed assets** such as track, signalling and stations.

—— Challenges ahead: ——

1. Inadequate: The present invitation for private operators to participate in train operation constitute only 5% of the 2,800 Mail and Express services operated by Indian Railways

2. Private Player should meet expectations with better services

• The first IRCTC-run trains have a higher cost of travel between Lucknow and Delhi than a Shatabdi train on the same route that almost matches it for speed.

• Therefore, Private operators would have to raise the level of their offering even higher, to justify higher fares, and attract a segment of the population that is ready to pay premium prices

3. Need for level playing field

• As the experience of private operators in running container trains suggests, setting up an independent regulator will be critical for creating a level playing field for private players

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Conclusion

Private rail operations can thus be seen as a government-led pilot plan, not a full programme for unbundling of the monolithic Indian Railways, although the more attractive parts are being opened for private exploitation.

Connecting the dots
• Bibek Debroy Committee report
• Rakesh Mohan committee report

Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA)
Polity, law, fundamental rights, NGOs; Economy

What is FCRA?
• It is a law enacted by Parliament to regulate foreign contribution (especially monetary donation) provided by certain individuals or associations to NGOs and others within India.
• FCRA Act was originally passed in 1976 and majorly modified in 2010.
• The government has used the act over the years to freeze bank accounts of certain NGOs who it found were affecting India's national interest for wrong purposes.

Do you know?
• As per the FCRA Act 2010, all NGOs are required to be registered under the Act to receive foreign funding.
• According to terms stipulated in the FCRA, an organisation cannot receive foreign funding unless it is registered under the 2010 Act, except when it gets government approval for a specific project.
• Under the FCRA Act, registered NGOs can receive foreign contribution for five purposes — social, educational, religious, economic and cultural.

Important value additions:
NGOs
• The term 'NGO' is used to describe a body that is neither part of a government nor a conventional for-profit business organisations
• Groups of ordinary citizens that are involved in a wide range of activities that may have charitable, social, political, religious or other interests.
• Helpful in implementing government schemes at the grassroots.
• In India, NGOs can be registered under Indian Societies Registration Act, 1860, Religious Endowments Act,1863, Indian Trusts Act, etc.
• India has the largest number of active NGOs in the world.
• NGOs receive funds from abroad, if they are registered with the Home Ministry under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA).

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs) scheme
Housing; Social/Welare scheme

Context
• Cabinet approved an affordable rental housing scheme for migrants who went back to their home states during the lockdown.

About Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs) scheme
• It is under the ministry of housing and urban affairs
• It will be a sub-scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban)
• The scheme aims to cover nearly 3 lakh beneficiaries initially, with an estimated expenditure of around Rs 600 crore.
• Targeted beneficiaries would be workers who come from rural areas or towns to work in manufacturing, hospitality, health, construction, etc.

Affordable Rental Housing Complex
Ease of living for Migrant Workers /Urban Poor

Rental accommodation for Migrants, Urban poor in Industrial sector, Service Industry, Manufacturing sectors, Institutions & Associations.

• Use of existing Government funded Housing Stock (JnNURM/RAY) as ARHCs
• Incentivising Private/ Public Agencies for construction of ARHCs

2 components:

1. The ARHC scheme will have a two-pronged approach; first, existing vacant government funded housing complexes will be converted into ARHCs through a concession agreement for 25 years.

2. Secondly, special incentives like use permission, 50% additional Floor Area Ratio or Floor Space Index, concessional loan at priority sector lending rates, tax reliefs at par with affordable housing among others will be offered to private and public entities to develop ARHCs on their own available vacant land for 25 years.

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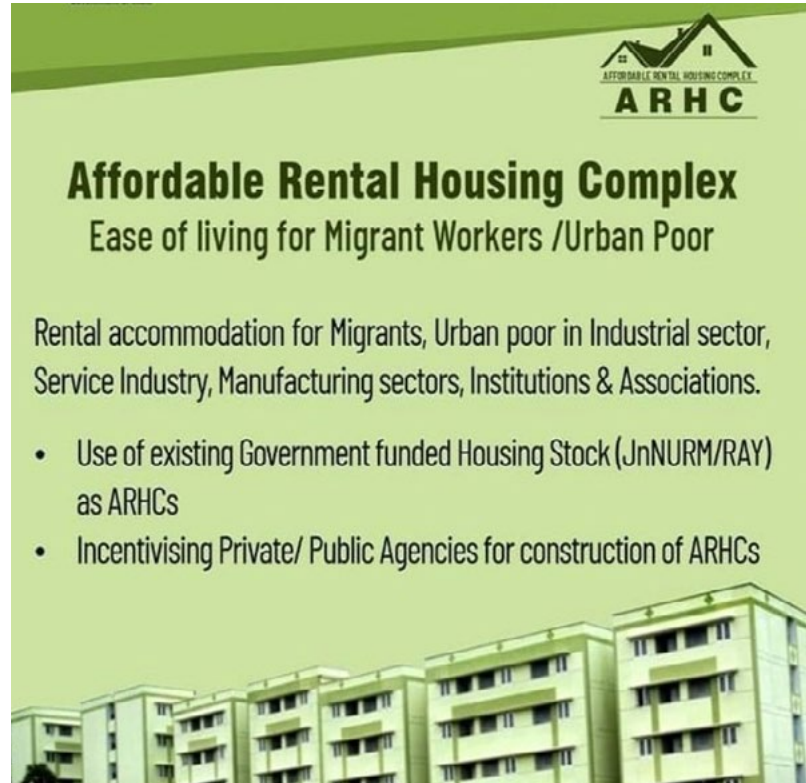
GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

New consumer rights law
Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of people

Context: The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 which replaces the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, comes into force on 20th July 2020.

Did You Know?
• December 24 is observed as National Consumer Day as the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 received the assent of the President on this day.

Some of the key provisions of 2019 Act are:

1. Definition of a Consumer
• A consumer is defined as a person who buys any good or avails a service for a consideration.
• It does not include a person who obtains a good for resale or a good or service for commercial purpose.
• It covers transactions through all modes including offline, and online through electronic means, teleshopping, multi-level marketing or direct selling

2. Establishment of the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)
• CCPA will protect, promote and enforce the rights of consumers.
• The CCPA will regulate cases related to unfair trade practices, misleading advertisements, and violation of consumer rights.
• The CCPA will have the right to impose a penalty on the violators
• It can pass orders to recall goods or withdraw services, discontinuation of the unfair trade practices and reimbursement of the price paid by the consumers.
• It will have an investigation wing to enquire and investigate such violations.

3. Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission
CDRCs will be set up at the -
• District level: Complaints where value does not exceed Rs one crore.
• State Level: Complaints where value is between Rs 1-10 crore
• National levels: Complaints where value exceeds 10 crore

Issues with Consumer Protection Act 1986
• Not aligned with digital age: It was not equipped to deal with digital-age problems, where e-commerce and direct sellers get away with infractions.
• Lacked Regulator: It had no regulator to secure consumers' rights
• Lacked effective implementation: Large number of pending consumer complaints in consumer courts across the country

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4. Penalties for misleading advertisement:
• The CCPA may impose a penalty on a manufacturer or an endorser of up to Rs 10 lakh and imprisonment for up to two years for a false or misleading advertisement.

5. Consumer Rights
• The right to be protected against the marketing of goods, products or services which are hazardous to life and property;
• The right to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods, products or services, so as to protect consumers from unfair trade practices
• The right to be assured, wherever possible, access to a variety of goods, products or services at competitive prices;
• The right to be heard and to be assured that consumer's interests will receive due consideration at appropriate fora
• The right to seek redressal against unfair trade practice or restrictive trade practices or unscrupulous exploitation of consumers;
• The right to consumer awareness
The 1986 also had same rights but was limited to goods. But the 2019 act expanded the scope by inclusion of services

6. Product liability:
• Product liability means the liability of a product manufacturer, service provider or seller to compensate a consumer for any harm or injury caused by a defective good or deficient service

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

7. Consumer Friendly

• It is the right of a consumer to sue a company at the place of her residence and not where the company specifies.

• The consumer can also request attendance/ hearings via video conference, which will cut the cost of litigation

Challenges

• Without a strong tort law ecosystem, the consumer will likely not get a fair deal.

• Parts pertaining to separate Consumer Protection Authority for advertisements, rules for e-commerce websites, accountability for celebrity endorsements are yet to be notified.

Way Forward

• Class action will make a stronger case for the court to impose a pinching penalty on errant firms, which would then perhaps ensure that the consumer is not taken for granted

Connecting the dots

• Judicial Backlogs in India and the reasons for it
• Lok Adalats

Consumer Protection Act, 2019

Govt schemes and Acts; Social issue

In news:

• The Consumer Protection Act,2019 came in to force from 20th July 2020.

• The new Act will empower consumers and help them in protecting their rights through its various notified Rules and provisions like Consumer Protection Councils, Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions, Mediation, Product Liability and punishment for manufacture or sale of products containing adulterant / spurious goods.

Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)

• Act includes establishment of the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers.

• The CCPA will be empowered to conduct investigations into violations of consumer rights and institute complaints / prosecution, order recall of unsafe goods and services, order discontinuance of unfair trade practices and misleading advertisements, impose penalties on manufacturers/endorsers/publishers of misleading advertisements. (includes e-commerce platforms)

E-Commerce rules are strengthened:

• Under this act every e-commerce entity is required to provide information relating to return, refund, exchange, warranty and guarantee, delivery and shipment, modes of payment, grievance redressal mechanism, payment methods, security of payment methods, charge-back options, etc. including country of origin which are necessary for enabling the consumer to make an informed decision at the pre-purchase stage on its platform.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Why a separate anti-torture law?

Government policies and interventions for development

Context:
- The death of a father and son due to alleged custodial torture in Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu.
- P. Jayaraj(58) and his son J Beniks(31), were taken into police custody for violating COVID-19 curfew hours. However, they died four days later allegedly due to custodial torture.
- This incident has once again given rise to the demand for a separate law against torture.

Do you know?
• Torture is not defined in the Indian Penal Code, but the definitions of 'hurt' and 'grievous hurt' are clearly laid down.
• India has signed U.N. Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment (CAT), but is yet to ratify it.

Does that mean there aren't safeguards against torture?

No, there are provision in law and Court judgements that provide safeguards
• Though the definition of 'hurt' does not include mental torture, Indian courts have included psychic torture, environmental coercion, tiring interrogative prolixity, among others, in the ambit of torture
• Voluntarily causing hurt and grievous hurt to extort confession are also provided in the Indian Penal Code with enhanced punishment.
• Under the Code of Criminal Procedure, a judicial magistrate inquires into every custodial death.
• The National Human Rights Commission has laid down specific guidelines for conducting autopsy under the eyes of the camera, to prevent interference by police

Connecting the dots
- Police reforms
- Capital Punishment—Is it needed?

Supreme Court Judgements on Custodial Torture
- **D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal:** Under this case, the Supreme Court of India observed in this widely publicized death in police custody that using torture to impermissible and offensive to Article 21.
- **Nilabati Behera v. State of Orissa:** Court made sure that the state could no longer escape liability in public law and had to be compelled to pay compensation
- Similarly, the Court has held in many cases that policemen found guilty of custodial death should be given the death penalty.
- Therefore, there is neither a dearth of precedents nor any deficiency in the existing law

Was there any attempt at enacting specific legislation on prevention of torture?
- Yes, a fresh draft of the Prevention of Torture Bill was released in 2017 for seeking suggestions from various stakeholders.
- It included 'severe or prolonged pain or suffering' as a form of torture but that was left undefined.

Criticism of the bill
• The Bill is vague and also harsh for the police to discharge its responsibilities without fear of prosecution and persecution.
• It was inconsistent with the existing provisions of law.
• The proposed quantum of punishment was too harsh.
• Though the 262nd Law Commission Report recommended that the death penalty be abolished except in cases of 'terrorism-related offences', the Bill provided for the death penalty for custodial deaths
• In the Bill, the proposed registration of every complaint of torture as an FIR and blanket denial of anticipatory bail to an accused public servant was not reasonable.
• Overall, the proposed Bill was not a reformative one.

Way Ahead
• Retired SC Justice Deepak Gupta has said that there is need to first implement the law as we have it
• The investigations, the prosecutions are not fair and these must be rectified first
• The temptation to use third-degree methods must be replaced with scientific skills
• There is need for better training for police officers

ILP Toppers

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ILP 2021
(ENGLISH & HINDI)

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Nitesh pandey
ILP Student

INDIA AND THE WORLD

Reviving SAARC to deal with China
Multilateral Relations; India and its neighbourhood

Context: As India-China border tensions continues, a hegemonic China, as part of its global expansionism, is threatening India's interests in South Asia.

China's growing presence in South Asia
• China's proximity to Pakistan is well known and friendly relations with it is crucial for success of CPEC project

• Nepal is moving closer to China for ideational and material reasons.

• China is wooing Bangladesh by offering tariff exemption to 97% of Bangladeshi products.

• China has also intensified its ties with Sri Lanka through massive investments.

• According to a Brookings India study, most South Asian nations are now largely dependent on China for imports despite geographical proximity to India.

India and SAARC in recent years
• Several foreign policy experts argue that India's strategic dealing with China has to begin with South Asia and it is important to reinvigorate SAARC

• In the last few years, due to increasing animosity with Pakistan, India's political interest in SAARC dipped significantly.

• India has been trying hard to isolate Pakistan internationally for its role in promoting terrorism in India. This has had detrimental effect on SAARC functioning

• India started investing in other regional instruments, such as BIMSTEC, as an alternative to SAARC.

> ### Can BIMSTEC emerge as alternative to SAARC?
> • BIMSTEC cannot replace SAARC for reasons such as lack of a common identity and history among all BIMSTEC members.
> • Moreover, BIMSTEC's focus is on the Bay of Bengal region, thus making it an inappropriate forum to engage all South Asian nations.

How to reinfuse life into SAARC?
• One way to infuse life in SAARC is to revive the **process of South Asian economic integration**.

• Deeper regional economic integration will **create greater interdependence with India** acquiring the central role, which, in turn, would serve India's strategic interests

• South Asia is one of the **least integrated regions in the world** with intra-regional trade at barely 5% of total South Asian trade, compared to 25% of intra-regional trade in the ASEAN region.

• While South Asian countries have signed trade treaties, the **lack of political will and trust deficit** has prevented any meaningful movement.

• According to the World Bank, trade in South Asia stands at $23 billion of an estimated value of $67 billion.

• India should take the lead and work with its neighbours to slash the tariff and non-tariff barriers.

• There's a need to resuscitate the negotiations on **a SAARC investment treaty**, pending since 2007. According to UNCTAD, intra-ASEAN investments constitute around 19% of the total investments in region.

What are the domestic challenges that India faces in revitalising SAARC?
• First, the divisive domestic politics fuels an anti-India sentiment in India's neighbourhood. Anti-Pakistan rhetoric, Bangladeshi migrant issue (CAA controversy) and Islamophobia in Indian soil, influences foreign policy in undesirable ways.

• Second, mission of atma nirbharta (self-reliance) and 'vocal for local' signals India's need to cut down its dependence on imports and sliding back to protectionism.This might obstruct deepening South Asian economic integration.

Conclusion
• Deeper regional economic integration will help India both economically & strategically to counter China's aggression in the region

Connecting the dots
• India's Act East policy
• RCEP and why India opted out of it?

INDIA AND THE WORLD

India-China : Apps ban
India-China relations

Context
• Indian government blocked 59 widely used apps, most linked to Chinese companies. (TikTok, SHAREit, UC Browser etc)

Mains Focus:

India's explanation on Apps ban
• The apps had been reported for "stealing and surreptitiously transmitting users' data in an unauthorized manner to servers which have locations outside India", which "impinges upon the sovereignty and integrity of India".
• Some Apps were engaged in activities prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of state and public order"
• From the perspective of data security and privacy, there was indeed a strong case to strictly regulate apps that handle vast amounts of user data.

What is the real intention/signal of India's move?
• The decision comes amid continuing tensions between India and China, after the killing of 20 Indian soldiers on the Line of Actual Control
• It is the first clear message from New Delhi that it will review the rules of engagement.
• This is an interim order and firms have been given 48 hours to respond to questions on their compliance with data security and privacy but this marks a decisive break from the past.
• It serves as a statement of intent while sending a clear signal to China that there will be costs for acts of aggression.
• The fact that it has chosen to block the apps outright, rather than ensure they were complying with the law, suggests the ban is less motivated by privacy concerns than about sending a message to China

Critical Analysis of the ban
• If sending a message about China is the motivation, the ban is more signalling than substance. It may help the government show the public it is taking China on.

• However, deterring Chinese behaviour on the border requires a tough diplomatic , economic and military response.
• The ban on Chinese mobile apps may be construed as low hanging fruit and a relatively soft target, but it is, at the same time, a decision that makes the point without leading to a revenue loss for India or hurting it economically
• Nevertheless, tensions on the border, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, have ignited a much-needed debate on India's economic dependencies on China.

India needs to reduce economic dependence on China
• There is an asymmetry in power, a visible economic disparity. The Chinese economy is roughly five times larger than India's.
• While India accounts for only 3 per cent of China's exports, China (excluding Hong Kong) accounts for 14 per cent of India's imports, and 5 per cent of exports
• India remains reliant on Chinese products in several critical and strategically sensitive sectors, from semiconductors and active pharmaceutical ingredients to the telecom sector.
• Chinese vendors are involved not only in India's 4G network but in on-going 5G trials as well.

What other retaliatory steps are being considered?
• Earlier, the government had made it mandatory for FDI from neighbouring countries to take prior approval so as to curb opportunistic/hostile takeovers during this period.
• E-commerce firms have been asked to explore the idea of listing the product's country of origin amidst call for boycott of Chinese products
• There is also talk of raising tariffs on Chinese goods
• Government can also impose curbs on contracts (having Chinese connection) in some infrastructure projects.

Conclusion
• However, given how pervasive Made in China is, how vast there is Chinese presence in the India's technology space— its investments in a long list of Indian unicorns — each step will come with its own set of consequences.
• New Delhi should prepare for these and calibrate its response, step by careful step.

Connecting the dots - Justice BN Srikrishna committee's report on the data protection law

INDIA AND THE WORLD

India's trade deficit with China dips
India-China dispute/concerns

In news:
• India's trade deficit with China fell to $48.66 billion in 2019-20 due to decline in imports.
• The trade deficit stood at $53.56 billion in 2018-19 and $63 billion in 2017-18.

Note: A trade deficit is an economic measure of international trade in which a country's imports exceeds its exports.

(Trade Deficit = Total Value of Imports – Total Value of Exports)

Recent measures taken by the Indian government to reduce the widening trade deficit with China:
• It is framing **technical regulations and quality norms** for several products to reduce dependence on Chinese imports.
• It has **imposed anti-dumping duties on goods,** which are being dumped in the domestic market at below the average prices from China.
• Government **tightened norms for FDI** coming from countries which share a land border with India.

Do you know?
• As per the amended FDI policy, a company or an individual from a country that shares a land border with India can invest in any sector only after getting government approval.

#Boycott China
India-China dispute/concerns

In news:
• 59 Chinese apps were banned and Union Power Minister said India would not import power equipment from China.
• The State power distribution companies would not place orders with Pakistan and Chinese firms for equipment as the sector is strategic and essential, and was vulnerable to cyberattacks.
• Minister for Road Transport and Highways said Chinese companies would not be allowed to take part in road projects.
• The government is also considering trade and procurement curbs targeting China.
• The government is also increasing scrutiny of Chinese investments in many sectors, and weighing a decision to keep out Chinese companies from 5G trials.

Do you know?
• The above moves could potentially cost Chinese companies billions of dollars.
• It is a clear message from India that it cannot continue trade and investment relations as normal, if China does not agree to return to the status quo of April before its incursions along the LAC began.
• However, China is far less dependent on India's market than India is on Chinese imports.
• India relies on China for crucial imports for many of its industries, from auto components to active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs). Between 70% to 90% of APIs come from China.
• India should focus on self-reliance in many of the above sectors.

Role of China Study Group (CSG)

What is China Study Group (CSG)?

• It is a government body, headed by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, which has the cabinet secretary, secretaries of home, external affairs, defence, and representatives of the Army as the members.
• The CSG was set up in 1976 by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) to advise on policy issues relating to China.
• It was initially headed by the Foreign Secretary and now by the National Security Adviser.

Functions or aim of CSG

CSG was set up in 1975-1976 under K.R. Narayanan with a twin purpose.

1. It was to keep under review the situation on the Sino-Indian border, and
2. It was to assist in preparations for negotiations with China on the border question.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

China-Bhutan: Border Dispute
India-China dispute/concerns; China-Bhutan relations

In news:
• Bhutan recently sent a demarche to China protesting against Chinese claims to the **Sakteng wildlife sanctuary** in eastern Bhutan.

• China had recently attempted to stop funding for the Sakteng sanctuary from the UN Development Program's **Global Environment Facility (GEF),** on the grounds that it was "disputed" territory.

• Bhutan has always maintained a discreet silence on its boundary negotiations with China, and it does not have any formal diplomatic relations with Beijing.

Do you know?
• The Sakteng sanctuary has in the past, too, received such grants, including in 2018-2019 for a project on preventing soil erosion, without any objection from China.

Indo-China Border Roads (ICBRs)

In the wake of heightened **road and track construction** work undertaken by China along India's Northern and Eastern frontiers in 1997, CSG was constituted to s**tudy the requirement of road communication along the China border** for fast and smooth movement of troops in case of any aggression.

At the end of the study, the **CSG identified 73 strategically important roads** along the China border for Indo-China Border Roads (ICBRs) to be built.

Do you know?
• Border Roads Organisation (BRO) handles the bulk of the ICBR road construction work.

• Several other entities are also responsible for constructing ICBR – such as NHAI, MoDNER, Central Public Works Department (CPWD), National Projects Construction Corporation (NPCC) etc.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

On India, Bhutan and China
India-China dispute/concerns

Context: For the third time since early JULY 2020, China has repeated its territorial claims in the eastern sector of Bhutan's Trashigang district.

What is China's Territorial claim?

- According to China, the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the China-Bhutan disputed areas which is on the agenda of China-Bhutan boundary talk.
- China's first claim was at a UNDP-led Global Environment Facility (GEF) conference on June 2-3, when the Chinese representative tried to stop funding for the Sakteng forest reserve in Bhutan's eastern district of Trashigang.
- China claims that the boundary between China and Bhutan has never been delimited and that it has had disputes over the eastern, central and western sectors of Bhutan.

Why is the claim by China surprising?
- China has not objected earlier to funding provided to the sanctuary at the GEF.
- The Trashigang area, where Sakteng is based, does not share a boundary with China.

Chinese officials have not raised the eastern boundary in 24 rounds of talks with Bhutan, that began in 1984. Thus far, talks have been only about the -
- Bhutan's north - Pasamlung and Jakarlung valleys
- Bhutan's West: Doklam and other pasturelands that come up to the trijunction point with India.

What is Bhutan's position?

- Bhutan totally rejected the claim made by China and was able to secure the funding from GEP
- Bhutan said that Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary is an integral and sovereign territory of Bhutan.
- Bhutan has conveyed its position to China through its embassy in New Delhi, as Bhutan and China do not have any formal diplomatic relation
- After repeated claims by China in past two months, Bhutan has now appeared to take a sober view of China's claims by saying that all disputes would be taken up in the next round of China-Bhutan talks.

Concerns for India
- Sakteng is situated along the border with Arunachal Pradesh, some part of which is also claimed by China.
- Even after the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty of 2007, Indian military is virtually responsible for protecting Bhutan from the kind of external threat that the Chinese military poses.

What is the Strategy behind Chinese claims?

For Bhutan -
- Pressure tactic: It is an attempt by China to hurry the scheduling of the next meeting, or to gain leverage in the boundary talks.
- Boundary talks between China & Bhutan — the last round was in 2016 — have been put off due to the Doklam stand-off in 2017, elections in 2018, and pandemic in 2020
- Reiteration of a "package solution" by China during these period as a solution for China-Bhutan boundary dispute.
- It refers to a deal offered by Chinese in 1990s whereby China was ready to give up its claims on 495 km2 in the norther region in exchange for control of 269 km2 in the western region (Doklam & Chumbi Valley)

INDIA AND THE WORLD

What is the Strategy behind Chinese claims?

For India -
- **Wedge between India & Bhutan:** China's new territorial claim is a part of the larger Chinese tactics of putting pressure on India's smaller neighbours, to punish them for any closeness to India.
- **Diversionary Tactic:** India which is already dealing with Chinese aggression across the Line of Actual Control, the Sakteng claim could be a diversionary tactic
- **Extend Claims on Arunachal Pradesh:** By claiming Bhutan's eastern boundary, China is attempting to double down on its claims over Arunachal Pradesh, neither of which it has lien on or control of.
- **To gain Control of Doklam region** located near Strategically important Siliguiri corridor of India -

  --- The repetition of its "package" offer is worrying as it implies that Beijing is not giving up its push for the Doklam plateau, located near trijunction of China,India & Bhutan
  --- China has consolidated its military infrastructure in Doklam Plateau -and would like to inch towards India's Chumbi valley, a strategically sensitive location.

Conclusion

No matter what Beijing's designs are behind its new claims, India & Bhutan must stay the course, with the close cooperation and complete understanding they have shared for decades, in order to respond to them purposively.

Guwahati-Trashigang-Tawang Link

Border Roads Organisation to build the road, which will connect Lumla near Tawang with Trashigang in Bhutan

Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary in Trashigang district in Bhutan and the areas around it have **traditionally been believed to be home to the mythical 'Yeti' or 'Migoi' in Bhutanese**

The area is also home to BROKPAS – a semi-nomadic population which migrated from Tibet in the 14th century

Traditional dispute between Bhutan and China: 269 sq km in western sector and 495 sq km in north-central sector

Till last month, China never registered any claim on Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary or any other area in eastern Bhutan

Keeping an eye on China's Nuclear Arsenal
India-China dispute/concerns

Context: There is now growing evidence that the People's Republic of China (PRC) continues to expand its nuclear arsenal

Why China is increasing its nuclear arsenal?
- **Power projection:** An increased nuclear arsenal means a stronger deterrence to China's opponents
- **Against USA:** China is pursuing a planned modernisation of its nuclear arsenal because it fears the multi-layered missile defence capabilities of the United States.
  - --- China is arming its missiles with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs) capabilities to neutralise America's missile shield.
  - --- China's DF-31As, which are road mobile Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), are equipped with MIRVs and potent penetration aids.

Expansionist mode of China vis-à-vis Nuclear arms
- **Increased Tests:** The PRC's ballistic missile tests in 2019 were the highest among the designated Nuclear Weapon States (NWS).
- **Increased Nuclear Arsenal:** The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) observes that China's nuclear arsenal has risen from 290 warheads in 2019 to 320 warheads in 2020.
- **Tactical Nuclear Weapons:** China's Lop Nur was the site of Chinese sub-critical testing since the PRC adopted a moratorium on hot testing in 1996, enabling China to miniaturise warheads.
- **Sizeable Inventory of Fissile materials:** China is estimated to possess 2.9+-0.6 metric tonnes of Weapons-grade Plutonium (WGP) compared to India's is 0.6+-0.15 tonnes of WGP
- **Goal to match U.S. & Russian nuclear force levels:** The Chinese state mouthpiece, Global Times, has recently called for a 1,000-warhead nuclear arsenal, underlining the motivation of the PLA

Challenges to India due to China's nuclear expansionism
- Sophisticated nature of Chinese nuclear capabilities relative to India, give Beijing considerable coercive leverage against India which could alter the conventional military balance
- Increased nuclear arsenal could lead China to press ahead with a limited aims war.
- China is believed to base a part of its nuclear arsenal in inland territories such as in the Far-Western Xinjiang Region, which is close to Aksai Chin.
- Korla in Xinjiang is believed to host DF-26 IRBMs with a range of 4,000 kilometres, which can potentially strike targets across most of India. They can be either conventional or nuclear tipped
- China's land-based missiles are a primarily road mobile and could play a key role in any larger conventional offensive China might mount against India along the LAC.

Way Ahead
- Conventional escalation between Chinese and Indian forces along the LAC must factor the role of nuclear weapons and their impact on military operations
- India's Strategic Forces Command (SFC) needs to be on a heightened state of alert to ward off any Chinese nuclear threats
- India should start seriously assessing its extant nuclear doctrine and redouble efforts to get a robust triadic capability for deterrence.

Connecting the dots -- No First Use policy of India's nuclear doctrine; Nuclear Suppliers Group and why India is not a part of it?

INDIA AND THE WORLD

Developmental approach to take on China
India-China dispute/concerns

Context: There is need to get industrial policy right, so as to take on China in Post-COVID world

India's developmental approach post 1991
• Development has been service sector-led and has undermined manufacturing
• At the same time, China has made rapid strides in manufacturing that has resulted in an uneven balance between the two

Consequences
• The share of manufacturing in GDP and employment has stagnated since economic reforms began in 1991 and manufacturing employment actually fell after 2014.
• China has developed capacities across a wide spectrum in applied engineering and chemical processes and has attempted to capture global markets.
• India on the other hand is stuck with various low-end services, the scope for which is rapidly declining.
• The annual trade-deficit between the two countries, of over $50 billion

Why the present India-China trade balance is unsustainable?
• Most Indian exports are raw materials or in that genre (low-tech and low employment, like ores, rare earths, chemicals), while the imports are in manufacturing (high-tech)
• Such a trade pattern inevitably results in unequal terms of trade in time

Even in areas where India has some competence, critical inputs are imported from China. For instance
• Pharmaceuticals (68% dependence on China, for active ingredients)
• Auto-industry (15-20% dependence on China for electricals, electronics and fuel injection)

• A sustained current account deficit has led India to multilaterals for loans even for undertaking earthworks, and then use the foreign exchange to balance the current account.
• High imports from China also leads exporting meaningful jobs to China.

What should India do to rectify the trade balance with China?
• India's approach to development has to change in favour of manufacturing if a total surrender is to be forestalled.
• Also, there has to be a near ban on imports of low-end products and consumer goods from China. Up to 3,000 imported (Chinese) items (toys, watches, plastic products) could be substituted by local supplies.
• There would be short-term financial losses to consumers, traders and domestic manufacturers for up to 2-3 years by not being able to import inexpensive goods from China, but this will gradually reduce
• Lower imports from China would also imply better overall terms of trade and therefore, stabilisation of the rupee, resulting in lower rupee value of petroleum products

Isn't the above approach equivalent to import-substitution model of yesteryears?
• There is a clear difference between strengthening local companies to become globally competitive (proposed) and companies producing under license for captive markets (earlier)
• Earlier, local industries could not grow in size due to controls, now they can
• Earlier, they were psychologically not prepared to face international markets, now they are.
• Also, the approach proposed here is not to fully substitute imports but to reduce unnecessary imports for saving foreign exchange and jobs, along with weaving the Indian industry into the international division of labour.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

India-Pakistan: Kulbhushan Jadhav case
India-Pak concerns; International laws and policies

About:

- Pakistan has claimed that former naval officer Kulbhushan Jadhav, who is arrested on charges of espionage and terrorism in 2016, has refused to file an appeal against his April 2017 conviction.
- India accused Pakistan of not allowing free and unimpeded consular access to death row prisoner Kulbhushan Jadhav.
- Pakistani security officials did not allow the Consular Officers to get Mr. Jadhav's consent for legal representation. The consent is necessary for filing a review plea against the death sentence.
- India had taken the case to the International Court of Justice which had ordered Pakistan to grant consular access to him.

Background:

- India had moved the International Court of Justice in the same year for the "egregious violation" of the provisions of the Vienna Convention by Pakistan by repeatedly denying New Delhi consular access to Jadhav.
- ICJ had ruled that Pakistan should "review and reconsider" Kulbhushan Jadhav's conviction and death sentence.
- It also ruled that Indian government should be given consular access to Kulbhushan Jadhav.

Important Value Additions:

- ICJ is the "principled judicial organ of the United Nations" (ICJ, 1945), and is based at the Hague in the Netherlands.
- Statute of the International Court of Justice, which is an integral part of the United Nations Charter established the ICJ.
- The ICJ is made up of 15 jurists from different countries (elected to nine-year terms by Permanent members of the UNSC) and no two judges at any given time may be from the same country. The court's composition is static but generally includes jurists from a variety of cultures.
- The function of the ICJ is to resolve disputes between sovereign states.

India-Bangladesh: Cattle smuggling issue
India-Bangladesh concerns

About:

- Three Bangladeshi nationals alleged to be cattle smugglers were lynched by locals in Assam. Four others from across the border escaped.
- This was the second such incident in the same district of Assam in less than two months.

Unresolved issues and irritants that remain:

1. **Water sharing:** Teesta River Agreement, Farakka barriage, Bangladesh objection to the construction of Tipaimukh dam on Barak river in Manipur.
2. **Migrant's issue:** NRC exercise and perception that illegal migrants will be deported to Bangladesh.
3. **Illegal activities along border:** Cattle smuggling, trafficking, drugs dealing and fake currency.
4. India's handling of **Rohingya issue.**
5. **China factor:** growing security and military relations, increasing investment of china in infrastructural projects in Bangladesh is cause of concern for India. Ex: Chittagong port.
6. **Delivery deficit** associated with Indian projects in Bangladesh.

Key facts:

- India shares longest border of length 4,096 km with Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh shares land borders with India to the west, north and the east and Myanmar to the east, whereas the Bay of Bengal lies to its south.
- Indian states Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and West Bengal share the India-Bangladesh border.
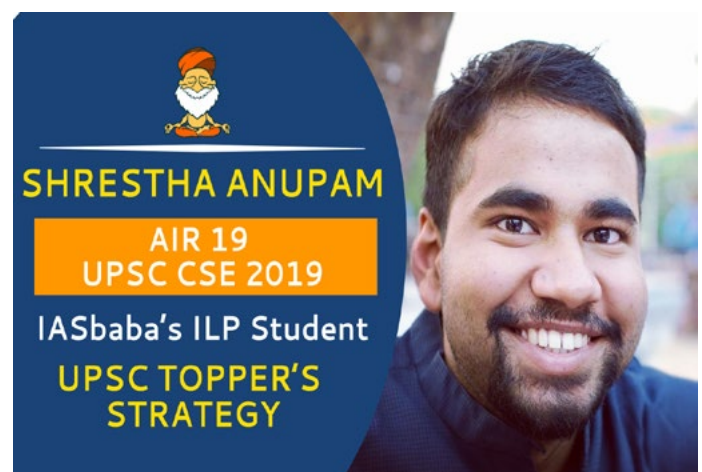
INDIA AND THE WORLD

'Enrica Lexie' Case (Italy v. India)

India-Italy ties; International laws and policies

About Enrica Lexie case: -
- It is an ongoing international controversy about a shooting that happened off the western coast of India.
- On 15 February 2012, two Indian fishermen on board Indian fishing vessel were killed off the coast of Kerala after they were fired upon by Italian marines on board the Italian-flagged commercial oil tanker MV Enrica Lexie.
- Italy had approached the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) in 2015 and the matter was heard by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in July 2019.

Why in news?
- **Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) tribunal** has now ruled that Italian marines held "diplomatic immunity" and would face a trial in Italy, not India.
- However, PCA tribunal found merit in India's counter-claim that the marines on board "Enrica Lexie" had violated the freedom of navigation rights under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) by shooting at fishing boat and should pay compensation to the victims' families, the boat owner and crew members.
- The tribunal said India must cease to exercise its jurisdiction.

Important value additions
- ITLOS is an independent judicial body established by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to adjudicate disputes arising out of the interpretation and application of the Convention.
- Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) is an intergovernmental organization located at The Hague in the Netherlands.
- The PCA is not a court in the traditional sense but provides services of arbitral tribunal to resolve disputes that arise out of international agreements between member states, international organizations or private parties.
- The PCA is constituted through two separate multilateral conventions and is not a United Nations agency, but the PCA is an official UN Observer.

India to accept and abide international tribunal's ruling

Do you know?
- The Centre informed the Supreme Court that it has decided to "accept and abide" by an international tribunal's ruling that the Italian Marines enjoy immunity and are outside the jurisdiction of Indian courts.
- The government said - India is bound by the award of the arbitral tribunal formed under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- According to Tribunal ruling - India is entitled to compensation for the loss of life. The Marines, who are now in Italy, will face criminal investigation there.

Government's decision to accept the tribunal decision is in tune with A**rticle 51(c) and (d)** of the Constitution.

Article 51 - Promotion of international peace and security. The State shall endeavour to -

(a) promote international peace and security;
(b) maintain just and honourable relations between nations;
(c) foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in the dealings of organised peoples with one another; and
(d) encourage settlement of international disputes by arbitration
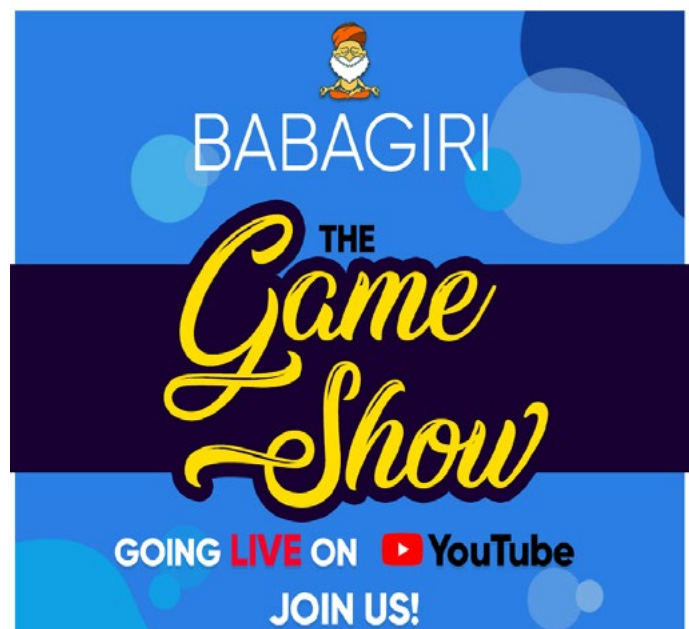
INDIA AND THE WORLD

India-UAE: Open Skies Agreement

India and the World, International Relations

Context:
• UAE is keen to have an open sky agreement with India.

• India has a open skies policy with SAARC countries and those beyond the 5,000-km radius, which implies that nations within this distance need to enter into a bilateral agreement and mutually determine the number of flights that their airlines can operate between the two countries. (as per National Civil Aviation Policy (2016))

• It is this policy that the UAE Ambassador wants India to revisit.

About Open Sky Agreement
• Open Sky Agreements are bilateral agreements that the two countries negotiate to provide rights for airlines to offer international passenger and cargo services. It expands international passenger and cargo flights.

• India has Air Service Agreements (ASA) with 109 countries including UAE. But, India does not allow unlimited number of flights between two countries.

• Open skies between India and UAE will allow unlimited number of flights to the selected cities of each other's countries.

Nepal blacks out Indian news channels

India and its neighbours

Context:
• Nepal banned private Indian news channels, claiming that the channels had been telecasting content hurting its national sentiments.

• Only state-owned broadcaster Doordarshan will be allowed to continue beaming into Nepal.

India-Nepal concerns:
• Tensions between India and Nepal have escalated over Nepal's claim over the Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura areas.

• Nepal maintains that India has claimed the disputed region by building the Darchula-Lipulekh link road despite repeated objections.

• India, on the other hand, said that the road falls within its territory.

• Nepal Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli has also claimed that the Indian government and his political rivals were plotting to oust him from power.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

Iran drops India from Chabahar rail project
India and Iran bilateral ties; International Relations

Context:

• Iranian government has decided to proceed with the construction of Chabahar rail project on its own.
• India and Iran had signed an agreement (before 4 years) to construct a rail line from Chabahar port to Zahedan, along the border with Afghanistan. However, Iran dropped India citing delays from the Indian side in funding and starting the project.

Do you know?

• India wanted the railway line to be built as part of a trilateral agreement between India, Iran and Afghanistan as an alternate trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
• Iran's announcement came after China finalised a massive 25-year, $400 billion strategic partnership deal with Iran, which could cloud India's plans.

About Chabahar Port
• Located on the Makran coast
• South-eastern coast of Iran
• It is relatively underdeveloped free trade and industrial zone (compared to the sprawling port of Bandar Abbas further west)
• It is located in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich Persian Gulf nation's southern coast.
• It lies outside the Persian Gulf and is easily accessed from India's western coast, bypassing Pakistan.

Iran and China to finalize 25-year Strategic Partnership
Internation Affairs; Policies affecting India's interests

In news:
• Iran and China are close to finalize a 25-year Strategic Partnership.
• The Comprehensive Plan for Cooperation between Iran and China will include Chinese involvement in Chabahar's duty-free zone, an oil refinery nearby, and possibly a larger role in Chabahar port as well.
• Iran decided to go head on its own with the construction of a railway line from Chabahar port to Zahedan, dropping India, which had signed MoU in 2016.

Do you know?
• Iran proposed a tie-up between the Chinese-run Pakistani port at Gwadar and Chabahar last year, and has offered interests to China in the Bandar-e-Jask port 350km away from Chabahar, as well as in the Chabahar duty-free zone.
• Iran-China deal impinges on India's "strategic ties" with Iran and the use of Chabahar port.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

Lost opportunity: On India losing Chabahar project
India and Iran bilateral ties; International Relations

Context:
Iran decided to proceed with the Chabahar port rail project by itself citing funding delays from India side in beginning and funding the project

Significance of Chabahar Port
• It gives a boost to India's bilateral ties with Iran which is a major oil supplier for India.
• It will give India access to Afghanistan, Russia and Europe, thus circumventing Pakistan
• The port and the rail project (Chabahar to Zahedan to Zarang near Afghanistan border) will enhance connectivity, energy supplies and trade
• The port is also a key link in the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a multi-modal network of ships, rail and road routes to move freight between India to Russia via Iran.
• It will facilitate India's role in Afghanistan's development through infrastructure and education projects.

Why the recent move by Iran is considered as setback for India?
• India and Iran had agreed to construct 628km rail line from Chabahar port to Zahedan, which will be extended to Zaranj across the border in Afghanistan.
• This rail line was considered by India as an alternate trade route to Afghanistan & Central Asia.
• The state-owned Indian Railways Construction Ltd. (IRCON) had signed a MoU with the Iranian Rail Ministry in 2016 and promised to provide all services, superstructure work and financing (around USD 1.6 billion).
• Iran's latest action comes in the backdrop of Iran finalising a 25-year strategic partnership deal with China worth $400 billion, negotiated in secrecy.

Reasons for Iran's actions

• **Delay in Indian funding due to fear of US Sanctions:** Despite several site visits by IRCON engineers and preparations by Iranian railways, India never began the work, worrying that it could attract sanctions by the USA.
• **Hiccups in bilateral relations:** India has already zeroed out its oil imports from Iran due to USA sanctions. Bilateral ties with Iran took a hit in February 2020 after the riots in Delhi drew condemnation from Iranian
• **Difficulties in logistics procurement:** The USA had provided a sanctions waiver for the Chabahar port and the rail line but it was difficult to find equipment suppliers and partners due to worries of being targeted by the USA
• **Better Deal with China:** The $400 billion deal includes Chinese involvement in Chabahar's duty-free zone, an oil refinery nearby and possibly a larger role in Chabahar port.
• **Growing Iran-China relationship:** Iran proposed a tie-up between the Chinese-run Pakistani port at Gwadar and Chabahar in 2019 and offered interests to China in the Bandar-e-Jask port 350 km away from Chabahar, as well as in the Chabahar duty-free zone.

Conclusion
In a world where connectivity is seen as the new currency, India's loss could well become China's gain.

Connecting the dots
• String of Pearls Theory
• Belt & Road Initiative of China

Iran ties need quiet diplomacy
India and Iran bilateral ties; International Relations

Context:
Recently Iran's Transport and Urban Development Minister had launched the track laying programme for the 628 km long rail link between Chabahar and Zahidan.

The event sparked concerns that India was being excluded from the project especially in the backdrop of Iran finalising a **25-year strategic partnership deal with China worth $400 billion**, negotiated in secrecy.

Later Developments
• Iran has since clarified that India has not been excluded and it could join the project at a later stage.
• This keeps the door open for Ircon International Limited (IRCON) which has been associated with the project even as India continues with the development of Chabahar port.

Need for Chabahar Port & Rail Project- Connectivity for Afghanistan
• The Chabahar port project, signed in 2003, has been jointly developed by India, Iran, and Afghanistan.
• The Chabahar port actually contains two separate ports called **Shahid Kalantari** and **Shahid Beheshti**
• Chabahar port on Iran's Makran coast, just 1,000 km from Kandla(Guajarat), is well situated but road and rail links from Chabahar to Zahidan and then 200 km further on to **Zaranj in Afghanistan,** need to be built.
• Indian PSU IRCON had prepared engineering studies estimating that the 800 km long railway project would need an outlay of $1.6 billion.
• With Iran under sanctions during 2005-13, there was little progress in Iran.
• Meanwhile, India concentrated on the 220 km road to connect Zaranj to Delaram in Afghanistan that was completed in 2008 at a cost of $150 million.

Developments post 2015
• Things moved forward after 2015 when sanctions on Iran eased with the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or the Iran nuclear deal
• In 2016, MoU was signed to equip and operate two terminals at the Shahid Beheshti port (part of Chabahar port) as part of Phase I of the project. This was operational in 2018 and India's wheat shipments to Afghanistan have been using this route.
• Another milestone was the signing of the Trilateral Agreement on Establishment of International Transport and Transit Corridor between Afghanistan, Iran and India.
• A special economic zone (SEZ) at Chabahar was planned but re-imposition of U.S. sanctions has slowed investments into the SEZ.

Did India face hurdles due to US re-imposing Sanction on Iran?
• India was given a waiver from U.S. sanctions to continue cooperation on Chabahar as it contributed to Afghanistan's development
• Despite the waiver, the project has suffered delays because of the time taken by the U.S. Treasury to actually clear the import of heavy equipment such as rail mounted gantry cranes, mobile harbour cranes, etc.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

Why Iran needs China?

1. **Investments:** Chinese promises investment (much needed in sanctions era) in Iranian infrastructure in return for assured supplies of Iranian oil and gas at concessional rates.
2. **Rising tensions in the region:** There has been missile strikes in Saudi Arabia claimed by the Houthis and a U.S. drone strike killed Gen. Qassim Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds Force. Iran thus finds a strategic partner in China
3. **Provocation by USA:** During June-July 2020, there have been more than half-a-dozen mysterious explosions in Iran. Reports attribute these to U.S. and Israeli agencies in an attempt to provoke Iran before the U.S. elections.
4. **Closer relations with China** sends a signal to US that Iran will not take lightly of such provocations
5. **Friend at UNSC:** Russia and China are the only countries to veto the U.S.'s moves in the UNSC. Hence, Iran's closeness with China will help in UNSC Diplomacy

Does that mean that Strategic space for India in Iran has been closed?

1. **China's aggressiveness:** Iran may well be considering a long-term partnership with China, but Iranian negotiators are wary of growing Chinese mercantilist tendencies.
2. **Waiver for India:** Iran realises the advantage of working with India- its only partner that enjoys a sanctions waiver from U.S. for Chabahar since it provides connectivity for land-locked Afghanistan.
3. **Common Enemy:** Iran and India also share an antipathy to a Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. This is why Iran would like to keep the door open for India

Way Ahead

India needs to improve its implementation record of infrastructure projects that it has taken up in its neighbourhood.

The key is to continue to remain politically engaged with Iran so that there is a better appreciation of each other's sensitivities and compulsions.

Did You Know?

• Iran has ambitious plans to extend the railway line from Zahidan to Mashad (about 1,000 km) and then another 150 km onwards to Sarakhs on the border with Turkmenistan.

• Another plan is to link it with the International North-South Transport Corridor towards Bandar Anzali on the Caspian Sea.

• In 2011, a consortium of seven Indian companies led by Steel Authority of India Limited had also successfully bid for mining rights at **Hajigak mines in Afghanistan that contain large reserves of iron ore.**

• However, developments at Hajigak remain stalled because of the precarious security situation in Afghanistan continues.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

India-Iran: Farzad-B gas field
India and Iran ties; International Relations

According to Government of India -

• Iran had gone silent on Chabahar-Zahedan railway project and India didn't receive any response from Iran since December 2019.
• The ONGC's foreign arm OVL is also out of the Farzad-B gas field exploration project.
• Policy changes by the Iranian government, Iran's precarious finances, and the U.S. sanctions situation – are the reasons for dropping India from the projects.

Do you know?

• The MEA has confirmed that India is no longer involved in the Farzad-B gas field project where ONGC had originally signed an agreement for exploration in 2002, investing approximately $100 million thus far.
• India had proposed to invest $1.6 billion in the Chabahar-Zahedan railway line, and approximately $6 billion in the Farzad-B gas field project.

Malabar exercise: May include Australia
International relations; Defence

Context:
• India to decide whether to include Australia in the Malabar exercises with Japan and the U.S.
• The decision, if taken, could bring all Quad countries together as part of the annual war games.
• After years of reluctance, India said it was open to Australia's inclusion in the Malabar as an observer.

India to take a call on Australia's inclusion in Malabar Excercise

About Malabar Exercise
• Malabar is an annual military exercise between the navies of India, Japan and the U.S. held alternately in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
• The annual Malabar exercise started in 1992 as a bilateral event between the navies of India and the United States.
• It was expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan in 2015.

Do you know?
• Australia's inclusion would be seen as a possible first step towards the militarisation of the Quad coalition, something Beijing has opposed in the past.
• Japan and US have been keen on Australia's inclusion and have been pushing India to consider it.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

15th India- European Union (virtual) summit
India and EU ties; International Relations

Focus areas:
- India and EU to restart free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations - Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)
- To conclude several agreements including - a roadmap for cooperation, an agreement on research sharing for civil nuclear cooperation and launch a maritime security dialogue as well as negotiations between Europol and the CBI.
- Medical developments on vaccines and treatment.

Do you know?
- EU is India's largest trading partner and investor, and accounts for 11% of India's global trade.
- EU had welcomed India's election to the UN Security Council next year.
- EU has reservations about the model "Bilateral Investment Treaty" (BIT) that India has proposed, especially on dispute mechanisms in Indian courts.
- Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement is a Free Trade Agreement between India and EU, which was initiated in 2007.

THINK!
Significance of EU to India

India-EU summit
India and EU ties; International Relations

Major outcomes:
1. India and EU committed to a framework for strategic cooperation until 2025. (Five-year roadmap for the India-EU strategic partnership.)
2. Both vowed to cooperate on their response to the coronavirus pandemic and the United Nations Security Council.
3. To revive talks on a free trade agreement (Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement) that have been suspended since 2013.
4. Civil nuclear research and development cooperation agreement between EURATOM and the Department of Atomic Energy.
5. Exchange best practices in range of areas and the renewal of their science and technology agreement for another five years.

India-EU areas of convergence:
- India and the EU are natural partners.
- India-EU partnership is important for global peace and stability.
- Both share similar 'universal values' of democracy, pluralism, respect for international institutions and multilateralism.
- Share common interest in tackling climate change, and building trade.
- EU is India's largest trading partner, while India is the EU's ninth biggest trading partner.

India-EU areas of divergence:
- EU leadership had raised concerns over the situation in Jammu and Kashmir as well as Citizenship Amendment Act.
- EU expressed concerns about India's "protectionist" tone to "Atmanirbhar Bharat" slogan.

India Ideas Summit

Context:
- Both countries reiterated for longer term plan and work towards a comprehensive trade deal.
- As an intermediate step between the imminent limited deal and the comprehensive deal (Free Trade Agreement), India **proposed a preferential trade agreement** that would cover 50 to 100 goods and services.
- India wants US to restore its access to the U.S. preferential trading system or **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)** and increase market access for some categories of Indian agricultural products among others.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

India-Russia relations
India and Russia ties; International Relations

Indian envoy to Russia said -
- India wants Russia to be more involved in the Indo-Pacific. (as India views Russia as a very important Pacific power)
- Russia should look to its own interests in the region and that will create a mutual basis for cooperation and dialogue.

Recent developments:
- Indian and Russian investments in Vietnam's oil and gas sector can be considered as one of the areas of cooperation.
- India wants Indo-Pacific region to be free and fair for everyone.
- A stable Indo-Pacific assumes particular importance for Russia too with the proposed energy bridge from Arctic to Vladivostok to Chennai.

Do you know?

- There have been standoffs between China and Vietnam in the South China Sea due to overlapping claims close to the Indian oil blocks in Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- Russian President Vladimir Putin to visit India later this year which coincides with the 20th year of India-Russia strategic partnership.

India-US concerns:

- U.S. concerns include - market access for American dairy and agricultural products, medical devices and a cut in information and communication technology (ICT) import tariffs.
- The U.S. also has concerns with India's digital trade policies (for instance FDI in commerce, and data localisation).

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About Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)
- It is a preferential tariff system extended by developed countries (also known as preference giving countries or donor countries) to developing countries (also known as preference receiving countries or beneficiary countries).
- It involves reduced MFN Tariffs or duty-free entry of eligible products exported by beneficiary countries to the markets of donor countries.
- It helps in making the goods of beneficiary country competitive in donor country.

INTERNATIONAL

Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)
Role of international organizations; Security issues

What is CAATSA?
• CAATSA, which came into effect from January 2018; enables the U.S. government to punish entities engaging in significant transaction with the defence or intelligence sectors of Russia, Iran or North Korea.

The law is designed to punish Russian President Vladimir Putin for the
• 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine
• Involvement in the Syrian civil war
• Meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election

In news
• Recently, we read about Defence Acquisition Council approving the procurement of 21 MiG-29 fighter jets and upgrading 59 of these Russian aircraft and the acquisition of 12 Su-30 MKI aircraft.
• India has also planned to purchase the S-400 Triumf missile defence system from Russia for about $5 billion.
• The above deals could attract CAATSA sanctions.
• CAATSA law provides for punitive action against countries purchasing defence hardware from Russia.

US to withdraw from WHO
International Organization

Context:
• Trump administration formally started the withdrawal of the U.S. from the World Health Organization (WHO), due to its failed response to the coronavirus.
• WHO, the Geneva-based body, leads the global fight on maladies from polio to COVID-19.
• Trump had threatened to suspend the $400 million in annual U.S. contributions and had that US will withdraw from WHO.

Important Value Additions:
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.

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

INTERNATIONAL

International Comparison Program (ICP)

International Organization; International Programs

In news:

• World Bank released new PPPs for the reference year 2017, under the International Comparison Program (ICP).
• ICP is a partnership of various statistical administrations of up to 199 countries guided by the World Bank.
• The Program produces internationally comparable price and volume measures for gross domestic product (GDP).
• Its component expenditures are based on purchasing power parities (PPPs).
• The ICP tries to make different countries GDPs comparable by calculating them in PPP both currency converters and spatial price deflators.

Do you know?

• ICP is one of the largest statistical initiatives in the world. It is managed by the World Bank under the auspices of the United Nations Statistical Commission, and relies on a partnership of international, regional, sub-regional, and national agencies working under a robust governance framework and following an established statistical methodology.
• India has participated in almost all ICP rounds since its inception in 1970.
• India is participating in the current phase of International Comparison Programme (ICP) with reference to 2017.
• India is third-largest economy in terms of its PPP-based share in global actual individual consumption and global gross capital formation.
• The next ICP comparison will be conducted for the reference year 2021.

What Is Purchasing Power Parity (PPP)?

• PPP is a popular macroeconomic analysis metric which is used to compare economic productivity and standards of living between countries.
• PPP is an economic theory that compares different countries' currencies through a "basket of goods" approach.

Pakistan-Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement

Internation Affairs; Policies affecting India's interests

In news:

• Pakistan to allow Afghanistan to send goods to India via the Wagah border from July 15, as part of Pakistan's commitment under the Pakistan-Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement.
• The decision is expected to boost Afghanistan's exports to India.

Do you know?

• Both Pakistan and India had suspended trade through the Wagah border in March to deal with the pandemic challenge.
• However, Pakistan is silent about allowing Indian exports to Afghanistan.

INTERNATIONAL

Srebrenica massacre
International Affairs; Map-based

In news:
• On July 11, 25 years on, commemoration services were held at the Srebrenica-Potocari Memorial and Cemetery in remembrance of the victims of the massacre.
• In July 1995, approximately 8,000 Muslims, mostly men and boys were killed in Srebrenica, by Bosnian Serb forces led by Commander Ratko Mladić.
• These killings were later classified as genocide by international tribunals investigating the massacre.

Do you know?
• Srebrenica is a small town in Bosnia and Herzegovina in south-eastern Europe on Balkan Peninsula.
• The Bosnian War that occurred between 1992-1995, witnessed a period of displacement and ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats by the Bosnian Serb army and paramilitary forces.

China-Iran ties
International Relations

About:
• Iran and China are taking their partnership to a new level through a $400-billion long-term agreement.
• Both the countries are in an advanced stage of finalising the agreement that would allow China to expand its presence in banking, telecommunications, ports, railways and several other sectors in the Islamic Republic in return for heavily discounted oil for 25 years.
• The above agreement if finalized could be an economic lifeline for sanctions-hit Iran and China could enhance its strategic influence in a region where the U.S. has built a strong presence since the Second World War.
• The agreement could also attract punitive measures from the U.S. against China.

Converging areas:
• Both countries are at odds with the U.S.
• While China is a huge energy market and is abundant with surplus cash, Iran is a sanctions-hit, cash-strapped energy exporter.
• Iran has a very crucial place in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
• China and Iran would launch joint training exercises, joint research and weapons development and intelligence sharing.
• China will also offer its GPS to Iran, build infrastructure for 5G rollout and develop free trade zones.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S. rejects Beijing's claims in S. China Sea
International Affairs

About:

• United States said China's claims to offshore resources across most of the South China Sea are completely unlawful.

• South China Sea has rich source of valuable oil and gas deposits and is a vital waterway for the world's commerce.

• US also said that it would stand with the international community in defence of freedom of the seas and respect for sovereignty and reject any claims in South China Sea.

Do you know?

• China claims most of the South China Sea through a so-called **nine-dash line**, a vague delineation based on maps from the 1940s.

• US rejected claims of China in the waters surrounding Vanguard Bank off Vietnam, Lucania Shoals off Malaysia, waters considered in Brunei's exclusive economic zone and Natuna Besar off Indonesia.

• US also rejected China's southernmost claim of Malaysian-administered James Shoal, which is 1,800 km (1,150 miles) from the Chinese mainland.

Britain bans Huawei from future role in 5G network
International Affairs

Context:

• Britain imposed ban on Chinese telecommunications company Huawei, citing concerns that Huawei equipment could allow the Chinese government to infiltrate U.K. networks.

• US has threatened to cut off security cooperation unless Britain dumped Huawei.

• The decision would delay the 5G rollout and cost millions of pounds.

US Sanctions on China
International Affairs

• U.S. stripped Hong Kong of preferential trade treatment and authorised sanctions on banks over China's clampdown in the financial hub

• According to Trump administration, Hong Kong will now be treated the same as mainland China — no special privileges, no special economic treatment and no export of sensitive technologies.

• China vowed to retaliate and impose sanctions on relevant U.S. personnel and entities.

World Drug Report and UNODC
Role of international organizations; Security issues

Context
According to the latest World Drug Report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) -

• India in top five (fourth position) in terms of seizure of opium in 2018.
• Opium seizure - Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan were the top 3 countries.
• India was at the 12th position in the world in terms of heroin seizure.
• Heroin seizure – Iran, Turkey, United States, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan.
• Global area under opium poppy cultivation declined for the second year in a row in 2019.
• Despite the decline in cultivation, opium production remained stable in 2019, with higher yields reported in the main opium production areas.
• Asia is host to more than 90% of global illicit opium production and the world's largest consumption market for opiates.
• Asia accounted for almost 80% of all opiates seized worldwide in 2018.
• Outside Asia, the largest total quantity of heroin and morphine was seized in Europe (22% of the global total in 2018).

Do you know?

• Heroin is manufactured from the morphine extracted from the seed pod of opium poppy plants.
• Opium is illicitly produced in about 50 countries.
• However, close to 97% of the total global production of opium in the past five years came from only 3 countries.
• 84% of the total opium was produced in Afghanistan.
• Myanmar accounts for 7% of the global opium production, and Laos accounted for 1% of the opium production.
• Mexico accounts for 6% of the global opium production, while Colombia and Guatemala account for less than 1% of global production.
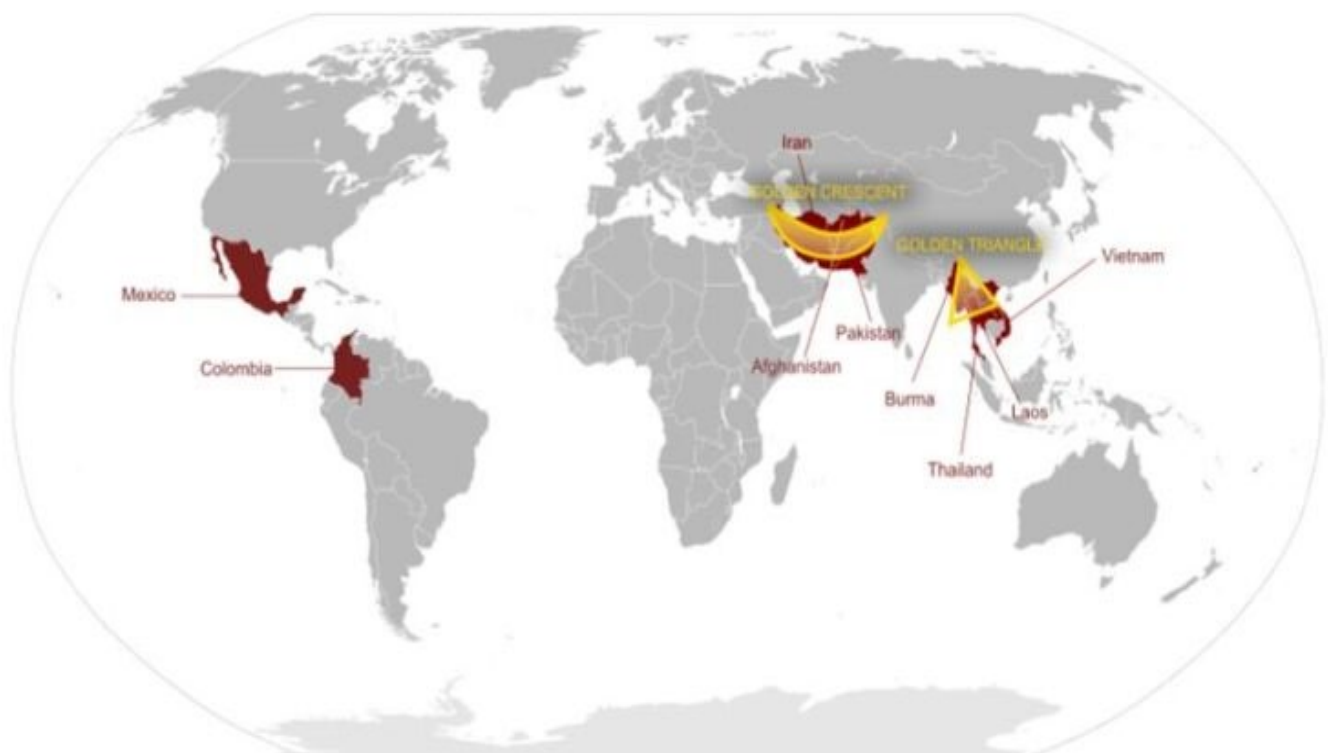
About United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

• UNODC is a United Nations office that was established in 1997.
• It is a member of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group.
• The office aims long-term to better equip governments to handle drug-, crime-, terrorism-, and corruption-related issues.
• These are the main themes that UNODC deals with: Alternative Development, anti-corruption, Criminal Justice, Prison Reform and Crime Prevention, Drug Prevention, -Treatment and Care, HIV and AIDS, Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling, Money Laundering, Organized Crime, Piracy, Terrorism Prevention.

ECONOMY

Measures taken to boost MSMEs
Economy; Growth and Development

Context
Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are facing problems like **low liquidity or cash flow** and **lack of workforce** as the daily-wagers have gone to their villages due to COVID lockdown.

Measures taken:
1. RBI introduced **Long Term Repo Operations (LTRO)** worth Rs 1,00,000 crore to help banks increase lending at cheaper interest rates.
2. Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved ₹50,000 crore **equity infusion for MSMEs**.
3. The CCEA also approved the **new definition of MSMEs**.
4. RBI is likely to allow banks to assign **zero risk weight for loans** that will be extended to the MSMEs. Zero risk would mean that banks will not have to set aside additional capital for these loans.
5. National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC) to provide 100% guarantee coverage to eligible MSMEs, in the form of a **Guaranteed Emergency Credit Line (GECL) facility.**
6. **Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE)** was launched by the GoI to make available collateral-free credit to the MSMEs sector.

New definition of MSMEs

Micro enterprise : :
investment < 1 cr and turnover < 5 cr

Small enterprise : :
investment <10 cr and turnover < 50 cr

Medium enterprise : :
investment < 50 cr and turnover < 250 cr

Key facts:
• India currently has over 75 million MSMEs
• MSMEs provide employment to over 114 million people
• MSMEs contribute to more than 30% of the GDP

Equity infusion into MSMEs

• Cabinet panel approved a ₹50,000 cr equity infusion into MSMEs through Fund of Funds, and an additional ₹20,000 cr fund for the MSMEs sector.

ECLGS for the MSME sector
Economy; Growth and Development

About
• Banks have sanctioned more than Rs. 1 lakh-crore loans under the Rs. 3-lakh crore Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) for the MSME sector reeling under COVID-19-induced economic slowdown.
• The scheme is the biggest fiscal component of the Rs. 20-lakh crore 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' package announced by Finance Minister last month.

Important value additions
Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS)
• The ECLGS scheme has been formulated as a specific response to the unprecedented situation caused by COVID-19 and the consequent lockdown which has severely impacted manufacturing and other activities in the MSME sector.
• The Scheme aims at mitigating the economic distress being faced by MSMEs by providing them additional funding of up to Rs. 3 lakh crore in the form of a fully guaranteed emergency credit line.
• The main objective of the Scheme is to provide an incentive to Member Lending Institutions (MLIs), i.e., Banks, Financial Institutions (FIs) and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) to increase access to, and enable availability of additional funding facility to MSME borrowers, in view of the economic distress caused by the COVID-19 crisis, by providing them 100 per cent guarantee for any losses suffered by them due to non-repayment of the GECL funding by borrowers.

ECONOMY

Asian Development Bank
Regional group/organizations; Economy

Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE)

• The Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGS) was launched by the Government of India (GoI) to make available collateral-free credit to the micro and small enterprise sector.

• Both the existing and the new enterprises are eligible to be covered under the scheme.

• The Ministry of MSMEs and Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) established a Trust named Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) to implement the scheme.

WB and India sign $750 million Agreement for MSME

• World Bank and the Government of India signed the $750 million agreement for the MSME Emergency Response Programme.

• The programme aims to support increased flow of finance into the hands of MSMEs severely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

• World Bank's MSME Emergency Response Programme will address the immediate liquidity and credit needs of some 1.5 million viable MSMEs to help them withstand the impact and protect millions of jobs.

Do you know?

• World Bank has to date committed $2.75 billion to support India's emergency COVID-19 response, including the new MSME project.

About:
• Asian Development Bank (ADB) is a regional development bank established on 19 December 1966, which is headquartered in **Manila, Philippines.**
• ADB aims to promote social and economic development in Asia.
• The bank admits the members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and non-regional developed countries.

Do you know?

• The ADB was modeled closely on the World Bank, and has a similar weighted voting system.
• From 31 members at its establishment, ADB now has 68 members.
• ADB is an official United Nations Observer.
• India was a founding member of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 1966 and is now the bank's fourth largest shareholder and top borrower.

As of 31 December 2019, ADB's five largest shareholders are Japan and the United States (each with 15.6% of total shares), the People's Republic of China (6.4%), India (6.3%), and Australia (5.8%).

Why ADB is in news?
• ADB announced that it had appointed Election Commissioner **Ashok Lavasa** as its vicepresident (VP) for private sector operations and public-private partnerships.

ECONOMY

Rolling back the induced livelihood shock
Indian Economy and issues relating

Context: During the lockdown, India's less-privileged workforce have witnessed falling incomes and loss of means of livelihood.

Pre-Pandemic Issues with Poverty
• **Poverty Line:** India's poverty line has been a matter of debate due to its unrealistically low thresholds leading to low poverty numbers.
• **Irregular Updation:** There has also been ambiguity around poverty estimation due to irregular updating of official poverty lines and unavailability of data on consumption expenditure from National Sample Surveys in recent years

What can be the possible extent of Poverty in India?
• According to the household consumption expenditure reported in the PLFS, 2017-18 (which replaces the employment-unemployment surveys of the NSSO) and applying State-specific poverty lines (used by the erstwhile Planning Commission in 2011 based on the Tendulkar Committee recommendations, adjusted with current price indices), about 42% or around 56 crore people can be considered as poor before the lockdown was announced.
• Another 20 crore people were within a narrow band 20% above the poverty line given the people towards the lower half of the consumption expenditure distribution

Poverty Deepening due to Pandemic
• Certain estimates from the PLFS data extrapolated for the year 2020 suggest that about an additional 40 crore people were pushed below the poverty line due to the lockdown
• Around 12 crore of this lockdown-induced newly poor are in urban areas and another 28 crore people in rural areas.
• Those who were already poor are going to suffer a further worsening in their quality of life, a phenomenon known as poverty deepening.
• Before the lockdown, around 16% of the population had per capita consumption expenditure of about a third of the poverty line, managing their daily expenses with ₹30 per day or less.
• After the lockdown this could swell to more than 62 crore (47%) people pushed to such extreme poverty.

What should be the State response to prevent poverty deepening?
1. Revamped and expanded NREGA needs to be made the fulcrum of the rural recharge.
• The demand for work is anticipated to increase by 25% with reverse migration-fuelled increase in rural labour supply.
• The revamped scheme would require providing 90 million workers guaranteed employment of 20 days of work/month for at least the next six months.
• This means an additional financial stimulus of ₹1.6-lakh crore.

2. Universalisation of the Public Distribution System
• Recent experience of expanding food coupons to non-ration card holders in Delhi suggests that such measures are likely to exclude marginalised communities
• Thus, food distribution through PDS needs better equity focus in implementation.

ECONOMY

... Continued

3. Stabilising urban economy

• Pandemic induced reverse migration from Urban areas to rural areas can bring instability to urban economy
• Urban employment guarantee programme becomes a dire necessity to stabilise the urban economy.
• A direct employment programme implemented through municipal corporations could be introduced to guarantee 20 days of work per month.
• This can be used to develop key social infrastructure in urban areas including slum development, drinking water supply, toilet construction, parks and common areas, urban afforestation and social forestry.
• The wages could be fixed with 30% premium over prevalent MNREGA benchmark average wage in the State.
• Subsidies like cash transfer can be provided to employers in MSMEs so as to revive their business.

Conclusion

If the course of economic progress and development programmes are not reoriented, the implications could be severe with increasing hunger-related deaths and destitution, leading to social unrest and crime

Connecting the dots

• Food Coupons Vs Subsidised Food provision
• Direct Benefit Transfer
• Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)

Do we need a fiscal council?

Government Budgeting; Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

Context:

• Former RBI Governor D. Subbarao gives his opinion on whether Fiscal Council is needed or not
• The government needs to borrow and spend more now in order to support vulnerable households and engineer economic recovery

Challenges with respect to increasing borrowings

• A steep rise in debt will jeopardise medium-term growth prospects
• Loss of inter-generational equity: Increased borrowing increases interest burden on future generation and reduces their capability to borrow
• Possible downgrading of Sovereign ratings which may lead to slowdown of foreign investments in country
• Inflation in near term
• Loss of market confidence due to government's fiscal irresponsibility

How to increase borrowing while still retaining market confidence?

• Government has to come out with a credible plan for fiscal consolidation post-COVID-19 in order to retain market confidence.
• The government can signal its virtue by establishing some new institutional mechanism for enforcing fiscal discipline, such as for example a fiscal council

About Fiscal Council

• It was first recommended by the 13th Finance Commission and was subsequently endorsed by the 14th Finance Commission and then by FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) Review Committee headed by N.K. Singh.
• Fiscal council, at its core, is a permanent agency with a mandate to independently assess the government's fiscal plans and projections against parameters of macroeconomic sustainability
• It will then put out its findings in the public domain.
• Such an open scrutiny will keep the government on the straight and narrow path of fiscal virtue and hold it to account for any default.
• It will give an independent and expert assessment of the government's fiscal stance, and thereby aid an informed debate in Parliament.

ECONOMY

Challenges w.r.t to Fiscal Council

1. Lack of Political will leading to Chronic fiscal irresponsibility

• Back in 2003 when FRBM was enshrined into law, it was thought of as the magic cure for fiscal ills.

• The FRBM enjoins the government to conform to pre-set fiscal targets, and in the event of failure to do so, to explain the reasons for deviation

• The government is also required to submit to Parliament a 'Fiscal Policy Strategy Statement' (FPSS) to demonstrate the credibility of its fiscal stance

• However, there is lack of in-depth discussion in Parliament on fiscal stance and the submission of the FPSS often passes off without even much notice.

2. Its working may create confusion

• Fiscal council will give macroeconomic forecasts which the Finance Ministry is expected to use for the budget, and if the Ministry decides to differ from those estimates, it is required to explain why it has differed.

• Besides, forcing the Finance Ministry to use someone else's estimates will dilute its accountability.

• If the estimates go wrong, Finance Ministry will simply shift the blame to the fiscal council.

3. Duplication of Work

• As of now, both the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and RBI give forecasts of growth and other macroeconomic variables, questions will be raised about need for Fiscal Council's projections

• Another argument made in support of a fiscal council is that it will act as watchdog & prevent the government from gaming the fiscal rules through creative accounting.

• However, there is already an institutional mechanism in form of CAG to do the job of auditing & fiscal watchdog of government spending

What will be the mandate/functions of Fiscal Council?

The fiscal council's mandate will include

• Making multi-year fiscal projections, preparing fiscal sustainability analysis

• Providing an independent assessment of the Central government's fiscal performance and compliance with fiscal rules

• Recommending suitable changes to fiscal strategy to ensure consistency of the annual financial statement

• Taking steps to improve quality of fiscal data

• Producing an annual fiscal strategy report which will be released publicly.

Way Ahead- Starting with small steps

• A week before the scheduled budget presentation, let the CAG, a constitutional authority, appoint a three-member committee for a five-week duration with a limited mandate of scrutinising the budget after it is presented to Parliament

• The committee will scrutinise government's fiscal stance and the integrity of the numbers, and give out a public report

• The CAG's office will provide the secretarial and logistic support to the committee from within its resources.

• The Finance Ministry, the RBI, the CSO and the Niti Aayog will each depute an officer to serve in the secretariat.

• The committee will be wound up after submitting its report

Connecting the dots

• N.K. Singh Committee recommendations

Tamil Nadu: top investment destination

• Tamil Nadu has emerged as the country's top investment destination in the first quarter of this financial year.

• Overall fresh investment announcements in India slumped to the lowest in five years.

• The Tamil Nadu government had signed 17 MoUs , whereas Maharashtra had signed 12 MoUs with firms from Singapore, South Korea and the U.S. through a virtual summit.

Do you know?

The nationwide lockdown has also led to suspension of work on investment projects worth around Rs. 21.12 lakh crore due to critical factors such as shortage of labour, funds and equipment.

ECONOMY

Country of origin tag is must for e-commerce portals
Govt schemes and initiatives; Economy

Context:
• Ministry of Consumer Affairs has said that all e-commerce portals should ensure that the "country of origin" of the products being sold by them should be mentioned as part of mandatory declarations.
• The move is aimed to give push to 'Made in India' products and to help the consumers make an informed choice. (Boycott China-made goods)
• As per **Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules, 2011** – it is mandatory for all manufacturers to declare the package name and address of the manufacturer, common and generic name of commodity, net quantity, month and year of manufacturing, MRP and consumer care details.

Core industry output contracts
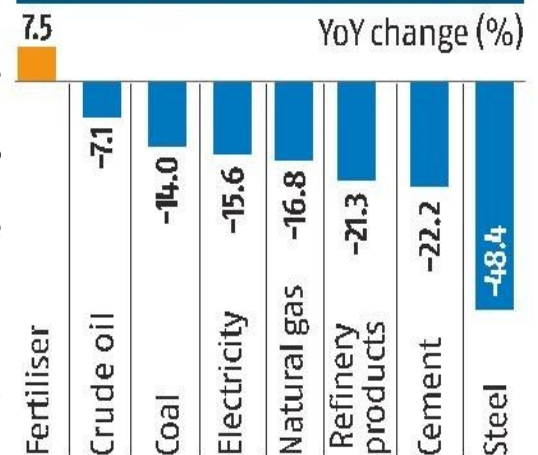*Economy; Growth and Development*

In news:
• The output of eight core sector industries shrank 23% in May 2020.
• Of the eight core sectors, the fertilizer industry was the only one which saw actual growth in output in May month compare to May 2019.
• Steel sector performance was the worst, which recorded a 48.4% fall, while cement production dropped 22%.
• Good monsoon and kharif sowing season - led to some growth in the fertilizer sector.

Key prelims pointers:
• The eight core sector industries are coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity.

COVID CRIPPLES GROWTH
Sectoral performance in May
YoY change (%)

Fertiliser	Crude oil	Coal	Electricity	Natural gas	Refinery products	Cement	Steel
7.5	-7.1	-14.0	-15.6	-16.8	-21.3	-22.2	-48.4

ECONOMY

COVID-19 fiscal response and India's standing
Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources

Context: Before the announcement of the Atmanirbhar Bharat package, India lagged significantly behind comparable developing countries in providing COVID-19 relief package.

Challenges with the relief package

1. Discerning Fiscal Response: Given the blurring of the distinction between fiscal and monetary components, ensuring comparable and accurate figures for fiscal responses is a challenge.

2. Differing numbers: Domestically the total Atmanirbhar package is billed at 10% of GDP. The headline number for India's fiscal response in international databases is around 4% of GDP.

3. Inadequate Demand-Side Intervention:
• The one significant demand-side intervention in the Atmanirbhar Bharat package was ₹40,000 crore of additional outlay for MGNREGA
• Most other demand-side measures involve the frontloading, consolidation, or rerouting of existing funds.
• For example, the recently announced ₹50,000 crore Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan, which consolidates projects of 12 ministries/departments.

4. Given the strict containment measures, the package is inadequate:
• The extent of relief measures does not seem to be commensurate with the economic disruption and dislocation caused by the severity of the lockdown.
• Vietnam, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Egypt, all while averaging less stringent measures than those in India, have announced stimulus measures that are as large or more substantial, as a share of GDP

What lessons India can learn from other countries of world while enhancing relief?

1. Cash Transfers
• Cash transfers constitute the largest category of support by other developing countries. Of the World Bank's list of 621 measures across 173 countries, half were cash-based
• The World Bank reports that, on average, such transfers amount to 30% of monthly GDP per capita, reaching 46% for lower-middle-income countries, for an average of three months.
• Bangladesh and Indonesia have increased the number of cash transfer beneficiaries by 163% and 111%, respectively.
• Indonesia's cash schemes now cover more than 158 million people (or 60% of the population).
• India could take these actions into account in decisions about expanding existing transfer programmes (like PM-Kisan scheme) or even creating new ones.

2. Financing through monetary routes
• Countries are experimenting with purchases of public and private bonds in the secondary market (quantitative easing) or directly purchasing government bonds on the primary market (monetising the deficit).
• Indonesia and Brazil have both amended laws to allow their central banks to buy government bonds
• Philippine central bank has also bought $6bn (₹42,250 crore) worth of government bonds under a three-month repurchase agreement that is extendable after three month

Time to reskill India
Indian Economy and issues relating to it;
Government policies and interventions

Context: A large number of workers both in the in-formal and formal sectors will either lose their jobs or encounter a significant change in how jobs are done post-Covid-19.

Did You Know?
• The travel & tourism sector accounted for 12.2% of employment opportunities generated in the country in 2017.
• 80% of travel & tourism industry is composed of SMEs
• As per initial estimates by the Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH), losses could be in the range of Rs 5 lakh crore.

What are the adversely impacted sectors due to COVID-19 pandemic?
• Adversely impacted sectors are tourism & hospitality, restaurants, organised retail, media & entertainment, logistics and real estate, among others.
• Consequences: Workers in these sectors could seek redeployment into other sectors or alternative livelihood opportunities.
• Way Ahead: Reskilling of such workers can make the churn smoother and less disruptive for these vulnerable categories.

What steps need to be taken for reskilling?
• Reskilling can be taken up in a phased manner
• Initially target of reskilling should be a section of migrant workers who have returned to their source states
• It should also be done to those who were in sectors where jobs are not likely to come back soon due to social distancing.
• At least 25% of the at-risk workforce needs to be targeted, which is seeking redeployment and can be made relatively productive through reskilling.
• This reskilling will be a short-term mission because most of this workforce would hopefully get back to their first occupation/location once the situation improves in the medium term.

Which sectors can take up more jobs?

As in the supply equation, the demand situation can be divided into three areas.

1. Domestic consumption-facing sectors
• This includes the gig economy that could temporarily support lost livelihoods in the most impacted sectors.
• As healthcare resources are under stress in the management of Covid-19, there is a huge demand for not only related healthcare personnel, but also workers in general patient care, diagnostics, health-tech and counsellors.
• Also, e-commerce, telecom, financial services, etc, are relatively resilient sectors that can absorb manpower.

2. Self-Employment
• For reverse migrants who will not return in the short term, training can be provided for entrepreneurship and self-employment
• Opportunities are also likely to come up due to economic revival and focused on rural economy (rural roads, houses and light manufacturing)
• Since agriculture remains the mainstay for rural India, a section of migrant labourers could be reskilled in high-value agriculture (horticulture, livestock, sericulture, aquaculture and plantations).

Way Ahead
• **Remodelling skill value chain:** Candidates have to be motivated to undergo remote counselling and a predominant digital delivery of learning.
• **Leveraging of Technology:** Since vocational training is more hands-on, technologies like AR/VR-powered simulating training has to be integrated with video-based teaching.
• **Capabilities and Mindset:** Trainer capacity has to be enhanced to provide more online training. Importantly, a mindset change at all levels of skill delivery, administration and governance has to be enabled.
• **Bridging Digital Divide:** Digital infrastructure for a time-bound reskilling effort needs to be seamlessly integrated into the long-term plan of 'digital-first skilling'. This requires addressing issues like digital illiteracy & digital accessibility

Conclusion - A reskilling programme will strengthen the vocational education ecosystem and also im-prove employment and livelihood.

ECONOMY

3. Enhance MGNREGA

• India has been a leader in employment guarantee policies with its flagship MGNREGA programme.

• Mexico announced an enlargement of its rural permanent employment scheme to 200,000 farmers and beneficiaries.

• Indonesia has allocated more than $1 billion (more than ₹7,000 crore) to fund public works schemes that will benefit at least 600,000 workers

• Additionally, the Indonesia central government has directed village authorities to focus their budgets on a cash-for-work programme for day labourers and the unemployed.

• It is the right time to expand entitlements in MGNREGA programme as well as introduce an urban version of it.

Conclusion

• Additional fiscal outlay — in the form of cash and in-kind transfers and expanded public works schemes — would save lives and jobs today and might prevent a protracted slowdown.

Connecting the dots

• N.K.Singh committee recommendations
• Need for Fiscal Council

AGRICULTURE

A way to Aatmanirbharat in agriculture
Government policies and interventions; Indian Economy; Agriculture sector

Context: For a large country like India with a 1.37-billion population, much of the food has to be produced at home i.e self-reliant in agricultural sector.

Do you know?
• During the 1950s & 60s, India was in a situation of 'ship to mouth', where in it was dependent on food aid from other countries
• However, today India has been a net exporter of agri-produce.

Difference in situation between 1960s and now
• In 1960s, if India had spent all its foreign currency reserves (about $400 million) just on wheat imports, it could import about 7 million tonnes (mt) of wheat.
• Today, India has foreign exchange reserves of more than $500 billion. Therefore, for importing 20 mt of wheat at a landed cost of $250/tonne, it would cost just $5 billion, which is simply 1% of India's foreign exchange reserves.
• Therefore, the biggest reform of the last three decades that has given aatmanirbharta in food is the correction of the exchange rate, coupled with the gradual integration of India with the world economy

Agri-trade scenario in India
• Over the last 10 years (2010-11 to 2019-20) India has been a net exporter of agri-produce. In fact, it has been so ever since reforms began in 1991.
• The golden year of agri-trade has been 2013-14: exports at $43.6 billion and imports were at $18.9 billion, giving a net trade surplus of $24.7 billion
• For the past five years, agri-exports have been sluggish and sliding
• Agri-exports in 2019-20 were just $36 billion, and net agri-trade surplus at $11.2 billion.

How to increase the agri-trade surplus in coming years?

1. Agri-trade policy to be based on principle of "comparative advantage".
• That means exporting more where we have a competitive edge, and importing where we lack competitiveness
• The current agri-export basket of 2019-20 gives a sense of "revealed comparative advantage".
• Marine products with $6.7 billion exports top the list followed by rice at $6.4 billion, spices at $3.6 billion, buffalo meat at $3.2 billion, sugar at $2.0 billion

2. Diversification of subsidies
Rice and sugar are heavily subsidised through free power and highly subsidised fertilisers, especially urea.
• Together, the power and fertiliser subsidies account for about 10-15% of the value of rice and sugar being produced on per hectare basis
• This is leading to virtual export of water as one kilogram of rice requires 3,500-5,000 litres of water for irrigation, and one kilogram of sugar consumes about 2,000 litres of water.
• However, we don't give similar incentives for exports of high-value agri-produce like fruits and vegetables, spices, tea and coffee, or cotton. Thus, there is a need to provide subsidies to these crops as well

3. Giving boost to Oil Palm
• On the agri-imports front, the biggest item, edible oil, is worth about $10 billion (in quantity terms, about 15 mt plus)
• Thus, there is a need for augmenting productivity and recovery ratio of oil from oilseeds, and in case of palm oil, from fresh fruit bunches.

AGRICULTURE

Dairy Cooperatives: A model for realisation of Atmanirbhar Bharat

Economics of animal-rearing; Agriculture sector

Context: The Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan aimed at making India self-reliant in the post-Covid-19 economic reconstruction.

Self-reliance is thought to be achieved by giving thrust on two themes: 'vocal for local' and 'local to global'.

Do you know?

• India has been the largest milk producer country of the world for the last 22 years.
• Currently, milk production of India stands at around 188 million metric tonnes (MMT)—in 2018-19, which is around 21% of world milk production.

Significance of Milk Sector

• Contributes to around 4.5% of national GDP
• It is primary source of income for about 100 million rural households—mostly landless, small or marginal farmers.
• Of the total value of the agricultural economy, around 28% (Rs 8 lakh crore, or $110 billion) is contributed by dairying.
• Milk production in India has been growing at a CAGR of 4.5% over the past 20 years, compared to less than 2% CAGR of the world. This high growth has enabled India to absorb the growing population especially in rural areas

Milk Sector & Self-reliance

• Self-sufficiency in milk production was achieved decades ago.
• During the early 1970s, milk production of India was just one-third that of the US and one-eighth of Europe
• At present, India's milk production is double that of the US and 25% more than Europe's.

How was this self-reliance achieved?

• During the 1970s, most dairy farmers did not receive remunerative returns due to the long chain of middlemen and lack of access to organised markets.
• The scenario changed after the adoption of a three-tier cooperative model, popularly referred to as the Amul model with the three-phase implementations of Operation Flood
• This not only led to India becoming the largest producer of milk but also largest consumer of milk globally
• India's per capita milk availability is around 400 gm per day per person, which is higher than global average of less than 300 gm per day per person.

What needs to be done to sustain India's self-sufficiency in milk production?

1. Supporting Private investments
• Indian dairy cooperatives and private players could create additional milk processing capacity of 4.5-4.8 crore litre per day in the next decade.
• To facilitate this growth, a financial package for dairy and fisheries was announced by Union government during lockdown.
• This includes the creation of the Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) worth Rs 15,000 crore to support private investment in dairy processing, value addition and cattle feed infrastructure.
• The proposed fund should be channelised through the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB).

AGRICULTURE

What needs to be done to sustain India's self-sufficiency in milk production?

2. Extension of the Kisan Credit Card scheme to dairy farmers
• The government that has announced this extension should implement it effectively at ground level
• This will ensure cash flow and meet the working capital requirement of small farmers.

3. Holistic Approach
• A holistic approach is needed to bring unorganised farmers into the fold of the organised sector.
• This desires convergence across policies, strengthening Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), common service centres (CSCs), business correspondents (BCs) commodity exchanges and digital markets.
• The thrust should be on ensuring that dairy farmers get a reasonable share of the earnings that the private players receive through value addition.
• The dairy sector also needs to have its adequate share in the proposed creation of 10,000 farmer producer organisations (FPOs) as part of national policy so that gglomerating FPOs can come up for better convergence.

4. Protecting Dairy Farmers from foreign players
• Allowing cheaper import from milk-surplus economically-developed countries would hit Indian dairy farmers hard.
• India withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations citing apprehensions about cheaper dairy imports impacting the domestic dairy sector.

Direct seeding of rice (DSR) technique
Agriculture; Irrigation technique

In News:
• Punjab farmers planted paddy using the direct seeding of rice (DSR) technique in the kharif season, rather than traditional transplanting.

Benefits of direct seeding of rice (DSR) technique
• Handling crop residue after harvest is easy.
• Large scale use of DSR to plant paddy could solve the staggering problem of stubble burning.
• Decreases air pollution.
• Direct seeding (both wet and dry) avoids nursery raising, seedling uprooting, and transplanting, and thus reduces the labor requirement.
• Direct seeded plants tend to have better root growth and are therefore more prepared for climatic extremes

Green-lighting ecological decimation amidst a pandemic
Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Context: Projects in critical forest habitats are being considered or have been given clearance by the Environment Ministry endangering the ecological balance.

Environment protection has become secondary to development process

Through the lockdown, 'expert' bodies of Union Environment Ministry have considered, and in many cases cleared, multiple industrial, mining and infrastructure proposals in critical wildlife habitats & forests.
These include -

- The Etalin Hydropower Project in the biodiversity-rich Dibang valley of Arunachal Pradesh
- A coal mine in Assam's Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve
- A diamond mining in the Panna forested belt
- A coal mine with a coal-fired power plant in Odisha's Talabira forests
- A limestone mine in the Gir National Park
- A geo-technical investigation in the Sharavathi Lion-Tailed Macaque Sanctuary in Karnataka

Authorities considered these projects via video-conferencing in contravention of environmental laws, and without all necessary documents or site inspections.

Why government's draft EIA is being criticised?

1. Undermining Public Participation
- No meaningful public consultation can take place amidst a pandemic and repeated lockdowns.
- MoEFCC had given June 30 deadline for feedback on its draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification, but it was extended through High Court Order to August 11

2. Subverting the spirit of EIA
- As per the draft, starting a project before obtaining environmental approvals will no longer be a violation, and it can be regularised post-facto.

3. Large Exemption Category
- Instead of strengthening EIA process, the draft notification proposes to exempt a wider range of projects from public hearings, including those which authorities can arbitrarily designate as 'strategic'.
- The draft even allows for a class of projects to secure clearance without putting out any information in the public domain.

4. Inadequate Focus on Monitoring
- Despite demands from environmentalists, the draft notification says virtually nothing on improving monitoring & compliance with clearance conditions and safeguards.

5. Economic Agenda undermining Environmental safeguards
- Green clearances for "seamless economic growth" seems to be the government's agenda in order to revive economy which is facing slowdown in recent quarters

ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

Consequences of the above actions
• Further environmental degradation.
• Development-induced displacement.
• Disproportionate impact on poor & weak: The effects of these are overwhelmingly borne by Adivasi and other marginalised groups
• Further endanger habitats and lives,
• Intensifies human's vulnerability to infectious diseases and related socio-economic shocks.

Conclusion

These giant leaps backward (dilution of Environmental protection standards) will not make us atmanirbhar (self-reliant).

Why 21st century has seen multiple lethal epidemics?
• There has been an accelerated destruction of wild habitats, forests and diversified food systems for urbanisation, mining, and industry
• This means pathogens which were once largely confined to animals and plants in the wild are now better positioned to infect humans.
• The expansion of monoculture cropping and livestock farming systems, coupled with dense human settlements are eliminating the biodiversity and distance barriers that lent resilience to the human species

Connecting the dots
• Paris Climate Deal
• Ease of Doing Business – Improvements by India

NGT on Brahmapuram fiasco
Statutory bodies; Environment issues; Pollution

In news:
• National Green Tribunal (NGT) bench held that the Chairman and Member Secretary of the Kerala State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) will be held liable if they fail to initiate prosecution and recover compensation from those responsible for the unscientific handling of waste at the dumping site of the Kochi Corporation at Brahmapuram.
• NGT bench observed that the progress appeared to be very slow and was disregardful of the statutory and constitutional obligation of providing a clean environment.

Key points to remember:
• Non-compliance with Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 (SWM Rules, 2016)
• Unscientific handling of waste at the dumping site resulting in environment pollution and impacting public health
• Role of State Pollution Control Board (SPCB)
• Role of State Level Monitoring Committee on solid waste management
• Role of National Green Tribunal (NGT)

Do you know?
• To protect and improve the environment is a constitutional mandate.
• It is a commitment for a country wedded to the ideas of a welfare State.

Indian Constitution contains specific provisions for environment protection under DPSPs and FDs.

Article 48A (DPSP): 'Protection and improvement of environment and safeguarding of forests and wildlife. The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country'.

Article 51-A (g) FD: "It shall be duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life and to have compassion for living creatures."

Article 21 FR: Right to wholesome environment is a part of right to life and personal liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.

"The State is under constitutional obligation to ensure clean environment to all its citizens. In cases of pertaining to environmental matter, the State has to act as facilitator and not as obstructionist."

About NGT -
• NGT Act 2010 provides for establishment of NGT
• Deals with cases relating to environment protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources
• also deal with enforcement of any legal right relating to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages

ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

WB funds for Namami Gange
Pollution; Infrastructure

About
• World Bank has approved a 5 year loan to the Namami Gange project worth Rs. 3,000 crore ($400 million).
• World Bank fund will help to develop and improve infrastructure projects to abate pollution in the river basin.

Do you know?
• Namami Gange project or the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has already received Rs. 4,535 crore ($600 million) from the World Bank until December 2021.

Important Value Additions:
About Namami Gange Mission
• Aims at providing comprehensive and sustainable solutions for a cleaner ecosystem along the stretch of 97 towns and 4,465 villages on the Ganga stem.
• Namami Gange is being implemented by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), and its state counterparts—State Programme Management Groups.
• The project covers eight states and seeks to fully connect all 1,632 Gram Panchayats along the Ganga to a sanitation system by 2022.

About National Mission for Clean Ganga
• It is the implementation wing of the National Ganga Council.
• It was established in the year 2011 as a registered society.
• It is under the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
• It has a two-tier management structure.
• It comprises of Governing Council and Executive Committee.

Objectives
• To ensure effective control of pollution and rejuvenation of the river Ganga by adopting a river basin approach.
• To maintain minimum ecological flows in the river Ganga with the aim of ensuring water quality and environmentally sustainable development.

PROTECTED AREAS

Bid to turn Shivalik forest into tiger reserve
Conservation; Protected Areas

About
• Uttar Pradesh government is actively considering the proposal to declare the Shivalik forest in the Saharanpur circle a tiger reserve.
• If accepted, it would be the fourth tiger reserve in Uttar Pradesh after Amangarh in Bijnor, Pilibhit and Dudhwa in Lakhimpur-Kheri.
• The move would not only reduce the increasing man-animal conflict but also help nurture the rich biodiversity of the region.

Do you know?
• As of 2019, there are 50 tiger reserves in India, which are governed by Project Tiger which is administrated by the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).**
• India is home to 80 percent of tigers in the world.
• Tiger Reserves are declared by National Tiger Conservation Authority via Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006 under centrally sponsored scheme called Project Tiger.
• To declare an area as Tiger Reserve, the state governments can forward their proposals in this regard to NTCA. Central Government via NTCA may also advise the state governments to forward a proposal for creation of Tiger Reserves.

Sacred Groves
Environment and Biodiversity; Conservation

In news:
Coimbatore-based **Kannan Warrier** gets Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education's National Award of Excellence for outstanding research in forestry, including conservation of endangered sacred groves in the Alappuzha district of Kerala.

Classification of Sacred Groves
1. **Traditional Sacred Groves** – It is the place where the village deity resides, who is represented by an elementary symbol
2. **Temple Groves** – Here a grove is created around a temple and conserved.
3. Groves around the burial or cremation grounds.

Preventing Man-Animal conflict and traffic
Conservation; Protected Areas

About
• Karnataka Forest Department decides to introduce **time-stamped card system** for vehicles passing through **Nagarahole National Park** roads.
• Traffic monitoring mechanism along the roads in national park areas will ensure better compliance of forest laws by motorists and minimise road kills.
• Time-stamping mechanism will help ensure that motorists don't stop midway and litter the area or cause disturbance to wildlife.
• Speed limit of 30 kmph is being introduced apart from having road humps to act as speed breaker at every 500 meter stretch.

About Sacred Groves:

• Sacred groves comprise of patches of forests or natural vegetation – from a few trees to forests of several acres – that are usually dedicated to local folk deities.
• These spaces are protected by local communities because of their religious beliefs and traditional rituals that run through several generations.
• The groves are treasure houses of rare species, and medicinal and economically important plants. Felling trees from these lands is considered taboo.
• People believe that any kind of disturbance will offend the local deity, causing diseases, natural calamities or failure of crops. For example, the Garo and the Khasi tribes of northeastern India completely prohibit any human interference in the sacred groves.

PROTECTED AREAS

Dibru Saikhowa National Park and Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve
Conservation; Protected Areas

About
- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Environment Ministry, Oil India Limited (OIL) and two other entities to explain how the proposed drilling of seven oil wells in an **eastern Assam national park (DibruSaikhowa)** was permitted.
- Earlier, the NGT had ordered the formation of a committee to probe allegations of largescale illegal coal mining by the North Eastern Coalfields inside **Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve** in Assam.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Indian Bullfrog (Hoplobatrachus tigerinus)
Endangered species; Conservation

About
- IUCN category: Least concern
- It is one of the most familiar and abundant frogs of South and South-East Asia, and also the largest frog found in the Indian Subcontinent.
- Their opportunistic feeding behaviour, prolific breeding (with large egg clutches) and adaptability makes them invasive in nature, where they tend to overpower other native species, a problem frogs native to Andamans are facing at present.
- The species was also introduced in Madagascar and the situation follows the same course

Do you know?

- Bullfrog legs are considered a delicacy and they are illegally hunted and served in several places across the country even though the species is protected under Schedule IV of the Wildlife Protection Act of India, 1971.
- It is the most hunted frog across the country and the forest department works diligently towards any leads to try and curb its consumption.

Himalayan Butterfly a.k.a Golden Birdwing
Biodiversity and Conservation

About:

•   A Himalayan butterfly named Golden Birdwing is now India's largest after 88 years.

•   Golden Birdwing is larger than the Southern Birdwing, which was earlier considered to be the largest.

•   The females (Golden Birdwing) are larger than the males.

•   While the female Golden Birdwing was recorded from Didihat in Uttarakhand, the largest male was from the Wankhar Butterfly Museum in Meghalaya capital Shillong.

Pic: Golden Birdwing

Do you know?

•   Southern Birdwing is listed as Least Concern in the IUCN Red List.

•   The species is more common in the Western Ghats of south India and is the state butterfly of Karnataka, India.

Red Sanders seized in Andhra Pradesh
Environment and ecology; Biodiversity; Conservation

In news:

•   Andhra Pradesh Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force seized 1.50 tonnes of red sanders logs in Seshachalam hills, 25 km from Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh)

Important Value Additions:

About Red Sanders:

•   Pterocarpus santalinus or Red Sanders is an endemic tree of South India

•   They are found in Tropical Dry Deciduous forest of the Palakonda and Seshachalam hill ranges of Andhra Pradesh and also found in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

•   Red Sanders usually grow in the rocky, degraded and fallow lands with Red Soil and hot and dry climate.

•   IUCN has put it under the category of endangered species in the Red List due to the dwindling population because of illegal felling and smuggling.

Do you know?

•   Its export is banned in India in accordance with the CITES and Wildlife Protection Act 1972.

•   It is used for various purposes such as immunity medicine, furniture, radiation absorbent, musical instrument, food dyes and spices, Ayurveda and Siddha medicine, decorative and ornamental purposes etc.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

After Mizoram, Nagaland bans sale of dog meat
Animal welfare and conservation

About
• Nagaland government decides to ban the commercial import and sale of dogs and dog meat.
• The Mizoram government had taken a similar decision in March.
• The announcement followed an appeal by the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations (FIAPO), which is an apex body of animal rights groups.

Do you know?
• Dog meat — considered a delicacy among certain communities of Nagaland and some other parts of the Northeast — has been traditionally consumed in parts of the state for decades.
• Certain communities in Nagaland also consider dog meat to have medicinal properties.
• Regulation 2.5 of **Food Safety & Standards** (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulation 2011, FSSAI which lists out meat and meat products which are fit for consumption.
• Dog meat is not on the list, and thus, considered unfit for human consumption.

Assam floods: Several rare Rhinos died due to floods
Animal welfare and conservation

Key facts:
• All rhinos have poor eyesight. They have blurred vision and tend to attack based on smell and hearing.
• Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR) - has more than 55% of the world's population of the one-horned Rhinos.

One-horned rhino:
• One-horned rhinoceros is the largest of the Asian Rhinos.
• Assam is home to the largest population of one-horned rhinos.

SC to examine laws dealing with animal, bird sacrifices
Animal welfare and conservation

About
• Supreme Court to examine the constitutional validity of the Kerala Animals and Bird Sacrifices Prohibition Act of 1968 that prohibits sacrifice of animals and birds in temples to 'please' the deity.
• SC bench highlighted the "dichotomy" in animal protection law that allows killing of animals for food but does not permit "killing of animals for offer to a deity and then consumption".
• **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1960** allows killing of animals but prohibits cruelty to animals.

Section 28 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 1960 does not make killing of animals for religious purposes an offence. However the 1968 Kerala State law bans killing of animals and birds for religious sacrifices but not for personal consumption.

Kaziranga National Park

It is a national park in the Golaghat and Nagaon districts of Assam. The sanctuary, which hosts two-thirds of the world's great one-horned rhinoceroses, is a **World Heritage Site**.

Kaziranga is recognized as an **Important Bird Area** by BirdLife International for conservation of avifaunal species.

Kaziranga has the largest population of the Wild water buffalo anywhere accounting for about 57% of the world population.

Total number of National Parks in Assam is Five (5). Kaziranga National Park, Manas National park, Orang National Park, Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Nameri National Park.

Conservation status:
• IUCN status: Vulnerable
• It is included in the Schedule – I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Rewa solar power project
Infrastructure, Energy

In news:
- The 750- megawatt Rewa solar Power Plant in Madhya Pradesh was dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Key Takeaways
- The plant consists of three solar power generating units that are located on a 500-hectare plot of land inside a 1,500-hectare solar park
- The solar plant was set up by the Rewa Ultra Mega Solar Limited, a joint venture between Madhya Pradesh Urja Vikas Nigam Limited and the Centre's Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI).
- This project will reduce carbon emission equivalent to approx. 15 lakh ton of CO2 per year, which is equivalent to planting 26 million trees.

Do You Know?
- The process of reverse auction in bidding for projects was tried for first time in India for this project
- It has a purchase rate of 2.97 rupees per unit, which is the lowest rate till date.
- International Finance Corporation, a World Bank group company, has invested close to $440 million or Rs 2,800 crore in the project
- Bhadla Solar Park in Jodhpur district in Rajasthan has a capacity of 2,245 MW and Pavagada Solar Park in Tumkur district, Karnataka has a capacity of 2,050 MW

Sure power: On India's solar strategy
Infrastructure: Energy; Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Context: The inauguration of a 750 MW photovoltaic solar project at Rewa, in Madhya Pradesh

Do you know?
- India's installed base of this solar power source is about 35 gigawatts
- In Paris Agreement on climate, India set the goal of installing 100 GW of solar power by 2022

Need of Solar energy:
- **Energy Security:** India energy demands is largely fulfilled by non-renewable source of energy
- **Environmental Sustainability:** India's large part of energy demand is fulfilled by thermal energy largely dependent on fossil fuels which causes pollution. Solar energy is clean form of energy resource, which can be a substitute.
- **India being Tropical Country,** there is abundance of free solar energy in almost all parts of country.
- **Changed Developmental Strategy:** Solar energy is being viewed as a path for self-reliant industrialisation
- **Green energy in rural area** - This is crucial for agri - business in farms for running irrigation, greenhouses, and crop and hay dryers, making agriculture risk - free.

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Challenges w.r.t developing Solar Energy

• Low domestic cell manufacturing capacity at 3.1 GW last year

• Heavy reliance on China for importing of photovoltaic cells, modules and associated equipment

• Projected addition of capacity in a COVID-19 affected future could fall short of stated goals (100 GW by 2022)

• India's domestic content requirement clause is facing legal challenge at WTO.

• Land availability in India for solar plant is less due to high population density.

• India's solar waste is estimated to be around 1.8 million by 2050 also needs to be tackled.

• Challenges with respect to importing critical raw materials such as polysilicon

Connecting the dots

• Impact of COVID-19 on Environmental Protection Standards

• Paris Climate Deal – US opting out of it – Critical Analysis

Way Ahead

• Government needs to make solar energy a strategic sector, giving it as much importance as defence.

• India needs to show leadership at global level to advance the manufacture and absorption of solar photovoltaic infrastructure in low- and middle-income countries.

• There has to integrated policies fully supported by States where Industry gets help to set up facilities and avail low cost financing

• India should also be able to invest in intellectual property.

• There has to be faster adoption of Innovative technologies- aesthetic photovoltaic window and roof tiles for buildings

• A decentralised approach will be suited for Indian landscape and this there has to be greater use of residential and commercial buildings to deploy more panels.

• India needs a Solar Waste Management and Manufacturing Standards Policy.

Conclusion

• Rapid progress requires a strategic shift to aid competitive domestic manufacturing.
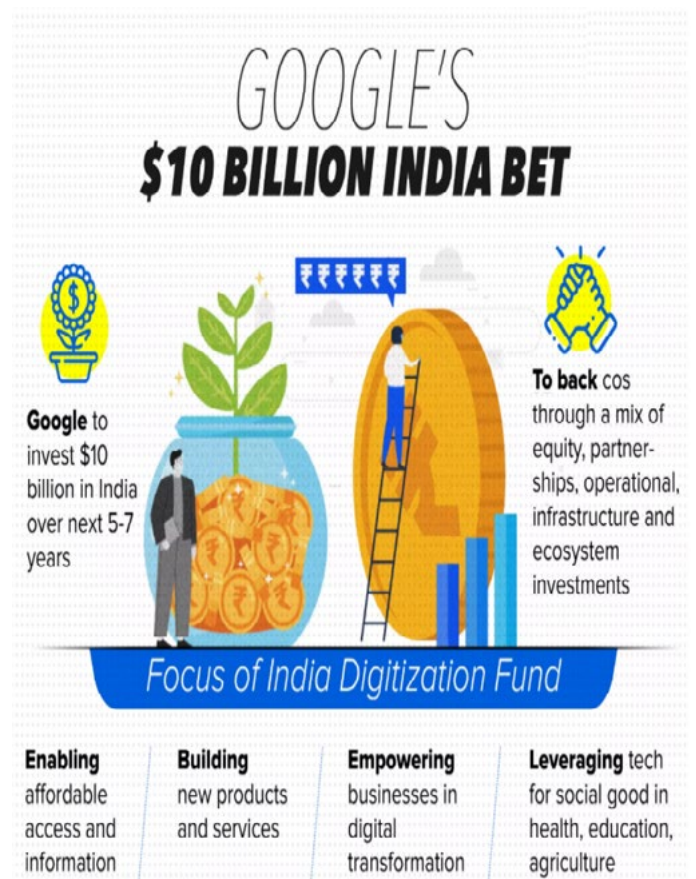
Google to invest $10 billion in India

Economy; Investment; Digital Infrastructure

Context:

• Technology giant Google to invest $10 billion (Rs. 75,000 crore) in India over the next five to seven years.

• The investment focuses on digitising the economy and building India-first products and services.

Investments will focus on four areas key to digitisation —

1. enabling affordable access and information for every Indian in their own language,
2. building products and services that are deeply relevant to India's unique needs,
3. empowering businesses on their digital transformation journey, and
4. leveraging technology and AI for social good in areas such as health, education and agriculture.

GOOGLE'S $10 BILLION INDIA BET

Google to invest $10 billion in India over next 5-7 years

To back cos through a mix of equity, partnerships, operational, infrastructure and ecosystem investments

Focus of India Digitization Fund

Enabling affordable access and information

Building new products and services

Empowering businesses in digital transformation

Leveraging tech for social good in health, education, agriculture

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Digitisation of Government Financial working
Digital Infrastrucutre

Context:
• A case for three-phase transition to mandatory digital payments, accounting, and transactions for government proposed by the CAG under a new project and law called **DATA (Digital Accountability and Transparency Act)**

What are the goals of DATA?
• The starting point is mandatory and common data standards for all entities receiving government funds in all forms of funding
• The endpoint is a single searchable website to ascertain total government funding by element and entity

What steps are needed to make DATA a reality?

Covering the distance between these needs three elements:

1. 100 per cent end-to-end electronic data capture: All receipts and expenditure transactions including demands, assessment, and invoices should be received, processed, and paid electronically.
2. Data governance for standards across all government entities: Data standards are rules for describing and recording data elements with precise meanings and semantics that enable integration, sharing, and interoperability.
3. Technology architecture that must ensure that all IT government systems should conform to a prescribed open architecture framework (for instance, IndEA) while ensuring robust security and maintaining privacy.

What are the advantages of DATA?

1. Long Overdue reform:
• The Union budget grew from Rs 197 crore in 1947 to Rs 30 lakh crore in 2020 and total government expenditure may be higher than Rs 70 lakh crore.
• But the form and manner of keeping accounts have more or less remained unchanged since Independence

2. Reduce errors
• Manual transactions and manual payments often lead to manually entered data at different stages in different databases on different systems which makes to unreliable & vulnerable to errors
• DATA ensures Business continuity (electronic records cannot be lost or misplaced like files or paper records) and an incontrovertible audit trail

3. Cost efficiency
• Bad behaviour currently costs the RBI Rs 4,000 crore in bank agency commissions because many parts of the government do not use the RBI's free e-kuber system

4. Enhance transparency & accountability
• It makes all government revenue and expenditure data electronic, machine-readable, granular, comprehensive, purpose linked, non-repudiable, reliable, accessible and searchable.
• It will enable legislatures to draw "assurance" that each rupee due to the government has been collected, and each rupee has been spent for the purpose it was allocated.

5. Addresses the problem of siloed IT systems
• Government computerisation has often mechanised manual processes rather than "re-engineered processes".
• This has created siloed IT systems with individual databases that lack modern data sharing protocols, which DATA tries to solve

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

6.Addresses concerns of fiscal data

Due to siloed IT systems, fiscal data was being
• Incomparable - as basic as salary expenditure across states
• Obscure – large expenditures booked under omnibus head called other
• Non-traceable - actual expenditure against temporary advances drawn or funds drawn on contingent bills
• Misclassification - grants in aid as capital expenditure and bookings under suspense heads

7. Enables the use of cognitive intelligence tools
• DATA will provide with huge information which will enable tools like Big Data analytics, artificial intelligence, machine learning to use it for policy making
• This in turn will support the establishment of budget baselines, detecting anomalies, data-driven project costing, performance comparisons across departments.

Connecting the dots
• Justice B.N Srikrishna Committee recommendation on Data protection

Karnataka-T.N. economic corridor
Infrastructure; Environment issues

Context:
• Expert Appraisal Committee of the Environment Ministry has recommended the grant of Environmental Clearance for the development of an economic corridor — the Satellite Town Ring Road (STRR) — between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
• The greenfield highway is part of Bharatmala Pariyojna and will be implemented by the National Highways Authority of India.
• The new road would provide better, fast, safe and smooth connectivity for commuters between the two States as well as in the region.
• The NHAI said that 12,111 trees would be felled for the project and 206 persons would be affected with regard to property and other structures.

Important value additions

About Bharatmala Pariyojana
• It is a new umbrella program for the highways sector that focuses on optimizing efficiency of freight and passenger movement across the country.
• It bridges critical infrastructure gaps through effective interventions like development of Economic Corridors, Inter Corridors and Feeder Routes, National Corridor Efficiency Improvement, Border and International connectivity roads, Coastal and Port connectivity roads and Green-field expressways.
• It is a centrally-sponsored and funded Road and Highways project of the Government of India.
• It is both enabler and beneficiary of other key Government of India schemes, such as Sagarmala, Dedicated Freight Corridors, Industrial corridors, UDAN-RCS, BharatNet, Digital India and Make in India.

About EAC and EIA
• Expert appraisal committee (EAC) exists at the Union as well as state levels (state expert appraisal committee or SEAC)
• It is formed to advise the government on environmental clearance of development projects.
• They are involved at all the stages, except for public hearing.
• Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a process of evaluating the likely environmental impacts of a proposed project or development.

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Hardly smart about urban health care
Urbanization; Government policies and interventions for development

Context: The Smart Cities Mission completed five years, in JULY 2020

What is the objective of Smart Cities Mission?
• The Mission sought to make 100 selected cities "smart", primarily through an "Area-Based Development" model under which a small portion of the city would be upgraded by retrofitting or redevelopment

Coronavirus pandemic has largely been an urban crisis
• Most of the Smart Cities are now reeling under the devastation caused by COVID-19
• Megacities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai have accounted for most of the COVID-19 positive cases.
• Indian cities are not only facing a public health crisis but also a larger emergency of economic issues and livelihoods.
• A high percentage of urban residents have lost employment during the lockdown and continue to face an uncertain future

How Smart Cities mission projects were leveraged during Pandemic?
• Some cities have been using the Integrated Command and Control Centres created under the 'Smart Cities Mission' as "war rooms" for monitoring real time data regarding the spread of the virus.

Criticism of Smart Cities mission

1. The projects undertaken under the scheme are behind schedule
• Of the 5,151 smart city projects across the 100 cities, while around 4,700 projects have been tendered, only 1,638 projects have been completed.
• In terms of expenditure, of the total investment of ₹2,05,018 crore, only projects worth ₹26,700 crore have been completed

2. The mission has largely neglected Public Health
• Only 69 of over 5,000 projects undertaken under the Mission were for health infrastructure
• Also, such projects are for an estimated cost of ₹2,112 crore, amounting to just around one per cent of the total mission cost.

3. It has further weakened local governments
• The 'Smart Cities Mission with parallel governance structures of Special Purpose Vehicle have further driven away local bodies from their responsibilities of enhancing Public Health
• India's urban local bodies continue to be financially and administratively weak and heavily understaffed.

Way Ahead- Strengthening local capacities
• The relative success of Kerala in containing the pandemic has shown how a decentralised political and administrative system with strong local governments and high investment in local public health care can be effective.
• Programmes such as the National Urban Livelihoods Mission and National Urban Health Mission, which have lately received limited focus and resources, need to be strengthened.
• Introduction of a national urban employment guarantee programme that assures jobs for urban residents (Kerala has been running such a scheme since 2010)

Conclusion
• As Indian cities face an unprecedented challenge, it is important to get the priorities of urban development right and invest in programmes that improve the health and livelihoods of its residents.

Connecting the dots - Environmental impact of Urbanisation and solutions

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Video surveillance system on trains
Infrastructure; Security

In news:
• Railway board had formed a committee to standardise the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Video Surveillance System in coaches.
• The SOP would consist of details relating to data uploading, retention and retrieval besides defining monitoring and response by security personnel and front-line Railway officials.

Do you know?
• The Railways has planned to install surveillance cameras in 7,000 coaches by March 2021 as part of a **Video Surveillance System** to cover stations and trains.
• The panel has devised a strategy on the modalities and procedure for realtime surveillance, storage, retention and retrieval of feed generated by CCTV cameras installed in passenger coaches.

Benefits:
• Security measure to prevent/detect crimes at railway stations/trains.
• Helps to ensure adequate safety of women, children and elderly passengers on railway premises.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

UAE's HOPE probe mission to Mars
Space related issues

In news:
• The first Arab space mission to Mars, an unmanned probe dubbed "Hope" took off from Japan.
• The Hope Mission aims to reveal more about the atmosphere of the Red Planet.
• The Japanese rocket carrying the probe off from the Tanegashima Space Centre in southwestern Japan.
• "Hope" is expected to enter Mars orbit by February 2021, marking the year of the 50th anniversary of the unification of the UAE, an alliance of seven emirates.

Other MARS ventures planned in 2020
• Tianwen1 from China
• Mars 2020 from the United States

Unlike the two other Mars ventures scheduled for this year, it will not land on the Red Planet, but instead orbit it for a whole Martian year, or 687 days.

Do you know?
• The launch of the probe, known as "AlAmal" in Arabic, had twice been delayed because of bad weather.
• Only the United States, India, the former Soviet Union, and the European Space Agency have successfully sent missions to orbit the fourth planet from the sun.
• China is preparing to launch its first Mars rover later this month.
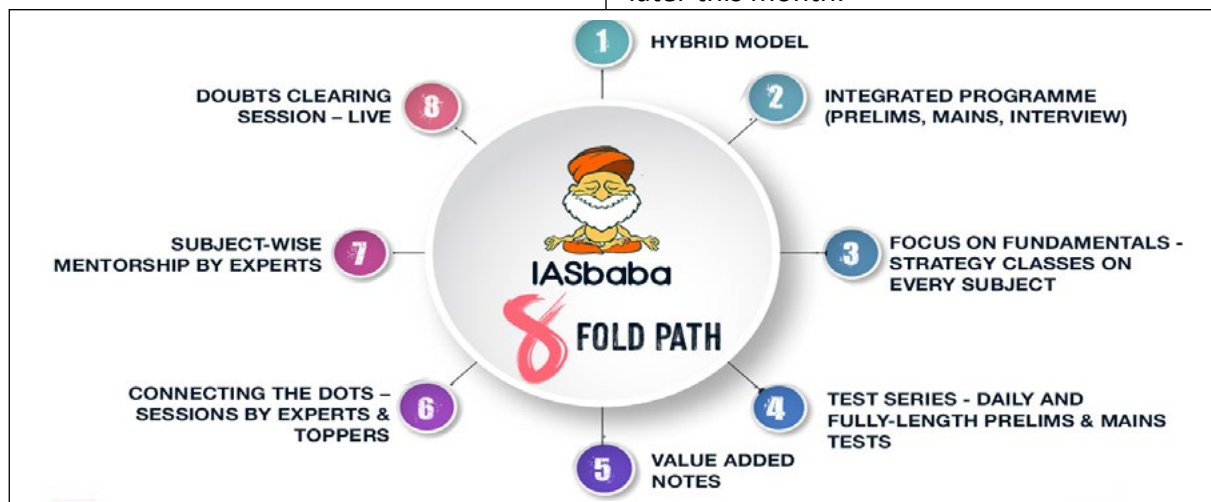
Kawasaki disease
Health; Science – Health and Medicine

About:
• Kawasaki disease is a syndrome of unknown cause that results in a fever and mainly affects children under 5 years of age.
• It is a form of vasculitis, where blood vessels become inflamed throughout the body.
• The fever typically lasts for more than five days and is not affected by usual medications.
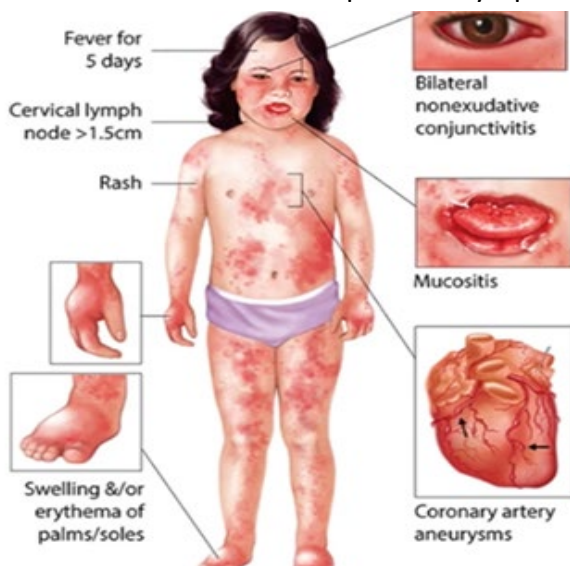
Why in news?
• Children with Covid-19 infection have often shown some symptoms similar to those associated with a rare illness called Kawasaki disease.
• World Health Organization (WHO) termed this new illness "multisystem inflammatory disorder".

Symptoms:
• It affects children.
• Its symptoms include red eyes, rashes, and a swollen tongue with reddened lips — often termed strawberry tongue — and an inflamed blood vessel system all over the body.
• There is constant high fever for at least five days.
• The disease also affects coronary functions in the heart.

Do you know?
• What causes Kawasaki disease is not yet known.
• It is an immunological reaction to an infection or a virus. A child's immunity system responds to a particular infection and develops these symptoms.

Bubonic plague
Health; Science – Health and Medicine

In news:
• A city in northern China sounded an alert after a suspected case of bubonic plague or 'Black Death' was reported.

What is Bubonic plague?
• It is a rare but serious bacterial infection transmitted by fleas from rodents.
• It is a zoonotic disease and it can be transmitted to other animals or humans.
• It mainly results from the bite of an infected flea.
• It may also result from exposure to the body fluids from a dead plague-infected animal.
• It is one of the three plagues caused by bacterium Yersinia pestis. The other two being Septicaemic plague and Pneumonic plague.
• It is spread by Yersinia pestis bacteria and requires urgent hospitalisation. According to the WHO it can kill an adult in less than 24 hours, if not treated in time.

What are its symptoms?
• Swollen lymph nodes, which can be as large as chicken eggs, in the groin, armpit or neck. They may be tender and warm.
• Others include fever, chills, headache, fatigue and muscle aches.
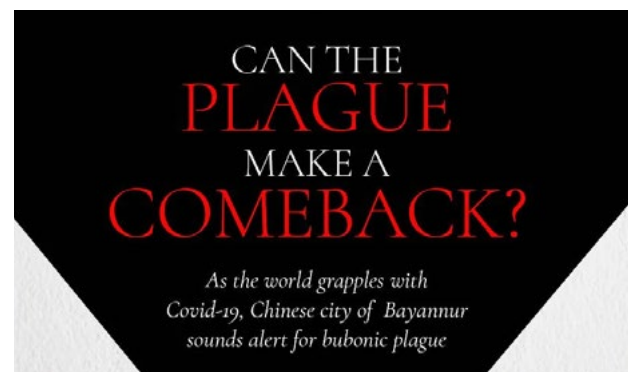
Do you know?
• There are no reports of human to human transmission of bubonic plague. To prevent bubonic plague, people are generally advised to not touch dead animals and wear insect or fleas repellent in case of an outbreak.
• According to the WHO, a vaccine for the bubonic plague is available for individuals with high exposure to the plague.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Coronavirus is airborne
Health; Science – Health and Medicine

Things to keep in mind if Coronavirus is airborne:

1. Face-coverings and face-masks may be made mandatory even while practising social distancing, especially indoors or in crowded areas
2. Large social gatherings to be avoided
3. Proper ventilation and minimising the recirculation of air may be needed at offices, educational institutes and hospital settings
4. Usage of ultraviolet lights to kill aerosols suspended in the air in closed settings
5. Physical distancing and washing hands is still very important
6. Health care workers may all need to wear N95 masks
7. When indoors, one simple thing people can do is to open their windows and doors whenever possible

KritiScan: UV Baggage Disinfection System
Science and Technology; Indegenous technology

In news:

• In order to control spread of infection through baggage, International Advanced Research Centre for Powder Metallurgy and New Materials (ARCI), Hyderabad and Vehant Technologies, Noida have co-developed KritiScan UV Baggage Disinfection System.
• The compact UVC conveyor system developed can efficiently disinfect the baggage passing through the conveyor within a few seconds.
• UVC based disinfection systems are known for their rapid disinfection capability.
• The disinfection process is dry and chemical-free.

Do you know?

• UVC light, when irradiated on an infected surface, quickly disrupts the genetic material in the virus and thus inhibits its multiplication.
• The Kritiscan UV advanced baggage disinfecting system uses UVC light (254 nm) with appropriate irradiance to inactivate microbes and viruses.
• The system can efficiently disinfect the baggage within 8 seconds as compared to standard hand-held disinfection techniques.

ChAdOx1 nCoV-19
Science – Health and Medicine; Recent developments/advancements

In news:

• ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 is Oxford University's experimental COVID-19 vaccine.
• According to Lancet study, the vaccine candidate produced neutralising antibodies and boosted the immune system as well.
• According to the Scientists, increasing T-cell response as well as antibodies could be very important in controlling COVID-19.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

FAO alerts India on Locust Attack

Role of international organization;Disaster

Context:

• Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has warned India to remain on high alert against locust attack.

• India is facing the worst locust attack in 26 years.

FAO's three categories of Desert Locust situations

• The FAO has three categories of Desert Locust situations: outbreak, upsurge, and plague.

• The current locust attack (2019-2020) has been categorised as an upsurge.

• Outbreaks are common, but only a few result in upsurges. Similarly, few upsurges lead to plagues.

• The last major plague was in 1987-89 and the last major upsurge was in 2003-05. Upsurges and plagues do not occur overnight; instead, they take many months to develop.

Do you know?

• When there are good rains and green vegetation develops, Desert Locusts – which are always present somewhere in the deserts between Mauritania and India – can rapidly increase in number and within a month or two, start to concentrate, gregarise.

• If left unchecked, they can lead to the formation of small groups or bands of wingless hoppers and small groups or swarms winged adults.

• Such a situation is called an 'outbreak', and usually occurs with an area of about 5,000 sq. km (100 km by 50 km) in one part of a country.

• Locust upsurge is more serious situation and generally affects an entire region.

• The most serious category, a 'plague' can develop when an upsurge is not controlled and ecological conditions remain favourable for breeding, locust populations continue to increase in number and size, and the majority of the infestations occur as bands and swarms.

• The area in which plagues occur covers about 29 million sq. km and can extend across 58 countries.

• There have been six major plagues in the 1900s, one of which lasted almost 13 years, the FAO website notes.

Locust Attack

What are locusts?

• The desert locust (Schistocerca gregaria) is a short-horned grasshopper.

• They differ from ordinary grasshoppers in their ability to change behaviour (gregarize) and form swarms that can migrate over large distances.

• They can rapidly reproduce and increase some 20-fold in three months.

• The normal locust season in India spans June-November and coincides with the kharif season.

Do you know?

• There were serious outbreaks in 1812, 1821, 1843-44, 1863-67, 1869-73, 1876-81, 1889-98, 1900-1907, 1912-1920

• The last major upsurge in India occurred in 1993

CYBER SECURITY

Mega Twitter hack
Cyber security

What was the Twitter hack all about?
• On July 15th, many high-profile accounts started tweeting a message saying any bitcoin sent to a link in the tweet will be sent back doubled
• Among the affected names are former president Barack Obama, Bill Gates, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Uber & Apple Twitter handles
• Even when Twitter deleted such tweets, the accounts tweeted again within minutes.
• In the four-odd hours the tweets were live, the Bitcoin wallet promoted in the tweets received over $100,000 via at least 300 transactions.

How did the hack happen?

• Early suggestions are the hackers managed to access administration privileges, which allowed them to bypass the passwords of any account they wanted.
• Twitter has said that hack is believed to be a co-ordinated social-engineering attack by persons who successfully targeted some of their employees who had access to internal systems and tools
• "Social-engineering" could mean one of several things.
• It might imply a targeted phishing operation - a common tactic employed by cyber-criminals, who find out which individuals have the keys to a system and then target them with personal emails that trick them into handing over details.
• Or it might mean the perpetrators managed to convince one or several staff members to go rogue, by offering a financial inducement or other means.
• The exact details of how the cyber-attack happened is not yet fully known

Way Ahead – what steps needs to be taken?

• As social media platforms are also used as warning systems, and for publication of news, they need to be extra careful with security.
• Social media platforms also need to have contingency plans ready
• Social media companies need to spend more on security (there is no law regarding this as of now).
• There is need for comprehensive & strict laws about cyber security
• India is still to come out with a national cybersecurity policy or mandate companies to do such checks

Conclusion
As more people adjust to online activities, there is a need to look at cybersecurity as a necessary spend.

Connecting the dots
• Critical analysis of Social Media
• EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Justice B. N. Srikrishna Committee report on data protection regime

DEFENCE

Passage Exercise (PASSEX)
Defence

In news:
• Indian naval ships conducted a Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with the U.S. Navy's USS Nimitz carrier strike group near the Andaman and Nicobar islands as it is transiting the Indian Ocean.
• The exercise comes amid a high alert by the Navy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) due to the standoff with China along the border in Ladakh.

Do you know?
• As part of this exercise, four frontline naval ships, Shivalik, Sahyadri, Kamorta and Rana including a stealth corvette, teamed up with carrier USS Nimitz and three other U.S. ships in the eastern Indian Ocean near the islands.
• On June 27, JS Kashima and JS Shimayuki from the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) training squadron had conducted a PASSEX with INS Rana and INS Kulish in the Indian Ocean.
• The Navy is keeping a close watch on the movement in the IOR of Chinese naval ships, whose presence has gone up considerably over the years in the name of antipiracy patrols. In 2017, China opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa.

DEFENCE

MoD approves 33 new fighter jets
India-Russia ties; Defence

In news:
• **Defence Acquisition Council** approved deals worth Rs. 38,900 crore which includes procurement of **21 MiG-29 fighter jets** and upgrade of 59 MiG-29s and acquirement of **12 Su-30 MKI aircraft**.
• The approval came after Defence Minister's visit to Russia for the Victory Day Parade.

Important Value Additions:
About Defence Acquisition Council
• DAC – is the government's highest decision-making body on defence procurement.
• DAC is chaired by Union Defence Minister.
• To counter corruption and speed up decision-making in military procurements.

The decision flowing from the Defence Acquisition Council are to be implemented by the following 3 Boards –
1. Defence Procurement Board headed by the Defence Secretary
2. Defence Production Board headed by the Secretary (Defence Production)
3. Defence Research & Development Board headed by the Secretary (Defence Research & Development)

Spike-LR (long range) Anti-Tank Guided Missiles
Defence

• Indian Army is set to place repeat order for Spike-LR (long range) Anti-Tank Guided Missiles from Israel.
• Earlier, Army had decided to place repeat order for 72,400 Sig Sauer assault rifles from the U.S.

Strategic Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi (DSDBO) road
Geography; Defence and Security issues

In news:
• Border Roads Organisation (BRO) to fast-track the work on the strategic Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi (DSDBO) road.
• DSDBO road runs almost parallel to the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at Aksai Chin.
• China has been objecting to Indian road and infrastructure development at several points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
• DSDBO road is also objected by the Chinese.

Indo-China Border Roads
• BRO is also building the 61 strategic Indo-China Border Roads (ICBRs), measuring 3,323.57 km, under the direction of the China Study Group (CSG).
• 75% of the construction work on the 61 Indo-China Border Roads (ICBRs) is completed.

Important Value Additions:

About Border Roads Organisation (BRO)
1. It was formed in 1960 by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.
2. It was established for coordinating the speedy development of a network of roads in the North and the North Eastern border regions of the country.
3. It works under the Ministry of Defence.
4. It undertakes variety of construction and development works such as airfields, building projects, defence works, etc.

<mark>MISCELLANEOUS</mark>

In News	Description
1. Udyog Setu	**About:** • Consortium of Indian Associations (CIA) has urged the Centre to develop Udyog Setu, a mobile application, similar to the Aarogya Setu to bail out the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that have been badly hit by COVID-19. • Lack of reliable data was impeding the sector's revival and hence Udyog Setu app could help. • The mobile application will contain all the data pertaining to the MSMEs such as the names of enterprises, turnover, number of employees, plant location and the like.
2. C. Rangarajan gets Mahalanobis award	**About** • Former Reserve Bank of India Governor C. Rangarajan has been conferred the P.C. Mahalanobis Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his contribution to official statistics. • The Mahalanobis International Award is sponsored by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation of the Government of India. • The award recognizes an individual for lifetime achievements in statistics in developing country or region. **Do you know?** • Professor P.C. Mahalanobis (1893-1972) was a highly distinguished statistician who made extensive contributions to methodology, applications, statistical development, and public policy. • He founded the Indian Statistical Institute and served as an advisor to the Government of India.
3. Covaxin	**About:** • Covaxin - developed by the Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech India Ltd (BBIL) got approvals from the Drug Controller General of India for human trials. • The trials are done on groups of people and are meant to test if the vaccine is safe on humans and produces protective antibodies. • The potential vaccine in question is a SARS-CoV-2 strain sourced from the ICMR-National Institute of Virology. • It is envisaged to launch the vaccine latest by 15th August, 2020 after completion of all clinical trials.
4. Jairam Ramesh committee	**About Jairam Ramesh committee on Science and Technology to meet on pandemic** • The standing committee on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change headed by Jairam Ramesh to meet on July 10th to discuss the "preparedness to deal with COVID-19 and other pandemics in future". • The committee will also be deliberating on the vaccines for COVID-19 including the one being developed by Bharat Biotech International Limited partnering with Indian Council of Medical Research. • Parliamentary panel called the principal scientific advisor to govt to brief it on COVID response.

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
5. Aatmanirbhar Bharat Innovation Challenge	**About:** • Aatmanirbhar Bharat Innovation Challenge was launched to identify the best Indian Apps that are already being used by citizens and have the potential to scale and become world class Apps in their respective categories. • Focus - To create world class Made in India Apps. • PM urged tech community to participate in Aatmanirbhar Bharat App Innovation Challenge. • The scheme will run in two tracks: promotion of existing apps and development of new apps.
6. DRDO hospital	**About** • 1,000-bed COVID hospital, which includes a 250-bed ICUs designed and constructed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) with the Tata Trust, was inaugurated by Defence Minister and Home Minister in Delhi. • DRDO built it in record time of 12 days with assistance from Home Ministry, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), armed forces and Tata Trust.
7. Govt. blocks 40 websites of Sikhs For Justice	**About:** • Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) issued orders for blocking 40 websites of the U.S.-based Sikhs For Justice (SFJ) under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. • The ban orders came on recommendations from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
8. 'Net Zero' Carbon Emission Mass Transportation Network by 2030	• **Indian Railways** announced that it would endeavour to be self-reliant for its energy needs and committed to utilize solar energy for meeting its traction power requirements and become a complete 'Green mode of transportation'. • The Ministry of Railways has decided to install solar power plants on its vacant unused lands on mega scale. • The move will help to achieve conversion of Indian Railways to 'Net Zero' Carbon Emission Railway.
9. PM's inaugural address at India Global Week 2020	**PM @India Global Week** • The story of global revival will have India playing a leading role, as Indians are natural reformers. • He also highlighted India's efforts towards self-reliance with global inclusiveness. *India Global Week 2020 theme: 'Be The Revival: India and a Better New World'*
10. Adaptations of Flood Tolerant Plants	**About:** • Farmers in flood-prone areas of Assam have been harvesting the water-resistant Swarna Sub1. • Swarna Sub1 is developed by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and the Manila-based International Rice Research Institute, since 2009.

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
11. Google acquires 7.7% stake in Jio Platforms	**About:** • Reliance Jio to deploy 5G technology in India next year. • Jio and Google to partner to develop cheap entry-level 4G or even 5G smartphone with Android operating system. • Google has announced to invest ₹33,737 crore to acquire a 7.7% stake in Jio Platforms. • Reliance Industries Ltd. is looking to raise capital in a similar manner for its retail and petrochemical businesses. **Key points:** • Jio has designed and developed a complete 5G solution from scratch. (Made-in-India 5G solution) • Google had announced recently that it would invest $10 billion fund in India. • Therefore, investment in Jio would be the first and the biggest investment that Google would make in India.
12. India Ideas Summit	**About:** • Prime Minister to address a global audience on the subject of U.S. and India as key partners and leaders in a post-COVID-19 world at the India Ideas Summit on July 22. • The summit will bring together senior officials from the Government of India and the U.S. administration. • India Ideas Summit is organised by top advocacy group US-India Business Council (USIBC), would be held on July 21-22.
13. February Delhi Riots and Hate Speech	According to a fact-finding committee constituted by the Delhi Minorities Commission to look into the February riots in north-east Delhi - • Violence followed an "organised and systematic pattern" and did not have the spontaneity of a riot. • Violence occurred immediately after a speech by BJP leader Kapil Mishra. • Following the speech, different groups/mobs quickly fanned out to the local areas, openly carrying various weapons and actions were not taken by the district administration or the police to protect life and property. • The report added that the attacks were targeted towards the Muslim population. **Do you know?** • The committee is headed by M.R. Shamshad, Advocate-on-Record, Supreme Court.
14. Iran to continue work with India on Chabahar line	• In the latest twist to Iran's ChabaharZahedan railway project, Iran's Railway Minister said Iran and India are "determined to continue" cooperation on the railway line. • Earlier Iranian official had said that India was not a part of the inauguration as it had not signed the ChabaharZahedan rail agreement, despite a previous 2016 MoU between Iranian railway infrastructure company CDTIC and Indian railway construction company IRCON.

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
15. Police nexus with Criminals	**About:** • U.P. wanted criminal received information from police • U.P. wanted criminal (Vikas Dubey), who recently killed eight policemen during Kanpur encounter, received information about the police raid through a phone call from the local police station. • (Ethics case-study example)
16. Example of Police Brutality in India	**About:** • Police brutality has increased across India and there is urgent need for Police Reforms. • The tragic and brutal death of Jayaraj and his son Bennix in police custody had raised a storm of protest in Tamil Nadu and across the country. • Incidents of police brutality during lockdown period – where police were seen torturing innocent people. • Recent such incident is the Madhya Pradesh's Guna police assault on Dalit couple. • Human rights NGO Amnesty India said the force used by the police was excessive and violated international standards. **Do you know?** • The victims of such police actions are mostly migrant workers, daily wage earners, vegetable sellers, street vendors and such other people belonging to the working class.
17. India-Nepal: Lord Ram birthplace issue	**In news:** • Nepal has planned to explore an archaeological site in Thori near the border town of Birgunj, Nepal. • The development comes four days after Nepal Prime Minister said the real birthplace of Lord Ram is located in Thori village around Birgunj, a major border town and called for further studies of location of the ancient city of Ayodhya. **Do you know?** • Thori is known to have a cluster of ancient Hindu religious sites that draw pilgrims from different parts of Nepal. • Nepal PM's remarks have drawn strong reaction from Indian civil society.
18. UN blacklists Pak. Taliban leader Noor Wali Mehsud	**In news:** • Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terror group's leader Noor Wali Mehsud has been designated as a global terrorist by the UN. • Noor Wali Mehsud had participated in the financing, planning and perpetrating acts on behalf of and in support of entities associated with al-Qaeda. • The UN Security Council's 1267 ISIL and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee added Noor Wali Mehsud to the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaeda Sanctions List. **Do you know?** • The TTP was blacklisted by the UN on July 29, 2011 for its association with al-Qaeda. • Under Noor Wali's leadership, TTP has claimed responsibility for numerous deadly terrorist attacks across Pakistan. • Blacklisting by the Security Council entails that all states are required to freeze without delay the funds and other financial assets or economic resources of designated individuals and entities.

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
19. India and Non-Alignment	**According to External Affairs Minister -** • India will never be a part of an alliance system. • As the world rebalances, the middle powers like India, Japan, the European Union and others have opportunities in shaping Geopolitics. • India must now take more "risks", as the world expected it to take a more proactive stance on the "big issues" of the day, including connectivity, maritime security, terrorism, climate change and terrorism.
20. EU leaders strike deal to rebuild economy	**About:** • EU leaders agreed on a €750 billion rescue package to pull the bloc out of deep recession.
21. 'Mukhya Mantri Ghar Ghar Ration Yojana'	**About:** • Delhi Government announced the 'Mukhya Mantri Ghar Ghar Ration Yojana' which will allow beneficiaries to avail doorstep delivery of ration. • The scheme entitles residents who currently collect ration from PDS shops to get the same ration delivered to their homes. (to ensure that the poor "get ration with respect")
22. Criminalisation of politics	**Key facts:** According to Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report and an analysis of self-sworn affidavit by MPs - • 24% RS members face criminal cases • Out of the 229 MPs, 28 or 12% had declared serious criminal cases • 203 of the 229 MPs, or 89% of those analysed, had declared assets over ₹1crore