Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs July 2020

By Jawwad Kazi
UPSC

Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs July 2020
(Study Material)

By Jawwad Kazi

https://t.me/jawwadkazicurrentaffairs

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Year 2020
## Contemporary Issues

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One Nation, One Voter ID


Why is it in News?
- Recently the Election Commission of India decided to allow voting through postal ballot for senior citizens above the age of 65 in the upcoming Bihar elections due to greater risk associated with Covid-19.
- Hence the issue of voting rights of migrants came to the fore as they too miss out on exercising their right to vote. This led to the suggestion of ‘One Nation, One Voter id’.

Migrants statistics:
- Population:
  2. National Election Study survey - approximately 20 crore voters out of 91.05 crore registered voters want to vote but are unable to do so.
- Background:
  1. Migrant labourers mostly hail from most poverty-stricken rural areas and from among the most marginalised sections (SC/STs and OBCs, and other minorities).
  2. They migrate for employment, particularly in the construction sector, domestic work, in brick kilns, mines, transportation, security, agriculture, etc
  3. These migrants don’t enrol themselves as voters at place of work as they don’t want to settle there. They intend to return after completion of work or season.

Present Challenges:
- Migrants do not satisfy the requirements of being an “ordinary resident” under Section 20 of the Representation of People Act, (RP Act), in the host state, to obtain voter cards.
- They are, therefore, unable to transfer their constituency.
- Economic constraints disable a majority of them from voting as they cannot travel to their home states on the polling day.

Constitution and Laws:
- Under article 326 of the Constitution, elections be held on the basis of universal adult franchise.
- The Supreme Court has interpreted the right to vote as an extension of the fundamental right of the freedom of expression.
- So, ensuring this fundamental right to the Indian migrant workers, irrespective of caste, gender, creed, ethnicity or faith is a constitutional obligation of the ECI.

Benefits of One Nation, One Voter ID:
- Reduction of burden on State Exchequer:
  1. Elections involve lot of human resources and state machineries.
  2. Wastage of papers in printing lots of unnecessary copies of electoral rolls in the country will also be stopped.
- Prevention of election malpractices:
  1. Every election faces all issues related to bogus voting, mistakes/duplication of names in
electoral rolls, new registration of voters etc.

(2) Single card might reduce or eliminate these issues and make effective voting in largest democracy in the world.

- **Provision of Right to Vote:**
  (1) Providing ballot portability will ensure basic democratic right to vote to ignored communities such as migrants.

- **Welfare of migrants:**
  (1) Political right to vote might force government to initiate dedicated welfare policies for migrants.
  (2) Right to vote will empower vulnerable communities to access their other basic civil rights.

**Way forward:**

- **Role of Election Commission:**
  (1) It should ensure that every Indian who is eligible to vote is able to exercise his right.
  (2) It should ensure that Aadhaar-Voter ID linkages should not result in the exclusion of eligible individuals.
  (3) It could undertake substantial outreach measures using the network of District Collectorates to reach migrant workers.

- **Aadhaar-linked voter-ID:**
  (1) ECI is already testing its feasibility and this would enable to use extensive and unique database of Aadhaar.
  (2) Migrants should be able to physically vote in their city of work, based on the address on their existing voter IDs and duration of their temporary stay.

- **Use of technology:**
  (1) ‘One Nation One Voter ID’ should ensure native ballot portability.
  (2) Technologically feasible to record and transfer votes to their respective constituencies without compromising on the credibility of the election process.

- **Expansion of Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System:**
  (1) The ECI has under Section 60(c) of the RP Act the power to notify a certain class of persons to vote via postal ballot.
  (2) Presently, government employees who are away from home, military personnel and other classified service providers can vote through Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System.
  (3) Expand such kind of systems to migrants and NRIs to ensure “no voters are left behind”.

**Source: The Hindu, Indian Express**
Custodial Torture

Syllabus: GS2: Executive: Police Reforms

Why is it in news?
- Recently two people, booked for trivial offences, died in the custody of Tamil Nadu police allegedly as a result of custodial torture.
- In Last 3 years, NHRC has received more than 5000 complaints of custodial deaths.

Reasons for Rising Instances of Torture Under Police Custody:
- Impunity of the police: Police persons responsible for such act hardly punished.
- Work Culture:
  1. Local police officers are under immense work pressure and given unfair treatment by seniors.
  2. No domestic law: There is no specific law that deals with torture prosecution in police custody. Even the Law Commission has advised the government to enact such law.
- Justification as instant justice: Due to slow process in judiciary, such extra judicial acts by police are justified as way instant justice. For instance, in Hyderabad encounter of accused in Disha rape.
- Political Interference: The criminalisation of politics and political patronage to police force creates the sense of impunity in the police for extra judicial activities.
- Lack of Reforms in Criminal Laws: Various criminal laws of India are continued from colonial era. They were created with a master-slave mentality, which leads to same traditions in present times.
- Failure to Ratify United Nations Convention Against Torture: India is one of only 19 countries who has not ratified it.
- Lack of skills: Police lack interrogative skills to get the truth pushes officers for extra judicial methods.

Impact:
- Loss of Image: Such incidents reduce respect for police. Because of such incidents, there is demand for Defunding Police in USA.
- Decline of trust in democratic system: Police is the part of state which directly comes in contact with citizens. Such behaviour of police reduces the trust in the democratic system.
- Promotes Anti-Establishment Activities: Such incidents act as a fodder for anti-establishment activities such as Naxalism, secessionist movement.

Important Supreme Court Judgement Regarding Police Reforms:
- Prakash Singh Case: The SC gave following orders to State and Centre government.
  1. Constitute a State Security Commission (SSC) to:
     (a) Ensure that the state government does not exercise unwarranted influence or pressure on the police.
     (b) Lay down broad policy guideline
  2. Evaluate the performance of the state police
  3. Merit based appointment of DGP with minimum two years of tenure.
  4. Minimum two-year tenure for other police officers.
(5) Separate the investigation and law and order functions of the police.

(6) Police Establishment Board (PEB): To decide transfers, postings, promotions and other service related matters of police officers.

(7) Police Complaints Authority (PCA) at state level: To inquire into public complaints against police officers of and above the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police in cases of serious misconduct, including custodial death, grievous hurt, or rape in police custody and at district levels to inquire into public complaints against the police.

(8) National Security Commission (NSC) at the union level: To prepare a panel for selection and placement of Chiefs of the Central Police Organisations (CPO) with a minimum tenure of two years.

- **DK Basu Judgement:** D. K. Basu Guidelines are the specific requirements and procedures laid down by the Supreme Court of India for the police and other agencies to follow during the arrest, detention and interrogation of any person. Some of these guidelines include:

  (1) The police officials who carry out the arrest or interrogation should wear clear, accurate and visible identification and name tags with their designations.

  (2) A memo of arrest should be prepared at the time of arrest and should include the time and date of arrest. It should also be attested by at least one witness who could include a family member of the person arrested. The arrest memo should be counter-signed by the person arrested.

  (3) The person arrested, detained or being interrogated has a right to inform a relative, friend or well wisher.

  (4) When a friend or relative lives outside the district, the time, place of arrest and venue of custody must be notified by police within 8 to 12 hours after arrest.

**Way forward:**

- **Independent Monitoring:** Monitoring implementation of the D K Basu guidelines by independent and balanced civil society or at all levels and under court supervision.

- **Ratification of UNCAT:** It Aims to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment which will act as a moral guide for police.

- **CCTV in Police Station:** Such system will bring in transparency in interrogation procedure.

- **Strengthening of Regulatory institution:** Institution such as State Human Rights Commission and National Human Rights Commission should be given more power eg. Independent investigation wing for custodial death cases.

**Source:** The Hindu, IndianExpress, LiveMint.
Contempt of Court

Syllabus: GS2: Dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions

Why it is in news?
- The Supreme Court initiated suo moto contempt of court proceeding against civil rights activist Prashant Bhushan for his tweets criticising Chief Justice of India.

Introduction
- Objective:
  1. Purpose is to uphold the majesty and dignity of justice delivery system.
  2. Help judges to do their duties of deciding cases without fear, favour and affection.
  3. Protect judicial institutions from motivated attacks and unwarranted criticism.
  4. Avoid denigration of authority of Court.
  5. Maintaining confidence in justice system.

- Constitutional Provisions:
  1. Art. 129 and 215: The SC/HC shall be a court of record and shall have all the powers including the power to punish for contempt of itself respectively.
  2. Art. 142(2): Enables the Supreme Court to investigate and punish any person for its contempt.
  3. Contempt of Court: In India, the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, divides contempt into civil contempt and criminal contempt.
  4. Civil contempt: it is defined as wilful disobedience to any judgment, decree, direction, order, writ or other processes of a court or wilful breach of an undertaking given to a court.
  5. Criminal Contempt: It is any action
     6. In written or spoken, signs and action that 'scandalise' or 'tend to scandalise' or 'lower or tend to lower the authority' of the Courts.
  7. Prejudices or interferes with any judicial proceeding
  8. Interferes with or obstructs the administration of justice

2006 Amendment to the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971:
- Court may impose punishment for contempt only when it is satisfied that substantially interferes or tends to substantially interfere with the due course of justice.
- Addition of the word truth and good faith as defences against the law of contempt in India.
- Cases dealing with contempt of court.

Arundhati Roy Case:
- SC observed that fair criticism of the conduct of a Judge, the institution of the judiciary and its functioning may not amount to contempt if made in good faith and in public interest.

Sahara case, 2012:
- Five-judge bench of SC permitted contempt law as a pre-emptive mechanism in pending proceedings.
- So that sensitive reports and comments don’t lead to a “real and substantial risk of prejudice to the proper administration of justice” and “the fairness of trial”.
Challenges:

- **Limits freedom of speech**: limits the freedom granted by Article 19(1)(a).
  
  (1) **Laws are not objectively defined**: It can be used against bonafide intentions and to suppress criticism by public.
  
  (2) **Conflict of interest**: Contempt law invokes conflict of interest for judiciary as it itself is the victim and the judge simultaneously.
  
  (3) **Against democracy and people’s sovereignty**: Contempt law is not in consonance with the constitutional scheme which makes people sovereign and the source of all power. Contempt law suppresses criticism of judiciary by public.
  
  (4) **Lack of safeguards**: Contempt law is draconian in nature without commensurate safeguards in favour of the persons charged with the accusation.
  
  (5) **Prevents rigorous evaluation of the Court’s functioning**.
  
  (6) **Waste of time and energy of court over trivial issues**.

Way forward:

- **Criticism not contempt**: The law of contempt should be employed only to enable the court to function, not to prevent criticism.
  
- **Balance Between freedom of speech and Contempt of Court**: Judiciary should balance two conflicting principles, i.e. freedom of expression, and fair and fearless justice.
  
- **Contempt of Court in Public Interest only**: This extraordinary power must be sparingly exercised considering the subjectivity involved in its definition and only when there is public interest demand.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express.
Permanent Commission for Women in the Armed Forces

Syllabus: GS 2: Social Justice

Why is it in the news?
- The Defence Ministry recently issued the formal letter sanctioning the grant of Permanent Commission (PC) for women officers.
- The order specifies grant of Permanent Commission (PC) to Short Service Commissioned (SSC) women officers in all the ten streams of the Indian Army.
- Government has followed Supreme Court’s verdict (February 2020) that has asked the government to give permanent commission to women officers in the Army.

Background:
- The induction of women officers in the Army (for non-combat role) started in 1992.
- **Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES):** Women were commissioned for a period of five years in certain chosen streams such as Corps of Signals, Army Education Corps etc.
- The WSES was replaced with the Short Service Commission (SSC) scheme in 2006.
- **Short Service Commission (SSC) scheme:**
  (a) Women were commissioned for a period of 10 years, extendable up to 14 years.
  (b) Serving WSES officers were given the option to move to the new SSC scheme. They were to be however, restricted to roles in streams specified earlier (which excluded combat arms such as infantry and armoured corps).

Main Point of Contention:
- The male SSC officers could opt for PC at the end of 10 years of service. This option was not available to women officers.
- Therefore women officers could not qualify for after retirement benefits such as pension, which starts only after 20 years of service as an officer.

Developments:
- In 2003, a PIL was filed in Delhi High Court for grant of PC to women SSC officers in the Army.
- In 2008, the Defence Ministry passed an order saying PC would be granted prospectively for few streams such as Judge Advocate General (JAG) department. This circular was challenged in Delhi High Court.
- In 2010, Delhi High Court ruled in favour of PC to women officers. This order was challenged by the government in Supreme Court.
- In 2019, Government issued an order to grant PC to SSC women in 8 streams out of 10. But the order was to be implemented in prospective manner (for those who joined after March 2019).
- **SC ruling in February 2020:**
  (1) Ruled in favour of PC and directed the government to extend PC to SSC women officers in all 10 streams and that too in retrospective manner.
  (2) The Supreme Court did not order that women be deployed in combat roles (It is up to the competent authority), but clarifies that women officers would be eligible for command posting.
Government’s Arguments against PC and Commander Role to Women Officers:
- Women are physiologically unfit for answering the ‘call beyond duty’ of the Army.
- Male and female officers could not be treated equally when it came to postings because of their different physical standards.
- Women are not suited for commanding roles in the Army as male troops are not prepared to accept orders from women officers.
- There are the perils of women being taken as prisoners of war
- **Domestic Obligations:** Prolonged absence during pregnancy, motherhood and greater family demands towards their children and families.

Supreme Court’s stand:
- Arguments founded on physical strength of men and women, violates equality.
- Arguments based on physical strengths and social context of family, do not constitute a constitutionally valid basis for denying equal opportunity to women officers.
- Submissions citing pregnancy and motherhood as reasons for not granting PC to women were based on ‘sex stereotypes’.
- A change of mindset is required with changing times. You need to give them opportunity to serve to the best of their capabilities.

Significance of the New Orders:
- **It has done away with all discrimination** on the basis of years of service for grant of PC in 10 streams of Army services.
- **It has removed the restriction** of women officers only being allowed to serve in staff appointments.
- **It would open new avenues for women** to further promotions to higher ranks in the command appointments (If women officers had served only in staff, they would not have gone beyond the rank of Colonel).

Final Words:
- The Navy and Air Force have already broken the gender barrier and recruited female fighter pilots. Women officers have displayed exceptional bravery in adverse situations.
  (1) **Minty Agarwal:** She had guided Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman as flight controller when he shot down a Pakistani F-16.
  (2) **Mitali Madhumita** was awarded the Sena Medal for her bravery when terrorists attacked the Indian embassy in Kabul.
- The Orders needs to be implemented in letter and spirit.

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express, Firstpost, The Print.
Syllabus: GS 2- Social justice- Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection of vulnerable sections.

Why is it in the news?

- The Supreme Court recently confirmed that persons suffering from disabilities are also socially backward and are entitled to the same benefits of relaxation as SC/ST candidates in public employment and education.
- The Supreme Court upheld a 2012 judgment of the Delhi High Court in Anamol Bhandari (minor) Vs. Delhi Technological University.

Context:

- The Supreme Court decision came on a petition filed by Aryan Raj, against the Government College of Arts, Chandigarh. Aryan Raj is a special needs person.
- The college had denied Mr. Aryan relaxation in minimum qualifying marks in the Painting and Applied Art course.
- The general qualifying standard was 40%, whereas SC/ST candidates were given a relaxation to 35%.
- Argument by the College: Disabled persons too need to meet the general qualifying standard of 40% in the aptitude test.
- From Supreme Court:
  (1) SC/ST candidates require 35% to pass in the aptitude test and the same shall apply in future, so far as the disabled are concerned.
  (2) New academic courses should be crafted to specifically cater to the needs of intellectually disabled persons.
- Significance: The public sector employers and educational institutions will have to allow the same relaxations to disabled that SCs and STs are entitled to.

Persons with Disability (PwD) in India:

- Constitute 2.21% of the total population (about 2.68 crore) - 2011 Census.
- Majority of India’s disabled population reside in rural areas.

Problems faced by Persons with disabilities in India:

- Low literacy: 45% are illiterate, compared to 26% of all Indians. Only 8.5% of acquire a graduate degree.
- Fewer Jobs: About 72% of Indian population with intellectual disability are not employed as compared to 44% of general population.
- Social Stigma and Exclusion:
  (1) Most people considers PwD a liability which leads to discrimination and harassment.
  (2) A significant proportion of people see the disabled as an object of sympathy and pity. This leads to their ‘othering’ and their treatment as a second-class citizen.

Obstacles in Survival:

(1) There exists infrastructural, institutional and attitudinal barriers for the persons with disabilities.
(2) Most of the public places and buildings in India are not disability-friendly.

- Mental Illness: There is an under-emphasis on mental illnesses in the reservation and legal decision making.

Government Initiatives:

- Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016: The Act provides for the following:
  1. Reservation- For persons with benchmark disabilities and those with high support needs:
     a. Reservation in higher education- not less than 5%.
     b. In government jobs- not less than 4 %.
     c. In allocation of land, poverty alleviation schemes- 5% allotment.
  2. Free Education: Every child between the age group of 6 and 18 years with benchmark disability, shall have the right to free education.
  3. Guardianship: A grant of guardianship would be in place under which there will be joint decision making between the guardian and the persons with disabilities.
  4. Authority:
     a. Central & State Advisory Boards on Disability are to be set up at the Central and State level to serve as apex policy making bodies.
     b. The Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities and the State Commissioners will act as Grievance Redressal agency and also monitor implementation of the Act.

- Accessible India Campaign:
  1. It is an initiative of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.
  2. It is a nation-wide flagship campaign for achieving universal accessibility to persons with disabilities(PwDs).
  3. Purpose: To provide equal opportunity and make them live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life in an inclusive society.
  4. Targets/Components:
     a. Enhancing the accessibility of built environment.
     b. Information & communication eco-System accessibility.
     c. Accessibility to transport system.

Way Ahead:

- Preventing/Reducing Disability:
  1. Majority of the disabilities occur due to the preventable causes such as lack of good and accessible medical facilities to pregnant mother, poverty, accidents etc.
  2. Governments need to invest heavily in the health sector in order to prevent future disabilities, especially in rural areas.

- To move from ‘Charity-based approach’ to the ‘Rights-based approach’:
  1. The ‘sympathy’ based perspectives needs to be changed by widespread awareness programmes and capacity building.
  2. Role of public sphere, movies and TV news channels is important in this direction.

- Education and Jobs:
  1. Better access to education and jobs would help integrate PwD with society and help generate higher economic growth.
  2. Government should invest sufficiently and bring expertise to unlock the potential of people with disabilities.

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express, The Wire, Scroll.in
Privatization of Railways

Syllabus: GS 3- Infrastructure

Why is it in the news?

- The Union Government has recently invited Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for private players for the operation of passenger train services.
- Government invited bids for about 151 number of trains that is to be operated over 109 routes.

Introduction:

- Indian railway is among the four largest rail networks in the world (with USA, China and Russia).
- According to a data in 2018, India had 68,443 route kilometers of Railways.
- Employment to about 12 lakh people.
- In 2015, Bibek Debroy Committee recommended liberalization in Indian railways, in order to encourage growth and improve services.

Existing Issues/Problems with Indian Railway:

- **Congested networks:**
  1. Over-stretched infrastructure with 60% plus routes being more than 100% utilized.
  2. It leads to a reduction in average speed of passenger and freight trains.
- **Safety and poor quality of service delivery:**
  1. There have been a number of accidents and safety issues in recent years.
  2. Poor cleanliness of trains and stations, quality of food and difficulties in booking tickets are key issues.
- **Shortfall in Carrying Capacity:**
  1. In 2019-20, about 5 crore intending passengers could not be accommodated in railways for want of capacity.
  2. The travel demand was 13.3% in excess of supply during summer and festival seasons.
- **Lack of Price Competitiveness:**
  1. The railways has consistently lost passenger traffic to budget airlines in the long-distance segment.
  2. For comparatively shorter hauls, there is range of competitive volvo buses now.
- **Expansion of Railway lines without financial viability.**

Details/ Key modalities of the proposal

- This is the first initiative of private investment for running passenger trains.
- Government is expecting to entail private sector investment of about Rs 30,000 crore.
- Private players will be allowed to run these trains for a 35-year period.
- **Revenue Sharing:**
  1. The private entity shall pay fixed haulage charges and energy charges for using public infrastructure.
  2. They will pay share of their revenues determined through a transparent bidding process.
- **Power Distinction:**
  1. The private operators will choose their technology and determine the fare, along with other
on-board services like food, cleanliness and passenger amenities.

(2) The Railways will control certain aspects like safety, time-tableting of trains etc.

- **Rail Development Authority (RDA):**
  
  (1) Railways would subsequently constitute a Rail Development Authority.
  
  (2) It will decide rail fares to ensure pricing is commensurate with the expenses.

**Significance of the proposed Amendment:**

- The move would enhance the passengers’ services and safety in trains.
- It will help the railways to increase its earnings.
- There would be substantial reduction in journey time.

**Other major Objectives:**

- To reduce losses in passenger services.
- To introduce modern technology rolling stock with reduced maintenance.
- To boost job creation.
- To provide world-class travel experience to passengers.
- To reduce demand supply deficit in the passenger transportation sector.

**Concerns/ Challenges:**

- Entry of private players may diminish Indian railway’s control on trains, tracks and manpower.

- **Fare increase, Job Losses and social justice:**

  (1) Privatisation may lead to increase in fair prices as private entity would seek to maximise its profit.
  
  (2) Increase in fairs would put the poor/marginalised sections at disadvantage.
  
  (3) There are other concerns of job losses and job security. Also there will be no reservation for SC/ST/OBCs in the new setup.

- **Class Division:**

  (1) The high fares due to privatisation may create further class divisions.
  
  (2) The railways-run trains may become “trains for the poor” and the private ones will run for the rich.

- **Uncertainties may lead to Confusion (According to Metro Man E. Sreedharan):**

  (1) Two types of fares and two types of trains will create confusion.
  
  (2) Private players will find it difficult to work with the railways, and may abandon it midway as there will be little room to raise fares.
  
  (3) Without an independent regulator, a lot of friction is likely between the railways and private players.

- **Conflict of Interest:**

  (1) Railways will be a competitor and also a regulator of private trains.
  
  (2) Due to cross-subsidise passenger fares, the below cost pricing will make it difficult for private players to compete.
  
  (3) Increasing fare to recover profits may bring Private operators in competition with Aviation industry.

**Way Ahead:**

- **Independent Regulator:**

  (1) A strong independent regulator to fix tariffs and facilitating entry of private player is need of the hour.
  
  (2) Government had proposed a Rail Development Authority, but it has not materialised.

- **Need to exercise caution (According to Rakesh Mohan committee report):**
(1) There are inherent complexities involved in the process of privatisation.
(2) The international experience on privatising railways shows it is exceedingly difficult and controversial.
(3) This should be treated as an opportunity to explore what will work, while keeping the flexibility to adjust the framework and fine-tune the rules.

Sources: The Hindu, The Print, NITI Aayog, LiveMint.

India-US Trade Relations

Syllabus:
- GS 2- International relations- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements.
- GS 3- Economic Development

Why is it in the news?
- Recently the Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal held talks with US commerce secretary.
- The Minister made a statement that India and the US are on the verge of finalising a limited trade deal.
- The Minister reiterated that the longer term plan is to work towards a comprehensive trade deal.

More in the news:
- India wants to negotiate with its top trading partner for a preferential trade agreement for 50-100 goods and services.
- Indications are that the negotiations involve discussions to improve access for India’s generic drugs to the American market.
- The US has been seeking more access for its farm goods, like almonds and apples.
- India raised concern on U.S. ban on import of wild catch shrimp from India.

India-US Trade:
- The US is India’s largest trading partner for two consecutive years now.
- The bilateral trade between India and US stood at USD 88.75 billion in 2019-2020.
- US is largest market for Indian exports, both for merchandise and services.
- The US is one of the few countries with which India has a trade surplus (Trade gap of USD 17.42 billion in 2019-20).

Background:
- The talks for a trade deal between India and US started in 2018.
- There have been disagreements over various issues like tariffs, subsidies, IP, data protection, etc.
- The trade tensions culminated when US revoked India’s Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) status.
- GSP programme allows duty-free benefits to export a variety of products in US.
- In response, India imposed retaliatory tariffs on 28 items imported from the US, including apples and almonds.

India’s Demands:
- To restore benefits accorded to Indian exporters under GSP programme.
Greater market access for its products from sectors such as textile and engineering.
Additional market access for some agricultural produce such as grapes and pomegranates.
Exemption from high duties imposed by the US on some steel and aluminium products
Early conclusion of the totalisation agreement or Social Security Agreement with the US. It aims to protect the interests of professionals of Indian-origin.

**US’s Demands:**
- Concessions for US’s farm products, especially dairy items.
- Removal of price caps on pharmaceutical products such as stents and knee implants.
- Eliminate tariffs on Information and Communication Technology (ITC) products.
- Enforcement of intellectual property provisions for pharmaceutical products.
- Relaxation of Indian laws covering e-commerce and digital trade (data storage rules).
- US has also raised concerns over high trade deficit with India.
- India’s decision to levy a new 2% digital tax on foreign transactions, has become the latest sore point.

**Issues with removing barriers:**
- **Domestic Farm Sector**: Concessional farms/dairy products from US will impact Indian farmers as their products will find it difficult to compete with US’s products.
- **Affordability**: Removal of price caps on pharmaceutical products such as stents and knee implants would make these products very expensive.
- **IP Enforcement** would impact India’s domestic industries such as its generic medicine programme. US may drag India to WTO for violations of IP framework.
- **Eliminating tariffs on ICT products** may impact India’s limited domestic ICT industry and also there will be loss of revenue for the government.

**Other Issues/ Challenges:**
- **Moving from a limited agreement to a comprehensive one is complex**:
  1. The US is likely to push for far greater access in future for its farm/dairy products than India will be prepared to offer.
  2. Same was major sticking point in the RCEP negotiations.
  3. The US has a track record of extracting concessions at each point/round of negotiations and then demanding more.
- **US’s concern over Raw imports from China**:
  1. India accounts for 40% of US generic drug imports and India seeks concessions on drug exports.
  2. The United States has raised concerns over India’s dependence on China for sourcing raw materials for generic drugs.

**Way Ahead:**
- **Need to Strategically Secure a Deal**:
  1. Trade agreements is important to get greater market access for domestic products and promote “Make in India” projects.
  2. India has opt out of BTAs with multiple countries recently and also from RCEP.
  3. India is looking for greater trade and strategic ties with the Western countries including US and EU.
  4. The current global environment and strained US-China relations, provides an opportunity for reconfiguring trade relations.
  5. However, India must maintain a balance between offering too many exceptions and securing one’s own benefit.
Focus on Structural Bottlenecks:
(1) India needs to address the structural issues such as poor export infrastructure, lack of understanding of export rules, quality, packaging etc.
(2) The structural issues continue to plague the country’s export competitiveness.
(3) On issues like IP rights and digital taxation, Indian needs to develop a clear and coherent strategy on free trade agreements.

Sources: The Hindu, Indian express, LiveMint, ET.

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Syllabus: GS2: International Relations.

Why is it in news?
- Iran and China are close to finalising a 25-year Strategic Partnership which will include Chinese involvement in Chabahar’s duty free zone, an oil refinery nearby, and possibly a larger role in Chabahar port as well.
- Iranian government has started Chabahar Port to Zehadan rail construction project on its own. India had signed agreement for this construction of this project.

About Chabahar Port:
- Location:
  (1) A seaport in Chabahar located in southeastern Iran, on the Gulf of Oman.
(2) Located on the Makran coast of Sistan and Baluchistan Province.
(3) Next to the Gulf of Oman and at the mouth of Strait of Hormuz.

- **Specifications:**
  1. Consists of two ports **Shahid Kalantari** and **Shahid Beheshti** and ten berths.
  2. Only the Iranian port with direct access to the Indian Ocean.
  3. **Golden Gate:** Being close to Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan etc., it has been termed the “**Golden Gate**” to these land-locked countries. It is also called as ‘a gateway to golden opportunities’.

- **India’s engagement:**
  1. **2003 Agreement:** An initial pact to build the Chabahar port was first inked in 2003. But the deal did not go forward in subsequent years. Negotiations only intensified after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal between P5 + 1 (the UN Security Council’s five permanent members -- China, France, Russia, UK and US plus Germany) and Iran.
  2. **May 2016:** India signed a series of twelve memorandums of understanding relating to Chabahar port.
  3. **2018:** Phase 1 of Chabahar port was operationalised in 2018.

**Importance of Chabahar Port for India:**

- **Gateway to INSTC:** India looks at investment in Chabahar port as gateway to INSTC - international North-South Trade Corridor.
- **India’s Strategic Presence:** It will boost India’s presence in the Central Asian region.
- **Countering China’s String of Pearls:** The location of Chabahar is very close to Gwadar port developed by China in Balochistan area of Pakistan. Chabahar port will act as counter to it.
- **Free and Open Indian Ocean:** Successful implementation of Chabahar port will increase the presence of India Navy in Indian Ocean which will help to counter the Chinese navy in the Indian ocean.
- **Lower Costs for imports:**
  1. Costs of imports of products like iron ore, oil, sugar, and rice from Central to India will be significantly lowered.
  2. As per the study of the Ministry of Commerce, the cost of imports via Chabahar port along with INSTC is 30% cheaper than those via Mediterranean-Suez route.
- **Link to Afghanistan and Region:** India has also signed to develop Chabahar port to Zaranj-Delaram highway in Afghanistan.
- **Development of Industries:**
  1. Provides opportunities to Indian companies to penetrate and enhance their footprint in the region.
  2. India will also be developing various industries (aluminium and urea plants) in the Chabahar Economic Zone.
- **India’s enhanced role in the Middle East:** India’s traditional old ties with Iran and substantial investment in Chabahar port also provide India with an opportunity to become an important player in the Middle East.

**Challenges**

- **Increasing Chinese Presence:**
  1. There is increasing bonhomie between Iran and China as they see USA as a common enemy.
  2. Iran and China have proposed a deal for strategic investment in Iran which can be extended to include Chabahar port.
- **Lack of implementation:** Iran has blamed non implementation from Indian side for starting
Chabahar Port to Zehadan rail construction project on its own.

- **Political turmoil of Middle East:** Relations with Iran will also require a delicate balancing act on the part of India given its own relations with countries like the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia and Israel which have a troubled history with Iran.

- **U.S factor:**
  1. USA is using “Maximum Pressure” strategy by putting sanctions on Iran. Initially India got waiver but USA under Trump administration reluctant to extend it further.
  2. This has even impacted India’s oil imports from Iran.

**Way forward:**

- **Pace up implementation of projects:** India should convince Iranian side of its intention and capacity to implement the projects.

- **Close Monitoring of Iran China relations:** India should closely monitor Iran China relations and convince Iran for engaging with India.

- **Strategic Autonomy of India:** India should explain its strategic interest in the region to USA and get India Iran relations out of sanctions.

- **Strategic Hedging:** India should balance its relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel in which India has been already successful.
Syllabus: GS2: International Relations.

Why is it in news?
- China’s assertiveness in South China Sea and Eastern Ladakh has prompted member countries for strengthening the QUAD.

Introduction:
- Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is a mechanism which enables dialogue between four major democracies within the Indo-Pacific region, Australia, Japan, India, and the US, on issues of regional security.
- It first emerged as a cooperative response to the devastation of the 2004 tsunami.
- Navies of India, Australia, Japan, and the US had engaged in the coordinated delivery of humanitarian and disaster relief.
- The dialogue was first initiated by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007.
- Objective: To secure a rule based global order, liberal trade practices and establish and maintain the freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Due to ambivalence over growing US-China tension in Asia-Pacific, Australia had left the quad in 2008.
- During the 2017 ASEAN Summits Australia re-joined Quad in negotiations to revive the quadrilateral alliance.

Recent Development:
- Earlier Quad has met at the Assistant and Joint Secretary levels until 2017.
- Foreign ministers of Quad member nations met in September last year.
- This had resulted in elevation of level in talks between Quad members.
- This could be seen as a strengthening of the Quad framework to discuss regional security challenges and prospects for coordination.

Purpose of member countries joining QUAD:
- Growing assertiveness of China: USA has primarily considered Quad as a counter growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. However, India is silent about this.
- Freedom of Navigation and International Rule of Law: India wants to ensure stable order in Indo-Pacific with freedom navigation under international law.
- Stability of Korean Peninsula: Japan also feels that China’s increasing assertiveness and adamant behaviour may disturb peace and security in the Korean peninsula and adjoining areas.
- Australia has been worried about rising Chinese influence in politics and universities of Australia.
- America’s huge trade deficit with China has compelled U.S. to look towards the Quad as an opportunity to regain its strategic prowess in the Indo Pacific region.
- China’s aggressive soft power diplomacy in region such as lending heavy loans, building huge infrastructure in adjoining countries has created a sense of insecurity in the South East Asian countries.

Significance of QUAD:
The Unique Academy

- **Terrorism and illegal immigration**: Quad can help in tackling common problems of terrorism and illegal immigrations in the region.

- **Geo Politics of Indo Pacific**: The term “Indo-Pacific” in place of “Asia Pacific” under QUAD entrusts India with greater responsibilities in the region.

- **Infrastructure in South Asia**: Involvement of U.S. and Japan in developmental projects in South Asia can provide more capital for infrastructure projects.

- **Countering North Korea**: Quad can also help in movement to curtail North Korea’s nuclear and missile programmes.

- **Strengthening ties with Member Countries**: It will help India to strengthen ties with U.S., Japan and Australia and minimise difference of opinions on trade, defence procurements and other issues.

- **Boost to Act East Policy**: Quad provides India with a powerful platform to secure its interests in East Asia and will give further boost to India’s Act East policy.

- **Counter narrative to OBOR**: The Quad has also sought to deepen cooperation by building a counter-narrative to China’s OBOR (One Belt, One Road) through the exploration of similar, competing infrastructural projects.

**Challenges:**

- **Destabilised Geo Politics**: Emergence of new players such as U.S. and Japan can lead to new rivalries in the region.

- **Threat to India’s strategic stronghold**: Though Quad will be primarily engaged in building infrastructure projects, it will probably degrade India’s strategic stronghold in the Indian Ocean region.

- **Presence of U.S. and Japanese Navy**: India had earlier objected to presence of Chinese navy ships near Sri Lanka but now, India will not be able to object against deployments by U.S. and Japanese navies near Sri Lanka.

- **US-China Rivalry**: India may have been dragging itself into US-china rivalry by engaging in Quad.

- **Lack of well-defined Strategic mission**: Despite the potential for cooperation, the Quad remains a mechanism without a defined strategic mission.

**Way Forward:**

- **Asia Africa Growth Corridor**: The India-Japan-ASEAN led Asia Africa Growth Corridor also needs to be formally inducted as a Quad project.

- **A single coordinating authority**: It could be set up in order for these proposed transnational connectivity projects to be executed in a coordinated manner.

- **Promoting Sagarmala Project and East Coast Economic Corridor**: Through the Quad, India should promote its flagship ventures like the Sagarmala port modernization and connectivity project and the Asian Development Bank led East Coast Economic Corridor, which aims to industrialize the entire Eastern Indian coastal belt and extend value chains to Southeast Asia.

- **Neighbourhood First Policy**: India already have strong influence in South Asia. India must take in confidence neighbourhood countries before taking major strategic steps in Indo Pacific region.
India-EU Relations - Free Trade Agreement Negotiations

Syllabus:
- GS 2 - International relations- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements.
- GS 3 - Economic Development

Why is it in the news?
- India and the European Union (EU) recently held their 15th India-EU summit (on 15th July 2020).

More about the Annual Summit:
- The summit is held after a gap of more than two years. The practice was put off due to disagreements over bilateral trade and investment issues.
- Both the sides have agreed to set up a “High-level dialogue on Trade and Investment”.
- There is however, no time frame set for the conclusion of the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA).

Key Declarations concluded during the summit:
1. A joint political statement- For multilateral cooperation at the WHO, UNSC and G-20.
2. A Roadmap to 2025- A common guideline to guide joint action and strengthen the Strategic Partnership.
3. Agreement on research and development cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy.
5. Five-year renewal for science and technology cooperation agreement.

India-EU Trade:
- EU is India’s largest trading partner group. It is also one of the largest investors in India and also a main source of technology.
- However, India constitute under 3% of the E.U.’s global trade.

BTIA Talks:
1. The free trade talks, officially known as BTIA had started between India and EU in 2007.
2. In 2013, India and the EU suspended the talks due to differences over variety of issues.

What EU wants?
- Removal or reduction in tariffs on European cars, wines and spirits and greater market access.
- High level of investment protection
- A stronger intellectual property regime
- A sustainable development chapter with social and environmental clauses

What India wants?
- Access for more visas to be granted to its skilled workers in the services industry.
- Recognition of a data secure country (which will reduce compliance costs for Indian software providers).

Major Obstacles:
- India’s Protectionist Policies:
  1. EU says that India’s programmes such as ‘Make in India’ and ‘Aatmanirbhar Bharat’ have
given rise to protectionist tendencies.

(2) The recent decision of NDA government to cancel various BITs had slowed interest from European companies.

**2) India’s stand on it:**
(a) The ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ is neither protectionist nor isolationist. It is about:
(b) Getting our act together to improve domestic production of finished goods.
(c) Gain from better integration with the global value chain and fair trade.

**3) Dispute Settlement:**
(a) EU wants the investment deal along with the trade agreement including a dispute settlement mechanism.
(b) India is reluctant to sign it as it allows foreign investors to sue the local government for unanticipated policy changes.
(c) India wants disputes to be heard by Indian courts first, before approaching international tribunals. However, EU was not comfortable with it.

**4) Data Security:**
(a) India has been demanding status as a “data-secure nation”.
(b) However, EU is reluctant to this demand, given its concerns over regulatory norms and data-privacy standards.

**Way Ahead:**
- **Addressing Mutual Trust Deficit:**
  (1) Enhanced business cooperation would help both the EU and India to diversify their strategic value chains.
  (2) India could succeed in attracting EU investment that might be moving out of China.
- **Erosion of WTO:** During the time when WTO’s relevance and its powers are diminishing (especially the dispute settlement mechanism), India should engage itself in FTAs.
- **India’s Standing in FTAs:**
  (1) India currently does not have FTA with any of its top trade partners, including U.S, China, EU and the Gulf economies.
  (2) This situation is not reasonable as most trade is now driven either by FTAs or global value chains.
  (3) Without the preferential FTA tariffs or GSP+ status, India is likely to struggle to keep exports competitive in global market.

**Sources:** The Hindu, LiveMint, Indian Express.
The Unique Academy

11

Criminal Laws in India

Syllabus: GS2: Dispute Redressal Mechanisms.

Why is it in news?
- The Supreme Court and High Court judges, senior lawyers and academicians have written a letter to chairperson of the committee constituted by Union Home Ministry to introduce reforms in criminal laws.
- The letter said that the committee lacks diversity, both in terms of the social identity of the members, as well as their professional background and experience.
- The Committee was constituted through a Ministry of Home Affairs notification on May 4, 2020.
- Chairperson: Ranbir Singh (vice-chancellor, National Law University Delhi).

Need for reforms in criminal laws:
- Colonial Era baggage:
  (1) Various laws such as Indian Penal Code are continued from colonial era which were formed to subordinate Indians and serve British interest.
  (2) Those were mainly formed to protect the government & enforce the will of those in power than to protect the citizens and enforce laws.
- Prone to Judicial Activism: They are founded on Victorian morality and are backward looking. Hence sections such as section 498 and 377 of the IPC were scrapped by Supreme Court.
- Incompetent to Deal with New Crimes: These laws don’t cover fast changing nature of technological crimes such as cyber bulling, hacking, data theft etc.
- Quantum of Fines: Range of fines in punishments under IPC is from a few hundreds to a few thousands, which is neither sufficient nor serves the purpose of compensating crime victims.
- Autonomy to Bureaucracy:
  (1) Criminal laws are very much dependent on whims of political masters.
  (2) In today’s fast changing society regulating institutions need autonomy for efficient functioning.
- Fragmented Nature of Criminal Laws:
  (1) Criminal acts in India are dealt under various provisions such as Indian Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code and various government resolutions.
  (2) It has been observed that due to fragmented nature of criminal laws police continue use various provisions of these even after they are scrapped by judiciary.

Issues with present committee:
- Short time frame.
- Ltd scope for public consultation.
- Broad scope for reforms to the committee.
- Not clear why Law Commission could not have done it.
- Lack of diversity, all male and Delhi based committee.

Earlier Attempts:
- V S Malimath Committee 2003: For reforms in criminal justice systems.
- J S Verma Cmt2013: Reforms related to laws concerning crimes against women.
Way forward:
- Reworking of the existing classification of offences like “Four-fold scheme, by Madhava Menon panel on national criminal justice policy”:
  1. **Social welfare offences code**: focus is on reparation & restitution rather than punishment;
  2. **Correctional offences code**: covering crimes punishable with up to three years’ imprisonment and/or a fine;
  3. **Penal code**: for graver offences punishable with jail term beyond three years and even death;
  4. **Economic offences code**: for select crimes that endanger economic security under the IPC and other relevant economic laws.
- **Police Reforms**: Establishing separate investigation and prosecution divisions.
- **Inclusive Committee**: Committee formed to review criminal laws should be made inclusive to reflect the socio economic realities of society.
- **Balance between Liberty and Regulations**: Balance between freedom of speech and laws such as sedition laws should be maintained.
- **Victim protection**: unless and until victims are protected by the system they will not come ahead whatever may be the law.

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**12**

**Naga Issue**

**Syllabus**
- Security Challenges and their Management in Border Areas

**Why is it in News?**
- Governor R N Ravi’s letter to Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio created controversy.

**Stand of Governor in letter:**
- Armed gangs in Nagaland are carrying out extortion and committing violence and State government is mute spectator for this law & order problem.
- Such acts question the legitimacy of elected government, the sovereignty and integrity of the nation.
- He had stated that his approval would be necessary for transfer and posting of officials of the state government.

**Constitutional provisions:**
- **Article 371A (1) (b)** applies exclusively to Nagaland.
- It bestows upon the governor “special responsibility with respect to law and order”.
- According to the provision, the governor, for all practical purposes, has the final say on all matters related to the state’s law and order and on what constitutes law and order.

**Stand of State Government:**
- Since taxation problem is related to Naga’s political problem, it’s unfair to term as law & order problem of State. It’s because, Naga’s political problem is currently handled by Union government.
- The procedure of taking approval from the Governor for transfer and posting of senior officers was done away through a resolution in the state assembly in December 2013.
Nullifying the resolution would be against the principles of democracy and would be viewed as anti-people.

Stand of NSCN-IM:
- Ceasefire agreement in 1997 had recognized NSCN-IM as legitimate organization of the Naga people and not a gang.
- AS NSCN-IM is legitimate organization, it levies legitimate taxes and not extortions.
- Extortions being carried out by some groups in the guise of freedom fighters has complicated the situation.

Stand of People:
- Most communities in Nagaland are listed as Scheduled Tribes and are exempted from paying direct taxes to the Union government under Section 10(26) of Income Tax Act.
- So, many people see so-called taxation by outfits as extortion.

Background
- Demands:
  (1) The Nagas are not a single tribe, but an ethnic community that comprises several tribes who live in the state of Nagaland and its neighbourhood.
  (2) One key demand of Naga groups has been a Greater Nagalim that would cover not only the state of Nagaland but parts of neighbouring states, and even of Myanmar.

![Image of Greater Nagalim](image-source)

Image Source: Indian Express

Events:
(1) The assertion of Naga nationalism began during British rule and continued after Independence.
This gave rise to armed insurgency.

(2) In 1946, A Z Phizo formed the Naga National Council (NNC), which declared Naga independence on August 14, 1947.
(3) The NNC split in 1975 and led to formation of the NSCN. It splits further into the NSCN-IM and NSCN-Khaplang in 1988.
(4) Nagaland has been under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act since 1958.

**Peace Talks:**

(1) In 1975, A peace accord was signed in Shillong in which the NNC leadership agreed to give up arms. This led to split and formation of the NSCN.
(2) In 1997, The NSCN-IM signed a ceasefire agreement with the government. It was agreed that there would be no counter-insurgency offensive against the NSCN(I-M), who in turn would not attack Indian forces.
(3) Naga rebel groups have given up the demand for a sovereign Nagaland.

**Framework Agreement:**

(1) Centre appointed interlocutor for the Naga peace talks in 2014.
(2) In 2015, the Centre signed a Framework Agreement/Naga Peace Accord with the NSCN(I-M).
(3) Under agreement, NSCN-IM has been derecognized as a militant organization.
(4) Government is open to discuss the Naga territorial issue within the existing boundaries of Manipur and Assam.
(5) Other issues such as AFSPA, demographic changes due to cross border migrations and other tribals like Meitei will be discussed.
(6) Issues related to autonomous Naga territorial councils for Arunachal and Manipur; a common cultural body for Nagas across states will be discussed.
(7) In 2017, six other Naga armed outfits under the banned of the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) joined the talks.

**Concerns:**

- **Compromising peace talks:** Such statements/letters might create rift between Naga outfits and Union Government and derail process of 23 years of peace talks.
- **Questioned credibility of interlocutor:** NSCN-IM questioned the credibility of interlocutor for solving of long pending issue, NSCN-IM mentions that Interlocutor lacks understanding if he terms it as law & order problems of State.
- **China factor:** Assertive China in post-Galwan period needs to be considered in the background since China had helped such outfits before.
- **Issue of flag and constitution:** The government and the NSCN(I-M) have failed to agree on issues relating to a separate Naga flag and a constitution.
- **Future of the rebels:** Those individuals who have participated in the movement will have to be rehabilitated.

**Way forward**

- **Non-invocation of Article 371A (1) (b):**
  (1) Governor should not invoke Article 371A (1) (b) and take over the state’s law and order machinery.
  (2) The provision was meant to be only used in the “formative stage” of the state.
  (3) Over the years, Governors had gradually weaned away from playing an executive role.
  (4) Law and order being a state subject, the state government should handle it.
- **Focus on role of interlocutor:**
  (1) Taxation and other law & order problems are related to Naga’s political problem.
(2) Between the dual role of Governor and interlocutor, one must focus on role of interlocutor to solve political problem.
(3) Once Naga political issue is concluded, law and order will automatically come under control.

- **Confidence Building Measures:**
  (1) Government and NSCN-IM must maintain the tempo for the ongoing peace talks.
  (2) Both must ensure that sporadic events do not derail the whole process.
  (3) Both must ensure that no one will be allowed to make irresponsible statements which may distract the process.

- **Role of security forces:**
  (1) It must be ensured that there should not be any excesses on people by security forces.
  (2) On other hand, forces must prevent any help from across the border, particularly China border.

- **Unification and Autonomy:**
  (1) Unification of Naga-inhabited areas without disturbing the existing boundaries can be option.
  (2) Maximum autonomy may be given in ethnic, cultural and developmental areas to autonomous councils.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express, The Wire, The Economic Times
Syllabus: GS2: Issue related to population.

Why is it in News?

- The Lancet journal published a report on population levels in the next decade and following 80 years.

Lancet findings:

- World population will peak much earlier than previously estimated.
- It used data from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017 to model future population in various scenarios as a function of fertility, migration, and mortality rates.
- Global:
  1. The global TFR is predicted to steadily decline from 2.37 (2017) to 1.66 (2100).
  2. India in 2100 will be the world’s most populous country.
- India:
  1. Population peak:
     a. A peak population of 1.6 billion will reach in 2048, from 1.38 billion in 2017.
     b. By 2100, the population is projected to decline by 32% to 1.09 billion.
  2. Working Age Population:
     a. The working-age population (20-64) will also increase in the first half of the century, and then decline in the second half.
     b. However, this will be the largest working-age population in the world by 2100.
  3. TFR & life expectancy:
     a. India’s TFR was already below 2.1 in 2019.
     b. The TFR is projected to have a continue a steep decline until about 2040, reaching 1.29 in 2100.
     c. Among the 10 countries with the largest populations in 2017 or 2100, India is projected to have one of the lowest life expectancies.
  4. Other:
     a. From 2017 to 2100, India is projected to rise up the list of countries with the largest GDP, from 7th to 3rd.
     b. India is projected to have the second largest net immigration in 2100, with an estimated half a million more people immigrating to India.
- Reasons for early peak:
  1. Female educational attainment will result into decline in fertility rates.
  2. Access to contraception will hasten declines in fertility.

Comparison with UNDP:

- The United Nations Development Programme visualizes TFRs convergence towards a level of approximately 1.75.
- The Lancet visualizes TFRs convergence towards a level of approximately 1.41.
- The difference between a convergent TFR of 1.75 or 1.41 is profound.
- Lancent forecasts that world population is expected to peak by 2061 at 9.73 billion and by 2100...
reach 8.79 billion. The UNDP forecasts about 10.8 billion at this time

**NFHS data:**
- India's population growth rate peaked between 1961 and 1971 and it has been falling since then.
- While Total Fertility Rate in rural areas remains higher than in urban areas, it has been declining at a faster rate than the latter.
- The average Total Fertility Rate is reaching replacement level 2.1.

**Perception of Population Explosion:**
- India is second populous country and hosts 16 per cent of the world’s population
- There is a perception that India's population is growing at tremendous rate and is the base of all problems.
- This perception reflected in PM's Independence Day speech which stressed the need to control ‘population explosion’ in India.
- Such perception led to many population control suggestions including Two-Child policy and national law for it.

**Issue of Two-Child policy:**
- Suggestion of Two-Child policy has long been debated as a population control measure.

**Concerns:**
1. It increases risk of premature acceleration of India's transition to an aging population.
2. Population aging threatens to hamper country’s economic growth in the decades ahead.
3. It may increase risk of worsening the sex ratio imbalance and the practice of female foeticide. Approximately 15.8 million girls have gone missing at birth in India since 1990 as a result of sex selection.
4. It may increase the number of abortions of third child to avoid penalties or a loss of government benefits.
5. It would fall disproportionately hard on the poor and on minorities and could constitute a violation of human rights.

**Case study of China:**
1. China, as a consequence of its one-child policy, is now struggling with how to deal with a large aging population
2. In China today, there are a roughly five working-age adults for every elderly person over the age of 65.
3. But by 2050, there will be only about two working-age adults per elderly person in China.

**Challenges:**
- The economic growth of a shrinking workforce will be evident.
- The high burden on health and social support systems of an ageing population might be major challenge before India.
- Countering the ‘theory of population explosion’ is another major challenge as it is deeply rooted perception in India.

**Way Forward:**
- **Liberal Migration Policies:**
  1. Wealthy countries such as the UK and the USA could counteract the impact of these changes through net migration of working-age adults from the countries with growing populations.
  2. There is need to discourage rising hostility towards migration and promote labour-market flexibility.
Technological and skills advancement:

1. Technological advancement may compensate shortage of work force in future.
2. Japan has managed the needs of its greying population with virtually no emphasis on migration.
3. India need to augment its skill providing schemes to ensure gainful employment to avoid demographic disaster in future.

Develop human resource:

1. Proper investment in human capital is needed by focussing on education, skill development and healthcare facilities.
2. Greater economic independence to women will allow women to negotiate with the system on their own terms and for better support services as well.
3. Two-Child Policy is unnecessary in the background of falling fertility rates without national population control law.

Source: Indian Express, The Hindu, The Print, Scroll.in, DowntoEarth

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**14 Locust Swarms in India**

Syllabus: Disaster and Disaster Management

- Question: Discuss the phenomenon of locust swarms & its effects. Suggest the measures to control this menace.

Why is it in News?

- India is facing worst locust attack in last 26 years and current locust attack (2019-2020) has been categorized as an upsurge.

About Locust:

- Locusts are short-horned grasshoppers belong to the family Acrididae.
- Locusts have the ability to change their behaviour and habits and can migrate over large distances.
- They feed on green, leafy plants and always travel during the day time.
- When conditions are favourable for reproduction, locust numbers increase 20-fold in three months.
- The desert locust restricts itself to the semi-arid and arid deserts of Africa, west and south Asia that receive less than 200 mm of rain annually.
- Serotonin regulates mood and social behaviour in locusts which led to neurochemical stimulations. This results into phenomenon of coming together as swarms.
- Each locust can eat its weight in plants each day. So, it’s dangerous as it devastates green vegetation beyond imagination.

Effects of locust attack:

- Damage to Agriculture: Locust swarms devastate crops and cause major agricultural damage.
- Threat to food Security: It can lead to famine and starvation and threaten food security of nation.
- Agriculture Income: It affects farmer’s income negatively.
- Increase in Input Cost: It might increase the burden on the state exchequer due to increase in expenditure on pesticides.
Climate Change and Locust Attack:

- Indian Ocean Dipole, in which the western and eastern parts of the ocean, warm differentially, will have impact in bringing excessive rains to India and West Asia.
- A pattern of warming in the Indian Ocean due to climate change may increase frequency of locust attacks.

**Meteorological drivers for current locust attack:**

1. The strong Indian Ocean Dipole was resulted into torrential rainfall in last June.
2. Rainfall continued in several parts of West Asia, Oman, Yemen and in the Horn of Africa and dry sand became heavily moisture facilitating the formation of several locust swarms.
3. Heavy rains in the main spring-breeding tracts provided ground to feed.
4. Strong westerly winds due to cyclone Amphan brought more locusts swarms to Indian land.

**Initiatives:**

- **Use of drones:**
  1. Drones have been deployed for controlling locusts in Rajasthan.
  2. A drone can spray pesticide on nearly 2.5-acres during a flight of 15 minutes.
  3. Government modified policy of drones for the use of drones at night.

- **Use of noise:**
  1. Local villagers are using old technique of making noise by beating ‘thalis’, dhols and bursting crackers.
  2. These measures will help in controlling locusts at their resting place.

- **Use of helicopters:**
  1. India is a first country to use helicopters with pesticides to control locust population in the districts of Jaisalmer, Barmer, Jodhpur, Bikaner in Rajasthan.
  2. The Indian Air Force also participated in anti-locust operations by deploying a Mi-17 helicopter for aerial spraying in Jodhpur district.

- **Use of specialist vehicles and fire engines:** Government is using specialist vehicles for spraying operations in at least nine densely populated states in the north, centre and west.

- **Financial assistance:** Union government is providing financial assistance to state governments against locust attack.

- **International cooperation:**
  1. India, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan are holding weekly talks to stem locust swarms across the wider region.
  2. India has offered assistance to Iran & Pakistan to jointly combat the locust menace.
  3. While Iran has accepted the offer, India is preparing to supply pesticide Malathion to Iran.

**Way Forward**

- **Immediate measures:**
  1. Use of Pesticide: Use appropriate amount of organophosphate chemicals and other pesticides such as Malathion to control breeding population.
  2. Declaration of National Disaster: Central government should designate locust attacks as a natural disaster. This will enable farmers to claim insurance compensation.
  3. Monitoring System: Monitoring for locust breeding is essential as it is much easier to destroy eggs than fully grown locusts.
  4. International Cooperation: International cooperation with affected countries including Pakistan is necessary.

- **Long terms measures:**
  1. Protect Birds: British realized that birds could help to limit the locust population. Kites, Crows, Storks, Starlings, Peafowls birds fed on locusts.
(2) Protect other species: Other species effective in checking the locust population are pigs, toads and snakes should be protected. Ground beetles and parasitic flies also fed on locusts.

(3) Curbing Global Warming: Global warming increased the intensity of warmer oceans and cyclones. To control locusts’ population, we need to take measures to prevent further global warming.

(4) As Serotonin helps to form swarms, more research is necessary for serotonin inhibition.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express, LiveMint.

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**Assam Floods**

**Syllabus: GS 3 Disaster and Disaster Management.**

- Question: Assam floods are the result of poor understanding of river dynamics and embankment strategy. Do you agree?

**Why is it in News?**

- 90 per cent of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR) remains submerged in Assam floods of 2020

**Causes of Floods:**

- Physiographic conditions:
  
  (1) The 640 km long Brahmaputra valley is very narrow and confined between hills on the east, north, and south.
  
  (2) The main stem of Brahmaputra and most tributaries joining it in the valley have a high gradient in these hills.
  
  (3) Guwahati is susceptible to water logging due to its bowl like shape.
Meteorological situations: The Northeast region under the Brahmaputra basin receives very high annual rainfall ranging from 248 cm to 635 cm largely during 5 rainy months from May to September.

Earthquake and landslides: The NE region is highly seismic and geologically unstable. The debris and loose earth from the landslides due to earthquakes are deposited in the river beds of the valley making it shallow.

Unplanned Development: It has led to severe encroachments in the wetlands, low lying areas, hills and shrinkage of forest cover. Roads and Bridges restrict natural flow of river.

Bank erosion and dams: Bank erosion around the Brahmaputra and its tributaries has resulted into wideness of the Brahmaputra river, which has increased up to 15 km.

Failure of Embankments: The river also changes course frequently due to sentiments deposited. It’s virtually impossible to contain it within embankments.

Why Floods are essential for Assam & Kaziranga?

Agriculture and fishing: Flood waters have rejuvenated croplands and fertilised soil in alluvial areas which also function as a breeding ground for fish.

Tourism: Assam is one of the natural tourist spots. Floods rejuvenate the ecosystem and attract global tourists.

Kaziranga:

1. The entire area of Kaziranga — formed by alluvial deposits from the Brahmaputra and its tributaries — is centred around the river.
2. Floods helps replenish water bodies and maintain its landscape, a mix of wetlands, grasslands and semi-evergreen deciduous forests.

Concerns:

Increased frequency and intensity:

1. Earlier, a big floods would come once in ten years. Now, they happen every 2 years.
2. Massive deforestation in catchment areas or release of waters by dams upstream may increase intensity.

Threat to biodiversity:

1. While in the past, Kaziranga and Karbi Anglong were part of the same landscape, the animals now have to cross the NH 37 which cuts across the park.
2. As a result, animals that venture out of the park, die either under the wheels of speeding vehicles on the highway, or are killed by poachers.

Embankments’ economy:

Embankment as a measure:

1. Great Assam Earthquake of 1950 made the riverbed of the Brahmaputra rise substantially and led to the construction of a series of embankments.
2. Since 1950s, the state has adopted embankments to control floods.
3. Embankments was introduced in the background of poor understanding of the hydrology of the Brahmaputra.

Problem of Embankments:

1. The river changes course frequently due to sediment deposition.
2. So, it becomes very difficult to contain river within embankments.
3. Embankments were immediate technological and engineering fix and were introduced without enough time and resources spent on studying the river dynamics properly.

Contractors and State agencies nexus:
(1) The construction of embankments became business-as-usual.
(2) It led to an “embankment economy” involving contractors for construction, maintenance and repair of embankments.

Government initiatives till date:

- **Technological Fixes:**
  (1) Heavy reliance on embankments to river is evident.
  (2) Dredging of rivers to increase depth of rivers.
  (3) Building of large hydropower plants to increase storage capacity during rainy seasons.

- **MoU with China:**
  (1) Flash flood on Siang river 20 years ago led to signing of MoU with China in 2002.
  (2) China agreed to provide hydrological data critical to averting such calamities.

Way forward

- **Study river dynamics:**
  (1) With failure of embankment strategy, it has become inevitable to understand river dynamics. It will help to predict and set early warning systems.

- **International Cooperation:**
  (1) As river and its basin covers China, Bhutan, Bangladesh and India, international cooperation become inevitable.
  (2) Water flow information shared by China on the Brahmaputra with India should also be shared with the public.

- **Forecasting system:**
  (1) More accurate and decentralised forecasts of rain can help in improving preparedness.
  (2) Weather reports should be made available on district level and should be accessible to public.

- **Integrated approach:**
  (1) India needs an integrated approach to managing floods.
  (2) It would mean thinking simultaneously about water management, physical planning, land use, agriculture, transport and urban development as well as nature conservation.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express, The Print, Scroll.in
Mob Lynching

1. **Syllabus:** GS 2- Social justice- Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection of vulnerable sections.
2. **Question:** The recent incidents of mob attacks in various parts of the country needs to be dealt with iron hand. Comment

Why is it in the news?
1. Recently the incidents of mob attacks have been reported from various part of the country.
2. Three persons travelling in a car were recently attacked by a group of men in Palghar, Maharashtra.
3. Three persons are lynched in Assam’s Karimganj district as alleged cattle thieves, suspected to be Bangladeshi Nationals.

Introduction:
1. Mob Lynching is a form of violence in which a mob, under the pretext of administering justice without trial inflict an assault and torture on the presumed offender.
2. By committing the act of violence, persons take the law into their own hands to avenge what they may perceive to be crime.

Possible Causes behind the Lynching:
1. **Organized vigilantism:**
   1. Lynching is a result of organised hate-mongering and communal bigotry.
   2. Intolerance to different views/practices and ideological support from political groups are the reason behind most of the mob attacks.
2. **Role of Social Media:**
   1. Fake news has become a new normal these days. Various groups circulate hate messages in order to incite or appeal to a particular section of people.
   2. The dissemination of hate messages and rumours on social media further instigate the matter.
3. **Rumours of child lifters:**
   1. The incidents of mob lynchings on the rumours of child kidnappers have also been reported.
   2. This claimed several lives on domestic visitors, mentally deranged peoples and incited numerous mob attacks.
4. **No Fear of Law or Punishment:**
   1. The response of the state towards the accused is not adequate to instill the fear among the perpetrators and stop the menace.
   2. There are reports of the perpetrator roaming scott free or attracting lighter punishment.

Other Issues/ Challenges:
1. **Inaction of Police and Public:**
   1. Certain incidents have reportedly happened in the presence of policemen.
   2. Policemen appears to be indifferent in front of crowd and barely register the event.
   3. The crowd gathered around the spot doesn’t do anything, despite being more in numbers.
   4. So, one plays the perpetrator and the other the silent spectator.
2. **Inadequate Response from the Government:**
(1) Despite the increase in violence related to bovine issues, the ministry of home affairs was long reluctant to collect data on lynchings.

(2) Number of lynching incidents across the country has disturbed the socio-political fabric in the country. Despite that, a strong and separate law is yet to come to deal with the mob violence.

**Supreme Court on Lynching:**

- **Stern Action:**
  (1) The Supreme Court has asked the States to take stern measures to stop violence in the name of cow protection.
  (2) The Court had directed the States to form a dedicated task force in each district to deal with mob violence.
  (3) The Court had asked chief secretaries of states to file status report giving details of actions taken by them to prevent incidents of cow vigilantism.

- **Separate Law:**
  (1) The Supreme Court had also ordered calling for a special law to deal with lynching.
  (2) The Court says a special law would still a sense of fear among those involved.

**Way Ahead:**

- **Public Response:**
  (1) People must come out and raise their voice against the mob violence in the name of religion.
  (2) Gandhian message of humanism and the importance of peaceful co-existence needs to prevail.

- **Stringent Action:**
  (1) Immediate and firm action must be taken against the perpetrators of such hate crimes.

- **Dealing Apolitically:**
  (1) The issue of mob attacks must be kept outside the vote bank calculations as it not only curb the rights of the vulnerable sections, but also goes against the very spirit of our constitution.
  (2) If not dealt properly it may prove to be a threat to unity and integrity of the nation.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express, The Wire, Scroll.in
Presidential System

- Syllabus: GS2: Parliamentary system, Executive at Centre and State.
- Question: Analyse the need for Presidential system in India.

Why is it in news?
- Recently there were various instances where MLAs have shifted their allegiance to a different party to be a part of the Executive.
- This has casted the Indian democracy in poor light.
- To avoid such situations, it has been argued that India should shift to the Presidential system from Parliamentary system.

Present Political Structure in India:
- Indian parliamentary system is based on British model of governance where Executive is part of the Legislature.
- Judiciary has ruled that parliamentary system is part of the Basic Structure of Indian Constitution.

Argument for Presidential system:
- Increasing Incidents of Defections:
  (1) Political parties are trying to get MLAs on their side even from opposition parties to form the government which often leads to horse trading and corruption.
  (2) Under Presidential system, President is directly elected by citizens. So incidents will be reduced.

- Brings in talent:
  (1) Under Presidential System President gets to nominate member of his cabinet. Selection of them is not restricted to Member of Parliament.
  (2) Hence, President can bring outside talent to his government.

- Decisive decision making:
  (1) President under Presidential system is not dependent on his strength in Parliament or legislature.
  (2) Hence President can take effective decisions without any hurdles.

- Coalition government:
  (1) Under Parliamentary system, it is difficult for any political party to get complete majority in legislature which often leads to formation of coalition government.
  (2) Coalition governments are weak and lead to policy stagnation.

- Constant elections:
  (1) Government under parliamentary system is dependent on strength in parliament.
  (2) Hence members of government are in constant election mode to ensure strength in legislature.

- Unqualified legislator:
  (1) Party tickets are given to candidates based on their winning ability which is further dependent on social factors such as caste, religion etc rather than their qualification to become legislator.
  (2) This brings many unqualified legislators to parliament.
Against

- **Debated in Constituent Assembly:**
  1. Dr B R Ambedkar had put benefits and draw backs of both the systems in the Constituent assembly.
  2. The Constituent Assembly after thorough discussion adopted Parliamentary system as it is most suitable for our country.

- **Part of basic structure:**
  1. The Supreme Court has held in its various judgements that Parliamentary system is a Basic Structure of Indian constitution.
  2. According to Professor Upendra Bakshi, any attempt to change this will be struck down by Judiciary.

- **Centralisation of Power:** Presidential system leads to concentration of power in one person which can bring despotic tendencies in governance.

- **Policy stagnation:**
  1. Under Parliamentary system, the Executive is part of legislature which brings cohesion in policy formation and policy implementation.
  2. But under Presidential system, where the legislature and the executive could be from different parties from different parties, it can lead to policy stagnation.

- **Outside talent in Parliament is also possible:**
  1. In Parliamentary system also outside talent can be brought in, for instance through Rajhya Sabha nomination.

**Way forward:**

- Reforms in Anti Defection Laws: Defecting and resigning members of legislature should be barred from contesting elections for the remaining period of the House.
- Training for Legislature: Leaders elected by citizens should be given training for effective functioning of legislator.
- Strengthening the institution: Institutions of Parliamentary democracy should be strengthen to maintain checks and balances.
- **Conclusion:** For a diverse country like India, Parliamentary system is best suited to accommodate different voices and aspirations.
Current Affairs
July 2020

By Jawwad Kazi
1. **Postal Ballot**

**Why is it in news?**
- Election Commission of India is considering postal ballot for senior citizens above 65 years during the Covid 19 pandemic.

**About Postal Ballot:**
- Postal voting is a type of voting in elections whereby Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot Papers (ETPB) are distributed to electors and returned by post, in contrast to electors voting in person at a polling station via an electronic voting system aided by Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).
- Earlier EC allowed senior citizens above the age of 80 years, persons with disability and service voter for postal ballot.
- Now EC considering to allow senior citizens above 65 years of age for postal ballot due to Covid 19 pandemic.

2. **Lok Sabha Assembly bypolls put off**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Election Commission has deferred byelections to a Lok Sabha seat in Bihar and seven Assembly seats in Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala “due to some extraordinary circumstances peculiar to these constituencies”.

**Details:**
- The vacancies are required to be filled through byelections within six months from the date of occurrence of vacancy, provided that the remainder of the term in relation to the vacancy is one year or more.

**About Election Commission:**
- It is an autonomous constitutional authority under Article 324 of Constitution of India responsible for administering Union and State election processes in India.
- The body administers elections to the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies in India, and the offices of the President and Vice President in the country.

3. **Violation of Size of the Cabinet**

**Why is it in news?**
- Opposition parties have alleged that recent cabinet expansion in Madhya Pradesh violated the 15% limit fixed by Constitution.

**Details:**
Article 164 (1A) of the Constitution: The total number of Ministers, including the Chief Minister, in the Council of Ministers in a State shall not exceed 15% of the total number of members of the Legislative Assembly of that State.

According to this, with an Assembly strength of 206, the strength of the Council of Ministers shouldn't have exceeded 30.

The appointment of 34 Ministers exceeds this limit.

4. University Grant Commission (UGC)

Why is it in news?

- UGC is pushing forward for University exams during Covid 19 pandemic which state governments are reluctant to take.
- In this context, UGC reiterated that guidelines were legally binding on the States and must be followed.

Constitutional Provisions:

- School education is in State list where States are authorised to govern it.
- Higher education comes under Concurrent list where both Centre and State can make rules but Centre has upper hand.

5. Criminalisation of Politics

Why is it in news?

- Association for Democratic Reforms has released report regarding criminal cases against Rajya Sabha members.

Details:

- About a quarter of the sitting Rajya Sabha members have declared criminal cases against themselves.
- Out of the 229, 28 or 12% had declared serious criminal cases.

Supreme Court Directives:

- A party would have to give reasons to the voter that it was not the candidate’s “mere winnability at the polls” which guided its decision to give him the ticket.

Details of Candidates:

1. The information should be published in a local and a national newspaper as well as the parties’ social media handles.
2. The published information on the criminal antecedents of a candidate should be detailed and include:
   - The nature of the offences.
   - Charges framed against him.
   - The court concerned and the case number.

Publication: The information should mandatorily be published either within 48 hours of the selection of candidates or less than two weeks before the first date for filing of nominations, whichever is earlier.

Compliance Reports to ECI: Political parties should submit compliance reports with the Election Commission of India within 72 hours or risk contempt of court action.

Applicability of Judgement: The judgment is applicable to parties both at the Central and State levels.
6. **PMCARES FUND**

**Why is it in news?**
- Various political parties and social activist are demanding transparency and accountability in operating of PM CARES fund.

**Details:**
- **About PM CARES fund**: The Prime Minister’s Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) Fund was set to accept donations and provide relief during the COVID-19 pandemic, and other similar emergencies.
- **Not a public authority under RIT Act**: As per the PMO, PM CARES Fund is not a Public Authority under the ambit of Section 2(h) of the RTI Act, 2005.
- Contributions by companies towards the PM-CARES Fund will count towards mandatory Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) expenditure.
- There will be tax exemptions for the amount donated.
- The fund will be a public charitable trust.
- The Prime Minister is the Chairman of this trust and other members include the Defence Minister, Home Minister and Finance Minister.
- There is already a Prime Minister’s National Relief Fund for identical purpose.

**Prime Minister’s National Relief Fund:**
- This fund was instituted in 1948 by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to assist displaced persons from Pakistan.
- The fund is currently used primarily to tackle natural calamities like floods, cyclones and earthquakes.
- The fund is also used to help with medical treatment like kidney transplantation, cancer treatment and acid attack.
- Prime Minister is the chairman of this fund. It also include other members such as Congress President and representative of FICCI and Tata Trusts.

7. **Rental housing scheme for migrants.**

**Why is it in news?**
- A scheme for providing affordable rental housing to about 3 lakh urban migrants was approved by the Union Cabinet.

**Details:**
- It was announced by Finance Minister as a part of the package to address the COVID-19 crisis.
- It will be implemented as sub-scheme of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban.
- **Implementation Ministry**: Ministry Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry.
- About 1.03 lakh completed government-funded houses across cities that were yet to be allotted to beneficiaries under existing schemes would be converted into the rental housing complexes.
- The urban local bodies in cities would decide the rent amount.
- The vacant housing complexes would be converted through 25-year concession agreements, a statement said.
8. Draft of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020

Why is it in news?

Details:
- Under earlier rules medical examination for trans persons applying for a certificate of identity was required.
- This was opposed by transgender community as it was against the right to self-identification.
- New rules mandate that a District Magistrate would issue a transgender identity certificate and card based on an affidavit by the applicant, “but without any medical examination”.
- Trans persons would be required to fill out a form and submit an affidavit saying they perceive themselves to be “a transgender person whose gender does not match with the gender assigned at birth”.

9. Pragyata guidelines

Why is it in news?
- Pragyata guidelines for digital education were issued by Ministry of Human Resources.

Details:
- Schools can hold live online classes for a maximum of 1.5 hours per day for Classes 1-8, and three hours per day for Classes 9-12.
- For kindergarten, nursery and pre-school, only 30 minutes of screen time per day for interacting with parents is recommended.
- These guidelines, prepared by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), are only advisory in nature, and State governments have been asked to build on them and formulate their own rules, based on local needs.
- The Pragyata guidelines acknowledge that these students live in households which fall into different categories according to available digital infrastructure.
- Survey advised: Noting that students from different categories may be present in the same classroom, the guidelines advise schools to first survey their own students before making decisions about the mode of teaching.

Judgements

10. Maratha quota

Why is it in news?
- The Supreme Court is hearing petitions against Bombay High Court decision upholding a State law providing reservation to Maratha community in education and government jobs in Maharashtra.

Details:
- Maharashtra government has provided 12-13% quota to the Maratha community under the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act.
- Bombay High Court has upheld this act.
- The petitioner has claimed that State law has breached the 50% cap on reservation fixed by a Constitution Bench in the Indira Sawhney judgment.
• **Indra Sawhney Judgement:** This judgment capped the reservation limits to 50% in India.

## 11. SC rejects Rajasthan Speaker’s plea to stay HC proceedings

**Why is it in news?**

- The Supreme Court was hearing a petition against Rajasthan High Court in anti-defection notices to Congress MLAs.

**Details:**

- The Supreme Court refused Rajasthan Assembly Speaker’s plea to stop the State’s High Court from deciding the validity of the anti-defection.
- The Speaker had complained that the HC had no jurisdiction to ask him to defer the disqualification proceedings until the final decision is taken by him as per the Kihoto Hollohan case.
- Supreme Court observed that right to dissent is an important part of democracy and cannot be curtailed for just not attending party meetings.

## Institution in News

## 12. CERT-IN

**About Cert IN:**

- CERT-In is the national nodal agency for responding to computer security incidents as and when they occur.
- CERT-In has been designated to serve as the national agency to perform the following functions in the area of cyber security:
  1. Collection, analysis and dissemination of information on cyber incidents.
  2. Forecast and alerts of cyber security incidents.
  3. Emergency measures for handling cyber security incidents.
  4. Coordination of cyber incident response activities.
  5. Issue guidelines, advisories, vulnerability notes and whitepapers relating to information security practices, procedures, prevention, response and reporting of cyber incidents.
  6. Such other functions relating to cyber security as may be prescribed.
1. Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs)

Why is it in news?
- RBI has asked Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) to adopt a ‘Fair Practices Code’ (FPC) to ensure the highest standards of transparency and fairness while dealing with their stakeholders.
- It is likely that there will be rise in non-performing assets (NPA) due to the pandemic.

More from RBI to ARCs:
- ARCs are expected to eschew any harassment of the debtor while recovering loans.
- ARCs shall ensure that the staff are adequately trained to deal with customers in an appropriate manner.
- The ARCs must put in place a Board approved Code of Conduct for Recovery Agents and obtain their undertaking to abide by that Code.
- ARCs would be responsible for the actions of their Recovery Agents.

About Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs):
- It is a specialized financial institution that buys the NPAs or bad assets from banks and financial institutions and attempts to recover the debts by itself.
- The ARCs take over a portion of the debts of the bank that qualify to be recognised as Non-Performing Assets.
- ARCs are registered under the RBI and regulated under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Securities Interest (SARFAESI) Act, 2002.

Significance of ARCs:
- ARCs clean up the balance sheets of banks when the latter sells these to the ARCs.
- This helps banks to concentrate in normal banking activities.
- Banks rather than going after the defaulters by wasting their time and effort, can sell the bad assets to the ARCs at a mutually agreed value.

2. Moratoriums don’t apply to Mutual Funds: Bombay HC

Why is it in news?
- The Bombay High Court ruled that two circulars issued by the RBI granting moratoriums on payment of installments on term loans do not apply to mutual funds and debentures.

Details (from HC):
- According to the circulars issued by RBI, moratoriums applies to following:
  1. All commercial banks.
  2. All primary (urban) co-operative banks.
3. **External Debt Rises**

**Why is it in news?**
- According to RBI data, India’s external debt stood at $558.5 billion in March, an increase of $15.4 billion compared with the year-ago period.

**More about the scheme:**
- **Major components of the external debt:**
  1. Commercial borrowings remained the largest, with a share of 39.4%.
  2. Non-resident deposits at 23.4%.
  3. Short-term trade credit at 18.2%.
- Long-term debt (by March end), with original maturity of above one year, was placed at $451.7 billion, a rise of $17 billion over the level recorded in March 2019.
- Short-term debt on residual maturity basis constituted 42.4% of the total external debt and 49.5% of foreign exchange reserves at the end of March.

**Debt in Denominations:**
- U.S. dollar-denominated debt continued to be the largest component of India’s external debt, with a share of 53.7% at end-March 2020.
- It is followed by the Indian rupee (31.9%), yen (5.6%), SDR (4.5%) and the euro (3.5%).

4. **Namami Gange Project**

**Why is it in news?**
- The World Bank has approved a five-year loan to the Namami Gange project worth $400 million (₹3,000 crore).
- The loan is granted to develop and improve infrastructure projects to abate pollution in the river basin.

**Details:**
- The Namami Ganga has already received ₹4,535 crore from the World Bank until December 2021 as part of the first phase of the National Ganga River Basin project.
- So far, 313 projects worth ₹25,000 crore have been sanctioned under the mission.

**Namami Gange Mission:**
- Namami Gange is an Integrated Conservation Mission, also known as Integrated Ganga Conservation Mission project.
- The objective of the programme was to reduce pollution of the basin by adopting a river-basin approach for comprehensive planning.
- The project also aims to maintain minimum ecological flow in the river, conserve and rejuvenate it.
- The Vision for Ganga Rejuvenation includes restoring the “Aviral Dhara” (Continuous Flow)
“Nirmal Dhara” (“Unpolluted Flow”).

- **According to mission, Namami Gange has focused on the followings:**
  1. River Surface Cleaning
  2. Crematoria modernization
  3. Ghat repair
  4. Rural Sanitation
  5. Municipal Sewage Management

### 5. National Logistics Law

**Why is it in news?**

- The Commerce Ministry is considering replacing the Multi-Modal Transportation of Goods Act (MMTG) with a full-fledged national logistics law.

**Aim:** To promote growth of the logistics sector.

**Details:**

- National Logistics Efficiency and Advancement Predictability and Safety Act (NLEAPS) is under consideration.
- NLEAPS tends to define various participants of the logistics space and create a light regulatory ecosystem.

**Background:**

- Logistics Sector comprises of industrial parks, warehouses, cold storages and transportation.
- India’s logistics sector is highly fragmented and the logistic cost is about 14% of GDP.
- Government aims to reduce the logistics cost from the present 14% to less than 10% of GDP.

**Significance of new proposed Policy:**

- The move assumes significance as high logistics cost impacts the competitiveness of domestic goods in the international market.
- Effective implementation of the policy would help provide an impetus to trade, enhance export competitiveness, and improve India’s ranking in the Logistics Performance Index.

### 6. Foodgrain offtake by States rises sharply

**Why is it in news?**

- States and Union Territories in the country to draw more than double the quantity of rice for distribution during April to June this year.
- Relief measures being implemented in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic have paved the way for states to do so.

**Details:**

- The total amount of rice lifted by the States and Union Territories from the Food Corporation of India (FCI) was 90.71 lakh tonnes (in 3 months).
- Central government had announced that Priority Household (PHH) and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) cardholders would receive free additional entitlement of 5 kg per person.
- This was in addition to their entitlement under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

**For Others:**

- The Centre came up with a scheme for providing wheat and rice to ration cardholders not covered under the NFSA or non-priority household (NPHH) cardholders.
- This has been used by Tamil Nadu to provide additional entitlement of rice to about 85.99 lakh
such cardholders.

**For Migrant workers:**
- For the migrant labourers who were not covered under the NFSA or any scheme of the States, the Union government announced one more scheme.
- Workers can avail free food grains at 5 kg per person per month for May and June.

**About Food Corporation of India (FCI):**
- The Food Corporation of India was setup under the Food Corporation’s Act 1964.
- **FCI’s objectives of the Food Policy:**
  1. Effective price support operations for safeguarding the interests of the farmers.
  2. Distribution of foodgrains throughout the country for public distribution system.
  3. Maintaining satisfactory level of operational and buffer stocks of foodgrains to ensure National Food Security.

### 7. Levy on foreign e-com firms:

**Why is it in news?**
- The government is not considering extending the deadline for payment of Equalisation Levy by non-resident e-commerce players.

**New Rules in April 2020:**
- The 2% equalisation levy was introduced in the 2020-21 Budget and came into effect from April 1.
- The tax would be levied on consideration received by e-commerce operators from online supply of goods or services.
- The tax applies on e-commerce transactions on websites such as Amazon.com.
- Google in particular has been worried as the tax applies on advertising revenue earned overseas if those ads target customers in India.
- The deadline for payment of the first installment for April-June is July 7.

### 8. Govt. lifts curbs on hand sanitisers, face masks

**Why is it in news?**
- Face masks and hand sanitisers are no more essential products under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.

**Details:**
- In March this year, the Union Consumer Affairs Ministry had declared face masks and hand sanitisers as essential commodities for 100 days.
- It was done to boost supply and prevent hoarding of these items in its fight to check the spread of COVID-19.

**Essential Commodity:**
- The product deemed essential can come under price control under Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- Government has the power to bring any item of medical necessity under price control.
- Currently, the health ministry prepares the list of drugs eligible for price regulation.

### 9. Country of origin tag

**Why is it in news?**
- The Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs has sent out a reminder to all e-commerce portals about
“country of origin” tag.

● Minister asks e-commerce firms to ensure that the “country of origin” of the products being sold by them should be mentioned as part of mandatory declarations.
● The Ministry’s reminder to e-commerce portals is part of a concerted effort by the government to have ‘country of origin’ declarations on these websites.

Details:
● The Ministry in its reminder invoked the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules, 2011.
● These rules make it mandatory for all manufacturers to declare the following:
  1. Package name and address of the manufacturer
  2. Common and generic name of commodity
  3. Net quantity
  4. Month and year of manufacturing
  5. MRP and consumer care details.
● In 2017, new provisions were added for e-commerce websites such as Amazon and Flipkart, making it compulsory for them to display these information along with “declaration of country of origin or manufacture or assembly” and a clear mention of expiry date.

10. Rubber Act

Why is it in news?
● The rubber sector is in turmoil amid concerns that the Centre plans to repeal the Rubber Act of 1947.
● But sources in the sector suspect that reports of the likely repeal of the Act, which first surfaced in 2016, was the result of a ‘clerical error.’

Details:
● The rubber sector has about 1.3 million rubber farmers contributing to a ₹1-lakh crore industry.
● The existence of the Rubber Board, the system of licensing, extension, replanting, research, subsidies, control over export-import etc. depend on the Rubber Act.
● Withdrawal of the Act would empower the Centre to disband the board and end the present system of rubber farming.

Background:
● The Rubber Act came into being in 1947 to promote natural rubber, a strategic product, entrusting the task to the Rubber Board.
● The sector has since grown to comprise 8.22 lakh hectares of cultivation and 13.2 lakh small cultivating units.
● Some experts have raised concerns as over the years the Centre had ignored the sector by cutting financial allocations.

11. New e-commerce Rules

Why is it in news?
● The Consumer Protection (E-commerce) Rules, 2020, will be notified within a few days.
● The new rules fall under the Consumer Protection Act.
● According to the Minister, these rules are mandatory and not merely advisories as issued earlier.

Key Rules under the new Directives:
● The e-commerce portals will have to set up a robust consumer redressal mechanism.
● They will also have to appoint a grievance officer for consumer grievance redressal.
They will have to provide every detail relating to return, refund, exchange, warranty and guarantee.
They have to clarify on modes of payment, payment methods, security of payment methods and charge-back options.
They will have to mention 'the country of origin' at the pre-purchase stage on its platform. It is necessary for enabling the consumer to make an informed decision.
They have to acknowledge the receipt of any consumer complaint within 48 hours and redress the complaint within one month.
Under the rules, sellers cannot refuse to take back goods or refuse refunds, if such goods or services are defective, deficient, etc.
The rules also prohibit the e-commerce companies from manipulating the price of the goods or services to gain unreasonable profit through unjustified prices.

12. GST Compensation Cess

Why is it in news?
• The Centre made up a 42% shortfall in Goods and Services Tax compensation cess collection in 2019-20.

Details:
• During 2019-20, the cess collected was only ₹95,444 crore, just under 58% of the ₹1.65 lakh crore that was paid out to States.
• States had been protesting the delay in payment of pending compensation.

What is Compensation Cess?
• Compensation cess was introduced as relief for States for the loss of revenues arising from the implementation of GST.
• States were guaranteed a 14% tax revenue growth in the first five years after GST implementation by the Central government.
• States’ tax revenue as of FY16 is considered as the base year for the calculation of this 14% growth.
• Any shortfall against it is supposed to be compensated by the Centre using the funds specifically collected as compensation cess.
• Compensation cess is levied on five products considered to be ‘sin’ or luxury goods.

13. FDI in Air India for NRIs

Why is it in news?
• Union Government has notified changes in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) rules which permit Non-resident Indians (NRIs) to acquire upto 100% in Air India.
• The amendment in FDI policy will permit FDI in Air India Ltd at par with other Scheduled Airline Operators.

Details:
• The Notification: Foreign investments in Air India, including that of foreign airlines shall not exceed 49% either directly or indirectly except in case of those NRIs, who are Indian nationals, where foreign investments is permitted up to 100% under automatic route.
• Previously, NRIs could own up to 49% in the carrier.
• India allows upto 49% FDI under the automatic route, government route beyond that and up to 100% for NRIs in scheduled air transport service/ domestic scheduled passenger airline, and regional air transport service.

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Substantial ownership and effective control of M/s Air India Limited shall continue to be vested in Indian Nationals as stipulated in Aircraft Rules, 1937.

14. GI Tag for Kashmir Saffron

Why is it in news?
- The J&K administration issued the certificate of Geographical Indication (GI) registration for saffron grown in the Kashmir Valley.

Significance of GI Tag to Kashmir Saffron:
- With the GI tag, Kashmir saffron will acquire more prominence in the export market.
- The tag would help farmers get the best remunerative price.

More about Kashmir Saffron:
- Kashmir saffron derived from the crocus flower.
- Saffron is grown commercially primarily in India, Spain and Iran. But the Kashmir variety is considered the best and it is the most expensive.
- First cultivated in Greece, saffron has been grown in the Kashmir valley for hundreds of years.
- Kashmir’s is the only Saffron in the world that is grown at an altitude of 1,600 metres.

About Geographical Indication (GI) Tag:
- A GI or Geographical Indication is a name or a sign given to certain products that relate to a specific geographical location or origins like a region, town or country.
- Geographical Indications are covered as a component of intellectual property rights (IPRs) under the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property.
- At the International level, GI is governed by the World Trade Organisation’s (WTO’s) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).
- In India, Geographical Indications registration is administered by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 which came into force with effect from September 2003.
- The first product in India to be accorded with GI tag was Darjeeling tea in the year 2004-05.
- The registration of a geographical indication is valid for a period of 10 years. It can be renewed from time to time for further period of 10 years each.
1. **India UAE Open Sky Agreement**

**Why is it in news?**
- India an UAE are working of Open Sky Policy.

**Details:**
- India has an open skies policy with SAARC countries and those beyond the 5,000-km radius, which implies that nations within this distance need to enter into a bilateral agreement and mutually determine the number of flights that their airlines can operate between the two countries.

2. **India’s trade deficit with China dips to $48.66 billion**

**Why is it in news?**
- According to government data, India’s trade deficit with China fell to $48.66 billion in 2019-20 on account of the decline in imports from the neighbouring country.

**Details:**
- In April 2020, the government tightened norms for FDI coming from countries which share a land border with India.
- As per the amended FDI policy, a company or an individual from a country that shares a land border with India can invest in any sector only after getting government approval.

3. **No final decision on India’s involvement in Colombo terminal: Rajapaksa**

**Why is it in news?**
- A year after the previous Sri Lankan government signed an agreement with India and Japan to jointly develop the East Container Terminal (ECT) in Colombo, Sri Lankan Prime Minister has said “there is no final agreement” on the project.

**Details:**
- Development of the ECT has remained contentious in Sri Lanka, with nationalist groups objecting to any “foreign involvement” in running “national assets”.
- Under this project Sri Lanka Ports Authority was to retain 100% ownership, a jointly-owned Terminal Operations Company — 51% stake with Sri Lanka, and 49% with India and Japan — was to run the terminal.
- Over 70% of the transhipment business at the strategically located ECT comes from India.
- The ECT is adjacent to the Colombo International Container Terminal, which is a joint venture between China Merchants Port Holdings Company Limited and the Ports Authority, with the Chinese company holding 85% stake.
4. India USA Relations

Why is it in news?
- PM Modi addressed US India Business Council.

Details:
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited U.S. companies to invest in India’s healthcare, infrastructure, defence, energy, farm and insurance sectors.
- India offers a perfect combination of openness, opportunities and options.
- Reforms have ensured increased competitiveness, transparency, digitisation, innovation and policy stability.
- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has said that the U.S. needs to learn to work with a more multipolar world and “go beyond” alliances.
- Mr. Jaishankar was optimistic that the trade differences between India and the U.S. could be resolved and the relationship be shifted to a “higher gear”.
- US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said countries like India and the U.S. should work together to face the ‘challenge’ of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC).

5. Indian Diaspora

Why is it in news?
- Indians are largest group granted citizenship in Australia last year.

Details:
- More than 38,000 Indians became Australian citizens in 2019-2020, a 60% increase from the previous year and the largest diaspora group to be granted the country’s citizenship.
- Out of the over 2,00,000 people who became Australian citizens in 2019-2020, 38,209 were Indians, the highest number on record, followed by 25,011 Britishers, 14,764 Chinese and 8,821 Pakistanis.

6. U.S. stance on CAATSA unchanged

Why is it in news?
- USA has reiterated the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) in the context of India’s jet fighter deal with Russia.

About CAATSA:
- **Aim:** Taking punitive measures against Russia, Iran, and North Korea.
- **Section 231 of the Act** empowers the US President to impose at least five of 12 listed sanctions, enumerated in Section 235, on persons engaged in a “significant transaction” with the Russian defence and intelligence sectors.
- **Waiver:** US President has power to give waiver to countries to comply with law. Previously US has given waiver to India.

International Event


Why is it in news?
Central government told the Supreme Court that it accepts UNCLOS ruling in the Italian Marines case as India is party to the convention.

Background:
- The mariners from Italy had killed two fishermen from India near India’s territorial waters.
- Now tribunal under UNCLOS held that mariners will face criminal investigation in Italy. India is entitled to compensation for the loss of life. It’s freedom and right of navigation was violated by the Marines.
- Government’s move is in tune with Article 51(c) and (d) of the Constitution which mandates to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations and encourage settlement of international disputes by arbitration.

About UNCLOS:
- It lays down a comprehensive regime of law and order in the world's oceans and seas establishing rules governing all uses of the oceans and their resources.
- It embodies in one instrument traditional rules for the uses of the oceans and at the same time introduces new legal concepts and regimes and addresses new concerns.
- The Convention also provides the framework for further development of specific areas of the law of the sea.

8. UN blacklists Pak. Taliban leader

Why is it in news?
- The UN Security Council’s 1267 ISIL and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee added Noor Mehsud, the leader of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to the ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaeda Sanctions List subjecting to an assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo.

United Nations 1267 Resolution:
- It was passed in 1999 which establishes ISIL and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee.
- The committee looks after sanctions against members or groups related to above organisations which results into assets freeze, arms embargo and travel ban.

9. Gandhi-King initiative

Why is it in news?
- A Bill which seeks to establish an exchange programme between India and the U.S. to study the work and legacies of Mahatma Gandhi and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr was passed U.S House of Representative committee.

Details:
- The Bill will establish annual scholar and student exchange programmes for Indians and Americans to study the leaders’ legacies and visit historic sites in India and the U.S., relevant to the India’s freedom struggle and the U.S.’s civil rights movement.
- The Bill also seeks to establish the Gandhi-King Global Academy, a conflict resolution initiative based on the principles of non-violence.
- It proposes the establishment of the U.S.-India Gandhi-King Development Foundation set up by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the government of India, organised under Indian law.

10. National Security Law in Hong Kong
Why is it in news?
- First arrest was made under National Security Law passed by China in Hong Kong.

Details:
- The British had taken control of Hong Kong in 1842 after the First Opium War.
- In 1898, the British government and the Qing dynasty of China signed the Second Convention of Peking, which allowed the British to take control of the islands surrounding Hong Kong, known as New Territories, on lease for 99 years.
- London promised that the islands would be returned to China after the expiry of the lease, in 1997.
- Hong Kong returned to Chinese control on July 1, 1997 as a Special Administrative Regions of China.
- The region has its own currencies, economic and legal systems, but defence and diplomacy are decided by Beijing.
- Hong Kong has seen for last few year pro-democracy protests triggered by fears that Beijing was stifling the city’s freedoms, guaranteed by a “one country, two systems” formula agreed when it returned to Chinese rule.
- The law punishes crimes of secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces with up to life in prison, will see mainland security agencies in Hong Kong for the first time and allows extradition to the mainland for trial.

11. China repeats claim on Bhutan’s east

Why is it in news?
- China is putting new claims in eastern side of Bhutan.

Details:
- The boundary between China and Bhutan is yet to be demarcated, and the middle, eastern and western sections of the border are disputed.
- China has proposed a package solution to these disputes, reviving a reference to its 1996 proposal for a territory swap to give Bhutan the disputed areas in its north in exchange for the disputed western areas, including Doklam.
- China also repeated its claim on Bhutan’s eastern boundary at Sakteng, which experts warn, may be a new pressure tactic by Beijing to push Thimphu into concluding a boundary deal.

International Institutions

12. Economic and Social Council

Why is it in news?
- The Prime Minister of India addressed high-level dialogue of the UN’s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on “Multilateralism after COVID-19: What kind of UN do we need at the 75th anniversary?”

Details:
- Prime Minister called for reform within the world body to make multilateral system more representative, and to achieve sustainable peace and prosperity through multilateralism.
- India had extended assistance to more than 150 countries, and helped set up a SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) COVID-19 emergency fund in the South Asian
neighbourhood.

**Economic and Social Council**
- The UN Charter established ECOSOC in 1945 as one of the six main organs of the United Nations.
- It is the central platform for fostering debate and innovative thinking, forging consensus on ways forward, and coordinating efforts to achieve internationally agreed goals.
- It is also responsible for the follow-up to major UN conferences and summits.

**13. UN Reforms**

**Why is it in news?**
- United Nations (UN) has published draft Declaration on the Commemoration of the Seventy Fifth Anniversary of the UN.

**Details:**
- It reiterated our call for reforms of three of the principal organs of the United Nations.
- It committed to instil new life in the discussions on the reform of the Security Council and continue the work to revitalise the General Assembly and strengthen the Economic and Social Council.
- Mention of ‘discussions’ in this key anniversary document is being interpreted as dilution of the progress made on the path of reform of the principal organs of the UN during the 122nd plenary meeting of the General Assembly.
- The final draft for the upcoming UNGA is also a step down from the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on September 16, 2005 when the call for reform was demanded against the backdrop of widespread unilateral decisions as seen during the Iraq war of 2003 and the “war on terror”.

**14. World Health Organisation**

**Why is it in news?**
- US president formally started the withdrawal of the U.S. from the World Health Organization (WHO).

**Details:**
- Trump administration formally sent a notice to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to start withdrawal process. The withdrawal will be effective in one year.
- USA approximately contribute 400 million USD to WHO budget.

**About WHO:**
- WHO began when its Constitution came into force on 7 April 1948 – a date we now celebrate every year as World Health Day.
- **Primary Role:** To direct and coordinate international health within the United Nations system.
- **Areas of Work:** health systems, health through the life-course, noncommunicable and communicable diseases, preparedness, surveillance and response and corporate services.

**Funding to WHO:**
- The WHO’s budget is biennial, spanning a two-year period.
- Assessed contributions are the dues each member State pay (calculated relative to the country’s wealth and population). It go towards keeping up the WHO’s core functions.
- Voluntary contributions come from member States (in addition to their assessed contribution) or from other partners. They can range from flexible to highly earmarked. Voluntary contributions are targeted at specific programmes such as polio eradication and the fight against HIV, malaria...
The United States is the biggest overall donor to the WHO and had contributed more than $800 million by the end of 2019 for the 2018-2019.

The Gates Foundation is the second largest donor, followed by Britain.

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### Environment

#### 1. Environment Performance Index

**Why is it in news?**
- India secured 168 rank in the 12th edition of the biennial Environment Performance Index of 2020. India’s rank was 177 in 2018.
- All South Asian countries, except Afghanistan, were ahead of India in the ranking.
- Denmark tops the Index.

**About the Index:**
- Environment Performance Index is a biennial practice measuring the environmental performance of 180 countries.
- It was released by the Yale University.
- It is prepared by Columbia University and Yale University in collaboration with the World Economic Forum.
- The Index ranks 180 countries on 32 performance indicators across 11 issue categories covering environmental health and ecosystem vitality.
- The 2020 EPI features new metrics that gauge waste management, carbon dioxide emissions from land cover change, and black carbon emissions.

**Way Ahead for India (According to the Index):**
- India needs to re-double national sustainability efforts on all fronts.
- The country needs to focus on a wide spectrum of sustainability issues, with a high-priority to critical issues such as air and water quality, biodiversity and climate change.

#### 2. Assam keelback snake found after 129 years

**Why is it in news?**
- The Assam keelback — a snake species endemic to the region — was rediscovered in 2018 by a team from Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

**Details:**
- It is also known as ‘Herpetoreas pealii’.
- It was discovered 129 years ago by Samuel Edward Peal, a British tea planter based in Upper Assam.
- The two specimens of 1891 were kept in the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), Kolkata, and the Natural History Museum, London.
- Currently, it was found in Poba Reserve Forest (PRF) which is located at the interstate boundary.
of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.
• It is a non-venomous snake.
• Most snakes and other reptiles are categorised as ‘data deficient’ in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) list. This is the worst category because there is practically no information available about it and it is difficult to determine its status.

3. Two more species added to India’s list of butterflies

Why is it in news?
• Lepidopterists have discovered the Striped Hairstreak and Elusive Prince in Arunachal Pradesh.

Details:
• Striped Hairstreak:
  (1) It was first recorded by Japanese entomologists in Hainan province of China.
  (2) It is located near Myanmar border of India.
• Elusive Prince:
  (1) It has a Vietnamese connection.
  (2) It was thought to be the more familiar Black Prince found in the Eastern Himalayas.
  (3) It only had a male specimen of the Elusive Prince.
  (4) We don’t have information about female.
• The Rohana genus:
  (1) It had been represented in India by two species — the Black Prince (Rohana parvisatis) and the Brown Prince (Rohana parvata).
  (2) In the Black Prince, the male is black and the female is brown.
  (3) In the Brown Prince, both male and female are brown.

4. Reconstitution of Central Zoo Authority (CZA)

Why is it in News?
• Environment Ministry has reconstituted the Central Zoo Authority.

Details:
• Reconstituted body will include Director, School of Planning and Architecture, P.S.N. Rao, and Senior Principal Scientist, CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Karthikeyan Vasudevan (Names are not important).
• About CZA:
  (1) It is a statutory body founded in 1992.
  (2) It has been constituted under the section 38A of Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972.
  (3) It is an affiliate member of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA).
  (4) Union Environment Minister is the chairman of CZA. Apart from the chairman, it consists of 10 members and a member-secretary.
  (5) Almost all of them are officials in the Environment Ministry and non-government experts are those who are wildlife conservationists or retired forest officers.
  (6) Regulation of zoos across country is the main function.
  (7) Standards and norms for housing, upkeep, health care and overall management of animals in zoos has been laid down under the Recognition of Zoo Rules, 1992.

5. Environment concerns about infrastructure projects in Western Ghats

Why is it in news?
Environmentalists have raised concerns over clearances to three infrastructure projects, cutting the Western Ghats east of Goa.

**Doubling of rail track between Hospet and Vasco port:**
- It is cutting through forest land between Castle Rock and Kulem.
- **Benefits:**
  1. It will help transport of ore and coal.
  2. It will improve tourism potential for Hospet and Goa.
  3. It will improve connectivity to coastal region with interior regions of Karnataka.
  4. It will lead to creation of employment in Karnataka and Goa.
- **Mitigation measures:**
  1. 8 underpasses for animal passage are planned.
  2. Mechanical or electronically controlled tunnel gates to avoid trapping of animals are visualized.
- **Concerns:**
  1. Diversion of 128.28 hectares in Western Ghats’ ecologically sensitive area, declared as a UNESCO Heritage site will be done.
  2. There is no mention of tiger corridor.
  3. There is a possibility of local extinction of species endemic to Western Ghats.

**Four Lane National Highway between Anmod and Mollem:**
- **Benefits:**
  1. It will create linkage between NH-4 and NH-17 connecting Panaji to Belagavi.
  2. It may result into fewer road accidents due to increased capacity.
  3. It is estimated of saving of fuel worth Rs 272.9 crore per year.
  4. It will create 3,00,000 temporary jobs.
  5. It will lead to establishment of small, medium and largescale industries.
- **Mitigation measures:**
  1. Construction of rubble wall across contour lines to avoid soil erosion will be taken place.
  2. Building of wildlife crossings and underpasses will be done.
  3. It will put signage to allow wild animals on priority.
  4. Boards at entry points to caution vehicles will be installed.
- **Concerns:**
  1. Fragmentation of wildlife habitat will take place.
  2. Cutting of over 12,000 species of trees will alter plant communities and erode plant diversity.
  3. It will promote weeds and exotic species that outcompete native plants and alter animal use.
  4. It will shift animal corridors due to noise pollution and traffic.

**Transmission Line from Sangod in Goa to the Karnataka border**
- **Benefits:**
  1. Additional 400kV feed from Karnataka will meet Goa’s peak electricity demand.
- **Mitigation measures:**
  1. Installation of towers will be done in such way to minimize cutting of trees.
  2. Efforts will be undertaken to minimize impact of installation on wildlife.
- **Concerns:**
  1. High-tension wires over Tambdi-Surla stream might threaten large birds like raptors and hornbills fly.
  2. Cutting of 4,139 endemic trees will be taken place.
  3. Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) is not scrutinised by state wildlife board.
  4. There is a possibility of fragmentation of habitat and reduction of biodiversity.
6. **Report on Gas leak of Vishakhapatnam**

**Why is it in news?**
- High Powered Panel found lack of safety protocols and emergency response procedures are causes of styrene vapour leak in the LG Polymers unit at Visakhapatnam.

**Details:**
- Uncontrolled release of styrene vapour qualifies as a major accident under the Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemicals Rules, 1989.
- **Causes mentioned by HPC:**
  1. Poor design of the tank
  2. Inadequate refrigeration and faulty cooling system
  3. Absence of circulation and mixing system
  4. Poor process safety management system
  5. Total breakdown of the emergency response of the procedures
- **Other observations:**
  1. Temperature in the tank rose substantially. It was a tank with small vents.
  2. Rise in temperature caused the styrene liquid to eventually vaporize and increase the pressure.
  3. Alarm system (at the plant) was not used despite there being a total of 36 activation points.
  4. Factory has “absolutely no stocks of inhibitors and negligible stocks of terminators, which could have been used to minimise the impact of the accident.

7. **Locust Attack terminologies**

**Why is it in news?**
- FAO has warned India to remain on high alert against locust attack in the month of August.
- India is facing worst locust attack in last 26 years and current locust attack (2019-2020) has been categorized as an upsurge.

**Details:**
- Desert Locusts are always present in the deserts between Mauritania and India.
- Good rains and good vegetation can increase their number rapidly and began to concentrate.
- **FAO's 3 categories of desert locust situations:**
  1. **Outbreak:**
     a. When increase in number goes unchecked, it can lead to the formation of small groups of wingless hoppers and swarms winged adults.
     b. Generally, it affects area of about 5,000 sq. km.
  2. **Upsurge:**
     a. Last major upsurge was in 2003-05.
     b. If outbreaks go unchecked and there is heavy rain in adjacent areas, successive breeding causes further hopper band and adult swarm formation.
  3. **Plague:**
     a. Last major plague was in 1987-89 there is heavy rain.
     b. When an upsurge is not controlled and ecological conditions remain favourable for
breeding, locust populations continue to increase in number and size.
(c) It takes at least one year or more for a plague to develop through a sequence.
(d) The area in which plagues occur covers about 29 million sq. km and can extend across 58 countries.
(e) There have been six major plagues in the 1900s, one of which lasted almost 13 years.

8. **India’s tiger census of 2018 sets Guinness record**

Why is it in news?
- India’s tiger census of 2018 sets Guinness record for world’s largest camera-trap wildlife survey.

India’s tiger census of 2018:
- It is the fourth cycle of the All India Tiger Estimation.
- It counted 2,967 tigers, which is about 75% of the global tiger population.
- Camera traps were placed in 26,838 locations across 141 different sites.
- It surveyed an effective area of 1,21,337 sq.km.

Indian Tiger/Bengal Tiger:
- The length of the tiger from the tip of its nose to end of its tail is between 2.6 to 3 m.
- It weighs between 135-280 kgs.
- The average life span of a tiger in the wild is about 14 to 16 years.
- The Indian/Bengal tiger is found mainly in India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh.
- In India, tigers are found in 19 states.
- There are 39 Tiger Reserves in our country today.
- It is classified as ‘Endangered’ in IUCN list.
- It is the national animal of both India and Bangladesh.

9. **Forest fires and their effect on carbon emissions**

Why is it in news?
- Study based on remote sensing models has recently been publish.
- The study considers burn indices for demarking forest fire scars.

Key Findings of The Study:
- During 2003–2017, a total of 5,20,861 active forest fire events were detected in India.
- According to Forest Survey of India, over 54% of the forest cover in India is exposed to occasional fire.
- Healthy vegetation shows high reflectance in near-infrared spectrum while burnt part show low reflectance.
- Healthy vegetation shows low reflectance in shortwave infrared spectrum while burnt region shows high reflectance.
- States of northeast India, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand are the most fire-prone in India.
- There is a sharp increase of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and ozone during high fire activity periods.
- The occurrence of high fire intensity at the low altitude Himalayan hilly regions may be due to the plant species (pine trees) in the area and proximity to villages.
- The sharp increase in average and maximum air temperature, decline in precipitation, change in
land-use patterns have caused the increased incidences of forest fires.

10. Annual Floods

Why is it in news?
- 85 per cent of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR) remains submerged in Assam floods of 2020.
- Annual floods are essential for the survival of Kaziranga.

Details:
- Why floods in Kaziranga’s ecosystem are essential?
  1. Assam is sandwiched between the Brahmaputra river and the Karbi Anglong Hills. So, it is a flood prone area.
  2. Kaziranga is a riverine ecosystem, not a solid landmass-based ecosystem.
  3. The entire area of Kaziranga — formed by alluvial deposits from the Brahmaputra and its tributaries — is centred around the river.
  4. Floodplain ecosystem has not only been created by floods but also feeds off it.
  5. The regenerative nature of floods helps replenish Kaziranga’s water bodies and maintain its landscape, a mix of wetlands, grasslands and semi-evergreen deciduous forests.
  6. Floodwaters also function as a breeding ground for fish.
  7. The waters also help get rid of unwanted plants such as water hyacinth which collect in huge masses in the landscape.
  8. In a herbivore-dominated area like Kaziranga, it is important we maintain its grassland status.
  9. Some believe that floods are a way of natural selection. A number of animals (especially the old, weak) cannot survive the floods.

- Concern:
  1. Earlier, a big flood would come once in ten years. Now, they happen every 2 years.
  2. Massive deforestation in catchment areas or release of waters by dams upstream may increase intensity.
  3. While in the past, Kaziranga and Karbi Anglong were part of the same landscape, the animals now have to cross the NH 37 which cuts across the park.
  4. As a result, animals that venture out of the park, die either under the wheels of speeding vehicles on the highway, or are killed by poachers.

11. Assam orders judicial probe into illegal coal mining in Dehing Patkai

Why is it in news?
- Assam government set up one-man inquiry panel comprising retired Gauhati High Court Judge Brajendra Prasad Katakey to investigate the allegations against coal mining in the sanctuary since 2003.

Details:
- Controversy was created due to conditional clearance by the National Board of Wildlife’s (NBWL) to a coal mining project by Coal India Limited.
- Dehing Patkai:
  1. The Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary and a part of Dehing Patkai Rainforest is important due to elephant habitat.
  2. It was declared as Dehing-Patkai Elephant Reserve under Project Elephant.
  3. Reserve spreads across the coal- and oil-rich districts of Upper Assam — Dibrugarh, Tinsukia
and Sivasagar.

(4) It is believed to be the last remaining contiguous patch of lowland rainforest area in Assam.

(5) Recently, Assam announced decision to upgrade the Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary to a national park.

(6) The most common mammal species of this sanctuary are hoolock gibbon, stump-tailed macaque, Asian elephant, Bengal tiger, Indian leopard, Chinese pangolin, Red giant flying squirrel, Asian golden cat.

12. Mobile app KURMA helps save turtles in India

Why is it in news?

- A number of conservation agencies launched a citizen science initiative, a mobile-based application called KURMA, aimed at turtle conservation.

Details:

- The application, developed by the Indian Turtle Conservation Action Network (ITCAN) in collaboration with the Turtle Survival Alliance-India and Wildlife Conservation Society-India.
- It not only provides users a database to identify a species but also provides the location of the nearest rescue centre for turtles across the country.
- Tortoise and freshwater turtles are among the most trafficked in the country.
- **Major challenges for freshwater turtle conservation:**
  1. Wildlife crime prevention agencies are not sufficiently equipped to know how to distinguish one species from the other.
  2. their protection status in accordance with CITES and wildlife protection act.

- **Turtles in India:**
  1. Turtles are fresh water and sea dwelling species.
  2. Turtles are one of the oldest groups of reptiles in the world.

13. Assessment of Climate Change over Indian Region

Why is it in news?

- Ministry of Earth Sciences released the first ‘Assessment of Climate Change over Indian Region’.

Details:

- It warns of tropical cyclones, thunderstorms, heat waves, floods and droughts in India.
- **Temperature:**
  1. Surface air temperature over India has risen by 0.6°C per year during 1901-2018.
  2. Regions of North India have become more warm than the South.
  3. The frequency of warm days is projected to increase by 55% and that of warm nights by 70%, both relative to 1976- 2005.
  4. In coming decades, the average duration of heatwaves during April-June is projected to double, and their frequency to rise by 3 to 4 times compared to 1976-2005.
  5. By the end of the 21st century, average temperature over India is projected to rise by 4.4°C, relative to the average temperature during 1976-2005.
  6. Sea surface temperatures on the tropical Indian Ocean have been rising by an average 1°C annually over 1951-2015.

- **Monsoon:**
  1. During 1951-2015, annual rainfall over India witnessed a declining trend.
  2. On other hand, precipitation increased over J&K and Northwest India.
(3) The coming decades will witness a rise in inter-annual variability of rainfall associated with monsoon.

- **Droughts and floods:**
  (1) Since the 1950s, the frequency and intensity of droughts & floods have increased, particularly in Central India and South Peninsular regions.
  (2) In addition to an increase in the area under drought, frequency and severity too have increased during 1951-2016.
  (3) Flood risks are higher over the east coast, West Bengal, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Konkan and cities like Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata.
  (4) The Himalayan flood basins will witness greater floods, due to the faster glacial and snow melting.

- **Sea Level:**
  (1) During 1993-2015, the sea level over the North Indian Ocean (Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal) rose by 3.3 mm per year.
  (2) A risk of inundation in Andhra Pradesh and Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna delta basins is highlighted.

- **Tropical cyclones:**
  (1) Before the 1950s, 94 severe cyclonic storms formed in the Bay of Bengal, a number that jumped to 140 post the 1950s.
  (2) Cyclones formed in the Arabian Sea have risen from 29 to 44.
  (3) Storms in the Arabian Sea are gaining more strength and the trend is projected to continue.

- **Himalaya snow cover:**
  (1) During the last seven decades, the Hindukush Himalayas have warmed at an average 0.2°C per decade, leading to a decline in snow cover and glaciers in the last four to five decades.
  (2) The Karakoram Himalayas have witnessed an increase in snowfall during winter.

- **Causes & effects:**
  (1) Anthropogenic activities and consequent GHGs led to rise in global temperature and atmospheric moisture content.
  (2) A higher concentration of water vapour, in turn, leads to intense rainfall during monsoon.
  (3) Heating leads to vaporisation, which is directly linked to decreasing soil moisture, resulting in droughts.
  (4) Rising sea levels would make India’s big cities vulnerable to erosion and damage to coastal projects.

### 14. Migration of the Pied Cuckoo

**Why is it in news?**

- A study of the migration of the pied cuckoo from Africa to India and back has begun.

**Details:**

- Study is taken up by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), along with the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing (IIRS) and the Government of India’s Department of Biotechnology.
- This is the first study in the country that seeks to trace and observe the migratory routes of the pied cuckoo.

**Pied Cuckoo:**

(1) It is also called as Pied Crested Cuckoo and Jacobin Cuckoo.
(2) It has been associated with a bird in Indian mythology and poetry, known as the Chataka.
(3) They arrive in the Himalayan foothills with onset of monsoon.
(4) It is believed that Pied Cuckoo come from Africa, but fact has not proven yet.
(5) It is also found in Sri Lanka and parts of Myanmar.
(6) We find some Pied Cuckoos in South India. But those are resident birds and not migratory.
(7) Its appearance is all black with a white wing patch.
(8) It lays its eggs in the nests of babblers, bulbuls, and shrikes.

**Indian Bioresource Information Network (IBIN):**
(1) The pied cuckoo migration study is part of a larger project called the Indian Bioresource Information Network (IBIN).
(2) IBIN is funded by the Government of India’s Department of Biotechnology (DBT).
(3) IBIN aims to put relevant Indian bioresources information online.

### 15. Flood in Pobitora Sanctuary

**Why is it in News?**
- Assam floods forced rhinos of Pobitora to take shelter in houses.

**Pobitora wildlife sanctuary:**
- Pobitora is a sanctuary located in the floodplains of the Brahmaputra river in Morigaon district of Assam.
- It was earlier a grazing reserve and notified as a wildlife sanctuary in 1998.
- Pobitora has the highest density (102 rhinos in a 16 sq km area) of rhino population in the world.
- Apart from rhinos, feral buffaloes, wild boar also inhabit the sanctuary.

**Indian Rhino Vision 2020 (IRV 2020):**
(1) It is a joint programme of the Department of Environment & Forests, Govt of Assam, WWF India, the International Rhino Foundation and the US fish & wildlife service.
(2) Six rhinos were translocated from Pobitora and re-introduced into the Manas National Park between December 2010 and January 2011 under this vision.
(3) Earlier, under the same programme, two rhinos were translocated from Pobitora to Manas National Park in 2008.

### 16. Depletion of Himalayan Plants

**Why is it in news?**
- Botanical Survey of India found depletion of many species in glacial ecosystem.

**Details:**
- Many flowers at lower altitude are getting depleted, according to BSI study.
- **Blue Poppy:**
  (1) It is considered the Queen of Himalayan Flowers.
  (2) It is found from Kumaon to Kashmir at elevations of 3,000 to 5,000 meters.

### 16. Aerial seeding in Aravalli region

**Why is it in News?**
- The Haryana Forest Department has started aerial seeding across the state on a pilot basis.

**Details:**
- Technique will allow plantation in sections of the Aravallis that are either difficult to access or inaccessible altogether.
- **Aerial seeding:**
(1) It is a technique of plantation.
(2) Seed balls – seeds covered with a mixture of clay, compost, char and other components – are sprayed on the ground.
(3) It is done by using aerial devices, including planes, helicopters or drones.
(4) Coating of clay, compost, char and other material provides the required weight for seeds to drop on a predetermined location rather than disperse in the wind.

**Advantages of technique:**
(1) Areas that are inaccessible, have steep slopes, are fragmented or disconnected with no forest routes, make conventional plantation difficult.
(2) They can be targeted with aerial seeding.
(3) The process of the seed’s germination and growth is such that it requires no attention after it is dispersed.
(4) They eliminate the need for ploughing and digging holes in the soil and the seeds do not need to be planted, since they are already surrounded by soil, nutrients, and microorganisms.
(5) The clay shell of these pellets along with the other items in the mixture also protects them from birds, ants and rats.

**Species selection:**
(1) The species selected have to be native to the area.
(2) Species should be hardy, with seeds that are of an appropriate size for preparing seed balls.
(3) Species should have a higher survival percentage.

The idea of the forest department is not to replace conventional methods but to supplement them.

Why is it in news?
- According to the UNFPA's State of the World Population report 2020, one in three girls missing globally due to sex selection, both pre- and post-natal, is from India.

About the report:
- The report examines the issue of missing women by studying sex ratio imbalances at birth.
- It also studies the excess female mortality due to deliberate neglect of girls because of a culture of son preference.
- Excess female mortality is the difference between observed and expected mortality of the girl child or avoidable death of girls during childhood.

Findings of the Report:
- The report cites a 2014 study to state that India has the highest rate of excess female deaths at 13.5 per 1,000 female births below the age of 5 due to postnatal sex selection.
- Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan excess female mortality of girls below 5 years of age was under 3%.

Misuse of Technology:
- The advent of technology ensured that parents didn’t have to wait for the birth of their girl child to kill her but could terminate a foetus upon knowing its gender.
- This resulted in the number of girls missing due to female foeticide exceeding those that were missing because of postnatal sex selection.

Data:
- According to estimates averaged over a five year period (2013-17), annually, there were 1.2 million missing female births, at a global level.
- India had about 4,60,000 girls ‘missing’ at birth each year.

Consequences:
- These skewed numbers translate into long-term shifts in the proportions of women and men in the population of some countries.
- In many countries, this results in a “marriage squeeze” as prospective grooms far outnumber prospective brides.
- It further results in human trafficking for marriage as well as child marriages.

2. State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2020 report

Why is it in news?
- The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2020 report was recently released in New York.

Findings of the report:
Between 8.3 crore and 13 crore people globally are likely to go hungry this year due to the economic recession triggered by COVID-19.

Hunger continues to be on the rise since 2014 and the global prevalence of undernourishment, or overall percentage of hungry people, is 8.9%.

Asia remains home to the greatest number of undernourished (38 crore), followed by Africa (25 crore), Latin America and the Caribbean (4.8 crore).

A healthy diet costs more than ₹143 (or $1.90/day), which is the international poverty threshold.

The number of people globally who can’t afford a healthy diet is at 300 crore people, or more than the combined population of China and India.

Data:

According to current estimates, in 2019, 21.3% (14.4 crore) of children under 5 years were stunted, 6.9% (4.7 crore) wasted and 5.6% (3.8 million) overweight.

About State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report:

It is produced jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the UN World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF and WHO.

Its first edition was brought out in 2017.

3. Manodarpan

Why is it in news?

The Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry recently rolled out a mental health initiative named Manodarpan.

It is launched by keeping in mind the stress faced by students and their families especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

More about Manodarpan:

The platform includes a national toll free helpline for students of schools, universities and colleges. Students can call 8448440632 for help during the COVID crisis and beyond.

The helpline will be manned by a pool of experienced counsellors, psychologists and mental health professionals.

Manodarpan also has a website which will host an interactive online chat platform, advisories and tips on mental and emotional health, a national database of counsellors, links to webinars and other resources.

Background:

COVID-19 is understandably a challenging time for everyone around the world.

Children and adolescents may be more vulnerable and may experience heightened level of stress, anxiety and fearfulness.

4. Plea to declare Sanitary Napkins as Essential Item

Why is it in news?

Union Ministry of Health and Family welfare submitted an affidavit in Bombay High Court against the PIL that sought to recognise sanitary napkins as an essential commodity.

Background:

The PIL filed by a law student has sought implementation of “the Menstrual Hygiene Management National Guidelines, 2015”.
The PIL wants sanitary napkins to be added in the schedule of the Essential Commodity Act, 1955.

The PIL states that since imposition of lockdown there is a complete negligence in providing sanitation facilities for menstruating women.

Ministry of Health’s Response:

- The decision to include sanitary napkins under essential commodities may be taken after understanding the current market scenario, and the demand supply gap.
- Decision should also take into consideration the options of brands, quality, specification, costing and preferences available to the beneficiaries.

Significance of being an Essential Commodity:

- The product deemed essential automatically come under price control.
- Government has the power to bring any item of medical necessity under price control.
- Currently, the health ministry prepares the list of drugs eligible for price regulation.

5. Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)

Why is it in news?

- The special bulletin on Maternal Mortality in India 2016-18, released by the Office of the Registrar General’s Sample Registration System (SRS).

Details:

- The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in India has declined to 113 in 2016-18 from 122 in 2015-17 and 130 in 2014-2016.
- The MMR of various States according to the bulletin includes Assam (215), Bihar (149), Madhya Pradesh (173), Chhattisgarh (159), Odisha (150), Rajasthan (164), Uttar Pradesh (197) and Uttarakhand (99). The southern States registered a lower MMR — Andhra Pradesh (65), Telangana (63), Karnataka (92), Kerala (43) and Tamil Nadu (60).

About MMR:

- MMR is defined as the number of maternal deaths per 1,00,000 live births.
- The target of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) set by the United Nations.
- Maternal mortality in a region is a measure of reproductive health of women in the area.
- As per WHO, maternal death is the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management.

6. Infant mortality Rate

Why is it in news?

- The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) in Madhya Pradesh, has been recording the country’s worst rate for years now.
- The IMR in MP surged by a single point over the previous year to 48 in 2018.

Rural MP:

- In rural Madhya Pradesh, 52 children below one died per 1,000 live births (Infant mortality rate) and 36 in urban area.
- The country’s average stands at 36 deaths for rural and 23 for urban areas.
- The IMR for boys in the State stood at 51, while for girls it was 46 in 2018, according to the Sample Registration System bulletin issued by the office.

Major Causes of Mortality:
Increasing premature deliveries.
- Infections.
- Birth asphyxiation.
- Delay in securing treatment.

7. **Online Education**

**Why is it in news?**
- Centre has proposed long-term measures to bridge the divide of social inequity in online education that is coming to the fore due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Details:**
- Government has plans to distribute laptops or tablets to 40% of all college and university students over the next five years.
- The Centre and States are to share the cost of making devices available, in a 60:40 ratio.
- It also plans to equip all government schools with information and communication technology (ICT).

**Safety Measures for Schools:**
- The School Education Department estimated up to ₹1 lakh per school for sanitisation and quarantine measures in preparation for the safe reopening of schools.
- The measures would include:
  1. Ensuring basic water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities.
  2. Safe drinking water.
  3. Availability of alcohol rub/sanitiser.
  4. Disinfectant, cleaning material and equipment for temperature checking.

**Awareness Programs:**
- In order for government schools to be reopened, funds will be provided for awareness and community mobilisation.
- It will be done to sensitise parents, students and local leaders.
- Teacher would be encouraged to function as first-level counsellors, disseminate basic information about COVID-19 and provide digital/online/mobile education.

8. **CBSE Reduces Syllabus**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Central Board of Secondary Education has reduced syllabi for Classes 9 to 12 by 30% this year.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted regular classes.
- The core concepts will be retained.

**Background:**
- The CBSE has advised school principals and teachers to ensure that “the reduced topics are also explained to the students to the extent required to connect different topics.
- The reduced syllabus will not be part of the topics for internal assessment and year-end Board examination.
- The council has also prepared an alternative academic calendar for Classes 1 to 12 to support pedagogy in affiliated schools.

**Key Removed Topics:**
9. LEAD Portal

Why is it in news?
- The Delhi government launched an e-learning portal- LEAD (Learning through E-Resources Made Accessible for Delhi).
- The LEAD portal contains 10,000 instructional materials and course content for Classes I to XII.

More about the Portal:
- It will give students access to textbooks, study material and course content as per the syllabus of the CBSE, NCERT and Delhi government’s curriculum online.
- It will include digital QR coded textbooks, explanatory videos, practice questions and evaluation.
- The LEAD portal would be linked to the digital platform by Union HRD Ministry- DIKSHA. It will help to connect and share Delhi’s programmes and experiences with the entire country.

10. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

Why is it in news?
- The Union Cabinet approved the new National Education Policy (NEP).
- The NEP 2020 proposes several structural changes in the early as well as the higher education system.

Key Highlights of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:
- **Universal Access:** NEP 2020 envisions universalisation of early childhood education from ages 3 to 6 by 2030.
- **Open Learning:** NEP 2020 provides for open learning for classes 3, 5 and 8 through NIOS and State Open Schools, secondary education programs equivalent to Grades 10 and 12, vocational courses, adult literacy and life-enrichment programs.
- **Multilingualism and Sanskrit:**
  1. NEP 2020 advocates for mother tongue/local language as the medium of instruction at least till Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond.
  2. Sanskrit to be offered at all levels of school and higher education as an option for students.
(3) Other classical languages and literatures of India also to be available as options.

- **Evaluation and Assessment:**
  1. All students will have to take school examinations in Grades 3, 5, and 8.
  2. Board exams for Grades 10 and 12 will be continued, but to be redesigned and made easier.
  3. PARAKH: A new National Assessment Centre, called Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development (PARAKH), will be set up as a standard-setting body.

- **Social Inclusion:**
  1. NEP 2020 provides for setting up of Gender Inclusion Fund.
  2. There will be Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions and groups.

- **Vocational Courses:**
  1. A National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy will ensure basic skills at the Class 3 level by 2025.
  2. By 2025, at least 50% of learners through the school and higher education system shall have exposure to vocational education.

- **Financial support for students:** Efforts will be made to incentivise the merit of students belonging to SC, ST, OBC, and other SEDGs.

- **Investing in Education:** NEP aims to increase the public investment in the education sector from the current 4.3 per cent to reach 6 per cent of GDP at the earliest.

  - Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) shall be established which would digitally store the academic credits earned from various recognized HEIs so that the degrees from an HEI can be awarded taking into account credits earned.
  
  - National Research Foundation will be created as an apex body for fostering a strong research culture and building research capacity across higher education.
  
  - Common Regulator for Higher Education: Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) will be set up as a single overarching umbrella body for entire higher education (excluding medical and legal education).
1. WHO nod for Truenat rapid molecular assays for TB

Why is it in News?
- WHO approved use of TrueNat assays for initial diagnosis of TB and of rifampicin resistance.

Details:
- TrueNat Assay is included in India’s National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP) after ICMR approval.
- TrueNat test:
  1. It was developed by Bigtec Labs, the R&D subsidiary of Molbio Diagnostics.
  2. Test uses real-time micro polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technology.
  3. It provides results in less than hour.
- TB is the leading cause of from infectious diseases in the world (1.5 million deaths in 2018).

2. Covaxin and Covid timeline

Why is it in news?
- ICMR set 15 August as a deadline to complete all clinical trials of covaxin.

Details:
- India’s top drug regulator, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization allowed to conduct human clinical trials for ‘Covaxin’.
- Covaxin:
  1. It is developed by Bharat Biotech India and ICMR’s National Institute of Virology.
  2. It is a ‘inactivated’ vaccine i.e. made up using dead covid-19 virus.
  3. Once the vaccine is injected into a human, it has no potential to infect or replicate, since it is a killed virus.
  4. It just serves to the immune system as a dead virus and mounts an antibody response towards the virus.
  5. Vaccine is tested on animals like guinea pigs and mice to see if it is safe, before the firm approached CDSCO for approvals.
- Development of vaccine doesn’t have fixed period and expensive in nature.
- Stages of development of vaccine:
  1. Stage I - R & D:
     a. Some labs are using genetic codes instead of covid-19 protein.
     b. Some labs are trying with m-RNA technology which involves injecting genetic instructions to human cells for creating proteins to fight the virus.
  2. Stage II - Pre-Clinical Trial:
     a. In this stage, vaccine developed in stage-I is tested on cell cultures and animals.
     b. Test is done with inactivated virus on genetic sequence.
     c. If it harms the cells, we have to go back to stage-I.
(3) **Stage III – Clinical Trials:**
   (a) After successful testing on animals, regulators allow vaccine for human trials.
   (b) This stage has been shortened in case of covid-19.

(4) **Stage IV – Regulatory Review:**
   (a) Manufacturer of vaccine submits observations for approval and license.

(5) **Stage V – Manufacturing:**
   (a) It involves funding, infrastructure development, raw material and scientific experts.

(6) **Stage VI – Quality control:**
   (a) Regulator and manufacturer both monitors safety of vaccine.

**Concerns of scientists:**
(1) ICMR claim/deadline on vaccine is risky.
(2) It may bypass many safety experiments of stage-III of clinical trials.

### 3. Possibility of Raman spectroscopy to detect RNA virus

**Why is it in news?**
- Tata Memorial Centre has started study on using Raman spectroscopy to detect RNA virus in saliva samples.

**Details:**
- Presently, it can only identify RNA viruses and not identify the specific one. So, it can be used only for screening.
- **Raman Spectroscopy:**
  (1) It is named after scientist C. V. Raman.
  (2) It is used to determine vibrational modes of molecules.
  (3) It provides detailed information about chemical structure, phase and polymorphy, crystallinity and molecular interactions.
  (4) It is based on inelastic scattering of photons – also known as Raman Scattering – i.e. the interaction of light with the chemical bonds within a material.

### 4. India’s first Plasma Bank

**Why is it in news?**
- India inaugurated its first plasma bank at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS) to ease access to plasma.

**Details:**
- Presently, hospitals are using plasma to treat covid-19 patients.
- **Plasma Bank:**
  (1) It is just like blood bank and created for covid-19 patients.
  (2) Antibody rich plasma from revered patients is extracted and given to present patients.
  (3) **Donation criteria:**
    (a) Patients, who suffered from covid-19 and recovered at least 14 days before the donation, can donate plasma.
    (b) People between the ages of 18 and 60, and weighing not less than 50 kg are eligible to donate.
    (c) Women who have given birth are not eligible to donate, as the antibodies they produce during pregnancy can interfere with lung function.
    (d) People with diabetes, hypertension, and cancer cannot donate.
Laboratory tests (serum protein and CBC, TTI testing for hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus, HIV, malaria, and syphilis) will be carried out before donation.

Serum Covid-19 specific IgG antibody concentration higher than 80 is preferred.

Each plasma donation would be used to treat 2 patients.

All plasma proteins lost by you due to donation will be formed again in 24-72 hours.

500 ml of plasma can be donated every two weeks, while blood can be donated once in three months.

5. Covid and Kawasaki Symptoms

Why is it in news?
- Children with Covid-19 infections have found with symptoms of rare disease – Kawasaki around the World, including India.

Details:
- Few symptoms (not all) of kawasaki such as rashes and inflammation are found in children while other symptoms are absent.
- WHO called this new illness ‘multisystem inflammatory disorder’.

Kawasaki Disease:
1. It is basically found in children, particularly under 5.
2. Symptoms include red eyes, rashes, and a swollen tongue with reddened lips and an inflamed blood vessel system all over the body.
3. Children experience fever for at least 5 days.
4. It also affects coronary functions in the heart.
5. Causes of this disease are unknown.

Link with Covid-19:
1. Symptoms: Rashes and high fever like Kawasaki are present but others like red eyes, red tongue are not present.
2. Sometimes heart is swollen, but coronary function is not affected.
3. Inflammation, abdominal pain, diarrhoea are common.
4. Sometimes, children who are covid negative witnessed these symptoms.

Steroids remained a key treatment to reduce inflammation.

6. Forty-year-old puzzle about Stars solved

Why is it in news?
- Puzzle regarding production of lithium is solved by Indian researchers.

Evolution of Stars and Lithium:
- During the process of evolution of Stars, lithium gets destroyed.
- Planets have more lithium than Stars.

Contradiction puzzle:
1. Some Stars found with rich Lithium.

Lithium:
1. Its atomic Number is 3 and it is soft silver colored alkali metal.
2. It is the lightest metal and lightest solid metal.
3. It is highly inflammable. So, it must be stored in mineral oil.
4. It is highly reactive and doesn’t occur freely in nature.
5. It is commonly used in industrial applications, including heat-resistant glass and ceramics,
lithium grease lubricants, flux additives for iron, steel and aluminum production, lithium batteries, and lithium-ion batteries.

(6) It was first produced during Big Bang around 13.7 billion years ago.

(7) While other elements grew million times in the universe, Lithium presence grew by only 4 times the Big Bang value.

(8) Low growth of lithium is due to destruction of Lithium in Stars.

**Present study:**

(1) Lithium enhancement among low mass giant stars is common.

(2) When star evolves beyond the Red Giant stage, and before it reaches the Red Clump stage, there is a helium flash.

(3) This helium flash enriches star with Lithium.

(4) This study challenges the ‘Planet Engulfment Theory’ which proposes planets increase lithium of stars when they enter into star’s atmosphere after Red Giant stage.

### 7. WHO confirms aerosol transmission of corona virus

**Why is it in news?**

- WHO accepted the possibility of aerosol transmission in crowded places.

**Details:**

- WHO acknowledged that the novel coronavirus can remain in the air in crowded indoor spaces.
- In crowded places, short range aerosol transmission can happen.
- However, WHO does not think that even in these situations, the virus was transmitted exclusively by the aerial route and it needs more research.

**Previously acknowledged transmission modes:**

1. **Respiratory Droplets transmission:**
   - When an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or sings, such transmission happens.
   - It is still understood to be the primary mode of transmission.

2. **Fomite transmission:**
   - It refers to transmission through infected surfaces.
   - Surfaces include doorknobs, elevator buttons, handrails, phones, switches, pens, keyboards and, if not disinfected, even a doctor’s stethoscope.

- It means that wearing a mask becomes even more important than earlier.

### 8. Aptamer-based assay developed for coronavirus detection

**Why is it in news?**

- Faridabad-based Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI) has developed an Aptamer-Linked Immobilized Sorbent Assay (ALISA) based detection assay for novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2).

**Aptamer-based Assay:**

- ALISA based assay is developed by using DNA aptamers.
- The nucleotide bases in the aptamer bind to the spike protein (antigen) and help in the detection of positive samples.

**DNA Aptamers:**

1. DNA aptamers are small, single-strand structured DNA molecules.
2. Aptamers bind to a specific target including proteins, peptides, carbohydrates, small molecules, toxins, and even live cells.
(3) Aptamers assume a variety of shapes due to their tendency to form helices and single-stranded loops.
(4) They are extremely versatile and bind targets with high selectivity and specificity.
(5) Rather than primary sequence, aptamer binding is determined by its tertiary structure.

9. Fifth Generation (5G)

Why is it in news?
- Jio and Nokia are working on field trials of 5G.

Fifth Generation:
- The first generation of networks allowed only mobile voice calls to be made.
- The second generation allowed mobile voice calls as well as sending of short text messages.
- The third generation or 3G network allowed web browsing on mobile devices.
- The fourth generation or 4G networks improved the speed and latency.
- Latency is the time a device takes to communicate with the network.
- The 5G networks will have faster speeds with latency down to between 1-10 milliseconds from 50 milliseconds for 4G networks across the world.

How 5G works?
1. All 5G networks chiefly operate on three spectrum bands.
2. 5G is based on OFDM (Orthogonal frequency-division multiplexing), a method of modulating a digital signal across several different channels to reduce interference.
3. The low-band spectrum has been proven to have great coverage and works fast even in underground conditions.
4. However, the maximum speed limit on this band is 100 Mbps.
5. The high-band spectrum offers the highest speed but has extremely limited network coverage area and penetration capabilities.
6. Low-band 5G uses a similar frequency range to current 4G cellphones, 600-700 MHz, giving download speeds a little higher than 4G: 30-250 megabits per second (Mbit/s).
7. Mid-band 5G uses microwaves of 2.5-3.7 GHz, currently allowing speeds of 100-900 Mbit/s, with each cell tower providing service up to several miles in radius.
9. 3rd Generation Partnership Project (3GPP), the industry organization that defines the global specifications for 3G UMTS (including HSPA), 4G LTE, and 5G technologies.

10. Campfires of the Sun

Why is it in news?
- A solar Orbiter built by the European Space Agency and NASA has delivered the closest photos ever taken of the sun's surface.

Campfires:
- These are tiny solar flares observed on the Sun’s surface.
- These tiny explosions are also called nanoflares.
- It could explain why the sun's outer shield, the corona, is 300 times hotter than the star's surface.
- Solar Orbiter (SolO):
  1. It is a Sun-observing satellite, developed by the European Space Agency (ESA) and NASA.
  2. Its primary mission is to examine the sun’s polar regions.
  3. It will help researchers to understand the origins of the solar wind, charged particles that
blast through our solar system and affect satellites and electronics on Earth.

(11) Itolizumab – new drug for covid-19

Why is it in news?
- The Drug Controller General of India recently approved Itolizumab as a novel biologic therapy for restricted emergency use.

Details:
- It is the drug used for psoriasis, a chronic skin disease.
- Psoriasis:
  1. It involves unregulated growth of some skin cells.
  2. It results into development of red patches mostly on knees and elbows, but also on some other parts of the body.
- The drug controls the hyper-activation of the immune system in response to SARS-CoV-2 virus.
- It prevents morbidity and mortality due to large generation of cytokine which damages lungs and other organs.

12. Mars Missions in the world

Why is it in news?
- The UAE launched the Arab world’s first mission to Mars with the spacecraft Amal (Hope).

Details:
- It is UAE’s first of three missions to Mars by July end.
- Why July end is good for launch?
  1. Earth and Mars will be aligned at their closest points in two years in July end.
  2. It means requirement of less fuel to reach planet.
  3. If a spacecraft is launched too early or too late, it will arrive in the planet’s orbit when the planet is not there.
- Mars Missions:
  1. UAE’s Hope:
    a. It will collect data on Martian climate dynamics.
    b. It will help scientists to understand why Mars’s atmosphere is decaying into space.
    c. Hope is scheduled to reach Mars’s orbit Mars in February 2021.
  2. China’s Tianwen-1:
    a. China launched its first Mars mission ‘Tianwen 1 or Quest for Heavenly Truth 1’.
    b. It aims to study Martian topography and geology and determine the composition of the surface material, climate and environment.
    c. The orbiter is expected to reach the planet by early 2021.
    d. India had become the first Asian country to launch Mars orbiter mission Mangalyaan.

13. Mars rover Perseverance

Why is it in news?
- NASA launched Mars rover Perseverance

Details:
- About Rover:
  1. It is a part of NASA’s Mars Exploration Program.
(2) It’s a six wheeled robot that weighs 1040 kgs.
(3) Perseverance is the largest, heaviest and most sophisticated vehicle NASA has ever sent to Mars.
(4) It will land on Jezero Crater.
(5) Black and white plate is installed to honour medical team.
(6) It was launched by Atlas V rocket.
(7) It is powered by the plutonium.
(8) USA is the only country to safely put a spacecraft on Mars.

**Aim:**
(1) It aims for evidence of ancient microbial life.
(2) It aims to characterize the Planet’s geology and climate.
(3) It will collect selected rock and sediments for future return to Earth.
(4) It will test oxygen production to prepare for human exploration.

**Ingenuity:**
(1) It is equipped with small helicopter – Ingenuity.
(2) It will test first powered flight on Mars.
(3) It could assist future Mars rovers.
(4) It can fly on its own without human control.

### 14. First Criticality of Kakrapar-3

**Why is it in News?**
- The third unit of the Kakrapar Atomic Power Project (KAPP-3) in Gujarat achieved its ‘first criticality’.

**Details:**

**KAPP-3:**
(1) It is the country’s first 700 MWe (megawatt electric) unit.
(2) It is the biggest indigenously developed variant of the Pressurised Heavy Water Reactor (PHWR).
(3) It uses natural uranium as fuel and heavy water as moderator.
(4) Before it, the biggest reactor size of indigenous design was the 540 MWe PHWR at Tarapur.
(5) Four units of the 700MWe reactor are currently being built at Kakrapar (KAPP-3 and 4) and Rawatbhata (RAPS-7 and 8).

**India facts:**
(1) India has a target of expansion of its existing nuclear power capacity of 6,780 MWe to 22,480 MWe by 2031.
(2) Currently, nuclear power capacity constitutes less than 2% of the total installed capacity.
(3) PHWR technology started in India in the late 1960s with the construction of the first 220 MWe reactor, Rajasthan Atomic Power Station, RAPS-1 with the help of Canada.

**PHWR:**
(1) The biggest advantage of the PHWR design is the use of thin walled pressure tubes instead of the large pressure vessels that are used in pressure vessel type reactors.
(2) This results in the distribution of pressure boundaries to a large number of small-diameter pressure tubes.
(3) It reduces the severity of the consequence of an accidental rupture of the pressure boundary.
(4) The 700 MWe PHWR design has enhanced safety through a dedicated ‘Passive Decay Heat Removal System’.
(5) The system can remove decay heat (released as a result of radioactive decay) from the reactor.
The Unique Academy

1. Samudra Setu

Why is it in news?

- Operation Samudra Setu has been concluded after successfully bringing back 3,992 individuals.
- **About Operation Samudra Setu:** It was launched by the Navy as part of the national effort to repatriate Indian citizens abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Other Similar Missions:** Operation Sukoon in 2006 (Beirut) and Operation Rahat in 2015 (Yemen).

2. India is fourth highest source of opium seizure.

Why is it in news?

- According to the latest World Drug Report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), fourth highest seizure of opium in 2018 was reported from India, after Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Details:

- **Global Pattern:** Opium is illicitly produced in about 50 countries. About 84% of the total opium was produced in Afghanistan, from where it is supplied to neighbouring countries, Europe, west Asia, south Asia and Africa.
- **Decline in Cultivation:** The global area under opium poppy cultivation declined for the second year in a row in 2019. However, the global area under opium poppy cultivation is nevertheless still substantially larger than a decade ago and at similar level of the global area under coca cultivation.

3. Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi road.

Why is it in news?

- Defence Minister directed the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) to complete the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi (DSDBO) road by October.

Details:

- China has been objecting to Indian road and infrastructure development at several points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
A road branching from the DSDBO road towards the Galwan Nalah is believed to be one of the reasons for their objections here.

About Border Road Organisation:
- The BRO has been functioning under the administrative control of Ministry of Defence (MoD).
- However, the budget for the BRO was being reflected in the Demands for Grants under from Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH).
- Vision: Playing a national role in socio economic development through its large scale contribution to infrastructure development.

4. Malabar Exercise

Why is it in news?
- India is considering admission of Australia into Malabar exercise.

Malabar Exercise:
- Malabar began as a bilateral naval exercise between India and the U.S. in 1992, and was expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan in 2015.
- Australia has made repeated requests for admission into this exercise.
- The decision, if taken, could bring all Quad countries together as part of the annual war games.

5. Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)

Why is it in news?
- DAC has paced up acquisition of Air force fighter equipments.

About Defence Acquisition Council:
- Objective: To ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces in terms of capabilities sought, and time frame prescribed, by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.
- Chairman: Defence Minister.

6. NATGRID

Why is it in news?
- The National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID) has signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) to access the centralised online database on FIRs and stolen vehicles.

About NATGRID:
- One Point Access: First conceptualised in 2009, NATGRID seeks to become the one-stop destination for security and intelligence agencies to access database related to immigration entry and exit, banking and telephone details of a suspect on a “secured platform”.
- Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS):
  1. The MoU was signed between CCTNS and NATGRID.
  2. CCTNS is a platform that links around 14,000 police stations.
  3. All State police are mandated to file FIRs in the CCTNS.
- At least 10 central agencies will be able to access data on a secured platform.
- It will be an automated system and the request will land directly with the concerned department. No two agencies would know about the request generated by the other.
7. FDI in Defence Sector

Why is it in news?
- Government is revising FDI norms for defence sector.

Details:
- The government is going to come out with a decision on 74% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in defence.
- The second draft of the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) 2020, now renamed as the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020, was put out in public domain for comments from stakeholders and public.
- The government announced a series of measures to promote domestic defence manufacturing which include a negative import list, separate budgetary allocation for domestic procurements, indigenisation of spares and components and raising the FDI cap through automatic route from 49% to 74%.

8. Passage Exercise

Why is it in news?
- Indian naval ships conducted a Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with the United States Navy’s USS Nimitz carrier strike group near the Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) islands.

Details:
- The Nimitz Carrier Strike Group of USA is transiting through Indian Ocean Region.
- During the passage, Indian Navy units undertook PASSEX with the U.S. Navy.
- The Indian Navy had conducted similar PASSEXs with the Japanese Navy and the French Navy in the recent past.
- With regular large-scale exercises deferred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the India Navy has recently undertaken several PASSEXs, which is an opportunity to improve interoperability on the high seas.
1. Padmanabhaswamy Temple

Why is it in news?
- Royal family of Travancore got the managerial rights over Padmanabhaswamy Temple as per Supreme Court Judgement.

Padmanabhaswamy Temple:
- It is a Hindu temple located in Thiruvananthapuram.
- The city of Thiruvananthapuram in Malayalam translates to "The City of Lord Ananta". It refers to the deity of the Padmanabhaswamy temple.

Architecture:
1. Its architectural style is the fusion of Chera style and Dravindian style.
2. The principal deity Padmanabhaswamy (Vishnu) is in the "Anantha Shayana" posture, the eternal yogic sleep on the serpent Adi Shesha.
3. The Lord's right hand is placed over a Shiva lingam.
4. Sridevi-Lakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity and Bhudevi the Goddess of Earth, two consorts of Vishnu are by his side.
5. Brahma emerges on a lotus, which emanates from the navel of the Lord.
6. The idols of two goddesses holding chamaram, Garuda, Narada, Tumburu, the divine forms of the six weapons of Lord Vishnu, Surya, Chandra, Saptarshi (Seven Sages), Madhu, and Kaitabha are also there in the Sanctum.
7. The temple has a 100-foot (30 m), 7-tier gopuram made in the Pandyan style.

2. Natesa of Rajasthan temple returns to India

Why is it in news?
- Natesa, a rare sandstone idol in the 9th century, is returning to the country from London after its theft 22 years ago.

Details:
- Idol is made with Prathihara style of Rajasthan.
- It was originally from the Ghateswara Temple, Baroli, Rajasthan.
- It was stolen in 1998.
- ‘Operation Black hole” of Rajasthan Police exposed the racket of stealing and smuggling of artefacts.
The sandstone Natesa figure height is almost 4 ft.
It is a brilliant depiction of Shiva.
A beautiful depiction of Nandi is shown behind the right leg of the Natesa icon.
1. **Hagia Sophia Museum**

**Why is it in news?**
- President of Turkey announced that the iconic Hagia Sophia museum will be reclassified as a mosque and will be opened for Muslim worship.

**About Hagia Sophia Museum**
- It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the archaeological wonders of the world located in Turkey's capital, Istanbul, and revered among both the Christian and Muslim communities.
- Throughout history, the monument has been claimed and debated over and over among religious sects, something which continues till this date.
- It was cathedral of church until 1453 when Byzantine Empire was captured by the Ottoman Empire after which it was converted into mosque.
- This had caused a major contention among the orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Muslims regarding the true nature of the monument.
- To resolve this issue, the monument was secularised into a museum in 1935.
- Finally, the Turkey government has now again reclassified Hagia Sophia as a mosque.

2. **Koalas may become extinct in Australia's New South Wales by 2050**

**Why is it in news?**
- Parliamentary inquiry report observed that Koalas in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) could become extinct by 2050 unless the government immediately intervenes to protect.

**Details:**
- **About Koalas:**
  1. They are found in Australia.
  2. They are not ‘bears’. They are Marsupials, but often called the koala “bear”.
  3. This stree-climbing animal is a marsupial—a mammal with a pouch for the development of offspring.
  4. They are herbivores.
  5. They rely on the eucalyptus tree for both habitat and food.
  6. Eucalyptus is toxic and very little nutrients are derived from it. That’s why koalas sleep a lot.
  7. According to IUCN, it is one of 10 animals most vulnerable to climate change and listed as ‘vulnerable’.
  8. Many Koalas carry chlamydia, a sexually transmitted disease.

3. **EU Innovation Fund**

**Why is it in news?**
- Bids to Euinnovation fund for low carbon technology for funding support have been invited.

**Details:**
• EIF will support clean technologies such as floating wind farms, carbon capture mechanisms and energy storage.
• **About EIF:**
  1. It aims at funding for innovative low carbon technologies.
  2. Focus areas are energy intensive industries, Carbon capture and utilisation, Construction and operation of carbon capture and storage, generation of renewable energy and energy storage.
  3. The EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), the world’s largest carbon pricing system, is providing the revenues for the Innovation Fund.
  4. EIF is key to achieve EU’s commitments under the Paris Agreement and its objective to be climate neutral Europe by 2050.

### 4. Mysterious appearance of pink glacial ice in the Alps

**Why is it in news?**

- Mysterious appearance of pink glacial ice in the Alps in Italy is due to Algae.

**Details:**

- The plant is known as Ancylonema nordenskioldii.
- It is basically present in Greenland’s so-called Dark Zone, where ice is melting.
- Normally ice reflects more than 80% of the sun’s radiation back.
- As algae darken the ice, it absorbs the heat and melting of ice happen quickly.
- As ice melts, water and air helps to grow more algae and cycle is created.

### 5. Golden Birdwing

**Why is it in news?**

- Golden Birdwing became India’s largest butterfly after 88 years.

**Details:**

- Before, record was held by name ‘Southern Birdwing’.
- Southern Birdwing was recorded by Brigadier Evans in 1932.
- **Golden birdwing:**
  1. With a wingspan of 194 mm, the female of the species is marginally larger than the Southern Birdwing (190 mm).
  2. The male Golden Birdwing is much smaller at 106 mm.
  3. It is found in Himalayas.
- The smallest is the Quaker with a wingspan of 18 mm.

### 6. The woolly whitefly

**Why is it in news?**

- Entomologists feel that indigenous bugs can be biological weapons against a Caribbean-origin enemy of Indian fruit farmers — the woolly whitefly.

**Details:**

- According to the ICAR, the woolly whitefly damage 30-35% of crops in the country annually.
- The woolly whitefly first described from Jamaica in 1896.
- It is polyphagous, meaning a creature that feeds on various kinds of food.
- It is also called citrus whitefly.
7. African Swine Fever

Why is it in news?
- African Swine Fever (ASF) has been reported in India for the first time.

Details:
- The porcine industry in Assam suffered major losses due to killing of more than 17,000 pigs in Assam and over 4,500 in Arunachal Pradesh by ASF.
- In September 2019, ASF led to large scale culling of pig populations in China, largest exporter and consumer of pork, due to lack of vaccine.
- ASF:
  1. It is a severe viral disease that affects wild and domestic pigs.
  2. It results into an acute haemorrhagic fever.
  3. It doesn’t affect humans.
  4. The disease has a case fatality rate (CFR) of almost 100 per cent.
  5. Its routes of transmission include:
     a. Direct contact with an infected or wild pig (alive or dead).
     b. Indirect contact through ingestion of contaminated material such as food waste, feed or garbage, or through biological vectors such as ticks.
  6. Symptoms include high fever, depression, anorexia, loss of appetite, haemorrhages in the skin, vomiting and diarrhoea.
  7. It is different from Classical Swine Fever (CSF), whose signs may be similar to ASF, but is caused by a different virus for which a vaccine exists.
- The current outbreak of ASF has affected China, Mongolia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Republic of Korea and Indonesia.
- In China, the first ASF outbreak was confirmed in August 2018.
- The outbreak has affected pork consumers and also small farmers, who do not have the resources to protect their pigs from the disease.

8. Indigenous vaccine for Pneumonia

Why is it in news?
- The Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) has approved the first fully indigenously developed conjugate vaccine for pneumonia (Pneumococcal Polysaccharide).
- The vaccine is developed by the Serum Institute of India Pvt. Ltd, Pune.

Details:
- This vaccine is used for active immunisation against invasive disease and pneumonia caused by “streptococcus pneumonia” in infants.

Data:
- According to a November 2019 UNICEF report, pneumonia caused 1,27,000 deaths in India in 2018.
- It is the second highest number of child mortality under the age of five in the world.
- In India, pneumonia and diarrhoea cause the most deaths in children under five years.

About Pneumonia:
- Pneumonia is an infection in one or both lungs.
- It is caused by Bacteria, viruses, and fungi.
The infection causes inflammation in the air sacs in your lungs, which are called alveoli.
The alveoli fill with fluid or pus, making it difficult to breathe.
There are also a few noninfectious types of pneumonia that are caused by inhaling or aspirating foreign matter or toxic substances into the lungs.

9. **Currency swap facility for Sri Lanka**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Reserve Bank of India has agreed to a $400 million currency swap facility for Sri Lanka till November 2022.

**Context:**
- The Central Bank of Sri Lanka had sought the swap facility to help bolster the pandemic hit island nation’s foreign exchange reserves.
- The RBI’s action comes in the wake of a recent bilateral ‘technical discussion’ on rescheduling Colombo’s outstanding debt to India.
- Sri Lanka owes $960 million to India.

10. **UN blacklists Pak. Taliban leader**

**Why is it in news?**
- The UN Security Council’s 1267 ISIL and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee added Mehsud Taliban leader to the ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaeda Sanctions List subjecting to an assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo.

**United Nations 1267 Resolution**
- It was passed in 1999 which establishes ISIL and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee.
- The committee looks after sanctions against members or groups related above organisations which results into assets freeze, arms embargo and travel ban.

11. **Small Arms Imports**

**Why is it in news?**
- Indian Army is taking a decision to order another 72,400 assault rifles from Sig Sauer of the U.S.
- The domestic small arms manufacturers have expressed concern over continuing imports and asking for a level playing field to showcase their products.

**Arguments of Domestic Manufacturers:**
- There are Indian companies which can now make small arms with over 50% indigenous content and we can match the price and timelines.
- Indian companies are not considered for deals through Fast Track Procurement (FTP), which is limited to foreign vendors currently.

**Other Deals of India:**
- **Light Machine Guns (LMG):** The Ministry of Defence (MoD) signed a ₹880-crore contract with the Israeli Weapon Industries (IWI) for 16,479 Light Machine Guns (LMG).
- **SIG-716 Assault Rifles:** The Army has recently begun inducting the first batch of 10,000 SIG-716 assault rifles. The rifles are being procured under a contract signed in February 2019 with Sig Sauer of the U.S. for 72,400 SIG-716 assault rifles worth over ₹700 crore.
- **AK-203 Assault Rifles:** The Army is also close to signing the final deal for the procurement of over 7.5 lakh AK-203 assault rifles. Most of these rifles would be manufactured locally by an India-
Russia Joint Venture (JV) under technology transfer.

12. **Open Credit Enablement Network (OCEN) for MSMEs**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Indian Software Products Industry Round Table (iSPIRT), which is a think tank, has developed a credit platform.
- A countrywide pilot of the newly-developed credit protocol infrastructure for the democratisation of credit will start within a fortnight.
- The countrywide pilots will involve multiple banks and thousands of MSMEs.

**Details:**
- The credit protocol infrastructure is known as Open Credit Enablement Network (OCEN).
- OCEN will mediate the interactions between loan service providers, usually fintechs and mainstream lenders, including all large banks and NBFCs.
- OCEN is a common language for lenders and credit seekers.
- With this, credit will become more accessible for a large number of entrepreneurs and small businesses in the country.

13. **Skill India Mission**

**Why is it in news?**
- Speaking on the occasion of the World Youth Skills Day, Prime Minister urged the youth skill, reskill and upskill themselves.

**Details:**
- The World Youth Skills Day also marks the fifth anniversary of “Skill India Mission”.
- Under the programme, hundreds of PM Kaushal Kendras had been set up and capacity of the ITI ecosystem increased.
- More than five crore youth were skilled.

14. **Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)**

**Why is it in news?**
- The audit regulator, National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA), has constituted a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) under the Chairmanship of R Narayanaswamy.
- The TAC would comprise of seven members, including the Chairman.
- TAC would aid and advise the Executive Body of the NFRA on issues related to the drafts of accounting standards and auditing standards.
- It will also provide inputs from the perspectives of users, preparers and auditors of financial statements.

**About NFRA:**
- NFRA is an independent regulator to oversee the auditing profession and accounting standards.
- It was constituted under Companies Act 2013.
- It came into existence in October 2018.

15. **THAAD defence systems**

**Why is it in news?**
- Recently, China has issued a statement reiterating its long-standing objections to the presence of the US THAAD missile defence system in South Korea.

**What is THAAD?**
- Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) is a transportable, ground-based missile defense
THAAD is alarmed about incoming missiles by space-based satellites with infrared sensors.

This anti-ballistic missile defense system has been designed and manufactured by the US company Lockheed Martin.

South Korea is not the only country with the THAAD missile defense system. It has been previously deployed in the UAE, Guam, Israel and Romania.

The Kinetic Kill Technology is used to destroy the incoming missile.

16. PM Modi Launches CHAMPIONS Platform

Why is it in news?

Prime Minister launched the technology platform CHAMPIONS.

Details:

CHAMPIONS stands for Creation and Harmonious Application of Modern Processes for Increasing the Output and National Strength.

The portal is basically for making the smaller units big by solving their grievances, encouraging, supporting, helping and handholding.

It is a real one-stop-shop solution of MSME Ministry.

17. Kisan Credit Card campaign for Dairy Farmers

Why is it in news?

The Government will provide Kisan Credit Card (KCC) to 1.5 crore dairy farmers belonging to Milk Unions and Milk producing Companies.

KCC will be provided to them within the next two months (1st June-31st July 2020) under a special drive.

About Kisan Credit Card (KCC): The scheme aims at providing adequate and timely credit for the comprehensive credit requirements of farmers under single window for their cultivation and other needs as indicated below:

1. To meet the short term credit requirements for cultivation of crops
2. Post-harvest expenses
3. Produce Marketing loan
4. Consumption requirements of farmer household
5. Short term credit requirements of rearing of animals, birds, fish, shrimp, other aquatic organisms, capture of fish.

Eligibility:

- All farmers-individuals/Joint borrowers who are owner cultivators.
- Tenant farmers, Oral lessees and Share Croppers etc.
- SHGs or Joint Liability Groups of farmers including tenant farmers, share croppers etc.

18. Swachhata App

Why is it in news?

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) has launched an upgraded version of the existing Swachhata-MoHUA App.

The app has now been modified to get their covid-related complaints redressed by their respective Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

The ministry has introduced nine additional categories of complaints specific to covid-19 on the
Swachhata-MoHUA App
- The addition of these new categories has no impact on the existing categories of the App.

**More about Swachhata Application:**
- The Swachhata application is a fourth generation complaint redressal mobile and web platform.
- It is an initiative of the Swachh Bharat Mission in association with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- The core of the Swachhata application is to use citizen participation and civic engagement to help resolve the Swachh Bharat complaints.
- Benefit: The app can pinpoint the location of the complaint with accuracy using the geo-location of the picture.

**19. Russian Imperial Movement**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Trump administration designated an ultranationalist group ‘Russian Imperial Movement’ based in Russia as a terrorist organization.

**Details:**
- It is the first time the government applied the label of terrorist to a white supremacist group.
- The Russian Imperial Movement is not considered to be sponsored by the Russian government.
- However, according to US officials, President Vladimir Putin has tolerated its activities and it has helped advance the Russian government’s external goals by recruiting Russian fighters to aid pro-Russia separatists in eastern Ukraine.
- The group has also helped support neo-Nazi groups in Scandinavia.

**20. ‘#iCommit’ Initiative**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Ministry of Power launched ‘#iCommit’ campaign, on the occasion of World Environment Day.

**Details:**
- The initiative is a clarion call to all stakeholders and individuals to continue moving towards energy efficiency, renewable energy.
- It aims to create a robust and resilient energy system for secured energy future.
- The ‘#iCommit’ initiative, driven by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), under the administration of Ministry of Power.
- It is uniting a diverse set of players such as Governments, Corporates, Multilateral and Bilateral Organisations, Think Tanks and Individuals.
- The initiative will also celebrate and promote key undertakings of Government of India such as National Electric Mobility Mission 2020, FAME 1 and 2, Saubhagya Scheme, UDAY, KUSUM, UJALA), Atal Jyoti Yojna (AJAY) amongst others.

**21. Shahakar Mitra scheme**

**Why is it in news?**
- Union Minister for Agriculture & Farmers Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar launches Sahakar Mitra Scheme.

**Details:**
• Sahakar Mitra is an Internship Programme. It is an initiative by National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC).
• Sahakar Mitra scheme will help cooperative institutions access new and innovative ideas of young professionals while the interns will gain experience of working in the field to be self-reliant.
• The scheme promotes “Vocal for Local” that was launched under Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.
• NCDC is a statutory body established in 1963. It comes under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers’ Welfare.

22. iFLOWS

Why is it in news?
• Maharashtra’s Chief Minister and Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Science and Technology, launched an Integrated Flood Warning System called ‘iFLOWS-Mumbai’.

Details:
• It is a joint initiative between the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).
• The warning system will be able to relay alerts of possible flood-prone areas anywhere between 6 to 72 hours in advance.
• Mumbai is only the second city in the country after Chennai to get this system.
• Similar systems are being developed for Bengaluru and Kolkata.