UPSC
Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs April 2020
(Study Material)

By Jawwad Kazi
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# Contemporary Issues

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**MISCELLANEOUS**

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<td>Matterhorn mountain in Swiss Alps lights up with Indian flag</td>
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Global Oil crisis

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<td>Question</td>
<td>Analyse the impact of recent oil crisis on India’s energy sector.</td>
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<td>Why in News?</td>
<td>• Prices of West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the American benchmark for crude oil, fell to less than zero.</td>
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<td>• The price of a barrel of WTI fell to <strong>minus $37.63 a barrel.</strong></td>
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<td>• It means that <strong>sellers have to pay</strong> buyers to get rid of their crude.</td>
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<td>• During his intervention at the video conference hosted by Saudi Arabia, the rotating head of the G-20, Petroleum Minister of India reassured the grouping that India will continue to remain a <strong>global energy demand centre</strong></td>
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<td>How oil market works?</td>
<td>• WTI oil is <strong>traded as futures contracts</strong> in the NYMEX (New York Mercantile Exchange) where traders buy and sell monthly futures such as, for instance, May futures, June futures and so on</td>
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<td>• The sellers of such futures will have to <strong>deliver a barrel of crude oil at the contracted price in the contracted month</strong> just as buyers will have to take delivery at the contracted date.</td>
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<td>• There’s a huge <strong>speculative participation in oil futures</strong> trading too.</td>
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<td>• So speculators buy and sell contracts with no intention of taking delivery (in the case of buyers) or offering delivery (in the case of sellers) of the physical oil, on the contracted date.</td>
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<td>• These speculators have to unwind their “positions” on the contract expiry date. If they fail to do so, they will have to take physical delivery of the crude oil on the contracted date.</td>
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<td>May Futures – Negative</td>
<td>• Speculators who had taken large bets on May futures <strong>began to unwind their “positions”</strong>.</td>
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<td>• This was because the futures contracts are set to expire today, Tuesday.</td>
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<td>• Those <strong>not intending to take physical delivery have to square off their contracts before the expiry date</strong></td>
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<td>• So, speculators who did not want to take delivery in May proceeded to unwind their “positions,” <strong>leading to the massive fall in prices.</strong></td>
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<td>• Prices fell as <strong>demand for oil is falling</strong> and the world, especially America, is running out of storage space.</td>
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<td>June Futures - still at $20.43 a barrel.</td>
<td>• First Traders <strong>expect demand to recover by June</strong> as lock downs are lifted across the world and economic activity resumes.</td>
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<td>• Second, traders also <strong>expect that storage space may be created</strong> as existing inventory is drawn down.</td>
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<td>• Third, <strong>America is also talking of adding to their strategic storage</strong> by taking advantage of the low prices. This could create demand for oil.</td>
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Finally, contract expiry for June contracts is still a few weeks away, giving speculators that much more time to speculate.

### Impact on India
- First, the oil import bill will fall sharply this fiscal year, giving tremendous relief to the government on the external account front.
- With merchandise exports from India badly hit due to the lockdown in the West, foreign exchange earnings are under pressure.
- With oil prices falling and foreign exchange outgo reducing, the pressure on the current account balance is off.
- Second, India is quietly building up its strategic reserves, taking advantage of the cheap prices.
- India has a capacity to hold over 39 million barrels of oil at its strategic reserves in Vishakhapatnam, Mangalore and Padur, near Udupi. These are underground salt caverns converted and built to store crude oil.
- With cheap oil flooding the market and stretching energy storage capacity, Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas stressed New Delhi will continue to fill up its strategic petroleum reserves.
- Minister also lauded efforts by the OPEC+ countries, which also include Russia and others, as an extension of the cartel, to balance the supply-side factors, which is imperative for long-term sustainability.

### Way Ahead
- should fill the oil caverns with strategic reserves
- should increase its imports of gas (LNG) from Australia, Africa and the US. This will reduce the political risks of dependency on oil supplies from the Middle East. Gas is also now economically competitive.
- Minimize interference of government in management and operational efficiency of the petroleum companies.
- should create an institutional basis for an integrated and diverse energy policy

### Sources
The Hindu, Indian Express
### Syllabus

**GS 3 : Economy : Effects of liberalization on the economy**

### Question

- Discuss the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on global economy in the light of UNCTAD and World Bank reports.

### Why in News?

- Trade set to plunge as COVID-19 pandemic upends global economy – WTO

### Developing Nations and Public External Debt

- **UNCTAD Report**
  
  (1) Developing countries’ repayments on their public external debt alone will soar between **$2.6 trillion and $3.4 trillion in 2020 and 2021** due to the COVID-19.
  
  (2) Pandemic has hit developing countries at a time when they have already been **struggling with unsustainable debt burdens for many years** as well as with rising health and economic needs.
  
  (3) Report called for a **global debt deal for the developing world** and underlines the vital need for decisive action to provide substantive debt relief to developing countries.

  (4) Crisis has triggered record **portfolio capital outflows from emerging economies and sharp currency devaluations** in developing countries.

- **The International Monetary Fund (IMF) cancelled debt repayments** due to it by the 25 poorest developing economies for the next six months. This debt cancellation is estimated at **around $215 million**.

- **(G20) announced the suspension of debt service payments** for 73 of the poorest countries from May to the end of this year.

- **UNCTAD way forward**
  
  (1) Report proposed the establishment of an **International Developing Country Debt Authority (IDCDA)** to oversee debt write-off implementation.
  
  (2) It will lay the institutional and regulatory foundations for a more permanent international framework to **guide sovereign debt restructuring in future**.

### Recession

- **World Bank**
  
  (1) The World Bank had recently projected a **1.5%-2.8% growth rate in this fiscal year**.
  
  (2) Estimates suggest a much deeper downturn than the **Great Recession [2007-09]**.
  
  (3) “huge” capital outflow from developing countries in the COVID-19 context and suggested steps to **improve debt transparency and investment quality**.

### Way Ahead

- The world’s largest 20 economies need to step up the pace of reforms to reinvigorate growth, create jobs and build a more inclusive global economy.

- **Structural reforms**
  
  (1) Need structural reforms combined with policies to increase demand, to lift productivity and create the jobs needed to tackle inequality.
  
  (2) Remove barriers that stifle entrepreneurship and limit the capacity of companies to make the most of knowledge and technological diffusion.
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(3) Address labour-market challenges to make growth more inclusive, including unemployment, low participation of women in the labour force and informal employment.

- **Role of international institutions**
  - (1) More debt relief to developing and LDC countries
  - (2) Aid packages to developing and LDC countries to revive global consumption and demand
  - (3) Special packages to strengthen Healthcare sector and supply chain management
  - (4) IMF and WTO needs to work together for balance of payment improvement and against protective trade barriers

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### COVID -19 and Indian Economy

**Syllabus**

| GS 3 : Economy | Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment |

**Question**

- Critically analyse the Post-COVID banking sector in the background of performance of different sectors.

**Why in News?**

- Covid-19 has caused severe disruption for the Indian economy: World Bank

**15th Finance Commission**

- Despite the strain on government finances due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no credible proposal to amend the legislation meant to control the fiscal deficit
- The State governments have been demanding that their own 3% fiscal deficit targets be relaxed to 4% or even 5%, to give them elbow room in dealing with the impact of the lockdown.

**Banking sector**

- **NPAs**
  - (1) Possibility of fresh NPAs as operations of a number of companies in specific sectors will not see business getting back to normal as the labour has moved out and the production may not be able to restart.
  - (2) Capital intensive sectors such as aviation, real estate, consumer durables, and jewellery may take a long time before there is a demand revival.

- **Outlook**
  - (1) Moody’s Investors Service has changed the outlook for Indian banking system to negative from stable, as it expects deterioration in banks’ asset quality due to disruption in economic activity.
  - (2) Asset classes such as microfinance, unsecured loans, and SME borrowers (including the LAP segment) will see continuing pressures on asset quality due to weaker profiles of borrowers and expectation of only a gradual economic recovery: Crisil
RBI
(1) Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced a three-month moratorium on loan and card repayments
(2) Slashed its main policy rate — repo rate — by a larger-than-expected 75 basis points (bps)
(3) Slashed mandatory cash reserve ratio (CRR) of banks by 100 bps, releasing Rs 1,37,000 crore into the banking system

Challenge before India Inc.

- India Inc's biggest challenge in the months ahead will be redeeming bonds and meeting other loan obligations at a time when cash flows will be hard to come by.
- The three-month breather on loan repayments — to banks and NBFCs — will help but only temporarily.
- 80 per cent of manufacturing companies had more than a month's inventory when the lockdown took effect.
- Less demand for consumption as unemployment spiked to over 23 per cent as of April 5, versus the 6-8 per cent range pre-pandemic; in rural India it increased to 20 per cent. While in urban areas it soared to 31 per cent.

Sectors

- Resilience categories:
  (1) Pharmaceuticals, telecom, FMCG, fertiliser, oil refineries, power & gas distribution and transmission are among the sectors — comprising nearly 44 per cent of the debt — which are in high resilience category.
  (2) Another 52 per cent debt is to sectors with moderate resilience such as automobile manufacturers, power generators, roads and construction.
  (3) Around 4 per cent of debt is in sectors that are least resilient, such as airlines, gems and jewellery, auto dealers and real estate.
- Power
  (1) Renewable power is struggling because of complete disruption of supply chains from China.
  (2) Consequently, they are way behind on project schedules and could face payment issues from their customers, the power discoms.
- MSME
  (1) MSMEs are the most impacted, especially from the labour exodus.
  (2) Operations may not return to normal because of the labour migration issue even lockdown relaxation.
- Aviation sector
  (1) The passenger traffic has declined by 47%.
  (2) The revenue impact for airlines operating to and from the Indian market would be USD 11.221 billion (over Rs 85,000 crore).
  (3) COVID-19 crisis would see global airline passenger revenues drop by $314 billion this year, a fall of 55% compared to 2019.
  (4) Airlines in the Asia-Pacific region would record the largest revenue drop of USD 113 billion in 2020 compared to last year.
  (5) Expected to impact more than 29 lakh jobs in the Indian aviation and dependent industries.
- Tourism Sector:
  (1) most likely won’t recover in the entire 2020-21 financial year.
With tourists cancelling their plans to travel due to fear of infection, people engaged in this sector are facing a gloomy future.

Hotels, restaurants, guides, transportation modes (air, rail, road, and waterways), handicrafts, adventure sports, mountaineering services, etc. are heavily dependent on the tourism sector.

- Other

Sectors such as automobiles, construction materials and metals have seen their volumes fall sharply, while realisations are down for metals and upstream oil companies.

**Forex**

- Despite the continued outflow of funds by foreign portfolio investors in March, foreign exchange reserves saw a jump, as it rose by $5.7 billion to hit $475.6 billion.
- While the exports also decline, the imports fall more since we are net importers and that results into a rise in foreign exchange reserves.
- The sharp decline in crude oil prices over the last one month has helped India’s cause as crude oil import accounts for almost 20 per cent of total import bill.

**Rupee value**

- Rupee hits record low on weak sentiment, lockdown extension at 76.44 against dollar
- **Reasons for fall:**
  1. With continuing uncertainty over the spread of the coronavirus and its economic impact, investors are seeking refuge in safe haven assets such as the dollar
  2. Most emerging market currencies have fallen in this period, and while the Indian rupee has also fallen.

**Inflation**

- Trend
  1. As per data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) showed that headline retail inflation, as measured by the consumer price index, fell to a four-month low of 5.9 per cent in March, down from 6.58 per cent in February
  2. Decline has been due to a moderation in food prices — the consumer food price index fell from 10.81 per cent in February to 8.76 per cent in March
- **Possibility**
  1. Extended lockdown will exert upward pressure on food prices in April due to supply chain constraints and households hoarding of food supplies.
  2. This expected surge in food inflation, while temporary, is unlikely to be offset by lower international crude oil prices.
  3. But, lower international crude oil prices are unlikely to translate to lower retail petrol and diesel prices in India as both central and state governments will use this opportunity to raise taxes to shore up their revenues. This implies that headline retail inflation is likely to remain elevated temporarily.

**Way Ahead**

- Arresting risks to the growth outlook and preserving financial stability should receive the highest priority
- **Government and Banks - Key Role**
  1. Banks and financial institutions should do all they can to keep credit flowing to economic agents facing financial stress.
  2. Stimulus packages to revive domestic demand in the economy.
  3. Special packages for MSMEs.
| (1) banks and financial institutions should do all they can to keep credit flowing to economic agents facing financial stress |
| (2) Stimulus packages to revive domestic demand in the economy |
| (3) Special packages for MSMEs |
| **Currency Swap** |
| (1) For better management of external account and to provide cushion for sudden outflow of funds |
| (2) Negotiating with US for dollar swap |
| (3) India already has a $75 billion bilateral currency swap line with Japan |
| **suspend the initiation of corporate insolvency against companies for a period of six months to prevent companies from being dragged into insolvency, due to the impact of the nationwide lockdown** |
| **Rupee:** |
| (1) When the uncertainty over the economic disruption caused by the coronavirus begins to recede, and economic activity begins to crawl back in, global funds will start flowing back towards emerging markets, including India |
| (2) When countries will be fighting to grab export market share in order to boost growth, the central bank must ensure that the currency’s value does not affect the country’s export competitiveness. |
| **RBI monetary measures** |
| (1) The priority concern of the MPC should be to **arrest the economic fallout** of the coronavirus than inflation |
| (2) RBI should also expand its use of unconventional policy measures to tackle this crisis. |
| (3) It should **inject more liquidity** into the system to revive economy |
| (4) For large corporates, debt restructuring by banks is necessary |
| **Sustainable growth:** |
| (1) should seize the opportunity to try and find a way to drive the economy forward without once again driving our air pollution levels. |
| (2) Focus on Renewable energy and effective waste management |

**Sources**

The Hindu, Indian Express, LiveMint
## COVID-19 and Mental Health

### Syllabus

**GS 2: Social Justice**: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

### Question

- Examine the emerging mental health challenges due to COVID-19

### Why in News?

- COVID-19 lockdown: A recipe for mental health crisis

### Alcohol repercussions

- Data about alcoholic people
  
  1. The majority of alcohol drinkers across India are men, but the percentage in some States is higher than the national average of 29.2%, according to the National Family Health Survey 2015-16.
  
  2. In Tamil Nadu, it is 46.7%; in Kerala 37% and in Andhra Pradesh 34.9%.

- **Severe withdrawal symptoms**, triggered by the sudden unavailability of alcohol after the lockdown

- Withdrawal symptoms can range from **shivering, dehydration and sleeplessness** to more acute conditions such as **delirium, hallucinations, fever, vomiting and seizures**.

- Within a week of the lockdown, reports of **deaths and suicides** related to alcohol withdrawal began to rise

- The mortality rate for people with severe withdrawals is **over 15%**

- Impact on families - there has been a withdrawal-related spike in incidents of **domestic violence**

- **Kerala**
  
  1. **Kerala government issued an order** that said that since a section of people were undergoing serious distress, some even attempting suicide, due to alcohol unavailability, a process should be initiated to make a limited amount of alcohol available to them
  
  2. **Doctors petitioned the Kerala High Court against the order.**
  
  3. **Division bench of the Kerala High Court** stayed the government order for **three weeks**

### Other symptoms

- **Reasons:**
  
  1. The pandemic and ensuing lockdown in India have exacerbated symptoms like anxiety in those with existing mental health conditions.
  
  2. The isolation and uncertainty has also prompted some to seek professional help for the first time.
  
  3. Issues range from fears about the virus to worries about job security
  
  4. Overabundance of misinformation about the coronavirus, especially on social media, is creating fear
  
  5. For most people the issue is the inability to buy groceries, vegetables, fish, meat, eggs, and dairy products; either because they are not available locally, or because their daily earnings have stopped.

- **Symptoms:**
(1) Sleep – impacted the most
(2) Anxiety and fear
(3) Domestic Violence
(4) Suicidal tendency

Way Ahead
- National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences launched a national COVID-19 psychosocial helpline in conjunction with the Health Ministry.
- Many states have also started regional language helplines
- Need more counsellors – in both public and private institutions
- Promotion of Meditation techniques to remain calm
- Accurate and precise information may minimize frustration and fear
- Avoid smoking, alcohol and other drugs to deal with emotions
- Proper diet and exercise is helpful to control intensity of emotions
- Government should launch new online skills development courses for future fields such data science

Sources
The Hindu, Indian Express, Business Standard

COVID-19 and Railways

Syllabus | GS 3 : Economy : Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways
---|---
Question | Railways has been reorienting its role in the wake of COVID-19. Discuss.

Why in News?
- IR might have suspended all passenger trains on March 22, the first time in its history
- Indian Railways (IR), the world’s fourth largest rail network has been busy reinventing itself so that its massive infrastructure — spread across a staggering 64,000 km, over 7,000 stations, and with 12 lakh employees — can be honed into a valuable tool during the pandemic.

New Initiatives
- Coach to Ward
  (1) One of the first ideas that came up was to convert coaches into quarantine or isolation wards, given the acute shortage of these.
  (2) Some 5,000 coaches had been repurposed as of April 10.
  (3) These isolation coaches have one toilet and one bathing room each, the middle berths have been removed, and windows fitted with mosquito nets. They have oxygen cylinders and fixtures for medical equipment.
  (4) challenge will be to station them in spots where uninterrupted water and electricity supply is assured.
  (5) Second, in the absence of air-conditioning and specialised equipment, it might make more sense to use these as second-line quarantine rather than treatment facilities.
- Hospital Back up
  (1) Next major initiative was to put to use IR’s extensive health facilities, consisting of 586 health units, 45 sub-divisional hospitals, 56 divisional hospitals, eight production unit hospitals, and 16 zonal hospitals across the country.
Meal Wagon

(1) In an innovative move, two sets of long-distance, super-heavy, fast freight trains were introduced — **Annapoorna Trains** by Northern Railways and **Jai Kisan Specials** by South Central Railway.

(2) Normally, a freight train of 42 wagons carries around 2,600 tonnes of foodgrains. The special trains now carry **5,200 tonnes**

(3) Western Railway has dramatically increased milk loading at Palanpur in Gujarat to transport milk to Haryana and Delhi

(4) IR is also providing **cooked meals** for the needy, tying up with local NGOs and groups for distribution.

(5) IRCTC, the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation, has set up **kitchens** across the country, starting at Mumbai Central

- For the first time, a goods terminal near Silchar was used for **medicine parcel service** — one for Barak Valley and the other for Tripura

### Way Ahead

- The challenge will be to see if IR can keep up the momentum after the lockdown is lifted
- While it’s always played a leading role in the transport of bulk commodities such as coal, iron ore and foodgrains, it could use the opportunity provided by the pandemic to **dramatically revamp its freight business**.
- Its huge, **trained workforce and extensive resources and networks** could be used to create a **new freight model**
- It could, for instance, **tie up with road transport to offer seamless cargo movement**, incorporate sophisticated facilities to cover a **wider range of goods, including perishables, medicines etc.**
- The challenge will be to establish timetabled long-distance trains and **assured delivery times** even after passenger trains are back on track.
- And, most important, keep its **rates competitive**

### Sources

The Hindu

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## COVID-19 and Food Security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>GS 2 : Social Justice : Issues relating to poverty and hunger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Food Security has been prime concern of India during pandemic crisis. Elaborate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why in News?</td>
<td>Food Supply chain disrupted due to COVID-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulses</td>
<td><strong>Only 15% of poor households</strong> have received the one kg of pulses promised for April under the Centre’s COVID-19 welfare package</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Of the 1.96 lakh tonnes of pulses that should have been given to more than 19 crore households this month, only 30,000 tonnes have been distributed so far, according to the Consumer Affairs Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Reason</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(1) Delays caused by the fact that the government only stores unmilled pulses in its godowns,
(2) Has had to start a massive milling operation before delivering them to ration shops.

Allocations:
(1) Last month, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced extra ration allocations from April to June as part of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, said to be worth ₹1.7 lakh crore.
(2) All 80 crore National Food Security Act beneficiaries were to get an extra 5 kg of rice or wheat each month, while each household was to get one kg of pulses to meet protein needs.

Distribution:
(1) The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation is the nodal agency which procures and stores a buffer stock of pulses.
(2) To provide the necessary 5.88 lakh tonnes of cleaned and milled pulses promised under the scheme, NAFED has pressed over 100 dall mills into service to process about 8.5 lakh tonnes of unmilled pulses lying in about 165 godowns across the country.
(3) Only a few States have dal mills within their own jurisdiction and they have been asked to lift the milled pulses themselves to speed up the process.

Food Supply Chain

- Reasons for disruptions:
  (1) Labour shortages are impacting logistics and loss of jobs and income has impacted people's ability to afford food
  (2) Supply side shocks – due to production and transportation
  (3) Demand side shocks – due to decreased income and job security in future

Way Ahead

- Production
  (1) Needs to create more synergies in food technology, agriculture, biotechnology.
  (2) Prioritizing and adaptation of innovation should act as main drivers of productivity growth and improved sustainability
  (3) Amidst the current tensions, good seeds and other farm inputs must reach farmers in time for kharif season.
  (4) Automated machines should be introduced for the planting of seeds to counter reverse migration crisis

- Supply chain
  (1) Improve transportation network
  (2) Increase storage, particularly cold storages for perishables
  (3) Innovative use of largest network of Indian railways
  (4) Remove lacunas of logistic sector
  (5) Several states have deployed an e-pass system for essential service providers

- Demand
  (1) Stimulus packages to revive demand
  (2) Promote e-commerce for food essentials
  (3) Create awareness about food habits

Sources
The Hindu, Indian Express, Livemint
# COVID-19 and South Asia

**Syllabus**

**GS 2 : IR: India and its neighborhood- relations.**

## Question

- Global Health crisis provides opportunity to reinvent cooperation within South Asian countries. Do you agree?

## Why in News?

- The World Bank recently warned that South Asia faces its worst economic performance in 40 years due to the coronavirus pandemic.

## India’s Response

- **India**, a **$2.9 trillion economy** — the biggest in the 8-member SAARC grouping — responded by unveiling a **₹1.7 lakh crore ($22.6 billion) economic stimulus plan**, providing direct cash transfer to poor senior citizens and women
- The central bank cut the key interest rate by **75 basis points** to make loans cheaper and provided **₹1 lakh crore liquidity to the market**.
- A **moratorium on repayment of loans for three months** has been provided.
- The government has **suspended the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code for 6 to 12 months** to give breathing space to companies trying to secure the necessary financing, renegotiating loans, and attempting to secure other reliefs from banks.

## Other SAARC countries

- **Pakistan**
  - The government announced a Rs. 1.2 lakh crore rescue package to help businesses and vulnerable people
  - Separately, the government has decided to allocate Rs. 7,500 crore for small and medium enterprises
- **Bangladesh**
  - Has announced a $11.6 billion stimulus package to support the economy, with a primary focus on supporting the manufacturing and service sectors, agriculture and social safety nets
- **Sri Lanka**
  - Central bank announced a $250 million refinancing facility for banks, enabling them to expand their lending capacity by ₹40,000 crores to businesses, offer loan repayment moratoriums and provide working capital
  - Sri Lanka is also planning to enter into an agreement with the Reserve Bank of India for a currency swap worth $400 million to boost the foreign reserves and ensure financial stability.
- **Nepal**'s tourism sector is the worst hit by the pandemic. It has announced a relief package which includes a 25% discount on electricity.
- The **Maldives** government has announced an emergency 2.5 billion Maldivian rufiyaa ($161.8 million) stimulus package to shore up the local economy
- **Afghanistan**
  - It is a heavily aid-reliant and import-dependent economy.
  - The Afghan government has allocated about $25 million to deal with the crisis.
The World Bank has approved a $100.4 million grant to support the war-torn country’s weak economy.

**South Asian Future Health Crisis**

- South Asia could face a further public health crisis as children miss routine vaccinations, the UNICEF warned
- health of hundreds of thousands of children could be impacted by this disruption of regular immunisation services
- Background
  1. Almost a quarter of the world’s unimmunised or partially immunised children – about 4.5 million children – live in South Asia.
  2. Almost all of them, or 97%, live in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.
  3. Agency estimated that 4.5 million of South Asia’s children had already missed out on routine immunisations, even before the pandemic
  4. The South Asia region is also home to two of the last polio endemic countries in the world, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

**Vaccination**

- Bangladesh and Nepal have halted their measles and rubella campaigns
- Pakistan and Afghanistan have suspended their polio drives
- Vaccine stocks were also running low in some countries in the region due to lockdowns and travel bans which have disrupted supply chains.

**Lessons**

- South Asian countries have invested very little in health.
- **Privatization:**
  1. Focus of healthcare in the private sector is on profit rather than on people’s needs.
  2. Whilst privatisation has brought in advanced technology and expertise, the high costs of treatment in the private sector have resulted in impoverishment as most of the population has no insurance or third-party coverage, and increases out of pocket expenditure
  3. Sector has also been poorly regulated

**Diseases**

- Hunger, malnutrition, poor sanitation and large-scale migration are features of this region.
- Existing infectious diseases like TB, HIV and malaria have been worsened by emerging ones like dengue, chikungunya, healthcare-associated infections and antimicrobial resistance.
- The region is also an epicentre of an epidemic of lifestyle diseases.

**Poor Prioritization**

- Defence budgets take the largest share of national budgets, and obviously adversely impact social sector spending.
- Religion continues to occupy a central space in the society and politics of the region. religious dogma can impact health policy and health-seeking behaviour.

**Way Ahead**

- **Vaccination**
  1. As long as frontline health workers take the appropriate precautions, particularly washing their hands, there is no reason not to vaccinate – in fact, it is crucial that vaccination continues
  2. UNICEF strongly recommends that, where immunisation campaigns are suspended, governments begin rigorous planning now to intensify
immunisation activities once the COVID-19 pandemic is under control

- Health System
  1. A long-term commitment to universal health care, with not only a national but also a regional and global focus, is needed.
  2. Joint research into health areas can be a unifying point for SAARC.

Sources
The Hindu, Indian Express

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**COVID-19 and Cyber security**

**Syllabus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>GS 3 : Security : Challenges to internal security through communication networks and basics of cyber security;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
  2. Companies went for work from home using virtual technologies  
  3. Many people finding way to earn online  
  4. Organised crime using COVID-19 for launching phishing attacks: KPMG |
| Cyber Security | 1. Concept  
  (1) Cybersecurity involves protecting systems, programmes, and networks from digital attacks or cyberattacks.  
  (2) Such attacks are usually aimed at changing, or destroying sensitive information to extort money from users or disrupt business processes. |
| Privacy Concerns | 1. Use of technology, that seeks to utilise people’s personal health data  
  2. Technology has been invoked at three levels-  
  (1) First, in creating a list of persons suspected to be infected with COVID-19;  
  (2) Second, in deploying geo-fencing and drone imagery to monitor compliance by quarantined individuals;  
  (3) Third, through the use of contact-tracing smartphone applications, such as AarogyaSetu.  
  While cell-phone based surveillance might be plausible under the Telegraph Act of 1885, until now the orders authorising surveillance have not been published  
  3. AarogyaSetu  
  (1) Contact-tracing application,  
  (2) Details of the application’s technical architecture and its source code have not been made public  
  (3) Like Aadhar, it is not backed by legislation  
  (4) AarogyaSetu is framed as a necessary technological invasion into personal privacy, in a bid to achieve a larger social purpose |
Without a statutory framework, and in the absence of a data protection law, the application’s reach is boundless.

Supreme Court’s Puttaswamy judgement

- Supreme Court’s judgment in K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017) - each of us is guaranteed a fundamental right to privacy
- To be sure, the right to privacy is not absolute. There exist circumstances in which the right can be legitimately curtailed.
- However, any such restriction, as the Court held in Puttaswamy, must be tested against the requirements of legality, necessity and the doctrine of proportionality.

**Organized Crime and Phishing attacks**

- Many existing organised crime groups have changed their tactics to use COVID-19 related materials on health updates, fake cures, fiscal packages, emergency benefits and supply shortages
- The main targets are remote workforces and hospitals and COVID-19 testing facilities
- Phishing emails claiming to have important updates or encouraging donations, impersonating trustworthy organisations.
- Another similar scam run via Telegram is the Paytm doubling scam. Scamsters in specific Telegram groups lure Paytm Wallet customers to double their wallet amount by clicking on a few links.

**Way Ahead**

- Organizations’ role
  1. Onus is on the company to keep its cyber security up-to-date.
  2. Encrypt and secure all devices and connections.
  3. If possible, companies should ask employees to use corporate-issued devices, since they are likely already secure.
- Individual role
  1. Changing passwords frequently
  2. Alerting phishing emails to proper government channels
  3. Two-factor authentication
  4. Anti-virus or anti-malware software and secure VPNs
- Government role
  1. Home ministry, CERT and other government agencies should issue frequent advisories and expose cyber fraudsters on a regular basis.
  2. Legal actions against those found guilty on immediate basis
  3. Partnering with private sector for state-of-the art technologies

**Sources**
The Hindu, Indian Express, The Week
### COVID-19 and Human Rights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>GS 2 : Social Justice</th>
<th>Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>“First victim of any global disaster is Human rights”. Discuss the human right violations during COVID-19 in the context of above statement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why In News?</td>
<td>The UN rights chief warned that countries flouting the rule of law in the name of fighting the novel coronavirus pandemic risk sparking a “human rights disaster”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| UN Stand | **States’ right and Human Rights**  
(1) UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet called on countries to **refrain from violating fundamental rights “under the guise of exceptional or emergency measures”**  
(2) Ms. Bachelet acknowledged that states have the right to restrict some rights to protect public health,  
(3) But she insisted that any restrictions should be **necessary, proportionate and non-discriminatory**, and also limited in duration.  
**Curfew**  
(1) **Shooting, detaining, or abusing someone for breaking a curfew** because they are desperately searching for food is clearly an **unacceptable and unlawful response**  
(2) **Jails and prisons are high risk environments**, and states should focus on releasing whoever can be safely released, not detaining more people  
**Free Speech**  
(1) Warned that efforts to rein in dangerous **misinformation** around the pandemic was in some cases being used as an excuse to crack down on **legitimate** free speech  
(2) Undermining rights such as freedom of expression may do incalculable damage to the effort to contain COVID-19  
**Abuse of Power**  
(1) Any exceptional measures or state of emergencies introduced in the name of fighting COVID-19 should be **subject to proper parliamentary, judicial and public oversight** to avoid abuses |
| Background | Reports from different regions that police and other security forces have been using excessive, and at times lethal, force to make people abide by lockdowns and curfews  
**such violations have often been committed against people belonging to the poorest and most vulnerable segments of the population** |
| Bombay High Court and fundamental duties | **Role of State:**  
(1) It expects effective measures from the state government for migrants and health workers in view of the COVID-19 pandemic,  
**Role of citizens:**  
(1) The citizens, who are always protective about their fundamental rights, also need to remind themselves and discharge the fundamental duties. |
Some citizens are “very casually” committing a breach of social distancing guidelines and causing disturbance to social and communal harmony.

**Art 51-A** - To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

### Way Ahead

- Use maximum available resources at national and international levels to ensure availability, accessibility and quality of health care as a human right to all without discrimination, including for conditions other than COVID-19 infection; and ensure that the right to life is protected throughout.
- Ensure that stimulus packages and other responses to mitigate the economic impacts of the pandemic are people-centred and adequately support groups most affected by the loss of their livelihoods, such as informal and independent workers without access to unemployment benefits, and more generally people and groups without access to social safety nets.
- Ensure income security and targeted social assistance for the most marginalized or vulnerable. Ensure availability of food, water and sanitation, and adequate housing.
- Ensure that national and local response and recovery plans identify and put in place targeted measures to address the disproportionate impact of the virus on certain groups and individuals, including migrants, displaced persons and refugees, people living in poverty, those without access to water and sanitation or adequate housing, persons with disabilities, women, older persons, LGBTI people, children, and people in detention or institutions.
- Ensure that safeguards are in place where new technologies are used for surveillance in response to COVID-19, including purpose limitations and adequate privacy and data protections.
- Guarantee freedom of expression, including freedom of the press, so that information can be disseminated without suppression. Governments, as well as media and technology companies, need to counter misinformation with accurate, clear and evidence-based information, and avoid overbroad efforts that could result in censorship of protected speech.

### Sources

The Hindu, Indian Express, UN
## COVID-19 and Virtual Court

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>GS 2: Governance: Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
<td>Virtual Courts can be way out to improve efficacy of justice system in future. Do you agree?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why in News?</strong></td>
<td>Amidst the national lockdown, the Supreme Court and several other courts have been holding virtual proceedings. Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde emphasises that virtual courts are open courts too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Virtual courts</strong></td>
<td>A three-judge Bench headed by the CJI, in an order earlier this month, laid down broad norms for courts using video-conferencing and ratified the validity of virtual judicial proceedings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reasons:</strong></td>
<td>(1) The vital necessity to keep the courts open even during a national lockdown so that access to justice is not denied to anyone; (2) The need to maintain physical distancing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Supreme Court Bar Association And Open Court</strong></td>
<td>written to the CJI and other judges that open court hearings should be restored at the earliest, subject of course to the lockdown ending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Citing earlier judgments on the importance of open court hearings, the SCBA has requested (1) The use of video conferencing should be limited to the duration of the current crisis, (2) Should not become the “new normal” or go on to replace open court hearings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>The SCBA also has a specific request: that proceedings held virtually may also be streamed live so that access is not limited to the lawyers concerned, but is also available to the litigants and the public</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Way Ahead</strong></td>
<td>Issues can be resolved through live-streaming. And in the longer term, it should become the general practice.</td>
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<td>As the use of technology is stepped up, courts should consider other steps that will speed up the judicial process and reduce courtroom crowding.</td>
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<td>In the lower courts, evidence could be recorded, with the consent of parties, by virtual means.</td>
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<td>In the higher courts, a system based on advance submission of written briefs and allocation of time slots for oral arguments can be put in place. It may even lead to more concise judgments</td>
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<td><strong>Sources</strong></td>
<td>The Hindu, Indian Express</td>
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## COVID-19 and Poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>GS 2: Social Justice: Issues relating to poverty and hunger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
<td>Increase in poverty is inevitable in the background of shattered economy due to COVID-19. Critically examine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why in News?</strong></td>
<td>The World Bank says that for the first time since 1998, global poverty rates will rise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>World Bank Data</strong></td>
<td>The World Bank estimates that sub-Saharan Africa will see its first recession in 25 years, with nearly half of all jobs lost across the continent. By the end of the year, 8% of the world’s population — half a billion people — could be pushed into destitution, largely because of the wave of unemployment brought by virus lockdowns. <strong>South Asia</strong> will likely experience its worst economic performance in 40 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal Sector</strong></td>
<td>Most at risk are people working in the informal sector. It employs 2 billion people who have no access to benefits like unemployment assistance or health care. In Bangladesh, 1 million garment workers - 7% of the country’s workforce — lost their jobs because of the lockdown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poverty</strong></td>
<td>In 1990, 36% of the world’s population, or 1.9 billion people, lived on less than $1.90 a day. By 2016, that number had dropped to 734 million people, or 10% of the world’s population, largely because of progress in South Asia and China. Some of the biggest gains were made in India, where 210 million people were lifted out of poverty from 2006 to 2016, according to the UN. Since 2000, Bangladesh lifted 33 million people — 10% of its population — out of poverty.</td>
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<td><strong>Sources</strong></td>
<td>The Hindu, Indian Express</td>
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## COVID-19 - Migrants and Urban Homeless

<table>
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<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>GS 2: Social Justice: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
<td>Emergence of reverse migration created a challenge for governance not only presently, but also in future. Critically analyse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Why in News?** | The exodus of migrant workers from the cities following the announcement of the 21-day lockdown threw the spotlight on the vast number of Indians who live outside their home states. Days before State governments led by Uttar Pradesh arranged buses to bring back migrants, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Supreme
### Court

The Unique Academy

**Court** that “so far rural India has largely remained safe from this disease” and if migrants returning on foot are permitted to conclude their journey “there is a serious and imminent potential of the disease penetrating in rural India also.”

### Factual Data

- The total number of internal migrants in India, as per the 2011 census, is **45.36 crore or 37% of the country’s population**. It includes inter-state migrants as well as migrants within each state.
- The annual net flows amount to about 1 per cent of the working age population.
- Economic Survey pegged the size of the migrant workforce at roughly **20 per cent or over 10 crore in 2016**.
- **Uttar Pradesh and Bihar** account for the origin of 25 per cent and 14 per cent of the total inter-state migrants, followed by Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.
- The inter-state migrant crisis after the lockdown was felt more by cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Surat is borne by the 2011 Census data.
- The share of migrant workers is the **highest in construction sector for females** (67 per cent in urban areas, 73 per cent in rural areas), while **highest number of male migrant workers are employed in public services** (transport, postal, public administration services) and modern services (financial intermediation, real estate, renting, education, health) at 16 per cent each and 40 per cent each in rural and urban areas, respectively.
- It is estimated that in India, 29.4% of the urban people live in informal settlements (formerly called slums).
- The migrant workers and the urban landless form a majority of those who do **menial jobs in cities**, including the frontline sanitary works of the local bodies.
- many from the informal settlements continue to do conservancy work such as sweeping and segregating and disposal of waste.

### Emerging issues

- **1918 case study.**
  (1) The 1918 influenza virus was carried to rural India in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar by soldiers who fought in Europe in the First World War.
  (2) They returned by ships to Bombay and Madras and then carried the virus to their villages, causing a disaster which saw 18 million deaths in India.
- **Dilemma of workers:**
  (1) Urban migrant workers were ill prepared to stay back or get back to their homes.
  (2) Lakhs of workers, who were dependent upon daily and casual labour, are still stranded in Mumbai and Delhi without wages.
  (3) The functioning of shelters in several places has been uneven across States and metropolitan cities.
- **Threat to Rural areas:**
  (1) With all forms of public transport including railways suspended and State borders sealed, lakhs of migrant workers in urban areas started walking hundreds of kilometres to reach their homes.
  (2) Spread of infection can be more if migration continues without proper handling.

### Way ahead and Initiatives

- **Collecting workers data is priority.** This data is important to identify the districts which should be on high alert for potential virus spread as these workers return to their homes.
- Allowing **migrant travel in a safe way** by train that provides for the necessary physical distancing is the least that the government can do.
MHA issued guidelines and asked States to organize relief camps for migrants and arrange food and other amenities for them.

Union and the State governments set up a special task force and identify large public spaces such as stadiums, public halls and educational institutions to shelter them.

Food and medical assistance could be provided through government funds, NGOs and other locally available voluntary groups.

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express

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**Joint Audit and independent panel**

**Syllabus**

GS 2: Governance: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

**Question**

There is a need to review auditing process in changing scenario. Do you agree?

**Why in News?**

Ministry of Corporate Affairs floated 2 proposals-

1. Mandatory **joint audits** for large companies
2. An **independent panel** for appointment of auditors for large companies by an independent panel

**Proposals**

- The Ministry had invited comments on the above proposal as well as on a proposal to **limit the number of partners** per audit firm.
- Also proposed barring auditors of large corporates from providing any **non-audit services** to their clients to avoid conflict of interest.

**Concerns**

- Proposal to limit the number of partners per audit firm, causing major concerns at the four **big audit firms**, Deloitte, KPMG, EY and PricewaterhouseCoopers
- **Audit firms stand**
  1. There was **little evidence** of mandated joint audits leading to better audit quality internationally.
  2. Joint audits create an issue of a lack of accountability.
  3. Many other countries had considered and rejected joint audits as a measure to improve audit quality.
  4. It is important to leave the decision to appoint an auditor with an audit committee as an independent panel may not have the necessary expertise to appoint the right auditor.
  5. Proposal to limit the number of partners in a firm was retrograde step.

**CII stand**

- Mandating joint audits for larger companies would “not help improve audit quality, but would result in increased cost.
- Appointment of auditors should be **left to the company** like all critical decisions.

**ICAI stand**

- (ICAI) has supported the idea of mandatory joint audits
- ICAI had recommended the implementation of an independent panel to appoint auditors,
- but noted that the panel may face issues in assessing auditors appropriate for a variety of companies.
ICAI, too, has opposed the proposal to limit the number of partners in a single firm.

**Way Ahead**

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| • | About audit process:  
  (1) Increased **transparency** in the functioning of an audit committee was a better solution  
  (2) The Centre should consider requiring audit committees to make greater **disclosures on the selection process** for auditors  
 | • About partners:  
  (1) The government needed to take steps to promote the **merger of smaller firms into larger firms** rather than limiting the partners  
 | **Sources** | Indian Express |

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Government jobs to be reserved for domiciles of J&K, says Centre

Why in News
- The Union government has issued a notification defining “domiciles” in the new Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir for protecting jobs in the Group D category and entry-level non-gazetted posts for the domiciles.

More in News
- Revocation of special status:
  1) On August 6 last, the Centre revoked J&K’s special status under Article 370 and Article 35A of the Constitution and bifurcated it into J&K and Ladakh UTs.
- Notification:
  1) Anyone who has resided for a period of 15 years in the UT of J&K or has studied for a period of seven years and appeared in Class 10th/12th examination will be deemed to be domicile.
  2) Under the 2010 Act, the clause for “permanent resident of the State” has been substituted by “Domicile” of the UT.
  3) The Act pertained to employment in the civil services comprising “district, divisional and State” cadre posts.
  4) Only permanent residents of J&K were eligible to apply for the gazetted and non-gazetted posts. The amendment allows non-domiciles also to apply to these posts.

Sources
- The Hindu

Chakmas, Hajongs starving in Arunachal, says rights body

Why in News
- A Delhi-based rights body has sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s intervention in ensuring food for the Chakma and Hajong communities.

More in News
- About Chakma and Hajong communities:
  1) The Chakmas and Hajongs, displaced in the 1960s by violence and a dam in erstwhile East Pakistan.
  2) Then, Chakmas and Hajongs were settled in parts of Arunachal Pradesh.
- Present Issue:
  1) A Delhi-based rights body said that Chakma and Hajong communities have allegedly not been included in the government’s economic package.
  2) Reminding that denial of food was a violation of the right to life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution, he requested the Prime Minister to provide the two communities rice at the subsidised price.

Sources
- The Hindu

Bodoland Territorial Area Districts placed under Governor’s Rule

Why in News
- Assam’s Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) was placed under the Governor’s Rule after the expiry of the five-year term of the tribal council that governs it.
More in News

- About BTAD:
  1. The BTAD comprises **four districts of western and northern Assam**
  2. BTAD falls **under the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) formed in 2003.**

- Present issue:
  1. **Election** to the council, scheduled on April 4, **had been deferred** because of the COVID-19 pandemic
  2. Governor “assumed to himself the administration” of the BTC in exercise of powers conferred by a relevant Section of the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.**

Sources: The Hindu

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## Niti Aayog questions Australian institute’s terror ranking of India

### Why in News

- A report compiled by Niti Aayog has questioned the methodology adopted by an Australian based institute - Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP)

### More in News

- **IEP findings:**
  1. IEP ranked India as the **seventh worst terrorism affected country ahead of conflict-ridden countries** such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Palestine and Lebanon.
  2. The countries ahead of it are Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan and Somalia

- India has moved to the seventh position from the **previous year’s eighth in the annual Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2019.**

- **NITI Aayog stand:**
  1. The positioning in the global indices impacted investments and other opportunities: NITI Aayog

- **Use of GTI:**
  1. GTI scores are **directly used in the Global Peace Index, the Global Slavery Report published by the Walk Free Foundation,**
  2. GTI indirectly used in computing country scores in the **World Economic Forum’s Travel and Tourism Competitiveness** and **Global Competitiveness Indices** and compilation of Safe Cities Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit

Sources: The Hindu

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## Geo-fencing app will be used to locate quarantine violators

### Why in News

- The Centre is using powers **under the Indian Telegraph Act** to “fetch information” from telecom companies **every 15 minutes** to track COVID-19 cases across the country

### More in News

- **Geo-fencing:**
  1. The government has tested an application that triggers e-mails and SMS alerts to an authorized government agency if a person has jumped quarantine or escaped from isolation, based on the person’s mobile phone’s cell tower location.
  2. The “geo-fencing” is **accurate by up to 300 m,** a government communication said.
  3. Kerala was one of the first States to use geo-fencing to track COVID-19 cases.
  4. The SOP said that geo-fencing will **only work if the quarantined person has a mobile phone from Airtel, Vodafone-Idea or Reliance Jio,** as “BSNL/MTNL” **do not support location based services.** BSNL and MTNL are government owned
Telegraph Act:
(1) The particular provision under the Act, amended multiple times since 1885, authorizes State or Centre to access information of a user’s phone data in case of “occurrence of any public emergency or in the interest of the public safety.”
Privacy concern:
(1) It said that the phone number should be deleted from the system after the period for which location monitoring is required is over and the data would be deleted four weeks from thereon.

Sources: The Hindu

Rajya Sabha members’ oath taking put off

Why in News: Rajya Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu has put on hold the oath taking by 37 newly elected members of the Upper House till the nationwide lockdown is lifted.

More in News: A new Member is not entitled to sit, participate and vote in the House or in a Committee until he has taken the oath.

Sources: The Hindu

Tablighi Jamaat: Its purpose, how it runs

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

More in News: Tablighi Jamaat, which literally means a society for spreading the faith, is a Sunni Islamic missionary movement.
- The proselitising movement aims to reach out to ordinary Muslims and revive their faith, particularly in matters of ritual, dress, and personal behaviour.
- Its roots lie in the Deobandi version of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence.
- It was launched by Deoband cleric and prominent Islamic scholar Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Khandhalaw in 1927 in Mewat
- In the first Tablighi conference held in 1941, approximately 25,000 people from across North India attended.
- The Tablighi Jamaat is based on six principles –
  1. The first is the kalimah, an article of faith in which the Tabligh accepts that there is no God but Allah and that Prophet Muhammad is his messenger.
  2. The second is salaat, or prayer five times daily.
  3. The third is ilm and dhikr, the knowledge and remembrance of Allah conducted in sessions in which the congregation listens to preaching by the imam, performs prayers, recites the Quran and reads the Hadith;
  4. The fourth principle is ikram-i-Muslim, the treatment of fellow Muslims with honour.
  5. The fifth is ikhlas-i-niyat, or sincerity of intention.
  6. The sixth is dawat-o-tabligh, or proselytisation

Sources: Indian Express

During India coronavirus lockdown, the laws that come into play

Why in News: During the lockdown, Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code and Disaster Management Act 2005 have been widely invoked.
More in News

- For Disobedience
  1. **Section 188 IPC** deals with those disobeying an order passed by a public servant, and provides for *imprisonment ranging from one to six months.*
  2. For those violating *orders passed under the Epidemic Diseases Act*, Section 188 IPC is the provision under which punishment is awarded.
  3. **Section 51 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005** provides for punishment for two kinds of *offences*: obstructing any officer or employee of the government or person authorized by any disaster management authority for discharge of a function; and *refusing to comply with any direction* given by the authorities under the Act. Punishment can extend to one year on conviction, or two years if the refusal leads to loss of lives or any imminent danger.

- For Spreading Fear:
  1. **Section 505 IPC** provides for *imprisonment of three years or fine*, or both, for those who publish or circulate anything which is likely to *cause fear or alarm*.
  2. **Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act** provides for *imprisonment, extending to one year*.

- For false claim to aid:
  1. Under **Section 52, Disaster Management Act**, whoever makes a *false claim for obtaining “any relief, assistance, repair, reconstruction or other benefits” from any official authority* can be sentenced to a maximum of two years imprisonment and a fine will be imposed on the person.

- For refusing to do duties:
  1. In case of *refusal or withdrawal of any officer who has been tasked with any duty* under the Act, the officer can be sentenced to imprisonment extending to one year. However, those who have written permission of the superior or any lawful ground are exempt from such punishment.

- Legal Shield:
  1. For any offence under the Disaster Management Act, a *court will take cognisance only if the complaint is filed by the national or state or district authority, or the central or state government.*
  2. However, there is another provision: *if a person has given notice of 30 days or more about an alleged offence*, and about his intention to file a complaint, he or she can approach the court which can then take cognisance.
  3. The Act *protects government officers and employees from any legal process for actions they took “in good faith”*

Sources
Indian Express

Invoke Essential Commodities Act, Centre asks states

**Why in News**
- Amid disruptions in the supply of essentials and fears of hoarding by traders, the Centre has *asked the states to invoke the Essential Commodities Act 1955 to ensure smooth supply chains.*

**More in News**
- These measures include
  1. fixing of stock limits,
  2. capping of prices,
  3. enhancing production,
  4. inspection of accounts of dealers and other such actions
## Suspension of the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) for the next two financial years

### Why in News
- Government decided to suspend operation of the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) for the next two financial years, and divert Rs 7,900 crore to the fight against COVID-19.

### More in News
- About MPLADS
  1. In 1993, the government announced the MPLAD Scheme.
  2. It was formulated to enable the members of Parliament to identify small works based on locally felt needs in their constituencies.
  3. The objective being to recommend works of developmental nature with emphasis on the creation of durable community assets.
  4. The broad focus is on clean drinking water, primary education, public health, sanitation and roads.
  5. Each Lok Sabha MP gets Rs five crore per year for his/her constituency;
  6. Rajya Sabha MPs have the flexibility to spend it across the state from where they have been elected.
  7. This money is allocated through a parliamentary appropriation.
- MPLADS was challenged in the Supreme Court as being violative of Articles 275, 282, the 73rd and 74th Amendment, and the constitutional design itself.
- In 2010, a five-judge bench of the SC held Even though MPs have been given a seemingly executive function, their role is limited to ‘recommending’ works and actual implementation is done by the local authorities. Therefore, the scheme does not violate separation of powers and constitution.
- A complete breakdown of how the money is utilised is also available under the Right to Information (RTI).
- The funds spent are subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

## Power Ministry brings fourth draft of Electricity Amendment Bill

### Why in News
- Union Power Ministry has come out with fourth draft of the Electricity (Amendment) Bill since 2014, which seeks to set up an Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority (ECEA) having power of a civil court to settle disputes related to power purchase agreement between distribution companies (discoms) and generation companies (gencos).

### More in News
- Provides that the ECEA will have sole authority to adjudicate matters related to specific performance of contracts related to purchase or sale of power, between power gencos and discoms.
- Decision of the ECEA can be challenged at the Appellate Tribunal For Electricity (APTEL) and, subsequently, at the Supreme Court.
- Commenting on the Bill, All India Power Engineers’ Federation (AIPEF) V.K. Gupta told the PTI, “The setting up of ECEA would dilute the power of the State and Central regulatory commissions to settle matters related to PPAs (power purchase agreements) between discoms and gencos.”
Currently, State electricity regulatory commissions and Central Electricity Regulatory Commission settle State-level and inter-State PPA disputes, respectively.

AIPEF strongly condemned the timings of the Power Ministry’s move to bring back the Electricity Amendment Bill 2020 when the whole country is fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ministry had brought first draft in 2014 that was introduced in the Lok Sabha seeking separate carriage and contend electricity distribution business. But, unfortunately, that Bill lapsed after dissolution of the Lok Sabha.

At first glance, Mr. Gupta said, “The purpose of the Bill seems to be to privatise discoms and ensure payment to private generators.

“The proposed amendments in the Electricity Act will increase the electricity tariff exponentially. Already due to private generators, average tariff across India is ₹8 and with these proposals, it will rise to ₹10,” said Padamjit Singh, chief patron, AIPEF.

The Bill also provides that the Electricity Act would be applicable to the entire country, including the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

It also provides that the cross (power) border trade shall cover import or export of electricity from India and any other country. The transaction related to passage of electricity through India would be treated as transit between two other countries.

The draft law provides for introduction of power distribution sub-licensee or franchisee, which would not require a separate licence from State commission and providing information about them would sufficient.

It also calls for creating National Renewable Energy Policy by the Central government in consultation with State governments.

The Bill enables State as well as Central power regulators to specify transmission charges under open access. Earlier, both functions were with the Central commission.

Sources  The Hindu

Judiciary

Supreme Court upholds right to discuss COVID-19

Why in News  The Supreme Court upheld the right to free discussion about COVID-19, even as it directed the media to refer to and publish the official version of the developments in order to avoid inaccuracies and large-scale panic.

More in News  It ordered the government to start a daily bulletin on COVID-19 developments through all media avenues in the next 24 hours.

A daily bulletin by the Government of India through all media avenues, including social media and forums to clear the doubts of people.

Sources  The Hindu

SC adjourns plea seeking declaration of financial emergency due to coronavirus lockdown
Why in News
● The Supreme Court adjourned a petition for issuing directions to the government to declare national financial emergency under Article 360 in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

More in News
● Petition:
  (1) The petition stated that this was the biggest emergency in independent India.
  (2) It must be addressed as per constitutional provisions through unified command between Central and State governments.
  (3) This will be required not only to defeat the war against coronavirus, but also in recovery of the economy after lockdown is over.
● Supreme Court:
  (1) SC said that petition would be taken up for hearing after the court resumes its normal functioning.
  (2) As of now, limited Benches are hearing extremely urgent cases through videoconferencing.

Sources The Hindu

No 100% quota for tribal teachers: Supreme Court

Why in News
● A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court held it unconstitutional to provide 100% reservation for tribal teachers in schools located in Scheduled Areas across the country.

More in News
● What is case?
  (1) The case stemmed from a legal challenge to January 10, 2000 order issued by the erstwhile State of Andhra Pradesh.
  (2) Bench Order providing 100% reservation to the Scheduled Tribe candidates, out of whom 33.1/3% shall be women, for the post of teachers in schools located in the Scheduled Areas of the State.
● Supreme Court Bench:
  (1) “It is an obnoxious idea that tribals only should teach the tribals. When there are other local residents, why they cannot teach is not understandable. The action defies logic and is arbitrary. Merit cannot be denied in toto by providing reservation.”
  (2) A 100% reservation to the Scheduled Tribes has deprived Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes also of their due representation.
  (3) The court referred to the Indira Sawhney judgment, which caps reservation at 50%.

Sources The Hindu

NEET applies to minority-run medical colleges: Supreme Court

Why in News
● The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) is mandatory for admission to medical colleges run by religious and linguistic minority communities, the Supreme Court held.

More in News
● Case:
  (1) The judgment was based on a challenge by the colleges to several notifications issued by the Medical Council of India (MCI) and the Dental Council of India (DCI) under Sections 10D of the Indian Medical Council Act of 1956 and the Dentists Act of 1948 for uniform entrance examinations.
Supreme Court Judgement:

1. admissions solely through NEET for graduate and postgraduate medical/dental courses does not violate any fundamental and religious rights of minorities.
2. NEET would apply for both aided and unaided medical colleges administered by minorities.
3. The court held that rights of trade, business and occupation or religious rights “do not come in the way of securing transparency and recognition of merits in the matter of admissions.
4. The right to freedom of trade or business is not absolute. It is subject to “reasonable restriction” in the interest of the students’ community to promote merit, recognition of excellence, and to curb the malpractices.
5. A uniform entrance test qualifies the test of proportionality and is reasonable.

Governor can call for floor test if he feels State govt is shaky: Supreme Court

Why in News

- A Governor can call for a floor test any time he objectively feels a government in power has lost the confidence of the House and is on shaky ground, the Supreme Court held.

More in News

- Case
  1. Madhya Pradesh political controversy, which led to the fall of Kamal Nath government and the return of the BJP regime under Shivraj Singh Chauhan after 22 Congress MLAs offered their resignations.

- SC Judgement
  1. “In directing a trust vote, the Governor does not favour a particular political party. It is inevitable that the specific timing of a trust vote may tilt the balance towards the party possessing a majority at the time the trust vote is directed. All political parties are equally at risk of losing the support of their elected legislators, just as the legislators are at risk of losing the vote of the electorate. This is how the system of parliamentary governance operates.”
  2. The Governor’s requirement to have a trust vote does not “short-circuit” any disqualification proceedings pending before the Speaker.
  3. a Governor need not wait for the Speaker’s decision on the resignation of rebel MLAs before calling for a trust vote in the House.
  4. But Governors cannot misuse their wide powers to call for a floor test to displace elected governments for political reasons.
  5. “This power is granted to the Governors to ensure that the principle of collective responsibility is maintained at all times and must be exercised with caution” while referring to the nine-judge Bench judgment in the S.R. Bommai case.

- Judicial Review
  1. decision of the Governor to call for a trust vote was not immune from judicial review.

Sources

The Hindu
Karnataka moves SC against Kerala HC order to lift border curbs

**Why in News**
- Karnataka challenged in the Supreme Court a Kerala High Court order on April 1 to remove the road blockade at the inter-State border to facilitate flow of vehicles carrying essential items and patients in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak.

**More in News**
- The petition, seeking the immediate stay of the HC order, said Kerala is the “worst affected” State in the country with coronavirus cases.
- Two patients from Kerala, in need of urgent medical care, died after their ambulances were denied entry at the border by the Karnataka authorities.

**Sources**
The Hindu

Need for green clearance way to achieve sustainable development, says SC

**Why in News**
- The need for environment clearance for a project must be seen as a measure to achieve sustainable development, the Supreme Court has said.

**More in News**
- Case:
  1. SC was hearing appeal against the January 8, 2016, decision of the National Green Tribunal bench for the western zone.
  2. NGT held a May 14, 2002 circular issued by the Union Environment and Forests Ministry as contrary to law.
  3. The Ministry circular envisaged the grant of ex post facto environmental clearance.
- SC judgement:
  1. The court ruled that the “concept of an ex-post facto EC (environmental clearance) is in derogation of the fundamental principles of environmental jurisprudence”,
  2. ex-post facto EC (environmental clearance) is detrimental to the environment, and could lead to irreparable degradation
  3. In the absence of an EC, there would be no conditions that would safeguard the environment.

**Sources**
Indian Express

SC extends tenure of TDSAT chairperson

**Why in News**
- The Supreme Court extended the tenure of the Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) Chairperson, which was coming to an end on April 20 by three more months.

**More in News**
- Asked the government for not filling up the vacancies of the Administrative and Technical Member in the Tribunal despite these falling vacant in 2018 and 2019, respectively
- The Bench asked how tribunals could function without members and asked the government to expedite the process.

**Sources**
Indian Express
Environment

Mass nesting of Olive Ridley turtles draws to a close at Rushikulya

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<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>Although sporadic nesting still continues, mass nesting of Olive Ridley turtles has ended at the Rushikulya rookery on the Odisha coast.</th>
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<tr>
<th>More in News</th>
<th>The Forest Department has commenced measures to protect the eggs from predators, and human intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>About Olive Ridley:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) Mother Olive Ridleys lay eggs in nests dug up in the beach sand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Each nest on average contains around 100 eggs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) The eggs hatch in about 45 days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) The incubation period gets lengthened by a few days if the temperature of the sand is lowered by climatic changes such as rain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trend:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) Mass nesting has occurred at the Rushikulya rookery after a gap of one year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) In 2019, mass nesting did not take place on this coast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) But in 2018, the unusual phenomenon of double mass nesting was observed between February and April, with the total nesting figures rising over 4,73,000 then.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Sources     | The Hindu                                                                                         |

Dolphins reclaim Bosphorus as virus silences Istanbul

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>A lull in boat traffic and a fishing ban in Istanbul has proved good news for some of the city’s most-loved inhabitants -- the dolphins that swim in the fish-rich waters of the Bosphorus Strait between Europe and Asia.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More in News</th>
<th>At Sarayburnu, which separates the Golden Horn from the Sea of Marmara, a pod of dolphins were spotted swimming with an army of seagulls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The visibility of the dolphins is seen as an indicator of a healthy maritime ecosystem as the mammals are fighting for survival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Since 1983, maritime mammal hunting has been prohibited in Turkey, and dolphins are protected by law.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Sources     | The Hindu                                                                                         |

NWBL’s nod for road through Arunachal tiger reserve seen as necessary evil

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>The recommendation of the National Board for Wild Life (NBWL) for a realigned road through India’s easternmost tiger reserve is seen as a necessary evil to connect a strategic settlement on the border with Myanmar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More in News</th>
<th>The total length of the road is 156 km with 100.5 km passing through the reserve.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>road could help save the banks of the river Noadihing used as a shortcut by locals and porters to move through the 1,985 sq. km.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Namdapha Tiger Reserve in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh.
- road could improve patrolling in the reserve, 90% of which is inaccessible and thus not monitored by an understaffed team of forest guards.
- will provide the opportunity for creating anti-poaching camp and watchtower facilities nearby the habitations of Lisu community residing in the reserve so that necessary check can be kept on poaching till the relocation of this community outside,
- A majority of the Lisu people, called Yobin in India, live in Myanmar. They have traditionally survived on hunting.

Mumbai’s yearly pink guests come visiting

**Why in News**
- While the whole of Mumbai stays indoors, thousands of flamingoes are frolicking by the Thane Creek

**More in News**
- About Flamingoes at Thane Creek:
  (1) This is a yearly phenomenon in Mumbai.
  (2) 90% of them are lesser flamingoes.
  (3) They breed in the Kutch region of Gujarat, and come here to feed on the blue green algae, tiny crustacean, molluscs and insects present in the water
  (4) the rest are greater flamingoes, which fly all the way from West Asia and Africa.
  (5) birds have increased in number over the last three decades.
  (6) Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary that has provided “additional protection” to the birds and its habitat
  (7) The flamingoes will be on their way back home in May or June

**Sources** The Hindu

Efforts to double tiger population at Manas National Park hit by prey turning nocturnal, finds study

**Why in News**
- Herbivorous prey that have turned nocturnal due to human pressure could impact efforts to double the tiger population in a sub-Himalayan national park shared by India and Bhutan - study

**More in News**
- Study by Assam-based NGO Aaranyak and World Wide Fund for Nature
- Study findings:
  (1) The Manas National Park straddles the international boundary with 500 sq. km in western Assam and 1,057 sq. km in Bhutan.
  (2) The area under Project Tiger in the Indian part with the park at its core is 2,837 sq. km
  (3) Manas has seven ungulate (hoofed animals) prey species whose body weight varies in the range of 10-250 kg.
  (4) The population density of the ungulates – wild pig, hog deer, barking deer, swamp deer, sambar, gaur and wild buffalo – was estimated to be 42.66 individuals per sq km.
  (5) The researchers did not find any evidence of the ungulate population decreasing, but the increase in their numbers was not at the desired rate for the tiger density to double to 8.77 per 100 sq. km,
(6) The change in activity for the Manas ungulates from daylight hours to night has largely been attributed to human interference.

(7) Armed conflict and ethnic unrest from 1988-2001 hit Manas hard with extremists and poachers wiping out its population of 180 rhinos, forcing the U.N. to downgrade its World Heritage Site tag.

(8) The hormonal cycle of animals that feel threatened to be active during the day changes and that can impact its breeding habit. This in turn can make the tiger population recovery slow.

Sources: The Hindu

India to receive normal monsoon, forecasts IMD

| Why in News | ● India will likely have a normal monsoon, with a chance of ‘above normal’ rain in August and September, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said |
| More in News | ● Monsoon:  
(1) The June-September rainfall accounts for 75% of the country’s annual rainfall.  
(2) The Long Period Average of the season rainfall over the country as a whole for the period 1961-2010 is 88 cm  
(3) El Nino phenomenon, a warming of the central equatorial Pacific that’s associated with the drying up of monsoon rain.  
(4) The Indian Ocean Dipole, a temperature anomaly in the ocean that can increase monsoon rain.  
● IMD Forecast:  
(1) The IMD’s confidence stems largely from global weather models pointing to negligible chances of El Nino  
(2) Officially redefined the definition of what constitutes ‘normal’ rainfall and reduced it by 1 cm to 88 cm  
(3) Quantitatively, the monsoon seasonal rainfall is likely to be 100% of the Long Period Average (LPA) with a model error of ± 5%.  
(4) Expectation of excess rain comes from a forecast by the dynamical model or the Monsoon Mission Coupled Forecast System — that relies on supercomputers, mathematically simulating the physics of the ocean and the atmosphere.  
(5) The Indian Ocean Dipole was also expected to be in a “neutral” state during the monsoon, the forecast added. |
| Sources | The Hindu |

Anti-smog guns installed at 14 large project sites in Delhi

| Why in News | ● Anti-smog Guns have been installed at 14 of the 47 large projects in Delhi. |
| More in News | ● Before 2 months, Supreme Court  
(1) Ordered the installation of anti-smog guns at all large construction sites among other locations to reduce dust pollution  
(2) Had said that anti-smog guns should be mandatory in projects that require environmental clearance from the State or Centre, and have a built-up area of over 20,000 square metres  
● The anti-smog gun sprays nebulised water droplets into the air through high-pressure propellers, which help dust particles settle down. |
| Sources | The Hindu |
### UN’s COP26 climate summit postponed, says U.K. government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>• The United Nation’s COP26 Climate Change Summit due to take place in the Scottish city of Glasgow in November has been postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic, the British government said</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in News | • Global CO2 emissions needed to drop 45% by 2030 and reach “net zero” by 2050, to limit temperature rises at 1.5 degrees Celsius — the safe cap set as a goal in the Paris accord  
• UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa said postponement was unavoidable but that the pandemic should not divert the world from the climate change challenge. |
| Sources | The Hindu |

### International Relation

#### Trump says ready to help end Saudi-Russian oil price war

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>• U.S. President Donald Trump said he was ready to help resolve an escalating oil price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia that has helped push crude benchmarks to 17-year lows.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in News | • Saudi Arabia:  
(1) The threat of a global recession triggered by the coronavirus pandemic had already hammered prices when Riyadh said last month it would raise exports after a production-cut agreement among top producers flopped in early March  
(2) Saudi Arabia said it would increase exports further to a record 10.6 million barrels per day from May, deepening a global supply glut as crude recorded its biggest monthly and quarterly price plunges in history.
(3) Saudi Arabia had been exporting around 7.0 million barrels per day under an output reduction agreement among a 24-member producer alliance known as OPEC+, which included Russia.  
• OPEC+ and USA:  
(1) OPEC+ failed to reach an agreement on further production cuts to shore up sagging prices as the coronavirus battered the global economy last month  
(2) The price war has also hit shale oil producers in the U.S. |
| Sources | The Hindu |

#### U.K. extends work visas for Indian, foreign doctors amid coronavirus outbreak

| Why in News | • The one-year extension will apply to around 2,800 migrant doctors, nurses and paramedics employed by the NHS whose visa is due to expire before October  

More in News
- will get an automatic extension for one year as they battle the coronavirus pandemic for the country’s National Health Service (NHS).
- The free of charge extension will also apply to their family members, demonstrating how valued overseas NHS staff are to the U.K
- The extension to NHS visas will not only be fee-free and automatic but also exempt from the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS)

Sources The Hindu

U.S. oil plunges below $0 a barrel: What does a negative futures price mean?

Why in News
- The price of a barrel of benchmark U.S. oil plunged below $0 a barrel for the first time in history, a troubling sign of an unprecedented global energy glut as the coronavirus pandemic halts travel and curbs economic activity.

More in News
- What does a negative futures price mean?
  (1) The price of a barrel of crude varies based on factors such as supply, demand and quality.
  (2) Supply of fuel has been far above demand since the coronavirus forced billions of people to stop traveling.
  (3) Because of oversupply, storage tanks for WTI are becoming so full it is difficult to find space
  (4) There's no available storage anymore so the price of the commodity is effectively worthless
  (5) So when it's minus a dollar, they'll pay you a dollar to get it out of there.
- Way of Trading
  (1) The price plunge was partly due to the way oil is traded.
  (2) A futures contract is for 1,000 barrels of crude, delivered into Cushing, where energy companies own storage tanks with roughly 76 million barrels of capacity.
  (3) Each contract trades for a month, with the May contract due to expire on Tuesday.
  (4) Investors holding May contracts didn't want to take delivery of the oil and incur storage costs, and in the end had to pay people to take it off their hands
- What does this mean for consumers?
  (1) The crash in crude futures prices at Cushing won't necessarily translate into a crash in prices at the gas pump
- What does it mean for airlines?
  (1) For cash-strapped airlines, the decline in crude prices will make it cheaper to operate flights that are already nearly empty as people remain homebound due to the coronavirus
- What does it say about the economic rebound?
  (1) Even if demand were to return to pre-virus levels, it would take a long time to burn off all that stored crude

Sources The Hindu

SAARC countries unite to combat COVID-19 infections

Why in News
- crisis has united the SAARC countries earning them a praise from the World Bank for their quick response.
Corona situation and measures by SAARC:

(1) Among the SAARC countries, **India has the largest number of the COVID-19 cases** (18,601), followed by Pakistan with 9,216 infections, while Bhutan has the lowest number of infections with just six patients.

(2) They adopted international travel bans, enforced strict lockdowns, and **banned all religious gatherings** to battle the pandemic.

(3) Announced **special economic packages, set up a joint fund**.

(4) SAARC responded proactively to the daunting challenge with **India taking the lead by pledging USD 10 million toward a COVID-19 emergency fund**, an initiative led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in bringing the SAARC leaders together through a video-conference.

(5) Subsequently, **Nepal and Afghanistan pledged USD 1 million each; Maldives committed USD 200,000; Bhutan USD 100,000; Bangladesh USD 1.5 million; Sri Lanka USD 5 million and Pakistan pledged USD 3 million to the fund**.

Mr. Modi’s move revived the grouping as **India had been distancing itself from the SAARC in the last three years, citing the security challenge facing the region from terror networks based in Pakistan**.

Sources: The Hindu

Global hunger could double due to COVID-19 blow, says UN

**Why in News**

- The number of people facing acute food insecurity could nearly double this year to **265 million** due to the economic fallout of COVID-19.

**More in News**

- People facing acute food insecurity could nearly double this year to **265 million** due to the economic fallout of COVID-19.
- The impact of **lost tourism revenues, falling remittances and travel and other restrictions** linked to the coronavirus pandemic are expected to leave some **130 million people acutely hungry this year**, adding to around **135 million already in that category**.

Sources: The Hindu

Indian peacekeepers continue to provide humanitarian, healthcare assistance amidst COVID-19 threat

**Why in News**

- Indian peacekeepers serving in the UN missions across the world continue to provide **essential humanitarian and healthcare assistance** to the local communities notwithstanding the threat posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

**More in News**

- Indian peacekeepers with the **UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)** repaired an important **road intersection in Khor Adar**
- **United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)** healthcare peacekeepers are working relentlessly to prevent the COVID19 spread.

Sources: The Hindu

TCS to power Israel’s first fully digital bank

**Why in News**

- TCS will launch Israel’s first fully digital bank.

**More in News**

- **India’s largest software services** firm Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) will launch Israel’s first fully digital bank.
|● is being seen as a **transformative initiative** that can impact the business model of other sectors as well.  
● digital banking operations platform — **powered by the TCS BaNCS Global Banking Platform** |
|---|
**Sources** The Hindu

### Sri Lanka to seek $400mn debt swap facility from RBI to meet short-term financial needs

|**Why in News**  
● Sri Lanka is set to enter into an agreement with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for a **currency swap worth USD 400 million to boost the foreign reserves and ensure the financial stability** of the country which is badly hit by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic|
|---|
**More in News**  
● The swap arrangement is a decision two countries reach while doing trade related payment.  
● **Tourism** is the third-largest earner of foreign exchange in Sri Lanka.  
● The decline in tourist arrivals has hit the island nation's tourism industry in a big way|
|---|
**Sources** The Hindu

### China names its Mars mission Tianwen-1 ahead of its planned launch this year

|**Why in News**  
● China named its **first Mars exploration mission** to be launched later this year as **Tianwen-1**|
|---|
**More in News**  
● **Tianwen-1:**  
(1) China’s **first Mars exploration mission** to be launched  
(2) To be launched to mark the **50th anniversary of the launch of the country’s first satellite Dong Fang Hong-1 in 1970**  
(3) “Tianwen,” which means Heavenly Questions or Questions to Heaven, a poem written by China's well known poet Qu Yuan  
● **Mangalyaan:**  
(1) India became the **first Asian country** to have successfully launched its Mars orbiter mission, **Mangalyaan** which has entered the orbit of the red planet in 2014.  
(2) India also became the **first country to have entered the Martian orbit in its first attempt.**|
|---|
**Sources** The Hindu

### What is the impact of Donald Trump’s immigration ban on skilled workers from India?

|**Why in News**  
● United States President Donald Trump announced that he would be using an **executive order to suspend legal immigration into the U.S. for 60 days.**|
|---|
**More in News**  
● **Why Such Step?**  
(1) **The immediate context** of his proposal is the teetering U.S. economy, which, like many others across the world, has ground to a **virtual halt in the face of the pandemic.**
(2) The deeper context to the announcement is the fact that Mr. Trump is seeking re-election in the November 2020 election.

- What does it mean for Visa applicants?
  (1) The order is not expected to halt visa processing for many thousands of temporary employees, including a sizeable number of Indian nationals in the H-1B skilled worker category; agricultural workers classified under the H-2A visa; and seasonal workers, who fall into the H-2B category.
  (2) Policy will also likely carve out exemptions for certain categories of essential workers, including those in health care and who have a critical role to play in fighting the pandemic.
  (3) Exemptions are also being made for those who seek to immigrate via their immediate relatives.
  (4) Members of the armed forces, those who are immigrating for law enforcement reasons and are already in the pipeline, and those on the EB-5 programme, which requires individuals to invest at least $500,000 in U.S. real estate projects, will be considered.

- Could there be any impact on skilled workers of India?
  (1) So far as skilled workers seeking the H-1B visa are concerned, similar conditions apply. U.S. visa issuance in all countries, not only in India, has ground to a halt.
  (2) It could have an economically debilitating impact on the Indian IT and Information Technology Enabled Service (ITeS) sectors.
  (3) However, this derives more from the overall impact of the pandemic, and not from Mr. Trump’s immigration ban.

Sources: The Hindu

**Australia cancels premier multilateral air combat training exercise**

**Why in News**
- Australia has informed India that their premier multilateral air combat training exercise Pitch Black 2020 has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 situation.

**More in News**
- About Pitch Black:
  (1) In the last edition of Pitch Black in 2018, the IAF for the first time deployed fighter aircraft.
  (2) The next edition of Pitch Black is scheduled in 2022.
- About India-Australia defence relations:
  (1) The bilateral naval exercise AUSINDEX early last year saw participation of the largest Australian contingent ever to India with over 1,000 personnel.
  (2) The Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) has been long pending and is expected to be concluded soon as well as a broader maritime cooperation agreement including the Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) to elevate the existing strategic partnership.
  (3) The defence cooperation between India and Australia is underpinned on the Memorandum on Defence Cooperation 2006, the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation 2009 and the bilateral Framework for Security Cooperation 2014.

Sources: The Hindu

**U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom downgrades India in 2020 list**
### Why in News
- The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has downgraded India to the lowest ranking, “countries of particular concern” (CPC) in its 2020 report.

### More in News
- Findings of Report:
  1. So far as skilled workers seeking the H-1B visa are concerned, similar conditions apply. U.S. visa issuance in all countries, not only in India, has ground to a halt.
  2. Could have an economically debilitating impact on the Indian IT and Information Technology Enabled Service (ITeS) sectors.
  3. However, this derives more from the overall impact of the pandemic, and not from Mr. Trump’s immigration ban.
- The commission had recommended sanctions against Mr. Modi for the 2002 riots, and the U.S. government had subsequently cancelled his visa.
- India was categorised as a “Tier 2 country” in last year’s listing.
- This is the first time since 2004 that India has been placed in this category.

### Sources
The Hindu

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### China cancels annual Boao forum due to coronavirus

**Why in News**
- China has cancelled the 2020 Boao Forum for Asia due to the coronavirus epidemic.

**More in News**
- About Boao Forum
  1. Beijing is trying to promote it as the region's answer to Davos.
  2. The annual conference, initially scheduled for March 24-27, was postponed in early March due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

**Sources**
The Hindu

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### Coronavirus outbreak will not affect S-400 deliveries: Indian Ambassador

**Why in News**
- All the major military contracts, including the deliveries of S-400 air defence missile systems, between Russia and India will be on schedule and the coronavirus pandemic will have no effect on their timeframe.

**More in News**
- India-Russia S-400 Deal
  1. In October 2018, India signed a $5 billion deal with Russia to buy five units of the S-400.
  2. It was signed notwithstanding warning from the Trump administration that going ahead with the contract may invite U.S. sanctions.
  3. The S-400 is known as Russia’s most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system.
- The U.S. imposed sanctions on Russia under the stringent Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). The law also provides for punitive action against countries purchasing defence hardware from Russia.

**Sources**
The Hindu

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### India to use Chabahar port to send assistance to Afghanistan

**Why in News**
- An Indian ship began its journey to Iran’s Chabahar port, carrying a major consignment for Afghanistan of wheat and anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine, which is being used in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.
More in News

- leading to the integration of Afghanistan in India’s regional strategy for the containment of the disease through the SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund.
- The use of the Chabahar port is being viewed as symbolically important as it is the first time India is using it for a humanitarian mission since the top leaders of Iran criticized India for the violence in Delhi.

Sources: The Hindu

Top oil producers agree on deal to cut output

Why in News

- Top oil-producing countries agreed to cut output in order to boost plummeting oil prices due to the coronavirus crisis and a Russia-Saudi price war.

More in News

- Agreement to cut production by nearly 10 million barrel per day by OPEC+ members
- Oil prices have slumped since the beginning of the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Compounding the problem, Russia and Saudi Arabia had both ramped up output in a bid to hold on to market share and undercut US shale producers.
- The production cut deal marks a possible end of the price war between Riyadh and Moscow.

Sources: The Hindu

IMF approves debt relief for 25 countries

Why in News

- The International Monetary Fund announced immediate debt relief for 25 poor countries to help them free up funds to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

More in News

- Nearly all in Africa, but also Afghanistan, Yemen, Nepal and Haiti.
- The fund together with the World Bank have called for rich nations to stop collecting debt payments from poor countries from May 1 through June 2021.
- About CCRT:
  1. The debt relief will be funded by the IMF’s Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT),
  2. It was first set up to combat the West Africa Ebola outbreak in 2015 and has been repurposed to help countries fend off COVID-19.
- The fund currently has $500 million, with Japan, Britain, China and the Netherlands among its main contributors.

Sources: The Hindu

World economy bound to suffer ‘severe recession’: IMF

Why in News

- The world economy, already “sluggish” before the Coronavirus outbreak, is now bound to suffer a “severe recession” in 2020, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva has warned.

More in News

- Before pandemic, world economy was already in a fragile state as it was weighed down by trade disputes, policy uncertainty and geopolitical tensions.
- poses daunting challenges for policymakers in many emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs)
- Rising malnutrition is expected as 368.5 million children across 143 countries who normally rely on school meals for a reliable source of daily nutrition must now look to other sources.
**US, Brazil on first list of 13 countries to get India HCQ**

**Why in News**

- The government has cleared a list of 13 countries, including the US and Brazil, that will be among the first to receive hydroxychloroquine, the drug that has garnered global interest in the treatment and prevention of COVID-19.

**More in News**

- Approved the first list of 13 countries on a “first come first serve” basis.
- Nearly 35 per cent of the hydroxychloroquine tablets being exported and over 65 per cent of the active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) used to make the drug will be sent to the US.
- Besides the US, Brazil, Bahrain, Mauritius, Seychelles, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Spain and SAARC countries Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Maldives and Afghanistan are the 13 on the first list.

**Sources**

Indian Express

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**Government nod mandatory for FDI from neighbouring countries**

**Why in News**

- In a move that will restrict Chinese investments, the Centre has made prior government approval mandatory for foreign direct investments from countries which share a land border with India.

**More in News**

- For Neighbouring countries:
  1. Previously, only investments from Pakistan and Bangladesh faced such restrictions.
  2. Revised FDI policy is aimed at “curbing opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions of Indian companies due to the current COVID-19 pandemic,
  3. China's footprint in the Indian business space has been expanding rapidly, especially since 2014. Net Chinese investment in India until 2014 stood at $1.6 billion. The total current and planned Chinese investment in India has now crossed $26 billion, in the March 2020
- For other than neighbouring countries
  1. Investors from countries not covered by the new policy only have to inform the RBI after a transaction rather than asking for prior permission from the relevant government department.

**Sources**

Indian Express

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**India co-sponsors resolution calling for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines**

**Why in News**

- India has co-sponsored a UN General Assembly resolution that called for a fair, transparent and equitable access to essential medical supplies and any future vaccines developed to fight COVID-19.

**More in News**

- About resolution:
  1. Mexico-drafted resolution
  2. Intended for International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19
- Adoption of resolution:
  1. The 193-Member General Assembly adopted the Mexico-drafted resolution by consensus
Rajasthan ceases use of rapid testing kits as most results invalid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>The Rajasthan government stopped using rapid testing kits for coronavirus.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in News| • Stopped using rapid testing kits for coronavirus after they delivered inaccurate results  
• informed the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) about the issue  
• The State’s Health Minister Raghu Sharma said the kits gave only 5.4% accurate results against the expectation of 90% accuracy and therefore the kits were of no benefit. |

Sources: The Hindu

DRDO develops mobile virology research lab

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated through videoconference a mobile virology research and diagnostics laboratory (MVRDL).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in News| • It has been developed by the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO), together with ESIC Hospital, Hyderabad, and the private industry  
• Lab will be helpful in carrying out -  
  (1) diagnosis of COVID-19  
  (2) in virus-culturing for drug screening,  
  (3) convalescent plasma-derived therapy,  
  (4) comprehensive immune profiling of patients towards vaccine development  
  (5) early clinical trials specific to Indian population,  
• MVRDL is the combination of a bio-safety level (BSL)-3 lab and a BSL-2 lab and can process 1,000-2,000 samples a day  
• comply with the biosafety standards of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) |

Sources: The Hindu

CSIR lab defends sanitization tunnel after ministry’s advisory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>Advisories advocating against use of sanitization tunnels lack scientific basis, say CSIR-NCL, ICT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in News| • Ministry Advisory  
  (1) Spraying of chlorine on individuals can lead to irritation of eyes and skin  
  (2) Inhalation of sodium hypochlorite can lead to irritation of mucous membranes to the nose, throat, respiratory tract and may also cause bronchospasm  
• CSIR stand  
  (1) Efficacy of sodium hypochlorite, also known as hypo or bleach, ranging from 0.02% to 0.05% weight concentration was studied on personnel walking through mist tunnel unit |

Sources: The Hindu
(2) Results indicated that sodium hypochlorite used in this weight concentration range did not show any adverse effects on the skin.

(3) Thus, we recommend using 0.02% to 0.05 wt. % sodium hypochlorite solution (200 to 500 ppm) for external body surface sanitization of personnel walking through the mist tunnel by following standard safety precautions.

- World Health Organization Stand

(1) WHO had recommended the usage of sodium hypochlorite at 0.5% (equivalent to 5,000 ppm) for disinfecting surfaces.

(2) WHO had recommended the usage of 70% ethyl alcohol to disinfect small areas between uses, such as reusable dedicated equipment like thermometers.

ICMR nod for coronavirus detection assay developed by IIT Delhi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>IIT Delhi said it has got the approval from the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) for a probe-free coronavirus detection assay developed by it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in News</td>
<td>Approval making IIT-D the first academic institute to have obtained ICMR approval for a real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based diagnostic assay.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The assay was developed by researchers at IIT Delhi’s Kusuma School of Biological Sciences (KSBS).</td>
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<td>Using comparative sequence analyses, the IIT Delhi team identified unique regions (short stretches of RNA sequences) in the COVID-19/SARS COV-2 genome.</td>
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<td>These regions are not present in other human coronaviruses, providing an opportunity to specifically detect COVID-19.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Health Ministry does a U-turn on plasma therapy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>Plasma therapy is not an approved treatment for COVID-19 and is only one of the several therapies which is being explored currently, the Health Ministry said.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in News</td>
<td>The Health Ministry statement comes days after the Drug Controller-General of India gave its go-ahead to a proposal by the ICMR for the clinical trial of convalescent plasma therapy in COVID-19 patients as per the protocol developed by ICMR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Plasma treatment:</td>
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<td>(1) Plasma treatment is done by taking blood plasma from a cured COVID-19 patient to treat positive cases to effectively strengthen the immune system.</td>
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<td>(2) In 2014 convalescent plasma, collected from patients who had recovered from Ebola virus disease, was recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as an empirical treatment during the outbreak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) During the H1N1 virus outbreak of 2009 and SARS epidemic of 2003, plasma therapy was used to treat patients.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pharma units in limbo amid confusion over hydroxychloroquine exports

| Why in News | Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) maintains that the drug is still prohibited for export, causing some confusion in industry circles. |

Sources The Hindu
Why Confusion:
(1) The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced that it would “license” the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and supply it to various countries on a “government to government basis”,
(2) A week after Ministry’s announcement, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) maintains that the drug is still prohibited for export, causing some confusion in industry circles.

India is the lead producer for HCQ, an anti-malarial drug, while Indian-made paracetamol is used as a fever medication worldwide.

The Indian pharmaceutical industry has been painstakingly built over 25 years with a market of $22 billion to 206 countries.

Three quasi-subspecies of virus in circulation in India, says ICMR

A mixture of three quasi-subspecies of SARS-CoV-2 is in circulation in India, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said.

These imported variants showed no differences from how they behaved in the place of origin.

Even a single case was a hotspot, especially when the country registered its highest single-day jump in COVID-19 cases since January 30.

Two CSIR labs start sequencing novel coronavirus

India has shared nine whole genome sequences of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) with the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID) — a public platform started by the WHO in 2008 for countries to share genome sequences.

Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID)
(1) a public platform started by the WHO in 2008 for countries
(2) intended to share genome sequences

India:
(1) Shared nine whole genome sequences of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) with the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID)
(2) All the sequences have been shared by the Pune-based National Institute of Virology
(3) Sequencing the genome of SARS-CoV-2 will help understand where the virus came from, if there are different strains circulating in India, and how the virus has spread.
(4) According to CSIR Director-General Dr. Shekhar C. Mande, both the Hyderabad-based Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CSIR-CCMB) and the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB), Delhi have already started sequencing the virus.

How does alcohol in hand sanitisers (and soap) kill the coronavirus?

The last few weeks have seen hand sanitisers go off the shelves, to the extent that there is now a government order to ensure availability and to prevent profiteering.
More in News

- Corona Virus:
  1. The novel coronavirus has a lipid envelope.
  2. When the virus comes out through droplets when an infected person coughs, it is still within a cell. Even if it isn’t, it can stay alive in surfaces for some time.
  3. It replicates only when within the cell.
  4. Like other coronaviruses, SARS-CoV-2 particles are spherical and have proteins called spikes protruding from their surface.
  5. These spikes latch onto human cells, then undergo a structural change that allows the viral membrane to fuse with the cell membrane.

- How sanitizer/soap/alcohol works?
  1. Soap being a detergent destroys the envelope. The same is true for alcohol.
  2. As it replicates only when within the cell, that is how soap or alcohol attacks the virus by destroying envelope.
  3. Envelope is disrupted when it comes into contact with soap or a hand sanitiser with more than 60% alcohol.

Sources: Indian Express

To do rapid tests, or not to

Why in News

- The Indian Council of Medical Research advised states not to use rapid test kits for the next two days given too much variations have been reported in results of rapid test kits and RT-PCR kits.

More in News

- States have started to look at “rapid tests” — serological or blood tests — as an alternative to the longer, swab-based tests routinely being used.

- What is Serological test?
  1. Serology tests are blood-based tests that can be used to identify whether people have been exposed to a particular pathogen.
  2. Serology-based tests analyze the serum component of whole blood.
  3. The serum includes antibodies to specific components of pathogens, called antigens. These antigens are recognized by the immune system as foreign and are targeted by the immune response.
  4. Blood has two components, a matrix called plasma and the blood cells.
  5. The plasma minus the components of whole blood that cause it to clot is known as serum.
  6. The serological test screens the plasma for antibodies that the body develops against the virus. It takes less than 30 minutes.

- How is it different from the tests being done more widely?
  1. The standard test for COVID-19 so far has been the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR).
  2. It is done after taking nasal or throat swabs of the patient, from which RNA is extracted and converted to DNA, which is then amplified before being checked for confirmation of the virus.
  3. The PCR test takes up to nine hours.
  4. The long time is also because the swab is first screened to decide the family of the virus; if that confirms it is a coronavirus, a second test is done to ascertain if it is indeed the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV2.
  5. It is important to note, however, that the PCR test is capable of identifying infection at an earlier stage.
Medical masks, home-made masks, and what is recommended for whom

Why in News
- office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the government issued a detailed manual on how to make home-made masks and recommended it to everyone, especially those living in densely populated areas, to protect themselves from novel coronavirus disease.

More in News
- Background for detailed manual:
  1. By covering the nose and mouth, masks reduce the possibility of the virus getting inside the respiratory tract.
  2. SARS-CoV2, the virus behind COVID-19 disease, is being transmitted through air droplets that are released, for example, when an infected person coughs.
  3. The virus is also being spread by asymptomatic patients. As such, in public places, one cannot be sure whether an infected person is in close proximity or not.
  4. The advice had come at a time when the virus was not known to stay in the air for any significant amount of time. It was only in March that research was published showing that the novel coronavirus can indeed survive in the air for up to three hours.
- Different Masks:
  1. The one in great demand is called N95, so named because it is able to block at least 95% of particles in the air that are of the size 0.3 microns or bigger (1 micron is a millionth of a metre).
  2. A single SARS-CoV2 virus is typically up to 0.2 microns in size, so it can possibly penetrate the N95 mask.
  3. The virus is enclosed in air droplets that are much bigger in size. It is very unlikely that there are droplets that are less than 0.3 microns in size. So that way the N95 is a very good barrier to virus entry.
  4. N95s are much better than the typical surgical masks worn by medical staff whose main purpose is to keep out large droplets of wearer's saliva from going out, for example during a surgery.
  5. The manual says a home-made double-layered mask made of 100 per cent cotton cloth was 70 per cent as effective as a surgical mask in blocking small particles.

Sources
- Indian Express

How coronavirus enters lungs, affects breathing

Why in News
- The novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV2) has often done so by leading to pneumonia, the eventual cause of death.

More in News
- How Virus affects?
  1. Once the virus enters the body, it can cause discomfort when it reaches the air passages on the outside of the lungs. These passages conduct air into and from the lungs.
(2) The virus *injures the lining of the passageways*, and the body responds with an *inflammation*, which in turn irritates the nerves in the lining. That is when an infected person *coughs*

(3) Infection can be *more severe* if the virus goes past the lining of the airways, and *reaches the air sacs at the end of the air passages*—called alveoli

(4) Alveoli are responsible for the *exchange of gas* in the lungs. If they get infected, the *sacs respond with inflammatory fluids, which fill the air sacs.* That is what leads to pneumonia

- Pneumonia
  (1) *when the lungs’ ability to transfer oxygen is impaired*, and the infected person has difficulty breathing.
  (2) When a person *cannot inhale enough oxygen and exhale enough carbon dioxide*, *pneumonia can lead to death.*
  (3) *Pneumonia as a result of COVID-19 is viral pneumonia*, which means it *cannot be treated with antibiotics.*
  (4) In severe cases, *ventilator support may be needed to ensure sufficient oxygen circulation in the body.*

Sources Indian Express

### The COVID-19 virus and its polyproteins

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>● novel coronavirus (COVID-19), how it is easily infecting and transmitting itself from people to people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in News</td>
<td>● Difference between Bacteria and Virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) <strong>Bacteria are alive.</strong> Each bacterial cell has its <em>own machinery to reproduce itself.</em> Take a bacterial cell, and put it in a solution containing nutrients, it grows itself and multiplies in millions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) The <em>genes in the cells (genome, made up of DNA molecules)</em>, the information contained in which is transcribed as a <em>message to the messenger molecules called RNA</em>, and the <em>message therein is translated into action molecules called proteins</em>, which are the foot-soldiers that help the growth and multiplication of the bacterium.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Coronavirus are not have DNA as their genome, but RNA; in other words, they can only translate and not transcribe. Thus, they are <em>‘dead’, unable to renew and grow themselves</em>; they need help. This they <em>achieve by infecting ‘host cells’</em> which they bind to, and multiply by the millions.</td>
</tr>
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<td>(4) With no host cell to help, a virus is simply a dead storage box.</td>
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<td>● Polyprotein Strategy</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(1) Upon infection, the <em>entire RNA with its 33,000 bases</em> is translated in one shot as a <em>long tape of amino acid sequences.</em></td>
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<td>(2) Since this long chain contains several proteins within it, it is called a <em>polyprotein</em> sequence</td>
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<td>(3) One needs to analyze this long chain, <em>find the relevant proteins, isolate and study what each of them does in helping infection.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|             | (4) COVID19 has RNA-based genomes and subgenomes in its polyprotein sequence, that code for the *spike protein (S)*, the *membrane protein (M)*, the *envelope protein (E)*, and the *nucleocapsidprotein (N)*, which covers the viral cell nuclear material) - all of which are needed for the architecture of the virus.
### How Agra, Bhilwara and Pathanamthitta coronavirus models differ?

*(can be used as a solution)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>Agra (Uttar Pradesh)</th>
<th>Bhilwara (Rajasthan)</th>
<th>Pathanamthitta (Kerala)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After early cases in Agra, Bhilwara and Pathanamthitta, respective state and district administrations worked hard to contain the outbreak within those geographies.</td>
<td>(1) localized yet massive combing operation for contacts (2) Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme personnel (3) A congested area, within a 3-km radius in Lohamandi of Agra, was cordoned off immediately after the positive reports arrived (4) District administration identified epicentres, delineated impact of positive confirmed cases on the map and deployed a special task force as per the micro plan made by the district administration. (5) The hotspots were managed through an active survey and containment plan. (6) Area was identified within radius of 3 Km from the epicenter while 5 Km buffer zone was identified as the containment zone (7) In the containment zone, Urban Primary Health Centres were roped in. Each of the 1,248 teams had 2 workers including ANMs/ASHA/AWW reaching out to 9.3 lakh of people through household screening.</td>
<td>(1) spotlighted itself with a “ruthless containment strategy (2) The city was completely isolated with Section 144 CRPC being imposed. (3) In the first phase, essential services were allowed; in the second phase, there was a total shutdown with the city and district borders sealed and checkposts set up at every entry and exit point. (4) All trains, buses and cars were stopped. The District Magistrates of neighbouring districts too were asked to seal their borders. (5) The containment zone is usually 3 km around the epicentre, and the buffer zone is 7 km. (6) Through this, six areas were identified and special teams were deployed for continuous screening of suspected cases. (7) There was door-to-door supply of essential groceries, fruits, vegetables and milk. Raw and cooked food packets were distributed to the needy and there was a complete shutdown of industries, factories &amp; brick-kilns.</td>
<td>(1) Technology has been the hallmark of the Pathanamthitta model (2) Border sealing and contact tracing happened here too. (3) But more than just screening contacts, every person who had entered the district was screened and a database created so that they could be easily reached at short notice. (4) In addition, graphics were created showing the travel route of the positive cases and publicised. (5) This included details of all places the family had travelled to, and the potential contacts they would have made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources**

| The Hindu | Indian Express |
Rajasthan ceases use of rapid testing kits as most results invalid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>The Rajasthan government stopped using rapid testing kits for coronavirus.</th>
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<tr>
<td>More in News</td>
<td>stopped using rapid testing kits for coronavirus after they delivered inaccurate results</td>
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<tr>
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<td>informed the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) about the issue</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The State’s Health Minister Raghu Sharma said the kits gave only 5.4% accurate results against the expectation of 90% accuracy and therefore the kits were of no benefit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: The Hindu

Less than 1% wastage in FCI go-downs: Paswan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>Minister for Food and Public Distribution claimed that less than one per cent of the total foodgrains in FCI godowns have gone waste since 2015-16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in News</td>
<td>623.06 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) of rice and wheat were procured in 2015-16, out of which 3116 tonnes was lost. This was 0.005% of the total purchase.</td>
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<td>In 2016-17, the loss was 0.014 per cent</td>
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<td>In 2019-20, 0.002 per cent of the foodgrains was damaged, which amounted to a total of 1930 tonnes of grains</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Sources: The Hindu

Lockdown in India has impacted 40 million internal migrants: World Bank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>The nationwide lockdown in India, which started about a month ago, has impacted nearly 40 million internal migrants, the World Bank has said.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in News</td>
<td>Title of report : ‘COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens’</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Findings of report</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(1) the magnitude of internal migration is about two-and-a-half times that of international migration.</td>
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<td>(2) Governments need to address the challenges facing internal migrants by including them in health services and cash transfer and other social programmes, and protecting them from discrimination, it said</td>
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<td>(3) coronavirus crisis has affected both international and internal migration in the South Asia region.</td>
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<td>(4) The number of recorded, primarily low-skilled emigrants from India and Pakistan rose in 2019 relative to the prior year but is expected to decline in 2020 due to the pandemic and oil price declines impacting the Gulf countries</td>
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<td>(5) In India, the number of low-skilled emigrants seeking mandatory clearance for emigration rose slightly by 8% to 3,68,048 in 2019.</td>
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<td>(6) migration flows are likely to fall, but the stock of international migrants may not decrease immediately, since migrants cannot return to their countries due to travel bans and disruption to transportation services.</td>
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<td>(7) highlighted the global shortage of health professionals and an urgent need for global cooperation and long-term investments in medical training.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: The Hindu
RBI relaxes export rules, allows States and UTs to borrow more

**Why in News**
- RBI has announced more measures to fight economic disruptions caused by COVID-19, including extension of the realisation period of export proceeds and allowing States to borrow more

**More in News**
- Measures:
  1. The measure will enable exporters to realise their receipts, especially from COVID-19 affected countries, within the extended period,
  2. also provide greater flexibility to exporters to negotiate future export contracts with buyers abroad.
  3. The central bank has also formed an advisory committee to review the ways and means limit for State governments and union territories.
  4. Till the panel submits its report, the central bank has increased the ways and means advances limit by 30% for States and union territories.

**Sources**
The Hindu

Government cuts interest rates on NSC, PPF

**Why in News**
- The government slashed interest rates on small savings schemes, including National Savings Certificate and Public Provident Fund,

**More in News**
- Govt slashed interest rates by up to 1.4% for the first quarter of 2020-21, in line with the moderation in bank deposit rates.
- Interest rates are paid quarterly, while the five-year term deposit will earn 6.7%, down from the current rate of 7.7%.

**Sources**
The Hindu

NBFCs seek RBI clarification on what constitutes a ‘default’

**Why in News**
- NBFCs are planning to write to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) seeking clarification on what constitutes a default

**More in News**
- RBI norms:
  1. The regulator has mandated additional provision for accounts that are in default
  2. According to RBI norms, if repayment is overdue for 0 to 30 days, it is classified under SMA 0 (special mention account), if overdue by 31 to 60 days, it is SMA 1 and if overdue from 61 to 90 days, the account is classified as SMA 2.
- NBFC concern/confusion:
  1. The word ‘default’ can be construed to mean even a single-day default
  2. Lack of clarity about ‘default’ from regulator

**Sources**
The Hindu

Rupee slips as investors flock to safe havens
Why in News
- The rupee slipped 30 paise against the dollar with greenback strengthening against major currencies.

More in News
- Investors flocked to safe havens following uncertainties about the global economy after U.S. crude oil futures slipped into negative zone for the first time in history
- The dollar index, which gauges the greenback’s strength against a basket of six currencies, rose by 0.25% to 100.2

Sources
The Hindu

CII says India growth may slip to 1.5% in FY21

Why in News
- The Confederation of Indian Industry said it expected India’s economy to slow down considerably, with its estimate ranging from a contraction of 0.9% to a growth of 1.5%, in the current financial year due to the COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent lockdown

More in News
- In the manufacturing sector
  1. under lockdown, only food processing, pharmaceuticals and medical equipment units were operational
  2. construction and mining activities had halted completely.
- In the services sector
  1. the majority of trade, transportation and hospitality units remain closed
  2. financial, IT and government services remain partially operational.
- Future trend prediction by CII
  1. Any significant revival in investment activity is unlikely as capacity utilisation levels may remain sub-optimal.
  2. Consumption demand is likely to remain lacklustre as people’s incomes have been impacted.”
  3. on the external front, as economies across the globe continue to struggle with the pandemic, global trade may decline by 13-32% in 2020, as estimated by the World Trade Organisation.
  4. In the ‘baseline scenario,’ the GDP is expected to grow at 0.6% as economic activity is expected to remain constrained due to continuing restrictions on the free movement of goods and people beyond the lockdown period.
  5. This will lead to disruption in supply chains, slow pick-up in investment activity, labour shortages in the short-run and muted consumption demand on account of reduced household incomes
- CII suggestions
  1. suggested urgent fiscal interventions, including cash transfers amounting to ₹2 lakh crore to JAM account holders, in addition to the ₹1.7 lakh stimulus already announced.
  2. It had also recommended additional working capital limits to be provided by banks backed by a government guarantee, at 4-5% interest.
  3. suggested that a fund or SPV be formed with a corpus of ₹1.5 lakh crore that will subscribe to NCDs/bonds of corporates rated A and above. “The fund can be seeded by the government contributing a corpus of ₹10,000-20,000 crore, with further investments from banks and financial institutions such as LIC, PFC, EPF, NIIF, IIFCL etc.
The CII has suggested a credit protection scheme whereby 75-80% of the loan should be guaranteed by the RBI, i.e. if the borrower defaults, the RBI should buy the loan and repay the bank up to 75-80% of the loan so that the risk to the lender is limited.

SIDBI could provide the guarantee for loans to industry and trade while NABARD could provide the guarantee for loans to agro-processing sectors.

**Coronavirus lockdown | Industries cannot be forced to pay wages during lockdown: panel**

**Why in News**
- The Parliamentary Committee on Labour in its report on the Industrial Relations Code, 2019 has recommended that “in case of natural calamities, payment of wages to the workers until the re-establishment of the industry may be unjustifiable.”

**More in News**
- Industrial Code:
  1. The Industrial Code makes it incumbent upon the employer to pay 50% wages to the workers/employees who are laid off due to shortage of power, coal, raw material etc for 45 days.
- Committee recommendations:
  1. The Committee has expressed reservations for payment of the prescribed percentage of wages to the workers in the event of closure of an establishment due to “natural calamity.”
  2. The Committee has suggested that “clarity” be brought in so that employers “not responsible for closure or lay off, are not disadvantaged in case of such natural calamity of high intent.
  3. The basic idea about our recommendations is that the industry should also not be forced when the situation is beyond their control. The law has to be reasonable.
  4. It is for the government to step in and extend a helping hand for the industries.
- Dissent note against the report:
  1. Mr. Kareem said the recommendations are unfortunate especially in the present context.
  2. “Given the present situation where the entire nation is fighting against monstrous attack of novel coronavirus and when every ordinary citizen has been shouldering the risk beyond his/her capacity, I am not able to understand the rationale behind these recommendations”

**Sources**
- The Hindu

**NCDEX gets SEBI go-ahead for Rs 500-cr IPO**

**Why in News**
- Agricultural commodity bourse, National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange Ltd (NCDEX), has received capital market regulator SEBI’s approval to launch the Rs 500-crore initial public offer (IPO).
More in News

- Sebi’s observations are mandatory for any company to launch public issues like initial share-sale, follow-on public offer (FPO) and rights issue.
- After BSE and MCX, this would be the third listing by an exchange.
- About NCDEX:
  1. The exchange offers services across the entire post-harvest agricultural commodities value chain by utilising a varied presence, which has enabled it to create a wide network of stakeholders and market participants.
  2. It also engages in research, training and building awareness in agricultural commodities market through NCDEX Institute of Commodity Markets and Research.

Sources

The Hindu

Parekh for easing 90-day NPA deadline norm

Why in News

- HDFC Ltd. chairman Deepak Parekh has suggested a relaxation in non-performing assets (NPA) classification to a period of six months.

More in News

(Can be used for economy recovery measures)

- Suggestions:
  1. Suggested that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) approve one-time restructuring of loans.
  2. Asked State governments to waive stamp duty for a limited time period to help revive demand.
  3. Advised real estate developers to liquidate unsold inventory to generate funds rather than going for costly borrowings to deal with the COVID-19 crises.
  4. Since banks were averse to risks, recommendations had been made to the RBI to directly purchase corporate bonds/commercial papers, as primary markets had died down.

Sources

The Hindu

World Bank approves $1 billion emergency funds for India to tackle pandemic

Why in News

- The World Bank approved $1 billion emergency financing for India to tackle the coronavirus outbreak.

More in News

- “In India, $1 billion emergency financing will support better screening, contact tracing, and laboratory diagnostics; procure personal protective equipment; and set up new isolation wards,” the World Bank said.
- In South Asia, the World Bank also approved $200 million for Pakistan, $100 million for Afghanistan, $7.3 million for Maldives and $128.6 million for Sri Lanka.
- The World Bank said it is now working to grant up to $160 billion over the next 15 months.
- The broader economic program will aim to shorten the time to recovery, create conditions for growth, support small and medium enterprises, and help protect the poor and vulnerable.

Sources

The Hindu

E-commerce firms can’t supply non-essential goods, says government
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) clarified that supply of non-essential goods by e-commerce companies will remain prohibited during the lockdown.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in News</td>
<td>As per the April 15 order, “e-commerce companies” and vehicles used by their operators had been allowed but it was not specified if it was applicable to items others than essentials. MHA had revised its guidelines issued under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, to allow the States to decide on the additional public activities to be allowed from April 20 in non-hotspot zones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources</td>
<td>The Hindu</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**No plan for GST relief for key medical items: Centre**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>The Centre does not plan to provide an exemption from paying Goods and Services Tax (GST) for key medical items such as ventilators, sanitisers, coronavirus (COVID-19) diagnostic test kits, masks and other protective equipment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in News</td>
<td>Current structure (1) Currently, sanitisers are taxed at 18%, while ventilators and test kits are taxed at 12%. Masks attract 5% GST. (2) Basic customs duty and health cess have been exempted on most of these items till September Centre stand: (1) Exempting GST would increase manufacturing costs without helping the consumer much, and would also incentivise import of such items from China, official sources said. (2) As GST is a value added tax collected on net basis at each stage of the supply chain, an exemption would lead to blocked input tax credit, thus increasing the cost and compliance burden for manufacturers, without reducing the cost for consumers (3) The increased manufacturing cost would discourage domestic manufacturers and incentivise imports from foreign players who would not face any input tax credit blockage, (4) Given that the government itself is the single largest buyer of these medical items during the pandemic — and is supplying such goods for free — it may not be desirable to distort the rate structure at the cost of the domestic supplier who is making a much-needed effort to ramp up production capacity,</td>
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<td>Sources</td>
<td>The Hindu</td>
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</table>
What are the concerns around the AarogyaSetu app?

Why in News

- On April 2, the AarogyaSetu app — for pan-India use and available in 11 languages — was launched as the main contact tracing technology endorsed by the Central government.

More in News

- About App:
  1. Developed by the National Informatics Centre under the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology
  2. The app has now added on functionalities such as donating to the Prime Minister’s Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund, or PM CARES fund, and hosting e-passes for essential services providers.

- How it works?
  1. It is designed to keep track of other AarogyaSetu users that a person came in contact with, and alert him or her if any of the contacts tests positive for COVID-19.
  2. It achieves this using the phone’s Bluetooth and GPS capabilities.
  3. According to the privacy policy of the app, it gives users a colour coding of green and yellow based on their self assessment.
  4. The data of users who fall in the yellow category are uploaded to the server, while that of those in the green category — purportedly the lower risk group — is retained in the app.
  5. When the Bluetooths of two AarogyaSetu users sniff each other out, this unique digital identity is exchanged along with the time and location of the meeting.
  6. When an app user tests positive, all unique digital identities in his or her records get an alert on the risk they face and instructions on self isolation and next steps.

- Has it been effective?
  1. The AarogyaSetu app faces the same issue as every other contact tracing technology that has come up during the pandemic period — it is people dependent. It needs widespread usage and self-reporting to be effective.
  2. There are technical loopholes as well. The unique digital identity in AarogyaSetu is a static number, which increases the probability of identity breaches.
  3. A better approach would be constantly-changing digital identification keys like what Google and Apple deploy in their joint contact tracing technology.
  4. The abundance of data collected is also potentially problematic. AarogyaSetu uses both Bluetooth as well as GPS reference points, which could be seen as an overkill. Other apps such as TraceTogether make do with Bluetooth.

- Are there privacy concerns?
(1) With **no legislation that spells out in detail how the online privacy of Indians is to be protected**, AarogyaSetu users have little choice but to accept the privacy policy provided by the government. (2) As per the policy, **“persons carrying out medical and administrative interventions necessary in relation to COVID-19” will have access to the data.**

**CSIR to let firms defer fee on use of its technology**

**Why in News**
- The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has said it will **allow firms that use its intellectual property to manufacture items for containing COVID-19 to defer payments for up to six months.**

**More in News**
- **About CSIR:**
  (1) Being a **publicly funded organization**, technologies developed by the CSIR are generally **available to the industry on a non-exclusive licensing basis**, that is any company can earn the right to manufacture and sell a product **provided they pay a technology fee.**
  (2) **Three CSIR laboratories** were already part of the network of government laboratories **involved in testing for the disease.**
  (3) These were the **Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, the Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine and the Institute of Microbial Technology.**
- CSIR technologies include a paper strip-based test to detect the virus, various kinds of hand sanitisers, a pre-fabricated makeshift hospital and a 3-D printed ventilator.

**GI tag to Manipur black rice, Gorakhpur terracotta**

**Why in News**
- Chak-Hao, the black rice of Manipur and the Gorakhpur terracotta have bagged the **Geographical Indicati on (GI) tag.**

**More in News**
- **About Chak-Hao:**
  (1) a scented glutinous rice which has been in cultivation in Manipur over centuries, is characterised by its special aroma.
  (2) It is normally eaten during community feasts and is **served as Chak-Hao kheer.**
  (3) Chak-Hao has also been used by traditional medical practictioners as **part of traditional medicine.**
  (4) this rice takes the **longest cooking time of 40-45 minutes** due to the presence of a fibrous bran layer and higher crude fibre content.
- **About terracotta work of Gorakhpur**
  (1) It is a centuries-old traditional art form, where the potters make various animal figures like, horses, elephants, camel, goat, ox, etc. with **hand-applied ornamentation.**
  (2) The entire work is done with bare hands and artisans use **natural colour, which stays fast for a long time.**

**Sources**
- The Hindu

**Intellectual Property rights | India remains on U.S. Priority Watch List**
Why in News

- India continues to be on the ‘Priority Watch List’ of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) for lack of adequate intellectual property (IP) rights protection and enforcement, - Annual Report of USTR

More in News

- Findings of Report:
  1. These long-standing concerns were about innovators being able to receive, maintain and enforce patents particularly in the pharmaceutical sector; concerns over copyright laws not incentivizing the creation and commercialization of content; and an outdated trade secrets framework
  2. India also further restricted the transparency of information provided on state-issued pharmaceutical manufacturing licenses, continues to apply restrictive patentability criteria to reject pharmaceutical patents,
  3. The report also mentioned high customs duties on IP-intensive products such as medical devices, pharmaceuticals, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) products, solar energy equipment, and capital goods,
  4. The government’s 2019 draft Copyright Amendment Rules, if implemented, would have “severe” consequences for Internet-content rights holders, the report said, as the proposed rules broadened the scope of compulsory licensing from radio and television broadcasting to online broadcasting
  5. Trademark counterfeiting levels were “problematic”, the report said and there were “excessive delays” in obtaining trademarks due to a lack of examination quality.
  6. The U.S., the report noted, continues to urge India to join the Singapore Treaty on the Law of Trademarks, a treaty that harmonises trademark registration.
  7. Algeria, Argentina, Chile, China, Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine and Venezuela are also on the Priority Watch List.

Sources

The Hindu

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**Nobel laureate Phillip Anderson dies at 96**

**Why in News**

- Philip Anderson, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist has died at 96

**More in News**

- Anderson will be known as the man who started solid state physics as a field.
- He expanded the world’s understanding of magnetism and superconductivity

**Sources**

The Hindu

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**Prominent virologist Gita Ramjee dies from coronavirus**

**Why in News**

- World-renowned virologist Gita Ramjee has become the first Indian-origin South African to have died after contracting the novel coronavirus

**More in News**

- Outstanding Female Scientist Award in Lisbon by the European Development Clinical Trials Partnerships (EDCTP) for her lifetime commitment to finding new HIV prevention methods

**Sources**

The Hindu

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**Jharkhand’s chhau dancers and artisans take a battle stance against**

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66  Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs April - 2020 (Study Material)
COVID-19

- This year, in response to the pandemic and resulting lockdown, the Chhau artisans are instead finding inventive ways to create personal protective equipment (PPE).

More in News

- About Chhau:
  1. In April every year, for more than a century, this community has celebrated Spring with chhau, a masked ritual dance drama.
  2. There are three versions of chhau. Purulia chhau in West Bengal, Mayurbhanj chhau in Odisha and Seraikela chhau in Jharkhand.
  3. The artform features epics and regional legends, using martial art and acrobatic moves
  4. Mask making began in Charida, West Bengal, about 150 years ago, and these colourful masks depicting faces of boldly painted gods, heroes, birds and animals are still popular today
  5. Mask makers come from two areas: Charida and Seraikela, as Odisha's chhau does not use masks.

- In the response to corona, artisans using masks to create PPE

Sources

The Hindu

India co-sponsors resolution calling for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines

- India has co-sponsored a UN General Assembly resolution that called for a fair, transparent and equitable access to essential medical supplies and any future vaccines developed to fight COVID-19

More in News

- About resolution:
  1. Mexico-drafted resolution
  2. Intended for International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19

- Adoption of resolution:
  1. The 193-Member General Assembly adopted the Mexico-drafted resolution by consensus
  2. Pakistan was among the small minority of nations that did not sponsor the resolution

- India has been at the forefront of sending essential medical supplies and medicines such as anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine to several nations - US, Mauritius and Seychelles, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, The Maldives, Mauritius, Sri Lanka and Myanmar

Sources

The Hindu

Sikkim not to host Kailash Yatra through Nathu La

- The Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and border trade between India and China through the Nathu La pass will not take place this year due to the Coronavirus outbreak: Sikkim Government

More in News

- About Yatra
  1. The Ministry of External Affairs organises the yatra from June-September each year

Sources

The Hindu
(2) It organizes through two different routes — Lipulekh Pass (Uttarakhand) and Nathu La Pass (Sikkim).
(3) Kailash Mansoravar is in Tibet
- Sikkim Government issued order of cancellation of yatra this year
- Sikkim’s tourism sector has been severely hit due to the coronavirus outbreak, with the state government losing out revenue of more than Rs 10 crore

Sources The Hindu

NGT directs team of Centre, CPCB to supervise scientific disposal of COVID-19 waste

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>The National Green Tribunal directed a team, comprising the Centre and the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), to supervise handling and scientific disposal of COVID-19 waste in accordance with the guidelines.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
- But the coronavirus pandemic has presented further challenge in terms of capacity to scientifically dispose of generated waste.  
- directed the state Departments of Environment and pollution control boards to ensure compliance of Biomedical Waste Management Rules, 2016 and furnish action taken report to CPCB  
- The CPCB has issued revised guidelines for management of waste generated during the diagnostics and treatment of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patient |
| Sources     | The Hindu                                                                                                                                                                                        |

Saudi Arabia abolishes flogging as punishment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>Saudi Arabia has abolished flogging as a punishment.</th>
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</table>
| More in News | convicts who would previously have been sentenced to the lash will from now on receive fines or prison terms instead,  
- The state human rights commission said, - a “major step forward” in the reform programme launched by the King and his powerful son. |
| Sources     | The Hindu                                                                                                                                                                                        |

BRO opens Rohtang Pass 3 weeks in advance

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Why in News</th>
<th>The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) opened the Rohtang Pass, three weeks in advance, for transporting essential supplies and relief materials to Lahaul and Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh amid the lockdown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in News | About Rohtang Pass:  
(1) The pass is at 13,058 feet on the eastern Pir Panjal Range of the Himalayas  
(2) The operation to clear snow is carried out every year as the pass remains snow-bound for almost six months, from mid-November to mid-May, isolating Lahaul and Spiti districts from the rest of the country.  
(3) The valley depends on air traffic for external logistics and supplies during winters  
- Decision to open in advance:  
(1) for transporting essential supplies and relief materials to Lahaul and Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh amid the lockdown |
| Sources     | The Hindu                                                                                                                                                                                        |
(2) The Army said blizzards, freezing temperatures and avalanches at Rahala Fall, Beas Nallah and Rani Nallah delayed the operation.

(3) The work on the 8.8-km-long Atal Tunnel, below the Rohtang Pass, was also stalled when the lockdown started.

Sources: The Hindu

Saudi Arabia ends death penalty for minors

Why in News: ● Saudi Arabia’s King Salman has ordered an end to the death penalty for crimes committed by minors.

More in News: ● The decision comes on the heels of another ordering judges to end the practice of flogging, replacing it with jail time, fines or community service.

● The crown prince has sought to modernize the country, attract foreign investment and revamp Saudi Arabia’s reputation globally.

Sources: The Hindu

IGNCA to begin online lectures on arts

Why in News: ● Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) has decided to move its lectures online, with the first one on the future of the arts post-COVID-19.

More in News: ● To begin with, the IGNCA trustees, including classical dancers Sonal Mansingh and Padma Subrahmanyam and art director Nitin Desai, would give lectures.

Sources: The Hindu

Facebook tones down Libra project

Why in News: ● Within ten months of publishing its first white paper on cryptocurrency, Facebook has toned down the ambitious Libra project.

More in News: ● Before 10 months:

(1) The social networking giant had said that its digital currency will be the future of global money, and may lay the foundation of a new financial order.

(1) The project will now focus on building more traditional payment network in which coins will be tied to a local currency, similar to the digital dollars in a PayPal account.

Sources: The Hindu

IITs not to take part in World University Rankings

Why in News: ● Several Indian Institutes of Technology, including IIT Bombay, IIT Madras, IIT Delhi, IIT Guwahati, IIT Kanpur, IIT Kharagpur and IIT Roorkee, have decided not to participate in the World University Rankings, for 2020.

More in News: ● About World Universal Rankings:

(1) an annual publication of university rankings by the Times Higher Education (THE) magazine

(2) Some of the major parameters for the ranking are having Nobel Laureates among faculty and having a strong international faculty and student presence on the campus.

● IIT stand:

(1) said they may reconsider their decision next year if THE “is able to convince them about the parameters and transparency in their ranking process”.

Sources: The Hindu
| Why in News | This year, the **annual National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)** exercise wasn’t carried out due to the COVID-19 lockdown |
| Sources | The Hindu |

**U.S. lawmakers urge China to shut down ‘wet markets’ amid coronavirus crisis**

| Why in News | Amidst the coronavirus pandemic, a group of top U.S. lawmakers have **urged China to urgently shut down all of its operating wet markets** |
| More in News | Wet markets:  
(1) A wet market **sells fresh meat, fish, produce, and other perishable goods** as distinguished from “dry markets”.  
(2) It gets its name from **the floors being constantly wet** from the spraying of fresh produce and cleaning of meat and seafood stalls.  
(3) A **zoonotic disease** is an illness that can be **passed from an animal to a human**.  
US law makers urged China as that have a potential to expose humans to **health risks through the introduction of zoonotic disease** |
| Sources | The Hindu |

**Lewis of ‘DLS method’ fame passes away**

| Why in News | Tony Lewis, one of the men behind the **Duckworth-Lewis-Stern (DLS) method used in weather-affected limited-overs matches**, has died |
| More in News | About DLS:  
(1) **Tony**, alongside fellow mathematician Frank Duckworth, devised the Duckworth-Lewis method which was **introduced in 1997**.  
(2) **adopted officially by the ICC (International Cricket Council)** in 1999.  
(3) **Renamed the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern Method in 2014**.  
(4) **the mathematical formula continues to be used in rain reduced limited overs cricket games across the globe**.  
(5) **The formula came about in response to the extraordinary climax of a rain-interrupted 1992 World Cup semifinal in Sydney.**  
(6) **The method then in use was based on removing the lowest-scoring overs from each team’s innings**. |
| Sources | The Hindu |

**‘Pink Supermoon’ to be visible on April 8**

| Why in News | People will be able to watch ‘Supermoon’ on April 8 evening |
| More in News | **Supermoon**, which will be a **little larger than the usual full moon**, will be visible from India in the evening of April 8.  
**Traditionally, the full moon in the month of April is named after certain wildflowers, called pink moss, native to eastern North America**, and hence the name ‘pink’ refers to the pink flower that blossoms during this time and **not the colour of the moon**. |
| Sources | The Hindu |

**Amabie, the ‘spirit’ that went viral**

| Why in News | As COVID-19 continues its global rampage, **countries around the world are developing signature motifs of resistance**. |
About Amabie

1. In Japan, it is a three-legged mer-person with scaly skin, lank hair and a beak that looks like the artistic offspring of a marriage between Picasso and Dali: the amabie.

2. The amabie is a pictorial representation of a 19th century yokai or mythological spirit that has emerged as the social media mascot for the novel coronavirus, trending.

3. The story of the half-human, half-fish amabie spirit was first featured in a woodblock-printed news sheet in April 1846.

Sources: The Hindu

Matterhorn mountain in Swiss Alps lights up with Indian flag

Why in News

- Switzerland has expressed solidarity with India in its fight against the coronavirus pandemic by projecting the tricolour on the famous Matterhorn mountain in the Swiss Alps to give “hope and strength” to all Indians.

More in News

- Swiss light artist Gerry Hofstetter has been lighting up the 4,478-meter pyramidal peak straddling between Switzerland and Italy with spectacular displays of flags of different countries.

Sources: The Hindu

Festivals, rice beer in intangible cultural heritage list

Why in News

- Culture Ministry publishes draft list of more than 100 items, seeks public comment.

More in News

- Cultural Heritage List
  1. national list was an attempt to further awareness and protection to more such elements.
  2. The initiative is a part of the ministry’s Vision 2024 programme.
  3. As per the 2003 UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the list has five broad categories — oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, knowledge and practices related to nature and traditional craftsmanship.

- What included in the list?
  1. traditional folk festival of Pachoti in Assam, where the birth of a baby, particularly a male infant as the tradition “relates to the birth of Krishna”, is celebrated with relatives and neighbours.
  2. The oral traditions of the transgender community called Kinnar Kanthgaet and compositions of Ameer Khusro are among the entries from Delhi.
  3. Gujarat’s Patola silk textiles from Patan with its geometric and figurative patterns.
  4. The practice of tying a turban or safa across Rajasthan.
  5. From Jammu and Kashmir, the Kalam Bhat or Qalambaft gharana of Sufiana music in Budgam district and from Ladakh, the Buddhist chanting across both Leh and Kargil districts were on the list of intangible cultural heritage.
  6. The making of khor, a rice beer, by the Tangkhul community in Manipur as well as other crafts associated with it, like making gourd vessels and wicker baskets.
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| (7) **Kerala’s martial art form, Kalaripayuttu,**  
(8) The practice of **making designs at the entrance of homes and temples called kolam** in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh  
(9) Different forms of **shadow puppet theatre** — Chamadyacha Bahulya in Maharashtra, Tolu Bommalatta in Andhra Pradesh, Togalu Gombeyatta in Karnataka, Tolu Bommalattam in Tamil Nadu, Tolpava Kuthu in Kerala and Ravanchhaya in Orissa — have also been included. |
| **Sources** | The Hindu |