By Jawwad Kazi

Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs August 2020

By Jawwad Kazi
UPSC

Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs August 2020
(Study Material)

By Jawwad Kazi

https://t.me/jawwadkazicurrentaffairs

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New National Education Policy 2020

- Syllabus: GS 2: Issues relating to Education and Human Resources.

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

Background:
- The first education policy was passed in 1968.
- The last education policy was implemented in 1986, 34 years ago.
- NEP 2020 is the 1st education policy to be introduced in India in the 21st century. It replaces the 1986 policy which was modified once in 1992.
- Aim of NEP 2020: Producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society.

Key Highlights of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:
- Universal Access:
  (1) NEP envisions universalisation of early childhood education from ages 3 to 6 by 2030.
  (2) NEP thus expands age group 6-14 years of mandatory schooling to 3-18 years.
- Change in Structure:
  (1) NEP changes the existing 10+2 structure of school education to a 5+3+3+4.
  (2) 4 years undergraduate degrees with option for entry and exit at various stages.
  (3) Students can exit after 1 year with a Certificate, after 2 years with a Diploma and after 3 years with a bachelor’s degree.
  (4) There will be no rigid separations between arts and sciences and students can select subjects of their liking across the streams.
- Multilingualism and Sanskrit:
  (1) NEP advocates for mother tongue/local language as the medium of instruction at least till Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8.
  (2) Sanskrit to be offered at all levels of school and higher education as an option.
  (3) Other classical languages and literatures of India also to be available as options.
- Enrolment Ratio:
  (1) NEP aims to achieve 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in preschool to secondary level by 2030.
  (2) To achieve 50% GER by 2035 in higher education, from 26.3% as of 2018.
- 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 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) From Grade 6, the students will have access to vocational skills and internships will be encouraged.

- **Common Regulator for Higher Education:**
  (1) Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) will be set up as a single overarching umbrella body for entire higher education.
  (2) HECI would have four pillars that look into standards, regulations, accreditation and funding.

- **Academic Bank of Credit (ABC):**
  (1) The credit bank shall be established which would digitally store the academic credits earned from various recognized HEIs.
  (2) The degrees from an HEI can be awarded taking into account credits earned.

- **Investing in Education:** NEP aims to increase the public investment in the education sector to reach 6% of GDP.

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

- **Foreign Universities to open Campus:** The universities from among the top 100 in the world will be able to set up campuses in India.

**Significance of NEP 2020:**

- **Changing Focus on Education:**
  (1) NEP has renamed the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) as the Ministry of Education.
  (2) NEP aims to achieve 100% youth and adult literacy in India.

- **Flexibility:**
  (1) Flexibility in selecting subjects and reduced focus on mathematics and science will lead to development of well-rounded individuals.
  (2) NEP focusses on key concepts and ideas in order that children are able to develop critical thinking and more analysis-based learning.
  (3) Phasing out of specific streams, all universities and Colleges to become multi-disciplinary by 2040.

- **Exams:**
  (1) The exams will primarily test core competencies rather than rote learning.
  (2) Extra-curricular activities would be accounted in exams.
  (3) There will also be the possibility of taking the board exams twice in a year.

- **Language:**
  (1) NEP promotes multilingualism and a learning of native languages.
  (2) Early comprehension of concepts is better in the home language and is critical for future progress.

- **Skilling:**
  (1) Vocational education improves the scope of employability and self-employment.
  (2) NEP provide opportunities for skilling and facilitate lifelong learning.
  (3) New age subjects such as coding and computational thinking will be introduced at a middle
The Unique Academy

school level.

- **Fee regulation:**
  1. NEP proposes to cap fees of educational institutions.
  2. This is welcomed step as there are schools in India that charges in lakhs annually.

- **Capacity building of teachers:**
  1. NEP provides for setting up of recruitment standards and professional development path for teachers.
  2. This will be very essential to the implementation of NEP.

**Concerns/ Criticism of NEP:**

- **Language Issue:**
  1. The emphasis on mother tongue as the language of instruction might infringe the autonomy of parents.
  2. It will impact specifically to children of parents with transferable jobs.
  3. English is a global language and a major reason for India’s service sector boom and demand for Indian IT professionals worldwide.

- **Funding:**
  1. NEP is silent on the structure and finance of school education in the country.
  2. It is unclear how the expenditure will be shared between the central and state governments.
  3. The target of investing 6% of GDP seems challenging, given the limited resources and past records.

- **No debates and Discussions:**
  1. Despite education being a concurrent subject, all the states were not taken on board.
  2. The NEP bypasses the parliamentary debates and parliamentary scrutiny.

- **Centralisation of Power:**
  1. NEP states that teacher’s training board will be set up for all kinds of teachers and no state can change that.
  2. It shifts the power in the hands of central government.

- **Lack of Resources:**
  1. NEP talks about teachers’ credibility, but innumerable teaching posts are vacant in India.
  2. Many schools in India lacks basic infrastructure such as benches, blackboards, well-equipped libraries etc.

- **Exclusion due to Technology:**
  1. NEP talks of establishing a National Education Technology Forum to advance digital learning and e-content.
  2. However, a large number of students do not have access to technology and gadgets. Also many villages lack in e-infrastructure.

**Way Ahead:**

- **Addressing Language Issue:**
  1. Concerns of parents with transferable jobs should be taken care of and there should be a room for students and parents to decide upon the language.
  2. It is important to give priority to English, as it is a language of mobility and it has become a global language of communication.
  3. English is an advantage point for Indians as compare to China and rest of the southeast and east Asian countries.

- **Implementation:**
  1. The changes suggested in the policy are transformational which requires political will and the
system to welcome quality human resources.

(2) Governments need to ensure that aspiration is matched by implementation.

- **Taking States Onboard:**
  (1) The education ministry needs to build consensus with states.
  (2) State’s concerns should be addressed to make it simple to run education during implementation.

- **Funding and Resources:**
  (1) Sufficient funding is crucial. The previous policies have been hamstrung by shortage of funds.
  (2) Building upon primary resources like school infrastructure and human resources are imperative for the success of NEP.

- **Addressing Post-corona scenario:**
  (1) The classrooms and learning processes in near future won’t be the same in a post-corona world.
  (2) A budgetary provision is a must to address the challenges that students are going to face.

Sources: The Hindu, IE, LiveMint, Telegraph, The Quint.

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**Hindu Women Inheritance Rights**

**Syllabus: GS2: Social Justice and women empowerment**

**Why is it in news?**

- The Supreme Court of India recently laid to rest a confusion regarding the 2005 amendment to the Hindu Succession Act, 1956.
- The amendment had upheld the daughters right to be a coparcener in ancestral property. Coparcener means legal heir in ancestral property.
- But differing interpretations regarding the application of the amendment had brought the issue before the SC.

**Background:**

- **Mitakshara law:** According this school of law only male heir of the family can be coparcener.
- **Hindu Succession Act 1956:**
  - This act codified Mitakshara law, that means it recognised only males as legal heirs and continued the discrimination against women.
  - The law applied to everyone who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion.
  - Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains and followers of Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj are considered Hindus for the purposes of this law.
- **2005 Amendment:**
  - Section 6 of the Act was amended to make a daughter of a coparcener by birth “in her own right in the same manner as the son”.
  - The law applies to ancestral property and to intestate succession in personal property, where succession happens as per law and not through a will.
- **Different Interpretation by Courts:** Different benches of the Supreme Court had taken conflicting views on this issue.
- **Prakash v Phulwati (2015):** Two-judge Bench held that the benefit of the 2005 amendment could be granted only to daughters whose father was alive on September 9, 2005 (the date when the
amendment came into force).

- **February 2018:** Two-judge Bench held that the share of a father who died in 2001 will also pass to his daughters as coparceners during the partition of the property as per the 2005 law.

- **174th Law Commission Report:**
  - It had recommended to reform Hindu succession law to make it equal for male and female.
  - Even before the 2005 amendment, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu had made changes in the law, and Kerala had abolished the Hindu Joint Family System in 1975.

- **Recent Judgement by Supreme Court:** 3 Judge Bench held that Hindu woman’s right to be a joint heir to the ancestral property is by birth and does not depend on whether her father was alive or not when the law was enacted in 2005.

**Significance of the Judgment:**
- **Removes the Confusion in the law:** Various interpretation by different benches had created confusion about the provisions of law which this judgement makes clear.
- **Women Empowerment:** The Hindu women can rightfully claim their right to ancestral property
- **Corrects the historical discrimination against women.**

**Issue/Challenges:**
- **Male as Head of Hindu Undivided Family:**
  - Hindu Succession act consider the male member as a head of the family for considering lineage.
  - This results in unfair discrimination against the woman’s natal family.
  - Even when the woman has acquired the property through her skills and efforts, the husband’s natal family has a stronger claim over it than her parents.
  - However, there is no reciprocal provision for the property belonging to the husband.
  - **Continues Stereotype Against Women:** The provision that only male can be head of Hindu Undivided family perpetuate stereotype that women do not have the capacity to acquire, hold, and manage their property.
  - **Patriarchal Mind-set:** Even after recognition by the law, only male members are considered as rightful inheritor of family property. It is so highly ingrained in the society that women often wilfully give up their share for male members.
  - **Low Awareness About Rights by women:** Assertion of rights through the law is premised upon awareness of rights.
  - **Capacity to Claim the Rights:** Even after recognition by the law, women lack the wherewithal to claim their rights in the court of law.

**Way forward:**
- **Making the Law Gender Neutral:** Male as well as female should be equally eligible to be considered as head of the family for finding lineage.

**Awareness about Law:**
- There is need for efforts from government to create awareness about the law and rights of women.
- Automatically dividing property equally between male and female implemented in various states is good to start with.

**Women Empowerment:**
- Often women decline their right to avoid spoiling their relations with natal family as it acts as support system in case of failure of marriage.
- This dependence of women for support needs to be corrected through genuine women empowerment.

**Source:** The Hindu, The Wire, India Express.
Age of Marriage for Women


Why is it in the news?
- Prime Minister announced in his Independence Day address that the government is looking to review the legal marriage age for women.
- Government has set up a committee to reconsider the minimum age of marriage for girls.

Minimum age of Marriage in India
- Personal laws of various religions deal with marriage have their own standards.
- For Hindus, the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 sets 18 years as the minimum age for the bride and 21 years as the minimum age for the groom.
- Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 also applies to Buddhist, Jain, Sikh and followers of Arya Samaj.
- In Islam, the marriage of a minor who has attained puberty is considered valid under personal law.
- Child marriages are not illegal but can be declared void at the request of the minor in the marriage.

Data
- About 25% of newly married young women got married before the legal age in India.
- About 10% of women had a child while still a minor.
- UNICEF estimates: Each year, at least 1.5 million girls under the age of 18 are married in India. It makes India home to the largest number of child brides in the world.
- As per IFPRI study published in The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health:
  1. Children born to adolescent mothers (10-19 years) were 5% points more likely to be stunted than those born to young adults (20-24 years).
  2. Children born to adolescent mothers had 10% points higher prevalence of low weight as adult mothers.

Other Issues Associated with Early Marriage
- Educational Impact: Lower education among teenage mothers, as most of them are school dropouts.
- Lack Economic Empowerment: Poor economic status, which has links with a child’s height and weight measurements.
- Nutritional Impact: Early marriage and premature delivery is major cause behind Maternal and Child Mortality.

Significance of the move
- Recognition and concern about early marriages at the highest levels in the government is welcome gesture.
- Improving maternal and child health outcomes: Increasing age of marriage for girls could help address variety of issues such as child mortality, MMR, illiteracy, stunting, wasting etc.
- Population Control:
  1. Increasing age of marriage may help keep the population in check.
  2. It could prevent women from being forced into early motherhood and its multiple
complications.

Issues/ Concerns

- **Formal increase in Child marriage:**
  (1) The proposal seeks to bring women aged 18-21 years into the bracket of child-marriages.
  (2) It may lead to an increase in the number of child marriage cases.
  (3) This will bring many young girls, especially from the vulnerable sections of the society, in conflict with law.
  (4) This will increase the burden on law enforcement and judicial system.

- **Increase in Parental Backlash:**
  (1) Child Marriage Act has mostly used by parents to punish their daughters for elopement and to punish boys in self-arranged marriages.
  (2) Increasing age will expand the numbers of married persons deemed underage and criminalise them without legal protection.

- **Discrepancy in Existing Law:**
  (1) The existing law is not being implemented well at ground level.
  (2) The law declares child marriage illegal but considers such a union void, unless the partners involved does not challenge it.
  (3) Marital rapes have not been effectively tackled so far.

Way Ahead:

- **Focus on Empowerment:**
  (1) The issue must be addressed by empowering girls, as poverty and lack of education are the main drivers of early marriage.
  (2) The Right to Education must be extended up to 18 years of age.
  (3) As per NFHS, the urban women and those who are richer and better educated marry later.
  (4) Ensuring safety at workplace and equal opportunity for growth.
  (5) Creating enabling opportunities for girls will delay marriage and lead to long term and positive socio-economic outcomes.

- **Awareness:** The experts called for the need for awareness about safe sex and access to reproductive health information.

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express, The Wire, Scroll.in

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**All India Recruitment Exam**

**Syllabus: GS 2: Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency and Accountability**

**Why is it in News?**

- The Union Cabinet approved the creation of a National Recruitment Agency (NRA) for conducting a Common Eligibility Test (CET) for various government jobs.

**Present System & facts:**

- **Present Pattern:**
  (1) Candidates have to appear for examinations for various posts separately.
(2) Those who fail in tier 2 have to again appear for the PT next year.
(3) Present recruitment cycle takes at least 18 months.
(4) Present pattern experiences clashing dates, leaked papers and scams.

- **Statistics:**
  (1) About 2.5 crore candidates apply for 1.25 lakh non-gazetted jobs every year.
  (2) These 2.5 crore candidates also appear for 50 other recruitment tests for positions at State and Central government bodies.

**Common Eligibility Test (CET):**
- National Recruitment Agency (NRA) will conduct a CET for all non-gazetted posts, including Group B and C jobs.
- **Validity:**
  (1) The CET score of the candidate shall be valid for a period of three years.
  (2) The best of valid scores shall be considered as current score of the candidate.
- **Number of Attempts:**
  (1) There will be no restriction on the number of attempts subject to the upper age limit.
  (2) SC, ST and OBC candidates will be given an age relaxation as per the government’s policy.
- **Levels:**
  (1) The CET would be held separately for 3 levels - Graduate, 12th pass & 10th pass.
  (2) Based on the CET screening, final selection for recruitment shall be made through separate specialised Tiers (II, III etc) of examinations.
  (3) Specialized tiers shall be conducted by the respective recruitment agencies.
- **Syllabus and languages:**
  (1) The curriculum for this test would be common for all exams.
  (2) The exam would be conducted in 12 languages initially and will be expanded to all languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
- **State Government/PSE/Private sector:**
  (1) Though the test score would be used for Central government recruitment for now, it could be used by State governments.
  (2) Score could be used even by the public sector enterprises and private sector in their recruitments.
- **Other:**
  (1) For now, the examination will be held once a year.
  (2) Candidates will have the facility to give a choice of centres and scheduling of their own tests.

**National Recruitment Agency:**
- **Three Agencies:**
  (1) Initially, three of the over 20 Central government recruitment agencies – RRB, SSC, IBPS - would be brought under the NRA.
  (2) Gradually all Central recruitment agencies would be brought under the NRA.
- **Registration & Composition:**
  (1) Society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
  (2) Headed by a Chairman of the rank of the Secretary to the GOI.
  (3) It will have representatives of the Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Finance/Department of Financial Services, the SSC, RRB & IBPS.

**Need of NRA & CET:**
- **Multiple registrations:**
  (1) At present, there are multiple recruiting agencies for various posts.
(2) It needs registration at multiple platforms and results into duplication of data.

**Financial Burden:**
(1) Candidates have to pay fees to multiple recruiting agencies which increases financial burden.
(2) Candidates have to travel long distances and stay at lodges for appearing in various exams.

**Other:**
(1) Women candidates especially from rural areas face constraints in appearing in multiple examinations due to difficulties in transportation and places to stay.
(2) Multiple exams always lead to clashing of dates for different exams. It reduces opportunities of appearance for different exams by same candidate.

**Benefits:**

- For candidates:
  (1) Freedom to appear once and apply to all these recruitment agencies will increase opportunities.
  (2) The exam would be held online and centres would be set up in every district which will increase access for candidates.
  (3) Validity of result of screening test for 3 years will save energy and time.
  (4) Single exam will reduce financial burden due to reduction of additional expenses for travel, boarding, lodging to reach their exam centres.
  (5) The availability of exam centres in every district would benefit the female candidates, particularly in rural areas.

- For Organizations:
  (1) CET would significantly reduce the lengthy recruitment cycle.
  (2) This will reduce the time taken by the agencies to hire the candidates.
  (3) Reduction of tiers of examination might reduce costs for recruiting agencies.

- For Examination Pattern:
  (1) It will bring standardization and reduce opacity in examination pattern.
  (2) Jumbling of different, but similarly difficult questions using algorithm will ensure unique paper for each candidate. It will reduce the chances of cheating.

**Challenges:**

- Implementation:
  (1) The relevance of reforms will depend on the commitment of governments.
  (2) As large chunk of public employment falls within the purview of States, CET application is limited.

- Declining Central Public Employment:
  (1) A large number of vacancies remained unfilled.
  (2) With privatization of core services to the private sector, possibility of fewer government jobs lurks in the future.

**Way forward:**

- Need of sustained political commitment:
  (1) Though it is a welcome step, it needs sustained political commitment.
  (2) We must introduce CET at State level as many services are controlled by States.

- Need of clarity:
  (1) There is need to define procedures to avoid confusion in recruitment process.
  (2) We must define powers, functions and jurisdiction of NRA with clarity.

- Cooperative federalism:
  (1) As many services falls under state, there is need for cooperation between Centre and State.
  (2) Centre can provide its sophisticated exam conduction strategy to states for effective recruitment.

**Source:** Indian Express, the Hindu, the Livemint, Hindustan times
### Goods and Service Tax Shortfall: Causes, Challenges and Solutions

**Syllabus:** GS3: Mobilisation of Resources.

**Why is it in news?**
- Central government has asked state governments to borrow from RBI to compensate revenue short falls.

**About GST:**
- Goods and Service Tax (GST) is an indirect tax levied on the supply of goods and services.
- This law has replaced many indirect tax laws that previously existed in India.
- GST replaced multi-layered, complex indirect tax structure with a simple, transparent and technology-driven tax regime.
- The purpose was intended to make the process simpler and cost effective by making production more efficient.

**Current Status:**
1. GST is currently levied on every product except petroleum, alcohol, tobacco and stamp duty on real estate in four slabs of 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent.
2. Most of the daily use articles have zero GST as per the latest revision of the tax rates last year.

**Background:**
- In 2017 GST act and Constitutional Amendment to that effect was passed.

**Compensation for Revenue Shortfall:**
1. The State governments were promised compensation for revenue shortfall if revenue growth fall below 14% for 5 years.
2. The special cess was established called GST Compensation Cess for this.

**Loss Due to Pandemic:**
1. Revenue growth in States has declined which means Central government needs compensate more amount to bridge the gap of 14%.
2. On the other hand, collection of Compensation Cess is itself low.
3. Attorney General Opined that Compensation cannot be paid from Consolidated Fund of India.

**Two Options Given by Center:**
1. **Special Window to States:** To borrow the projected GST shortfall of Rs 97,000 crore, and an amount that can be repaid after five years of GST, ending June 2022, from the compensation cess fund.
2. **Relaxation on Borrowing Limit:** A 0.5% relaxation in the borrowing limit under Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act would be provided, delinked from the conditions announced earlier as part of pandemic package.
3. **To Borrow Entire Amount:** Entire amount of projected shortfall of Rs 2.35 lakh crore, both on account of faltering GST collections and the expected shortfall due to the pandemic, facilitated by the RBI.

**Issues/Challenges:**
- **Capacity of States:** States do not have recourse to multiple options that the Centre has, such as
The Unique Academy

issue of a sovereign bond (in dollars or rupees) or a loan against public sector unit shares from the Reserve Bank of India.

- **Lower Interest Rate for Centre**: Centre can command much lower rates of borrowing from the markets as compared to the States.
- **No Impact on market or Rating**: In terms of aggregate public sector borrowing, it does not matter for the debt markets, nor the rating agencies, whether it is the States or the Centre that is increasing their indebtedness.
- **Duty of Central Government**: Fighting this recession through increased fiscal stimulus is basically the job of macroeconomic stabilisation, which is the Centre’s domain.
- **Credibility Issue**: Breaking this important promise, using the alibi of the COVID-19 pandemic causes a serious dent in the trust built up between the Centre and States.

**Significance of GST:**

- **Reduced Cascading effect**: Levying of tax on the tax paid at the previous stage has been substantially reduced by providing the credit of the tax paid on the inputs at each previous stage.
- **Better Compliance**: Use of technology through GSTN, the IT Infrastructure, has contributed by eliminating the human interface in on-line compliance of the tax.
- **Formalization**: GST regime has helped in an increase in taxpayer base for the government and a move towards greater formalization of the economy.
- **Tax Base Increase**: The taxpayer base increased by as much as 84%.

**Way forward:**

- **Consensus Building**: Many states have complained that borrowing options are imposed on them without consulting them.
- **Amendment to Constitution**: Constitution should be amended to add a clause to deal with unforeseen situations like pandemic or recession.
- **Sharing of Equal Burden**: Borrowing cost should be distributed equally between Center and State.
- **Increasing limits under FRBM Act**: States should be given relaxation of at least 1.5% above the borrowing limit.
- **Conclusion**: The GST mechanism has brought new chapter in cooperative federalism in India through GST council. It should be utilised to deal with unforeseen challenges with the spirit of team India.

6

**Nativism in Jobs**

**Syllabus: GS 2- Governance**

**Why is it in the news?**

- Madhya Pradesh Government recently announced that state government jobs would only be open to residents of the state.

**Similar Developments in recent times:**

- Haryana government passed an ordinance reserving 75% of private sector jobs for locals.
- In July, 2019 the Andhra Pradesh assembly passed a Bill that makes it mandatory for industries to reserve 75% jobs for Andhraites.
In November 2019, Maharashtra announced that it would reserve 80% of private sector jobs for Maharashtrians.

Introduction:
- Locals first policy demand has time and again raised its head in different states in India.
- It reflects the fear of some locals who believe that their jobs are being taken away from outsiders.
- It is also a result of job crisis or rising unemployment in any state.

Constitutional Provisions:
- The Constitution of India guarantees freedom of movement and consequently employment within India through several provisions.
- Article 14 provides for equality before law irrespective of place of birth.
- Article 16 guarantees no birthplace-based discrimination in public employment.
- Article 19 ensures that citizens can “move freely throughout the territory of India”.
- Exception: Article 16(3) of the Constitution says that Parliament may make a law “prescribing” a requirement of residence for jobs in a particular state.

State having jobs reserved for locals
- The Public Employment (Requirement as to Residence) Act abolishes all existing residence requirements in the states with some exceptions only in the case of Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura and Himachal Pradesh.
- Constitutionally, some states have special protections under Article 371.
- Andhra Pradesh under Section 371(d) has powers to have “direct recruitment of local cadre” in specified areas.
- In Uttarakhand, class III and class IV jobs are reserved for locals.
- Some states, which conduct official business in their regional language, require proficiency of that local language. Ex. West Bengal, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

Issues/ Concerns
- Legal challenge:
  (1) As per the constitution, only the Parliament is allowed to put in a residence requirement for government jobs and not a state legislature.
  (2) There is 50% cap on quotas set by Supreme Court.
- Against National Integration:
  (1) Son of the soil sentiments may give rise to sub-nationalism or regionalism.
  (2) If pursued by other states, it will lead to a collective race to the bottom.
  (3) Restrictions on labour movement may weaken the advantage of diverse labour pool and exchange of skills.
- Doing Business:
  (1) The job restrictions may discourage companies to invest or expand in a particular state.
  (2) This will in turn hamper the growth, development and employment prospects.
- Political Escape:
  (1) It may also be used for inciting local passions to divert public attention from real challenge of employment generation.
  (2) It also shows lack of focus on current unemployment crisis.

Supreme Court Judgments:
- Dr Pradeep Jain vs Union of IND, 1984: Held that such reservation based on place of birth or residence would be unconstitutional.
- Sunanda Reddy vs State of AP, 1995: Affirmed the view of Pradeep Jain case and struck down the
state govt policy which gave 5% extra weightage to candidates who had studied with Telugu as medium of instruction.

- **Allahabad HC in 2019** struck down notification of UP Sub Service Selection Commission prescribing preference for women who are 'original residents' of the state.

**Jobs for locals in the private sector?**
- The state can recommend a preference to locals but ensuring that it is followed would be difficult.
- Private employers do not go on an annual recruitment drive to fill vacancies but hire as and when required.

**Way Ahead:**
- Striving towards economic revival and job creation.
- Education, Skill development and capacity building of locals.
- Labour market reforms.
- **A Framework to facilitate interstate migration:**
  1. A safe interstate migration should be facilitated and portability of social security benefits should be provided.
  2. It could provide more opportunities to remedy regional disparities.
  3. Matching skills seamlessly across geographies would facilitate the ease of doing business.

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

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**Defense Manufacturing in India**

**Syllabus: GS3: Indian Economy, Security**

**Why is it in news?**
- Prime Minister has emphasized the need for making India's defence manufacturing Atmanirbhar (self-reliant).

**Need for Defence Manufacturing in India:**
- **Import dependence:** According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India is the second largest arms importer for last 5 years.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** With increasing tensions with Pakistan and China, India is critically dependent on this imports for its strategic interest.
- **Export Promotion:** Export of defence equipment from India can help India economy in maintaining balance of payment.
- **Employment Generation:** As the need for defence requirement is growing, defence manufacturing is potential opportunity for employment generation.
- **Global Power Ambition:** As India wants to be rule maker and net security provider in South Asian region, it con not dependent on other countries for its defence needs.

**Challenges:**
- **Lack of Private Participation:** For long time defence manufacturing was reserved for public sector.
Now private players are cautious to enter defence sector.

- **Low R&D**: Public expenditure on R&D in India is less than 0.7% of GDP. It is very less compared to other countries with similar level of economy.
- **Technology Transfer**: Foreign players are initially reluctant for technology transfer. When it happens, it’s not in significant proportion.
- **Competitive Export Market**: Every major manufacturing country is trying to diversify its market which highly competitive market.
- **Red Tape**: Red tape hinders the ease of doing business especially in defence sector which is highly regulated.
- **Increasing non-capital expenditure in Defence Budget**: Majority of defence budget goes to pension and salaries.
- **Land Acquisition**: According to recent survey, land acquisition is biggest constrain for starting new business in India.

**Steps Taken:**
- **Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) 2016**: 
  - **Aim**: To promote indigenous design, development and manufacturing of defence equipment and enhance the role of MSMEs in the Defence industry.
  - **New Category of Capital Procurement**: Buy Indian - Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured (IDDM) has been introduced to encourage indigenous design, development and manufacturing of defence equipment.
  - **Ease of Doing Business**: Number of industry friendly provisions such as relaxation of eligibility criterion, minimal documentation, provision for considering proposals suggested by industry/individual etc. have been introduced in this procedure.
  - **Provision for Maintenance Transfer of Technology (MToT) to Indian partners**.
  - **The requirement of minimum indigenous content is rationalised**.
- **Offset Policy**:
  - The policy stipulates the mandatory offset requirement of a minimum of 30% for procurement of defence equipment by foreign defence players.
  - The key objectives of the defence offset policy are to leverage capital acquisitions to develop the domestic Defence industry.
- **Appointment of Chief of Defence Staff**: It has resulted in better synergy and coordination among the three forces which has helped in the scaling up of defence procurement.
- **Liberalisation of Defence Sector**: Now foreign direct investment up to 74% is permitted in defence sector through automatic route.
- **Defence Corridor**: Defence infrastructure corridor has been established in Utter Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
- **Innovation for Defence Excellence Initiative (iDEX)**: To promote innovation in technology in defence and aerospace.

**Way forward:**
- **Corporatization of Ordinance factory**: Ordinance factories which manufactures arms for government have not seen any reforms in last many years which is leading to decline in productivity.
- **Net Security Provider**: India should strengthen its efforts to become net security provider in South Asian region which promote demand for Indian defence equipment.
- **Increased investment in R&D**: R&D is the backbone of defence industry. Both private and public investment need to increase.
- **Participation in Export Control Regime**: Defence exports are regulated by export control regime
like MTCR and Wassenaar group. India should become effective member of such groups.

- **Skilled Labour:** Academic institutions need to make specialised course related to the defence sector like aerospace engineering.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express.

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### National Agriculture Infrastructure Fund

**Syllabus: GS 3 Agriculture**

**Why is it in News?**

- Prime Minister launched a financing facility of Rs 1 lakh crore under the National Agriculture Infrastructure Fund

**Agricultural Infrastructure Fund:**

- **Objectives:** To provide medium-to-long term debt financing for post-harvest infrastructure and community assets and marketing of farm produce.

- **Provisions:**
  1. Banks and financial institutions will provide loans to cooperative societies, FPOs, SHGs, entrepreneurs, and infrastructure providers.
  2. All loans up to Rs. 2 crore will have interest subvention of 3% per annum.
  3. The loans will be disbursed in the next four years with a sanction of Rs. 10,000 crore in 2020-21 and Rs. 30,000 crore in the next three years.

- **Credit Guarantee:**
  1. Credit guarantee coverage will be available under Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) scheme for a loan up to Rs. 2 crores.
  2. In case of FPOs, the credit guarantee may be availed under FPO promotion scheme of Department of Agriculture.

- **Transparency & Monitoring:**
  1. Agriculture Infrastructure fund will be managed and monitored through an online Management Information System (MIS) platform.
  2. The National, State and District level Monitoring Committees will be set up to ensure real-time monitoring and effective feedback.

**Need**

- **Post harvesting losses:**
  1. Indian farmers incur Rs 92,651 crore per year in post-harvest losses, the primary causes of which are poor storage and transportation facilities.
  2. Agriculture sector is lagging in all agri-logistics required to bring the produce from farm to markets.

- **Opportunities:**
  1. India has a huge opportunity to invest in post-harvest management solutions & build a global presence in areas such as organic and fortified foods.
  2. Most of the storage infrastructure in the country is not owned by farmers. NAIF can be used to address this.
Previous efforts:

- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sampada Yojana**: Mega food parks, integrated cold chains of fruits, vegetables and milk; infrastructure for agro-processing clusters; food safety laboratories and food processing units are eligible for grant.

- **The National Horticulture Board Grants**: NHB provides a grant for post-harvest infrastructure projects such as construction and modernisation of cold storages as well as non-cold storage structure of horticultural produce such as onion, vegetables, etc.

- **National Mission on Horticulture**: The Ministry of Agriculture provides grant for post-harvest projects.

- **Grants by States**: Many States provide grants and interest subsidy under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana.

- **Liberalization of APMCs**:
  1. Government had issued three ordinances related to amendments in the Essential Commodities Act.
  2. It allowed farmers to sell their produce outside the APMC mandis.

**Benefits**:

- **Creation of Agri Infrastructure**: It will provide better warehousing and cold storage facilities for farmers.

- **Investment Facilitation**: Data through an online portal will reveal which projects are being preferred by investors.

- **Empowerment of small Farmers**: Normally, banks prefer entrepreneurs of high net-worth. It will be a real achievement if FPOs, PACs and SHGs can secure loans from the fund.

- **Agriculture Price Realisation**: It will help farmers get higher prices for their crops.

- **Employment Generation**: It will help to create new jobs as food processing and post-harvest facilities are set up in rural India.

**Criticism**:

- **Unviable economic model**: Small farmers cannot hold stocks for long as they have urgent cash needs to meet family expenditures.

- **Lack of clarity**: Organisations such as the National Horticultural Board are already providing credit-linked subsidy on capital investments in post-harvest infrastructure. So, why new scheme rather than merging multiple schemes is a question to ask.

**Way Ahead**:

- **Use of negotiable warehouse receipt system**: NABARD should provide training to FPOs to use negotiable warehouse receipt system and navigate the realm of agri-futures to hedge their market risks.

- **Increase participation in agri-future markets**: Government agencies such as FCI, NAFED should increase their participation in agri-futures to ensure depth of India's agri future markets.

- **Stable Government policy**: Government policy has to be more stable and market friendly.

**Source**: The Hindu, Indian Express, Economic Times, Business Standard, Livemint
National Digital Health Mission (NDHM)

Syllabus: GS 2: Issues relating to Education and Human Resources.

- **Question:** Post-COVID era would mark a new milestone in the history of Indian Healthcare. Discuss with reference to National Digital Health Mission.

**Why is it in news?**

- Prime Minister launched the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM), during his address to the nation on India’s 74th Independence Day.

**Background:**

- **National Health Policy 2017:**
  (1) It had envisaged developing an integrated health information system.
  (2) System that improves efficiency, transparency and citizens’ experience with linkage across public and private healthcare.
- Niti Aayog in 2018 had recommended creating a centralised system to manage healthcare in the country and put forth the idea of a national health ID.
- **National Digital Health Blueprint:** It was released in 2019, with the objective providing an efficient and affordable health coverage through a wide range of data infrastructure services by leveraging open digital systems that will ensure security and privacy of personal information.

**Issues with Existing Healthcare System:**

- **Health Expenditure:**
  (1) Out of pocket expenditure in India is over 60%.
  (2) Over 6 million families gets into poverty due to health expenditures annually.
- **Shortages of Doctors:**
  (1) As per a recent report, India is facing shortage of around 600,000 doctors.
  (2) The country’s doctor-patient ratio at 1:1456. It is way below the WHO-stipulated limit of 1:1000.
  (3) A digital push would be a big step to overcome this problem.

**Key Provisions of NDHM:**

- **Unique ID:**
  (1) Every Indian would receive a unique health identity card under NDHM.
  (2) The health ID will contain information on what disease one suffers from, which doctor has been consulted and what medicines have been prescribed.
  (3) The hospitals, laboratories, online pharmacies, insurance companies, telemedicine firms are expected to participate in the health ID system.
- **Implementing Authority:**
  (1) The National Health Authority (NHA) would design, build, roll-out and implement the NDHM.
  (2) NHA is an office under Ministry of Health & Family Welfare which runs PM-JAY.
- **Pilot Basis:**
  (1) NDHM would first be tested in some Union Territories.
  (2) Based on the initial learnings, government will gradually work in partnership with the States
to launch the NDHM.

**Digital ID Process:**
- Patients can create a health ID, allowing them to share their data between hospitals and doctors digitally.
- The NDHM would be a voluntary programme.
- Those looking to benefit from government schemes, will be required to connect their ID to their Aadhaar.
- One copy of a patient’s records to be stored in doctor’s files and one is stored in their own individual locker (which can be owned by a company or by the government).

**Significance of NDHM:**
- **Cutting Down Cost:**
  1. The unique ID will contain information relating to medical conditions, physicians consulted, prescriptions, diagnostic reports etc.
  2. Digitisation will save patients from travelling far to see a Physician and also reduce the burden of getting same diagnostic tests done multiple times.
- **Inclusivity:**
  1. In the upcoming stages, e-pharmacies and telemedicine services would be brought under the fold of NDHM.
  2. The renewed push to telemedicine will take quality care to the masses, ensuring inclusivity in healthcare.
  3. Patients from rural areas and small towns would be able to consult experienced doctors and avail quality low-cost generic medicines.
  4. The technological intervention can bridge the urban-rural healthcare divide.
- **Performance and Research:**
  1. The digital data can be useful for the government to keep tab on the performances of districts and states.
  2. The data could further be used for research in India’s healthcare.

**Issues/ Challenges:**
- **Insufficient Resources:**
  1. NDHM would be a huge exercise and will require more resources than the currently allocated Rs. 144 crore.
  2. It will make private participation a necessity given the strained finances of government.
- **Privacy Concern:**
  1. NDHM involves collaboration among government, hospitals, pharmacies, laboratories, insurance firms etc.
  2. There is a risk of exposing individual health data to hacking and commercial misuse.
  3. India is still lacking a proper user centric law on data protection.
  4. The centralised data, combined with real-time Big Data analytics, can become a surveillance tool.
  5. Although NDHM is a voluntary exercise, it could become mandatory for availing government health services.
- **Lack of ecosystem:**
  1. Digitisation requires an ecosystem where all the stakeholders, processes and data is digitized and integrated. As of now, the health sector is far from it.
- **Insurance Cos:**
  1. Insurance companies may try to get access to the data and price their products based on
person's health records.

**UK’s Example:**
- In 2005, the UK’s had started deployment of an electronic health record systems with a goal to have all patients with a centralised electronic health record by 2010.
- While several hospitals acquired electronic patient records systems, there was no national healthcare information exchange.
- The program was ultimately dismantled and considered to be one of the most expensive healthcare IT failures.

**Way Ahead:**
- The government must consult with all stakeholders, including the rights groups.
- The potential and concerns of digitisation of health data must be appreciated before moving ahead.
- The NDHM must also be in compliance with the global best practices on data privacy.
- Insurance companies should not be allowed to misuse personal data.
- Reforms that are more important in healthcare must be taken up before a push for blanket digitisation.

**Sources:** The Hindu, IE, Financial Express, HT.

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**Child Labour**

**Syllabus:** GS 2- Social justice.

**Why is it in the news?**
- The report titled 'COVID-19 and Child labour: 'A Time of Crisis, A Time to Act' was recently released by International Labour Organisation (ILO) and UNICEF.
- Child labour decreased by 94 million since 2000, but that gain is now at risk, as Covid crisis could lead to the first rise in child labour after 20 years of progress.

**Background:**
- According to 2011 Census data, the number of child labourers in India is 10.1 million.
- Globally, a total of 152 million children are estimated to be in child labour.
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) has set target to eliminate child labour by 2025, and forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking by 2030.

**Factors Responsible for Child Labour:**
- **Poverty:** Due to unemployment among adult parents and low wages, children had to work to feed their families.
- Lack of decent work opportunities for adults and adolescents.
- Migration and emergencies.
- Social inequities reinforced by discrimination.
- Debt taken from money lenders and landlords. Failing to pay back such loans often leads to obligated works or bondage labour.

**Consequences of Child Labour:**
It leads to Malnutrition and Undernourishment.
Affects the future well-being of the children by denying them educational opportunities.
It deprives children of their childhood, their potential and dignity.
It leads to premature exit from schools.

Issues/ Concerns:

- Economic Loss:
  (1) Child labour reinforces intergenerational cycles of poverty.
  (2) It results in lower productivity and earning potential, unrealized tax revenue, increased poverty levels etc.

- Failure pointed out by ILO:
  (1) There is lack of harmony between global commitments and domestic priorities.
  (2) There is lack of effective labour inspections in the informal economy.

- Slow rate of Decline:
  (1) As per a study, the objective of eliminating child labour could take well over 20 years after the expiry of the 2030 SDGs.
  (2) ILO estimates that by 2025, around 121 million children would still be engaged in various occupations. The present figure is around 152 million.
  (3) The required rate is close to five times the prevalent pace of decline.

- Impact of Covid-19:
  (1) The pandemic is most likely to force children out of school and into farms and factories to work.
  (2) Once the lockdown is lifted and normal economic activity resumes, factory owners will look to cover their financial losses by employing cheap labour.
  (3) There is a risk of returning migrants taking children along with them to the cities.

- Global Trend:
  (1) As many as 60 million people are expected to fall into poverty this year alone.
  (2) It drives families to send children out to work.
  (3) A joint report by the ILO and UNICEF estimates that a 1% point rise in poverty leads to at least a 0.7% point increase in child labor.

Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act:

- The Act Prohibits employment of children below the age of 14.
- Adolescents (between 14-18 years) are prohibited in hazardous occupations and processes.
- Exceptions:
  (1) Children can work with family and in family enterprises after school hours and holidays.
  (2) Children can work in audio-visual entertainment industry, including advertisements, films, television serials etc.

Way Ahead:

- Integrated Approaches:
  (1) Efforts to curb child labour at both the demand side and supply sides.
  (2) Need to address poverty and inequality, improve access to education.
  (3) Employing parents may help free child from labour, as unemployment among adults compel them to send their child for work.

- Stringent Laws and Stricter Implementation:
  (1) A strong legal framework that mandates punitive action against errant firms and recruitment of youth and adults.
  (2) Proper implementation of existing labour laws and constitutional provisions is essential to prevent exploitation.
Responsibility of All:
(1) Teachers and others in the education system can alert other stakeholders such as social workers to situations where children display signs of distress.
(2) A consumer can use its voice to mobilise businesses and governments.
(3) Corporations need to move beyond legal obligations and adopt social responsibility to prevent children from entering the workforce.
(4) The parents should choose education over exploitative labour.


UN reforms

Syllabus: GS-2: Important International institutions, agencies and for their structure, mandate.

Why is it in news?
- India’s External Affairs minister is pitching for UN reforms as India is elected to non-permanent member of United Nation’s Security Council.

About United Nations:
- UN Charter: Under it, UN can take action on the issues like Peace and security, climate change, gender equality, governance, sustainable development, human rights, disarmament, terrorism, humanitarian and health emergencies, etc.
- Chief Administrative Officer: United Nations Secretary General.
- United Nations Security Council:
  - The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations.
  - It was created after World War-II to address the failure of a previous international organization, the League of Nations, in maintaining world peace.
- Membership:
  (1) It has 5 permanent members and 10 non-permanent members, each member has one vote.
  (2) Five permanent members (P-5): United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom and France.
  (3) Its 10 non-permanent members are elected by General Assembly on a regional basis for the two-year terms.

Need for Reform:
- WW-II organisation:
  - UN was established after WW-II to avoid any war further and to maintain world peace.
  - The 21st century global challenges UN has to face have changed completely.
  - On some instances UN has received criticism for not delivering on its mandate.
- Inequitable geo political representation: UN represents post World War 2 political consensus. For instance, there is no permanent member from South America, Africa or South East Asia to United Nations Security Council.
- Increasing consensus on undemocratic nature of veto power: Permanent 5 members can overturn any decision of security council. For a world of more than 190 countries, veto power to just 5 countries is undemocratic.
- Rise of emerging economies: Emerging economies like India, Brazil, South Africa want greater say
in UN affairs.

- **Failure to tackle crisis**: In recent times, UN has failed to tackle many crises like Syrian crisis or Libyan crisis.

- **Changed Geo-Political realities**: Geo political realities have changes significantly in 3 decades such as rise of cyber terrorism, climate change which is not reflected in UN charter.

**What reforms are needed in the UN**

- **UNSC Permanent Membership**: UNSC's members reflect the geopolitical realities of post-World War II era. In today's times the contemporary realities necessitate a change in membership of the Permanent Commission.

**Veto power**:

- A new pattern for sharing and usage of veto power is required. More countries must be admitted to the UNSC with veto power.

- Furthermore, even a single permanent member of the UNSC being able to hold back the UN decision making process using the veto holds back timely decisions and promotes parochial interests.

**Budgetary reforms**:

- The process of funding for UN must be more evenly shared by all members rather than relying on US alone.

**Financial and Administrative Reforms**:

- The UN is criticized for having a bloated budget and an inefficient bureaucracy. Financial and administrative reforms are needed to make it an agile and effective organization.

**Challenges**:

- **Difficulty in getting consensus**: Despite over two and a half decades of discussions, there has been no consensus over text-based negotiations.

- **Reluctance of Permanent Members**: Permanent members of UNSC are reluctant to give up or dilute their veto power.

- **Sovereignty issue**: For strengthening of UN to tackle emerging crisis, nations need to give up some part of their sovereignty which many countries are reluctant to do.

- **Budgetary dependence**: USA contributes more than 25% of UN budget and consequently it gets an overwhelming say in the reform agenda.

- **Legitimacy Crisis**: Failure of UN in recent times to address various crisis such as Syrian crisis, terrorism even Covid 19 has put questions on its legitimacy and authority.

**Way forward**:

- **Reforming Veto Power**: One nation should not be allowed to block UNSC consensus.

- **Expansion of UNSC**: Permanent members on UNSC should represent all the continents of the world.

- **Financial Resources**: UN should collect fee for its various services so that its dependence on particular will be reduced.
Syllabus: GS 2- International relations- Global groupings and agreements.

Why is it in the news?
- U.S. President Donald Trump has ordered a freeze on funding for the World Health Organization (WHO) for “mismanaging” the coronavirus crisis.

About WHO
- It was established in 1948 as a United Nations (UN) specialised agency to coordinate and direct the UN’s global health effort. Headquarter: Geneva, Switzerland.

Funding pattern of WHO
- The WHO's budget is biennial i.e. spanning a two-year period. Major contributions -
  - **Assessed contributions:**
    1. These are the membership fees of the WHO.
    2. It goes towards keeping up the WHO's core functions
  - **Voluntary contributions:**
    1. It come from member States (in addition to their assessed contribution) or from other partners.
    2. They are targeted at specific programmes such as polio eradication and the fight against HIV, malaria and other infectious diseases.
  - **Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP) Contributions:**
    1. These were started in 2011 to improve and strengthen the information sharing of influenza viruses.
    2. It helps to increase the access of developing countries to vaccines and other pandemic related supplies.
  - The United States is the biggest overall donor to the WHO and had contributed 20% to the last budget.

Why US halted the funding to WHO?
- **Slow response to Corona despite wide presence:**
  1. WHO was late to suggest human to human transmission of the virus, despite its spread in China in December.
  2. Timely information would have led countries to take appropriate actions to stop spread of the virus.
- **Declaration of Pandemic:**
  1. WHO underplayed the severity of the virus.
  2. Its experts were divided on whether or not there was a global emergency at the time.
  3. It was declared as a global emergency finally on January 30.
  4. It was declared as a pandemic on 11 March 2020, despite the fact that the virus was spread in over 60 countries by the time.

Criticism of Trump’s move
- Currently when there is no alternative to WHO, such a measure is dangerous.
It will weaken WHO's capacities and impact its functioning.
● It will also undermine the international cooperation against the epidemic.
● It will undermine WHO's position as source of advice and leadership.
● Its future credibility will suffer.
● It does not factor in the other areas where WHO has played a stellar role - polio, malaria, smallpox, HIV, H1N1, Zika, Ebola etc
● WHO has been playing major role in awareness, vaccination and capacity building in many developing and least developed countries.
● It is akin to finding a scapegoat for US's own administrative failure.

Other Issues with WHO:
● It is not immune to political motivations:
  (1) One of the institutional challenges for any UN body is that it tends to be obligated to its most powerful member states.
  (2) The head of WHO is elected with the support of powerful member states, and consequently does not enjoy the independence and autonomy.
● Lack of funding:
  (1) WHO’s two-year budget for 2020-2021 is about $4.8 billion, which is way less than many developed countries' health spending.
  (2) WHO requires huge amount to carry out its core functions and specific programmes efficiently.
● Dependent on countries for most of its information.

Way Ahead:
● Head of WHO must be independent and not obligated to anyone.
● Adequate budget and prompt action on the decisions adopted at the World Health Assembly.
● Putting in place an independent mechanism to verify the data received from countries should be put in place.
● More power to evaluate independent sources of information.
● Powers to send investigators similar to weapons inspectors to a country during a disease outbreak.
● A body separate from WHO solely responsible for pandemics.
● Conclusion: The world needs strong and robust body that can effectively coordinate resources and expertise, both during COVID-19 and future pandemics.

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

Syllabus: GS2: International events having impact on India.

Why is it in news?
- Israel and UAE signed an agreement to normalise the diplomatic relations between them.

Details:
- The deal has been brokered by US President.
- **Normalisation of Relationship**: The agreement once finalised, it will normalise relation between two countries and forge closer people-to-people relations.
- **Suspension of Plan to annex the Part of West Bank**:
  - Israel's Prime Minister agreed to temporarily suspend plans to annex parts of the West Bank.
  - Bitterly criticised by Gulf Arab states, Europe and a few other countries around the world.

Background:
- **Establishment of Israel in 1948**: Israel was established in 1948 under UN partition plan for 2 states.
- **First Arab Israel War 1948**: Israel was attacked immediately by Egypt, Transjordan, Syria and Iraq. Yet Israel captured even more territories, including West Jerusalem, that was not part of the UN partition plan.
- **Consequent Wars**: 1956 Suez Conflict, 1967 Six days' war and 1973 Yom Kippur war resulted in Israel capturing Sinai Peninsula and Gaza strip from Egypt, East Jerusalem and West bank from Jordan and Golan Heights from Syria.
- **Post 1967 embargo on Israel**: Arab countries declared famous 3 Nos: No peace, No talks and No recognition of Israel.
- **Camp David Accords 1978**: Egypt signed peace treaty with Israel and Israel withdrew from Sinai for Egyptian recognition. This normalised relations between Egypt and Israel.
- **Oslo Accord**: Palestinian Liberation Organization deal with Israel by which PLO recognized Israel and was allowed to form Palestinian Authority in West Bank and Gaza.
- **Washington Declaration 1994**: Jordan became 2nd Arab country to sign peace treaty.

Factors Behind The Agreement:
- **Old enmity between Israel and Arab states dissipated**: The Sunni Arab kingdoms in the Gulf region such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE had developed backroom contacts with Israel over the past several years.
- **Isolation of Iran**: Several nations in the Middle East also have contentious relations with Iran. Both Arab countries and Israel were wary of US President Barack Obama’s tilt towards Iran.
- **Israel’s Annexation Plan**:
  - Arab countries no more seem to be against Israel’s occupation of Palestine but Israel’s planned annexation of West Bank would have completely changed the status quo.
  - It these would have put them under political and diplomatic pressure.
- **Israel’s Domestic Politics**: Israeli PM has been facing mass protests for weeks against his mishandling of the coronavirus outbreak, and is on trial for corruption.
USA elections: US President can claim this as his foreign policy success.

Significance:

Israel’s relation with Gulf Countries:
- With exception of Jordan and Egypt, Israel does not have diplomatic relations with Gulf Arab states owing to its long-standing conflict with Palestinians.
- However, despite the absence of official diplomatic relations, Israel has been engaging with its neighbours with regard to issues like trade.

Decoupling of Relationship with Palestinian issues:
- The Arab Peace Initiative of early 2000s, a Saudi Arabia initiative endorsed by the Arab League, offered recognition to Israel in exchange for its full withdrawal from the occupied territories in Palestine.
- But this now seems to be given up.

Palestinian Issue:
- Palestine does not get much from the agreement except a temporary hold over the annexation plan of West Bank.
- Gulf countries have always asked for Two State solution for Palestine-Israel to normalise relation between them.
- Palestinians have criticised this agreement as betrayal of their trust by UAE.

Opening up Religious Places in Israel: It will enable Muslims in UAE to have far greater ability to visit many historic sites in Israel.

Implication for India: India has welcomed the agreement.

- Participation in Common Business Platform: With increasing trade and people to people contact between two countries, there will new market for India to invest in.
- Engagement with Emerging Security Agreement: Good relations of India with Israel and UAE gives India opportunity to be a part of emerging security agreement.
- Support at OIC: It will help in isolating Pakistan from its backers in OIC.
- Relations with Iran: India’s greater engagement towards Israel and Arab countries can impact relations with Iran.

Source: Indian Express, The Hindu.
Teesta River Issue

Syllabus: GS 2: India and its Neighbourhood Relations.

Why is it in News?
- Bangladesh is likely to receive a $1-billion assistance from China for an irrigation project on the Teesta river.
- Teesta river has been at the centre of a water-sharing negotiation with India.

Recent developments:
- This comes at a time when India is particularly concerned about China following the standoff in Ladakh.
- Bangladesh is concerned about the rise in killings at the Indo-Bangladesh border by BSF during the first half of this year.
- Chinese Funded River Project: The project envisages —
  1. Construction of huge water reservoirs.
  2. Construction of embankments.
  3. Reclaiming land.
  4. Intensive dredging.
- China has suggested setting up of townships and economic zones in the reclaimed land and has shown interest in developing these facilities.

Chinese interests in Bangladesh:
- China wants to increase its leverage over India's neighbour with whom India's relations are very cordial.
- It has also offered Bangladesh duty free trade on 97% of its goods to assuage Bangladesh over bilateral trade deficit.
- Experts feel that China often traps countries in debt traps using its 'Cheque book' diplomacy.

Teesta river & its significance:
- The Teesta originates in Sikkim and flows through North Bengal before entering Bangladesh.
- Of Teesta's catchment area, 83% lies in India and 17% lies in Bangladesh.
- More than 2 crore people in Bangladesh are directly or indirectly dependent on the river for their livelihood as it is the lower riparian region.
- But the river runs nearly dry in Bangladesh during the winter months, thus affecting lakhs of farmers, fishermen and others.
- The Teesta is Bangladesh's fourth largest transboundary river for irrigation and fishing activities.
Dispute:
- The construction of the Teesta barrage to irrigate farmlands and generate power on the river in the late 1970s had drastically reduced the flow of water into Bangladesh.
- Bengal diverts water from the river during the dry season to irrigate farmlands in North Bengal.
- During the monsoons, Bengal releases huge volumes of water from the Teesta barrage. This causes largescale floods and erosion of river banks in Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh wants 50 percent of the Teesta’s waters between December and May every year, because that’s when the water flow to the country drops drastically.

Negotiations till date:
- In 1983, agreement with ad hoc sharing of India-39%, Bangladesh-36%, Unallocated-25% was concluded.
- **2011 water sharing formula:**
The Unique Academy

- The two countries worked out a water-sharing formula of India- 42.5%, Bangladesh- 37.5% and unallocated-20%.
- The 20% would be allowed to flow freely to maintain the river’s health.
- West Bengal’s reservations about adverse impact on North Bengal cancelled the deal.
- As per constitution, consent of State is necessary for any decision on river & water resources.
- Hydropower on Teesta is another point of conflict as at least 26 projects (mostly in Sikkim) aimed at producing of 50000 MW. Need sufficient amount of water.

India – Bangladesh relations:

- New Delhi has had a robust relationship with Dhaka, carefully cultivated since 2008, especially with the Sheikh Hasina government at the helm.

- Benefits for India:
  (1) It helped India put down anti-India outfits, particularly ULFA in Assam.
  (2) It has helped the Indian government maintain peace in the eastern and Northeast states.
  (3) Bangladesh has been a key partner in the neighbourhood first policy.
  (4) Bangladesh is India’s biggest trade partner in South Asia.
  (5) India’s exports to Bangladesh in 2018-19 stood at $9.21 billion, and imports from Bangladesh at $1.04 billion.

- Benefits for Bangladesh:
  (1) India has provided developmental assistance worth $10 billion, making Bangladesh the largest recipient of India’s total of $30 billion aid globally.
  (2) India also grants 15 to 20 lakh visas every year to Bangladesh nationals for medical treatment, tourism, work, and just entertainment.

- Irritants and concerns:
  (1) Little progress on Teesta has been made since PM visit to Bangladesh in 2015.
  (2) Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and NRC: The issue of influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh has been central to the CAA-NRC debate.

- Recent cooperation:
  (1) The first trial run for trans-shipment of Indian cargo through Bangladesh to Northeast states under a pact on the use of Chittagong and Mongla ports took place in July 2020.

Way ahead:

(1) In the wake of the Ladakh standoff, India needs to become even more sensitive to Chinese defence inroads into Bangladesh.
(2) Timebound completion of promises made over several projects.
(3) Teesta resolution: A quick resolution of the issue based on addressing concerns of West Bengal must be ensured.
(4) Resolution of other concerns: India must address concern about Tipaimukh dam on the Barak river in Tripura, which might impact the water in the Meghna river downstream.
(5) India must assure sensitization of BSF authorities in killings at the Indo-Bangladesh border.

Sources: Indian Express, The Hindu, The Wire, The Print, Livemint
Arms Race (Rise of Nuclear Threat)

Syllabus: GS 2: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India’s interests

Why is it in News?
- The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has published a report about the current state of armaments, disarmament and international security.

Statistics:
- There are 9 nuclear weapon states- US, UK, Russia, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea.
- There is a decrease of weapons from the 13,865 to 13,400.
- USA & Russia together still possess over 90 per cent of global nuclear weapons.

Recent Developments:
- SIPRI 2020 report:
  1. There is an overall decrease in the number of nuclear warheads in 2019.
  2. But countries continue to modernize their nuclear arsenals.
  3. Decrease in number was due to the dismantlement of retired nuclear weapons by Russia and the USA.
  4. China is developing a nuclear triad for the first time under its modernization of nuclear arsenal.
  5. India & Pakistan are slowly increasing the size & diversity of nuclear forces.
  6. North Korea continues to prioritize its military nuclear programme.

- End of Nuclear Treaties:
  1. USA formally withdrew from the INF treaty on 2 August 2019 which was condemned by Russia.
  2. New START treaty will lapse in February 2021 while discussions on its extension has made no progress.
  3. USA wants China to be included in the extension of New START which China refused.

- Major Powers:
  1. The USA has embarked on a 30-year modernisation plan with $1.2 trillion.
  2. Russia is developing hypersonic delivery systems and theatre systems.
  3. China has initiated a modernisation programme to enhance the survivability of its smaller arsenal.
  4. USA report raised concerns that China might be conducting nuclear tests with low yields at its Lop Nur test site.

History:
- Nuclear Race:
  1. During cold war, it was an arms race for supremacy in nuclear warfare between USA, USSR and their allies.
  2. Mutual Assured Destruction involves capability of second strike/attack after sustaining the
first attack from other side.

- **Treaties:**
  1. **START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty):**
     a) In 1991, the START was signed between USA & USSR for reduction of the number & limit the capabilities of strategic offensive arms.
  2. **New START Treaty, 2010:**
     a) It asks for a 50% reduction of strategic nuclear missile launchers and a curtailment of deployed nuclear warheads
  3. **INF Treaty (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty):**
     a) It was signed between USA & USSR for elimination of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles.
     b) The US formally withdrew from the treaty on 2 August 2019 which was condemned by Russia.
  4. **CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty):**
     a) A Partial Test Ban Treaty was signed in 1963 banning underwater and atmospheric tests.
     b) Comprehensive test ban as a “zero yield” test ban prohibits supercritical hydro-nuclear tests but not sub-critical hydro-dynamic nuclear tests.
     c) China, Egypt, Iran, Israel and the U.S. have signed but not ratified.
     d) North Korea, India and Pakistan are the three who have not signed.

- **Levels of transparency:**
  - USA used to disclose information, the USA ended the practice of publicly disclosing the size of the US stockpile in 2019.
  - Russia shares information with USA, it does not make it publicly available.
  - India and Pakistan make statements about their missile tests but provide little information about the size of arsenals.
  - North Korea & Israel provide no information about its nuclear weapon capabilities.

- **India as a Nuclear Weapon State:**
  - India tested its first nuclear weapon in 1974 for peaceful purposes, and tested again in 1998.
  - **NPT and CTBT:**
    1. India refused to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty due to its biased nature towards vertical proliferation while restricting horizontal proliferation.
    2. India also refused to sign CTBT on account of its biased nature towards present nuclear powers.
  - **Nuclear Doctrine after 1998 tests:**
    1. No-First-Use Policy.
    2. Credible Minimum Deterrence.
    3. Nuclear retaliation in case of biological or chemical attack (2003 amendment).
  - **NSG (Nuclear Suppliers Group) exemption:**
    1. In 2008, NSG approved an exemption which allowed the members to conduct nuclear trade with India.
    2. India agreed to keep select civilian nuclear facilities under IAEA supervision.

- **Way ahead:**
  - **Role of Major Powers:**
    2. Adoption of No-First-Use policy and cancellation of Ground Based Strategic Deterrent.
    3. Mutual reduction of weapon which increases the risk of nuclear conflict.
Increase the transparency:
(1) Every nuclear weapon state must provide the information about status and size of their nuclear arsenal.
(2) Foster transparency & predictability in adversary relations might reduce the risk of misunderstanding and miscalculation.

Maintain regular dialogue on strategic stability:
(1) Unlike cold war era, present stability must account for third-country actors and technological advances.
(2) Third country actors might include nuclear weapon states other than USA & Russia.

Sources: The Hindu, Economic times, BBC, WEF, economists

Pakistan’s New Political Map

Syllabus: India and its Neighbourhood- Relations.

Why is it in News?
- Pakistan released a new political map that claimed all of Jammu and Kashmir and parts of Gujarat as its territories.

Pakistan’s New Political Map

Image Source: The Wire
- It shows Kashmir in India as “Indian illegally occupied Jammu & Kashmir” and mentions it as
“Disputed Territory – Final Status will be decided in line with the relevant UNSC resolutions”.
- The part of Kashmir and Ladakh border with China was not marked and described as “Frontier Undecided”.
- The red dotted LOC had been extended to the Karakoram Pass, clearly showing Siachen as part of Pakistan.
- The international border line lies along the eastern bank of Sir Creek. (Previously border was along the western bank).
- Junagadh in Gujarat is also shown as part of Pakistan.

Reasons for New Map by Pakistan
- **India’s New Map:**
  1. India’s abrogation of Art 370 and special status of J & K last year.
  2. India’s November 2019 new map shows UTs of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.
- **Lack of support from global community:**
  1. Pakistan tried to mobilise the international community against India’s abrogation of J&K’s autonomy.
  2. But global community including Arab countries didn’t give support to Pakistan.
- **Domestic Problems in Pakistan:**
  1. Pakistan is going through economic and food security crisis.
  2. FATF had threatened Pakistan to take action against terror financing.
  3. USA categorized Pakistan as a “safe harbour for terrorist groups.” All these factors pressurized Pakistan government to act.

Stand of India on Pakistan’s new political map
- Such assertions have neither legal validity nor international credibility.
- It only confirms reality of Pakistan’s obsession with territorial aggrandisement supported by cross-border terrorism.

India’s New Political map in November 2019
- Govt releases new map of India showing UTs of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh.
  - **It shows**
    1. Three districts of Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) as a part of the UT of J & K;
    2. Gilgit-Baltistan, another Pakistan administered territory, as a part of Ladakh.

Other recent cartographic issues
- Nepal also issued new political map which claims on some Indian territories including Kalapani, Lipulkeh and Limpiyadhura.
- Aggression shown by China at the Line of Actual Control on Ladakh has caused.

Stand of Arab countries on Kashmir Abrogation
- Gulf Arab countries including Saudi Arabia have remained silent on India’s abrogation of special status of J & K due to economic cooperation & annual trade of $100 billion.
- UAE had supported India by calling the decision an internal matter.

Sir Creek Issue
The dispute lies in the interpretation of the maritime boundary line.

Pakistan claims:
1. It claims the entire creek as per the Bombay Government Resolution of 1914.
2. It was signed between then Government of Sindh and Rao Maharaj of Kutch.

Indian claims:
1. The boundary lies mid-channel as depicted in another map drawn in 1925.
2. Since Sir Creek is navigable most of the year and according to Thalweg principle, a boundary can only be fixed in the middle of the navigable channel.

Siachen Glacier
- The Siachen Glacier is part of Ladakh. The Siachen glacier separates Pakistan from China in the region and prevents direct linking of PoK with China.
- Siachen also helps India to keep a close watch on China’s activities as Beijing has vastly improved its infrastructure in this region.

Junagadh Issue
- Junagadh was a Hindu majority princely state at the time of independence.
- Its Muslim ruler opted to join Pakistan but Hindu subjects wanted to join India.
- The issue was successfully resolved after a referendum in February 1948, in which 95% of the state’s residents voted for India.

Way Ahead
- Strengthen the position:
  1. India must strengthen relations with other four nations of UNSC permanent members to counter China and Pakistan’s unilateralism.
  2. India must maintain abrogation of special status and J & K issue is the internal matter of India.
- Reconsideration of neighbourhood policy:
  1. India must reconcile with Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh.
  2. It will increase India’s sphere of influence in neighbourhood and Indian Ocean.
- Restoration of normalcy in J & K:
(1) Restoration of basic human rights which had been restricted after abrogation.
(2) Economic package must be implemented to restore growth & development.

Source: Indian Express, Times of India, The Hindu, India Today, ORF, The Print

17 Regulation of Non-Personal Data

Syllabus: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Why is it in News?
- A Gopalakrishnan committee had released draft report on non-personal data (NPD) and invited public reviews.

Non-Personal Data
- Non-personal data is any set of data which does not contain information that can be used to identify individual or living person.
- Unlike personal data, NPD is more likely to be in an anonymised form.
- It includes anonymised data like climate trends collected by a weather app, or commuter patterns gathered by a cab aggregator, or traffic flow in a particular area.

Why there is a need to regulate NPD?
- **Exclusive access:**
  (1) NPD has economic value and exclusive access to it give a significant advantage to established players and acts as entry barriers for newer organisations.
- **Unregulated NPD:**
  (1) While the personal data is protected by privacy laws, NPD remains unregulated.
  (2) With rise of online interaction, people leave behind a lot of digital data.
- **Better Governance & Government Control:**
  (1) NPD is a collective resource and should be unlocked for better governance.
  (2) India generates unprecedented volumes of data due to large consumer base.
  (3) In this context, the entity that controls data will dominate the data economy.

Committee’s recommendations
- **Sharing of NPD:**
  (1) It recommended mandatory sharing of NPD to develop innovative products & services to benefit citizens.
  (2) Companies must allow open access to raw data they collect from their users.
  (3) But it is not obligatory on companies to share any data-related conclusions.
- **Separate legislation and Authority:**
  (1) Government should set up a new authority which would be empowered to monitor the use and mining of NPD.
  (2) Government should enact legislation to oversee non-personal data.
- **Community owned:**
  - Data collected from various communities considered as 'owned' by the community.
This does not include privately owned data, which will remain private.
Therefore data should be shared back with all those who need it.
It can be used to develop products or digital public goods.

**Representatives of the community:**
- **Data collectors** - Considered as data custodians. Will use and secure data as per the best interest of the community.
- **Data trusts** - Data infra that will enable data sharing and can be run by various kind of bodies.
- Non Personal Data Authority - Enable and regulate data sharing activities.

**Benefits of regulation**

- **Creation of level playing field:**
  (1) Data sharing and subsequent regulation will create level playing field between big companies, small companies and start-ups.
  (2) Data sharing will benefit to MSMEs and motivates for further innovations.

- **Stimulate innovation and economic prosperity:**
  (1) Access to data will give impetus to innovations in the country.
  (2) It might break monopoly of big companies & usher digital economic prosperity.
  (3) NPD is very critical for AI systems.
  (4) Data plays same role in digital economy as physical infrastructure does for industries.

- **Social benefits & Research:**
  (1) Shared data can be used for welfare of general public.
  (2) Regulation will give control to government than profit-oriented companies.
  (3) Sharing of Community NPD with universities, research labs and non-government organisations will help in R & D.

**Concerns:**

- **Sensitivity of NPD:**
  (1) NPD in certain categories such as national security; strategic interests or health of communities is dangerous even in anonymised form.
  (2) All anonymised data need not be secure as incidences of re-identification of individuals from anonymised data have happened.

- **Conflict with Copyright law & Trade Secrets:**
  (1) The application of NPD law to data protected under copyright laws is undefined. It might be in conflict with business intellectual property rights.
  (2) NPD sharing might reveal proprietary processes of data collection and contradict with trade secret of organizations and affect business.
  (3) Forced data sharing will impact foreign trade & investment in India. Amazon, Facebook and Google had opposed such sharing.

- **Discretionary power to regulator & over-regulation:**
  (1) NPD Authority will determine data sharing requests. But parameters are vague and gives discretionary power to regulator.
  (2) The Non-Personal Data Authority, Data Protection Authority, and the CCPA may lead to jurisdictional overlaps & hamper quality of regulation.

- **Conflict with Competition Law:**
  (1) Competition law should not require companies to share proprietary data with competitors.

- **Lack of clarity:**
  (1) It lacks clarity about roles for all participants, such as the data principal, the data custodian, and data trustees.
(2) It also lacked clarity about Grievance Redressal Mechanism.

Way forward:
- **Ensure clarity:**
  1. Definition of NPD must be clear to avoid conflict with intellectual property rights, to serve genuine public interest and to promote innovation.
  2. Clarity about roles and responsibilities of different regulators must be defined for speedy & effective regulation.
- **France model:**
  1. We can adopt France model which encourages sharing of data with the state.
  2. State acts as a trusted third party.
- **Data Security and business friendly model:**
  1. State-of-the-art system must be devised to protect shared NPD.
  2. Though social benefits are essential, it should not harm ease of business doing & fair competition.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express, Livemint, the print

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**Hooch Tragedy**

**Syllabus:** GS2: Issues related to health. GS3: Issues related security.

**Why is it in news?**
- More than a hundred people have died in Punjab after consuming spurious liquor. Similar incident had happened last year in Assam and in Bihar earlier.
- Such incidents have become increasingly common in recent times.

**Details:**
- Denatured spirit, used in the paint and hardware industry, had been distilled and sold as ‘country-made liquor’ at cheap prices.
- This mixture of denatured spirit released methanol, which upon consumption, changed into formic acid and killed over 100 people in a span of four days
- Many others who consumed the spirit have suffered partial blindness, giddiness, difficulty in breathing and have been admitted to hospitals.

**Reason for Rising Such incident:**
- **Impact of Socio economic profile:**
  1. Most of the victims such incidents belong to the marginalised sections and come from below poverty line.
  2. Tedious working nature and poverty make them vulnerable for such actions.
- **Political Attitude:**
  1. Politician are not serious about such issues. Even when some attention is given it is most often under the garb of populism.
- **Nexus between Liquor Mafia and Politicians:** It prevents any serious investigation against such incidents.
• **High Regulations:**
  (1) Alcohol trade is highly regulated with various state laws, licence fees, location etc.
  (2) Miscreants find it easy to sell in illegal market rather than comply with law.

• **Social and Economic Distress**
  (1) In today’s fast paced life there is increase in social distress especially in marginalised groups.
  (2) Under such situation, people consume whatever they get without thinking about its side effect for immediate satisfaction.

**Way forward:**
• **Uniform Liquor Law across India:**
  (1) Uniform law will reduce the compliance burden on liquor traders and reduce incentives for illegal trade.
  (2) Bringing liquor for human consumption under Goods and Service tax can be a first step in that direction.

• **Inter State Cooperation:** Illegal trade flourishes at border crossing between states, especially where there is ban on alcohol, due to different regulation and poor cooperation. States cooperating with each other can prevent it.

• **Mental Health Counselling:** Complete ban on alcohol can't solve the problem. Mental health counselling must be extended to addicts instead.

• **Role of NGOs:** There is need to revive Civil society's role in awareness about liquor addiction.
1. Contempt of Court

Why is it in news?
- The Supreme Court found civil rights lawyer Prashant Bhushan guilty of criminal contempt by “scandalising the court”.

Contempt of Court
- 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. Article 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. Article 142(2): Enables the Supreme Court to investigate and punish any person for its contempt.
- Contempt of court: In India, the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, divides contempt into civil contempt and criminal contempt.
  1. 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.
  2. Criminal Contempt: It is any action:
     a. In written or spoken, signs and action that 'scandalise' or 'tend to scandalise' or 'lower or tend to lower the authority' of the Courts.
     b. Prejudices or interferes with any judicial proceeding
     c. Interferes with or obstructs the administration of justice
- 2006 Amendment to the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971:
  1. 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.
  2. Addition of the word truth and good faith as defences against the law of contempt in India.

2. Governor

Why is it in news?
- The questions on Governors action have been raised in regard to calling Assembly session in Rajasthan.

Who summons an Assembly session?
According to Supreme Court, the Governor’s power under Article 174 to summon, prorogue and dissolve the house(s) must be exercised in consonance with the aid and advice of the chief minister and his council of ministers.

He is precluded [from taking] an individual call on the issue at his own will, or in his own discretion.

The discretion given to the Governor in respect of his relations with the Legislative Assembly is not only limited and circumscribed by the Constitution but also by the Rules framed by the Legislative Assembly under Article 208 of the Constitution.

When can the Governor act without the advice of the Council of Ministers?

In some States, the Governor has special powers to advance tribal welfare.

A Governor can reserve a bill passed by the legislature for the consideration of the President of India, and he or she can recommend President’s rule in a State.

If the Chief Minister and his Council of Ministers lose their majority, or they refuse to recommend a session in six months, or there is a reasonable doubt about their majority, the Governor could demand a session.

The Governor invites a person who he thinks has the legislative majority to form a government, but the use of this power cannot be arbitrary. If there is a Council of Ministers with a majority, the Governor has to go by its recommendation to dissolve the legislature.

In the event of a Chief Minister and his Council of Ministers losing the majority, the Governor can use his or her discretion to either explore the formation of a new government or dissolve the House.

3. 6th Schedule of Indian Constitution

Why is it in news?

The groups in Arunachal Pradesh are demanding 6th Schedule status for whole state.

Details:

Arunachal Pradesh shares border with Bhutan, China and Myanmar.

It is under the Fifth Schedule that does not provide special rights for the indigenous communities unlike the Sixth Schedule.

The Sixth Schedule currently includes 10 autonomous district councils in four northeastern States — Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.

4. Draft DNA Bill

Why is it in news?

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology has flagged that some provisions could be misused for caste or community-based profiling.

Details:

The committee, in its draft report, pointed out that DNA profiles can reveal extremely sensitive information of an individual such as pedigree, skin colour, behaviour, illness, health status and susceptibility to diseases.

Access to such intrusive information can be misused to specifically target individuals and their families with their own genetic data.

This is particularly worrying as it could even be used to incorrectly link a particular caste/community to criminal activities.

DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019

The Bill provides for the regulation of use of DNA technology for establishing the identity of certain persons.

(1) Use of DNA Data: DNA testing is allowed only in respect of matters listed in the Schedule to
(2) **DNA Data Bank:** The Bill provides for the establishment of a National DNA Data Bank and Regional DNA Data Banks, for every state, or two or more states.

(3) **DNA Regulatory Board:** The Bill provides for the establishment of a DNA Regulatory Board, which will supervise the DNA Data Banks and DNA laboratories.

(4) **DNA laboratories:** Any laboratory undertaking DNA testing is required to obtain accreditation from the Board. The Board may revoke the accreditation for reasons including, failure to: (i) undertake DNA testing, or (ii) comply with the conditions attached to the accreditation.

(5) **Offences:** The Bill specifies penalties for various offences, including: (i) for disclosure of DNA information, or (ii) using DNA sample without authorization. For instance, disclosure of DNA information will be punishable with imprisonment of up to three years and fine of up to one lakh rupees.

### 5. Lok Adalat

**Why is it in news?**
- Delhi State Legal Service Authority has started first online Lok Adalat.

**About Lok Adalat:**
- **Alternative Dispute Redressal Mechanisms:** It is a forum where disputes/cases pending in the court of law or at pre-litigation stage are settled/compromised amicably.
- **Statutory Status:** Lok Adalats have been given statutory status under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987.
- **No Appeal:**
  1. The award (decision) made by the Lok Adalats is deemed to be a decree of a civil court and is final and binding on all parties and no appeal against such an award lies before any court of law.
  2. If the parties are not satisfied with the award of the Lok Adalat though there is no provision for an appeal against such an award, but they are free to initiate litigation by approaching the court of appropriate jurisdiction.
- **No Fees:** If a matter pending in the court of law is referred to the Lok Adalat and is settled subsequently, the court fee originally paid in the court on the complaints/petition is also refunded back to the parties.

### Judgements

### 6. SC to study context of charges against Judiciary

**Why is it in news?**
- The Supreme Court decided to launch a detailed examination into the circumstances under which a person can make public allegations of corruption against the judiciary.

**1992 judgment**
- The Bench referred to the majority judgment delivered by Justice (as he was then) J.S. Verma for a Constitution Bench in 1992 concerning the removal of Justice V. Ramaswami, a Supreme Court judge.
- The judgment had laid down the procedure to deal with allegations against a sitting judge.
- The judge had to be given a fair opportunity to be heard before an inquiry committee formed under the Judges Inquiry Act of 1968.
- The judgment had limited the inquiry process against a judge to be done within a tight and limited circle of high judicial functionaries and parliamentarians.
The dominating spirit of the 1992 judgment was to “preserve the right, interest and dignity of the judge, which is commensurate with the dignity of all the institutions and functionaries involved in the process”.

7. States can have sub-groups among SC/STs, says court

Why is it in news?
- A five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court held that States can sub-classify Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Central List to provide preferential treatment to the “weakest of the weak”.

Supreme Court Decision:
- It referred the issue to a larger Bench to decide.
- This was because in a 2005 ruling, also by a five-judge Bench, the Supreme Court had ruled that state governments had no power to create sub-categories of SCs for the purpose of reservation.

Constitutional Provisions:
- The Constitution, while providing for special treatment of SCs and STs to achieve equality, does not specify the castes and tribes that are to be called Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- This power is left to the central executive — the President.
- As per Article 341, those castes notified by the President are called SCs and STs.
- A caste notified as SC in one state may not be a SC in another state. These vary from state to state to prevent disputes as to whether a particular caste is accorded reservation or not.

8. Brus reject resettlement site offer

Why is it in news?
- The organisation representing Bru communities displaced from Mizoram has rejected site for resettlement.

Details:
- The Joint Meeting Committee comprising the Bengali, Mizo, Buddhist Barua and other communities had submitted a memorandum to the Tripura government specifying six places in Kanchanpur and Panisagar subdivisions of North Tripura district for the resettlement of the Brus who fled ethnic violence in Mizoram since 1997.
- The JMC also proposed settling 500 families at most in these places.
- The Mizoram Bru Displaced Peoples’ Forum, Mizoram Bru Displaced Peoples’ Coordination Committee and Bru Displaced Welfare Committee have also trashed the demand for inclusion of four JMC members in the monitoring team for the resettlement of the Brus.

Bru Agreement:
- Twenty-three years after ethnic clashes in Mizoram forced 37,000 people of the Bru (or Reang) community to flee their homes to neighbouring Tripura.
- The Bru agreement had been signed to allow them to remain permanently in the latter state.
- The agreement among the Bru leaders and the governments of India, Tripura, and Mizoram, signed in New Delhi on January 16, gives the Bru the choice of living in either state.

9. States get Rs. 890 crore to mount COVID-19 response
Why is it in news:
- The Union government has released more than Rs. 890 crores to 22 States and UTs.

Details:
- This is a part of the Rs. 15,000-crore package announced in March to support the States’ emergency response and the preparedness of their health systems. The money was meant for patient treatment, manpower training and medical infrastructure.
- The amount is based on case load.
- It will be used for strengthening of public health facilities’ infrastructure for testing, installation of oxygen generators, cryogenic oxygen tanks and medical gas pipelines in public health facilities and procurement of bedside oxygen concentrators.

10. Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)

Why is it in news?
- Significant section of beneficiaries didn’t receive food grains due in July.

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana
- The scheme was launched to overcome the economic impact of coronavirus-induced lockdown on poor in March for 3 months. It was further extended for 3 months till November.
- Security:
  (1) Insurance cover of Rs 50 Lakh per health worker fighting COVID-19 to be provided under Insurance Scheme.
  (2) 80 crore poor people will to get 5 kg wheat or rice and 1 kg of preferred pulses for free every month for the next three months.
  (3) 20 crore women Jan Dhan account holders to get Rs 500 per month for next three months.
  (4) Increase in MNREGA wage to Rs 202 a day from Rs 182 to benefit 13.62 crore families.
  (5) An ex-gratia of Rs 1,000 to 3 crore poor senior citizen, poor widows and poor disabled.
  (6) Government to front-load Rs 2,000 paid to farmers in first week of April under existing PM Kisan Yojana to benefit 8.7 crore farmers.
  (7) Central Government has given orders to State Governments to use Building and Construction Workers Welfare Fund to provide relief to Construction Workers.

11. Assam Accord

Why is it in news?
- Some members of the Centre’s high-level committee headed by retired judge Biplab Kumar Sharma on implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord made their ‘confidential’ report public because of the government’s ‘disinterest’ in processing their recommendations.
- The committee had submitted report in February.

Assam Accord:
- Rajiv Gandhi government signed an agreement with the protesters - AASU and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad in 1985 bringing the agitation to an end.
- The agreement between the Centre and the protesters is called the Assam Accord.
- In the 15 clauses of the Assam Accord, the key focus areas were:
  (1) Foreigners issue
  (2) Economic development
  (3) Restricting acquisition of immovable property by foreigners
  (4) Prevention encroachment of government lands
The Unique Academy

(5) Registration of births and deaths
- This was done to ensure protection of political, social, economic and cultural identity of the local people.
- **Clause 6 of the Assam Accord**: Constitutional, legislative and administrative steps will be taken by the Centre to "protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people".

12. **PM CARES**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Supreme Court endorsed the PM CARES Fund as a “public charitable trust” to which donors contribute voluntarily.

**Supreme Court Judgement:**
- There is “no occasion” for the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) to audit a public charitable trust independent of budgetary support or government money.
- The Bench refused to direct the transfer of funds from the PM CARES Fund to the NDRF as funds collected in the PM CARES Fund are entirely different funds, which are funds of a public charitable trust.

**About PM CARES**
- 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 RTI 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.

13. **Swachh Survekshan 2020 report**

**Why is it in news?**
- Ministry of Union Housing and Urban Affairs released Swachh Survekshan 2020 report.

**Swachh Survekshan 2020**
- Swachh Survekshan survey was carried out under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan Urban.
- **Cleanest city**: Indore, for 4th time in a row.
- The survey of sanitation in over 4,000 cities was carried out over 28 days earlier this year.
- Among the cities with over 1 lakh population, Indore was ranked number one, followed by Surat, Navi Mumbai, Ambikapur, Mysore, Vijayawada, Ahmedabad, New Delhi, Chandrapur and Khargone.
- Among smaller cities, with population under 1 lakh, the top three cities — Karad, Sasvad and Lonavala — were all from Maharashtra.
- Chhattisgarh was ranked the cleanest State out of those with over 100 cities, while Jharkhand was the cleanest among those with fewer than 100 urban local bodies (ULBs) or cities.
- In the category of “Ganga towns”, Varanasi, PM’s Lok Sabha constituency, was ranked the cleanest.


**Why is it in news?**
- The Union Home Ministry notified new rules for administration in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) that specify the functions of the Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) and the Council of Ministers.

**Details:**
1. RBI Policy Rate

Why is it in news?
- The central bank kept the repo rate unchanged at 4 per cent and the reverse repo rate at 3.35 per cent.

Concept:
- Repo rate is the rate at which banks borrow from the RBI
- Reverse repo rate is the rate at which banks deposit excess funds with the RBI and earn interest on it.

Background:
- India’s GDP is set to contract in 2020-21.
- There was a supply chain disruptions across sectors along with a sticky surge in food prices
- Consumer confidence turned more pessimistic in July than previous.

Details:
- RBI kept key policy rates unchanged in the face of rising inflation pressures.
- The central bank didn’t extend the moratorium on loan repayments offered to borrowers beyond August 31.

Inflation to stay elevated:
- Retail inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index, rose to 6.09 per cent in June from 5.84 per cent in March.
- It breached the central bank’s medium-term target of 4 per cent, with a band of plus or minus two per cent.
- According to RBI’s projection, inflation will continue to stay elevated.

2. Debt Resolution/ Restructuring Plan

Why is it in news?
The central bank’s debt resolution plan for corporate and personal loans has been welcomed by analysts

Under the facility, lenders can go for a one-time restructuring of loans under stress due to the pandemic.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) also provided a fresh lifeline to millions of stressed small businesses by extending the provision of restructuring of loans.

Details:

- Stressed MSME borrowers will be made eligible for restructuring their debt under the existing framework.
- However, the borrower’s accounts with the lenders were classified as standard as on March 1, 2020.

Some key conditions stipulated by RBI for Small businesses:

- The aggregate exposure, including non-fund based facilities, of banks and NBFCs to the borrower does not exceed Rs 25 crore as on March 1, 2020.
- The restructuring of the borrower account is implemented by March 31, 2021.
- The borrowing entity is GST-registered on the date of implementation of the restructuring.

Significance:

- The move will help soften the impact on both banks as well as borrowers on the twin dimensions of controlling a rise in NPAs and supporting credit flow.
- The industry is encouraged by RBI’s decision to provide a window under the Prudential Framework to enable lenders to implement a resolution plan.
- It will help favourably towards the stability of financial sector to support growth and recovery in the economy.

3. Priority Sector Lending

Why is it in news?

- RBI has decided to broaden the scope of priority sector lending (PSL) by including start-ups and enhancing borrowing limits for renewable energy sectors.

Details:

- The central bank would also increase the targets for lending to ‘small and marginal farmers’ and ‘weaker sections’ under the PSL.
- Eligible entities get access to credit on easier terms from banks under the PSL.

About Priority Sector Lending (PSL):

- Priority sectors are those sectors which are considered as important for the development of the basic needs of the country.

- Following are considered Priority Sectors:
  1. Agriculture
  2. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
  3. Export Credit
  4. Education
  5. Housing
  6. Social Infrastructure
  7. Renewable Energy

- According to priority sector norms, scheduled commercial banks have to give 40% of their loans to the identified priority sectors in accordance with the RBI regulations.
4. **RBI’s surplus transfer to Centre**

**Why is it in news?**
- The board of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has approved the transfer of Rs. 57,128 crore as surplus to the government for the accounting year 2019-20.
- The board decided to maintain the Contingency Risk Buffer at 5.5%.

**Details:**
- Last year, the central bank had transferred Rs. 1.76 lakh crore.
- Out of Rs. 1.76 lakh crore, about Rs. 1.23 lakh crore were dividend and Rs. 52,637 crore were excess provisions.
- The Board discussed a proposal for setting up an Innovation Hub and also approved the Annual Report.

**Surplus Funds:**
- The 'Surplus funds' is the amount RBI transfers to the government after meeting its own expenses.
- This surplus is basically RBI’s income which it earns through interest on securities it holds.
- RBI also transfers a portion of its earnings into the Contingency Fund (CF).

**Financial year:**
- RBI’s financial year runs from July-June at present and is scheduled to be harmonised with the government’s April-March fiscal starting FY22.
- In the current year, the RBI will have a nine-month financial year, ending in March.

5. **Framework for Retail Payments Entity**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released a framework for setting up of a pan-India umbrella entity for retail payments systems.
- The formation of the umbrella entity has been authorised under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.

**Details:**
- The new entity would be incorporated under the Companies Act, 2013.
- The umbrella entity will set up, manage and operate new payments systems in the retail space.
- It would comprise ATMs, white label PoS, Aadhaar-based payments and remittance services.

**Other Tasks of the proposed entity:**
- Operate clearing and settlement systems for participating banks and non-banks.
- Identify and manage relevant risks.
- Monitor retail payments system developments and related issues in the country and internationally.

**Significance:**
- The entity would frame necessary rules and the related processes to ensure that the system is safe and sound, and that payments are exchanged efficiently.

6. **RBI’s Annual Report for 2019-20**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released its Annual Report for 2019-20.
- Following are the key findings of the report.
Shrink in growth:
- RBI foresees the economic contraction triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic extending into the second quarter.
- The shock to consumption has been severe.
- The government consumption would be key to the revival of demand.
- Urban consumption demand has suffered a bigger blow.
- Rural demand, by contrast, had fared better.

Wide-ranging reforms:
- RBI made a strong case for deep-seated and wide-ranging reforms to regain losses and return to the path of sustainable economic growth.
- Structural reforms in factor and product markets, the financial sector, legal architecture, and in international competitiveness would be needed.

Inflation:
- As per the report, headline inflation may remain elevated in Q2:2020-21 but may moderate during H2:2020-21 aided by large favourable base effects.
- Retail inflation was at 6.93 per cent in July, above the upper tolerance limit of 6 per cent (4 per cent target plus 2 per cent).

7. Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme
- The Centre has expanded its credit guarantee scheme to cover loans given to larger firms as well as to self-employed people and professionals who have taken loans for business purposes.
- The scheme was originally meant for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

More in news:
- Eligible MSMEs had to have an annual turnover up to Rs. 100 crore, with outstanding loans of up to Rs. 25 crore as on February 29, 2020.
- The scheme has now been expanded to cover enterprises with a turnover up to Rs. 250 crore, with outstanding loans up to Rs. 50 crore.

More about Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS):
- ECLGS had been formulated as a specific response to the unprecedented situation caused by COVID-19 and the consequent lockdown.
- **Aim:** Mitigating the economic distress being faced by MSMEs by providing them additional funding of up to Rs. 3 lakh crore in the form of a fully guaranteed emergency credit line.
- The scheme is said to be the biggest fiscal component of the Rs. 20-lakh crore Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package.
- **Objective:** To provide an incentive to Member Lending Institutions (MLIs), i.e., Banks, Financial Institutions (FIs) and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) to increase access to, and enable availability of additional funding facility to MSME borrowers.
- The scheme provides 100% guarantee for any losses suffered by them due to non-repayment of the GECL funding by borrowers.

8. Farm Infrastructure scheme
Why is it in news?
- Prime Minister Modi launched a financing facility of Rs 1 lakh crore under the Agricultural Infrastructure Fund.
- Prime Minister also released Rs. 17,000 crore to 8.5 crore farmers as the sixth instalment of the PM-Kisan scheme.

Details:
- Under the infrastructure scheme, banks and financial institutions will provide loans to cooperative societies, farmer producer companies, SHGs, entrepreneurs, start-ups, and infrastructure providers.
- According to the guidelines, all loans up to Rs. 2 crore will be disbursed with a 3% interest subsidy.
- The loans will be disbursed in the next four years with a sanction of Rs. 10,000 crore in 2020-21 and Rs. 30,000 crore in the next three years.
- The objective is to provide medium-to-long term debt financing for post-harvest infrastructure and community assets for marketing of farm produce.

Significance:
- The scheme will provide better warehousing and cold storage facilities for farmers.
- It will help farmers get higher prices for their crops.
- It will also help create new jobs as food processing and post-harvest facilities are set up in rural India.

9. Special Liquidity Scheme

Why is it in news?
- The proposals of stressed non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and housing finance companies (HFCs) have been sanctioned under the special liquidity window.
- The Special Liquidity Scheme (SLS) of Rs 30,000 crore was announced with an aim to improve the liquidity position of NBFCs and HFCs.
- The scheme is a part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat package.

Details:
- Any NBFC registered with RBI and any HFC registered with the National Housing Bank, are eligible to raise funding from this facility subject to certain conditions.
- RBI has provided funds for the scheme by subscribing to government-guaranteed special securities issued by a trust set up by SBI Capital Markets Ltd (SBICAP).
- The scheme is being implemented by SLS Trust, the SPV set up by SBICAP.
- The special liquidity scheme is open for three months for making subscriptions by the Trust.

On part of Government:
- Under the scheme, the government will provide an unconditional and irrevocable guarantee to the special securities issued by the Trust.
- The instruments will be commercial papers and non-convertible debentures.

10. New undersea cable for Andaman

Why is it in news?
- Prime Minister Modi launched an undersea Optical Fibre Cable(OFC) connecting the Andaman and Nicobar Islands with the mainland.
- It would provide residents of the Union Territory high-speed Internet connection.
Details:
- It is a 2,300-km-long submarine optical fibre cable project connecting Chennai and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Significance:
- The Indian Ocean and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands had been important centres for trade and strategic cooperation.
- The Andaman & Nicobar Islands had an important role to play in India’s “Act East” policy.

11. PM SVANidhi

Why is it in news?
- The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry said over 5 lakh applications had been received under the PM Street Vendor’s AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) scheme.
- About 1 lakh loans had been sanctioned under the scheme.

Pradhan Mantri Street Vendor’s AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi)
- The scheme was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to provide affordable working capital loan to street vendors to resume their livelihoods that have been adversely affected due to COVID-19 lockdown.
- PM SVANidhi is a special micro-credit scheme for providing affordable and collateral free loan of up to Rs 10,000 to street vendors.
- Incentives in the form of interest subsidy (@ 7% per annum) and cash back (upto Rs.1,200/- per annum) are being provided to promote good repayment behaviour and digital transactions respectively.
- The scheme targets 50 lakh beneficiaries.
- Implementation Agency: SIDBI.

12. PM announces taxpayers’ charter

Why is it in news?
- Prime Minister Modi launched a “Transparent Taxation — Honouring the Honest” platform that provides faceless assessment, faceless appeal and a taxpayers’ charter.

Details:
- The faceless assessment and taxpayers’ charter came into force from 13 August 2020.
- The faceless appeal system will be available from September 25, the birth anniversary of Deendayal Upadhyaya.

Faceless Assessment System:
- The assessment system seeks to eliminate corrupt practices by doing away with the territorial jurisdiction of income-tax offices.
- The cases of scrutiny will now be allocated randomly to any official in any part of the country, with the help of technology.
- The document identification numbers will be issued from the Central database.
- Review of orders will also be done by another team at some other place, chosen randomly using data analytics and artificial intelligence.

Authority:
- The officials in the Directorate General of Income Tax (Investigation) and the Principal Commissioner of I-T/Chief Commissioner of I-T (TDS) will be the only competent authorities for approving survey
actions to gather information for scrutiny and assessment.
• The department would escape unnecessary litigation and the officials would get reprieve from the energy otherwise spent on transfers and postings.

Significance:
• The platform would instil a sense of fairness and fearlessness in the taxpayers.
• The effort was to make the tax system seamless, painless and faceless.
• The new facilities were in consonance with government’s motto of ‘minimum government, maximum governance.

13. Unemployment allowance

Why is it in news?
• The central government has relaxed the eligibility criteria to avail the unemployment allowance under the Employees’ State Insurance Corporation (ESIC).
• Centre announced that workers can directly claim 50 per cent of the average wage as against 25 per cent earlier.
• The wages would be payable up to 90 days of joblessness, for their loss of employment between March 24 and December 31 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Details:
• The benefits would be payable 30 days after unemployment as against 90 days earlier.
• The Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana, which is run by ESIC and provides for the unemployment allowance, has been extended by one more year to June 30, 2021.
• The scheme will be available with original eligibility conditions during January 1, 2021 to June 30, 2021.
• The Insured Person should have been in insurable employment for a minimum period of 2 years before his/her employment.
• The person should have contributed not less than 78 days in the contribution period immediately preceding to unemployment.

14. Borrow from RBI to bridge GST gap: Centre tells States

Why is it in news?
• A special window could be provided to states, in consultation with the RBI.

Details:
• The Centre acknowledged that States are likely to face a GST revenue gap of Rs. 3 lakh crore this year.
• Compensation cess collections are only expected to bridge 22% of this gap.
• Of the remaining Rs. 2.35 lakh crore, the Centre said only Rs. 97,000 crore was due to GST implementation itself.
• The Centre then offered States two options for borrowing to meet the shortfall.
• A special window could be provided, so that the States can get this Rs. 97,000 crore at a reasonable rate of interest from RBI, and the amount can be repaid after five years through the collection of cess.
• States choosing this option may get 0.5% relaxation in their borrowing limits under the FRBM Act.
• Another option is that the entire gap of Rs. 2.35 lakh crore can be met by the borrowing by the States.

15. Government to divest up to 15% stake in HAL
Why is it in news?
• The Centre is looking to raise around Rs. 5,000 crore by divesting up to 15% stake in state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL).

Details:
• Government would sell 33.43 million shares of face value of Rs. 10 each, representing 10% of the total paid-up equity share.
• In case of over-subscription, a further 5% stake or 16.71 million shares would be offered.
• The floor price for the offer was fixed at Rs. 1,001 a share.

Background:
• The government has set an ambitious disinvestment target of Rs. 2.1 lakh crore for 2020-21.
• Economy has been further hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Present status of HAL:
• The government currently holds a 89.97% stake in HAL after selling a 10% stake through an Initial Public Offering (IPO) in 2018.
• HAL is the only aircraft manufacturer in the country and assembles and builds a range of military helicopters and aircraft.

16. Export Preparedness Index 2020

Why is it in news?
• Gujarat tops the Export Preparedness Index 2020 to evaluate States’ potential and capacities, followed by Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

Details:
• The index was released by government think-tank NITI Aayog.
• The other States that have made it to the top 10 include Rajasthan, Odisha, Telangana, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka and Kerala.
• The index ranks States on policy, business ecosystem, export ecosystem and export performance.
• Overall, coastal States emerged as the best performers, with six out of eight coastal States featuring in the top 10 rankings.
• In the landlocked States, Rajasthan performed the best, followed by Telangana and Haryana.
• Across the Union Territories, Delhi has performed the best.
1. **India announces $500 mn package for the Maldives**

**Why is it in news?**
- India has announced various new connectivity measures for the Maldives, including air, sea, intra-island and telecommunications in an effort to help Maldives deal with the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Details:**
- The USD 500 million financial package consist of a grant of USD 100 million and a new Line of Credit (LoC) of USD 400 million.
- Among the initiatives announced are an air connectivity “bubble” for travel, a direct ferry service, a submarine cable for telecom connectivity; and assistance for the Greater Male Connectivity project (GMCP) to connect Male to three neighbouring islands, the biggest such project thus far
- The GMCP would be the largest civilian infrastructure project in Maldives.

2. **1947 pact on Gurkha soldiers redundant: Nepal Minister**

**Why is it in news?**
- Nepal's Foreign Minister said that 1947 agreement among India, Nepal and United Kingdom has become redundant.

**Details:**
- This agreement deals with Gurkha soldiers in Indian Army.
- The 1947 agreement divided the Gurkha regiments of the British empire between India and the United Kingdom.
- However, Gurkha veterans have been alleging that the U.K. has been discriminating against them.
- The Minister also said India should respond to Nepal's request for talks on the Kalapani dispute to prevent the issue from impacting people-to-people relations.

3. **U.K. to issue coin to honour Gandhiji**

**Why is it in news?**
- Britain is considering minting a coin to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi, amid growing interest in recognising the contributions of people from the Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities.

**Details:**
- British Finance asked the Royal Mint Advisory Committee (RMAC) in a letter to pursue recognition of individuals from those communities.
- Gandhiji’s birthday, October 2, is observed as the International Day of Non-Violence.
• As part of a global reassessment of history, colonialism and racism triggered by the death in May of a Black man, George Floyd, in the United States after a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes, some British institutions have begun re-examining their past.

4. **India rejects China’s UNSC move on Kashmir**

**Why is it in news?**
• India rejected China’s initiative to discuss Kashmir issue in closed door meeting at United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

**Details:**
• India reiterated that Kashmir is a domestic issue.
• Earlier such attempts by China did not get support at UNSC.
• The issue had not been taken up at the council since it last figured in the world body before the India-Pakistan war of 1971. The meeting had failed to generate a common statement or a consensus on the matter.

**About UNSC:**
• The UNSC is one of the six main organs of United Nations.
• Its primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, which may meet whenever peace is threatened.
• All members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council.
• While other organs of the United Nations make recommendations to member states, only the Security Council has the power to make decisions that member states are then obligated to implement under the Charter.

5. **Trump bars H-1B visa holders from federal jobs**

**Why is it in news?**
• US President has signed an executive order preventing federal agencies from contracting or subcontracting foreign workers mainly those on H-1B visas.

**About H1B visa:**
• The H1B visa, most sought-after among Indian IT professionals, is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.
• The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

6. **Loya Jirga**

**Why is it in news?**
• Indian and Afghan officials in Delhi and Kabul discussed the outcome of the Loya Jirga.

**Loya Jirga:**
• It is grand assembly between Afghan government and Taliban in Afghanistan that advised the release of 400 Taliban militants convicted of serious crimes.
• The officials said the release was conditional, and contingent on a reduction in the level of violence by the Taliban as well as a “humanitarian ceasefire” for civilians to be transported during the coronavirus pandemic without fear of the Taliban.
• The Taliban is also required to guarantee that none of the men being released will return to combat.

7. **Israel-UAE pact (Abraham Accord)**

**Why is it in news?**
• U.S. President Donald Trump announced that Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) had reached a peace agreement.

**About Israel-UAE pact**
• The UAE and Israel would establish formal diplomatic relations and in exchange, Israel would suspend its plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank.
• Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had earlier vowed to annex the Jewish settlements in the West Bank.
• The Trump administration, as part of the President’s peace plan announced in January, had backed the annexation plan despite international criticism.
• But now, as part of the agreement, Israel will suspend declaring sovereignty over areas of the West Bank and focus its efforts on expanding ties with other countries in the Arab and Muslim world.

**Significance:**
• It’s a landmark agreement given that the UAE is only the third Arab country and the first in the Gulf region to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.
• Arab-Israeli ties have historically been conflict-ridden. Arab countries, including Egypt, Transjordan, Syria and Iraq, fought their first war with Israel in 1948 after the formation of the state of Israel was announced.

8. **Arab world’s first nuclear plant achieves criticality**

**Why is it in news?**
• The United Arab Emirates announced the start-up of its Barakah nuclear power plant, scoring another first for the Arab world.

**Details:**
• The work at Barakah had succeeded in loading nuclear fuel packages, carrying out comprehensive tests and successfully completing the operation.
• The UAE started loading fuel rods into the reactor at Barakah in February, after regulators gave the green light for the first of the plant’s four reactors, opening the way for commercial operations.
• Barakah, which means “blessing” in Arabic, is a regional first. Barakah was built by a consortium led by the Korea Electric Power Corporation at a cost of some $24.4 billion.

9. **Mali wakes up to military rule after President is forced out**

**Why is it in news?**
• Mali’s President resigned under deepening fear of a coup attempt.

**Details:**
• Mali has witnessed of protests over economic stagnation, corruption and a brutal Islamist insurgency for last few months calling for President’s resignation.
• It has prompted it neighbour to threaten to close borders.
• United Nations Secretary General has called for his unconditional release.
• He was brought to power after 2012 coup.
• Confirmation to International Agreements: Coup leader said:
  (1) “all past agreements” would be respected, including Mali’s support for anti-jihadist missions in the region.
  (2) MINUSMA (the UN force in Mali), (France’s) Barkhane force, the G5 Sahel, Takuba (a European special-forces initiative) remain our partners.
  (3) To remain “committed to the Algiers process,” a 2015 peace agreement between the Malian government and armed groups in the north of the country.
• Mali is the cornerstone of French-led efforts to roll back jihadists in the Sahel, and its neighbours are anxious to avoid the country sliding into chaos.

International Institutions

10. Indus Water Treaty

Why is it in news?
• India has refused a request by Pakistan to hold a meeting on issues around the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) at the Attari checkpost near the India-Pakistan border.

About Indus Water Treaty:
• It was signed on September 19, 1960, between India and Pakistan and brokered by the World Bank.
The treaty fixed and delimited the rights and obligations of both countries concerning the use of the waters of the Indus River system.

The treaty gave the waters of the western rivers—the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab—to Pakistan and those of the eastern rivers—the Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej—to India.

It also provided for the funding and building of dams, link canals, barrages, and tube wells—notably the Tarbela Dam on the Indus River and the Mangla Dam on the Jhelum River.

11. Asian Development Bank

Why is it in news?

- Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa has been selected for appointment as a Vice-President at the Asian Development Bank.

Asian Development Bank

- **Aim:** Prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty in the region.
- **Headquarter:** Manila, Philippines.
- **Function:**
  - (1) ADB assists its members, and partners, by providing loans, technical assistance, grants, and equity investments to promote social and economic development.
  - (2) ADB maximizes the development impact of its assistance by facilitating policy dialogues, providing advisory services, and mobilizing financial resources through cofinancing operations that tap official, commercial, and export credit sources.
- **Members:** From 31 members at its establishment in 1966, ADB has grown to encompass 68 members, of which 49 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.

12. BRICS Innovation Base

Why is it in news?

- China has proposed the creation of ‘BRICS innovation base’ to take forward 5G and Artificial Intelligence (AI) cooperation among the five countries, as BRICS industry ministers met virtually on Monday.
- This comes in the back drop of when India is considering China from 5G trails.

About BRICS:

- BRICS is the group composed by the five major emerging countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa -, which together represent about 42% of the population, 23% of GDP, 30% of the territory and 18% of the global trade.
- The acronym BRIC was coined by Goldman Sachs in 2001 to indicate the emerging powers that would be, alongside the United States, the five largest economies of the world in the 21st century.
- In 2006, BRIC countries started their dialogue, which since 2009 takes place at annual meetings of heads of state and government. In 2011, with South Africa joining the group, the BRICS reached its final composition, incorporating a country from the African continent.
- At the Fortaleza Summit (2014), in Brazil, important institutions were created: the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA)
1. Polar Bear

Why is it in News?
• According to research published in the Nature Climate Change journal, Polar Bear may go extinct by 2100.

Details:
• There are approximately 25,000 polar bears left in the wild.
• Polar Bears are endangered primarily by climate change.
• Polar Bear:
  1. It is found in Arctic Circle and its coastal region.
  2. They are carnivores in nature.
  3. They are very strong swimmers, and their large front paws, which they use to paddle, are slightly webbed.
  4. Fat and fur protect against cold surfaces. But under their fur, polar bears have black skin—the better to soak in the sun's warming rays.
  5. But under their fur, polar bears have black skin—the better to soak in the sun's warming rays.
  6. Because of their dependence on the sea ice, polar bears are classified as marine mammals.

2. Oil spill near Mauritius

Why is it in News?
• Mauritius declares emergency due to oil spill in Indian Ocean of its coast.

Details:
• Ship owned by Japan was carrying fuel and it began to spill due to cracks.
• As Mauritius depends on tourism, oil spill threatened its tourism and economy.
• Effects of oil spill on marine life:
  1. Oil destroys the insulating ability of fur-bearing mammals, such as sea otters.
  2. Oil also destroys the water repellency of a bird's feathers.
  3. Without the ability to repel water and insulate from the cold water, birds and mammals will die from hypothermia.
  4. Juvenile sea turtles can become trapped in oil and mistake it for food.
  5. Dolphins and whales can inhale oil, which can affect lungs, immune function and reproduction.
  6. Fish, shellfish, and corals may not be exposed immediately, but can come into contact with oil if it is mixed into the water column.
  7. Shellfish can also be exposed in the intertidal zone.
  8. When exposed to oil, adult fish may experience reduced growth, enlarged livers, changes in heart and respiration rates, fin erosion, and reproduction impairment.
  9. Oil can make fish and shellfish unsafe for humans to eat.

3. Forest cover loss threatens hornbills in Arunachal
Why is it in News?

• A study based on satellite data has revealed a high rate of deforestation in a major hornbill habitat in Arunachal Pradesh.

Hornbills:

• **Species of Hornbills:**
  1. Three species of the large, colourful fruit-eating hornbills: Great hornbill, Wreathed hornbill and Oriental Pied hornbill found in Papum Reserve Forest.
  2. The fourth species - the Rufous-Necked found in Pakke tiger reserve.

• They often referred to as ‘forest engineers’ or ‘farmers of forest’ for playing a key role in dispersing seeds of tropical trees to maintain balance of forest.

• Hornbills have been hunted for their casques — upper beak — and feathers for adorning headgear.

• Hornbills are big birds, with males larger than females.

• It is the heaviest, but not the longest, Asian hornbill.

• The great hornbill is evaluated as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

• The great hornbill is the state bird of Kerala and Arunachal Pradesh in India.

4. Environment is supreme than economy – Madras High Court

Why is it in News?

• Madras HC refuses to allow reopening of Vedanta-owned Sterlite plant in TN’s Thoothukudi on ground ‘Environment is supreme to economic considerations’.

Details:

• **History:**
  1. Smelting operations at Tuticorin have been halted since April 2018, after the TNPCB rejected the CTO (Consent to Operate).
  2. The state government issued orders to permanently seal the copper smelter plant.
  3. In response to Vedanta’s appeal, the NGT in December 2018 had set aside the TN government’s order, and had directed the TNPCB to renew the CTO.
  4. However, in February 2019, the Supreme Court set aside the NGT’s order on grounds of maintainability.
  5. The apex court gave Vedanta the liberty to approach the Madras HC with a writ petition challenging the impugned orders.

• **HC judgement:**
  1. Economic considerations would have no role to play while deciding the sustainability of a highly polluting industry.
  2. The only consideration would be with regard to safeguarding the environment.
  3. It dismissed Vedanta’s argument that India’s economy was hit by high imports and demand for copper could not be met.

5. Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) report on coal mining

Why is it in News?

• CSE investigation published in the organisation-owned magazine Down To Earth (DTE).

Findings of report:

• Currently India was not utilising its existing capacity fully.
• 67% of the mines auctioned since 2015 are not operational yet.
• From 2015-2020, the government tried to auction 112 mines, but succeeded in only 42 cases.
• Several potential coal reserves are located in dense forests particularly in Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.
• **Since 2015, of the 49 blocks cleared for coal mining, nine were-**
  (1) in ‘No-Go’ areas, or
  (2) regions that were once classified by the Ministry as containing very dense forests and hence closed to coal mining.
• In 2020, of the 41 blocks put up for auction, 21 feature in the original No-Go list.
• Our forests are where our coal reserves are — forests and coal are intrinsically linked in India.

### 6. Kerala’s Idukki landslide

**Why is it in News?**
• Kerala’s Idukki landslide wiped out settlement of tea estate workers and taken 58 lives till date.

**Details:**
• **Reasons:**
  (1) The location where the landslide was triggered has a 40° slope, and any slope above 20° is vulnerable to slipping during heavy rain.
  (2) The soil has a high content of sand, which absorbs more water, takes a loose form, and is at risk of slipping down.

Image: Indian Express

• **About Idukki:**
7. Cheetahs from South Africa to Mysuru zoo

Why is it in News?
- A male and two females cheetah from a cheetah conservation centre in South Africa arrived at Mysore zoo under an animal exchange programme.
- The Mysore zoo became second zoo in India to house African Cheetah, after Hyderabad zoo which has a pair of big cats.
- According to officials, the Mysore zoo earlier received African hunting cheetahs from Germany in 2011.

Details:
- **Asiatic Cheetah:**
  1. It was declared extinct from India in 1952
  2. It is considered the only large mammal that has gone extinct since the country’s independence.
- **African cheetah:**
  1. It is the fastest land animal.
  2. It is categorized as ‘vulnerable’ in IUCN red list.
  3. It is medium sized cat and bigger than Asiatic Cheetah.
  4. Males are slightly taller than females.
  5. The Southeast African cheetah usually lives on grasslands, savannahs, scrub forests, and arid environments such as deserts and semidesert steppes.

**Supreme Court on Cheetah Re-introduction Plan:**
(1) **May, 2012 Order:**
   (a) The apex court had stalled the plan to initiate the foreign cheetahs into the Palpur Kino sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh.
   (b) SC cited fears that they may come into conflict with a project to reintroduce lions into the same sanctuary.
   (c) SC was unhappy with the choice of the Kuno sanctuary as it is not a natural habitat for African cheetah.

(2) **January, 2020 Order:**
(a) The Supreme Court in January 2020 lifted its seven-year stay on a proposal to introduce African cheetahs from Namibia into the Indian habitat on an experimental basis.
(b) It set up a three-member committee to file a progress report about right precautions being taken every four months.
(c) The committee would help, advice and monitor the National Tiger Conservation Authority for survey and efforts for reintroduction.

8. Greenland Ice Melting

Why is it in News?
• Greenland lost record level 586 billion tonnes of ice in 2019.

Details:
• Its far more than the yearly average loss of 259 billion tons since 2003 and easily surpasses the old record of 511 billion tons in 2012.
• The climate crisis is heating the Arctic at double the rate in lower latitudes, and the ice cap is the biggest single contributor to sea level rise.
• Greenland Ice sheet:
  1. The Greenland ice sheet is roughly 79% of the surface of Greenland.
  2. It is the second largest ice body in the world, after the Antarctic ice sheet.
  3. The thickness is generally more than 2 km and over 3 km at its thickest point.
  4. The mean altitude of the ice is 2,135 metres (7,005 ft).
  5. If the entire Greenland ice sheet melts, sea level would rise by six metres.
• Reasons for melting:
  1. The scientists attributed the extreme ice loss in 2019 to “Greenland Blocking” of weather that kept warm air over Greenland for longer periods.
  2. Snowfall in Greenland was low in 2019, also due to the blocking pattern, meaning relatively little new ice was added.
• Greenland Blocking:
  1. A high-pressure zone over Greenland is often referred to as a “blocking” pattern.
  2. It slows the flow of weather systems circulating around the Northern Hemisphere. So it got name ‘blocking’.
  3. A negative NAO (North Atlantic Oscillation) is often an indicator of a Greenland block.
  4. It forces more melting of ice.
• Since meltwater is freshwater, it dilutes the salt content of the surrounding ocean, which contributes to slowing the Gulf stream system.

9. Kerala to host dragonfly festival

Why is it in News?
• Kerala will host the first-ever State Dragonfly Festival.

Details:
• It is part of a national dragonfly festival being organised by the WWF India, Bombay Natural History Society & Indian Dragonfly Society in association with the National Biodiversity Board, UNEP, UNDP and IUCN - Centre for Environment Conservation.
• ‘Pantalu’ is the official mascot of the festival.
• Dragonflies in Kerala:
  1. A dragonfly is an insect belonging to the order Odonata, infraorder Anisoptera.
(2) Adult dragonflies are characterized by large multifaceted eyes, two pairs of strong transparent wings, sometimes with coloured patches and an elongated body.
(3) Most common dragonflies find in Western Ghats are, Yellow bush dart copera marginipes, Brown backed red marsh hawk, Great blue skimmer, Ground skimmer.

10. NGT slams Ministry’s report on clean air programme

Why is it in News?
• The National Green Tribunal has slammed the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) over its report on the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).
• NCAP proposes 20-30% reduction of air pollution by 2024.

Details:
• Ministry to NGT:
  (1) To assess the impact of technological and policy interventions on air quality levels, a mid-term nationwide review might be conducted and targets updated, if required.
  (2) A committee has concluded that 20-30% pollutant reduction under the NCAP seems realistic.
• NGT view:
  (1) Right to Clean Air stood recognised as part of Right to Life and failure to address air pollution was denial of Right to Life under article 21.
  (2) For 10 years pollution would remain unaddressed which was too long period of tolerating violations when clean air was Right to Life.
  (3) Further, it was not clear what type of pollutants or all pollutants would be reduced.
  (4) There is no data how much pollution has been reduced in the last two years.
  (5) In 2019, the number of NACs (Non-Attainment Cities) has gone up from 102 to 122,
• About National Clean Air Program (NCAP):
  (1) Union Environment Minister launched NCAP to combat air pollution in a comprehensive and time-bound manner.
  (2) The programme’s objective is to put in place mitigation actions for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution.
  (3) The NCAP will be a mid-term, five-year action plan with 2019 as the first year.
  (4) The main aim of the programme would be 20-30% reduction of PM2.5 and PM10 concentration by 2024.
  (5) City specific action plans are being formulated for 102 non-attainment cities.

11. Uttarakhand, Maharashtra had highest leopard poaching in India

Why is it in News?
• A recent study by TRAFFIC India reveals 747 leopard deaths between 2015-2019 in India.

Details:
• 596 Out of 747 were linked to illegal wildlife trade and activities related to poaching.
• TRAFFIC is a leading wildlife trade monitoring network across the world.
• Report findings:
  (1) The highest numbers of poaching incidents were reported from Uttarakhand and Maharashtra.
  (2) Among all the derivatives, skin remained the most in-demand product.
  (3) Skin accounts 69% of all seizures.
  (4) Other derivatives like claws, teeth and bones were also traded.
  (5) Bones of the leopard are possibly traded as tiger bones as they have a larger international
The Unique Academy

...demand for traditional medicines.

- **Leopard:**
  - **Census:**
    - (a) The last formal census on India’s leopards was conducted in 2014.
    - (b) It estimated the population between 12,000 and 14,000.
  - **Conservation status:**
    - (a) It was elevated from ‘Near Threatened’ in 2008 to ‘Vulnerable’ in 2015 by IUCN.
    - (b) One of the major reasons for its decline is conflict with humans.
  - **Characteristics:**
    - (a) They are distributed across Africa and Asia.
    - (b) The leopard is the smallest of the big cats.
    - (c) Melanism is a common occurrence in leopards, wherein the entire skin of the animal is black in colour, including its spots. It is often called black panther or jaguar.
    - (d) It is a nocturnal animal and hunts by night.
    - (e) Leopards usually mate throughout the year, and give birth to two to three cubs after a gestation period of 90 to 105 days.

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### Social Issues

#### 1. ‘Lockdown hit treatment under PMJAY scheme’

**Why is it in news?**

- The nationwide lockdown had a significant negative impact on inpatient care utilisation under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY).
- Claim volumes under PMJAY falling by more than 50% compared with the months leading up to the lockdown.
- Wide variation was witnessed across States and procedure types.

**Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY):**

- The programme is being touted as the world’s largest health protection scheme.
- PM-JAY is one of two components of Ayushman Bharat, a flagship scheme of Government of India.
- The first component is Health and Wellness Centers and second being the PM-JAY.
- It aims at providing health insurance cover of Rs. 5 lakhs per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization (floater basis).
- It is to cover over 10 crore vulnerable families (approximately 50 crore beneficiaries).
- PM-JAY was earlier known as National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS).
- PM-JAY comes under the National Health Authority (NHA).
- The beneficiaries will be identified based on SECC (Socio-Economic Caste Census) database.
- No restrictions on family size, age or gender.

#### 2. Daughters have equal right to inherit property: SC
Why is it in news?
• The Supreme Court held that daughters have an equal birthright with sons to inherit joint Hindu family property.

Supreme Court Judgment:
• Hindu woman’s right to be a joint heir to the ancestral property is by birth and does not depend on whether her father was alive or not when the law was enacted in 2005.
• The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 gave Hindu women the right to be coparceners or joint legal heirs in the same way a male heir does.

The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005:
• It governs succession and inheritance of property.
• The law applied to everyone who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion.
• Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains and followers of Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj are also considered Hindus for the purposes of this law.

3. India’s Cancer Burden

Why is it in news?
• According to the National Cancer Registry Programme Report 2020, cancer cases in the country are likely to increase to 15.6 lakhs by 2025.
• It would be a 12% increase from current estimated cases- based on current trends.
• The figures were released by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and National Centre for Disease Informatics & Research (NCDIR), Bengaluru.

Estimations of the report:
• In 2020, tobacco-related cancers are estimated to contribute to 27.1% of the total cancer burden, and highest in the northeastern region of the country.
• Cancers of the lung, mouth, stomach and oesophagus were the most common cancers among men.
• Cancers of the breast and cervix uteri were the most common cancers among women.

4. National Recruitment Agency

Why is it in news?
• The Union Cabinet approved the creation of a National Recruitment Agency (NRA) for conducting a Common Eligibility Test (CET) for various government jobs.

Details:
• Initially, three of the over 20 Central government recruitment agencies would be brought under the NRA.
• The preliminary test for the Railway Recruitment Board, the Staff Selection Commission and the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection would be conducted by the NRA.
• The candidates can use the scores to apply to the individual agencies for the next round.
5. **Age of Marriage**

**Why is it in news?**
- According to some activists, raising the age of marriage from 18 to 21 for women will lead to an increase in parental backlash against young adults.

**Minimum age of Marriage in India:**
- Personal laws of various religions deal with marriage have their own standards, often reflecting custom.
- For Hindus, the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 sets 18 years as the minimum age for the bride and 21 years as the minimum age for the groom.
- In Islam, the marriage of a minor who has attained puberty is considered valid under personal law.
- Child marriages are not illegal but can be declared void at the request of the minor in the marriage.
- Women’s age of marriage was increased from 15 years to 18 years in 1978 by amending erstwhile Sharda Act of 1929.

6. **Identify PwDs for ration cards: Government**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Centre has asked States and Union Territories to identify persons with disabilities (PwD) eligible under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013.
- It also asked state governments to issue ration cards to those left out.
The directive comes ahead of the August 31 deadline for the special scheme for providing ration during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Details:
- Department of Food and Public Distribution reiterated that “disability is one of the criteria for the inclusion of beneficiaries” under the NFSA.
- The Department said PwD not already covered should be identified and given fresh ration cards.


Why is it in news?
- A nationwide lockdown has shown adverse impact on the psychological profile of people in the form of rise in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- A Web-based survey via Google form was conducted by Vardhman Mahavir Medical College and Safdarjung Hospital.

Details:
- PTSD is a mental health condition triggered by a terrifying event, causing flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety.

8. Khudol Initiative

Why is it in news?
- The United Nations listed Manipur's "Khudol" initiative among the top 10 global initiatives for an inclusive fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Details:
- Khudol initiative was launched by an Imphal-based NGO "Ya_All".
- Khudol means gift.
- Food, health and hygiene requirements of the LGBTQI+ community, people living with HIV, daily-wage earners, children and adolescents is being ensured through the initiative Khudol.
1. BeiDou, China’s version of GPS

Why is it in News?
- China’s President Xi Jinping officially commissioned the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System constellation.

Details:
- It will provide positioning services to transportation, emergency medical rescue and city planning and management areas.
- **BeiDou navigation system:**
  1. Beidou – 35 satellites navigation system developed by China.
  2. It’s an alternative to USA’ Global Positioning System (GPS).
  3. System uses a network of satellites and can provide positional accuracies of under ten metres (GPS provides positioning accuracies of under 2.2 metres).
  4. China initiated BeiDou in 1994 with aims to integrate its application in different sectors.
  5. It will help to keep military communications secure and improve weapons targeting, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.
  6. It has civilian applications too as 70% mobile are Beidou enabled.
- **Other countries’ navigation systems:**
  1. Russia has its navigation system called GLONASS.
  2. The European Union (EU) has Galileo.
  3. India’s system is called Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC).

2. Ammonium Nitrate

Why is it in News?
- According to the government of Lebanon, Beirut Explosion caused by over 2,700 tonnes of ammonium nitrate kept in storage for over six years.

Ammonium Nitrate

- **Properties:**
  1. In its pure form, ammonium nitrate (NH4NO3) is a white, crystalline chemical.
  2. It is soluble in water.
  3. Pure ammonium nitrate is not an explosive on its own.
  4. It is classified as an oxidiser (Grade 5.1) under the United Nations classification of dangerous goods.
  5. If mixed with ingredients like fuel or some other contaminants, or because of some other external factors, it can be very explosive.
  6. However, for combinations to explode, triggers like detonators are required.
- **Use:**
  1. It is a common chemical ingredient of agricultural fertilisers.
(2) It is the main component of the explosive composition known as ANFO — ammonium nitrate fuel oil.
(3) It is the main ingredient in the manufacture of commercial explosives used in mining and construction.
(4) It is used as an ingredient for the production of anaesthetic gases, cold packs.

- **In India:**
  (1) Ammonium nitrate is highly regulated in India.
  (2) The Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012, under The Explosives Act, 1884, defines the ammonium nitrate.
  (3) The rules also make storage of ammonium nitrate in large quantities in populated areas illegal in India.
  (4) In the majority of terror attacks in India, ammonium nitrate has been used along with initiator explosives like RDX.
  (5) For the manufacture of ammonium nitrate, an Industrial licence is required under the Industrial Development and Regulation Act, 1951.
  (6) A license under the Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012 is also required for any activity related to ammonium nitrate.

### 3. Global magnetic field of the Sun

**Why is it in News?**
- Global magnetic field of Sun’s atmosphere measured for the first time.

**Details:**
- This measurement may help to solve the coronal heating problem.
- It will also help to understand mechanisms of eruptions of the Sun, such as solar flares and coronal mass ejections.
- **Coronal heating problem:**
  (1) The core of the Sun is at a temperature of about 15 million degrees.
  (2) Its outer layer, the photosphere is a mere 5700 degrees hot.
  (3) However, its corona or outer atmosphere is much, much hotter than the surface.
  (4) ‘What causes the atmosphere of the Sun (corona) to heat up again, though the surface (photosphere) is cooler than the interior?’ is major puzzle before scientists.

- Technique known as coronal seismology or magnetoseismology is used to measure the coronal magnetic field.
- While ground-based measurements pose challenges, India’s first solar mission, Aditya-L1 satellite will aim to measure the solar coronal magnetic fields regularly.

### 4. Sunspots

**Why is it in News?**
- A massive Sunspot group, AR2770, was observed recently.

**Details:**
- Observation was done by ‘spaceweather.com’ using images of the Sun’s surface from NASA’s Solar Dynamics Observatory (SDO).
- **Sunspots:**
  (1) A Sunspot is an area on the Sun that appears dark on the surface and is relatively cooler than surrounding parts.
These spots are the visible markers of the Sun’s magnetic field.

Size of Sunspots can be as large as 50,000 km in diameter.

Photosphere is the outer surface of the Sun which radiates heat and light.

On the Photosphere, Sunspots are the areas where the star’s magnetic field is the strongest.

Most Sunspots appear in groups that have their own magnetic field, whose polarity reverses during every solar cycle, which takes around 11 years.

In every such cycle, the number of Sunspots increases and decreases.

The current solar cycle, which began in 2008, is in its ‘solar minimum’ phase, when the number of Sunspots and solar flares is at a routine low.

**Why Sunspots appear dark?**

Because Sunspots have high magnetic pressures, the atmospheric pressure in the surrounding photosphere reduces.

It results in inhibiting the flow of hot gases from inside the Sun to the surface.

Because they stop the convective flow of heat and light, Sunspots appear dark.

Photosphere has a temperature of 5,800 degrees Kelvin. Sunspots temperatures are around 3,800 degrees Kelvin.

Sunspots typically consist of a dark region called the ‘umbra’, which is surrounded by a lighter region called the ‘penumbra’.

**Solar Flares and Coronal Mass Ejections:**

When a Sunspot reaches up to 50,000 km in diameter, it may release a huge amount of energy that can lead to solar flares.

The flares are caused by explosions that are triggered due to the twisting, crossing or reorganising of magnetic field lines near Sunspots.

Sunspots also triggers Coronal Mass Ejections (CME).

Coronal Mass Ejections (CME) are large bubbles of radiation and particles emitted by the Sun that explode into space at high speed.

CMEs can trigger intense light in the sky on Earth, called auroras.

**Effects of solar flares:**

Solar flares can have a major effect on radio communications, Global Positioning Systems (GPS) connectivity, power grids, and satellites.

### 5. Plasma Therapy and Covid-19

**Why is it in News?**

- A preliminary analysis of an ongoing study of 300+ Covid-19 patients suggests that convalescent plasma therapy is effective.
- The preliminary analysis are published in The American Journal of Pathology.

**Convalescent Plasma Therapy:**

- The approach has been used earlier in medical history, with diseases such as the Ebola virus, diphtheria, scarlet fever, pertussis, Spanish flu, measles, MERS-COV, H1N1.
- The treatment involves taking plasma of patients who have recovered from COVID-19 as they carry antibodies against the viruses in their plasma.
- Plasma can be used in newly infected patients who do not have antibodies to fight the illness

**Associated risks:**

- If the plasma has a virus that goes undetected during COVID testing, we introduce more viruses into the patient. But the risk is low as the patient who has recovered will carry antibodies in the blood.
(2) There may be risk of an allergic reaction as plasma is being injected from another body, which can trigger allergic reactions along with lung damage, such as acute lung injury.
(3) The risk of transmission of infections including HIV, Hepatitis B and C, is also present, but all known viruses are tested before transfusing the plasma.

6. Saliva test for novel coronavirus

Why is it in News:
• FDA approves rapid, inexpensive saliva test for novel coronavirus

Details:
• SalivaDirect test can detect when the number of virus copies in the saliva sample is as low as six-12 copies per microlitre.
• In contrast, testing nasopharyngeal swabs leads to false negative test results due to errors at the time of sample collection. The sensitivity was about 93%.

Advantages:
(1) It has high sensitivity.
(2) It makes the sample collection non-invasive.
(3) It also reduces the need for trained healthcare workers to collect the samples and reduces the risk of virus spread to healthcare workers at the time of sample collection.
(4) Collecting nasopharyngeal samples can be uncomfortable to people, discouraging them from getting tested. The saliva test is likely to increase testing compliance.
(5) The saliva sample can be collected in any sterile container.
(6) The diagnostic test also does not require the use of preservatives at sample collection, does not require specialised reagents or equipment for nucleic acid extraction.

7. SARS-CoV-2-specific T cell immunity prevents recurrent severe COVID-19 disease

Why is it in News:
• Natural exposure or infection with the novel coronavirus may “prevent recurrent episodes of severe COVID-19”, a paper published in Cell.

T cell:
• T cell is a type of lymphocyte, which develops in the thymus gland.
• It plays a central role in the immune response.
• T cells can be distinguished from other lymphocytes by the presence of a T-cell receptor on the cell surface.
• These immune cells originate as precursor cells, derived from bone marrow.
• Their roles include directly killing infected host cells, activating other immune cells, producing cytokines and regulating the immune response.

8. India’s ASTROSAT makes rare discovery

Why is it in News?
• India’s ASTROSAT detected an extreme ultraviolet (UV) light from a galaxy which is 9.3 billion light-years away from Earth.

ASTROSAT:
• It is India’s first multi- wavelength satellite observatory.
It aimed at studying celestial sources in X-ray, optical and UV spectral bands simultaneously.

**Scientific objectives:**
(1) To understand high energy processes in binary star systems containing neutron stars and black holes;
(2) Estimate magnetic fields of neutron stars;
(3) Study star birth regions and high energy processes in star systems lying beyond our galaxy;
(4) Detect new briefly bright X-ray sources in the sky;
(5) Perform a limited deep field survey of the Universe in the Ultraviolet region.

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### Internal Security

#### 1. Info War

**Why is it in news?**
- Many of the ‘Chinese’ accounts on social media which spread false information about the border clash with India have been traced to Pakistan, in what is believed to be a coordinated disinformation campaign aimed at India.

**Details:**
- The India-China border tensions in the Galwan Valley, sparked a first-of-its-kind information war on social media, where Indian and Chinese accounts on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube traded images and videos in an effort to both capture the narrative and the attention of the media.
- Many of the accounts that posed as China-based users were actually Pakistani accounts.

#### 2. Draft Defence Export Policy

**Why is it in news?**
- Ministry of Defence put out a draft ‘Defence Production & Export Promotion Policy (DPEPP) 2020’ for public feedback.

**Defence Production & Export Promotion Policy 2020:**
- **Aim:**
  (1) Achieving a manufacturing turnover of $25 bn or Rs. 1,75,000 crore, including exports of $5 bn in aerospace and defence goods and services by 2025.
  (2) Enhance the defence procurement from domestic industries.
- **Subject to strategic considerations,** domestically manufactured defence products will be promoted through Government to Government agreements and Lines of Credit/Funding.
- **Aerospace industry:** The opportunities in the aerospace industry have been identified in the following segments — aircraft build work, aircraft Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO), helicopters, engine manufacturing and MRO work, line replaceable units, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and upgrades and retrofits.

#### 3. Defence Ministry to impose import embargo on 101 items

**Why is it in news?**
• The Defence Minister announced to introduce import embargo on 101 items beyond given timeline to boost indigenisation of defence production.

Details:
• **Aim:** To reach a turnover of $25 billion through indigenously manufactured defence products and to export products worth $5 billion.
• In any government contract over Rs. 200 crore, no foreign company can participate in the tendering process.
• It is part of Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative

### 4. Naval Innovation and Indigenisation Organisation

Why is it in news?
• Defence Minister launched Naval Innovation and Indigenisation Organisation

About Naval Innovation and Indigenisation Organisation (NIIO):
• The NIIO is a three-tiered organisation.
  1. The Naval Technology Acceleration Council (N-TAC) will bring together the twin aspects of innovation and indigenisation and provide apex level directives.
  2. A working group under the N-TAC will implement the projects.
  3. A Technology Development Acceleration Cell (TDAC) has also been created for induction of emerging disruptive technology in an accelerated time frame.
• The NIIO puts in place dedicated structures for the end users to interact with academia and industry towards fostering innovation and indigenisation for self-reliance in defence in keeping with the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

### 5. National Cadet Corps

Why is it in news?
• Defence Minister Singh has approved a proposal of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) for a major expansion scheme in all the border and coastal districts.

National Cadet Corps:
• The NCC aims at developing character, comradeship, discipline, a secular outlook, the spirit of adventure and ideals of selfless service amongst young citizens.
• It aims at creating a pool of organized, trained and motivated youth with leadership qualities in all walks of life, who will serve the Nation regardless of which career they choose.
• The NCC also provides an environment conducive to motivating young Indians to join the armed forces.

### 6. DRDO lists 108 defence items for Indian firm

Why is it in news?
• The DRDO has identified a list of 108 military subsystems and components for development by the Indian industry and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) will provide support for the process.

Details:
• The announcement follows the 101 items on the negative import list issued by the Defence Ministry, which have to be domestically procured in a phased manner.
• This was part of a series of measures announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in May.
to promote domestic defence manufacturing as part of the “Atmanirbhar Bharat” initiative.

### 7. Kavkaz 2020

#### Why is it in news?
- India has withdrawn its participation in Kavkaz 2020 multinational exercise in Russia in September.

#### Details:
- In view of the pandemic and consequent difficulties in exercise, including arrangements of logistics, India has decided not to send the contingent to Kavkaz 2020.
- Other reasons include participation of Chinese troops and the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia which have been recognised only by Russia and a few other countries.

#### Kavkaz 2020
- The invitees to Kavkaz 2020 strategic command-post exercise, also referred to as Caucasus-2020, to be held in Astrakhan in Southern Russia from September 15 to 26 include Pakistan, Turkey and other member-states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).
- India had confirmed its participation and a tri-service contingent consisting of 150 Army personnel and a small number of Navy and Air Force personnel had been identified.

### 8. Culture

#### 1. Odisha to give facelift to 11th century Lingaraja Temple

#### Why is it in News?
- The Odisha government announced to give a facelift to the 11th century Lingaraj Temple.

#### Lingaraja Temple:
- Lingaraj Temple, built in 11th century, is dedicated to Lord Shiva.
- The central tower of the temple is 180 ft (55 m) tall.
- The temple represents the style of the Kalinga architecture.
- Lingaraj Temple was built by the King Jajati Keshari, who belonged to Soma Vansh.
- The temple is built in the Deula style that has four components namely, vimana (structure containing the sanctum), jagamohana (assembly hall), natamandira (festival hall) and bhogamandapa (hall of offerings).
- Erected in red sandstone, Lingraj Temple has the stone of the darkest shade.
- Lingaraja temple is maintained by the Temple Trust Board and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).
- It is said that when construction of Lingaraj Temple was about to be completed, Jagannath culture started growing in Odisha. Hence, the presiding deity here is known as Hari-Hara; Hari denotes Lord Vishnu and Hara meaning Lord Shiva.

#### 2. Marthoman Jacobite Syrian Cathedral Church

#### Why is it in News?
The Kerala government took control of Marthoman Jacobite Syrian Cathedral Church at Mulanthuruthy in Ernakulam district.

Details:
- The Church has been in the focus of a dispute between Jacobite and Orthodox factions of the Malankara Church, a prominent non-Catholic Christian community.

**About Church:**
1. The Church at Mulanthuruthy, built in AD 1200, has been managed by Jacobite faction.
2. It is one of the ancient Churches in Kerala.
3. The church is a fine example of Gothic architecture.
4. The carvings, sculptures, symbolic icons and wall paintings, are a blend of Indian, West-Asian and European architecture.

**History of conflict:**
1. The Malankara Church first split in 1912, into the Jacobite and Orthodox groups. The two Churches reunified in 1959, but the truce lasted only until 1972-73.
2. Since then, the two factions have been engaged in battle over ownership of churches and their wealth.
3. The Christian population of Kerala comprises Catholic, Jacobite Syrian, Orthodox Syrian, Mar Thoma, Church of South India, Dalit Christians and Pentecostal Churches/groups.

**Supreme Court Verdict:**
1. Supreme Court verdict transferred its ownership to the rival Orthodox Church.
2. SC upheld the validity of the 1934 constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church to govern the parishes under the Church.

**Impact of verdict:**
1. It impacted over 1000-odd churches.
2. Since the SC verdict, several churches under dispute have already been handed over to the Orthodox group despite stiff resistance from the bishops and laymen.

**Why takeover now?**
1. As the government delayed implementing the SC order, the Orthodox Church moved to division bench against the non-compliance of the order of the apex court.
2. The division bench issued an ultimatum to the Ernakulam District Collector that the church should be taken over within five days and submit a compliance report.

3. Antique idols from U.S. galleries handed over to India

**Why is it in News?**
- The U.S. authorities have formally handed over to India a set of priceless antique pieces, including a limestone relief of Shiva and Parvati, a marble Apsara.

Details:
- **The marble Apsara ceiling panel:**
  1. It depicts a celestial goddess figure.
  2. It was dated to the 10th century, measuring 44 inches in height.
- **Stone relief of Shiva and Parvati:**
  1. Both are standing next to each other with halos behind them.
  2. It was dated back to 8th century.
- **Red sandstone figure of Parvati:**
  1. It is holding a fly whisk aside a male attendant.
  2. It is from Rajasthan or Madhya Pradesh, dated to the 11th century.
• **Buff sandstone stele of Rishabhanata:**
  (1) It is the first Jain Tirthankara seated in vajrasana and flanked by a pair of standing attendants.
  (2) It was either from Rajasthan or Madhya Pradesh, dated back to 10th century.

• **Antiquities and Art Treasures Act of 1972:**
  (1) Act is enacted to regulate the export trade in antiquities and art treasures, to prevent smuggling of and fraudulent dealings in antiquities.
  (2) ‘Antiquities’ - which have been in existence for not less than 100 years Viz.,
    (a) Sculptures in stone, terracotta, metals, ivory.
    (b) Painting in paper, wood, cloth, skin etc
    (c) Manuscripts
  (3) An art treasure is a human work of art, other than an antiquity, declared to be a treasure by the Centre for its artistic value after the artist’s death.
  (4) According to section 5, antiquities can be sold only under a license.
  (5) The 1972 Act falls within the purview of the Archaeological Survey of India.

4. **Kerala’s indoor Onam**

**Why is it in News?**
- Kerala CM called for indoor celebration of Onam festival.

**Onam festival:**
- It is a 10 days harvest festival of Kerala.
- The main temple festival for Onam is held at the Vamana Moorthy temple in Thrikkakara
- Athachamayam procession and the iconic Onam Sadhya (feast) are major celebrations of festival

**Legend:**
(1) Thrikkakara is considered the abode of Mahabali.
(2) It is said that the temple is at the site where king Mahabali was sent to Patala (the underworld) by Lord Vamana, with his foot.

**Athachamayam procession:**
(1) Procession witnesses all folk art forms from Pulikkali, Theyyam, Mayilattom to classical art forms like Kathakali.

**Pulikkali:**
(1) It is a colourful tiger dance at Thrissur.
(2) Tiger faces and yellow & black strips like tiger on human body is painted.

**A boat race, traditionally known as Vallam Kali in Malayalam, is a form of canoe racing integral to Onam celebrations.**
1. Lokmanya Tilak’s death centenary

Why is it in News?

- The Prime Minister has paid tributes to Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak on his 100th Punya Tithi.

Lokmanya Tilak:

- Education:
  1. The young Tilak was educated at Deccan College in Poona, where in 1876, he earned bachelor’s degrees in mathematics and Sanskrit.
  2. Tilak then studied law, receiving his degree in 1879 from the University of Bombay.

- Freedom struggle:
  1. He founded (1914) and served as president of the Indian Home Rule League.
  2. In 1916 he played important role in concluding the Lucknow Pact with Mohammed Ali Jinnah.
  3. He founded Deccan Education Society (1884), which aimed at educating the masses, especially in the English language.
  5. He organized two important festivals, Ganesh in 1893 and Shivaji in 1895.
  6. In 1907, the government again prosecuted Tilak on a charge of sedition and inciting terrorism and deported him to Mandalay, Burma (Myanmar), to serve a six-year prison sentence.

- Literature:
  1. In the Mandalay jail, Tilak wrote the Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā Rahasya or Gita Rahasya.
  2. In 1893, he had published The Orion; or, Researches into the Antiquity of the Vedas, and, a decade later, The Arctic Home in the Vedas.

2. Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN)

Why is it in News?

- Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN) has ensured essential immunization services during the COVID pandemic.

Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN):

- It is an innovative technological solution aimed at strengthening immunization supply chain systems across the country.
- This is being implemented under National Health Mission (NHM) by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- eVIN aims to provide real-time information on vaccine stocks and flows, and storage temperatures across all cold chain points in the country.

3. Offshore Patrol Vessel ‘Sarthak’
Why is it in News?
• Indian Coast Guard Offshore Patrol Vessel ‘Sarthak’ launched.

Details:
• The Ship is fitted with state-of-the-art Navigation and Communication equipment, sensor and machinery.
• The mere presence of Indian Coast Guard unit at sea serves dual objectives of “Deterrence” and “Reassurance”.
• The ship will be deployed extensively for EEZ surveillance, Coastal Security and other duties as enshrined in the Coast Guard charter of duties, to safeguard the maritime interests of the Nation.

4. BRICS Anti-Drug Working Group

Why is it in News?
• The 4th Session of the BRICS Anti-Drug Working Group comprising of Brazil, Russia, China, South Africa and India was held.

Details:
• The discussions included need for real time information sharing among the member states and need to curb increased drug trafficking through maritime routes.
• Misuse of darknet and other advanced technologies for drug trafficking was one of the key focal areas of the meeting.
• BRICS:
  (1) BRICS is an informal group of states comprising the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
  (2) It was formed in 2009.
  (3) Originally the first four were grouped as "BRIC" (or "the BRICs"), before the induction of South Africa in 2010.
  (4) Bilateral relations among BRICS nations are conducted mainly on the basis of non-interference, equality, and mutual benefit.
  (5) Brazil hosted the most recent 11th BRICS summit on 13–14 November 2019.
  (6) Currently, there are two components that make up the financial architecture of BRICS, namely, the New Development Bank (NDB) or sometimes referred to as the BRICS Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA).

5. Tribal Health and Nutrition Portal ‘Swasthya’

Why is it in News?
• Ministry of Tribal Affairs launched the Tribal Health and Nutrition Portal ‘Swasthya’ and e-newsletter on health and nutrition ALEKH.

Details:
• Swasthya e-portal:
  (1) It will provide all health and nutrition related information of the tribal population of India in a single platform.
  (2) It will also curate innovative practices, research briefs, case studies, and best practices collected from different parts of India to facilitate the exchange of evidence, expertise and experiences.
• GOAL Programme:
  (1) It stands for ‘Going Online as Leaders’.
(2) It is the initiative of the Ministry in partnership with Facebook.
(3) The Ministry aims to mentor 5000 Tribal Youth across India and enable them to become village-level digital young leaders for their communities.

6. Dhanwantari Rath

Why is it in News?
• Ayurveda Preventive and Promotive health services in the residential colonies of Delhi Police will be provided through a mobile unit named ‘Dhanwantari Rath’.

Details:
• A MoU was signed between All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) and Delhi Police for this mobile unit.
• AIIA:
  (1) It is an autonomous Institute under Ministry of AYUSH.
  (2) It aims at bringing a synergy between Traditional Wisdom of Ayurveda and Modern tools and technology.
  (3) It is a public Ayurveda medicine & research institution located in New Delhi.

7. MoU between Jute Corporation of India and National Seeds Corporation

Why is it in News?
• MoU to provide certified good quality seeds to jute farmers in the year 2021-22 is signed between Jute Corporation of India and National Seeds Corporation.

Details:
• In an effort to improve production and productivity of raw Jute in the country, the Ministry of Textiles will make available certified jute seeds to the farmers through the Jute Corporation of India (JCI).
• National Seeds Corporation (NSC) would be ensuring delivery of these quality certified seeds to the JCI.
• Jute Corporation of India:
  (1) It is an agency of the government of India that assists jute cultivators in states where this crop is grown, providing minimum price support.
  (2) It was incorporated by GOI as price support agency.
  (3) It is Located in Kolkata.
• National Seeds Corporation:
  (1) It is a Schedule ‘B’-Miniratna Category-I company wholly owned by Government of India.
  (2) It is under the administrative control of Department of Agriculture Cooperation & Farmer’s Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
  (3) NSC was established in 1963 to undertake production of foundation and certified seeds.
• Project ICARE:
  (1) It is the project to improve quantity and quality of jute.
  (2) The three agencies - the Jute Corporation of India (JCI), National Jute Board (NJB) and Central Research Institute for Jute & Allied Fibres (CRIJAF) are promoting modern agronomic practices for overall improvement of quantity and quality of jute under it.

8. MoU for skill development in Port and Maritime sector
Why is it in News?
• Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for skill development was signed digitally between Ministry of Shipping and Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

Details:
• The vision is making India the Skill Capital of the World.
• Maritime transport is a critical segment that propels the economic development of our country.
• This partnership will provide vast employment opportunities and better prospects to the youth of coastal areas.
• It will Set-up Multi-skill Development Centres for higher order skills in collaboration with DGT or NSDC through PPP model for skill training.

9. Trifood Project of Trifed

Why is it in News?
• Ministry of Tribal Affairs launched “Trifood Project” of TRIFED.

Details:
• TRIFOOD aims to enhance the income of tribals through better utilization of and value addition to the Minor Forest Produces collected by the tribal forest gatherers.
• To achieve this, as a start, two Minor Forest Produce (MFP) processing units will be set up at Raigad, Maharashtra and Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh.
• In association with Ministry of Food Processing, the units that will be set up under the Scheme for Creation of Backward and Forward Linkages under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana
• It will procure the raw material from the Van Dhan Kendras in the state.
• TRIFED:
  (1) It stands for ‘The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India’.
  (2) It was established in 1987 and became operational from April 1988.
  (3) The basic objective of the TRIFED is to provide good price to the products made or collected from the forest by the tribal peoples.

10. ‘Harit Path’ a mobile app

Why is it in News?
• NHAI launched ‘Harit Path’ a mobile app to monitor plantation along national highways.

Details:
• The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is a public sector undertaking under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.
• App will monitor location, growth, species details, maintenance activities, targets and achievements of each of its field units for each and every plant under all plantation projects.
• Harit Bharat Sankalp:
  (1) NHAI recently undertaken ‘Harit Bharat Sankalp’, a nation-wide plantation drive which is in line with its commitment to promote environment protection and sustainability.
  (2) Under this initiative, NHAI planted over 25 lakh plants in 25 days along the stretches of the National Highways.

11. India – AIIB agreement

Why is it in News?
• India and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) signed a loan agreement for a $500 million Mumbai Urban Transport Project-III.

Details:
• Project is intended to improve the network capacity, service quality and safety of the suburban railway system in Mumbai.
• Among primary beneficiaries of the project, 22% are female passengers who will benefit from improved safety and quality of service.

12. National Council for Transgender Persons

Why is it in News?
• The Central Government has constituted a National Council for Transgender Persons.

Details:
• It is constituted under Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.
• Composition:
  (1) The Union Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment will be Chairperson (ex-officio).
  (2) Union Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment will be Vice-Chairperson (ex-officio).
  (3) The other members of the Council include representatives of various Ministries/Departments, five representatives of transgender community, representatives of NHRC and NCW, representatives of State Governments and UTs and experts representing NGOs.
• Functions:
  (1) To advise the Central Government on the formulation of policies, programmes, legislation and projects with respect to transgender persons;
  (2) To monitor and evaluate the impact of policies and programmes designed for achieving equality and full participation of transgender persons;
  (3) To review and coordinate the activities of all the departments of Government and other Governmental and non-Governmental Organisations which are dealing with matters relating to transgender persons;
  (4) To redress the grievances of transgender persons; and
  (5) To perform such other functions as may be prescribed by the Central Government.

13. Conservation of River Dolphin

Why is it in News?
• Experts from India – Bangladesh – Nepal and Myanmar come together on webinar for enhancing conservation of river Dolphins in the region paving way for regional cooperation.

Details:
• Webinar was aimed at exploring the impact of COVID-19 on the ecosystem health of rivers and its dolphin population.
• River Dolphins:
  (1) It is a unique species found mainly in rivers of Asia and South America.
  (2) Species are vanishing rapidly.
  (3) Sunderban delta is an unique ecological space where Gangetic as well as Irrawaddy Dolphin are present, spread over India as well as Bangladesh.
• Gangetic Dolphins:
  (1) Gangetic Dolphin, the national aquatic animal of India, has been declared endangered by
IUCN.
(2) The Ganges river dolphin was officially discovered in 1801.
(3) The Ganges river dolphin can only live in freshwater and is essentially blind.
(4) They hunt by emitting ultrasonic sounds, which bounces off of fish and other prey, enabling them to “see” an image in their mind.
(5) They are frequently found alone or in small groups, and generally a mother and calf travel together.
(6) Females are larger than males and give birth once every two to three years to only one calf.
• Recently Prime Minister announced the “Project Dolphin’ in-line with “Project Tiger” which has successfully helped in increasing tiger population.

14. 7 New circles of Archaeological Survey of India

Why is it in News?
• The Ministry of Culture has announced 7 new circles of Archaeological Survey of India.

Archaeological Survey of India:
• It is an Indian government agency attached to the Ministry of Culture.
• It is responsible for archaeological research and the conservation and preservation of cultural monuments in the country.
• It was founded in 1861 by Alexander Cunningham.
• He became its first Director-General and known as the “Father of Indian Archaeology”.

15. Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2020

Why is it in News?
• NITI Aayog in partnership with the Institute of Competitiveness released the Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2020.

Details:
• It is the report to examine export preparedness and performance of Indian states for export.
• EPI intends to identify challenges and opportunities; enhance the effectiveness of government policies; and encourage a facilitative regulatory framework.
• The structure of the EPI includes 4 pillars – Policy; Business Ecosystem; Export Ecosystem; Export Performance.
• Findings:
  (1) Most Indian states performed well on average across the sub-pillars of Exports Diversification, Transport Connectivity, and Infrastructure.
  (2) The average score of Indian states in these three sub-pillars was above 50%.
  (3) Most of the Coastal States are the best performers. Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu occupy the top three ranks, respectively.
  (4) In the landlocked states, Rajasthan has performed the best, followed by Telangana and Haryana.
  (5) Across the Union Territories, Delhi has performed the best.

6. Export promotion in India faces three fundamental challenges:
   (a) Intra- and inter-regional disparities in export infrastructure;
   (b) Poor trade support and growth orientation among states;
   (c) Poor R&D infrastructure to promote complex and unique exports.

(7) It emphasized on key strategies to address these challenges:
16. Bureau of Police Research and Development

Why is it in News?
- The Bureau of Police Research and Development have completed its 50 years.

The Bureau of Police Research and Development:
- It was created on 28th August, 1970, through a resolution of Ministry of Home Affairs.
- At present it has 4 divisions – Research, Development, Training and Correctional Administration.
- In 1973, the Training Division was added, on the recommendation of the Gore Committee on Police training.

Mandate:
1. Promote excellence in policing;
2. Promote speedy and systematic study of police problems;
3. Apply science and technology in the method and techniques by the Police.

- In 2008, the National Police Mission was added.

17. Mahatma Ayyankali

Why is it in News?
- The Prime Minister has remembered Mahatma Ayyankali on his 157th Jayanti.

Mahatma Ayyankali (1863-1941):
- He was a social reformer who worked for the advancement of deprived untouchable people in the princely state of Travancore, British India.
- He founded Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (SJPS) for Dalits.
- He was also known as Urpillai and Moothapullai.
- Ayyankali became a stated protestor for rights of Pulayar (untouchable community of Travancore).
- Mahatma Gandhi called Ayyankali as 'Pulaya king'. Indira Gandhi described him as 'India's greatest son'.

10 Miscellaneous TidBits

1. Food Vision 2050 Prize for Naandi Foundation

Why is it in news?
- The Rockefeller Foundation has selected Naandi Foundation, as one of the ‘Top 10 Visionaries’ in the world for the Food Vision 2050 Prize, announced in New York.
- The recognition fetches Naandi a prize money of $200,000.
- Naandi foundation is Hyderabad-based non-profit body.

Details:
• The award recognised the application of the Arakunomics model in regions of Araku, Wardha and New Delhi, leading to the Food Vision 2050 that follows an “ABCDEFGH” framework.
• ABCDEFGH centring on: Agriculture, Biology, Compost, Decentralised decision-making, Entrepreneurs, Families, Global Markets, and ‘Headstands’.

**Vision of Arakunomics:**
• Naandi’s vision titled Arakunomics was based on work with tribal farmers in Araku for nearly 20 years.
• It is a new integrated economic model that ensures profits for farmers, quality for consumers through regenerative agriculture.
• The model is a tribute to the tribal farmers of Araku region for the world-class coffee produced and launched in Paris in 2017.
• They also did a high carbon landscape transformation in over 955 villages, thereby planting 25 million trees.

2. **India can become a global toy hub: PM**

**Why is it in news?**
• Prime Minister called upon start-ups and entrepreneurs to “team up for toys”.
• India’s share in the Rs. 7 lakh crore global toy market is minuscule.
• PM asserted that the country has the potential to be a hub for the industry.
• PM has asked the start-ups to be “vocal for local” and urged them to develop computer games in and based on India.

**Toy Industry in India:**
• India’s toy market is worth $1.7 billion.
• India currently manufactures only about 15% of its total toy demand.
• About 85 percent toys sold in India is made in China. This is primarily because Chinese toys are sold for a cheap price.
• The All India Toys Federation (AITF) is the apex body of toy manufacturers, traders and sellers in India.

3. **The COVID-19 Vaccine ‘Sputnik V’**

• Russian President Vladimir Putin on 11 August 2020 said that Russia had become the first country to grant regulatory approval to a COVID-19 vaccine.
• Russia likened to its success in the Cold War-era space race.
• The vaccine, to be called ‘Sputnik V’ in homage to the world’s first satellite launched by the Soviet Union.
• The vaccine is developed by Moscow’s Gamaleya Institute.

4. **India’s imports from China rise in June and July**

**Why is it in news?**
• India’s imports from China have risen to $5.6 billion in July, climbing for the second straight month.

**Details:**
• India’s imports from China had fallen to a record low of $3.2 billion both in April and May, coinciding with India’s lockdown on account of the pandemic.
• After seven months of this year, India’s imports from China reached $32.2 billion, down 24.7% year-on-year, largely because of the slump in April and May.
• Two-way trade, at $43.37 billion, continues to be heavily tilted in China’s favour.

Not possible to fully block Chinese firms: officials
• According to the official statement, it is not possible to fully decouple the trend due to the substantial investments by Chinese companies in India.
• The statement comes despite the uproar against the use of Chinese products amid the border stand-off in eastern Ladakh.
• Intelligence assessments have cautioned on the direct and indirect links many companies have with the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).
• While some measures can be taken, several Chinese investments are quite substantive.
• It is not possible to fully block Chinese investments in India.

5. Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP)

Why is it in news?
• The ICICI Bank has recently completed the allotment of equity shares under its qualified institutional placement (QIP).
• It raised about Rs. 15,000 crore to fund its business growth and meet regulatory capital requirement.
• The other lenders, including HDFC, Axis Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank have also raised capital as the system braces for a loan impairment impact due to the COVID-19 crisis.

What is Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP)?
• It is the means whereby a listed company can issue equity shares, fully and partly convertible debentures, or any securities other than warrants which are convertible to equity shares to a Qualified Institutional Buyer (QIB).
• QIP allows an Indian-listed company to raise capital from domestic markets without the need to submit any pre-issue filings to market regulators.
• SEBI had brought QIP to avoid the dependence of companies on foreign capital resources.

6. Raagotsav II to pay tribute to Pt Jasraj

Why is it in News?
• Pt Jasraj, a classical vocalist, died on 17th August, 2020
  Pt Jasraj:
  • He was an Indian classical vocalist, belonging to the Mewati gharana.
  • Jasraj created a novel form of jugalbandi called Jasrangi that is styled on the ancient system of moorchhana.
  • Moorchhana is jugalbandi between a male and a female vocalist, who each sing different ragas at the same time.
  • He had worked to popularise semi-classical musical styles, such as Haveli Sangeet, which involves semi-classical performances in temples.

7. Private firms employ more women in R&D

Why is it in news?
• According to data in the Science and Technology Indicators (STI), 2018 released, India’s private sector research companies appear to employ a larger proportion of women in research and development activities than government agencies.
• STI data is a periodic compendium of the state of scientific research in India.
Details:
• Of the 20,351 women employed in private R&D companies, 15,011 or about three in four were involved in “R&D activities”.
• However, of the 23,008 women in “major scientific agencies”, fewer than half — or 10,138 — were in the same ‘R&D activities’ category.
• Overall, India had 341,818 scientists in R&D with nearly 2,03,759 employed by government institutions or in the higher education sector.

Trend:
• The 2018 indicators reiterate the historic trend of India’s scientists being overwhelmingly men.
• For every one of the 15,011 women counted earlier, there are six male scientists in private sector R&D establishments, or about 92,000.
• However that proportion improves to about one in four in major scientific agencies where there are 43,753 male scientists in ‘R&D’ for the 10,138 women equivalent.

About STI data:
• The STI is prepared by a division of the Department of Science Technology, the National Science and Technology Management Information System.
• It is also based on data provided by a range of scientific establishments across the country.

8. Investments via P-notes

Why is it in news?
• Investments through participatory notes (P-notes) in the domestic capital market soared to Rs. 63,288 crore till July-end.
• This is the fourth consecutive monthly rise.

About Participatory notes (P-notes):
• P-notes are issued by registered foreign portfolio investors to overseas investors who wish to be a part of the Indian stock market.
• These are financial instruments used by investors and hedge funds to invest in the Indian securities, and no registration is required with the SEBI.
• They, however, need to go through a due diligence process.
• **Benefit of P-notes:** They are useful to the Indian economy as they can provide quicker means of raising funds for the Indian listed companies and economy.
• **Concern:** Because of the anonymous nature of the instrument, these investors could be beyond the reach of Indian regulators. Further, there is a view that it is being used in money laundering.

9. Quality control order

Why is it in news?
• The toy industry in India has asked the government to suspend a Quality Control Order (QCO) issued recently, for at least a year.

Details:
• The government has been directing the Indian toy industry to become more competitive, especially in the global arena.
• However, this cannot happen instantly, said the toy industry.
• The industry would need the support of the government to enable ease of doing business in the country.
10. Panel for stressed loans resolution norms

Why is it in news?
• The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) constituted the proposed expert committee under the chairmanship of veteran banker K.V. Kamath.
• The panel to make recommendations on norms for the resolution of COVID-19 related stressed loans.

Details:
• The committee will submit its recommendations on the financial parameters to the RBI.
• The Indian Banks’ Association (IBA) will function as the secretariat to the committee.
• The committee will be fully empowered to consult or invite any person it deems fit.
• The committee may devise its own procedures for its internal functioning.

11. The COVID-19 Vaccine ‘Sputnik V’

• Russian President Vladimir Putin on 11 August 2020 said that Russia had become the first country to grant regulatory approval to a COVID-19 vaccine.
• Russia likened to its success in the Cold War-era space race.
• The vaccine, to be called ‘Sputnik V’ in homage to the world’s first satellite launched by the Soviet Union.
• The vaccine is developed by Moscow’s Gamaleya Institute.

12. Indian Gaur

• The Indian Gaur, also called bison, is largest and the tallest in the family of wild cattle.
• It is native to South Asia and Southeast Asia.
• It is protected under schedule I of WLPA and kept under vulnerable category of IUCN red list.
• It is a state animal of Goa.