



# **MAY 2021 IASBABA MONTHLY MAGAZINE**

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VIOLENCE BETWEEN ISRAEL- PALESTINE  
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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](http://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 **72<sup>nd</sup> edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **MAY 2021** which can be accessed from <https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/>

### VALUE ADDITIONS FROM IASBABA

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

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

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

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## HISTORY/CULTURE/GEOGRAPHY

### Putola Nach

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

**In news**

- The COVID-19 pandemic has provided an Assam-based trust the opportunity to focus on a near-forgotten form of string puppetry called Putola Nach.

**Key takeaways**

- It is performed in three areas with distinct characteristics.
- These areas are Barpeta-Nalbari in western Assam, Kalaigaon in northern Assam and Majuli “island” in eastern Assam.
- The Ramayana, either in its entirety or by episodes, is performed, as well as scenes from the Mahabharata.
- The puppeteers are happy to add dialogues or chants taken from bhaona, the local traditional theatre.

### **Miscellaneous**

#### Lag B’omer Festival

- Lag B’Omer is an annual Jewish festival observed during the Hebrew month of Iyar.
- It is celebrated on the 33rd day of the Omer, the 49-day period between Passover and Shavuot.
- To mark the occasion, ultra-Orthodox Jewish pilgrims make their way to the base of Mount Meron every year, to pay their respects to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, a second century sage and mystic, who is believed to have died on this day.
- The Rabbi’s tomb is a much revered holy site in Israel

### Lineament among four factors behind frequent earthquakes in northern Assam

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

**In news**

- An unfamiliar lineament is among four factors behind frequent earthquakes in northern Assam’s Sonitpur area.

**Key takeaways**

- A lineament is a linear feature in a landscape dictated by an underlying geological structure such as a fault.
- According to the Geological Survey of India (GSI), Sonitpur district lies within a tectonically complex triangular area bounded by the east-west trending Atherkhet Fault, the northwest-southeast trending Kopili Fault and a north-south trending lineament.
- The National Centre of Seismology recorded 29 earthquakes of magnitude varying from 2.6 to 4.7 in Sonitpur after the 6.4 tremblor on April 28 that damaged several buildings, bridges and a river embankment.

**Do you know?**

- The north-east India is demarcated as Seismic Zone V, which indicates a zone with high vulnerability.
- The Indian plate is moving northeast toward the Eurasian plate in the Himalayan region, their slanting collision and release of stress and strain accumulated in the local tectonic or fault environments lead to earthquakes.



## New sites added to India's tentative list of UNESCO world heritage sites

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I - Culture

**In news**

- Six sites have been added to [India's tentative list of UNESCO world heritage sites](#).

**Key takeaways**

- Sites were submitted by the Archaeological Survey of India.
- Six of the nine sites have been accepted by UNESCO for its tentative list.
- Being added to the tentative list is a requirement before the final nomination of any site.
- The sites are:
  1. Maratha military architecture, Maharashtra
  2. HireBenkal megalithic site, Karnataka
  3. Bhedaghat-Lametaghat of Narmada Valley, Madhya Pradesh.
  4. Ganga ghats, Varanasi
  5. Temples of Kancheepuram
  6. Satpura Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh.
- These proposals will remain in tentative list for a year after which the government will decide which one of them to push for in their final dossier to UNESCO.

**Related articles:**

- [Hampi World Heritage site](#)
- [Rakhigarhi](#)

## Dahanu Gholvad Sapota

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

**In news**

- Dahanu Gholvad Sapota (Chikoo) was in news recently.
- A consignment from Palghar district of Maharashtra was shipped to the United Kingdom, giving major boost to exports of GI certified products.

**Key takeaways**

- GI certification of Ghovad Sapota is held by Maharashtra Rajya Chikoo Utpadak Sangh.

**Do you know?**

- **Sapota-growing states-** Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.
- **Highest growers:** Karnataka, Maharashtra.

## Governing board of the Kalakshetra Foundation

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - I - Culture

**In news**

- The Central government nominated 12 eminent artistes and musicians as members of the governing board of the Kalakshetra Foundation.

**Important value additions**

- Kalakshetra Foundation is an arts and cultural academy.
- It is dedicated to the preservation of traditional values in Indian art and crafts, especially in the field of Bharatanatyam dance and Gandharvaveda music.
- It is based in Chennai.
- **Founded in:** 1936
- **Founded by:** Rukmini Devi Arundale and her husband George Arundale.
- In 1994, an Act of the Parliament of India recognised the Kalakshetra Foundation as an "Institute of National Importance."
- The Kalakshetra style of Bharatanatyam developed by Rukmini Devi Arundale is noted for its angular, straight, ballet-like kinesthetics, and its avoidance of Recakas and of the uninhibited throw (Ksepa) of the limbs.



**Baba's Foundation course (Baba's FC)**

**FACULTY PROFILE**

 <p><b>Strategy Classes &amp; Answer writing sessions by</b>  <b>MOHAN KUMAR</b>            B.E (Telecommunications)            Involved with Teaching and Mentoring students since 9 years</p>	 <p><b>Ethics, Society, Internal Security by</b>  <b>SUNIL OBEROI</b>            Retd.IAS            Has worked on Civil Services Reforms in India with UNDP and DoPT and Involved in teaching and mentoring students since 8 years</p>
 <p><b>Geography by</b>  <b>ATYAB ALI ZAIDI</b>            B. Tech, NIT, Allahabad.            Involved with teaching and mentoring students since 6 Years</p>	 <p><b>Polity &amp; Governance by</b>  <b>SUDEEP T</b>            B. Tech            Involved with teaching and mentoring students since 6 Years</p>
 <p><b>Economics by</b>  <b>SUMANTH MAKAM</b>            MA            Involved with teaching and mentoring students since 6 Years</p>	 <p><b>Economics &amp; International Relations by</b>  <b>SPHURAN B</b>            B.Tech, MS (US)            Involved with teaching and mentoring students since 5 Years</p>
 <p><b>History by</b>  <b>ABHISHEK CHAHAR</b>            BA (Hons), LLB            Involved with teaching and mentoring students since 6 Years</p>	 <p><b>Environment &amp; Science &amp; Technology by</b>  <b>VIPIN MISHRA</b>            B.Tech, M.Tech            Involved with teaching and mentoring students since 5 years</p>
 <p><b>Ethics by</b>  <b>SANDEEP</b>            MA in International Relations            Published Paper's in International Journals and mentoring students since 7 years</p>	 <p><b>CSAT by</b>  <b>MANJUNATH BADAGI</b>            MBA            Renowned Mental Ability Expert            Known for his book - Mental Ability</p>

## POLITY/GOVERNANCE

### Supreme Court's Maratha quota verdict

**Context:** A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has struck down the Maharashtra law granting [reservation to the Maratha community](#) in admissions and government jobs in the state.

#### Background of the issue

- 2018 Maharashtra law gave 16% reservation to the Maratha community in jobs and admissions by terming them socially and educationally backward class in the state.
- This law got past the scrutiny of the Bombay High Court in June 2019 but the quantum of reservation stood reduced to 12% in admissions and 13% in jobs.
- With the introduction of this Act, the reservation benefits in the state exceeded 50 per cent.

The court had framed six questions of law on the issue; it unanimously agreed on three of those issues, while the verdict was split 3:2 on the other three.

#### Issue 1: On revisiting the Indra Sawhney ruling

The nine judge SC bench when looking into Constitutional validity of OBC reservations in Indra Sawhney Case had laid down two important precedents

- First, the criteria for a group to qualify for reservation is “social and educational backwardness”.
- Second, reservations should not exceed 50% so as to ensure “efficiency” in administration. However, this limit can be breached in “exceptional circumstances.”

**State Government Argument:** Indra Sawhney verdict must be referred to a 11-judge Bench for reconsideration since it laid down an arbitrary ceiling which the Constitution does not envisage.

**SC Verdict:** The court held that there is no need to revisit the case. The court said that the 50% ceiling, although an arbitrary determination by the court in 1992, is now constitutionally recognised. Exceeding the ceiling limit above 50% without exceptional circumstances violates Article 14.

#### Issues 2&3: On whether the Maratha law can be saved under the exception

- Since the 50% ceiling is held valid, the court looked into whether the Maratha quota law falls under the exceptional circumstances contemplated in Indra Sawhney's case.
- The court also looked into the Maharashtra State Backward Commission report that the Maharashtra government had relied on while granting reservations.

**State Government Argument:** Since the population of backward class is 85% in Maharashtra State and reservation limit is only 50%, an increase in reservation limit would qualify as an extraordinary circumstance.

**SC Verdict:** All five judges disagreed with the above argument. The bench also found that the M.G. Gaikwad Commission too did not articulate any exceptional circumstances to justify the excess quota. SC held that Marathas are dominant forward class and are in the main stream of National life. The above situation is not an extra-ordinary.

#### Issues 4, 5 & 6: On state's power to identify SEBCs, and 102nd Amendment

- 102<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional Act, 2018 gives constitutional status to the National Backward Classes Commission.
- The Amendment also gives the President powers to notify backward classes.

**State government argument:** It raised questions on the interpretation of the Amendment and argued that the Power of President to notify BC curtails their powers of States (violation of spirit of Federalism)

**SC Verdict:** The Bench unanimously upheld the constitutional validity of the 102nd Amendment but differed on the question whether it affected the power of states to identify socially and economically backward classes (SEBCs).

**Majority Verdict** with regard to Power of President & States

- **Final Say with President:** Three judges on the bench held the view that final say with regard to inclusion or exclusion (or modification of lists) of SEBCs is firstly with the President, and thereafter, in case of modification or exclusion from the lists initially published, with the Parliament”.
- **Space for States:** They also said that while the identification of SEBCs will be done centrally, state governments retain power to determine the extent of reservation and make specific policy in the spirit of “cooperative federalism”.
- **Fresh SEBC List:** The majority opinion by Justice Bhat essentially says that now the National Backward Classes Commission must publish a fresh list of SEBCs, both for states and the central list.

**Dissenting View:** Justice Bhushan and Justice Nazeer, however, preferred a textual reading of the Amendment and said it does not take away the state’s powers to identify SEBCs.

**Critical Analysis of the above Judgement**

- **Crossing 50% limit can perpetuate Caste:** SC observed that “To change the 50% limit is to have a society which is not founded on equality but based on caste rule”.
- **Equality Upheld:** The SC held that to dilute the 50% benchmark further, would be to effectively destroy the guarantee of equality, especially the right not to be discriminated against on the grounds of caste (under Articles 15 and 16).
- **Slippery Slope:** SC also observed that if the reservation goes above 50% limit it will be slippery slope and the political pressure will make it difficult to reduce the same.
- **Similar Laws will be scrutinised:** The ruling is likely to have an impact on several laws passed by various state assemblies reserving in excess of the 50% ceiling under the category of “extraordinary circumstances”.
- **Impact on EWS reservation:** The ruling may also have an impact on the reservations for economically weaker sections (EWS), introduced by the Central government through 103<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, in excess of the 50% ceiling.

**Read Related Articles**

- Andhra Pradesh [Locals First Policy](#)
- Madhya Pradesh [domicile based quota](#)
- Reservation is [not a fundamental right](#)

**Decentralisation and COVID**

**Context:** We need to respond with speed and agility to turn the tide of COVID Second Wave that is ravaging our country.

**Merits of Decentralized approach**

- **Local Knowledge:** Giving freedom to local bodies is the key because they have the advantage of ‘on ground’ information, monitoring and immediate action when it comes to tackling a public health emergency like COVID.
- **Decentralization encourages ownership** and sharing of responsibility, while a centralized command-and-control approach leads to passing the buck for crisis decisions to alternative sources of authority
- **Community participation is key:** If covid-appropriate behaviour and vaccinations are to be effectively enforced, it will need the active participation of everyone at the community level across the country.

- **Lessons from success stories:** The decentralized approach during covid first wave had led to the creation of success stories such as the 'Kerala model', the 'Bhilwara model', the 'Dharavi model' or the 'Karnataka model.' Likewise, lessons from successful models (Ex: Kerala Model) needs to be learnt this time.
- **Tiered vaccine pricing:** Vaccines need to be offered to the Central and state governments at a uniform price. The private sector, may be provided price flexibility based on the volumes procured. This may speed up vaccination drive

### Idea of placing convicts under house arrest

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II - Legislature; Judiciary

**In news**

- The Supreme Court has thrown open the door to the legislature to “ponder” over the idea of placing convicts under house arrest to avoid overcrowding of [prisons](#).

**Key takeaways**

- A Bench of Justices U.U. Lalit and K.M. Joseph, in a judgment, highlighted the “alarming” statistics of prisons.
- The suggestion is relevant considering the spread of COVID-19.
- A few days ago, a Bench, led by Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana, issued a series of directions, including the grant of interim bail and parole to prisoners to decongest prisons.
- The occupancy rate in prisons had climbed to 118.5% in 2019.
- [National Crime Records Bureau](#)'s figures of 2019 show that 18,86,092 inmates were admitted in jails.
- The number of undertrial prisoners in 2019 was 3,30,487, which, in fact, constituted 69.05% of the total number of prisoners.
- Secondly, a very large sum (₹6818.1 crore) was the budget for prisons.
- The “tremendous” overcrowding of prisons and the huge budget were both relevant in the context of the possibilities that house arrest offers.

### Learning from Politicians

**Context:** India's civil service has been confronted with unique challenges in light of the ghastly coronavirus pandemic, making the existing structures and processes ineffective.

**Civil Servant need to learning from politicians the following:**

1. **The ability to communicate clearly and effectively** – useful for elucidating the vision of the government, or explaining the benefits of a policy decision. Civil servant needs to framing the message to public as a story (just like politicians) to convey it more effectively.
2. **Ability to Listen:** Politicians are better listeners, which is an art, and can listen for hours. For the ordinary citizen, just being heard is a hugely empowering experience, and bureaucrats must practice this art to make governance sensitive & responsive to people's needs.
3. **Ability to simplify complex ideas**, while never losing touch with its core, is another skill successful politicians have mastered. This allows them to get to the root of the problem and propose simple yet grounded solutions.
4. **Emotionally Intelligence:** Another great distinguishing feature of a public representative is her decisively superior interpersonal skills and the ability to provide a human touch, especially to the underprivileged and the marginalised.

5. **Devotion to duty:** Driven by notions of public good, the ideal politician seeks to bring about transformative changes. Fulfilling the aspirations of an increasingly restless society demands an ever greater devotion to duty. This has to be replicated in civil servants also.

### Article 311 of the Indian Constitution

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - II - Constitution

**In news**

- Article 311 was recently in news.

**Key takeaways**

- Article 311 says that no government employee either of an all India service or a state government shall be dismissed or removed by an authority subordinate to the one that appointed him/her.
- Section 2 of the article says that no civil servant shall be dismissed or removed or reduced in rank except after an inquiry in which s/he has been informed of the charges and given a reasonable opportunity of being heard in respect of those charges.
- As per Article 311 (2) (a), if a government employee is convicted in a criminal case, he can be dismissed without DE.
- Under 311 (2) (c), a government employee can be dismissed when the President or the Governor, as the case may be, is satisfied that in the interest of the security of state it is not convenient to hold such an enquiry.

**Do you know?**

- In a departmental enquiry (DE), after an enquiry officer is appointed, the civil servant is given a formal charge sheet of the charges.
- The civil servant can represent himself/herself or choose to have a lawyer

### Prioritising the right to life

**Context:** The majority of India's working population is today reeling from the impact of multiple crises: a health emergency; massive job losses, declines in incomes from work; and significantly increased mass hunger and worsening nutrition.

**Survey by Hunger Watch**

- Even after lockdown was lifted last year, two-third families reported eating less than they did before the lockdown, and a reduction in healthy food.
- For a quarter of the families surveyed, incomes had fallen by half.
- It also found that hunger was higher in urban India compared to rural.

**Judiciary, Hunger & Right to Life**

- The Supreme Court on May 13 directed the Centre and the State governments of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to provide free rations without insisting on ID proof to all migrant workers and to run kitchens providing free meals twice a day.
- The directive shows that the apex court acknowledged a hunger crisis in the country that needed urgent state action

**Shortcomings of above direct:**

- It did not extend the facility to the country as a whole;
- It did not extend the facility to cover cash payments by the state besides meals and ration;
- It made the facility a state largesse rather than a right.



- Had SC recognised a universal right to livelihood as the basis for its verdict, deriving from the right to life, the above three lacunae would have been overcome.

#### Vaccine Policy & Right to Life

- Being vaccinated against COVID-19 is essential for defending one's right to life
- Government must respect everyone's right to life and must make the vaccine equally available to all irrespective of the recipient's capacity to pay.
- India is making people (aged 18-45 years) pay to be administered these vaccines in private clinics. Contrast this to US (most privatised medical systems) where vaccines are provided for free to all

#### What went [wrong with India's vaccine policy](#)?

- Government did not ensure adequate production through compulsory licensing of more producers
- It allowed price rise by Bharat Biotech and Serum Institute of India.

#### Way Ahead

State needs to take a range of measures that prioritise the right to life, which also remains the surest way of initiating assured (and equitable) economic recovery

- **Monthly cash transfer**, of about ₹7,000 per household for at least three months to those without regular formal employment, over and above the provision of free meals and rations.
- Expanded production and central procurement of COVID-19 vaccines, and distribution to States for **free immunisation to all**;
- Increased resources to the Integrated Child Development Services to enable revival and expansion of their programmes
- Making the **MGNREGS purely demand-driven, with no ceilings** on the number of days or the number of beneficiaries per household
- Covering [urban India with a parallel MGNREGA like scheme](#) that would also cater to the educated unemployed.
- A **1.5% wealth tax** levied on only the top 1% of households will be adequate to fund the above measures of government.

#### Connecting the dots

- [Vaccine Nationalism](#)
- [Vaccine Diplomacy](#)

### [U.P. Sunni Waqf Board](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - II – Acts and Policies

#### In news

- The Uttar Pradesh (UP) Sunni Central Waqf Board recently condemned the demolition of a mosque in Barabanki, UP and demanded its restoration.

#### Key takeaways

- The UP Sunni Central Waqf Board is a body constituted under The Wakf Act, 1954.
- It manages the affairs of Sunni Muslim waqf (charity) properties, waqf institutions and the marriage records of the Sunni Muslim community of UP.
- It has been the main Muslim litigant in the [Babri Masjid–Ram Janmabhoomi title dispute](#).

#### Important value additions

- A waqf (also known as wakf or hubous) is an inalienable charitable endowment under Islamic law.

- The state waqf boards were established by the state governments in view of the provisions of Section 9(1) of the Wakf Act, 1954.
- India also has a Central Waqf Council to advise the government "on matters concerning the working of boards and the due administration of waqfs."

### Politicisation of Providing Security Cover

**Context:** The recent order by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for providing security cover to 77 MLAs of BJP who were elected earlier this month after the West Bengal Assembly poll is not only unprecedented but appears politically motivated.

#### **Overstepping the norm**

- In practice, decisions to provide security to persons under threat is taken by a committee in the MHA, which comprises officials from the Ministry, the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Delhi Police and senior officials of the Central Armed Police Force.
- While the IB prepares the list of persons under threat and the degree of threat, the committee decides on the force to be deployed depending upon the place where the person is located.
- In these meetings, the threat perception of each of the person to be secured is discussed **one by one and not collectively for any group as such**.
- The threat perception for each of the persons (77 BJP MLAs) was not discussed thus giving rise to suspicions of political motivations.

#### **Was such kind of blanket protection not provided before?**

- In the past, such deployment of central forces for the protection of individuals was done in Punjab and in Jammu and Kashmir, when these regions were rocked by unrest & militancy.
- Since militants tried to sabotage the process of elections, poll candidates were generally targeted.
- The Central government, therefore, took blanket decisions to provide security to every candidate till the elections got over.

#### **Implication of the present move**

- **Unhealthy sign for Centre-State relations:** Law & order and protection to citizens including MLAs is the responsibility of State Police. But by deploying central forces, the Centre has sent a clear signal that it does not rely upon the State government to provide fool-proof security to the BJP MLAs.
- **Wrong signal to other police forces:** The Central government's distrust of officers who are considered close to a State's ruling dispensation does not bode well for police officers across the country.
- **Increased number of protected persons:** In 2019, as many as 66,043 police and CAPF personnel were deployed to protect 19,467 Ministers, Members of Parliament, judges and bureaucrats, against the sanctioned strength of 43,556 personnel
- **Impacts Training schedule:** Constant deployment of CAPF personnel on protection duties impacts their training schedule. After the initial eight-week training for VIP protection, the personnel have to undergo a two-week refresher training periodically to hone their skills.
- **Status Symbol:** Having security cover has now become a status symbol which doesn't bode well with democratic culture of society, where everyone is equal.

#### **Way Ahead**

- To curb the tendency of demanding security personnel around themselves, leaders and prominent persons should be asked to bear the expenditure,



- Members of Parliament and leaders with criminal records should be charged a fee for the security personnel deployed to protect them.

### Panel constituted to suggest reforms to IPC

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II - Policies and interventions

#### **In news**

- A panel has been constituted by the Union Home Ministry to suggest reforms to Indian Penal Code (IPC)
- It is likely to propose a separate Section on “offences relating to speech and expression.”

#### **Key takeaways**

- As there is no clear definition of what constitutes a “hate speech” in the IPC, the Committee for Reforms in Criminal Laws is attempting for the first time to define such speech.

#### **Do you know?**

- The Bureau of Police Research and Development recently published a manual for investigating agencies on cyber harassment cases that defined hate speech as a “language that denigrates, insults, threatens or targets an individual based on their identity and other traits (such as sexual orientation or disability or religion etc.).”
- T.K. Viswanathan committee was formed in the wake of [Section 66A](#) of the Information Technology Act, 2000, that provided punishment for sending offensive messages through communication services being scrapped by the Supreme Court in 2015.

### Renaming of Indian Broadcasting Foundation (IBF)

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

#### **In news**

- The Indian Broadcasting Foundation (IBF) will be renamed the Indian Broadcasting and Digital Foundation (IBDF).
- IBF is the apex body of broadcasters.
- It is now expanding its purview to cover digital streaming platforms

#### **Key takeaways**

- The move would bring broadcasters and OTT (over-the-top) platforms under one roof.
- OTT have seen a substantial jump in their viewership base after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The IBDF would also form a self-regulatory body, the Digital Media Content Regulatory Council (DMCRC), for digital OTT platforms.

#### **Do you know?**

- The Indian Broadcasting Foundation (IBF) was founded in 1999.
- It is the parent organisation of the Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC) which was set up in 2011.
- The BCCC examines content-related complaints relating to all non-news general entertainment channels in India.

#### **Important value additions**

- An over-the-top (OTT) media service is a media service offered directly to viewers via the Internet.

- OTT bypasses cable, broadcast, and satellite television platforms.
- Such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hotstar etc.



## **PRELIMS EXCLUSIVE PROGRAMME (PEP) - 2021**

### **PRELIMS STRATEGY CLASSES BY SUNIL OBEROI - Retd. IAS**

Has worked on civil services reforms in India with UNDP and DOPT. Was associated with induction training of new entrants of civil services and in-service training of senior civil servants.



## SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE

### Pandemic & Inequality in Digital World

**Context:** The novel coronavirus pandemic has accelerated the use of digital technologies in India, even for essential services such as health and education, where access to them might be poor.

#### **Digital Issues in Education**

- **Access to computer:** According to National Sample Survey data from 2017, only 6% rural households and 25% urban households have a computer.
- **Access to internet:** Smartphones with data will have improved access over the past four years, yet a significant number of the most vulnerable are struggling. Access to Internet facilities is not universal either: 17% in rural areas and 42% in urban areas.
- **Structural Obstacles in accessibility:** As per survey by Azim Premji Foundation, between 27% and 60% could not access online classes for a range of reasons: lack of devices, shared devices, inability to buy “data packs”, etc.
- **Disproportionate Burden on girls:** For girls, there is the additional expectation that they will contribute to domestic chores if they are at home.
- **Peer learning** has also suffered due to shift to online mode of learning.

#### **Digital Issues in Health**

- **Developing App is seen as solution:** Right now, the focus is on the shortage of essentials: drugs, hospital beds, oxygen, vaccines. In several instances, developing an app is being seen as a solution for allocation of various health services
- **Additional bureaucracy:** Digital “solutions” create additional bureaucracy for all sick persons in search of these services. Along with paper work, patients will have to navigate digi-work.
- **Challenges for Poor & illiterate:** Platform- and app-based solutions can exclude the poor entirely, or squeeze their access to scarce health services further. The use of CoWIN to book a slot makes it that much harder for those without phones, computers and the Internet.

#### **Conclusion**

Digital solutions are not the magic pill which solves all the problems of Pandemic. Digital solution is only the means to address the shortages being faced by health infrastructure of our country.

### Rural Imperative in the wake of COVID crisis

**Context:** The main kharif planting season will begin only from mid-June with the arrival of the monsoon rains.

#### **Agricultural Sector in 2020-21**

- The year 2020-21 was exceptional, where the farm sector expanded by 3%, even as the Indian economy as a whole contracted by 6.5%.
- Agricultural exports also grew 17.5%, despite the value of the country’s overall merchandise shipments falling by 7.2%.
- Industries like tractor, FMCG and cement companies rode high on rural demand in 2020-21.
- The end result was that rural India provided a cushion for the economy, which suffered its worst recession since Independence and the first after 1979-80.

#### **Reasons for above scenario**

- **Low impact of Pandemic:** Covid-19 cases being very low in rural areas last year and the government exempting agricultural activities from lockdown restrictions

- **Favourable Monsoon:** Another reason was excellent rains and favourable winter temperatures that helped farmers harvest a bumper crop.
- **Right interventions by government:** Firstly, government undertook massive procurement of wheat, paddy, mustard and rabi pulses that were marketed post the lockdown. The second was the record 389.37 crore person-days of employment that got generated under MGNREGA during 2020-21. Along with these two, there was Rs 6,000-per-farmer cash transfer under PM-Kisan that ensured sizeable liquidity infusion into the rural economy.

#### What will be the scenario this year?

- The Indian Meteorological Department has forecast a normal southwest monsoon, while FAO's world food price index hit an 83-month-high in April. On both these fronts — rainfall and prices — the outlook for agriculture, thus, remains favourable.
- The availability of cushion, provided by agricultural sector last year, is in doubt today, with the second wave of the pandemic not sparing rural areas
- This year, there is not much requirement for MSP procurement, barring in wheat.
- The scope of MGNREGA works is also limited when Covid has made deep inroads into rural areas.

#### Conclusion

- If the current wave subsides by planting season of Kharif, things shouldn't turn out too bad.
- The focus of government should be more on cash transfers. There's no better time to put to use the JAM (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile) infrastructure than now.

## Child Marriages and Pandemic

**Context:** The Global Girlhood Report 2020 says that at least half-a-million girls are now at risk of being victims of forced child marriages as this year comes to an end. Up to 2.5 million girls may be married early due to the pandemic over the next five years, says a Save the Children report.

#### Pandemic & Child Marriages

- **Increased poverty is directly related to child marriage:** In pandemic induced economic distress, vulnerable families are forced to choose between a girl child and the prospect of hunger & deprivation. A girl child is considered a burden, making her vulnerable to early marriage
- **Marriage seen as safety net:** One reason, cited by parents, in several surveys is that marriage is way of ensuring the girl child's safety at a time when many young men are out of jobs and seen as posing a danger to young girls.
- **Interrupted Education:** With so much uncertainty about when schools will reopen, there is every likelihood of girls not returning to school and this increases the danger of their being married early.
- **Lack of access to counsellor:** Without the safety net of schools, the girl child being forced into marriage is cut off from any possible communication with a teacher or counselor. Most of them do not have access to child helplines though the government has set these up.

#### Consequences of Child Marriages

- Child marriage is not only a violation of girls' human rights and their children's, but also represents a substantial **economic burden for countries** (early child marriage => tendency for more children => higher population growth)
- Early marriage heightens the risk of domestic slavery, **spousal violence** and poor health with girls married under the age of 15 almost 50% more likely to have experienced either physical or sexual intimate partner violence

## Connecting the dots

- [Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 and the recent amendments](#) to it

## Rural Areas & Second Wave

**Context:** The big cities battered by Covid-19 are now showing early signs of recovery from the second wave. There is growing concern now about smaller towns and rural areas where the virus has made inroads.

During the first wave, the virus did not have easy passage into rural areas. This was because

- Travel restrictions, prescribed or voluntary, prevailed even after the lockdown was lifted.
- Because co-morbidities like hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular disease are lower in rural populations, risk of severe illness and death was also less

However, during the second wave, complacency about the seriousness of COVID-19 and emergence of new strains created havoc in rural areas.

India suffered during second wave due to frail health systems in rural areas

- Inadequate health infrastructure
- Lack of trained health workforce
- Poor availability of drugs and other medical supplies,
- Poor connectivity to higher levels of care are deficient in many districts.

### What measures are needed to tackle second wave in rural areas?

- Household visits by frontline health workers for symptom surveillance and case detection.
- Engagement of the local community is vital. Where available, NSS and NCC resources can be drawn upon. Community-based organisations, which have grassroots presence, can assist in the delivery of health and social services.
- Large gatherings must be prohibited for at least six months.
- Decentralised, data-driven decision making
  - Essential data must be readily available locally at the block level for real-time alerts and rapid response.
  - More elaborate (optimal) data sets can flow to the state capital level for course corrections and resource allocation.
  - At the local level, qualitative information from key informant interviews must supplement quantitative data to help in identifying roadblocks and solutions.

## MoU signed for Digital Transformation of Tribal Schools

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - II - Education

### In news

- Ministry of Tribal Affairs and Microsoft have signed MoU on Joint initiative for Digital Transformation of Tribal Schools

### Key takeaways

- **Aim:** To skill educators and students in next-generation digital technologies including Artificial Intelligence.
- **Vision:** To build an inclusive, skills-based economy,
- The MoU shall support digital transformation of schools such as Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) and Ashram Schools, which fall under the Ministry.

- In the first phase, 250 EMRS schools have been adopted by Microsoft out of which 50 EMRS schools will be given intensive training and 500 master trainers would be trained.
- Teachers across states in India will be trained in a phased manner.

### Employment & Recovery of Indian economy

**Context:** Hit by a relentless second wave of COVID-19 infections, India has seen localised lockdowns across several States.

#### **Do You Know?**

- Labour participation Rate(LPR) is the measure the section of the population that is willing to take on jobs.
- Unemployment is a subset, which helps in giving a measure of those who are willing to take on jobs but are not employed.

#### **How have lockdowns affected jobs?**

- According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), the unemployment rate was 6.5% in March 2021 but rose to around 8% in April, the month when several States began to prepare for or had already imposed lockdowns.
- In April 2020, which was the first full month of the national lockdown last year, the unemployment rate had zoomed to 23.5%.

Rural-Urban Variation in Unemployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At 7.13%, the rural unemployment rate for April 2021 is lower than the urban figure of 9.8%.</li> <li>• The month of May has seen the rates rise further at the national level. As of May 21, the 30-day moving average for overall unemployment was 10.3%, with the relevant figures for urban and rural areas at 12.2% and 9.4%, respectively.</li> </ul>
Gender variation in unemployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women tend to face a double challenge, with lower labour participation and a higher unemployment rate for females compared with males (for ages above 15).</li> <li>• For the January-April 2021 period, urban female LPR was 7.2% compared with the urban male's 64.8%, while urban female unemployment was 18.4% against the urban male unemployment rate of 6.6%, CMIE data showed.</li> </ul>
Agriculture Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture was the saving grace during the first wave, but it is not so during the second one.</li> <li>• April 2020 saw this sector being the only one to add jobs — the count of those employed in the agriculture sector had gone up by 6 million or 5% compared with the average count in FY20.</li> <li>• MGNREGA data showed that April saw an uptick in the demand for jobs — 2.7 crore households signed up for work in April 2021, rising from 1.3 crore a year earlier — as reverse migration of labour picked up, resulting in availability of hands in the rural parts.</li> </ul>
Salaried Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cumulative loss of salaried jobs since the pandemic</li> </ul>



	began is pegged at 12.6 million, according to CMIE data
Variation across States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Haryana recorded the highest unemployment rate in April 2021 at 35%, as per CMIE data, followed by Rajasthan at 28%, Delhi at 27.3%, and Goa at 25.7%.</li> <li>Significantly, Gujarat, which, like the above States, also witnessed the ferocity of the pandemic's second wave, saw unemployment at an appreciably lower level of 1.8%.</li> </ul>

#### What are the consequences of rising unemployment?

- Reduced Family incomes
- Increased poverty levels
- Increased hunger: The Hunger Watch survey showed that 66% of surveyed households had less to eat even five months after last year's lockdown.
- Increased debt levels- Households cope with this shock by borrowing, largely from informal sources, and selling assets.
- Weak consumer sentiment – demand shock - loss of mobility, low discretionary spending and inventory accumulation.
- Lower-than-anticipated economic recovery

#### Measures taken by governments to address the economic situation

- The Central government has announced that it will distribute 5 kg of rice and wheat for free to ration card holders across the country. Individual States have added to this.
- Karnataka has announced a ₹1,250-crore relief package, through which farmers, auto, taxi and maxi cab drivers, construction workers and other informal sector workers will receive varying amounts in the form of a one-time dole.

#### Connecting the dots

- [Recession in India](#)

## Indian Prisons

**Context:** The prison, it is famously said, holds a mirror to society.

#### Issues with Indian Prison System

- Overcrowded jails- on an average at least 118 per cent higher than the limit
- Poor hygiene conditions
- Pleas for interim medical bail are often deferred by courts
- Increasing costs to the exchequer to maintain overcrowded jails.

#### Alternative of House Arrest

- SC urges courts to actively use the option of house arrest in cases where “age, health conditions and antecedents of the accused” are a criterion.
- In Independent India, house arrest has been used as a means of restricting movement and ensuring surveillance when an individual or groups of individuals are subject to preventive detention

#### Concerns with House Arrest

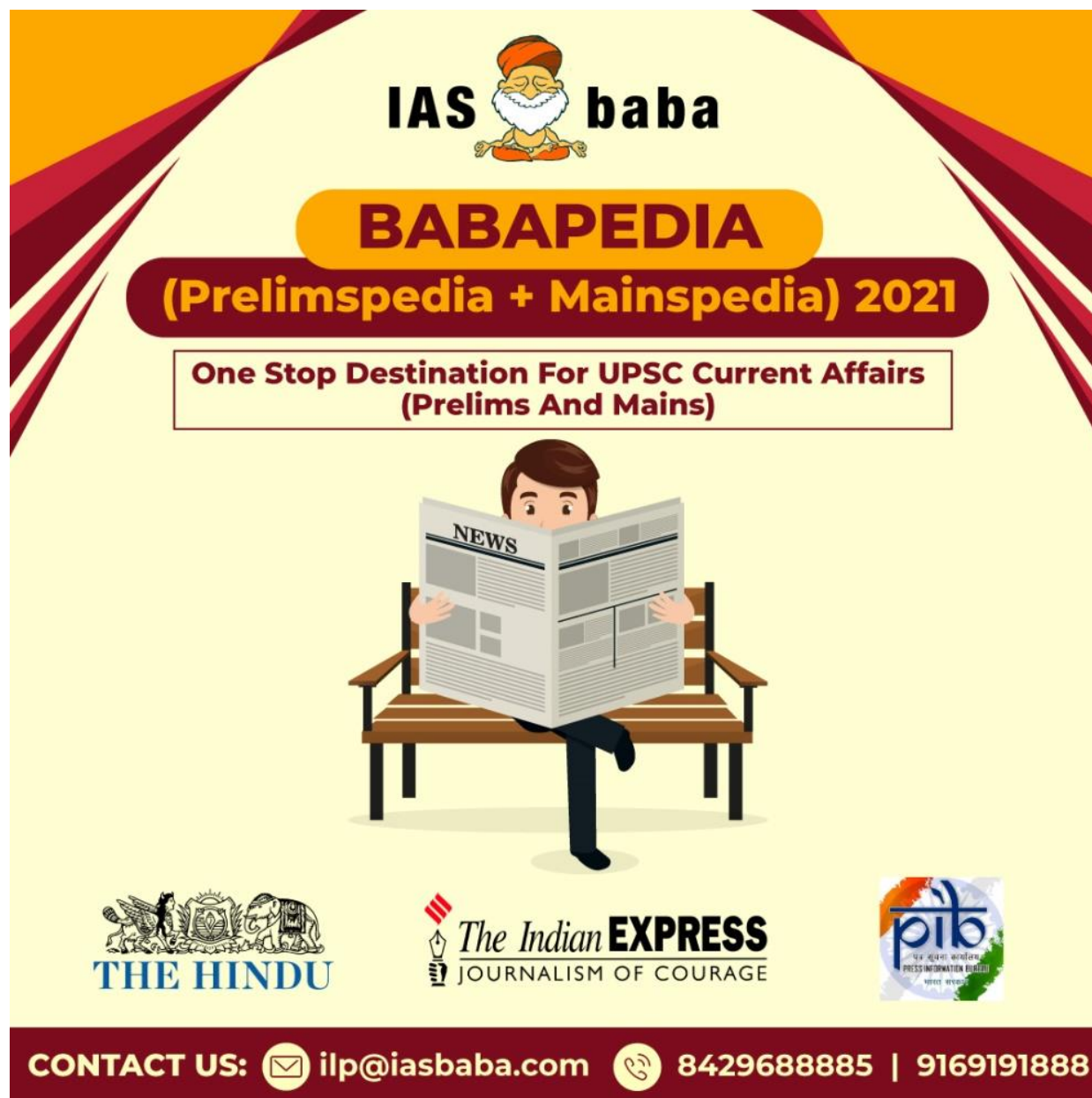
- Even with house arrest, there will be some who will believe that the confinement is too lenient while others who see it as too humiliating.
- A related issue in India is that few governments have evolved any legal understanding around the issue of political prisoners.

#### Conclusion

Democratic societies constantly evolve. This evolution includes shifts in public attitudes and definitions towards crimes: Sometimes they harden, at other times, expand.

### Connecting the dots

- [Police Reforms and the crucial judicial actor](#)



The advertisement features a central illustration of a man with a white beard and orange turban, labeled 'IAS baba', sitting cross-legged. Below him is a large orange button with the text 'BABAPEDIA' in bold black letters. Underneath the button is a dark red banner with the text '(Prelimspedia + Mainspedia) 2021' in yellow. Below the banner is a white box containing the text 'One Stop Destination For UPSC Current Affairs (Prelims And Mains)' in dark red. In the center of the advertisement is an illustration of a man sitting on a wooden bench, reading a newspaper titled 'NEWS'. At the bottom of the advertisement are three logos: 'THE HINDU' on the left, 'The Indian EXPRESS JOURNALISM OF COURAGE' in the center, and 'pib' on the right. A dark red banner at the very bottom contains the text 'CONTACT US: ilp@iasbaba.com 8429688885 | 9169191888' with an envelope icon and a phone icon.

**IAS baba**

**BABAPEDIA**

**(Prelimspedia + Mainspedia) 2021**

**One Stop Destination For UPSC Current Affairs  
(Prelims And Mains)**

**THE HINDU**

**The Indian EXPRESS**  
JOURNALISM OF COURAGE

**pib**

**CONTACT US: ilp@iasbaba.com 8429688885 | 9169191888**



## HEALTH ISSUE

### Antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

#### About

- The phenomenon by which bacteria and fungi evolve and become resistant to presently available medical treatment is known as anti-microbial resistance. It is one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century.
- Drug resistance in microbes emerges for several reasons. These include
  - The misuse of antimicrobials in medicine
  - Inappropriate use in agriculture
  - Contamination around pharmaceutical manufacturing sites where untreated waste releases large amounts of active antimicrobials into the environment.

#### Concerns

- **Undoes Medical Progress:** AMR represents an existential threat to modern medicine. AMR is a slow tsunami that threatens to undo a century of medical progress.
- **Increased Mortality:** AMR is already responsible for up to 7,00,000 deaths a year. Neonatal and maternal mortality will increase due to AMR.
- **Economic Loss:** Unless urgent measures are taken to address this threat, we could soon face an unprecedented health and economic crisis of 10 million annual deaths and costs of up to \$100 trillion by 2050.

#### Way Ahead

- **Comprehensive Surveillance Framework:** To track the spread of resistance in microbes, surveillance measures to identify these organisms need to expand beyond hospitals and encompass livestock, wastewater and farm run-offs.
- **Sustained Investments:** Finally, since microbes will inevitably continue to evolve and become resistant even to new antimicrobials, we need sustained investments and global coordination to detect and combat new resistant strains on an ongoing basis.
- **Multi-sectoral Coordination:** AMR must no longer be the remit solely of the health sector, but needs engagement from a wide range of stakeholders, representing agriculture, trade and the environment. Solutions in clinical medicine must be integrated with improved surveillance of AMR in agriculture, animal health and the environment.

### Medical Oxygen Crisis in India

**Context:** Medical oxygen is a critical component in the treatment of COVID affected patients. A shortage of medical oxygen at hospitals in many parts of the country in the wake of the ongoing second wave of COVID-19 infections has caused multiple deaths across country.

#### How much oxygen does India produce?

- Union Health Ministry has said that India had a daily production capacity of 7,127 metric tonnes (MT) of oxygen, which it asserted was sufficient given that the countrywide medical oxygen consumption as of April 12 was 3,842 MT.
- PMO has said in release that the production of **LMO [liquid medical oxygen]** in the country has increased from 5,700 MT/day in August 2020 to the present 8,922 MT (on April 25, 2021). The domestic production of LMO is expected to cross 9,250 MT/day by the end of April 2021.

#### What led to the shortage?

- **Caught off guard by steep demand:** While the Union government did constitute an inter-ministerial Empowered Group (EG2) of senior officers in March 2020 to ensure the availability of essential medical equipment, including medical oxygen, to the affected States, the group appears to have been caught off guard by the sheer scale and speed of the rise in infections.
- **Failure of Demand Forecasting:** Oxygen demand projections have woefully lagged behind actual requirements thus causing the crisis. The demand for medical oxygen, which prior to the onset of the pandemic last year was at about 10% of overall output, or 700 MT/day, has skyrocketed in recent weeks, to ~5700MT/day, with the incidence of patients suffering acute respiratory distress having sharply spiked during the current second wave.
- **Poor Logistical Preparation:** The logistical preparation for a second wave in India appears to have been wholly inadequate. With just 1,224 cryogenic tankers available for transporting LMO, there have not been enough vehicles to carry medical oxygen in quick time to critical locations. As a result, supplies ran out with replenishment not reaching on time and many seriously ill patients gasping to death

#### **Why are we facing supply challenges?**

- The stand-alone facilities for the production of oxygen, including the medical variant, have so far been geographically concentrated mainly in clusters in the eastern, southern and western parts of the country, thus necessitating the transportation of the element over distances by road.

#### **What is being done to boost supply?**

The Centre is taking a multi-pronged approach to address the crisis.

- **Diversion from Steel Plants:** For one, it has decided to deploy surplus stocks of the element available with steel plants across the country, including Public Sector Units.
- **Decentralised approach for producing oxygen:** Union Health Ministry is also expediting on a war footing the commissioning of 162 Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) plants that can generate oxygen from the air at various hospitals across the country.
- **International Assistance:** For now, the government is also accepting assistance from abroad with several countries, including Russia and Singapore, despatching oxygen equipment.

### Computed Tomography Scan

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS – III - Sci & tech

#### **In news**

- CT scans have been in news since several Covid positive patients with mild to moderate Covid symptoms, and some with negative RT-PCR reports having Covid symptoms are coming for the test

#### **Important value additions**

##### **CT scan**

- It is also known as computed tomography scan.
- It is a medical imaging technique used in radiology to get detailed images of the body noninvasively for diagnostic purposes.
- The use of ionizing radiations sometimes restricts its use owing to its adverse effects.

## Frequent Hospital Fires in India

**Context:** As many as 93 people, most of them Covid-19 patients, died in 24 incidents of fire in hospitals in India since August 2020.

### 1. Overstressed ICUs, ACs

- Hospitals are increasing beds, equipment and staff to admit more Covid patients, but it has not been possible to immediately expand the electrical wiring system.
- The ventilator, equipment, air conditioners are working 24 x 7 now. Ideally air conditioners need to run for 15-16 hours and then need a cooling period. This has put a pressure on the entire system
- Medical equipment or wires carrying current beyond their capacity can overheat leading to fires.

### 2. More inflammable material

- In Gujarat, fire officials have noted that ICUs lack cross-ventilation – this is the case with all ICUs as they are sealed for the purpose of keeping them sterile.
- A high oxygen percentage and sanitiser fumes in the ICU at times led to a flash fire reducing the time to respond.

### Way Ahead

- Hospitals must install sprinklers. If temperature rise to 78°C, sprinkler automatically starts dispensing 35 litres per minute. They can become first form of response,
- There is a need to augment deputation of more fire officials in major Covid hospitals
- Regular auditing once a week or two is required in densely populated hospitals

### Connecting the dots

- [Frequent accidents in fireworks](#)

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## Challenge ahead in vaccinating India

**Context:** Covid-19 vaccines were developed at an astonishing pace. No other disease has seen so many vaccines developed so fast. Out of 250 candidate vaccines that were being developed, at least 10 have already been approved for emergency use in different parts of the world.

- **High Demand:** With about seven billion people to be vaccinated worldwide, with mostly two jabs each, the demand for vaccines all across the world is obviously very high.
- **Stockpiling by Developed Nations:** The rich nations have behaved as they always do. More than 80% of available vaccines have been ordered and/or already stocked by a few countries representing only about 20% of the world population
- **Vaccination plans of Rich Nations:** Western countries, which have already immunised a significant portion of their adult populations, will proceed to vaccinate young children and, perhaps, even babies. It will therefore become even more difficult to access these vaccines in the free market.
- **New Virus Mutants:** New waves the world over are driven by mutants and although current vaccines seem effective against these, the chances of emergence of immune-escape mutants will only increase
- **Huge Population in India:** Although India ranks number three after the US and China in the absolute number of vaccines administered, only about 13% of its population has received a single jab and about 2% fully vaccinated
- **Ramping up of existing production takes time:** India is well known as the hub of vaccine manufacturing, however, vaccines are complex formulations of many components and depend

on a seamless supply of raw materials that are mostly imported. Ramping up of existing production, even after adequate funds are available, will inevitably take a minimum 2-3 months.

#### Way Ahead

- With at least three or four more vaccines, including Sputnik V, Janssen, and Novavax, already slated to be produced in India and several more being indigenously developed, India would certainly be producing vaccines to vaccinate its population.
- The proposed [IP waiver](#) might open up space for production of Covid vaccines with emergency use authorisations (EUA) on a larger scale in middle-income countries like India.

#### Connecting the dots:

- [Vaccine Nationalism](#)

### Shortage of anti-fungal injection, Amphotericin B

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - II - Health & GS-III - Sci & tech

#### In news

- Acute shortage of anti-fungal injection 'amphotericin' and other anti-fungal medicines used to treat mucormycosis, is now adding to difficulties of patients.
- Mucormycosis is a life-threatening infection that follows Covid-19 in roughly 30% diabetics.

#### Important value additions

- Amphotericin B injection is used to treat serious and potentially life-threatening fungal infections.
- It is in a class of medications called antifungals.
- It works by slowing the growth of fungi that cause infection.
- It is typically given by injection into a vein.
- Amphotericin B was isolated from *Streptomyces nodosus* in 1955 and came into medical use in 1958.
- It is on the World Health Organization's List of Essential Medicines.

### Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II - International Relations; Health

#### In news

- WHO approved the Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use.
- It is the first Chinese jab to receive the WHO's green light.

#### Key takeaways

- It is the two-dose vaccine, which is already being deployed in dozens of countries around the world.
- The WHO has already given emergency use listing to the vaccines being made by Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, J&J, and the AstraZeneca jab being produced at sites in India and in South Korea.

#### How does this vaccine work?

- The Sinopharm vaccine is an inactivated coronavirus vaccine, like Covaxin developed by Bharat Biotech India (BBIL) in collaboration with the National Institute of Virology (NIV).
- Inactivated vaccines take the disease-carrying virus (in this case SARS-CoV-2) and kill it using heat, chemicals or radiation.
- WHO notes that these vaccines take longer to make and might need two or three doses to be administered. The flu and polio vaccines use this approach as well.
- Out of the major vaccines being used in the world, Sinopharm, Covaxin and Sinovac (also developed by China) are the only ones that use inactivated virus.
- Others such as Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna are mRNA vaccines.
- Oxford-AstraZeneca, Sputnik and Johnson and Johnson's single-dose vaccines use a viral vector.

### Covid-19 infections being reported among the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

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

**In news**

- [Covid-19](#) infections are being reported among the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of Odisha

**Key takeaways**

- As many as 21 tribals across eight different PVTGs in the State have so far tested positive, including two from the Bonda tribe.
- [Bonda people](#) live in the highlands of Malkangiri.
- Members of Dongria Kondh, another PVTG, have tested positive in Rayagada district.

**Do you know?**

- Odisha has among the largest and most diverse tribal populations in the country.
- Of the 62 tribal groups residing in Odisha, 13 are recognised as PVTGs.
- According to the 2011 Census, Odisha's share of the country's total tribal population was 9%.
- Tribals constitute 22.85% of the State's population.
- **PVTGs in the states:** Bonda, Birhor, Chuktia Bhunjia, Didayi, Dongaria Kandha, Hill Kharia, Juang, Kutia Kondh, Lanjia Saora, Lodha, Mankirdia, Paudi Bhuyan and Saora.

### Biologics offer revolutionary approach to treating diseases

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - III - Sci & tech

**In news**

- A nanoparticle was recently designed by researchers from University of Massachusetts, U.S.A
- It offers a new and potentially revolutionary approach to treating diseases.

**Key takeaways**

- The new concept, Protein–Antibody Conjugates or PACs, combines two different approaches to drug delivery.
- This could have an impact on incurable diseases like pancreatic cancer.

## [New Naming System For Virus Variants](#)

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

### **In news**

- The World Health Organization (WHO) would unveil a system of naming of coronavirus variants similar to the way hurricanes are named

### **Key takeaways**

- The initiative seeks to remove stigma that gets attached to the country it was discovered in.
- It will also be easier for the public to remember rather than their lineage numbers
- Scientists refer to viruses and their variants by formal lineage names, which are a combination of letters and names that point to the relationships between different variants.
- Variants such as [B.1.1.7](#) and B.1.617 suggest that they have certain mutations in common and provide clues to their evolutionary history.
- However, 1.1.7 started to be known as the 'U.K. variant' and B.1.351 as the 'South African' variant.

### **Related articles**

[South African Covid Variant](#)

## [India's health worker brain drain](#)

**Context:** The surge in COVID cases across the country could lead to overburdening health workers and eventually causing shortage of them. Besides treating Covid patients, they will also have to administer vaccines, now available to the country's entire adult population.

### **Do You Know?**

- As per government reports, India has 1.7 nurses per 1,000 population and a doctor to patient ratio of 1:1,404 — this is well below the WHO norm of three nurses per 1,000 population and a doctor to patient ratio of 1:1,100.
- The 2020 Human Development Report shows that India has five hospital beds per 10,000 people — one of the lowest in the world
- According to Dr Devi Shetty, India will need an extra five lakh ICU beds, two lakh nurses and 1.5 lakh doctors in the next few weeks.

### **Issue of health Workers Brain Drain**

- **Migration of Health Workers lead to shortage:** For several decades, India has been a major exporter of healthcare workers to developed nations particularly to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Europe and other English-speaking countries. And this is part of the reason for the shortage in nurses and doctors.
  - As per OECD data, around 69,000 Indian trained doctors worked in the UK, US, Canada and Australia in 2017. In these four countries, 56,000 Indian-trained nurses were working in the same year
- **Factors of Migration:** Pull factors include higher pay and better opportunities in the destination countries while push factors include low wages in India's private sector, lack of govt investment, delayed appointment and reduced opportunities in public sector.
- **Countries tweaking policies to attract & retain health workers:** At the beginning of the pandemic, OECD countries exempted health professionals with a job offer from the travel bans. The UK has granted free one-year visa extensions to eligible overseas healthcare workers and their dependents. Similarly, France has offered citizenship to frontline immigrant healthcare workers during the pandemic.

### Has government taken measures to check brain drain of health workers?

- In 2014, government stopped issuing No Objection to Return to India (NORI) certificates to doctors migrating to the US. The non-issuance of the NORI would ensure that the doctors will have to return to India at the end of the three-year period.
- The government's policies to check brain drain are restrictive in nature and do not give us a real long-term solution to the problem

### Way Ahead

- We require systematic changes that could range from
  - Increased investment in health infrastructure,
  - Ensuring decent pay to workers
  - Building an overall environment that could prove to be beneficial for them and motivate them to stay in the country.
- The government should focus on framing policies that promote circular migration and return migration — policies that incentivise healthcare workers to return home after the completion of their training or studies
- It could also work towards framing bilateral agreements that could help shape a policy of “brain-share” between the sending and receiving countries — the destination countries of the migrants would be obliged to supply healthcare workers to their country of origin in times of need,

### Connecting the dots

- [Medical Oxygen Crisis in India](#)

## States asked to declare Mucormycosis an epidemic

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS -II - Health; Policies and interventions

### In news

- The Union government has asked the States to declare mucormycosis,, an epidemic under [Epidemic Diseases Act 1897](#).
- [Mucormycosis](#) is the black fungal infection being reported in COVID-19 patients.

### Key takeaways

- Declaring it an epidemic would lead to health facilities screening for it and reporting all such cases to the government.
- Rajasthan, Telangana and Tamil Nadu have already declared it an epidemic.

### Important value additions

- Mucormycosis or black fungus is a complication caused by fungal infection.
- People catch mucormycosis by coming in contact with the fungal spores in the environment.
- The disease is being detected among patients who are recovering or have recovered from Covid-19.

### Related articles

[Shortage of anti-fungal injection, Amphotericin B](#)

## [Airborne Transmission of SARS-COV-2 Virus](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - II - Health **In news**

- In a new advisory, the government has warned that the SARS-CoV-2 virus can be transported through air as well in the form of aerosols, and infect people up to 10 metres away.
- The general advisory on [Covid-19](#) was issued by the office of the Principal Scientific Advisor.

### **Key takeaways**

- The warning is in line with the latest evidence that suggests that airborne transmission of the virus, especially in enclosed spaces, cannot be ruled out.
- It was initially suggested that the virus spreads predominantly through large droplets that come out when a person is talking, sneezing or coughing.
- These droplets, because of their large size, were supposed to travel only short distances before falling on the ground.
- However, over the months, scientists have been finding increasing evidence of the virus travelling through aerosols as well.

### **Do you know?**

- Aerosols are small solid particles suspended in the air.
- Relatively light, aerosols can carry the virus to much larger distances.
- Also, they can remain suspended in the air for several minutes, or even hours, thereby greatly increasing the chance of the infecting a nearby person.

### **Related articles**

[Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia \(INSACOG\) launched](#)

[Virus Mutation: New SARS-CoV-2 strain](#)

[B.1.1.7 Lineage: New variant of SARS-CoV-2](#)

## [GST on Imported Oxygen Concentrator unconstitutional: Delhi HC](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - II - Health; Judiciary

### **In news**

- The Delhi High Court held the government's imposition of GST on oxygen concentrators imported for personal use as "unconstitutional".

### **Key takeaways**

- It said that oxygen concentrators constitute a life-saving device during the COVID-19 pandemic and during a pandemic a different approach needs to be adopted.
- The court had asked the government to consider temporarily dropping the 12% GST levied on such imports altogether, citing the shortage of oxygen in the second wave of the pandemic.

### **Do you know?**

- Article 21 of the Constitution enshrines the fundamental right to life.
- An oxygen concentrator is a device that concentrates the oxygen from a gas supply (typically ambient air) by selectively removing nitrogen to supply an oxygen-enriched product gas stream.

## [Rebuilding Public Health Infrastructure](#)

A third wave, if it happens, is likely to be worse. Some of the worries would be about



- Fast ascending infections in rural areas dominated by poor medical infrastructure
- The shortage of vaccines and the expected year-long timeframe to vaccinate all eligible individuals
- Ominous possibility of the virus impacting children
- Inadequate healthcare infrastructure for dealing with such a situation

India's bureaucracy needs to swiftly create healthcare structures, accessible in any grave eventuality as well as normal times.

### **1. Focus should be on PHCs**

- Strengthening, and refurbishing the local public health centres (PHCs), through public-private partnerships can be a win-win situation.
- These should be equipped and manned to deal with all emergency medical care, except for rare occurrences.
- The objective should be that no patient has to travel beyond 10 to 15 km in urban areas, and 20 to 25 km in rural regions for healthcare.

### **2. District Managing Group**

- A managing group can be created, comprising representatives from various related departments and organisations at the district level.
- It can bring into its fold experts and vital stakeholders like community members, social activists, and NGOs.
- The managing group should be headed by the district magistrate or his senior nominee.
- It can be formally notified, and bestowed with special administrative and financial powers to deliver prompt and uninterrupted services as may be defined by the state government.
- **Some of the powers and mandate of District Managing Group are mentioned below for illustration purposes.**
  - First, to notify and commandeer all or listed medical care centres within the district territory, public or private, to provide notified medical services during the public health emergency.
  - Second, to make all logistics arrangements well in advance by engaging public and private assets.
  - Third, develop medical centres with required specialisation services and the capacity in anticipation of the demand.
  - Fourth, to maintain and upgrade existing (PHCs), ensuring, particularly in rural areas, replacements for missing medical officers, engaging additional medical and technical staff through innovative sources.
  - Fifth, to declare containment zones, and to also ensure that citizens meticulously abide by the precautionary advisories and instructions.
  - Sixth, to tackle cases of leakage, black-marketing of essential medical supplies.
  - Seventh, to fix priorities and place special focus on rural areas in terms of speedy testing, tracing and vaccinating.
  - Eighth, to keep the general populace informed daily of the medical and other facilities available. And to meet daily to ensure clearing of bottlenecks and to course-correct if needed.

### **3. At the State level**

- Each state/UT should develop an action plan, in view of its challenges, and in consonance with the public health programme laid down by the Centre.

- Each state should see that such a capable implementing machine is driven by passionate team leaders. No bureaucratic rules should be allowed to obstruct the missionary spirit required here.

### Conclusion

A bottom-up approach will not only help blunt any possible surge in the Covid wave but will also build the much-needed health infrastructure. India should not miss this opportunity to strengthen its healthcare system.

## Launch of Ayush Clinical Case Repository (ACCR) portal and Ayush Sanjivani App

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II - Policies and interventions; Health

### In news

- Ayush Clinical Case Repository (ACCR) portal and the third version of Ayush Sanjivani App was recently launched.
- **Ministry:** Ministry for Ayush

### Key takeaways

#### Ayush Clinical Repository (ACCR) portal:

- It will serve as a platform to support both Ayush practitioners and general public.
- **Aim:** To aggregate information about clinical outcomes achieved by Ayush practitioners on a large scale.
- It is expected to document the strengths of Ayush systems for treatment of various disease conditions.
- It has dedicated section for reporting and publishing details of Covid 19 cases treated through Ayush Systems.

#### Ayush Sanjivani App

- It facilitates a significant study/ documentation regarding the efficacy of selected Ayush interventions, including Ayush 64 and Kabasura Kudineer medicines in the management of asymptomatic & mild to moderate Covid 19 patients.

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## GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

### India's Broken Sanitation System

**Context:** Newly-built “dry latrines” and “hanging toilets” in rural India are the result of the lockdowns of 2020-21 despite the Prohibition of Employment of Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, and a strict ban

#### Issues

- **Decline in Usage:** Sanitary toilet usage has declined because of the COVID-19 scare as, currently, more than six lakh toilets in rural India have acute water shortage
- **Emergence of Open-defecation:** Small pits filled with human excrement near construction sites in Uttar Pradesh highlight the re-emergence open-defecation pattern in India
- **Issue of “hanging toilets”:** In West Bengal, more toilets are found to be constructed as “raised beds with small holes” at the centre. These confinements, known as hanging toilets, are built by families who do not want to use sanitary toilets as they are always filled with excrement and faeces.
- **Increasing Burden on Sanitation Workers:** In rural India, long power cuts with no water coverage amidst the pandemic have again put the burden of maintaining sanitary toilets on sanitation workers. “Dry latrines”(toilets without flush or pit latrines) have been the biggest curse for India’s sanitation workers for it becomes additional burden for them to maintain it.
- **Gender-Based Sanitation Insecurity:** There is a disproportionate burden faced by women regarding shortage of or the non-availability of sanitation facilities. Women face threats to their life and feel unsafe while seeking a toilet facility or while going out for open defecation.
- **Corruption:** Forfeited bills and corruption by contractors keep toilets from having long-lasting infrastructure.
- **Impact of Lockdown:** The lockdowns have again multiplied the sanitation struggle in India, so much so that people are fearing the outcome of using these toilets every day.

#### Way Ahead

- **Re-Evaluating the State of Toilets:** The dependence on unimproved water sources in rural India even within sanitary toilets increases the need to re-evaluate the obsession with toilet construction in India.
- **Eradication of Dry Latrines and Hanging Toilets:** The usage of both dry latrines and hanging toilets puts the communities around them at high risk of illness, beyond Covid-19. Therefore, both the construction and usage of these units needs to be eradicated.

#### Conclusion

- Instead of focusing so heavily on building new toilets, we need to address the problems of actual toilet usage in rural India.

#### Connecting the dots

[Swachh Bharat Abhiyan](#)

## New framework for implementation of the SVAMITVA Scheme

**Part of:** GS Prelims And GS-II - Policies and interventions

### **In news**

- Union Minister for Panchayati Raj released the new framework for implementation of the [SVAMITVA Scheme](#) to mark the nationwide roll-out of the SVAMITVA Scheme.

### **Important value additions**

#### **SVAMITVA**

- It is a Central Sector Scheme.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Panchayati Raj
- It was nationally launched by the Prime Minister on the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day on 24th April 2021 after successful completion of the pilot phase of the Scheme in 9 States.
- **Aim:** To provide property rights to the residents of rural inhabited areas in India by using Drone survey and CORS Networks which provides mapping accuracy of 5 cms.

## Unique Disability ID (UDID)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - II - Governance; Policies and interventions

### **In news**

- The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Government of India has made it mandatory for all States/UTs to grant certificate of disability through online mode only using UDID portal from 1st June

### **Key takeaways**

- The Central Government notified the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Rules, 2017 under RPwD Act, 2016
- Rule 18(5) mandates the Central Government to appoint a date making it mandatory for the State/UT authorities to issue certificate of disability through online mode.
- It will ensure complete digitization of certification of disability from 01.06.2021, besides providing a viable mechanism for cross-checking genuineness of the certificate to achieve pan-India validity, and simplifying the process for the benefit of Divyangjan.

## Section 142 of the Social Security Code – 2020

**Part of:** GS Prelims GS-II – Policies and Interventions

### **In news**

- Section 142 of the Social Security Code, 2020 has been notified by Ministry of Labour & Employment covering applicability of Aadhar.

### **Key takeaways**

- The notification of section will enable the Ministry to collect Aadhar details for the database of beneficiaries under various social security schemes.
- National Data Base for unorganised workers (NDUW) is at an advanced stage of development by National Informatics Centre
- An inter-state migrant worker can register himself on the portal on the basis of submission of Aadhar alone.

## [SWAMIH completes its first residential project.](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - II - Policies and governance

### **In news**

- Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs handed over possession to homebuyers as Special Window for Affordable & Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH) Fund completes its first residential project.

### **Key takeaways**

- The residential project - Rivali Park, located in suburban Mumbai, was the first housing project in India to have received funding under the SWAMIH Fund.
- The SWAMIH Fund was launched in 2019.
- Rivali Park Wintergreens is the first investment by the Fund and is also the first project to get completed.
- The SWAMIH Investment Fund is one of the largest private equity teams in India and has done commendable work despite COVID-19 related restrictions.
- The Fund is targeting to complete an aggregate of 1,16,600 homes.
- This Fund is bridging the trust deficit between homebuyers and developers by completing construction and delivering homes without depending on any other source of finance.

## [Weberian Bureaucracy and its challenges](#)

**Context:** Despite its efforts, bureaucracy has emerged as a major concern for the ineffective response to the COVID-19 crisis.

### **Present Model**

- **Weberian bureaucracy** prefers a generalist over a specialist. Specialists in every government department have to remain subordinate to the generalist officers
- The justification is that the generalist provides a broader perspective compared to the specialist.
- A generalist officer (IAS and State civil service officials) is deemed an expert and as a result, superior, even if the officer works in one department or ministry today and in another tomorrow.
- Pandemic Situation: Healthcare professionals who are specialists have been made to work under generalist officers and the policy options have been left to the generalists when they should be in the hands of the specialists.

### **Issues**

- Weberian bureaucracy prefers **leadership based on position**.
- Traditional bureaucracy is still stuck with the leadership of position over leadership of function
- Administrative reform movement promotes **privatisation and managerial techniques** of the private sector as an effective tool to seek improvements in public service delivery and governance. But this isn't a viable solution, not the least in India where there is social inequality and regional variations in development.

### **Way Forward – Collaborative Governance**

- Collaborative governance is a model in which the public sector, private players and civil society, especially NGOs, work together for effective public service delivery.
- There is no domination of public bureaucracy as the sole agency in policy formulation and implementation.

- As part of new public governance, a network of social actors and private players would take responsibility in various aspects of governance with public bureaucracy steering the ship rather than rowing it.
- During the pandemic, we see civil society playing a major role in saving lives. As part of new public governance, this role has to be institutionalised.

#### Connecting the dots

- Minimum Government, Maximum Governance

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### Scheme in news: One Stop Centre scheme (OSCs)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS -II - Policies and interventions and their effects

#### In news

- [One Stop Centre Scheme \(OSCs\)](#) was in news recently.
- It has provided assistance to over 3 lakh women so far.
- **Implemented by:** the Ministry of Women and Child Development

#### Key takeaways

- The scheme is implemented through State Governments/ Union Territory (UT) Administrations.
- **Objective:** To provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence and in distress, both in private and public spaces, under one roof and facilitate immediate, emergency and non-emergency access to a range of services including police, medical, legal aid and counseling, psychological support to fight against any forms of violence against women.
- Till date, 701 OSCs in 35 States/UTs have been operationalised.

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### Launch of SeHAT OPD portal

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

#### In news

- 'Services e-Health Assistance & Tele-consultation (SeHAT) OPD portal was launched recently.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Defence

#### Key takeaways

- The portal provides tele-medicine services to the serving Armed Forces personnel, veterans and their families.
- This is the final version of the SeHAT OPD portal with advanced safety features.
- The trial version was made functional in August 2020.
- **Developed by:** Department of Military Affairs (DMA), Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS), Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) and Centre for Development of Artificial Computing (C-DAC) Mohali
- The portal will help reduce the load on hospitals and patients will be able to get contactless consultations in an easy and effective manner.

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### Monetary assistance as component of Mid-day-Meal (MDM) Scheme

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS -II - Welfare schemes

#### In news

- Ministry of Education has approved the proposal to provide monetary assistance to 11.8 Crore students through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) of the cooking cost component of the Mid-Day-Meal Scheme, to all eligible children, as a special welfare measure.

#### Key takeaways

- This will give a fillip to the Midday Meal programme.  
Government of India had also announced distribution of free-of-cost food grains @ 5 Kg per person per month to nearly 80 Crore beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PM-GKAY).

#### Important value additions

- The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) was launched as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme in 1995.
- Objective:** To enhance enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improve nutritional levels among children.
- In 2001 it became a cooked Mid Day Meal Scheme.
- The Scheme covers children of classes I-VIII studying in government, government-aided schools, special training centres (STC) and madarasas/ maqtabas supported under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).
- It is the largest school feeding programme in the world.
- It is covered by the National Food Security Act, 2013.

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## INTERNATIONAL

### Launch of Operation Samudra Setu-II

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

**In news**

- Indian Navy has launched Operation Samudra Setu-II to augment the ongoing national mission for meeting the Oxygen requirements.

**Key takeaways**

- Mission deployed Indian Naval warships will undertake shipment of liquid Oxygen filled cryogenic containers and associated medical equipment in support of India's fight against COVID-19.
- Two ships INS Kolkata and INS Talwar have entered port of Manama, Bahrain for embarking and transporting 40MT of liquid oxygen to Mumbai.
- Last year Indian Navy had launched [Operation Samudra Setu](#) as part of the [Vande Bharat Mission](#) and repatriated approx 4,000 stranded and distressed Indian citizens from Maldives, Sri Lanka and Iran.

### India invited as guest to G7 meeting

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

**In news**

- India has been invited to the [G7 meeting](#) as a guest country.

**Important value additions**

**The G-7 or 'Group of Seven'**

- Formed in:** 1975
- Countries:** Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK, and USA.
- Meetings are presided over by leaders of member countries on a rotational basis.
- The decisions taken during summit are non-binding.

**Do you know?**

- The G-7 was known as the 'G-8' after the original seven were joined by Russia in 1997.
- The Group returned to being called G-7 after Russia was expelled as a member in 2014 following the latter's annexation of the Crimea region of Ukraine.

### Initiative to waive TRIPS protection for COVID-19 vaccines

**Part of:** GS Prelims And GS-II - International Relations; Health

**In news**

- USA will support an initiative at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to waive Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) protection for COVID-19 vaccines.

**Important value additions**

**The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)**

- It is an international legal agreement between all the member nations of the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- It establishes minimum standards for the regulation by national governments of different forms of intellectual property (IP) as applied to nationals of other WTO member nations.
- TRIPS was negotiated at the end of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) between 1989 and 1990 and is administered by the WTO.



## Intellectual property waiver for Covid-19 vaccines

**Context:** The United States recently announced support for waiving intellectual property protection for Covid-19 vaccines, saying extraordinary circumstances call for extraordinary measures.

All 164 WTO members must agree on the draft, and any one member can veto it. The European Union, which had earlier opposed the waiver, has now stated its intent to discuss the US-backed proposal.

### What are patents and IP rights?

- A patent represents a powerful intellectual property right, and is an exclusive monopoly granted by a government to an inventor for a limited, pre-specified time.
- It provides an **enforceable legal right to prevent others from copying the invention.**
- Patents can be either process patents or product patents.
  - A **product patent** ensures that the rights to the final product is protected, and anyone other than the patent holder can be restrained from manufacturing it during a specified period, even if they were to use a different process.
  - A **process patent** enables any person other than the patent holder to manufacture the patented product by modifying certain processes in the manufacturing exercise.
- India moved from product patenting to process patenting in the 1970s, which enabled India to become a significant producer of generic drugs at global scale, and allowed companies like Cipla to provide Africa with anti-HIV drugs in the 1990s.
- But due to obligations arising out of the TRIPS Agreement, India had to amend the Patents Act in 2005, and switch to a product patents regime across the pharma, chemicals, and biotech sectors.

### What does the intellectual property waiver for Covid-19 vaccines mean?

- **Increased Production:** Most production is currently concentrated in high-income countries. The IP waiver might open up space for production of Covid vaccines with emergency use authorisations (EUA) on a larger scale in middle-income countries. production by middle-income countries has been happening through licensing or technology transfer agreements.
- Countries including Canada, South Korea, and Bangladesh have shown interest in making Covid vaccines if they can get a patent waiver
- **Role by India:** The US support for an IP waiver stems from a proposal by India and South Africa in the WTO last year. That proposal had, however, called for a waiver on all Covid interventions, including testing diagnostics and novel therapeutics.

### What are the deterrents for the waiver?

- **Undermine R&D Investment:** Pharma companies including Pfizer and AstraZeneca have opposed the proposed waiver — saying eliminating IP protections would undermine the global response to the pandemic, including the ongoing R&D efforts to tackle new variants.
- **Doubts on Safety from new facilities:** Pharma Companies also argued that waiving IPR & opening production facilities in developing countries could also undermine public confidence in vaccine safety and create a barrier to information sharing.

### Besides patents, what are the other roadblocks to scaling up production?

- **Trade barriers:** Countries like the US had blocked exports of critical raw materials used in the production of some Covid-19 vaccines using regulations like the American Defence Production Act.
- Bottlenecks in supply chains
- Scarcity of raw materials and ingredients in the supply chain

- Unwillingness of rich countries to share doses with poorer nations.

#### Connecting the dots

- [Vaccine Nationalism](#)

### Arctic Science Ministerial (ASM3)

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

#### In news

- India is participating in the 3rd Arctic Science Ministerial (ASM3) -
- It is the global platform for discussing research and cooperation in the Arctic region
- It is the first Ministerial meeting being held in Asia

#### Important value additions

- The first two meetings—ASM1 and ASM2—were held in the USA in 2016 and Germany in 2018, respectively.
- **ASM3 is jointly organised by:** Iceland and Japan.
- The meeting is designed to provide opportunities to various stakeholders to enhance collective understanding of the Arctic region, emphasize and engage in constant monitoring, and strengthen observations.
- **Theme:** 'Knowledge for a Sustainable Arctic'.

#### India and Arctic

- [India's engagement with the Arctic](#) began in 1920 with the signing of the Svalbard Treaty in Paris.
- Since July 2008, India has a permanent research station in the Arctic called Himadri at Ny Alesund, Svalbard Area in Norway.
- The launch of [NISAR \(NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar\) satellite](#) mission by India, in collaboration with the USA, is underway.
- India also contributes to the Sustained Arctic Observational Network (SAON).
- The research in the Arctic region from India is coordinated, conducted, and promoted by the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), Goa, under the Ministry of Earth Sciences

### South Sudan's Parliament dissolved

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

#### In news

- South Sudan's President Salva Kiir has dissolved Parliament.
- Lawmakers from opposing sides of the country's civil war shall now be appointed under a 2018 peace accord.

#### Key takeaways

- The setting up of a new legislative body was part of an accord signed in September 2018 between Mr. Kiir and Vice-President Riek Machar.
- In accordance with the 2018 accord, the new assembly will number 550 lawmakers, the majority — 332 — from Mr. Kiir's governing SPLM party.
- The parliamentarians will be nominated by the different parties.

#### Important value additions

- South Sudan is a landlocked country in east/central Africa.
- It is bordered to the east by Ethiopia, to the north by Sudan, to the west by the Central African Republic, to the south by Uganda.
- It gained independence from the Republic of the Sudan in 2011, making it the most recent sovereign country
- The White Nile passes through the country, passing by Juba.

## Christchurch Call to Action

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

### In news

- USA will join the Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online.
- It is a New Zealand-led global campaign to stamp out violent extremism online.

### Key takeaways

- The Christchurch Call is named after the New Zealand city in which 51 people from the Muslim community were killed in terrorist attacks broadcast live on the Internet on 15 March 2019.
- The Christchurch Call is an action plan that commits governments, international organizations and Internet players to take a series of measures, in particular:
  - developing tools to prevent the downloading of terrorist and violent extremist content;
  - combating the causes of violent extremism; improving transparency in the detection and removal of content; and
  - ensuring that the algorithms designed and used by businesses do not direct users towards violent extremist content, so as to reduce their viral nature.

## Reforms needed in WHO

**Context:** Recently, a report released by an independent panel co-chaired by former New Zealand PM Helen Clark linked the severity of the global outbreak to deficiencies across governments, the WHO and other multilateral organisations.

### Issues raised by the Panel

1. **Late warning:** In the first weeks of the pandemic, the WHO could have warned countries to assume that the SARS-CoV-2 virus was spreading among people, as a precaution
2. **Late Declaration of Pandemic:** WHO also could have declared the outbreak in Wuhan, China, a public health emergency of international concern — the highest level of global alert — earlier by at least January 22, 2020.
3. **Weak Body:** The WHO should have the power to investigate outbreaks speedily, with guaranteed rights of access and with the ability to publish information without waiting for a member state's approval (China)
4. **A month of lost opportunity:** Most countries failed to heed the warning, choosing to “wait and see,” rather than take firmer measures that could have contained the virus.

5. **A Pandemic Framework Convention** within six months was recommended by the Panel to address gaps in international regulations, and to clarify responsibilities between states and international organisations
6. **Changes in Financing:** An international pandemic-financing facility is needed that is capable of disbursing \$5 billion to \$10 billion a year for preparedness and \$50 billion to \$100 billion in the event of a crisis
7. The panel also recommended single, seven-year term for the WHO director-general and regional directors.

### Conclusion

Covid-19 is the 21st century's Chernobyl moment — not because a disease outbreak is like a nuclear accident, but because it has shown so clearly the gravity of the threat to our health and well-being.

### Connecting the dots

- [WHO and its funding](#)

## Violence between Israel- Palestine

**Context:** The ongoing violence between Israeli forces and Hamas — the worst fighting since 2014 — comes at a time when there seemed to be hope for a genuine easing of tensions in West Asia

### What was the reason for violence?

- **Israeli Police Action during Ramzan month:** The immediate provocation for the current conflict appears to have been the action taken by Israeli police and security forces to prevent Palestinians from gathering at the Damascus gate in Jerusalem after Ramzan prayers — a long-standing tradition — in which hundreds of civilians were injured.
- **Hamas Counter:** The action allowed Hamas (largest of several Palestinian militant Islamist groups) to don the mantle of “protector” and the bombs they launched initially killed three Israeli citizens.
- **Disproportionate response by Israeli army:** The Benjamin Netanyahu government's response was disproportionate: It carried out hundreds of airstrikes in Gaza and reportedly deployed artillery and troops as well.
- Over 100 Palestinians have been killed, at least 27 of them children. Both Hamas and Israel are attempting to use airstrikes and bombs against each other. Residential areas are bearing the brunt of Israeli attacks and there are **reports of rioting**.

### Who is benefitting from the violence?

While there are no winners in war, there are certainly some who benefit from it.

- Netanyahu continues to expand the offensive against Hamas at a time when his government — which has been in a minority in the legislature — is on the brink of collapse. This stokes nationalistic feelings and yields political benefits.
- Hamas, too, finds relevance in conflict, in stoking the flames of resentment that are bound to be just under the surface in places like Gaza, where an entire generation has lived through blockades and occupation.

### Implications of the recent violence

- **Erodes recent gains:** There was the softening of the hard stance vis a vis diplomatic ties with Israel by several Islamic regimes in the region (Ex: [Abraham Accords.](#)) However, the violence is a grave setback for peace in the region.
- **Deteriorating situation:** In the region, it is likely to make it harder for those trying to normalise ties with Israel.
- **Promotes Extreme Positions:** Within Israel and Palestine, it could embolden the maximalist, anti-peace voices.
- **Root problems remain unresolved:** The fundamental question of semi-legal settlements, of the differential rights enjoyed by Palestinians and Israelis, and violence as a means of political expression, remain unaddressed.

#### India

- India, for its part, has thus far managed to balance its historical commitment to the rights of Palestinians with its growing closeness to Israel.
- Delhi must continue to tread a fine line, without compromising either on its national and strategic interests, or its core humanitarian values.

### [Colombo Port City](#)

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

#### In news

- A Chinese-funded tax-free enclave in Sri Lanka recently cleared the final legal hurdle as its Supreme Court gave it a go ahead.

#### Key takeaways

- It is named the “Colombo Port City”.
- It is the largest single foreign investment by China in Sri Lanka among the other massive infrastructure projects.
- The Port City will attract billions of dollars for trade, banking and offshore services similar to what is available in Dubai and Singapore.
- The Port City will be administered by a commission with various powers to fast track investment approvals.
- All transactions within the Port City will be denominated in foreign currency and all salaries earned by any worker will be tax-exempt.

### [Lithuania quits Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries](#)

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

#### In news

- Lithuania has quit China’s 17+1 cooperation forum with central and eastern European states, calling it “divisive”.

#### Important value additions

#### Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (China-CEE, China-CEEC)

- It is an initiative by China.
- **Objective:** To promote business and investment relations between China and 16 countries of Central and Eastern Europe Countries (CEEC).

- **Founded in:** 2012 in Warsaw.
- It will now be known as 16+1 after Lithuanias' exit.

#### Do you know?

- Central and Eastern Europe is a term encompassing the countries in Central Europe, the Baltics, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Europe (the Balkans),
- It usually means former communist states from the Eastern Bloc and Warsaw Pact in Europe.
- Lithuania is a country in the Baltic region of Europe.
- **Capital:** Vilnius.

#### Bangladesh approves currency swap facility to Sri Lanka

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

#### In news

- Bangladesh's central bank has approved a \$200 million currency swap facility to Sri Lanka.
- It will help Sri Lanka in its foreign exchange crisis.

#### Key takeaways

- A currency swap is effectively a loan that Bangladesh will give to Sri Lanka in dollars, with an agreement that the debt will be repaid with interest in Sri Lankan rupees.
- This may be the first time that Bangladesh is extending a helping hand to another country.
- It is also the first time that Sri Lanka is borrowing from a SAARC country other than India.

#### Sri Lanka didn't approach India because

- India-Sri Lanka relations have been tense over Sri Lanka's decision to cancel a valued container terminal project at Colombo Port.
- Last July, RBI had extended a \$400 million credit swap facility to Sri Lanka, which was settled in February.
- The arrangement was not extended.
- RBI has a framework under which it can offer credit swap facilities to SAARC countries within an overall corpus of \$2 billion.
- The SAARC currency swap facility came into operation in November 2012.

#### Related articles

[India looks to secure Dollar Swap Line](#)

#### Myanmar Political Instability

**Context:** The February 1 military coup in Myanmar (third such coup in Myanmar's History) has led to countrywide civil disobedience movement against ruling military power. Military regained power because they feared that after the resounding electoral victory, Aung San Suu Kyi may move to curb the military's powers.

#### Did You Know?

- The 2008 Constitution of Myanmar secures a special place to the military, in that 25% of the seats in parliament and local legislatures are reserved for them, as indeed key ministries like Home, Defence and Border Affairs.
- The Constitution also disqualifies persons with foreign spouses from becoming president.

#### Implications of the Coup for India

- **Erodes Progress made in last decade:** The quasi-democratic experiment that Myanmar had started a decade back has now been aborted. India was champion of Democracy in Myanmar and had provided guidance in its Democratic transition.
- **Rise of China:** The growing international isolation of Myanmar government led by the Army could once again push the country into **dependence on China**.
- **Obstacles in Foreign Policy Agenda:** Recent developments in Myanmar pose a serious policy challenge to India. Myanmar is an important element for the success of India's 'Neighbourhood First', 'Act East', and 'Indo-Pacific' policies
- **Border & Regional Security:** The political instability in the post-coup period is expected to divert the attention of the Myanmar Army from its periphery and its borders. This may create tensions at border areas in India (refugees, insurgents, illegal movements)
- **Delayed Connectivity Projects:** Peace in Chin and Rakhine states of Myanmar is essential for the completion of the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project and the Trilateral Highway project. The political instability slows down these connectivity projects further **delaying the sub-regional integration**
- **Refugee Issue:** The refugee influx from Myanmar to Manipur and Mizoram (due to common ethnic links and family ties) is a matter of concern for India due to Political instability in Myanmar

#### India's Stance

- India expressed its concerns that the democratic gains made by Myanmar over the previous decades should not be undermined.
- India reiterated its "support to the process of democratic transition" and assured that India's developmental and humanitarian efforts in Myanmar aimed at the socio-economic development of the country will continue.
- India's envoy to UN told to UNHRC that the rule of law and democratic processes in Myanmar must be upheld and the detained political leaders released

#### Conclusion

As a non-permanent member of the UNSC during 2021-2022, India can play an important role with other partners like Vietnam in building international opinion, given that Vietnam is also a UNSC non-permanent member this year. If a supportive international environment is built up through the UN and ASEAN, the military in Myanmar could be encouraged to return to the democratic road map.

### Tianzhou-2 Cargo Spacecraft

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

#### In news

- China recently launched and docked a cargo spacecraft, Tianzhou-2.
- It is another step towards completing the construction of its first space station.

#### Key takeaways

- It was launched on a Long March-7 rocket.
- It will be followed by the launch of another cargo spacecraft, Tianzhou-3, and two manned missions, Shenzhou-12 and Shenzhou-13.
- The manned missions will each carry three astronauts who will spend several months in orbit.

#### Do you know?

- The launch was a third landmark for China's space programme in recent weeks.
- China landed a spacecraft in Mars on May 15 carrying its first Mars rover, Zhurong.



- The [Tianhe module](#), which the cargo spacecraft docked with was launched on April 29.

#### Related articles

[Mars Landing by China](#)

[Re-entry of Long March 5B Rocket](#)

### [US investigation into the origins of SARS-CoV-2](#)

**Context:** On May 14, a group of 18 scientists, most of them from the U.S., published a letter in the journal Science, calling for further investigation to determine the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This was necessary because the **two theories on the origins** —

- The virus could have been accidentally released from a laboratory in Wuhan, China or
- It was the result of a spillover from some animal species to humans

#### Why understanding origin of virus is necessary?

Understanding the origin of the virus is important to both increase safety in laboratories undertaking biological research, and to prevent pandemics of animal origin.

#### What have U.S. intelligence agencies been asked to do?

- Since the call issued by scientists, U.S. President Joe Biden, on May 26, ordered an **investigation by intelligence agencies** into the origins of the virus.
- The Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO) has also acknowledged that more work needs to be done on the lab leak theory, although a WHO team that visited Wuhan thought a **leak to be the least likely hypothesis**.
- Department of Immunology and Microbiology at the Scripps Research Institute in the U.S. have hypothesised that the virus **emerged from natural mutations**.

#### Why has the demand for a fresh inquiry arisen?

- WHO's governing forum, the World Health Assembly, mandated the Director-General in May 2020 to conduct an inquiry into the origin of SARS-CoV-2, and a joint probe was carried out by **WHO and China in January-February 2021**.
- Since there was **no conclusive evidence** for either hypothesis — natural spillover or lab leak — there were apprehensions when the report leaned in favour of the animal origin hypothesis, describing it as “likely to very likely”, and stated that a laboratory incident was “extremely unlikely”.
- WHO Director-General said he did not see the investigation as being extensive enough, and went along with the view that **requires further investigation**, potentially with additional missions involving specialist experts, were necessary.
- Some researchers from US have expressed concerns that the lab leak possibility had been given inadequate attention by the WHO team, and, in fact, treated as a “conspiracy theory”.

#### What is the basis for the natural origin hypothesis?

- Based on its study of possible natural origins, the Joint WHO-China study report identifies a SARS-related coronavirus in a (horseshoe) bat (SARSr-CoV; RaTG13) to which the SARS-CoV-2 virus has 96.2% genomic similarity.
- The novel coronavirus is less similar, by comparison, to the genome of viruses that have caused other epidemics such as SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome).

- Again, the higher infectivity of SARS-CoV-2 is attributed to peculiarities that it contains in the form of unique insertion of four amino acids in its spike protein that makes it more efficient than the virus causing SARS, for instance.
- Some coronaviruses found in pangolins in China are similar to SARS-CoV-2 in the RBD, showing that the optimised spike protein for efficient binding with human-like ACE2 may have resulted from natural selection.
- It could be hypothesised that while no direct link could be identified to a progenitor virus for the one that has paralysed the world, the process by which the **virus could adapt itself to spread among intermediate animals** and then humans was a natural one.
- It is also possible that a progenitor virus was acquired by humans, and it became more efficient at transmission as it spread among humans during an undetected phase.
- Scientists examined the possibility that there could have been an inadvertent release of SARS-CoV-2 from a laboratory, but argues that no progenitor virus with very high genetic similarity for such an experiment has been described, and the changes to the virus to transmit efficiently would have involved its repeated passage through cell cultures or animals with similar ACE2 receptors, which have not been described either.

### Conclusion

What does stand out in the present crisis is the emerging call for a global framework for safe biological laboratory research, and more insight into related coronaviruses, animal hosts, mutations, and pathways by which novel viruses infect humans.

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### COVID & Tokyo Olympics

**Context:** Japan has been gearing up to host the Olympics in July 2021 as fresh infections have been steadily declining.

However, things started to change from mid-April when Japan was hit by the fourth wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### Japan's Covid situation

- Japan was recording a seven-day average of less than 1,000 Covid-19 cases this March, and experts believed the country had overcome the pandemic for the third time in the last one year
- On May 8, Japan's Covid-19 cases topped 7,000 for the first time since mid-January and currently, Japan is still recording more than 4,000 cases a day.
- The country has recorded more than 700,000 infections and 12,000 Covid-19 deaths from the virus.
- With Japan witnessing Covid-19 cases at a rate that it has never before, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has already announced emergencies in nine prefectures of the country, including Tokyo — the venue of July's month's Olympic Games.

#### Why has the fourth wave hit Japan so badly? *(Compare these points with situation in India)*

- **Slow Vaccination:** Japan's vaccine rollout has been among the slowest in the industrialised world, with only 2.4 per cent of the population fully vaccinated. It started inoculating people only in February, much later than other developed nations.
- **Small Target group:** Also, it is only this week that the government started mass vaccination campaigns in Tokyo and Osaka. But the government's current goals call for only those over 65 to be fully vaccinated by the end of July, when the Summer Games are slated to begin.
- **Multiple Hurdles to Vaccination:** However, the progress is considerably slow owing to supply shortages and logistical hurdles, such as getting enough local doctors to help out. There has also

been considerable confusion over how to secure slots. Many across the country have complained about errors while booking their slots for the new mass vaccination centres run by the government

**What about the Olympics?**

- After having been postponed by a year (supposed to have been held in 2020), the Tokyo Olympics is scheduled to go ahead despite **severe criticism** from around the world.
  - **Resistance** towards holding the Games under the shadow of the pandemic has also grown in Japan, with one of the country's most prominent business tycoons calling out the government over its decision to continue with the Games.
  - In a survey released in Japan, 83 per cent of those polled said they did not want Tokyo to hold the Olympics and the Paralympics. That total was up 14 percentage points from a survey in April.
  - Olympics, to date, **has been cancelled only thrice** in 1916, 1940 and 1944 — all three cases due to the two World Wars. So, despite mounting criticism and protests, John Coates, vice-president of the International Olympic Committee, has promised that the Games would “absolutely” **go ahead, even under Covid restrictions**.
-

## INDIA AND THE WORLD

### USA's COVID rescue plan & lessons for India

**Context:** During Joe Biden's first joint address to the US Congress as President, he outlined a new paradigm for the US developmental pathway.

#### **Key Features of Joes Biden's Plan**

- **Blue Collar Job Creation:** Biden stated that "Nearly 90% of the infrastructure jobs created in the American Jobs Plan do not require a college degree. 75% don't require an associate's degree. The American Jobs Plan is a blue-collar blueprint to build America"
- **Strengthen Workers Right:** To further boost the bargaining ability of the working class, he called on Congress to pass the Protect the Right to Organize Act, which will support the right to unionise.
- **Gender Parity & Increasing Minimum Pay:** Biden argued in favour of raising the minimum wages in US and providing equal pay to women. He said "let's raise the minimum wage to \$15. No one working 40 hours a week should live below the poverty line".
- **Access to good education:** Here, Biden wants to increase universal public education from 12 to 16 years as well as give increase grants and invest in historical Black colleges and universities, tribal colleges, minority-serving institutions because these institutions don't have the endowments.
- **Addressing Child Care Poverty:** Another element in Biden's plan puts money directly into the pockets of millions of Americans by expanding tax credits for every child in a family — aimed at helping more than 65 million children and cutting child care poverty in half.
- **Affordable Healthcare:** Biden proposed to bring down the healthcare premiums and the price of prescription drug. He stated that "Health care should be a right, not a privilege, in America"
- **Bottom up/Middle out economics instead of "Trickle down" economics:** To finance these plans, Biden junked the long-held notion of "trickle down" economics (TDE) that advocated tax cuts for wealthy people. He announced that wealthiest 1 per cent of Americans need to begin to pay their fair share.

#### **So, what is the significance of Biden's speech for India's economy?**

- **Moving away from Neoliberalism:** Biden's strategy — big government spending push as well as focusing on raising revenues from the rich and the business class to rebuild the economy — is in stark contrast to neoliberal approach of minimum government strategy adopted by Union government since 2014.
- **Growing Inequality is the problem:** The middle class in India was likely down by one-third in 2020 and around 75 million were pushed below the poverty line even as India became the country with the third-most billionaires in the world. Similar type of growing inequality is sought to be addressed by Biden's strategy of redistribution of wealth by increased governmental intervention.

#### **Connecting the dots**

- Capitalism Vs Socialism Vs Mixed Market Economy

## India -UK Virtual Summit

**Part of:** GS Prelims And GS-II - International Relations

**In news**

- [Indian Prime Minister and the UK](#) Prime Minister held a Virtual Summit.

**Key takeaways**

**'Roadmap 2030'**

- To elevate bilateral ties to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'.
- It will pave the way for a deeper and stronger engagement over the next ten years in the key areas of people to people contacts, trade and economy, defence and security, climate action and health.

**'Enhanced Trade Partnership' (ETP)**

- It sets an ambitious target of more than doubling bilateral trade by 2030.
- As part of the ETP, India and the UK agreed on a roadmap to negotiate a comprehensive and balanced FTA, including consideration of an Interim Trade Agreement for delivering early gains.

**India-UK 'Global Innovation Partnership'**

- It aims to support the transfer of inclusive Indian innovations to select developing countries, starting with Africa

**A comprehensive partnership on migration and mobility**

- It will facilitate greater opportunities for the mobility of students and professionals between the two countries.

**Do you know?**

- Both sides agreed to enhance cooperation on new and emerging technologies, including Digital and ICT products, and work on supply chain resilience.
- They also agreed to strengthen defence and security ties, including in the maritime, counter-terrorism and cyberspace domains.
- The UK is India's second largest partner in research and innovation collaborations.

## "Cooperation for a Resilient Future" seminar - Part of ADB's annual meeting

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

**In news**

- Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs and [Asian Development Bank's](#) (ADB) Governor for India Nirmala Sitharaman participated in the Governor's Seminar on "Cooperation for a Resilient Future", held as part of ADB's annual meeting 2021.

**Important value additions**

**Asian Development Bank (ADB)**

- It was conceived in the early 1960s when a resolution was passed at the first Ministerial Conference on Asian Economic Cooperation held by the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East in 1963.
- The institution was opened in 1966 at Manila, Philippines with 31 initial members.
- **Headquarters:** Manila, Philippines
- **Members:** It has 67 members—of which 48 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.
- India is one of the founding members.
- **Objective:** A financial institution that would be Asian in character and foster economic growth and cooperation in one of the poorest regions in the world.
- ADB provides loans, technical assistance and grants.

- **Working:** The ADB was modelled closely on the World Bank, and has a similar weighted voting system where votes are distributed in proportion with members' capital subscriptions.
- As of 31 December 2016, Japan and USA hold the largest proportion of shares (15.607%), China holds 6.444%, India holds 6.331%, and Australia holds 5.786%
- ADB is an official United Nations Observer.

## MoU between Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and Qatar Financial Centre Authority (QFCA)

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

**In news**

- The Union Cabinet has approved signing of MoU between Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and Qatar Financial Centre Authority (QFCA).

**Key takeaways**

- The MoU would enhance cooperation between the Institutes to work together to strengthen the Accounting profession and entrepreneurship base in Qatar.
- ICAI has an active Chapter in Doha, Qatar which was established in the year 1981 and is the oldest among the 36 overseas Chapters of the ICAI.
- Qatar (Doha) Chapter is amongst the most vibrant Chapters of ICAI.

**Important value additions**

**The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI)**

- It is a statutory body established under The Chartered Accountants Act, 1949'.
- **Objective:** To regulate the profession of Chartered Accountancy in India.

## India-China: Lessons from Ladakh Stand-off

**Context:** After over a year, the [stand-off between Indian and Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh](#) shows no signs of resolution. Disengagement has stalled, China continues to reinforce its troops, and talks have been fruitless.

**Implications of the border tensions**

- More broadly, the India-China bilateral relationship has ruptured. India has made clear that the relationship is conditional on peace on the border.
- Political relations are marked by hostility and distrust.
- Reversing a long-held policy, India will no longer overlook the problematic border dispute for the sake of a potentially lucrative wider relationship;
- Even if disengagement continues, the relationship will remain vulnerable to destabilising disruptions.

**Key Lessons to be learnt**

1. China is more likely to be deterred or coerced with the threat of political costs, rather than material costs.

- China's defence budget is three to four times larger than India's, and its Western Theatre Command boasts over 200,000 soldiers. The material burden of the crisis would not disrupt its existing priorities.
- In contrast, India successfully raised the risks of the crisis for China through its threat of a political rupture, not military punishment

2. Indian Ocean Region is the key

- India should consider accepting more risk on the LAC in exchange for long-term leverage and influence in the Indian Ocean Region.
- At the land border, the difficult terrain and even balance of military force means that each side could only squeeze out modest gains at best.
- In contrast, India has traditionally been the dominant power in the Indian Ocean Region and stands to lose significant political influence and security if it fails to answer the rapid expansion of Chinese military power in the region.
- The Ladakh crisis, by prompting an increased militarisation of the LAC, should not defer long-overdue military modernisation and maritime expansion into the Indian Ocean.

#### Connecting the dots

- On [Pakistan's New Map](#) – Critical Analysis
- [India-Nepal Border Dispute](#): Kalapani and Lipulekh

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## India-Africa Relationship

### Historical Background

- During early 1920s both regions fight against colonial rule and oppression.
- After India gained independence, it became a leading voice in support of African decolonisation at UN
- Independent India, though extremely poor after two centuries of colonial exploitation, strived to share its limited resources with African countries under the banner of South-South cooperation
- In 1964, India launched the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme to provide technical assistance through human resource development to other developing countries – Africa was biggest beneficiary
- India's economic engagement with Africa, on the other hand, only began intensifying in the early 2000s. India's total trade with Africa grew from US\$ 6.8 billion in 2003 to US\$ 76.9 billion in 2018, and India is now Africa's third-largest trade partner

### Challenges

- Government aimed to export 10 million vaccine doses to the African continent. However, due to second wave and increasing domestic demand, export prospects may be hampered.
- Indian Line of Credits (LoCs) have **not been designed to achieve a larger development goal** such as food security, health security, clean energy or education for all. LoCs are typically used by recipient countries to fund small development projects such as roads, bridges, railway lines.
- There is **no synchronisation** between different development instruments of India.
- Moreover, **implementation** has been a key constraint for Indian LoCs, with poor disbursement rates and project completion record.
- There has instances of **violence against African students** is common in India that has created unease in India-Africa relationship
- Although India has immense social capital among African nations, it has **not matched this in material ties**, and China's economic and investment presence in Africa has been outstripping India's for many years
- China is essentially trying to offer an alternative authoritarian model of development to African countries. Its message is that no longer is the liberal international path the only road for African countries to take and prosper.

**With its limited resources, India can try to make its development cooperation with Africa more impactful in the following ways:**



- Clear strategy for African development
- Continue the current focus on capacity building
- Harness Indian civil society organisations, NGOs, and Indian diaspora:
- Promote development-friendly private investments:
- Timely completion of projects
- Improve the experiences of Africans in India
- A thought-fully planned [vaccine strategy](#) that balances interest of India and that of Africa

#### Connecting the dots

- [Pandemic in Africa and opportunity](#) for India
- Asia-Africa growth Corridor



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## ECONOMY

### Scheme For Special Assistance To States For Capital Expenditure For 2021-22

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS – III - Economy

**In news**

- The Ministry of Finance, Government of India has decided to provide an additional amount of upto Rs. 15,000 crore to States as interest free 50 year loan for spending on capital projects.

**Key takeaways**

- The Department of Expenditure has issued fresh guidelines in this regard on the “Scheme of Financial Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure” for the financial year 2021-22.
- Under the Scheme, financial assistance is provided to the State Governments in the form of 50-year interest free loan.
- In view of the positive response to the scheme and considering the requests of the State Governments, the Government has decided to continue the scheme in the year 2021-22.

**Do you know?**

The Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure for 2021-22 has three Parts:

- Part-I:** It is for the North-East and Hill States
  - Part-II:** It is for all other States not included in Part-I. This amount has been allocated amongst these States in proportion to their share of central taxes as per the award of the 15th Finance Commission for the year 2021-22.
  - Part-III:** It is for providing incentives to States for monetization/recycling of infrastructure assets and disinvestment of the State Public Sector Enterprises (SPSEs).
- An amount of Rs.5,000 crore is allocated for this part of the scheme.
  - Under this part, States will receive interest free 50 years loan ranging from 33% to 100% of the amount realised by them, through assets monetization, listing and disinvestment.

### Legal Metrology (Packaging Rules 2011)

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

**In news**

- According to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Importers of medical devices, used particularly for providing oxygen support to Covid-19 patients, are now allowed to import these devices without prior mandatory declaration for the next three months, the said in a notification.

**Key takeaways**

- The importers can make all necessary declarations after the custom clearance, but before they are sold to consumers.
- The Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules, 2011, make it mandatory to get the approvals prior to the import.
- Department of Consumer Affairs administers the Legal Metrology Act 2009.

**Do you know?**

- The act provides for application of legal requirements to measurements and measuring instruments.
- The objective of Legal Metrology is to ensure public guarantee from the point of view of security and accuracy of the weighments and measurements.
- The Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities), Rules 2011 are primarily intended to ensure that the consumers are able to make informed choices by being informed of essential declarations on the pre-packed commodities.

## Quality standards for four spices finalized

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

### In news

- The [Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs \(CCSCH\)](#) has finalised and recommended quality standards for four spices; cloves, oregano, basil, and ginger, during its [fifth session](#) held recently.

### Key takeaways

- The committee forwarded these four new standards to the [Codex Alimentarius Commission \(CAC\)](#) for adoption as full -fledged Codex standards.
- **New work items were also taken up:** To develop Codex standards for small cardamom and turmeric, and to develop the first group standard for spices that fall under the class 'dried fruits and berries'.

### Do you know?

- CCSCH is the youngest of the Codex Commodity Committees.
- The Committee is Chaired by India
- Spices Board India is its Secretariat.
- **Mandate:** To elaborate worldwide, science-based quality standards for spices and culinary herbs, in accordance with the Codex principles of consumer protection and fair trade practices.
- Dr M.R. Sudharshan is the current Chairman of the Committee.

## RBI Steps in to Ease COVID-19 Burden

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

### In news

- The RBI Governor has announced a series of measures to support the nation's fight against the second wave of COVID-19 infections.

### Key takeaways

- **Term Liquidity Facility of Rs. 50,000 crore** with tenure of up to 3 years, at repo rate, to ease access to emergency health services, for ramping up COVID-related health infrastructure & services.
- **Special Long Term Repo Operations for Small Finance Banks (SFBs):** In order to provide further support to micro, small and other unorganized sector entities, 3-year repo operations of Rs. 10,000 crore at repo rate, for fresh lending up to Rs 10 lakh per borrower (till 31 October, 2021)
- **Lending by SFBs to MFIs to be classified as priority sector lending:** In view of fresh challenges, SFBs are now permitted to regard fresh on-lending to MFIs with asset size up to Rs. 500 crore, as priority sector lending (till 31 March, 2022)
- **Rationalization of KYC norms** for enhanced customer experience: Steps being proposed include –
  - Extending scope to video KYC for new customer categories such as proprietorship firms,
  - Conversion of limited KYC accounts to fully KYC compliant accounts,
  - Introduction of more customer-friendly options in KYC updating and
  - enabling the use of KYC Identifier of Centralised KYC Registry (CKYCR) for V-CIP and submission of electronic documents as identity proof

- **Floating Provisions and Countercyclical Provisioning Buffer:** Banks can now use 100% of floating provisions held by them, as on December 31, 2020, for making specific provisions for NPAs; (till March 31, 2022)
- **Relaxation of overdraft facility for states:** Maximum number of days of overdraft in a quarter for state governments has been increased from 36 to 50 days.

## Strategy for Pulses Cultivation in Kharif 2021

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

### **In news**

- In order to attain self-sufficiency in the production of pulses, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has formulated a special Kharif strategy for implementation during the Kharif 2021 season.

### **Key takeaways**

- A detailed plan for both area expansion and productivity enhancement for Tur, Moong and Urad has been formulated.
- Under the strategy, the high yielding varieties (HYVs) of seeds will be distributed free of cost to increase area through intercropping and sole crop.
- The Agricultural Technology Application Research Institutes (ATARIs) and Krishi Vigyan Kendras will also be roped in for effective implementation and training to the farmers.

## Stress Resolution Framework 2.0 for Individuals, Small Businesses and MSMEs

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

### **In news**

- RBI has announced following set of measures to relieve stress faced by most vulnerable categories of borrowers – individuals, borrowers and MSMEs.

### **Key takeaways**

- Individuals, borrowers and MSMEs with aggregate exposure up to Rs. 25 crore, who have not availed restructuring under any previous frameworks, but classified as standard on 31 March, 2021, will be eligible to be considered under Resolution Framework 2.0.
- This can be invoked till September 30, 2021 and will have to be implemented within 90 days after invocation.
- For individuals and small businesses who have availed restructuring of loans under Resolution Framework 1.0, where moratorium of less than 2 years was permitted, lending institutions can now increase the period and/or extend residual tenure up to a total period of 2 years.
- In respect of small businesses and MSMEs restructured earlier, lending institutions are now permitted to review working capital sanction limits, as a one-time measure.

## Exports of Organic Millets Grown in Himalayas to Denmark

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

### **In news**

- In a major boost to organic products exports from India, first consignment of millets grown in Himalayas from snow-melt water of Ganges in Dev, Uttarakhand would be exported to Denmark.

#### Key takeaways

- [APEDA](#), in collaboration with Uttarakhand Agriculture Produce Marketing Board (UKAPMB) & Just Organik, an exporter, has sourced & processed ragi (finger millet), and jhingora (barnyard millet) from farmers in Uttarakhand for exports, which meets the organic certification standards of the European Union.
- Millets are gaining a lot of popularity globally because of high nutritive values and being gluten free also.

#### Do you know?

- Oil cake meal is a major commodity of the organic product exports from the country followed by oil seeds, fruit pulps and purees, cereals & millets, spices, tea, medicinal plant products etc.
- At present, organic products are exported provided they are produced, processed, packed and labelled as per the requirements of the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP).
- Organic products covered under the bilateral agreement with NPOP need not be recertified for import in India.

### Time for 5th generation banking reforms

**Context:** The government recently announced new banking reforms, involving the establishment of a Development Finance Institution ([DFI](#) for infrastructure, creation of a [Bad Bank](#) to address the problem of chronic non-performing assets (NPAs), and [privatisation of public sector banks \(PSBs\)](#) to ease its burden in terms of mobilising additional capital.

The Indian banking sector has been evolving on a continuous basis,

	Reforms	Outcomes
First Generation	During the pre-Independence period (till 1947), the <i>Swadeshi</i> Movement saw the birth of many small and local banks	Most failed mainly due to internal frauds, interconnected lending, and the combining of trading and banking books.
Second generation (1947-1967)	Indian banks facilitated resource mobilisation through retail deposits)	Banking sector got concentrated in a few business families or groups  Neglected credit flow to agriculture.
Third generation (1967-1991)	The government was successful in breaking the nexus between industry and banks through the nationalisation of 20 major private banks in two phases (1969 and 1980) and introduction of priority sector lending (1972).	These initiatives resulted in the shift from 'class banking' to 'mass banking' and had a positive impact on the expansion of branch network across (rural) India, massive mobilisation of public deposits and incremental credit

		<p>flow to agriculture and allied sectors.</p> <p>However, the banking industry experienced a decline in asset quality, financial soundness, and efficiency during this period as a result of relaxation in credit standards to meet the priority sector targets.</p>
Fourth generation (1991-2014)	<p>Indian banking saw landmark reforms such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue of fresh licences to private and foreign banks</li> <li>• Introduction of prudential norms</li> <li>• Providing operational flexibility coupled with functional autonomy</li> <li>• Focus on implementation of best corporate governance practices</li> <li>• Strengthening of capital base as per the Basel norms.</li> <li>• Since 2014, the banking sector has witnessed the adoption of the JAM (Jan-Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile) trinity, and issuance of licences to Payments Banks and Small Finance Banks (SFBs)</li> </ul>	<p>Reforms infused competition, thereby enhancing productivity as well as efficiency by leveraging technology.</p> <p>SFBs has helped to achieve last-mile connectivity in the financial inclusion drive.</p>

#### Fifth Generation Reforms - Promoting Niche/Differentiated Banking

- Niche Banking caters to the specific and varied requirements of different customers and borrowers.
- Essentially, these specialised banks would ease the access to finance in areas such as RAM (retail, agriculture, MSMEs), infrastructure financing, wholesale banking (mid and large corporates) and investment banking (merchant banking and financial advisory services).
- They also may be encouraged to get listed on a recognised stock exchange and adhere to **ESG (Environment, Social Responsibility, and Governance) framework** to create value for their stakeholders in the long run.
- Government should establish sector-wise regulators and bestow them with more powers to deal effectively with wilful defaulters.

#### Conclusion

Given the current challenges of a burgeoning population, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, and the West's intention to shift its manufacturing base to India and elsewhere, it is essential to say 'yes' to fifth generation banking reforms.

## Strategic disinvestment of IDBI BANK Ltd approved

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

### In news

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its in-principle approval for strategic disinvestment along with transfer of management control in IDBI Bank Ltd.

### Key takeaways

- The extent of respective shareholding to be divested by GoI and LIC shall be decided in consultation with RBI.
- Government of India (GoI) and LIC together own more than 94% of equity of IDBI Bank (GoI - 45.48%, LIC - 49.24%).
- LIC is currently the promoter of IDBI Bank with Management Control and GoI is the co-promoter.
- It is expected that strategic buyer will infuse funds, new technology and best management practices for optimal development of IDBI Bank Ltd. and shall generate more business
- Resources through strategic disinvestment of Govt. equity from the transaction would be used to finance developmental programmes of the Government benefiting the citizens.

## Finance Related Problems of MSME Sector

**Context:** According to the 2020-21 annual report of the Ministry of MSME, India's 63 million micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) contributed to 30% of the GDP  
MSMEs also employ more than 100 million workers.

### The sector's finance-related problems are due to three main factors

1. Absence of viable **credit providers**
2. **Absence of credit products** and schemes such as micro-insurance that help enterprises tide over business downturns
3. **Delayed payments** leading to a persistent crunch in working capital. The average number of days it takes for enterprises to receive cash for the credit sale are 176, 112 and 81 days for micro, small and medium enterprises, respectively.

### Delayed payments entail four kinds of costs for firms —

- Costs in retrieving payments in the form of personnel, time and effort;
- Interest forgone beyond the prescribed period;
- Business forgone due to working capital crunch;
- Losses due to non-reconciliation.

### Way Forward

- Given the labour intensive nature of MSME sector, government should prioritise reviving the sector in its post-pandemic economic recovery strategy.
- Therefore, government should identify the weaknesses in its present MSME schemes so that they deliver to its fullest potential



## 'Connected Commerce: Creating a Roadmap for a Digitally Inclusive Bharat' report

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

### **In news**

- NITI Aayog and Mastercard released a report titled 'Connected Commerce: Creating a Roadmap for a Digitally Inclusive Bharat'.

### **Key takeaways**

- The report identifies challenges in accelerating digital financial inclusion in India.
- It provides recommendations for making digital services accessible to its 1.3 billion citizens.

### **Key recommendations**

- Strengthening the payment infrastructure to promote a level playing field for NBFCs and banks.
- Digitizing registration and compliance processes and diversifying credit sources to enable growth opportunities for MSMEs.
- Building information sharing systems, including a 'fraud repository', and ensuring that online digital commerce platforms carry warnings to alert consumers to the risk of frauds.
- Enabling agricultural NBFCs to access low-cost capital and deploy a 'phygital' (physical + digital) model for achieving better long-term digital outcomes.
- To make city transit smoothly accessible to all with minimal crowding and queues, leveraging existing smartphones and contactless cards and make it an inclusive, interoperable, and fully open system

## S. Janakiraman advisory Group

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

### **In news**

- An advisory group has been constituted to assist the second Regulatory Review Authority (RRA)
- RRA was set up by the RBI recently to streamline regulations and reduce the compliance burden of regulated entities.

### **Key takeaways**

- **Headed by:** SBI Managing Director S. Janakiraman.
- The group will assist the RRA by identifying areas, regulations, guidelines, returns which can be rationalised
- It shall submit reports periodically to RRA containing the recommendations/suggestions.

### **Do you know?**

- In 1999, the RBI had set up a Regulations Review Authority (RRA) for reviewing the regulations, circulars, reporting systems, based on the feedback from the public, banks, and financial institutions.

## Production-Linked Incentive Scheme for The Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Storage

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

### **In news**

- The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal of Department of Heavy Industry for implementation of the [Production Linked Incentive \(PLI\) Scheme](#) 'National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Storage'.

### **Key takeaways**

- **Aim:** To achieve a manufacturing capacity of 50 GigaWatt Hour of ACC and five Giga Watt Hour of Niche ACC with an outlay of 18,100 crore.
- ACCs are the new generation of advanced storage technologies that can store electric energy either as electrochemical or as chemical energy and convert it back to electric energy as and when required.
- It will also give a big push to electric mobility, benefiting three-wheelers, four-wheelers and heavy vehicles.
- India is currently importing Battery Storage Equipment
- The scheme will be helpful in making the country self-reliant (Atmanirbhar).

## Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme 2021-22

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

### **In news**

- The Central Government in consultation with the RBI, has decided to issue Sovereign Gold Bonds.

### **Key takeaways**

- The Sovereign Gold Bonds will be issued in six tranches from 17th May to September 2021.
- The Bonds will be sold through Scheduled Commercial banks (except Small Finance Banks and Payment Banks), Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited (SHCIL), designated post offices, and National Stock Exchange of India Limited and Bombay Stock Exchange Limited.
- The minimum permissible investment will be one gram of gold.
- Investors will be compensated at a fixed rate of 2.50% per annum payable semi-annually on the nominal value.
- The Bonds will be restricted for sale to resident individuals, Hindu Undivided Families, Trusts, Universities and Charitable Institutions.
- The tenor of the Bond will be for a period of 8 years with exit option after 5th year to be exercised on the next interest payment dates.

## Rethinking PSE Policy

**Context:** Recently, the government said that it will be using three public sector enterprises (PSE) for manufacturing Covaxin to augment the manufacturing capacity under Mission COVID Suraksha. These were

- Haffkine Biopharmaceutical Corporation Ltd, a State PSE under the Maharashtra government;
- Indian Immunologicals Ltd (IIL), Hyderabad — a facility under National Dairy Development Board;
- Bharat Immunologicals and Biologicals Corporation Ltd (BIBCOL), Bulandshahr, a CPSE under the Department of Biotechnology.

### **This has revived the debate on the relevance of PSEs**

- **Cannot entirely do away with PSEs:** Since Independence, PSEs have played a pivotal role in realising the objective of achieving higher growth and equitable socio-economic development of the country. So to say the government has no business to be in doing business perhaps needs to be revisited

- **Crucial Role in testing times:** PSEs in the steel, petroleum and natural gas sectors have supplemented the efforts of the government in making available liquid medical oxygen as well as transportation of it.
- **Contribution of PSE Employees:** PSEs by their inherent work culture spend a lot of time and resources in manpower training and developing expertise. Former public sector employees, after retirement or having quit jobs and then joined private sector, have given the right kind of impetus to the industry, particularly the core sector of the economy.

#### Importance of Pharma PSE

- **Self-reliance:** The public sector drug companies were established with a vision to make the country self-reliant in producing medicines needed for the people of the country
- **Free & Fair Market:** Strong presence of Pharma PSEs helps save an industry like the drug industry from the clutches of MNCs and the private corporate sector.
- **Ensures affordability during crisis times:** Pandemic has resulted in loss of imports from China. This directly resulted in escalation of prices of everyday medicines like paracetamol in the Indian market. Expansion of Pharma PSE units at these times will make medicines affordable.

#### Way Ahead

- There is a need to revisit the PSE policy, but more in terms of their functioning — by empowering the boards of these entities, making them more autonomous.
- These companies should be run by a professional board without government interference. These PSEs could be run under the PPP model or as JVs too.
- Board members should be highly respected, knowledgeable, and from industry, management, finance and research fields.

#### Connecting the dots

- [Privatization: Merits](#) & Critical Analysis
- [Privatization of Banks](#)

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### Customs (Import of Goods at Concessional Rate of Duty) Amendment Rules , 2021

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

#### In news

- The Government has brought changes in the existing Customs (Import of Goods at Concessional Rate of Duty) Rules, IGCR 2017 to boost trade facilitation.
- The IGCR, 2017 lay down the procedures and manner in which an importer can avail the benefit of a concessional Customs duty on import of goods required for domestic production of goods or providing services.

#### Key takeaways

- Changes have been introduced by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs.
- However, some sectors such as gold, jewellery, precious stones and metals have been excluded.
- Another major change is to allow those who import capital goods at a concessional Customs duty to clear/re-sell them in the domestic market on payment of duty and interest, at a depreciated value.
- This was not allowed earlier and manufacturers were stuck with the imported capital goods after having used them as they could not be easily re-exported.

## Money Withdrawal from online wallets through ATM permitted

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

### **In news**

- Now Money kept in various online wallets like Amazon pay, Ola money, Mobikwik, Phone pe, Delhi Metro Card etc. can be withdrawn using an ATM or Point of Sale Terminal.

### **Key takeaways**

- RBI has permitted cash withdrawal of Rs. 2,000 per transaction with maximum limit of Rs. 10,000 per month.
- All non-bank Payment prepaid instruments can provide this service.
- Till date, RBI has permitted 37 Prepaid Payment Instruments (PPIs) in country.
- Maximum two lakh rupees can be kept in various wallets after completion of full KYC.
- All PPIs have to ensure interoperability by 31st March 2022

### **Important value additions**

- PPIs help facilitate the purchase of goods and services, including financial services, remittances and fund transfers against the value stored on such instruments.
- These instruments are generally pre-loaded cards.
- **Examples:** Paytm and GPay (semi-closed system PPIs), gift cards (closed system PPIs) and debit or credit cards (open system PPIs).

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## Business Localisation

**Context:** As global businesses look to diversify their supply chains, the spotlight is back on the government's '[Atmanirbhar Bharat](#)' (Self-Reliant India) campaign.

### **Benefits for Localisation**

#### **1. Benefits for Customers:**

- Locally produced goods are aptly suited for their home markets as they are developed and tested in local conditions
- Due to local manufacturing, customers (intermediary or end use) can expect faster deliveries.
- Local product tend be cheaper than imported goods due to differential rates of taxation

#### **2. Benefits to Companies**

- Local manufacturing enables a great deal of flexibility which allows cost efficiencies, control over quality, faster turn-around times in terms of production, transportation, deliveries, etc.
- Manufacturing locally helps India's industries grow and its talent pool to develop specialised skill sets.
- Localisation can be the gateway to further opportunities such as export growth, import substitution, and contract manufacturing.

#### **3. Benefits to Country**

- India has the world's largest population of youth at an employable age. Local manufacturing makes for a great opportunity for the country to supply a workforce to its industries.
- Localisation assists in raising the standards of the lives in the area.

- Localisation enables knowledge sharing and tech transfer with other countries, lending the home country access to the latest global technologies too
- Allows country to position itself as a manufacturing hub for other countries.

### Conclusion

With greater government support and industries' combined efforts, India will surely reap the numerous benefits of localisation in years to come

### Connecting the dots

- [Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan](#)
- Do you think the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat would be a [game changer for the domestic industries](#)? Substantiate your views.

## Personal Guarantors Liable for Corporate Debt : SC

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

### In news

- The Supreme Court upheld a government move to allow lenders to initiate insolvency proceedings against personal guarantors, along with the stressed corporate entities for whom they gave guarantee.
- These personal guarantors are usually the promoters of big business houses.

### Key takeaways

- It held that the November 15, 2019, government notification which allowed creditors (usually financial institutions and banks), to move against personal guarantors under the Indian [Bankruptcy and Insolvency Code \(IBC\)](#) was “legal and valid”.
- The government had also decided that corporate debtors and their personal guarantors should be dealt with by a common forum — [National Company Law Tribunal](#) (NCLT) — through the same adjudicatory process.
- Besides, Section 60(2) of the IBC had required the bankruptcy proceedings of corporate debtors and their personal guarantors to be held before the NCLT.

## New rules notified under the Insurance Act

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

### In news

- As per the new rules notified under the Insurance Act, Indian promoters of insurance joint ventures with foreign partners will no longer be able to nominate a majority of the board members.

### Key takeaways

- This follows the recent amendments to enhance the [foreign direct investment \(FDI\) limit in the insurance sector from 49% to 74%](#)
- This new norm will apply to all insurers, irrespective of the stake held by the foreign partner.
- Further conditions have also been specified on the composition of the board for firms where foreign investors' stake exceeds 49%.

## [White fungus](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS -II - Health; Sci & Tech

### **In news**

- Rising cases of 'white fungus' or 'candidiasis' have been detected recently in India.

### **Important value additions**

- This infection can be caused due to low immunity or if people come in contact with things that contain these moulds like water, etc.
- Patients of white fungus show Covid-like symptoms but test negative.
- The infection can be diagnosed through CT-Scan or X-ray.
- It is a fungal infection caused by a type of fungus called Candida.
- White fungus can affect not just the lungs but also other parts of the body including nails, skin, stomach, kidney, brain, private parts and mouth.
- However, it is regarded as just a normal fungal infection.

### **Related articles**

#### [Mucormycosis](#)

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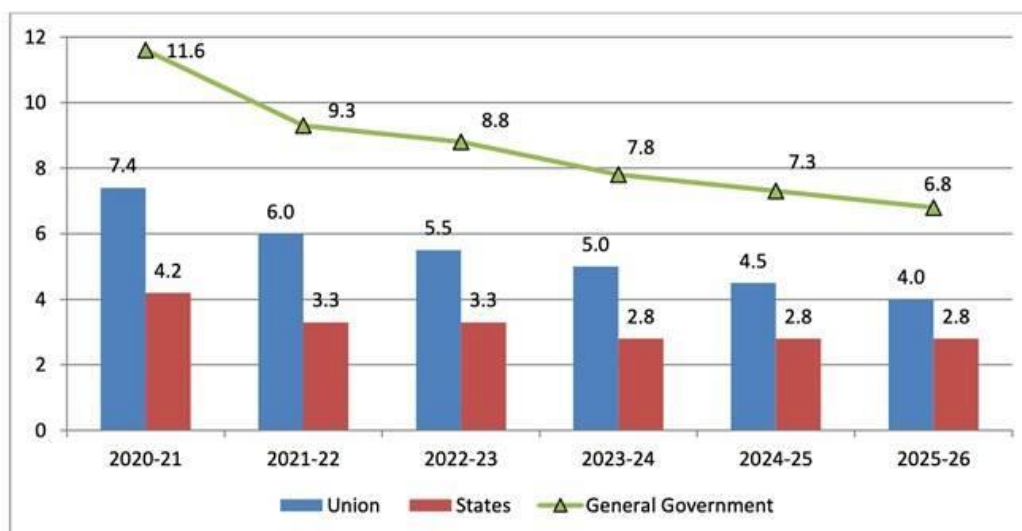
## [Covid-19 impact on central and state govt finances](#)

**Context:** It is relevant to look back at how Covid impacted the government — both at the Centre and in the states — finances over the past year.

### **Centre's Finances**

- The central government's revenues (both from tax and non-tax sources) fell sharply, on the other, the government overshot its expenditure as well.
- This resulted in the Union government's revenue deficit (the difference between its revenue receipts and its revenue expenditure) as well as its fiscal deficit (a measure of its overall borrowing) rising sharply.
- The Covid disruption has meant that the government's fiscal deficit (both at Centre and state levels) will remain bent out of shape for a few years to come.
- Therefore, 61% of the rise in fiscal deficit (as against what was imagined at the time of presenting the Budget in February 2020) was due to a fall in revenue and 39% was due to a rise in expenditure.

Figure A1: Fifteenth Finance Commission's Prescribed Glid Path of Fiscal Deficits (% of Nominal GDP)



Source: Figure 1.1, Page No. 10 of XV Finance Commission (2020)

#### What types of revenues fell and why?

- TABLE 1 below provides a sense of which type of tax revenues took the biggest hit due to Covid. We can notice that all types did barring the excise duties.
- Reduced incomes also result in reduced consumption and as such, the third biggest hit was the taxes raised on consumption — the GST.
- But the most interesting takeaway is the trend in **Union Excise Duties (UED)**, which grew by **over 35% in a year** that saw overall growth contracting by 8%.
  - The **lower international prices of crude petroleum** paved the way for the Union government to raise UED on those refined petroleum products which are not attracting GST, viz., petrol, diesel, Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF)

**Table 1: Union Excise Duties buck the trend thanks to phenomenal growth in cesses and surcharges**

Type of revenue	FY21(BE) vs FY21 (RE) [Change in % terms]
Gross Tax Revenue	—21.6
of which	
Corporation Tax (CIT)	—34.5
Taxes on Income (PIT)	—28.1
Customs	—18.8
Union Excise Duties (UED)	35.2



Goods and Services Tax (GST)	—25.4
Non-Tax Revenue	—45.3

### Concerns with rise in UED

- This massive jump in UED collection did not benefit the states since the Union government collected it by increasing cesses and surcharges on UED instead of raising the basic UED rate.
- The proceeds of cesses and surcharges are not shareable with state governments.
- In fact, if one removed the cesses and surcharges, the UED collections for the past financial year would actually fall by 20%, instead of going up by 50%.
- The table below provides another way to understand how far the cesses and surcharges helped the Union government while keeping the states out of the loop.

Table A1: Collection of Union Excise Duties and Annual Growth

Year	Gross Collection (Rs. Crore)			Annual Growth (%)		
	Union Excise Duties (UED) (A)	Cesses under UED (B)	UED - without Cesses (A-B)	Union Excise Duties (UED) (A)	Cesses under UED (B)	UED - without Cesses (A-B)
2018-19	231,044.93	69,137.03	161,907.90			
2019-20	239,452.43	81,505.77	157,946.66	3.64	17.89	-2.45
2020-21RE	361,000.00	233,900.00	127,100.00	50.76	186.97	-19.53

Source: Compiled by authors based on Union Budget Documents (various years)

Cesses accounted for 65% of all the UED collection in FY21 — registering an annual growth of 187% (all data highlighted in red)

### How were the state-level government finances impacted by Covid?

- States have contained their revenue as well as capital expenditures to cope up with the revenue shock. However, the containment of expenditures was not sufficient to compensate for (the) contraction in total receipts.
- As a result, over the first 9 months (three quarters) of FY21, these states saw their revenue deficits exceed the budget target by almost 240% and their fiscal deficit by over 40%.
- Beyond the aggregate, there were statewide variations — both in terms of revenues raised and expenditures made (See TABLE 3)

Annual Growth (%) in 2020 vis-à-vis 2019 (up to Quarter 3)	Decreased (in %)	Increased (in %)
Total Receipts	Haryana (-21%), Gujarat (-19%), Karnataka (-18%), Maharashtra (-18%) and West Bengal (-17%),	Andhra Pradesh (10%), Punjab (18%)

	Uttar Pradesh (-15%)	
Total Expenditure	Haryana, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha	Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Kerala

### Connecting the dots

- [Cess pool: On CAG report on GST](#)

## Increased Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

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

### In news

- There has been an increase in FDI inflows into India recently.
- Measures taken by the Government regarding Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy reforms, investment facilitation and ease of doing business have contributed to the increase.

### Key takeaways

**The trends in India's FDI are:**

- Highest ever total FDI inflow of US \$81.72 billion during the year 2020-21.
- It is 10% higher as compared to last year (US\$ 74.39 billion).
- **Top investor countries:** Singapore (29%), U.S.A (23%) and Mauritius (9%)
- **Maximum FDI received sector-wise:** Computer Software & Hardware (44%), Construction (Infrastructure) Activities (13%) and Services Sector (8%)
- **Maximum FDI received state-wise:** Gujarat (37%), Maharashtra (27%) and Karnataka (13%).

### Related articles

- [Government approval mandatory for FDI from neighbouring countries](#)
- [COVID-19 and FDI Policy](#)

## Shahi Litchi

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS -III – Trade; GI tags

### In news

- Shahi litchi was in the news recently.
- Season's first consignment of Shahi Litchi from Bihar was exported to UK.
- It is a major boost to the export of GI certified products

### Key takeaways

- Shahi litchi is the fourth agricultural products to get GI certification from Bihar in 2018.
- Jardalu mango, Katarni rice and Magahi paan are other GI certified products from the state.
- India is the second largest producer of litchi (Litchi chin) in the world, after China.
- **Top producer:** Bihar

### Important value additions

- **Litchi** is a sub-tropical fruit.
- It thrives best under moist sub-tropical **climate**.
- **Ideal conditions for growth:** Deep, well drained loamy soil, rich in organic matter and having pH in the range of 5 to 7

### Challenges ahead for India's GST

**Context:** The 43rd meeting of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council is to be held on May 28. Of the 31 representatives that are expected to attend, 17 members are from the ruling BJP or its alliance partners and remaining 14 are from non-ruling alliance.

#### **Do You Know?**

- The 17 members of the ruling dispensation and the 14 members of the non-BJP dispensation in the GST Council represent exactly one half of India's population each.
- However, the non-BJP group contributes a higher share of 60% of overall GST revenues and accounts for 63% of the country's GDP.

#### **Issues**

- **GST Meeting not held:** The GST Council was mandated to meet at least once every quarter, but it had not met for two quarters, ostensibly due to the pandemic
- **Increased dependency:** States are dependent on GST collections for nearly half of their tax revenues. However, in the wake of economic slowdown the compensation to states have not been steady.
- **Conditions for extra borrowings:** Centre imposed sudden and stringent policy conditions to grant approval to States for extra borrowing in the middle of the pandemic last year.
- **Differential Vaccine Pricing:** There is a feeling of betrayal over how the States have been forced to pay a much higher price for COVID-19 vaccines than the Centre.
- **Misuse of Cess:** States are wary of the Centre's duplicity in levying cesses that garner significant revenues for the Centre without sharing them with the States.
- **Failure to deliver on early promises:** GST was to deliver enormous economic efficiency gains, improve tax buoyancy and collections, boost GDP growth and usher in greater formalisation of the economy. However, 15th Finance Commission report formally acknowledges that GST has been an economic failure that did not deliver on its early promises.
- **Problems underpinning GST continues:** Economists point to the multiple rates structure, high tax slabs and the complexity of tax filings as the problems underpinning India's GST.
- **Uncertainty over guaranteed revenue after 2022:** GST has endured so far primarily because the States were guaranteed a 14% growth in their tax revenues every year, which minimised their risks of this new experiment and compensated for their loss of fiscal sovereignty. This revenue guarantee ends in July 2022 and there is increasing demand from States to continue this compensation regime even after 2022.

#### **Conclusion**

- The phrase 'cooperative federalism' was introduced into India's political lexicon to justify the transition to GST in 2017.
- Cooperative federalism has a larger meaning beyond just fiscal federalism. It also entails cooperative political, administrative and governance federalism between the States and the Centre.

#### **Also Read**

- [GST reform needs a new grand bargain](#)
- [Critical working of GST](#)

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## [Arrest the Economic Slide](#)

**Context:** Uday Kotak, the president of CII and MD of Kotak Mahindra Bank, has urged the government to provide another round of fiscal support aimed at protecting livelihoods, especially for the weaker sections of the economy.

### Issues

- **Economic Recovery difficult:** After [2021-22 Union Budget](#), India's GDP was expected to recover all the loss it suffered in 2020-21, when it [contracted by around 8%](#), and would grow by over 12% this financial year. Thanks to the vicious second Covid wave, India may not be able to get back to the level of absolute GDP it had in March 2020
- **Disproportionate Burden on Poor:** The second wave resulted in job losses and reduced wages across almost all income classes while making matters worse for the poor.
- **Reduced Aggregate Demand:** In the wake of reduced incomes, people are expected to severely constrain their expenditures, especially on anything they consider non-essential. This would lead to depressed demand in economy
- **Governments' recovery strategy in danger:** Depressed demand in turn, would delay, if not completely derail, the cornerstone of the government's Covid recovery strategy — fresh investments from corporate India.
- **Vicious Cycle:** Businesses will continue to hold back investments because there is not enough consumer demand, and consumers will not demand more because they do not have enough incomes. And this vicious cycle could get worse if the pace of vaccination doesn't pick up or if there is a deadly third wave.

### Way Ahead

- Given the widespread devastation due to the second wave of Covid-19, this is not the time for either the government or the companies to look at their financial balance sheets.
- Only one economic entity can break this cycle: The government. By providing additional direct monetary help to the poor and extending its existing schemes for collateral-free loans to small businesses, the government can arrest the slide.

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## [Edible oil prices rise sharply](#)

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

### In news

- Edible oil prices have risen sharply in recent months.

### Key takeaways

- Increase in prices was observed in six edible oils — groundnut oil, mustard oil, vanaspati, soya oil, sunflower oil and palm oil.
- With rising incomes and changing food habits, consumption of edible oils has been rising over the years.
- One main reason for increase in prices is the shift in usage of edible oils from food to biofuel.

- **Other reasons are:** More buying by China, labour issues in Malaysia, Impact of laNina on palm and soya producing areas and imposition of export duty on crude palm oil in Indonesia and Malaysia
- To immediately reduce the prices, the import duty must be reduced which has increased because of imposition of cess after the budget.

#### Important value additions

- The major sources of these imports are Argentina and Brazil for soybean oil; Indonesia and Malaysia palm oil; and Ukraine and Argentina again for sunflower oil.
- The domestic demand of edible oil is around 24 Million Tonnes (MT) while India produces only 11 Mt.
- Thus, 13 MT of edible oils is imported.
- While mustard oil is consumed mostly in rural areas, the share of refined oils —sunflower oil and soybean oil — is higher in urban areas.

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### Patented 'village rice'

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

#### In news

- Recently, patented 'village rice' sourced from Kumbakonam, Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu by a start-up Udaya Agro Farm was exported to Ghana & Yemen
- Enriched with protein, fibre, and a variety of minerals, 'village rice' is sourced directly from farmers of Thanjavur, also known as rice bowl of Tamil Nadu.

#### Do you know?

- In March, 2021, the first consignment of 'red rice' from Assam was exported to the USA.
- Iron rich 'red rice' is grown in Brahmaputra valley of Assam, without the use of any chemical fertilizer. The rice variety is referred as 'Bao-dhaan', which is an integral part of the Assamese food.

#### Related articles

[Shahi Litchi](#)

[Jackfruit](#)

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### Floating jetty inaugurated in Goa

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

#### In news

- The second Floating jetty at Old Goa was inaugurated recently.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways

#### Key takeaways

- The jetty will offer safe, hassle free transportation to the tourists.
- The Government of India has approved setting up of two Concrete floating jetties on River Mondovi (NW-68) to connect Old Goa and Panjim.
- This is the second floating jetty constructed.
- The first jetty located at Captain of Ports, Panjim Goa was inaugurated in February 2020 at Panjim.

#### Important value additions

### Concrete floating jetties have many advantages over the fixed jetties

- Their price is approximately 1/5th of the price of a fixed jetty.
- Similarly, they are quicker to build and install, easier to use.
- The designed life of a floating jetty is up to 50 years.
- Also, being floating structures they don't need CRZ clearances.
- They can be increased in size or reduced as per changes in users' requirements or the changes in jetty site's hydrographic profile.

## AGRICULTURE

### Production Linked Incentive Scheme for Food Processing Industry (PLISFPI)

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

#### In news

- The Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) has launched an online portal for '[Production Linked Incentive Scheme](#) for Food Processing Industry' (PLISFPI).

#### Key takeaways

- Government of India has approved a new Central Sector Scheme namely 'Production Linked Incentive Scheme for Food Processing Industry' for implementation during 2021-22 to 2026-27 with an outlay of Rs. 10,900 crore.
- **Objective:** To support creation of global food manufacturing champions commensurate with India's natural resource endowment and support Indian brands of food products in the international markets.
- **Category-I:** Applicant under this category could undertake Branding & Marketing activities abroad also and apply for grant under the scheme with a common application.
- **Category-II:** SMEs Applicants manufacturing innovative/ organic products who apply for PLI Incentive based on Sales.
- **Category-III:** Applicants applying solely for grant for undertaking Branding & Marketing activities abroad

### India – Israel Cooperation in Agriculture

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

#### In news

- India and Israel have signed a three-year work program (2021-23) for cooperation in Agriculture.

#### Key takeaways

- [India and Israel](#) are implementing the "INDO-ISRAEL Agricultural Project Centres of Excellence" and "INDO-ISRAEL Villages of Excellence".
- This is the 5th Indo-Israel Agriculture Action Plan (IIAP).
- **Aim:** To grow existing Centres of Excellence, establish new centers, increase CoE's value chain, bring the Centres of Excellence into the self-sufficient mode, and encourage private sector companies and collaboration.
- "INDO-ISRAEL Villages of Excellence" is a new concept

- **Aim:** Creating a model ecosystem in agriculture across eight states, alongside 13 Centers of Excellence within 75 villages.
- **Focus:** (1) Modern Agriculture infrastructure, (2) Capacity Building, (3) Market linkage.

### Crop in news: Jackfruit

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS -III - Economy; Trade; Agriculture

#### **In news**

- A shipment of fresh jackfruit was exported from Tripura to London.
- It is a major step towards harnessing exports potential of agricultural and processed food products from north-eastern region.

#### **Important value additions**

- Jackfruit is a species of tree in the fig, mulberry, and breadfruit family (Moraceae).
- It is a multiple fruit, composed of hundreds to thousands of individual flowers, and the fleshy petals.
- **Scientific Name:** Artocarpus heterophyllus.
- **Major producers in world:** India, Thailand, Indonesia and Nepal.
- **Major Production States of India:** Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Assam.
- Kerala is the largest producer of jackfruit in the world.
- It is the state fruit of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

#### **Do you know?**

- Recently, the first consignment of 'red rice' was sent to the USA from Assam.
- Iron rich 'red rice' is grown in Brahmaputra valley of Assam, without the use of any chemical fertilizer.
- The rice variety is referred to as 'Bao-dhaan', which is an integral part of Assamese food.

#### **Related articles**

[Shahi Litchi](#)

### Crisis in Dairy Sector

#### **Significance of Dairy Sector**

- **Livelihood:** In the farm-dependent population comprising cultivators and agricultural labourers, those involved in dairying and livestock constitute 70 million.
- **Women Empowerment:** Moreover, in the total workforce of 7.7 million engaged exclusively in raising of cattle and buffalo, 69 per cent of them are female workers, which is 5.72 per cent of the total female workforce in the country, of which 93 per cent live in rural areas.
- **Economic Growth:** In the Gross Value Added (GVA) from agriculture, the livestock sector contributed 28 per cent in 2019-20.
- **Provides Safety Net:** A growth rate of 6 per cent per annum in milk production provides a great support to farmers, especially during drought and flood. Milk production rises during crop failures due to natural calamities because farmers bank more on animal husbandry then.

#### **Issues**



1. **High Susceptibility:** Milk producers are highly susceptible to even minor shocks as the demand for milk and milk products are sensitive to changes in the employment and income of consumers.
2. **Lacks Political Clout:** Unlike sugarcane, wheat, and rice-producing farmers, cattle raisers are unorganised and do not have the political clout to advocate for their rights.
3. **No MSP:** There is no official and periodical estimate of the cost of production and Minimum Support Price for milk.
4. **Low Prices offered by Cooperatives:** Even though dairy cooperatives handle about 40% of the total marketable surplus of the milk in the country, they are not a preferred option of landless or small farmers. This is because, on average, fat-based pricing in dairy cooperatives is 20 to 30% less than the price in the open market.
5. **Shortage manpower:** In August 2020, the Animal Husbandry and Dairying department reported a requirement of 2.02 lakh artificial insemination (AI) technicians in India whereas the availability is only 1.16 lakh.
6. **Slow disbursement of Loans:** Out of the total 1.5 crore farmers in 230 milk unions in India, not even one-fourth of the dairy farmers' loan applications had been forwarded to banks as of October 3, 2020.
7. **Inadequate measures by government:** Dairying was brought under MGNREGA to compensate farmers for the income loss due to Covid-19. However, the budgetary allocation for 2021-22 was curtailed by 34.5 per cent in relation to the revised estimates for 2020-21.
8. **COVID-19 impacts**
  - **Increased Cost & Reduced demand:** The closure of shops had cut down the demand for milk and milk products while severe shortage of fodder and cattle feed has pushed up the input cost.
  - **Reduced Buyers:** During the pandemic, there has been a self-imposed ban on door-to-door sale of liquid milk by households both in urban and rural areas, forcing farmers to sell the entire produce to dairy cooperatives at a much lower price.
  - **Reduced access to Veterinary service:** Further, private veterinary services have almost stopped due to Covid-19, which has led to the death of milch animals

### Way Forward

#### Dairy farmers need the following to continue their vocation:

- One, a stable market and remunerative price (ignoring fat content or giving more weightage to the quantity of milk) for liquid milk;
- Two, uninterrupted supply of fodder and cattle feed at a reasonable price; and
- Three, regular supply of veterinary services and medicines

### Connecting the dots

- [Women and Dairy Cooperatives](#)
- Impact of [RCEP on India's dairy](#) sector
- How [India can push its dairy cart ahead](#)

## ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

### Species in news: *Xylophis Deepaki*

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS – III - Biodiversity

**In news**

- Herpetologist Deepak Veerappan has a snake named after him.

**Key takeaways**

- In the first four months of 2021, the Western Ghats presented new butterflies, frogs, fruit flies, and even a freshwater crab.
- Joining the list is a tiny snake of just 20 cm length with iridescent scales - *Xylophis Deepaki*.
- It was first stumbled upon in a coconut plantation in Kanyakumari.
- The species is named in honour of Indian herpetologist Deepak Veerappan for his contribution in erecting a new subfamily Xylophiinae to accommodate wood snakes.

**Do you know?**

- Wood snakes are harmless, sub-fossorial and often found while digging soil in farms and under the logs in the Western Ghat forests.
- Interestingly, their close relatives are found in northeast India and Southeast Asia and are known to be arboreal.

### Climate change causing a shift in Earth's axis

**Context:** Rising sea levels, heatwaves, melting glaciers and storms are some of the well-known consequences of climate change. New research has added yet another impact to this list – marked shifts in the axis along which the Earth rotates.

**How the Earth's axis shifts?**

- The Earth's axis of rotation is the line along which it spins around itself as it revolves around the Sun. The points on which the axis intersects the planet's surface are the geographical north and south poles.
- The location of the poles is not fixed, however, as the axis moves due to changes in how the Earth's mass is distributed around the planet. Thus, the poles move when the axis moves, and the movement is called "polar motion".
- According to NASA, data from the 20th century shows that the spin axis drifted about 10 centimetres per year. Meaning over a century, polar motion exceeds 10 metres.
- Generally, polar motion is caused by changes in the hydrosphere, atmosphere, oceans, or solid Earth. But now, climate change is adding to the degree with which the poles wander.

**What the new study says?**

- Since the 1990s, climate change has caused billions of tonnes of glacial ice to melt into oceans. This has caused the Earth's poles to move in new directions.
- As per the study, the north pole has shifted in a new eastward direction since the 1990s, because of changes in the hydrosphere (meaning the way in which water is stored on Earth).
- From 1995 to 2020, the average speed of drift was 17 times faster than from 1981 to 1995. Also, in the last four decades, the poles moved by about 4 metres in distance.
- While ice melting is the major factor behind increased polar motion, groundwater depletion also adds to the phenomenon. As millions of tonnes of water from below the land is pumped out

every year for drinking, industries or agriculture, most of it eventually joins the sea, thus redistributing the planet's mass.

#### Connecting the dots

- Paris Climate Deal
- Carbon Neutrality

## Climate Change & Natural Gas Sector

**Context:** Policy wonks, climate negotiators, academicians, corporates and NGOs are currently fixated on the concept of “net zero carbon emissions” and the appropriate target year for achieving it.

#### Why increasing the Natural Gas share is significant?

- The increase will **not generate the headwinds** (challenges) that the alternative of shutting down coal mines might
- It will not require industries to **invest** heavily in retrofitting their systems
- It will allow the government to meet its objective of providing **secure and affordable energy** to everyone without degrading the environment.
- Furthermore, it can be achieved through executive **ordinance** and without the need for legislative approval

#### What Steps are needed to make natural gas the “next stop” in India’s energy journey?

##### 1. Authorities must prioritise natural gas.

- Government must recognise its potential & versatility.
- Natural Gas is Competitive fuel; abundantly available in Asian/ME subcontinent; multiple uses and “greenest” of all fossil fuels.

##### 2. Authorities must correct the current disincentivising policy distortions-

- Pricing of Natural Gas is complex. There are multiple price formulae- one for gas produced domestically by PSUs, one for gas produced by private companies, one for production from deep waters etc
- Taxation is also comparably regressive - Cascading structure - Customers located at a distance from the source of gas pay a higher price than those closer to the source.

##### 3. Authorities should revamp the structure of the industry

- The Gas Authority of India Ltd (GAIL) is currently engaged in the production, transportation and marketing of gas.
- This dominance allows GAIL to misuse its gas pipelines network to deny its competitors access to the market.
- Most countries have tackled this conflict-of-interest situation by separating the upstream (production/import) and downstream (marketing) interests from transportation.

##### 4. Institutional mechanism should be created to enable better coordination between the central & state governments

- Centre-state differences have delayed the construction of import facilities and the creation of gas markets.
- A way has to be found to take these issues off the political table and brought within the frame of an integrated decision-making process.

#### Connecting the dots

- Paris Climate Deal

## COVID lessons for Climate Crisis

**Context:** Once-in-a-century occurrence, the Covid-19 pandemic was a black swan, overwhelming health systems, administrative capacity and community resilience.

The pandemic offers four lessons that could inform how we prepare for the climate crisis

1. **Political borders cannot stop planetary risks:** The origins of the virus may have been in China, but no country is immune. Climate risks are no different.
2. **Shocks come in waves:** Like the pandemic, climate shocks come not at once, but in waves. The probability of climate risks increases with time. A failure of the monsoons in one year compounds when rainfall is below normal for three or four years in a row.
3. **Some are more vulnerable than others:** Daily wage earners, migrant workers, industrial labour and people with co-morbidities have suffered the most during the pandemic. Similar will be vulnerability with any extreme weather events/ Climate Crisis.
4. **Economic Vulnerability:** The more dynamic your economy, the more you have to lose: The need to restore economic activity demands that there is also a readiness to respond to pandemic aftershocks. Ignoring the risks can jeopardise economic recovery. Similarly, the climate crisis will impact the world's engines of growth badly.

**These lessons must translate into action.**

### 1. First, create a Climate Risk Commission

- The commission will be a statutory authority to analyse and report on climate risks on a periodic basis.
- Like the finance commission, it must consult with not just climate experts but also state governments, academia, industry, the media and civil society.
- The commission's report should be tabled and debated in Parliament.

### 2. Prepare for climate shocks with decentralised capacity.

- The national and state disaster management agencies are a start. Similar structures are needed at district levels.
- Decentralised infrastructure, from distributed power sources, distributed water storage, revamped primary health centres (using off-grid power), or nature-based solutions to reduce coastal floods can greatly boost community resilience.

### 3. Assess critical vulnerabilities for hard infrastructure.

- This is not limited to reducing physical losses to power plants, bridges, airports, or telecom infrastructure. India must understand financial risks.
- RBI should demand regular reporting of climate risks in the lending portfolios of banks. SEBI must mandate the same from listed companies.
- There is a need to assess risks to legacy investments in coal, ongoing investments in natural gas, and exposure to supply chain risks for critical minerals needed for low-carbon technologies.

### 4. India needs a restructured economy

- The restructured economy values and monetises the preservation of natural capital, invests in sectors that are both low-carbon and employment-intensive
- It also creates an ecosystem to stimulate innovation (batteries, green hydrogen, carbon sequestration, regenerative agriculture, sustainable freight and transport, among others).

## Conclusion

The tragedy of the pandemic will be aggravated if we do not heed its lessons.

## Connecting the dots

- [Paris Climate Accord](#)

## NITI Aayog's Project for Great Nicobar Island

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

### **In news**

- The Environment Appraisal Committee (EAC) - Infrastructure I of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has flagged serious concerns about [NITI Aayog's ambitious project for Great Nicobar Island](#).

### **Key takeaways**

- The committee has, however, removed the first hurdle faced by the project.
- It has "recommended" it "for grant of terms of reference (TOR)" for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies, which in the first instance will include baseline studies over three months.

### **Important value additions**

#### **Galathea Bay**

- Galathea Bay is the site of the port and the centrepiece of the NITI Aayog proposal.
- It is an iconic nesting site in India of the enigmatic Giant Leatherback, the world's largest marine turtle.
- A number of species are restricted to just the Galathea region.
- These include the critically endangered Nicobar shrew, the Great Nicobar crane, the Nicobar frog, the Nicobar cat snake, a new skink (*Lipinia* sp), a new lizard (*Dibamus* sp,) and a snake of the *Lycodon* species that is yet to be described.

## Weathering of oldest rock paintings due to climate change

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Climate change

### **In news**

- Scientists have warned that environmental degradation is killing one of the oldest and most precious pieces of the world's human heritage.

### **Key takeaways**

- Pleistocene-era rock paintings dating back to 45,000-20,000 years ago are weathering at an alarming rate.
- **Location:** Cave sites in Maros-Pangkep region, Southern Sulawesi, Indonesia
- The artwork includes what is believed to be the world's oldest hand stencil created by pressing the hand on a cave wall, and spraying wet red-mulberry pigments over it.
- A nearby cave features the world's oldest depiction of an animal, a warty pig painted on the wall 45,500 years ago.
- The cave art of Sulawesi is much older than the prehistoric cave art of Europe.

## A-76 becomes World's Largest Iceberg currently afloat in the world

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

### **In news**

- A giant slab of ice bigger than the Spanish island of Majorca has sheared off from the frozen edge of Antarctica into the Weddell Sea.

- It has now become the largest iceberg currently afloat in the world.

#### Key takeaways

- The iceberg is designated A-76 by scientists.
- A-76 broke away from Antarctica's Ronne Ice Shelf.
- It was spotted in recent satellite images captured by the Copernicus Sentinel-1 mission.

#### Do you know?

- It surpassed the now second-place A-23A iceberg which is also floating in the Weddell Sea.
- Spain's popular tourist island of Majorca lies in the Mediterranean.
- The Weddell Sea is part of the Southern Ocean and contains the Weddell Gyre.
- Its land boundaries are defined by the bay formed from the coasts of Coats Land and the Antarctic Peninsula

### Range of all of the invasive whiteflies increasing

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

#### In news

- Researchers have found that the host range of all of the invasive whiteflies was increasing due to their polyphagous nature (ability to feed on various kinds of food) and prolific breeding.

#### Important value additions

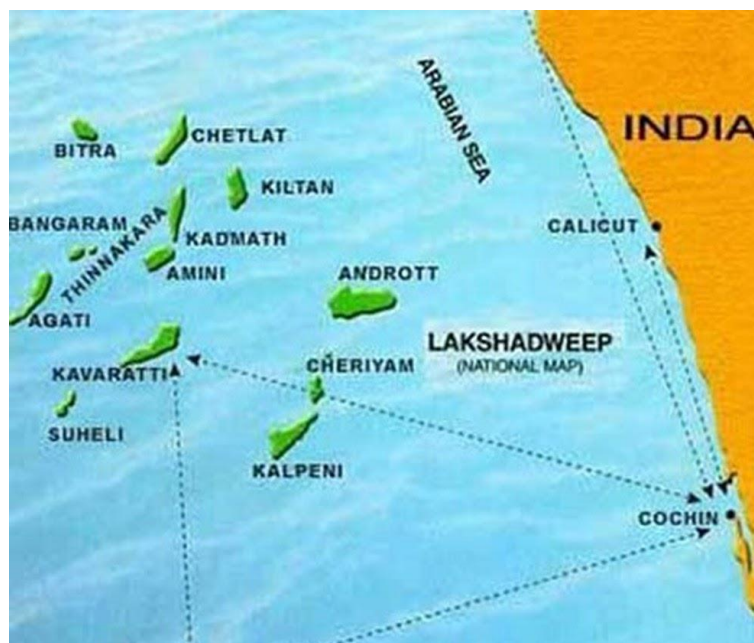
- Whiteflies are Hemipterans that typically feed on the undersides of plant leaves.
- They comprise the family Aleyrodidae, the only family in the superfamily Aleyrodoidea.
- In warm or tropical climates and especially in greenhouses, whiteflies present major problems in crop protection.
- Also, [Bt. cotton](#) is not resistant against white flies.
- They were also found to expand their host range on valuable plants species, such as coconut, banana, mango, sapota, guava, cashew, oil palm, and ornamental plants and important medicinal plants.
- The whiteflies are difficult to control by using synthetic insecticides.
- Currently naturally occurring insect predators, parasitoids and entomopathogenic fungi (fungi that can kill insets) are being used.

### Creation of a Lakshadweep Development Authority (LDA)

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

#### In news

- People of [Lakshadweep](#) are Discontent over the creation of a Lakshadweep Development Authority (LDA) by the new administrator Praful Khoda Patel.



### Key takeaways

- Mr Patel is the first political appointee as Administrator, a post mostly held by retired civil servants.
- Islanders have pointed out that the legislation is out of sync with the social and environmental realities of the archipelago.
- The creation of the Lakshadweep Development Authority (LDA) with extensive powers includes eviction of land owners.
- It is widely seen as being pushed by the real estate lobby and against the interest of the islanders.
- Hundreds of islanders have written to the administrator demanding the withdrawal of the proposed Regulation.
- It includes provisions such as:
  1. orderly and progressive development of land in both urban and rural areas and to preserve and improve the amenities thereof;
  2. grant of permission to develop land and for other powers of control over the use of land;
  3. conferring additional powers in respect of the acquisition and development of land for planning.

### Related articles

[NITI Aayog's 'sustainable' vision for Great Nicobar Island](#)

### [Habitat guilds experience land-use change](#)

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

#### In news

- A new study has noted a drastic loss of bird species in all modified landscapes in Uttarakhand.
- Natural oak-dominated forests and modified forests were analysed.

### Key takeaways



- Uttarakhand is home to the Western Himalayan temperate forests which harbour a large number of endemic bird species.
  - Six major land-use types which included natural oak forest, degraded oak forest (lightly used), lopped oak forest (intensively used), pine forest, agricultural cultivation area and sites with buildings were studied.
  - The results showed that there was a low diversity of species in monoculture areas and urban sites.
  - It also noticed strong decline in some of the habitat guilds in the areas that experienced land-use change.
  - Habitat guilds are groups of bird species that have common habitat preferences.
-

## ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS

### Asiatic lions test positive for SARS-CoV2 virus in Hyderabad zoo

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - III - Biodiversity; Sci & tech; Conservation

**In news**

- Based on reports by CCMB-LaCONES, it has now been confirmed that eight [Asiatic lions](#) housed in Nehru Zoological Park (NZP), Hyderabad have tested positive for SARS-CoV2 virus.

**Important value additions**

- LaCONES or Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species, is a Council of Scientific and Industrial Research lab located in Hyderabad.
- It is a part of CCMB (centre for cellular and molecular biology).
- It was conceptualised by Lalji Singh.
- It is India's only research facility engaged in conservation and preservation of wildlife and its resources.
- It was dedicated to the nation in 2007 by then President of India APJ Abdul Kalam.

**Asiatic Lion**

- It is a Panthera leo population in India.
- Its current range is restricted to the Gir National Park and environs in the Indian state of Gujarat.
- It is one of five pantherine cats inhabiting India. Others are:
  - Bengal tiger
  - Indian leopard
  - Snow leopard
  - Clouded leopard
- It is also known as the “Indian lion” and the “Persian lion”.
- **Status:**
  - Listed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972
  - Appendix I of CITES
  - Endangered on IUCN Red List.
- It is slightly smaller than African lions.
- The most striking morphological character is a longitudinal fold of skin running along the belly of Asiatic Lions.

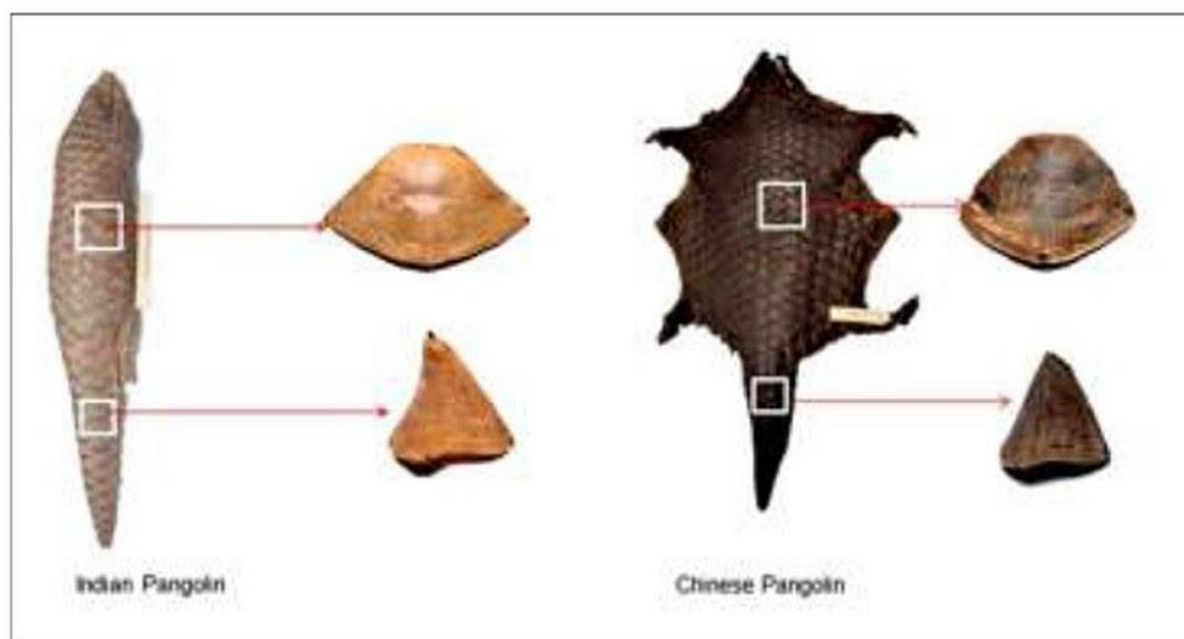
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### Indian Researchers sequence pangolin scales

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

**In news**

- Indian Researchers have sequenced 624 pangolin scales, thereby categorising the Indian and Chinese pangolins.



**Developing protocols:** Indian and Chinese pangolins are both endangered, therefore, it is important to identify species and the number poached. ■ FORENSIC SCIENCE INTERNATIONAL

#### Key takeaways

- [Pangolins](#), despite being listed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 continue to be the world's most trafficked mammal.
- The primary demand for its scales in the making of traditional East Asian medicines has led to an estimated illegal trade worth \$2.5 billion every year.
- To enforce the appropriate national and international laws and to track the decline of the species, researchers of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), Kolkata, have now developed tools to tell apart the scales of Indian pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) and Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*).
- Though the Chinese pangolin is distributed mostly in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, the north-eastern part of India is also its home.

### Elephant Casualties On Railway Lines

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

#### In news

- According to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), a total of 186 elephants were killed after being hit by trains across India between 2009-10 and 2020-21.
- Assam accounted for the highest number of elephant casualties on railway tracks (62), followed by West Bengal (57), and Odisha (27). Uttar Pradesh saw just one death.

#### Measures taken to avoid elephant casualties on railway lines

- A Permanent Coordination Committee was constituted between the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) and the MoEFCC for preventing elephant deaths in train accidents.
- Clearing vegetation along railway tracks to enable clear view for loco pilots.

**Related articles**[On the killing of an elephant in Kerala](#)[Launch of Project Re-HAB](#)**[Species in news: Red-Eared Slider](#)****Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - III - Biodiversity**In news**

- A American turtle popular as a pet is threatening to invade the natural water bodies across Northeast India.
- Northeast India is home to 21 of the 29 vulnerable native Indian species of freshwater turtles and tortoises.

**Key takeaways**

- Between August 2018 and June 2019, a team of herpetologists from the NGO 'Help Earth' found red-eared sliders in the Deepor Beel Wildlife Sanctuary and the Ugratara temple pond — both in Guwahati, Assam
- The red-eared slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) derives its name from red stripes around the part where its ears would be and from its ability to slide quickly off any surface into the water.
- It is native to the U.S. and northern Mexico.
- This turtle is an extremely popular pet.
- They grow fast and virtually leave nothing for the native species to eat.
- It has already affected States such as Karnataka and Gujarat, where it has been found in 33 natural water bodies.
- Preventing this invasive species from overtaking the Brahmaputra and other river ecosystems in the Northeast is crucial because the Northeast is home to more than 72% of the turtle and tortoise species in the country, all of them very rare.

**[Species in news: Subdoluseps Nilgiriensis](#)****Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III - Environment**In news**

- Researchers have discovered an Asian gracile skink species from Western Ghats.

**Key takeaways**

- It is named *Subdoluseps nilgiriensis*.
- It has a slender body (7 cm)
- It is sandy brown in colour.
- It is closely related to *Subdoluseps pruthi* found in parts of the Eastern Ghats.
- This species is only the third skink species discovered from mainland India in the last millennium.

**Do you know?**

- [Skinks](#) are non-venomous.
- They resemble snakes because of the often-inconspicuous limbs and the way they move on land.
- **Threats:** Seasonal forest fires, housing constructions and brick kiln industries in the area.



## INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

### 5G Technology and Spectrum Trials

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - III - Infrastructure

**In news**

- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Government of India approved permissions to Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) for conducting trials for use and applications of [5G technology](#).

**Key takeaways**

- The applicant TSPs include Bharti Airtel Ltd., Reliance JioInfocomm Ltd., Vodafone Idea Ltd. and MTNL.
- The duration of the trials, at present, is for a period of 6 months.
- Each TSP will have to conduct trials in rural, semi-urban settings and urban settings so that the benefit of 5G Technology proliferates across the country.
- Objective:** Testing 5G spectrum propagation characteristics especially in the Indian context; model tuning and evaluation of chosen equipment and vendors; testing of indigenous technology; testing of applications; and to test 5G phones and devices.
- 5G technology is expected to deliver improved user experience in terms of data download rates (expected to be 10 times that of 4G), up to three times greater spectrum efficiency, and ultra low latency to enable Industry 4.0.

**Do you know?**

5Gi technology

- The TSPs are encouraged to conduct trials using 5Gi technology in addition to the already known 5G Technology.
- International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has also approved the 5Gi technology as it facilitates much larger reach of the 5G towers and Radio networks.
- The 5Gi technology has been developed by IIT Madras, Centre of Excellence in Wireless Technology (CEWiT) and IIT Hyderabad.

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### Aerial Passenger Ropeway System Between Dehradun and Mussoorie

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III - Infrastructure

**In news**

- The Union Cabinet gave its approval to the transfer of land of Indo-Tibetan Border Police, ITBP to Government of Uttarakhand for development of Aerial Passenger Ropeway System between Dehradun and Mussoorie.

**Key takeaways**

- The proposed Ropeway is a mono-cable ropeway of 5.5 Km length between Purkul Gaon, Dehradun and Library, Mussoorie being constructed at an estimated cost of Rs 285 crore.
- It will have a carrying capacity of 1,000 persons per hour per direction.
- This will considerably reduce the traffic flow on the road route from Dehradun to Mussoorie.
- This will generate direct employment of 350 and indirect employment of more than 1,500 people.
- It will also be a huge attraction for tourists which in turn will provide a boost to the tourism industry

**Important value additions**

**Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)**

- It is India's primary border patrol organization with its border with China's Tibet Autonomous Region.
- It was formed in 1962 in the wake of the Sino-Indian War of 1962.
- The "Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force Act, 1992" provides for the constitution and regulation of the ITBP for ensuring the security of the borders of India and for matters connected therewith.

### 'Infrastructure' Status for exhibition and convention centres

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - III - Economy; Infrastructure

**In news**

- The Finance Ministry has granted 'Infrastructure' status for exhibition and convention centres.
- The move is expected to ease bank financing for such projects.

**Key takeaways**

- 'Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre is included in the Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure sub-sectors.
- For this, new item is inserted in the category of Social and Commercial Infrastructure.
- The tag would help such projects get easier financing from banks.

**Do you know?**

- Becoming a [MICE \(Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions\) destination](#) can generate significant revenue with several global firms active in India but it will take time to become a preferred destination.
- Last August, the government had granted infrastructure status to affordable rental housing projects.

### National Mission on Use of Biomass in Thermal Power Plants

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS -III - Energy Resources

**In news**

- Ministry of Power has decided to set up a National Mission on use of Biomass in coal based thermal power plants.

**Objectives of the Mission:**

- To increase the level of co-firing from present 5% to higher levels to have a larger share of carbon neutral power generation from the thermal power plants.
- To facilitate overcoming the constraints in supply chain of bio mass pellets and agro- residue and its transport upto to the power plants.
- To consider regulatory issues in biomass co-firing.

**Features:**

- The Mission would have a Steering Committee headed by Secretary (Power).
- The Committee comprises stakeholders including representatives from Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoPNG), Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) etc.
- The Executive Committee would be headed by Member (Thermal), CEA.
- **Duration of the Mission:** minimum 5 years.

**Significance of the Proposed Mission**

- It would address the issue of air pollution due to farm stubble burning and to reduce carbon footprints of thermal power generation.



- This would further support the energy transition and targets of moving towards cleaner energy sources.
- It will also contribute in the [National Clean Air Programme \(NCAP\)](#).

#### Related articles

#### [Phytoplankton Biomass in Bay of Bengal](#)

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#### [Mekedatu Multi-Purpose Project](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS -III - Infrastructure

#### In news

- The [National Green Tribunal \(NGT\)](#) has appointed a joint committee to look into allegations of unauthorised construction activity taking place in Mekedatu .
- The Karnataka government had proposed to construct a dam across the Cauvery River at the same place.

#### Important value additions

- The [Mekedatu multi-purpose project](#) involves building a balancing reservoir across the Cauvery River near Kanakapura in Ramanagaram district.
- It envisages supplying drinking water to Bengaluru and Ramanagaram districts, besides generation of power.
- However, Tamil Nadu has opposed it on the grounds that the project violates the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal award.

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#### [Srinagar Leh Transmission System transferred to POWERGRID](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS -III - Infrastructure; Economy

#### In news

- Union Ministry of Power has transferred the 220 kV Srinagar-Drass-Kargil-Khaltsi-Leh Transmission System to [Power Grid Corporation of India Limited \(POWERGRID\)](#), a Maharatna CPSU of Government of India.

#### Key takeaways

- The transmission system was commissioned in February 2019.
  - It connects the Ladakh region to the national grid, ensuring quality and reliable power supply.
-

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### Drone Delivery Of Covid-19 Vaccines

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

**In news**

- Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) and Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) have granted conditional exemption for [drone deployment](#) to the Government of Telangana for Experimental delivery of Covid-19 Vaccines.

**Key takeaways**

- The permission has been granted within Visual Line of Sight (VLOS) Range using drones.
- It is valid for a period of one year or until further orders.
- Earlier this month, similar permission was granted to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for conducting feasibility study of Covid-19 vaccine delivery using drones in collaboration with IIT Kanpur.
- The grant of these permissions is intended to achieve the dual objectives of faster vaccine delivery & improved healthcare access by:
  - Ensuring primary healthcare delivery at the citizen's doorstep
  - Limiting human exposure to COVID congested or COVID prone areas through aerial delivery
  - Ensuring access to health care to the last mile, especially in remote areas
  - Possible integration into the middle mile of medical logistics for long range drones
  - Improving medical supply chain, especially with a third vaccine expected to be commissioned and millions of doses to be transported across India.

### Converting Nitrogen Plants to Oxygen Plants

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II - Health & GS – III - Sci & tech

**In news**

- Considering the requirement of medical oxygen amidst the [COVID-19](#) pandemic situation, the Government of India explored the feasibility of conversion of existing nitrogen plants to produce oxygen.

**Key takeaways**

- Potential industries, wherein existing nitrogen plants may be converted for production of oxygen, were identified.
- In the nitrogen plants Carbon Molecular Sieve (CMS) is used whereas Zeolite Molecular Sieve (ZMS) is required for producing oxygen.
- Therefore, by replacing CMS with ZMS and carrying out few other changes such as oxygen analyzer, control panel system, flow valves etc. existing nitrogen plants can be modified to produce oxygen.
- A nitrogen plant modified for the production of oxygen can be either shifted to a nearby hospital.
- In case it is not feasible to shift the plant, it can be used for on-site production of oxygen, which can then be transported to hospital through specialized vessels/cylinders.

### Used Cooking Oil (UCO) Based Bio-Diesel

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS – III - Sci & tech

**In news**

- Union Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas flagged off the first supply of UCO (Used Cooking Oil) based Biodiesel blended Diesel under the EOI Scheme from Indian Oil's Tikrikalan Terminal, Delhi.

**Key takeaways**

- To create an eco-system for collection and conversion of UCO into Biodiesel, Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas had initiated Expressions of Interest (EOI) for "Procurement of Biodiesel produced from Used Cooking Oil" on the occasion of World Biofuel Day on 10th August 2019.
- It is a landmark in India's pursuance of Biofuels which will have a positive impact on the environment.

**Important value additions**

- **Biodiesel** is an alternative fuel, similar to conventional or 'fossil' diesel.
- It can be produced from vegetable oils, animal fats, tallow and waste cooking oil.
- A significant advantage of Biodiesel is its carbon-neutrality, i.e. the oilseed absorbs the same amount of CO<sub>2</sub> as is released when the fuel is combusted in a vehicle.
- Also, Biodiesel is rapidly biodegradable and completely non-toxic.

**Related article**

[How biofuels can double farm incomes](#)

**VINCOV-19**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS – III - Sci & tech; Biotechnology

**In news**

- The CSIR- Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology has developed, possibly the first specific drug for **COVID-19** treatment, which contain therapeutic antibodies.

**Key takeaways**

- The Drug Controller General of India (DGCI) has given its approval for human trials, Phase-I and Phase-II for the VINCOV-19 and expected to be tried in Delhi and Rajasthan soon.
- The VINCOV-19 is a collection of antibodies from Horses after they got injected with inactivated Corona virus.
- The approval for its emergency use is expected once the results of phase I and II are declared.
- It works best when given during early stage of infection.

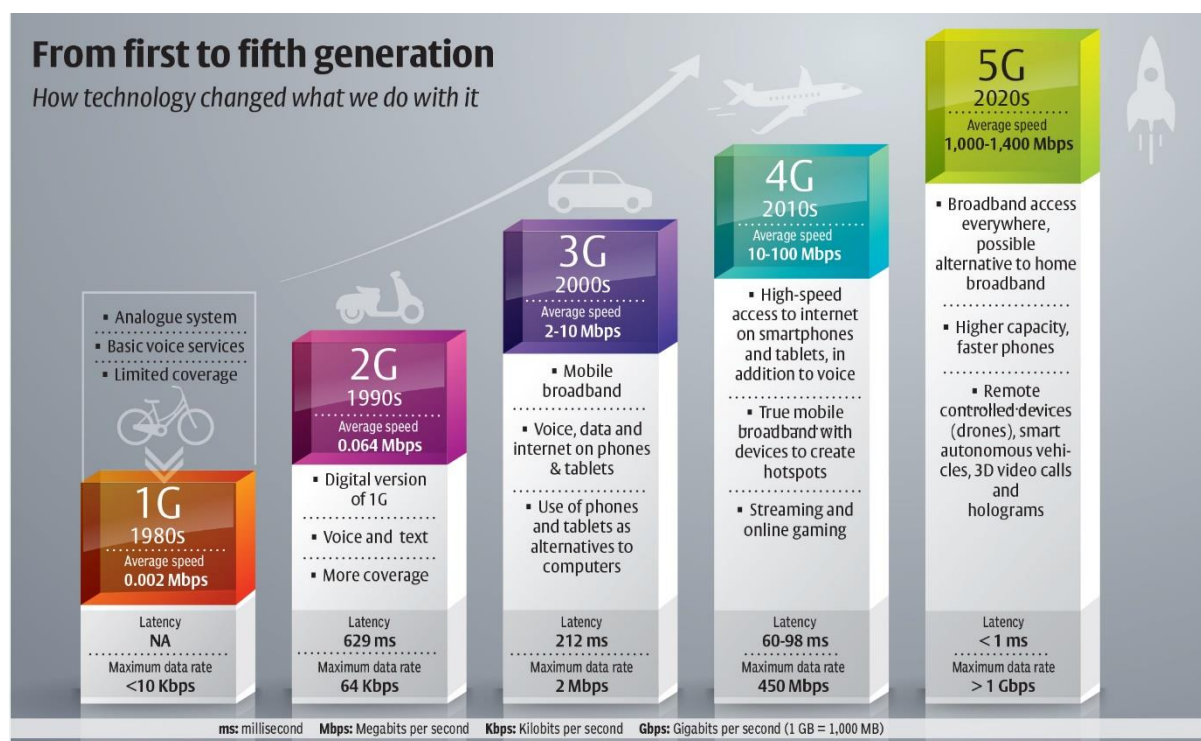
**5G Trials in India**

**Context:** The Department of Telecommunications allowed private telcos Airtel, Reliance Jio and Vi and well as state-run telco MTNL to start trials for 5G technology as well as its applications in various sectors. The trials will last for 6 months for now.

**What is 5G?**

- 5G is the fifth generation cellular technology that apart from increasing the downloading and uploading **speeds** (speed of 1 Gbps) over the mobile network, also reduces the **latency** i.e. the time taken by a network to respond.
- It also increases **energy efficiency** and offers more **stable** network connections.
- 5G is also designed to deliver signals more **reliably** than earlier cellular networks

- 5G will have a wider area in the **frequency spectrum** (range of frequencies) that will ensure no network congestion.
- In addition, it will also ensure **connectivity to a full circle** i.e. everything is connected to every other thing.
- 5G will help facilitate the ecosystem for the **Internet of Things (IoT)** and to incorporate **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** in our daily lives and
- To get the benefits of 5G, users will have to buy new phones, while carriers will need to install new transmission equipment to offer the faster service.



5G mainly works in 3 bands, namely low, mid and high-frequency spectrum — all of which have their uses and limitations.

- While the low band spectrum has shown great promise in terms of coverage but the maximum speed is limited to 100 Mbps. This means that while telcos can use and install it for commercial cellphone users who may not have specific demands for very high speed internet, the low band spectrum may not be optimal for specialised needs of the industry.
- The high-band spectrum offers the highest speed of all the three bands, but has extremely limited coverage and signal penetration strength. Internet speeds in the high-band spectrum of 5G has been tested to be as high as 20 Gbps (giga bits per second), while, in most cases, the maximum internet data speed in 4G has been recorded at 1 Gbps.

**Why are the trials for 5G technology important for telcos?**

- **Cut-throat market:** The telecom market in India is left with only three private telcos so in order to increase their average revenue per user, it is imperative for telcos to start offering the new 5G technology as soon as possible.

- **Standing Committee's Warning to government:** A [standing committee of Lok Sabha on Information Technology](#) had submitted its report on 5G and said that India will miss the 5G bus if government doesn't take quick steps.

#### What will 5G trials in India entail for now?

- In the initial phase, these trials will be for 6 months, including a 2 month period for procurement and setting up of the equipment.
- In these 6 months, telcos will be required to test their set up in urban areas, semi-urban areas as well as rural areas.
- During this period, the telcos will be provided with experimental spectrum in various bands, such as the mid-band of 3.2 GHz to 3.67 GHz, the millimeter wave band of 24.25 GHz to 28.5 GHz, and others.

#### Connecting the dots

- [Adjusted Gross Revenue Crisis in Telecom Sector](#)

### Re-entry of Long March 5B Rocket

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III - Space; Sci & tech

#### In news

- Debris from a Chinese [Long March 5B Rocket](#) made uncontrolled re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere and disintegrated over the Indian Ocean.

#### Key takeaways

- Long March 5B rocket had been launched into space on April 29 for putting into orbit a core module of the new Tianhe space station, which is expected to become operational in 2022.
- For days, there had been speculation on whether the debris would hit a populated area on the Earth's surface.

#### Why did the rocket cause worry?

- When a rocket is launched, its discarded booster stages re-enter the atmosphere soon after liftoff and harmlessly fall into the ocean
- In this case, however, a 10-floor large vehicle of the rocket weighing 18 metric tonnes went into orbit along with the section of the under-construction space station that it was carrying.
- An "uncontrolled re-entry" thus became inevitable, but China did not admit this fact to the world until 8th May.
- The chance of humans getting hurt were low because most of the debris burnt up in the atmosphere and large parts of the Earth are covered by oceans and massive land areas lie uninhabited.

#### Do you know?

- When rockets carry their payload into space, their booster stages that reach orbit fire the engine again after completing their job so as to drop back to Earth and not remain in orbit.
- Space agencies plan this process to ensure that such rocket parts end up in uninhabited areas, such as the middle of the ocean.
- China chose not to do this for its Long March rocket, leading to its vehicle crashing back uncontrollably.

## 2-deoxy-D-glucose approved by DCGI

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS - II - Health; GS- III - Sci & tech

### **In news**

- **Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI)** approved anti-COVID drug 2-deoxy-D-glucose for emergency use.
- **Developed by:** Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), a lab of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), in collaboration with Dr Reddy's Laboratories (DRL), Hyderabad.

### **Key takeaways**

- Clinical trial results have shown that this molecule helps in faster recovery of hospitalised patients and reduces supplemental oxygen dependence.
- Higher proportion of patients treated with 2-DG showed RT-PCR negative conversion in COVID patients.
- The drug will be of immense benefit to the people suffering from COVID-19.
- The drug comes in powder form in sachet, which is taken orally by dissolving it in water.
- It accumulates in the virus infected cells and prevents virus growth by stopping viral synthesis and energy production.
- Its selective accumulation in virally infected cells makes this drug unique.

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## Smokeless Cremation system developed

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III - Sci & tech

### **In news**

- Indian Institute of Technology, Ropar has developed a prototype of a moveable electric cremation system which claims to be using first of its kind technology that involves smokeless cremation despite using wood.

### **Key takeaways**

- It uses half of the wood otherwise required for the cremation.
- It is eco-friendly because of the technology that uses the combustion air system.
- It is based on wick-stove technology in which the wick when lighted glows yellow.
- This is converted into smokeless blue flame with the help of combustion air system installed over the wicks.
- The cremation system or incinerator heats up at 1044 degree Celsius which ensures complete sterilization.
- Keeping in view the present pandemic situation, if this system is adopted, it may provide respectable cremation to the near and dear ones of those who cannot afford the financial burden of arranging wood.

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## Mars Landing by China

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III - Sci & tech

### **In news**

- China landed a spacecraft on Mars carrying its first Mars rover in a big boost to its space ambitions.

### **Key takeaways**

- China had in July 2020, launched its first Mars mission, called [Tianwen-1](#), carrying a lander and rover.
- Tianwen-1 had been in orbit since February.
- Recently, a lander descended successfully on the surface of Mars carrying a rover named Zhurong.
- Only Russia and the U.S.A had previously carried out a successful landing on Mars.
- The rover will provide “first-hand materials for research on the Mars' space environment, surface topography, and soil structure.

#### **Do you know?**

- In 2019, the fourth lunar probe, [Chang'e-4](#), carried out the world's first landing on the far side of the moon.
- The Mars mission was launched the following year.
- Last month, a [Long March-5B Y2 rocket](#) carried out the first of three components for the space station, called the Tianhe or Heavenly Harmony module.

### [Species in news: Common crane](#)

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

#### **In news**

- Common crane was recently spotted in Ireland.
- It had disappeared more than three centuries ago from Ireland.
- The bird is part of its folklore and was a popular pet during medieval times,

#### **Key takeaways**

- A pair of cranes was spotted last year on a restored peat bog
- Peat bog is a type of wetland that is mostly found in northern latitude countries.
- The birds are in Ireland's Midlands region, but their exact location has been kept secret to protect them.
- Cranes stand at 4 feet tall with a wingspan of over 7 feet, and used to be the largest birds in Ireland.
- Although they were once common, the destruction of their habitat caused them to disappear around the 16th and 17th century.

#### **Important value additions**

##### **Why is bog restoration important**

- Bogs (also called quagmires) are soft, spongy wetlands that accumulate peat.
- Peat is a fossil fuel that is used for heating homes and businesses in northern Europe.
- They are formed in northern climates, and take thousands of years to develop.
- Bogs also act as carbon sinks, sequestering around 200 million tons of carbon from the environment in Siberia and Scandinavia.
- For centuries, however, bogs have been drained for extracting peat or for development, leading to the destruction of their delicate ecosystems, including damage to species such as cranes that breed here.





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### Mobile Monitoring Software (NMMS) App ; Area Officer Monitoring App

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II - Policies and interventions

**In news**

- National Mobile Monitoring Software (NMMS) app and Area officer monitoring App was recently launched
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Rural Development

**Key takeaways**

- The NMMS App permits taking real time attendance of workers at Mahatma Gandhi NREGS worksites along with geotagged photograph.
  - This will increase citizen oversight of the programme besides potentially enabling processing payments faster
  - Area Officer Monitoring App facilitates them to record their findings online along with time stamped and go-coordinate tagged photograph for all the schemes of Deptt of Rural Development.
  - This would also enable better record keeping of inspections by field and supervisory officials and also facilitate analysis of the findings for better programme implementation.
-

## DISASTER MANAGEMENT

### Public Buildings and Fire Safety

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III - Disaster management

#### **In news**

- Over the past year, there have been deadly fires in hospital buildings, including those treating COVID-19 patients.

#### **Key takeaways**

- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) says 330 people died in commercial building fires in 2019.
- Fatalities for residential or dwelling buildings: 6,329.**
- Electrical faults are cited as the leading cause of fires
- State governments are widely criticised for being lax with building safety laws and for failing to equip public buildings with modern technology.
- Hospital ICUs (intensive care units) are a great fire risk because they are oxygen-suffused, and need to meet high standards.
- Part 4 of the National Building Code of India deals with Fire and Life Safety.
- The document provides specifications and guidelines for design and materials that reduce the threat of destructive fires.
- Hospitals come under the institutional category in the code.

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## DEFENCE/INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY

### P-8I Patrol Aircraft

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence and Security

**In news**

- The U.S. State Department approved the proposed sale of six [P-8I](#) patrol aircraft and related equipment to India, a deal estimated to cost \$2.42 billion.

**Key takeaways**

- In November 2019, the Defence Acquisition Council, approved the procurement of the long-range maritime surveillance aircraft manufactured by Boeing.
- The possible sale comes through the Foreign Military Sale route and requires that the U.S. Congress be notified.
- With India having signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) foundational agreement with the U.S., the six aircraft will come fitted with encrypted systems.
- The P-8I is based on the Boeing 737 commercial aircraft and India was its first international customer.

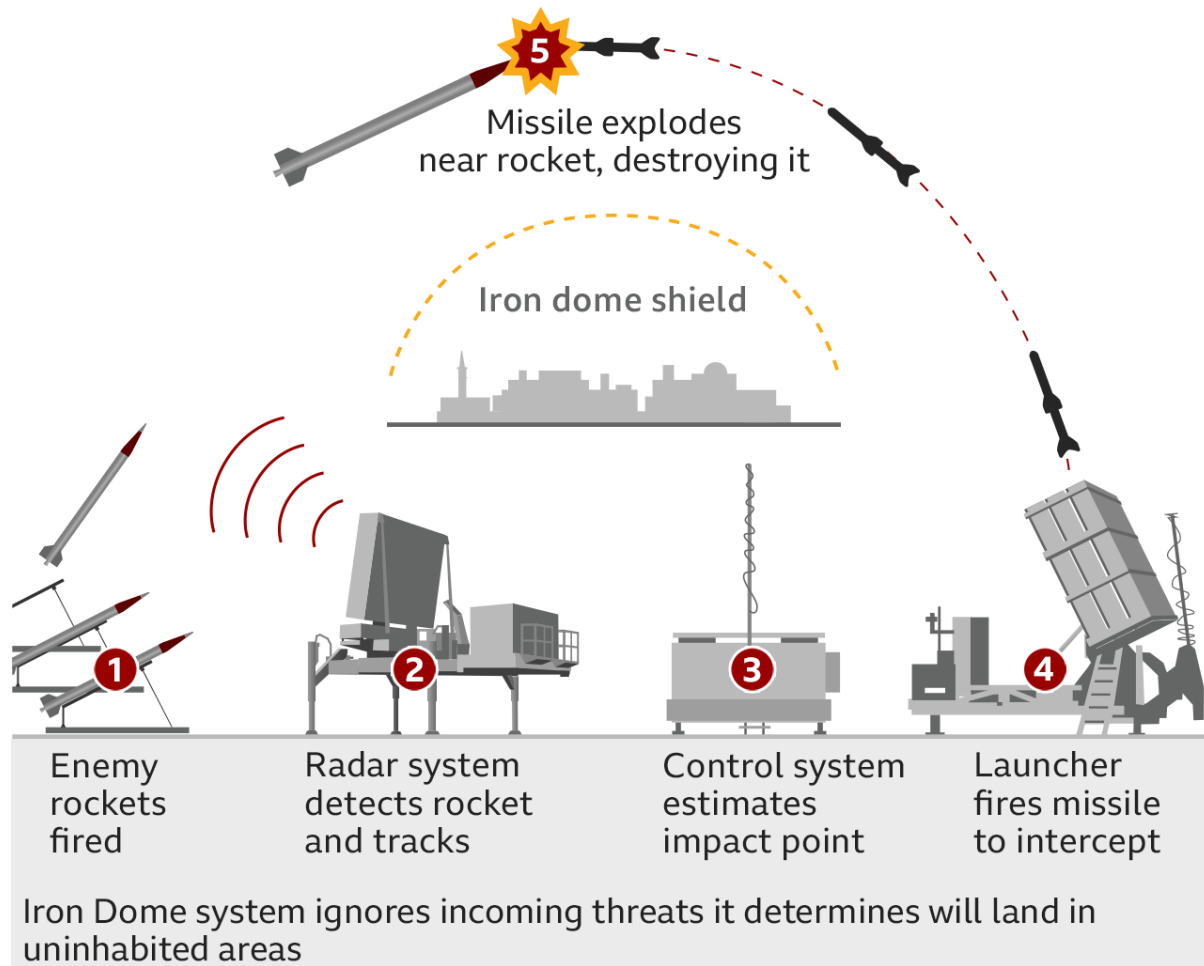
### Israel's Iron Dome rocket defence system

**Context:** Israeli Defence Forces(IDF) said that in [recent violence between Israel & Palestine](#), Hamas has fired more than 1,500 rockets from Gaza all the way into Israel which has been intercepted by Iron Dome.

**What is Iron Dome?**

- **Defence System:** Iron Dome is a multi-mission system capable of intercepting rockets, artillery, mortars, aircraft, helicopters and UAVs over short ranges of up to 70 km.
- **Versatility:** It is an all-weather system and can engage multiple targets simultaneously and be deployed over land and sea.
- **Developers:** Iron Dome is manufactured by Rafael Advanced Defence Systems Limited and has been in service with Israeli Air Force since 2011. The radar system was developed by Elta.
- **Context of Development:** Its development was prompted after a series of rocket attacks on Israel by Hezbollah and Hamas in the 2000s. In the 2006 Lebanon war, around 4,000 rockets were fired on the northern parts of Israel resulting in the death of about 44 Israeli civilians and evacuation of around 250,000 citizens following the development of the system was taken up.

# How Israel's Iron Dome defence system works



Source: Rafael Advanced Defense Systems

BBC

Source: [BBC](#)

## How does it work?

- An Iron Dome battery consists of a battle management control unit, a detection and tracking radar and a firing unit of three vertical launchers, with 20 interceptor missiles each.
- The interceptor missile uses a proximity fuse to detonate the target warhead in the air.
- The Iron Dome is deployed in a layered defence along with **David's Sling and Arrow missile defence system** which are designed for medium- and long-range threats.
- One of the system's important advantages is its ability to **identify the anticipated point of impact** of the threatening rocket, to calculate whether it will fall in a built-up area or not, and to decide on this basis whether or not to engage it.
- This **prevents unnecessary interception of rockets** that will fall in open areas and thus not cause damage, the paper states.
- The system has intercepted thousands of rockets so far and, according to Rafael, its **success rate is over 90%**.

- The I-DOME is the mobile variant with all components on a single truck and C-DOME is the naval version for deployment on ships.

#### What are the limitations of the system?

- The system has performed very well so far. However, the system can see limitations when it is overwhelmed with a barrage of projectiles. **The system has a 'saturation point'.**
- It is capable of engaging a certain (unpublished) number of targets at the same time, and no more. Additional rockets fired in a crowded salvo could succeed in breaching defences and cause damage.
- Several assessments suggest that Hamas is developing mitigating strategies including lowering the trajectories of the projectiles while also continuing to accumulate thousands of rockets with improved precision.
- One of the possible limitations is the system's **inability to cope with very short range threats** as estimates put the Iron Dome's minimum interception range at 5-7 kilometres.
- The other factor is the **cost of interception is high**. The cost of the interceptor missile is about \$40,000-50,000.

### Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II - Policies and interventions

#### In news

- The new rules for social media platforms and digital news outlets, called the Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code, came into effect recently.

#### Key takeaways

- The guidelines had asked all social media platforms to set up a grievances redressal and compliance mechanism, which included appointing a resident grievance officer, chief compliance officer and a nodal contact person.
- The Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology had also asked these platforms to submit monthly reports on complaints received from users and actions taken.
- A third requirement from instant messaging apps was to make provisions for tracking the first originator of a message.
- Failure to comply with any one of these requirements would take away the indemnity (security) provided to social media intermediaries under Section 79 of the Information Technology Act.

#### Do you know?

- Section 79 says any intermediary shall not be held legally or otherwise liable for any third party information, data, or communication link made available or hosted on its platform.

### Rules and rulers: On social media curbs

**Context:** [New Social Media Code](#) coming into effect. It seems that most if not all global social media giants will miss complying with the new rules

- The new rules were introduced in February 2021.
- Among other things, they require the bigger social media platforms to adhere to a vastly tighter set of rules within three months, which ended on May 25.
- The new rules require these platforms to appoint

- **Chief compliance officers** in order to make sure the rules are followed,
  - **Nodal officers** to coordinate with law enforcement agencies,
  - **Grievance officers** to look into complaints from users
- Another rule requires messaging platforms such as WhatsApp to trace problematic messages to its originators (Traceability)

### Issues

- Non-compliance were to trigger a further worsening of the already poor relationship between some social media players and the Government
  - The latest stand-off between them, over Twitter tagging certain posts by BJP spokespeople as 'manipulated media', has resulted in the Delhi Police visiting the company's offices.
- The traceability rule raises uneasy questions about how services that are end-to-end encrypted can adhere to this.
- These rules were introduced without much public consultation.
- There has also been criticism about bringing these new rules that ought to be normally triggered only via legislative action.

### Way Forward

- It is important that social media companies fight the new rules in a court of law if they find them to be problematic.
- Non-compliance by companies can never be justified, even if it is to be assumed that the U.S. Government has their back.
- Five industry bodies, including the CII, FICCI and the U.S.-India Business Council have sought an extension of 6-12 months for compliance. This is an opportunity for the Government to hear out the industry, and also shed its high-handed way of rule-making.

### Connecting the dots

- [Dominance of Big tech](#)
- Australia's [News Media Bargaining](#) Code



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## MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
1. Moorhen Yoga Mat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A biodegradable and compostable yoga mat was recently developed from water hyacinth from the fishing community in Assam.</li> <li>• The mat is called 'Moorhen Yoga Mat'</li> <li>• It will soon be introduced to the world market as a unique product.</li> <li>• The intervention was triggered through an initiative by North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR), an autonomous body under Department of Science &amp; Technology (DST) to involve the entire women community associated with a collective called 'Simang' meaning dream, led by the 6 girls to create wealth from water hyacinth plants.</li> <li>• Water hyacinth is considered as a nuisance since it does not benefit the fishing community and harms their occupation.</li> </ul>
2. Deepor Beel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deepor Beel is a permanent freshwater lake in Assam.</li> <li>• It is recognised as a Ramsar Site and a bird wildlife sanctuary.</li> </ul>
3. Cyclone 'tauktae'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cyclone 'Tauktae', which lay as a deep depression over the Arabian Sea close to Lakshadweep, was likely to intensify into a 'very severe cyclonic storm' bringing heavy to very heavy rain to many parts of the western coast</li> <li>• There is yet not clear whether the cyclonic storm will cross the Gujarat coast or just skirt it by May 18.</li> <li>• It is very likely to intensify into a cyclonic storm during the next 12 hours and is very likely to intensify further during the subsequent 24 hours and move north, north-westwards.</li> <li>• In view of Cyclone Tauktae warning, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has deployed 24 teams in Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Maharashtra.</li> </ul>
4. FakeBuster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researchers at the IIT, Ropar in Punjab and Monash University, Australia have developed a unique detector named 'FakeBuster'.</li> <li>• Significance: To identify imposters attending a virtual conference without anybody's knowledge.</li> <li>• FakeBuster is a DeepFakes Detection Tool for Video Conferencing Scenarios.</li> <li>• The technique will find out if some imposter is attending a Webinar or virtual meeting on behalf of one of your colleagues by morphing his image with his own.</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It can also find out faces manipulated on social media to defame or make a joke of someone.</li> </ul>
5. Cyclone Yaas		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Cyclone Yaas is likely to intensify into a “very severe cyclonic storm” and cross the Odisha and West Bengal coasts on May 26.</li> <li>A low pressure area has formed over the east-central Bay of Bengal and the adjoining north Andaman Sea.</li> <li>Yaas has been named by Oman.</li> <li>It refers to a tree that has a good fragrance and in English, the word is similar to Jasmine.</li> <li>Cyclone Tauktae, which was named by Myanmar, means “gecko” — a highly vocal lizard — in Burmese dialect.</li> </ul>
6. Vineyard Wind Project.	Wind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>USA has approved the nation's first major offshore wind farm that will help eliminate emissions from the power sector.</li> <li>It is known as Vineyard Wind project.</li> <li>It will be located off the coast of Massachusetts.</li> <li>It shall create enough electricity to power 400,000 homes by the second half of 2023.</li> <li>It shall create 3,600 jobs as well</li> </ul>
7. Auroville		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aurovillian Christoph Pohl’s documentary EverSlowGreen has been officially selected for screening at the prestigious ChangeNow summit in Paris.</li> <li>It tells the story of Auroville’s unique afforestation project that took root on an eroded desert plateau at Villupuram district in Tamil Nadu.</li> <li>Auroville is an experimental township in Viluppuram district.</li> <li>It was founded in 1968 by Mirra Alfassa (known as "the Mother") a French spiritual guru and a collaborator of Sri Aurobindo, who considered her to be of equal yogic stature to him and called her by the name "The Mother".</li> </ul>
8. International award 2020	ENI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bharat Ratna Professor C.N.R. Rao has received the International Eni Award 2020 for research into renewable energy sources and energy storage.</li> <li>It is also called the Energy Frontier award.</li> <li>The official ceremony will be held at the Quirinal Palace in Rome.</li> <li>The award has become internationally recognized over the years in the field of energy and environmental research.</li> <li>It aims to promote better use of energy sources and encourage new generations of researchers in their work.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This is considered to be the Nobel Prize in Energy Research.</li></ul>
9. Reclining Buddha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A reclining Buddha statue or image represents The Buddha during his last illness, about to enter Parinirvana, the stage of great salvation after death that can only be attained by enlightened souls.</li><li>• Statues and images of the Reclining Buddha show him lying on his right side, his head resting on a cushion or on his right elbow.</li><li>• It was first depicted in Gandhara art.</li><li>• The largest Reclining Buddha in the world is the 600-foot Winsein Tawya Buddha built in 1992 in Mawlamyine, Myanmar.</li><li>• Also, Cave No. 26 of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Ajanta contains a 24-foot-long and nine-foot-tall sculpture of the Reclining Buddha, believed to have been carved in the 5th century AD.</li></ul>

## (TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

### Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)

**Q.1 Which of the following operation has been launched to augment the ongoing national mission for meeting the Oxygen requirements?**

- a) Operation Raahat
- b) Operation Samudra Setu
- c) Operation Samudra Setu-II
- d) Operation Madad

**Q.2 Consider the following statements regarding Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC):**

- 1. It was established by WHO alone.
- 2. Its objective is to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.3 Consider the following statements regarding Codex Committee On Spices And Culinary Herbs (CCSCH):**

- 1. India is the host country.
- 2. The committee has developed and finalized standards for cloves, oregano, basil, and ginger in its recently held fifth session

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.4 Consider the following statements:**

- 1. Xylophis Deepaki is endemic species of Tamil Nadu.
- 2. Subfamily Xylophiinae accommodates wood snakes.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2

- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.5 Vorukh, recently seen in the news, is a disputed area between which of the following two countries?**

- a) Russia and Kazakhstan
- b) Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan
- c) Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
- d) Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

**Q.6 Patola Nach is a string puppetry of which of the following state of India?**

- a) Assam
- b) Nagaland
- c) Bihar
- d) Chhattisgarh

**Q.7 The Luzon Strait is the strait between:**

- a) Taiwan and Luzon island of the Philippines.
- b) China and Luzon island of the Philippines.
- c) Japan and Luzon island of the Philippines.
- d) Singapore and Luzon island of the Philippines.

**Q.8 Which of the following is not a member country of G-7?**

- a) France
- b) Japan
- c) Italy
- d) RUssia

**Q.9 Consider the following statements:**

- 1. Carbon Molecular Sieve (CMS) is used whereas Zeolite Molecular Sieve (ZMS) is required for producing oxygen.
- 2. It is not feasible to shift nitrogen plant after converting it to an oxygen-producing plant.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.10 Consider the following statements regarding bio-diesel:**

1. It can be produced from vegetable oils, animal fats, tallow and waste cooking oil.
2. Biodiesel is rapidly biodegradable and completely non-toxic.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.11 Deepor Beel is a Ramsar Site in which of the following state of India?**

- a) Assam
- b) Nagaland
- c) Meghalaya
- d) Manipur

**Q.12 SVAMITVA Scheme comes under which of the following Ministry?**

- a) Ministry of Environment
- b) Ministry of Finance
- c) Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
- d) Ministry of Panchayati Raj

**Q.13 Consider the following statements regarding Asiatic lions:**

1. It is Listed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972
2. It is categorised as Endangered on IUCN Red List.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.14 Consider the following statements regarding Asian Development Bank (ADB)**

1. Its headquarters is in Shanghai.
2. India is one of its founding members.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.15 Consider the following statements regarding TRIPS:**

1. It is an international legal agreement between all the member nations of the World Trade Organization (WTO).
2. TRIPS was negotiated at the end of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.16 Where is Dahla Dam located?**

- a) Pakistan
- b) Sri Lanka
- c) India
- d) Afghanistan

**Q.17 Consider the following statements regarding National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP):**

1. It is implemented by APEDA
2. It is not recognized by the Food Safety Standard Authority of India (FSSAI) for trade of organic products in the domestic market

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.18 APEDA comes under which of the following Ministry?**

- a) Ministry of Environment
- b) Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
- c) Ministry of Finance
- d) None of the above

**Q.19 Section 142 of the Social Security Code, 2020 has been notified for which of the following?**

- a) For increasing minimum wage of unorganised workers
- b) For increasing minimum wage of organised workers
- c) For collecting Aadhar details for the database of beneficiaries under various social security schemes.
- d) For collecting Aadhar details for the database of women only who are unemployed

**Q.20 Which of the following are Kharif crops:**

- 1. Tur
- 2. Urad
- 3. Cotton
- 4. Wheat

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 2 and 4 only
- b) 1, 2, and 3 only
- c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- d) 2 and 3 only

**Q.21 Consider the following statements regarding drug 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG):**

- 1. It is developed by AIIMS.
- 2. It accumulates in the virus infected cells and prevents virus growth by stopping viral synthesis and energy production.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.22 Long March 5B Rocket, recently seen in news, was launched by which of the following country?**

- a) Japan
- b) Russia
- c) India
- d) China

**Q.23 Global Innovation Partnership is launched through MoU between India and which of the following country?**

- a) USA
- b) Israel
- c) Russia
- d) UK

**Q.24 Which of the following is the most recent sovereign country?**

- a) Somalia
- b) Libya
- c) South Sudan
- d) Sudan

**Q.25 Consider the following statements:**

- 1. A lineament is a linear feature in a landscape dictated by an underlying geological structure such as a fault.
- 2. The north-east India is demarcated as Seismic Zone V, which indicates a zone with low vulnerability.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.26 Which of the following major vaccines being used in the world against COVID-19 are the only ones that use inactivated Virus?**

- 1. Sinopharm
- 2. Covaxin
- 3. Sinovac
- 4. Covishield

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 4 only
- c) 1, 2 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3 only

**Q.27 Mucormycosis, recently seen in news, is caused by which of the following?**

- a) Fungi
- b) Bacteria
- c) Virus

- d) Protozoa

**Q.28 Where is Galathea Bay located?**

- a) Philippines
- b) Japan
- c) India
- d) China

**Q.29 Consider the following statements regarding Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC):**

1. ACCs are the new generation of advanced storage technologies that can store electric energy either as electrochemical or as chemical energy
2. Implementation of the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme 'National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Storage' was recently approved.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.30 Hill station of Mussoorie is situated in the foothills of the which of the following mountain range?**

- a) Garhwal Himalayan range
- b) Aravalli Range
- c) Kaimur Range
- d) MaiKal Range

**Q.31 National Crime Records Bureau comes under which of the following Ministry?**

- a) Ministry of Defence
- b) Ministry of urban affairs
- c) Ministry of Home affairs
- d) None of the above

**Q.32 Consider the following statements regarding Special Window for Affordable & Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH) Fund:**

1. Rivali Park Wintergreens is the first project to get completed located in Rajasthan.

2. The SWAMIH Investment Fund is one of the largest private equity teams in India.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.33 Consider the following statements regarding Pangolins:**

1. Pangolins are the world's most trafficked mammal.
2. They are listed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 of India.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.34 Bonda community belongs to which of the following state of India?**

- a) Maharashtra
- b) Gujarat
- c) Chhattisgarh
- d) Odisha

**Q.35 Red eared slider, recently in news, is native to which of the following country?**

- a) China
- b) Vietnam
- c) USA
- d) Sri Lanka

**Q.36 Which of the following measures are taken to avoid elephant casualties on railway lines?**

1. A Permanent Coordination Committee constituted between the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) and the MoEFCC for preventing elephant deaths in train accidents.

2. Clearing vegetation along railway tracks to enable clear view for loco pilots.
3. Setting up underpass/overpass for safe passage of elephants.
4. Regulation of train speed from sunset to sunrise in vulnerable stretches

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1, 2 and 4 only
- c) 3 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Q.37 Where is Kajaki Dam situated?**

- a) Uzbekistan
- b) Tajikistan
- c) China
- d) Afghanistan

**Q.38 Consider the following statements regarding Petroleum & Explosives Safety Organization (PESO):**

1. It is an organization under, Ministry of Petroleum and natural gas.
2. It administers the usage of explosives & petrol stations in India.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.39 Consider the following statements regarding Plasma:**

1. It is a yellowish liquid component of blood
2. It carries cells and proteins throughout the body.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.40 Under which of the following article, a government employee can be dismissed**

**without a Departmental enquiry, when the President or the Governor, as the case may be, is satisfied that in the interest of the security of state it is not convenient to hold such an enquiry?**

- a) Article 311
- b) Article 312
- c) Article 313
- d) Article 314

**Q.41 Consider the following statements regarding Skinks:**

1. They are venomous
2. They resemble snakes
3. They are found in both Western and Eastern ghats

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1 and 3 only
- c) 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

**Q.42 Maros-Pangkep region, Southern Sulawesi, Indonesia, was recently in news for which of the following?**

- a) Surge in Covid-19 cases despite vaccination
- b) Forest fires
- c) Volcanic eruption
- d) Environmental degradation of oldest rock paintings

**Q.43 RNA is less stable than DNA due to which of the following?**

1. The molecules are made up of sugars different from DNA.
2. RNA has Single strand instead of double strand.

Select the correct the code:

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.44 Recently, the Government has brought changes in the existing Customs (Import of Goods at Concessional Rate of Duty) Rules, IGC 2017 to boost trade facilitation through**



which importers can now get the final goods manufactured entirely on job work basis. Which of the following sectors are excluded from this change?

1. Gold
2. Jewellery
3. Precious stones
4. Metals

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- b) 2, 3 and 4 only
- c) 1 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Q.45 Which of the following Ministry has signed MoU with Microsoft on Joint initiative for Digital Transformation of Tribal Schools?**

- a) Ministry of Tribal Affairs
- b) Ministry of Education
- c) Ministry of Information technology
- d) Ministry of External affairs

**Q.46 Where is Satpura Tiger Reserve located?**

- a) Maharashtra
- b) Gujarat
- c) Madhya Pradesh
- d) Uttar Pradesh

**Q.47 Weddell Sea is a part of which of the following Ocean?**

- a) Indian Ocean
- b) Pacific Ocean
- c) Southern Ocean
- d) Arctic Ocean

**Q.48 Consider the following statements regarding Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897:**

1. This law enables states to ban public gatherings, ask schools and large institutions to stop functioning, and issue advisories to companies to explore work-from-home models.
2. It also gives the state a right to penalise media organisations spreading misinformation.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.49 Consider the following statements:**

1. India is among the world's top five honey producers.
2. Compared to 2005-06 honey production and exports have decreased drastically.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.50 Consider the following statements regarding White fungus and Black fungus:**

1. Both are fatal diseases
2. White fungus is caused by candida while causative agent of black fungus is unknown.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.51 which of the following article deals with the fundamental right to life?**

- a) Article 19
- b) Article 22
- c) Article 21
- d) Article 24

**Q.52 Which of the following Ministry launched National Mobile Monitoring Software (NMMS) app and Area officer monitoring App:**

- a) Ministry of Environment
- b) Ministry of Finance
- c) Ministry of Rural Development
- d) Ministry of Urban Affairs

**Q.53 Consider the following statements regarding Kalakshetra Foundation:**

1. It is recognised as an "Institute of National Importance."
2. The Kalakshetra style of Bharatanatyam avoids Recakas and uninhibited throw (Ksepa) of the limbs.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.54 Consider the following statements regarding Whiteflies:**

1. Bt. cotton is resistant against white flies.
2. Whiteflies can be controlled by using synthetic insecticides.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.55 Consider the following statements regarding International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA):**

1. It is Headquartered in Vienna, Austria.
2. All UN Members are members of The IAEA

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.56 Consider the following statements regarding:**

1. Mount Nyiragongo is an active stratovolcano
2. Mount Nyiragongo is known for its Lava Lakes.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only

- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.57 Lakshadweep is under the jurisdiction of which of the following High Court?**

- a) High Court of Kerala
- b) High Court of Maharashtra
- c) High Court of Karnataka
- d) High Court of West Bengal

**Q.58 Which of the following country is not a landlocked country?**

- a) Lithuania
- b) Belarus
- c) Nepal
- d) Azerbaijan

**Q.59 Consider the following statements regarding "INDO-ISRAEL Villages of Excellence:**

1. It is a new concept in India-Israel's bilateral relationship.
2. It shall focus on Modern Agriculture infrastructure only

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.60 Vesak is the most sacred day for which of the following communities:**

- a) Hinduism
- b) Buddhism
- c) Jainism
- d) Christianity

**Q.61 Jardalu mango, Katarni rice and Magahi paan are GI certified products from Which of the following state?**

- a) Bihar
- b) Jharkhand
- c) Rajasthan
- d) Uttar Pradesh

**Q.62 Mekedatu Multi-Purpose Project is proposed to be constructed across which of the following river?**

- a) Cauvery
- b) Yamuna
- c) Krishna
- d) Godavari

**Q.63 Consider the following statements regarding launch of 'Services e-Health Assistance & Tele-consultation (SeHAT) OPD portal:**

- 1. The portal provides tele-medicine services to the serving Armed Forces personnel, veterans and their families.
- 2. It was launched by Ministry of Health

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.64 Consider the following statements regarding OTT Platforms:**

- 1. An over-the-top (OTT) media service is a media service offered directly to viewers via the Internet.
- 2. The services provided are free of charge.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.65 Which of the following is the largest producer of jackfruit in the world?**

- a) Kerala
- b) Dhaka
- c) New York
- d) Beijing

**Q.66 Which of the following is exempted from GST:**

- 1. Fresh fruits and vegetables

- 2. Coffee beans (non roasted)
- 3. Betel leaves
- 4. Charcoal

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 2, and 3 only
- b) 2 and 4 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only

**Q.67 Consider the following statements regarding mid day meal scheme:**

- 1. The Scheme covers children of classes 1st-12th studying in government, government-aided schools, special training centres (STC) and madarasas/ maqtabs supported under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).
- 2. It is not covered under by the National Food Security Act, 2013.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q.68 Consider the following Benefits of currency swap agreements:**

- 1. These swap operations carry no exchange rate or other market risks, as transaction terms are set in advance.
- 2. It reduces the risk of volatility against the third currency.
- 3. It does away with the charges involved in multiple currency exchanges.
- 4. It would discourage speculative attacks on the domestic currency.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1, 2, and 3 only
- b) 2 and 4 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only

**Q.69 What does the statue of Reclining Buddha, seen recently in news, represents?**

- a) It represents discussion and transmission of the teaching of Buddha

- b) It represents the moment of Buddha's awakening
- c) It represents Buddha during his last illness, about to enter Parinirvana
- d) It represents supreme enlightenment by connecting oneself with divine universal energy

**Q.70 Consider the following statements regarding floating jetties:**

- 1. Their price is approximately 1/5th of the price of a fixed jetty.
- 2. They are quicker to build and install, easier to use than a fixed jetty

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

### 2021 MAY MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS

1 C	19 C	37 D	55 A
2 B	20 B	38 B	56 C
3 C	21 B	39 C	57 A
4 C	22 D	40 A	58 A
5 C	23 D	41 C	59 A
6 A	24 C	42 D	60 B
7 A	25 A	43 C	61 A
8 D	26 D	44 D	62 A
9 A	27 A	45 A	63 A
10 C	28 C	46 C	64 A
11 A	29 C	47 C	65 A
12 D	30 A	48 C	66 D
13 C	31 C	49 A	67 D
14 B	32 B	50 D	68 D
15 C	33 C	51 C	69 C
16 D	34 D	52 C	70 C
17 A	35 C	53 C	
18 D	36 D	54 D	

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