UPSC

Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs June 2020
(Study Material)

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# Contemporary Issues

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Draft Electricity Amendment Bill 2020

Syllabus: GS 3 - Infrastructure- Energy

Why is it in the news?

- The Draft Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020 was unveiled by the Ministry of Power.
- The new draft is proposal for the amendment of Electricity Act, 2003.

Background:

- India is the third largest producer as well as consumer of electricity in the world.
- Electricity is a concurrent list subject.
- Supply of power at affordable prices is vital for sustained growth of the economy.
- However, the electricity sector, right from generation to distribution companies facing variety of challenges.

Existing issues/Problems:

- **Plant Load Factor (PLF):**
  1. Plant load factor (PLF) of coal based power generation companies is falling.
  2. In 2019-20 it is down to 56%, from 78% a decade ago.
  3. PLF is used to determine a plant’s power producing capacity.
- **Cross-Subsidisation:**
  1. Because of cross-subsidization, power tariffs in India for the industrial sector are one of the highest in the world.
  2. Populist tariff schemes and operational inefficiencies have adversely affected the DISCOMs.
  3. Farmers do not use the subsidised power optimally.
- **Higher Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) losses:**
  1. The AT&C losses are hovering around 20%.
  2. Under UDAY scheme, states were required to reduce their AT&C losses to 15% by March, 2019.
- **Renewable energy targets and DISCOMs inefficiency:**
  1. Government offered a slew of concessions to renewable energy developers.
  2. The declaration of solar and wind power plants as “must-run”, has increased the burden of discoms, as they had to absorb all renewable power as long as there was sun or wind, in excess of mandatory renewable purchase obligations.
  3. UDAY scheme did not turn around the DISCOMs.

Key Provisions of Draft Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020:

- **Viability of Electricity Distribution companies (Discoms)**
  1. **Cost reflective Tariff:** Commissions shall determine tariffs that are reflective of cost so as to enable Discoms to recover their costs.
  2. **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT):** Tariff be determined by Commissions without taking into account the subsidy. The subsidy disbursement will be made through DBT mechanism directly in consumers’ account.
- **Setting up of Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority (ECEA):**
  1. ECEA would be a Central Enforcement Authority headed by a retired Judge of the High Court.
(2) It will have powers of the Civil Court to enforce performance of contracts related to purchase or sale of power between discoms and generating companies.

- **Strengthening of the Appellate Tribunal (APTEL):**
  (1) The decision of the ECEA can be challenged at the Appellate Tribunal for Electricity (APTEL) and, subsequently, at the Supreme Court.

- **National Renewable Energy Policy:**
  (1) The amendment proposes to provide for a policy for the development and promotion of renewable sources of energy.
  (2) The specified percentage of purchase of electricity from hydro sources of energy would be mandatory for DISCOMs.

- **Franchisees and Distribution sub licensees:**
  (1) Many States DISCOMs have been assigning the task of distribution of electricity in a particular area or city to Franchisees/Sub-Distribution Licensees.
  (2) A person recognized and authorized by Distribution Licensee (DISCOMs).
  (3) No requirement of a separate license from State Electricity Regulatory Commission.

- **Cross border trade in Electricity:** Provisions have been added to facilitate and develop trade in electricity with other countries.

**Significance of the proposed Amendment:**

- **Cross-border Trade:**
  (1) There was no mention of cross border trade in the earlier act. It will add more sanctity to transactions related to cross border trade.

- **Security of payment:**
  (1) There will be no schedule or dispatch of electricity unless adequate security of payment is provided as per the contract.
  (2) This will help in managing the payment risk that is looming large on Gencos.

- **Distribution Franchisee:**
  (1) DISCOMs may outsource its various roles like meter reading, billing, revenue collection, etc. to agencies.
  (2) Adding them under the distribution sub-licensee ambit would make them more accountable.

- **Push to Renewable Energy:** Amendment provides special attention to Renewable Energy Development.

- **The Other Side:**
  - **Increasing Centralised Control:**
    (1) Setting up of ECEA would dilute the power of the state regulatory authority to settle matters related to Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) between discoms and gencos.
    (2) States would lose regulatory autonomy and independence. It goes against the federal structure.

- **Pointers towards Privatisation:**
  (1) The introduction of distribution sub-licensee and franchisee without separate licenses.
  (2) There is no schedule or dispatch of electricity without the security of payment.
  (3) According to experts the franchisee model has not worked in India so far.

- **Eliminating Subsidy:**
  (1) The proposed amendment is likely to increase the electricity tariff.
  (2) Currently, despite the subsidy, collection efficiency in rural areas is low. If the full rate is charged, it is likely to fall even further.
  (3) If consumers get the subsidy under DBT, they could utilise it for purposes other than payment of electricity bills.
Renewable Energy: The Bill proposes more concessions to renewable power developers. It would increase discoms’ financial burden.

Way Ahead:

- The distribution sector is under severe financial stress.
- There’s need of a National Electricity Distribution Plan (NEDP), like the National Electricity Plan, to find a holistic solution for its problems.
- Before framing any such legislation, Centre should consult with States, as electricity is in the Concurrent List.

Syllabus: Environment Conservation

- Question: Analyse the role of Environment Impact Assessment in light of India’s growing economic development.

Why it is in news?

- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has extended the date for public comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2020, which will replace the EIA notification, 2006.

What is the EIA?

- It scrutinises the potential of Env impact and negative externalities of the project beforehand. Suggests whether to go ahead, modify or shelve the project.
- Done by Expert Appraisal Committee of scientists and project management experts. Its preliminary report is published for public consideration.
- EAC then prepares a final report for the MoEF.

Concerns Related to Draft Notification:

- Eased processes for industry:
  (1) Projects are classified into A, B1 and B2 depending on their social and environmental impact. Projects in categories B1 or B2 will have relaxed rules.
- Greater exemptions proposed for inland waterways: It classifies inland waterways as Category B2 projects and will not require public consultations irrespective of whether these projects are located in notified ecologically sensitive areas.
- Ex-post facto clearance to projects operating without Prior-EC:
  (1) It proposes to give clearance to projects which are started without prior environmental clearance if they are not violating any law.
  (2) Even National Green Tribunal in 2017 held that such projects are against the law.
  (3) LG Polymer which was responsible of death of 12 people due to gas leak in Vizag was operating without environment clearance.
- Public consultation process diluted:
  (1) The draft proposes to expand the list of projects that do not require public consultation before receiving Prior-EC.
  (2) Also the time to furnish response has been shortened which will make it difficult for the
affected communities to take action.
(3) Public consultation ensures the EIA process is open, transparent and robust by taking into account all such concerns during the planning stage.

- **Downgrading of industries**: Industries previously fell under the category that required full assessment have been downgraded. Eg Construction. Only largest projects will be scrutinised.
- **Decreased frequency of compliance reports**: EIA 2006 notification requires compliance report to submitted every 6 months. Draft EIA 2020 increases this to 1 year.
- **Increased vulnerability to Climate Change**: Lax environmental norm will make India further vulnerable to climate change. According to Global Climate Risk Index, India is already 5 most vulnerable country to climate change.
- **Balance between environment and economy**:

**Way forward**:

(1) Since 2014, India has seen a steady rise in the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business ranking from 142nd (2014) to 63rd (2019) out of 190 countries.

(2) During the same time period, India has seen a subsequent decline from 155th (2014) to 177th (2018) out of 180 countries ranked on the Environmental Performance Index.

- **Expert Advisory Committee**: It is a part-time body, nominated by the Regulatory Authority for environment clearance, whose resources are limited. Its role need to be strengthen.
- **Democratization of EIA**: people who are impacted should be consulted before clearance regardless of nature of project.
- **Role of NGOs and Civil Society**: Often people affected by projects are marginalised groups who lack capacity to put their concerns. Here role of civil society should be strengthen to protect the interest of vulnerable sections.
- **Role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**: CSR fund should be utilised for the development and rehabilitation of impacted groups to address the social and environmental impact of industrial activities.
**Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)**

**Syllabus:** GS2: Policies for welfare of vulnerable sections.

**Why is it in news?**
- There is increase in demand for MGNREGA works after implementation of nationwide lockdown to control the corona virus.

**Introduction:**
- **Objectives of MGNREGA:**
  1. Provide 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to rural unskilled labour.
  2. Decrease migration of labour from rural to urban areas.
  3. Increase economic security.
- **Implementation Ministry:** Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) in association with state governments.
- **Cost sharing:** Centre bears the full cost of unskilled labour, and 75% of the cost of material (the rest is borne by the states).
- **Recent additions:**
  - **Direct Benefit Transfer:** Accounts of MGNREGA workers are seeded with Aadhar numbers through which wages are transferred to beneficiaries' account. This has resulted in reduced corruption.
  - **Electronic fund Management system:** Through this system funds are managed on real time basis.
  - **Integration with Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA):** Various construction activities under SBA are integrated with MGNREGA.
- **Significance:**
  - **Employment generation:** Provides employment during the lean period for agriculture, thereby reducing seasonal labour migration from rural to urban areas.
  - **Increasing rural income:** It has helped in increasing rural household income which helps in addressing agricultural distress.
  - **Economic empowerment:** The scheme has been successful in enhancing economic empowerment in rural India and increasing bargaining power helping overcome the exploitation of labour.
  - **Minimising gender gap:** Majority of beneficiaries of MGNREGA are women.
  - **Water conservation:** The water conservation measures, including farm ponds and dug wells, have been taken under MGNREGA. This in turn helps in addressing agricultural distress.
  - **Emphasis on individual assets:** The scheme was earlier focused on creation of community asset but in the last three years, individual assets have also been emphasised.
  - **More purchasing power:** Rural wages percolate down as a more purchasing power in the hands of the consumer.

**Challenges:**
- **Increase in demand:**
  1. Earlier mostly agricultural labours demanded MGNREGA wages.
  2. But now migrants returning from urban areas also availing MGNREGA work.
- **Less work days:** MGNREGA guarantees 100 days of work but most often workers get only 45 to 50 days of work.
Wages lesser than minimum wages: MGNREGA wages are tied to Consumer Price Index – rural which are not revised periodically. As result of this wages lower than minimum wages in many states.

Delay in wage payment: The MGNREGA stipulates wages within 15 days of work which often gets delayed by months.

Focus on unskilled labour: The act does not guarantee skilled work.

Way forward:

Skilling of workers: MGNREGA workers should be given on the job training so that they do not need to depend on unskilled work in future.

Revision of wages: Consumer Price Index- rural does not reflect the basic consumption in rural areas and is not revised periodically. Wages should reflect the consumption pattern of rural area.

Increasing the number of wage days: Given the importance of MGNREGA in addressing rural distress during Covid 19 pandemic, MGNREGA could be amended to guarantee 150 days of work.

Portability of Jobs card: Job cards could be made portable which will ensure that the worker is not denied work on account of relocation.

Promoting Decentralization: Decision making should be transferred to panchayat level which knows the community better and hence can ensure effective realisation of aims of MGNREGA.

Source: The Hindu, India Express, MoRD.

Farming Reforms Ordinances

Syllabus: GS 3:

Economic Development: Transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints.

Why is it in the news?

The Central government recently promulgated three important ordinances as part of “Atmanirbhar Bharat”, to bring reforms into the farm sector.

The Ordinances are as follows:

(1) The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance 2020.
(2) The Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance 2020.

Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance 2020:

The Union Cabinet has approved an amendment to the Essential Commodities Act (ECA) 1955.

Background:

Government had enacted ECA to regulate the production, supply and distribution of a host of commodities it declares ‘essential’ in order to make them available to consumers at fair prices.

If certain commodity is in short supply and its price is spiking, Centre used to notify stock-holding limits on it for a specified period.

Why ECA 1955 was Important:

The ECA gives consumers protection against irrational spikes in prices of essential commodities.
and ensure adequate supplies.

- It cracks down on hoarders and black-marketeers of such commodities.
- **Drawbacks of ECA 1955:**
  - Given that almost all crops are seasonal, ensuring round-the-clock supply requires adequate build-up of stocks during the season. ECA restricts it.
  - There can be genuine shortages triggered by weather-related disruptions and prices may move up.
  - The always monitored prices gives no incentives to farmers to farm.
  - The frequent stock limits and intervention discourages traders and private sector to invest in better storage infrastructure.

**Key Provisions of Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance 2020:**

- **The new ordinance deregulate** the production, storage, movement and distribution of the food commodities.
- It has removed cereals, pulses, onions, potatoes, edible oil and oilseeds from the purview of ECA.
- **Stock limits** can only be imposed on traders and others, when there is extraordinary price increase.
- **Protection of Consumer is ensured:** The amendment allows regulation during war, famine, extraordinary price rise and natural calamity.
- **Significance of Amendment:**
  - It will help to increase private and foreign investment in cold storage facilities and modernisation of the food supply chain.
  - Adequate processing and storage facilities will reduce wastage and increase income for farmers of perishable commodities.
  - **Due to the removal of stock holding,** the price volatility of seasonal crops is expected to reduce.
  - **Concern:** The deregulation of food grains may lead to inflationary food price spikes.

**About The Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance 2020:**

- The ordinance seeks to provide for barrier-free trade of farmers’ produce outside the markets notified under the various state agricultural produce market laws (state APMC Acts).
- The Ordinance will prevail over state APMC Acts.

**Background:**

- The APMC Act of most States currently restrict primary sale of commodities to within the limits of an APMC Mandi.
- **Other Issues with APMC Act:**
  1. The mandi licence is issued only to those individuals owning a shop or godown inside the APMC. This becomes an entry barrier for the private sector.
  2. It discouraged free trade and competition.
  3. The traders (buyers) inside the mandi take advantage and fix the prices by forming a cartel.
  4. The maximum profit is gained by the middleman and very less remains for the farmers.

**Key Provisions of new Ordinance:**

- **The farmer is not bound to sell** only to APMC-licensed buyers / commission agents.
- **Trade of farmers’ produce:** The Ordinance allows intra-state and inter-state trade of farmers’. produce outside the physical premises of market yards run by market committees formed under the state APMC Acts.
- **Electronic trading:** The Ordinance permits the electronic trading of farmers’ produce in the specified trade area.
- **Dispute resolution mechanism:** The parties involved in a trade-related dispute may apply to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate for relief through conciliation.
Significance:
- By opening up agricultural market for farmers, and removing barriers to inter-State trade, the changes allows the farmer more choices.
- It will raise farmers' income and also reduce wastage and improve quality.
- Traders and food processors will be able to buy freely from the farmers, they can stock and move any quantity of agriculture produce within the country.
- It will provide a facilitative framework for electronic trading.

About The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020:
- **Aim:** Facilitating contract farming, where a private buyer contracts to purchase a crop at a certain price at the beginning of a season.
- **Quality norms and Assessment:** Once entered into agreement, buyers procures the harvested produce at the pre-decided rate subject to its meeting agreed quality norms. The mutually accepted grade and standards will be monitored and certified by third-party quality assayers.
- **There will be Dispute Settlement Mechanism** with conciliation board. Parties can later approach the Sub-Divisional Magistrate and finally to the Collector.

Significance:
- It transfers the risk of market unpredictability from the farmer to the corporate sponsor.
- Both the farmers and buyers are insulated from excessive market risk.

Concerns:
- Due to contract farming foodgrain trade may go into the hands of corporates and food security may be threatened as a result of scarcity.
- There are apprehensions that Government may gradually move out of MSP mechanism.

Way Ahead
- **States may object:**
  1. Not all States have been on board with these reforms, especially as State governments will not be allowed to levy fees on the sales through APMCs.
  2. Both agriculture and markets are State subjects. Trade and commerce in foodstuffs is part of the concurrent list. Hence a legal question may arise.
- These are the much awaited reforms in agriculture sector. However government should trade cautiously.
- Implementing through parliamentary scrutiny and debates would be ideal.
Anti-Defection Law

Why is it news?
- Recent developments in the Assembly of Manipur has once again brought to fore the limitations and loopholes of the Anti-Defection law.
- Recently Defections have also taken place in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh Assemblies.

About anti defection law
- **Tenth Schedule** of the Constitution was inserted in 1985 to counter corruption-driven defections and ensure political stability & known as anti-defection law.
- It mentions the process of disqualification on the ground of defection by the Presiding Officer of a legislature.
- **Defection Criteria:**
  1. If he/she either voluntarily gives up the membership of his party or.
  2. If he/she disobeys the directives of the party leadership on a vote (Whip).
- The law applies to both Parliament and state assemblies.
- The Anti-Defection Law is a very unique Indian feature as in the British parliament, MPs who defy the party whip lose party membership and not seat.
- **Time limit:**
- The law does not specify a time-period for the Presiding Officer to decide on a disqualification plea.
- Courts can intervene only after the Presiding Officer has taken decision on the matter.

Exceptions:
- The law allows a party to merge with or into another party provided at least 2/3rd of its MPs/MLAs of original party are in favour of the merger.
- In such a scenario, defected members and members who stay with the original party will not face disqualification.

91st constitutional amendment in 2003:
- In the background of repeated splits and mergers, Atal Bihari Vajpayee government made 91st constitutional amendment.
  1. It prohibited defections through splits and mergers.
  2. It also capped number of ministers as post of minister was used for defections.

Interpretation of law by judiciary:

Voluntarily giving up his/her membership:
- Supreme Court has said that in the absence of a formal resignation by the member is termed as voluntary giving up of membership.
- If Members publicly expressed opposition to their party or support for another party, it considered as their resignation.

Decision of the Presiding Officer is subject to judicial review.
- SC in Kihoto Hollahan case observed that speakers exercise judicial powers similar to tribunal in the context of decision on petitions under anti defection law. So, speaker decision is subject to judicial review by HC and SC.
However, judgement held that judicial intervention is possible only after speaker took decision on the matter. Viz. Hyderabad HC refused to intervene in issue of delay by the Telangana Assembly Speaker in 2015.

**Anti-defection law and conscience of legislators:**
- Freedom of conscience is basic feature of parliamentary democracy.
- Law doesn’t allow MP/MLA to vote with his conscience & interests of his electorate. It forces legislator to follow party leadership.
- It also negatively affects supervisory role of legislature over executive.

**Flaws in Law:**

**Cross-voting in Rajya Sabha election:**
- It is not addressed by the anti-defection law as Law does not cover any vote outside the House.
- SC held that Rajya Sabha election, the vice-president’s election and the Presidential poll are “happening outside the House”.

**Why democracy should not adopt anti defection law :**
- Members can keep effective check on government if he/she allowed to vote independently.
- Members will ensure democratic debate as members are personally accountable to their vote.
- Law dilutes the separation of powers between the Executive and the Legislature.
- In the long run, it will ensure infiltration of democracy to grassroots.

**Way forward :**

**Independent Authority:**
- In Hollahan judgement, SC observed that position of speaker does not satisfy independent adjudicate authority as his position is dependent on majority.
- We need to create independent authority to deal with disqualification of MPs and MLAs under 10th schedule.

**Forbid for Byelections**
- Law should forbid a resigning Member for the by-election that follows immediately after his/her resignation.
- Resigning members should be allowed for election only after the end of Assembly term.

**Party whip :**
- Law should disqualify Members only if they vote against their party whip during important events such as no-confidence motions.
- On all other matters, Members should be given independence to vote.
**Syllabus: GS2: vulnerable sections:**

**Why in news?**
- On 23rd March 2020 PM announced nationwide lockdown to control the spread of Corona virus.
- Migrant workers, mostly employed in informal sector, lost their jobs.
- Lakhs of them were forced to walk thousands of kilometre back home.

**Facts:**
- **Census of India 2011:** More than 450 million Indians (37%) are internal migrants who change their residence within a country’s national borders.
- **Age composition:** About 30% of the migrants are youth aged 15-29 years and another 15 million are children.
- **Gender structure:**
  1. Males dominate the inter-State and inter-district streams of migration, while females dominate the intra-district stream of migration.
  2. Women migrants are less represented in regular jobs and more likely to be self-employed than non-migrant women.
  3. Domestic work has emerged as an important occupation for migrant women and girls.
- **Dominant Sectors:** construction, domestic work, textile, brick-kilns, transportation, mines, quarries and agriculture.

**Challenges of Migrant Labours in India:**

- **Covid specific:**
  1. **Loss of employment:** Many are daily wage earner who lost job immediately after announcement of lockdown.
  2. **Spread of virus:** Risk of contagion is higher in cramped colonies where the migrants reside in the cities.
  3. **Lack of resources:** Migrants are not able to follow norms such as social distancing, frequent hand washing due to lack of resources and their precarious living condition.
  4. **Tedious process to go home:** This involves standing for hours for medical examination, procuring a health certificate, and police verification.
  5. **Stigmatisation:** They are discriminated and stigmatised when the migrants return to their villages as they are considered “carries of the coronavirus”.
- **Lack of Social Security:** Many of them depend on daily wages for their sustenance without any social security.
- **Excluded in welfare policies of host destination:** Migrants donot form part of the vote bank of host destination, hence politicians often neglect their issues.
- **Lack of basic services:**
  1. Basic services like education, ration and drinking water are denied to them as they require address proof.
  2. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 is largely a regulatory law failing to incorporate welfare rights of the migrant labourers.
- **Low level of skills:** Migrants lack skills, many of them coming from rural areas without any formal education, hence are paid very low.
Social Discrimination: Sons of the soils populism in various states has led discrimination against them.

Importance of Migrant Labours:

- **Remittances**: Migrant workers send back remittances which help in addressing rural and agricultural distress.

- **Invisible hands of urban economy**:
  1. Migrant workers provide work force without which economy will become stagnant.
  2. For instance, works of coffee estate in Karnataka do not start every work until workers from Assam come back after monsoon break.

- **Consumers**: Migrant labors act as a market for various goods and services produced in urban areas.

- **Social Remittances**: Migrants bring back to the source areas a variety of skills, innovations and knowledge, known as ‘social remittances’, including change in tastes, perceptions and attitudes.

Way forward:

- **Portability of MGNREGA cards**:
  1. This will allow migrant labourers to use their NREGA job cards in any part of the country.
  2. In case of crisis like the pandemic, he or she can take up NREGA work at the destination site rather than returning home.

- **National Migrant Workers Commission**: Such commission should be established through legislative measures at the Central level backed up by State Level Migrant Workers Commissions.

- **Portability of voting rights**: So that they gather better bargaining power and political voice in the system.

- **Financial Inclusion**: Ensure access to formal banking facilities for migrants to enable safe and secure transfer of remittances.

- **Create inter-district and inter-state coordination committees.**

- **Portability of Ration Cards**:
  1. This has been done through One Nation One card scheme.
  2. But not all the states are implementing it yet.
India-China Relations

Syllabus GS2: International Relations

Why is it in news?

- 20 Indian soldiers including a CO were martyred in Galwan valley when a physical brawl broke out between Indian and Chinese soldiers. No firearms used.
- Most deaths reportedly were from injuries aggravated by intense cold in high altitude area.
- The clash appeared pre-meditated and pre-planned.
- CHN has not confirmed its casualties.
- Earlier on the night of 5-6 May, 70 Indian soldiers were injured in a major scuffle at the Pangong Tso lake.
- CHN well entrenched in area of Finger 4-8 of Pangong Tso lake and remain inside LAC at Nakula Pass.
- Indian and Chinese troops have been engaged in standoff at several locations along the LAC after Chinese troops moved into Indian territory at Pangong Tso, Galwan Nallah, Hot Springs in eastern Ladakh and Naku La in Sikkim.
- A massive incursion by Chinese troops in several areas that India claims to be part of its territory has resulted in this standoff.
- Military level and diplomatic talks have led to de-escalation recently.
How is this standoff new vis a vis earlier episodes?

- Although standoffs have occurred earlier also, the difference this year is the scale of Chinese incursion, its build up of armed forces near the LAC, the violence during the stand off and the simultaneous occurrence across multiple points.
- China’s aim is to unilaterally alter the LAC.

**Background:**
- **Line of Actual Control (LAC), a 4,057-km porous border** running through glaciers, snow deserts, mountains and rivers separate India and China.
- Both the nations have differing perceptions at several places about the LAC.
- **Under British Rule:**
  2. McDonald Line (1893) places Aksai Chin China’s control.
- India considers Johnson’s line as a correct source of border between India and China.

**Recent Measures to settle LAC dispute:**

Pic source: The Hindu
Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement (BPTA) in 1993:
(1) Jointly checking and fixing the parts of the line where they had “different views as to its alignment”.
(2) Progressively reduce their military deployments along the LAC to a “minimum level”, based on the principle of “mutual and equal security”.

Confidence Building Measures along the Line of Actual Control in 1996.

Protocol on Modalities for the Implementation of CBM along the Line of Actual Control 2008: Put in Place Standard Operating Procedure when military persons face off along LOC.

Border Defence Cooperation Agreement 2013:
(1) Enhanced the interactions of the military operations departments and the defence ministries.
(2) Agreed that they would not patrol of the other side in areas where there was no common understanding of the LAC.

Possible Reasons for Chineses incursion.

Anti-Regime sentiments in China: Communist Party of China (CPC) is worried about anti-regime sentiments at home.

Declining Popularity of Xi:
(1) Chineses polity controlled by CPC is based on strong leadership.
(2) Its hard handed stand shows Xi remains undeterred by growing backlash due to corona virus.

Signals to India: To not follow anti-China bandwagon globally put up by USA.

To distract from Corona virus controversy: Many intellectuals have claimed that China is trying to distract attention from Corona Virus controversy.

China’s advantage: China sees advantage in unsettled LAC as a bargaining tool with India.

Build-up of heavy Infrastructure by Indian side of LAC: As per China, this was unnecessary after 2008 agreement.

Break down of confidence building measures: Various agreements signed to settle LAC didn’t come to logical conclusion.

Evolution of Indo-China Ties

India was the first non-communist country to establish diplomatic relations with China on April 1, 1950.

Prime Minister Nehru made the first head of state level visit to China in 1954.

Panchsheel Treaty 1954: The treaty specifies five principles of peaceful co-existence which are.
(1) Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
(2) Mutual non-aggression.
(3) Mutual non-interference.
(4) Equality and mutual benefit.
(5) Peaceful co-existence.

1962 Indo-China border conflict: Major setback to Sino-Indian.

1988 visit of then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to China in 1988: Relations between the two countries saw a phase of improvement after this.

Doklam Standoff occurred in 2017.

The first informal summit held at Wuhan in 2018 was a step to ‘reset’ the bilateral relations.

The second informal summit was held at Mamallapuram near Chennai in 2019.

Areas of co-operation between India and China:

Trade Relations:
(1) Bilateral trade: US $ 95.6 Billion in 2018.
(2) Trade deficit against India: 53 billion US dollars.

WTO Reforms: Both countries have put common demand at WTO for reforms.
Cultural ties
(1) India has constructed a Buddhist temple in Luoyang, Henan Province, inside the White Horse Temple complex.
(2) Yoga is also becoming increasingly popular in China.

Multilateral Partnership:
(1) India and China were the founding members of BRICS and the New Development Bank. (BRICS Bank).
(2) India had joined Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO) as a full member in 2017.

Other Challenges in Indo-China Relations:
• China Pakistan Axis: India has objected to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor which passes through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.
• River water issue:
  (1) Brahmaputra river originates in Tibet and enters India through Arunachal Pradesh.
  (2) India has accused China of constructing check dams in the upper course of river.
• Tibet Refugees in India: China claims that India is supporting Tibetan refugees in anti-China activities.
• Trade Imbalance: India’s trade deficit against China has been increasing over the years. It is the biggest that India has with any other country.
• Other issues:
  (1) Trust Deficit: Both countries have mistrust over each other’s intentions in the Indo-Pacific region. Eg. Quad and recent Logistics treaty with Australia.
  (2) India has apprehensions about the growing Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region. (String of Pearls)
  (3) Growing Chinese influence in the South China Sea is also a threat to peace and stability in the Indian Ocean Region.
• Anti-India Agenda at International Fora by China: For instance, at UNSC, NSG.

Way Forward:
• Military Response: India should deploy troops matching to the deployment of Chinese troops along the LAC and demonstrating its capacity to protect its territory.
• Political response: India should amend laws and raise barriers to Chinese goods and services and investments.
• Diplomatic response:
  (1) India and China need to be engaged more at the formal and informal summits so that bilateral issues are solved amicably through dialogue.
  (2) The last major standoff between the Indian and Chinese armies in Ladakh in 2013 was resolved peacefully through military and diplomatic talks.
• Peaceful Coexistence: Both countries need to understand that both countries are bound to rise. In this respecting each other’s interests will be beneficial for both the countries.

Sources: The Hindu, ORF, South China Morning Post.
**Syllabus:** GS-2 India and its neighbourhood relations.

**Why is it in news?**
- A new bill has been unanimously passed in the Parliament of Nepal that amends its political map showing the area of Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani in its territory.
- This area has been considered as part of India since British times and is part of the Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand.
- Earlier, India had inaugurated border road to Lipulekh pass, near the disputed Kalapani area, which is used by Indian pilgrims to Kailash Mansarovar leading to protests in Nepal.
- **Maps of the area:**
Background:
- The Lipulekh pass has always been part of the road to Tibet.
- It is also mentioned as one of the border passes for trade in a 1954 agreement with China, which was also reaffirmed in another trade agreement in 2015.
- Since 1981, when China re-opened the Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimage route for Indians, Pilgrims have used the pass to walk into Tibet.
- The road built now follows the same alignment, and would essentially cut down their travel time by three days each way.
- The Nepal’s cabinet has issued new political map which claims Lipulekh and area around it till Kalapani as its territory invoking the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli with the British.
- Tensions were further ratched up when Indian Army Chief’s claimed that Nepal raised the dispute at the behest of an external force.

Why Nepal is raising it now?
- Although the British vide the Treaty of Sagauli had considered this area a part of Nepal, this understanding was changed subsequently.
- Since 1870s itself the Survey of India showed this as part of India and the Nepalese kings never objected to it.
- But after the start of Constitutional democracy in Nepal, its leadership has considered the area as disputed.
- Therefore in 2019, when a new political map of India, made after the bifurcation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) showed Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura as part of Pithoragarh district in Uttarakhand state Nepal protested strongly.
- It considered the decision to be unilateral and the subsequent inauguration of road further added fuel to the fire.

India-Nepal Historical Ties:
- India had recognised Nepal as a sovereign nation and the two countries established diplomatic relations on 17 June 1947.
- The India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950 is the foundation of the special relations that exist between India and Nepal.
- It is a bilateral treaty between Nepal and India establishing a close strategic relationship.
- The treaty calls for reciprocal treatment of Indian and Nepali citizens in:
  - Residence
  - Property
  - Business
  - Movement
- It calls for national treatment of both Indian and Nepalese businesses (e.g. after importing, foreign goods will be treated the same as domestic goods).
- India and Nepal share cultural ties in terms of Hinduism and Buddhism.
- The birthplace of Gautam Buddha is located in Lumbini in Nepal.

Significance of Nepal for India:
- Geographical:
  - India and Nepal share a land border of 1758 kilometres.
  - The border passes through Uttarakhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Sikkim.
  - Many perennial rivers originate from Nepal which feeds the major river systems of India.
- Cultural Relations:
The India-Nepal border is an important point of cultural and economic exchange.
- Nepal is a home to many Hindu and Buddhist religious sites which provides for greater scope of tourism between the two countries.
- **Natural Buffer**: Nepal forms a “natural buffer” from any possible future Chinese aggression from the Himalayas.

**Nepal-India areas of Co-operation:**

- **Bilateral Trade:**
  1. India has been Nepal’s largest trading partner from decades.
  2. India is also the largest source of foreign investment in Nepal.
  3. Indian firms are actively engaged in Manufacturing, banking, power sector and tourism industry of Nepal.

- **Regional Connectivity:**
  - Nepal is a landlocked country which is surrounded by Indian Territory on three sides and Tibetan plateau on the other side.
  - The Tibetan plateau is largely inaccessible due to its rugged topography thus Nepal has been dependent on India for regional connectivity.

- **India and Nepal had undertaken various road connectivity programs to promote economic growth and development.**
  - A few MoUs were also signed between India and Nepal for laying railway track from Raxaul in India to Kathmandu in Nepal.

- **Defence:**
  1. The Indian Army assists the Nepalese Army in its modernization drive through provision of equipment and training.
  2. Soldiers of the Gorkha Regiment of the Indian Army are also recruited from ethnic Nepali Gorkhas.
  3. Indian and Nepalese armed forces carry out military exercise Surya Kiran which is held every six month in India and Nepal alternatively.

- **Multilateral Partnership**: India and Nepal share multiple multilateral forums which are:
  1. **BBIN** (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal).
  2. **BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)
  3. **NAM** (Non Alignment Movement)
  4. **SAARC** (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation)

**Challenge areas in Indo-Nepal Relations:**

- **Trust deficit**: rising since 2015 blockade.
- **Project Implementation**: Nepal considers that India delays implementation of various infrastructure projects in Nepal.
- **Internal Politics of Nepal**: Nepal has witnessed political instability for years churning Indo-Nepal ties.
- **Anti-India Sentiments**: Some ethnic groups in Nepal consider that India indulges too much in the Internal matters of Nepal.
- **The increasing influence of China in Nepal** is an issue of concern for India in view of regional security.
- **Border security:**
  1. It is area of concern for India as the border with Nepal is porous and not heavily guarded.
  2. The border is exploited by terrorist outfits and insurgent groups from North Eastern part of India for arms smuggling.
- **Human trafficking** is another area of concern.
### Way Forward

- **Bilateral issues resolution:** India – Nepal should resolve border dispute through bilateral talks.
- **Trust Building:**
  1. India should ensure its that will take any step which against the interest of both the countries.
  2. India should maintain the stand to stay away of internal issues of Nepal to bring back the trust of Nepalese people.
- **Cooperation in energy:**
  1. Nepal has large potential for hydropower generation. It has not been fully utilised due to difference of opinions.
  2. India should leverage this and focus on the area of hydropower generation.
- **Soft Power:** India should focus more on people-to-people contacts so as to alter the narrative from economic co-operation to cultural linkages.
- **Countering Chinese influence:** India must actively engage in strategic partnership with Nepal in order to counter increasing Chinese influence in Nepal.
- **Source:** The Hindu, The Diplomat, ORF Online, Economic Times.

### India Australia Relations

#### Syllabus:
- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.
- **Why is it in News?**
  - First-ever virtual summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Australian premier, Scott Morrison has been taken place on 4th June 2020.
- **Details of Summit.**
- **Joint declarations:**
  1. Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
- **Signed documents:**
  3. Cooperation in Defence Science and Technology.

#### Significance of summit:
- It will strengthen the upgraded ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership’ between India and Australia.
- Relations are important for stability of Indo-Pacific region in the background of tense Indo-China relations.
- It will boost Trade and Investment at faster pace.
Will increase interaction with Indian diaspora, particularly students in Australia.

**History of relations:**
- Since 2000, both countries trying to improve relations by resolving the nuclear difference.
- Australia supported India-USA 123 agreement and also signed civil nuclear cooperation deal with India in 2014.
- India-Australia economic relationship has seen significant growth since 2014.
- Australia recognized the potential of India through its ‘India Economic Strategy’ in 2018.
- AUSTRALIA HIND, AUSINDEX, KAKADU and Exercise Pitch Black are examples of the Armed Forces’ close cooperation.

**Potential of relations:**
- **Common links:** Both share strong political, economic, and community ties. Both upheld values such as democracy, rule of law, freedom, mutual respect, respect for international institutions.
- **Indo-Pacific and Chinese Aggression:**
  1. Indo-Pacific region controls international trade and freedom of navigation.
  2. Relations might achieve stability in the region as China has become aggressive Viz. sinking of Vietnamese fishing vessel, threatening of Philippines navy ship etc.
- **Rising tensions & Maritime Security:**
  1. Indo-China relations had been at the worst level since 1962 over Galwan valley.
  2. China-Australia relations had strained due to Australia’s demand for independent investigation about origin of corona virus.
  3. Both countries are members of QUAD - a security dialogue framework comprising Japan, India, Australia and the United States.
- **Economic cooperation:**
  1. Australia wants to reduce economic dependence on China.
  2. India wants more access to Australian goods & services.
  3. In 2018-2019, the trade between India and Australia was approx $ 21 billion.
  4. It might strengthen India-ASEAN economic relations as Australia has deep connections with the ASEAN.
- **Support at global arena:**
  1. India’s relations with East Asia and USA is strongly supported by Australia.
  2. Australia supports India’s permanent membership in UNSC.
  3. Common membership of many groupings like the G-20, East Asia Summit, IORA, and the Quad strengthened cooperation on regional and global issues.
- **Resources:** Australia is rich in natural resources that India’s growing economy needs.
- **The Indian diaspora:** Approx. 7,00,000 Indian diaspora is a positive factor in relations.

**Challenge of relations:**
- Indian labour laws create obstacles in trade and investments.
- Long gap since Rajiv Gandhi’s visit in 1986 to Modi’s trip in 2014 increased dependence of Australia on China.
- Differences over market access over agriculture and dairy products is another issue. It was one of the factor for India’s opting out of RCEP.
- Nuclear differences since 1998 nuke test have moderated now.

**Way ahead:**
- **Strategic:**
(1) Include Australia into Malabar exercise as a permanent member for emerging balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region.
(2) Both should re-emphasize the vision of a “free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

- **Economic:**
  (1) Amend labour laws to increase Ease of Doing Business.
  (2) Resolve differences over market access for agricultural and dairy products to increase trade & investment.
- **Other:**
  (1) Address the gaps in the educational cooperation between both.
  (2) Promote the New Colombo Plan of Australia, which encourages Australian undergraduate students to study in Indo-Pacific countries.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express, Livemint, ORF, The Diplomat, The Print.

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# 10

**Health care challenges in context of COVID-19:**

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

**Why is it in the news?**
- The covid-19 pandemic has exposed the limitations of India’s public health system.

**More in the news:**
- The 2019 Global Health Security Index ranks India at 57 out of 195 countries in its pandemic preparedness.
- The index measures countries’ pandemic preparedness based on their ability to prevent, detect, mitigate and cure diseases.
- The index indicate that India may be more vulnerable than China (at 51) and Italy (31).

**Existing Issues in India’s Healthcare:**
- **Inadequate Infrastructure:**
  (1) Shortages in medical supplies.
  (2) Inability to provide adequate testing.
- **Non-affordability:**
  (1) Over 60% of households’ expenditure on healthcare is made through out-of-pocket payments.
  (2) It is 22.29% for European Union (excluding UK) and 11% and 16% for the USA and UK respectively.
  (3) Nearly 6 million families in India gets into poverty due to health expenditures annually.
- **The inappropriate mix:**
  (1) Inappropriate mix of inputs (infrastructure, human resources and supplies) results in a failure to deliver the desired health services.
  (2) As per the available National Health Accounts data, only 7% is spent on preventive healthcare, while more than 80% is spent on treatment and cure.

**Challenges:**
Funding Issue:
(1) Government spending on healthcare in India is one of the lowest in the world at around 1.2% of GDP. [Sri Lanka (1.6%), Bhutan (2.5%), and Nepal (1.1%).]

Poor infrastructure:
(1) The WHO puts the optimum ratio of hospital beds to population at 3.5 per 1,000; in India, it is 0.5 per 1,000 on average.
(2) Bihar (one of the least-developed states) has 0.12 beds per thousand people.

Shortage of workforce (Doctors as well as other staff):
(1) NITI Aayog figures show India’s doctor-to-population ratio at 1:1,655, against the WHO norm of 1:1,000.
(2) The acute shortages of doctors can result in a huge chaos if the crisis deepens.

Testing:
(1) The slow pace of testing in India is very worrying as it can encourage the spread.
(2) There are around 118 government approved laboratories in India which are capable of performing covid-19 tests.

Compromised quality and Unavailability of services: Poor's find it difficult to access the quality healthcare. The available care is either not affordable to them or lacks in quality treatment.

Upcoming Challenges:
• India could find itself in an acute health crisis over the next few months.
• Since the epidemic spread and a lockdown came into force, the following is left behind:
  (1) Many children might have missed vital immunizations.
  (2) Thousands of adults may have missed potentially life-saving medical treatment.
  (3) Emergency treatment for infectious and non-communicable diseases.
  (4) Reduced laboratory investigations.
  (5) Lowered access to mental health treatment.

Way Ahead:
• Need to Address the Resource situation- Poor infrastructure, Shortage of human resources and unavailability of services.
• Invest in Health:
  (1) India needs to scale up its investment in Healthcare.
  (2) The government will need to adopt innovative funding models for long-term sustainability.
• Quality and Sustainability: Need to strengthen delivery mechanism which includes expansion of private providers’ network, shift towards organized care delivery, speciality, low cost and value-based care.
• Maharashtra is a case in point:
  (1) The state has taken control of 80% of all private hospitals’ beds in the state till August 31.
  (2) For the patients of these beds, rates have been capped at Rs 4,000 in the case of simple ward and isolation beds.
• Keep Routine services open: Government must keep part of their routine health services running, so that people do not suffer long-term health consequences.
• 3T Formula: Test, Trace and Treat:
  (1) One viable strategy could be to conduct tests through random sampling.
  (2) Once a person tests positive, conduct contact tracing to identify and quarantine all those who might be susceptible.
Universal Basic Income (UBI)

Syllabus: welfare policies for vulnerable sections.

Why is it in news?
- Many economists are proposing direct cash transfer in the hands of poor in the form of Universal Basic Income.
- National Human Rights Commission has informed United Nations that India is considering some form of Universal Basic Income (UBI).
- **What is UBI:** UBI is a program where every citizen receives a flat monthly payment, regardless of whether he or she is working and earning income or not.

Need for UBI:
- **Rising unemployment:**
  1. Covid 19 crisis has killed many small businesses and rendered many unemployed.
  2. Increasing use of technology and automation is making human capital redundant.
  3. UBI can act as security against such unemployment.
- **Psychological or mental empowerment:**
  1. Uncertainty due to fear of job loss and poverty in Covid 19 pandemic has been emerging cause of depression and anxiety.
  2. UBI can act as cushion against such uncertainties.
- **Bargaining Capacity:**
  1. The poor are most often compelled to do whatever work which is available to sustain basic necessities which often results into modern slavery.
- **Autonomy and choices to beneficiaries:**
  1. Most of the welfare schemes are implemented in top down manner without having any feedback from target group.
  2. UBI gives money directly in the hands of beneficiaries which can be used according his/her needs.
- **Financial Inclusion:** Under UBI cash is directly transferred to bank accounts, it will lead to opening/ utilization of bank accounts of all.
- **Addresses inequality:**
  1. Many of the reforms implemented in India have not benefited all citizens equally leading to gross inequality. UBI will address such glaring inequalities.
- **Reduced Child labour:**
  1. Many children are compelled to work to support family income leaving their studies aside.
  2. UBI will support family income and hence reduced incidents of child labour.
- **Past example:**
  1. Madhya Pradesh implemented such scheme on pilot basis. It resulted in improved nutrient intake and reduced the incidence of indebtedness.

Argument against UBI:
- **Wasteful spending:** Households, especially male members, may spend this additional income on wasteful activities like betting and alcoholism.
Moral hazard (reduction in labour supply): A minimum guaranteed income might make people lazy and opt out of the labour market.

Gender disparity induced by cash: Gender norms may regulate the sharing of UBI within a household – men are likely to exercise control over spending of the UBI.

Rising inflation: Sudden introduction of cash without any wealth generation will lead to rise in inflation which will nullify benefits of UBI as purchasing power will decrease.

Financial cost: various studies have claimed 50% UBI will require 5% of GDP which will add significantly financial deficit of the government.

Against the Federalism:

Way forward:
(1) UBI has been advocated as an alternative to existing welfare schemes.
(2) This will reduce the autonomy of state governments to implement their schemes.

Well Defined inclusion/exclusion criteria: Complete UBI seems difficult and not required. Cash should be put into hands of those how need it based on well-defined inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Sunset clause: The UBI should be implemented with exit date otherwise it results into tool for promoting populist agenda.

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express.

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12

Privatization of Space

Syllabus: GS3 Awareness in the fields of Space.

Why is it in News?
- Finance Minister announced that government would make future projects for planetary exploration and outer space travel open for private sector.
- ISRO chief announced details about privatization of space after cabinet approval.

Details of initiatives:
- India introduced new autonomous body—‘IN-SPACe’ which will promote and regulate participation of private players in the space sector.
- ISRO will allow private companies to build their own facilities on the DoS premises.

About IN-SPACe
- IN-SPACe stands for ‘Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre’.
- IN-SPACe and space hierarchy:
  (1) It is a parallel mechanism & independent to ISRO under Department of Space.
  (2) The Space Commission is the apex body and will be above the IN-SPACe.
  (3) Like ISRO, IN-SPACe will report to space commission.
- Composition
  (1) Will have its own chairman (different from ISRO) and four directors for technical, legal, security and safety domains.
  (2) In addition, representatives of the academia and industry will be its members.
- Location: Bangalore for purpose of Ease of Operations as DoS is located there.
- Functions:
(1) Routine aspects & Earth observation will come under it.
(2) Advanced activities such as satellites and launch vehicles will be handled by ISRO.

**NSIL (New Space India Ltd):**
- **NSIL Position.**
- Will be under DoS, but little lower in hierarchy than ISRO and IN-SPACE.
- Second such commercial arm of ISRO after Antrix Corporation.
- **Role in the light of new changes.**
- Its role will be technology transfer of its small satellite manufacturing, as well as SSLV & PSLV to the private sector.
- NSIL will also handle future tech transfer activities on ISRO's behalf.

**ISRO role:**
- It will continue to work on advanced research and development, interplanetary missions, human spaceflight and capacity building in the space sector.
- It will focus more on Research and Development (R&D), exploring new technologies, and planning new space missions.

**Is privatization of space a right decision?**
- Space study and exploration is expensive.
- **NASA experience:** NASA has progressed due to its engagement with private sector. Nasa opened up its part of the International Space Station to commercial players including private astronauts.
- **Legacy of ISRO:** ISRO currently has time ups with around 150 private companies who supply parts and provide services for building vehicles.
- **Pillai committee:**
  (1) A committee was formed under scientist Dr A Sivathanu Pillai in 2018.
  (2) It strongly recommended opening up the space sector to private players.
  (3) The Pillai committee recommended a greater role for private sector will enable ISRO to launch 15 satellites per year from 3-4 satellites.
- **Capital and market:**
  (1) Private sector will bring more capital to do space research and exploration.
  (2) It might capture the global space market of $ 300 billion due to lower costs in India.
  (3) This will attract more Foreign Direct Investments (FDI).
- **Efficiency:**
  (1) It will enable ISRO to focus more on technological innovation and science-related roles.
  (2) Private sector might bring more efficiency and competitiveness.
- **Foreign Policy:** This will strengthen of India's foreign policy by using it as a tool.
- **Employment:**
  (1) New jobs will be created in the in the high-skilled-labor market to address the needs of the private space industry.
  (2) It will help in reversing brain-drain from the country.

**Concerns :**
- **Lack of clarity:**
  (1) Clarity about extent of private participation, especially the licensing procedure for space activities is absent.
- **Possible environment neglect:**
  (1) Private sector is profit driven and they might use profitable, non-environment friendly propellant.

**Draft Space Activities Bill of 2017**
Aim of the bill was to set up a legal and policy framework to facilitate a more productive public-private partnership in space activities. The bill is yet to introduce in Parliament.

Currently, space activities are regulated by policies like Satellite Communication Policy, 2000 and Remote Sensing Data Policy, 2011.

**Major Provisions:**

1. A non-transferable licence shall be provided by the Central Government to any person carrying out commercial space activity.
2. The Central Government will maintain a register of all space objects and formulate the mechanism for licencing, eligibility criteria, and fees for licence.
3. It will ensure safety requirements and supervise the conduct of every space activity of India and investigate any incident or accident in connection with the operation of a space activity.
4. It also has provisions for the protection of IPR created through space activity.

**Way forward:**

1. **More Clarity:**
   - Ensure more clarity about extent of private sector participation.
   - Need more clear specification of jurisdiction & hierarchy of ISRO, IN-SPACE, NSIL and Antrix to avoid confusion and fast decision making.

2. **Environment friendly:** Need to enforce environment friendly private sector approach through proper legal framework.

3. **Strong regulatory framework:** Need strict regulatory framework to avoid scam like Antrix-Devas scam.

4. Major skill development programs to enable human resource to participate effectively in new venture of India.
Opening of Coal Sector

Syllabus:
- GS III - changes in industrial policy; Infrastructure: Energy; Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Why is it in News?
- Parliament passed “THE MINERAL LAWS (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2020” to open up coal sector for commercial mining.
- Government initiated auction of 41 mines located in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Odisha for commercial mining.

Coal statistics:
- India has the world’s fourth largest coal reserves. India was second largest producer in 2019-20.
- Still, India imports nearly 250 million tonnes of coal from other countries.

History of Coal sector and mining:
- Private sector participation was permitted until the early 1970s.
- In 2014, SC struck down 218 coal block allocation on ground of “ad hoc and casual”.

Coal sector reforms:
1. Government enacted Coal Mines (Special provisions) Act of 2015 to return coal blocks to the private sector through transparent auctions.
2. CCEA gave approval for strategic disinvestment of MMTC, NMDC, BHEL under disinvestment strategy.

About the Act:
- It aims to achieve self-sufficiency in energy and boost industrial development.

Provisions of Bill:
1. Removal of the “captive end-use criteria”:
   - All companies including non-experienced companies are allowed for auction participation.
2. Licence cum mining lease:
   - It allows licence-cum-mining lease for coal/lignite to increase the availability of coal and lignite.
   - It also allows extraction of other minerals from these blocks.
3. Allocation termination:
   - Allocation will be transferred to the next successful bidder, after termination.
   - Environment and forest clearances will be transferred automatically for 2 years for continuity in mining.
5. Next auction: The auction of lease of mines can now be started before expiry of lease period to help in seamless production of minerals in the country.

Benefits:
Energy Security: It will provide Energy Security to India in the background of increasing global protectionism.

Participation: Removal of captive end-use criteria will enable wider participation including global companies.

Economy:
1. 100% FDI will attract more FDI in coal & mining sector and boost economy.
2. India will use her own natural reserves instead of importing coal.
3. The revenue sharing will be on ad valorem (the value of the transaction) basis and not on the basis of a fixed amount.

Private sector:
1. It will allow wider participation in auction of coal mines.
2. India will get access to global sophisticated technology for underground mining.
3. It will help create an efficient energy market through competition and reduce coal imports.

Employment:
1. It is expected to create employment generation for more than 2.8 lakhs people & reduce migration for employment.

Criticism:
Coal – questionable future - The falling cost of renewable energy has made it consistently cheaper.
Irrational economics - Before the covid-19 crisis, most plants running well under capacity. Aggressive push for coal mining risks creating stranded assets which cannot be sold to power generation companies due to decline in demand.
Apathy of private sector - It will take 2-5 years to open and for the company to receive dividends in coal. Transition from coal to renewables might take place in next 5-7 years. Environmental issues might prolong the project.
Less space for people opinion - Consultations and environmental assessments will be taken after the auction.
Wrong interpretation of import reduction - Of import, 50 million tonnes were coking coal, for making steel. our mines don’t have coking coal. Of the rest, 100 million tonnes are used for shore thermal power plants.
Environmental - In 2014, The National Green Tribunal which deals with environmental issues ruled against the forest clearance in ‘no-go’ Area. Supreme Court called for reassessment of mining policy in the forest. Yet ongoing auction of 41 coal mines across the country located in contiguous forests in parts of central India.

Way Forward:
Focus on renewable energy - India must shift from coal to renewable energy options.
Environment – utmost priority - Need strong Environment Impact Assessment to protect ecological sensitive area and wildlife.
Strengthen cooperative federalism - Jharkhand and Maharashtra objected the approval of auction. There is a need to understand concern of respective states.
Protection of tribal community and rights - Many forests with minerals also have scheduled tribes and backward communities living therein. Therefore dislocation and rehabilitation should be priority.
**Man-Animal Conflict**

- **Syllabus** - GS3: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

**Why in News?**
- A pregnant Elephant was painfully killed due to consumption of firecracker stuffed pineapple meant as a booby trap for wild animals.
- It was followed by a huge outcry from animal rights activists as well as common citizens on the plight of the animal.

**What was the issue?**

**Farmer’s perspective:**
1. Trap was laid for wild boar and not elephant.
2. Wild boar often destroy crops of small farmers leading to a dilemma of priorities between needs of small farmers’ and conservation of wild animals’.
3. Unlike other wild animals, the wild boars are not endangered and in fact need control of population.
4. In the absence of government efforts, farmers often try to control their population by themselves leading to other wild animals too suffering unintentionally.
5. The compensation schemes intended to dissuade the farmer from taking such steps have several lacunas:
   a. Time consuming, partial and not an effective solution.

**Elephant’s perspective:**
1. Elephants are increasingly facing blocked corridors, shrinking feeding grounds and lack of food.
2. Rampant destruction of habitat due to development projects, roads, quarrying etc are responsible for this.
3. Range of Elephants – only 25% of their range fall within protected areas leading to interaction with humans outside of these.
4. Forced out of forests they wander into adjoining areas of plantations and farms destroying the crops leading to losses and ire of farmers.

**‘Man Vs Animal’ conflict:**
1. Man-animal conflict refers to the interaction between wild animals and people and the resultant negative impact on people or their resources, or wild animals or their habitat.
2. It occurs when wildlife needs overlap with those of human populations, creating costs to residents and wild animals.

**Facts and Figures:**
- **Elephants:**
  1. India houses more than 60% of Asian elephants.
  2. Their population showed a decline of 10% in the 2017 census from the 2012 census.
  3. Almost 50 elephants have died annually in the last 10 years.
- The population of Asian elephants is on the decline globally – IUCN report.
- Wild elephants and wild pigs contribute to nearly 70% of the conflicts followed by macaques and...
Causes of conflict:

- Governance/Administration
  (1) Our development model is based on over exploitation of forests leading to habitat fragmentation and shrinking.
  (2) Government's easing up environmental clearances and opening up forests, exacerbating it further.
  (3) The National Board for Wildlife and the Forest Advisory Committee failed to scrutinise and minimise the large-scale diversion of forest land for development projects.
  (4) Opposed to the Madhav Gadgil Committee Report calling for the entire Western Ghats to be classified as ecologically sensitive and spared of destructive development.
  (5) Kerala’s recent decision diluting the Supreme Court guideline – which banned quarries within a 10km radius from forest boundaries – will adversely impact movement of wild animals and destroy the existing buffer zones.

- Commercial:
  (1) Changing crop patterns: People have started growing commercial crops like sugarcane and banana near forest areas which provide good hiding place for the wild animals.
  (2) Easy availability of food crops.

- Tribal:

- Environmental:
  (1) Water scarcity during summer.
  (2) Absence of large predators outside forests.
  (3) Indian conservation efforts are mixed up with Animal rights leading to indecisiveness about population control of non-threatened species.
  (4) Pesticides are fatal for Jackals which are the predator of wild boar cubs. Over use of pesticides affected Jackals leading to increase of wild boar population.
  (5) Urban wildlife activist, their social media campaigns and challenges to government order in the court have led to government inaction.

Problem of Animal range in India:

- Disproportionate part of animal range is outside protected area.
  (a) Elephants – only 25% of their range fall within protected area.
  (b) 2.6% of range of leopards, hyenas and wolves in central India.
- So, interaction between humans and animals is inevitable.

- Earlier – little tensions in interactions – but with increase in population and pressure on land => interactions – more tensions.

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What is the Impact?

- Conflict are more serious in the tropics and in developing countries where agriculture and livestock is important.

- On agriculture:
Crop damage: Destruction of crops by wild animals can result in loss of income.
Loss of livestock: killing of livestock by carnivores can destroy income source of agro-pastoralists who depend exclusively on cultivation and production of livestock.

On human Life:
Injury or loss of human lives: People living near forest areas are at risk of attack by carnivores.

Damage to property.

What are Government Initiatives to control conflicts?

Suggestions in Draft national wildlife action plan (NWAP) 2017-31:
(1) Environment ministry to ensure that developmental projects do not increase conflicts with the help of traditional knowledge.
(2) National surveys to collect data on wildlife-human conflict.
(3) Formation of a trained workforce for forest departments to tackle conflicts.

Immuno-contraception method:
(1) In January 2018, the Environment Ministry has approved it.
(2) The immuno-contraception is non-hormonal form of contraception.
(3) It causes production of antibodies which in turn prevents pregnancy.
(4) Sanctioned over Rs 10 crore for ‘immunology contraception’ of wild boars, Rhesus monkeys and elephants.

MEFCC Guidelines on Man-Animal conflict:
(1) Wild Life Rescue Teams - equipped with adequate personnel, equipment and communication systems should be present in potential areas of man-animal conflict.
(2) There should be proper rescue mechanisms for human and/or animal victim of conflicts.
(3) Awareness campaign for encouraging conservation friendly practices, cultivation of suitable species which do not attract wildlife.
(4) Compilation of data on conflicts, reasons for such conflicts, best practices of response.
(5) Help locals in constructing barriers and develop scaring away methods.
(6) Insurance programs for damage due to wildlife.

SMS Alert System in Kerala:
(1) A mobile App, called Wild Watch has been developed to mitigate man-animal.
(2) The system consists early warning system, public SMS alert, staff monitoring and management, fence integrity detection system and real-time monitoring.

National Board for Wildlife (NBWL):
(1) Directed all power companies and state electricity boards to either replace the existing wires with insulated cables or bury the transmission lines underground or set up reinforced electric poles with spikes.
(2) NBWL has also recommended dismantling solar - powered fences to prevent animals from going near potential sources of electrocution.

WWF Report – ‘Common Ground’:
Community-based natural resource management:
(1) The local community is key since they are the ones who can benefit the most from this.
(2) If people are empowered to manage their relationship with wild animals, these neighbours can become allies.

Payment for Environmental Services (PES):
(1) Is a concept that has recently gained popularity in the international development and conservation community.
(2) The most popular of these is financial reward for the sequestering of carbon, but it is also seen as a potential solution for human-wildlife conflict.
Wildlife friendly products: Products that are environmentally friendly and recognized by serious organizations.

What can be a Way forward - Measures to reduce this conflict:

- Soil and moisture conservation measures (SMC) should be taken in the forest so that water availability within habitat is ensured.
- Regulate monoculture and increase number of edibles miscellaneous species near forest areas. This will provide more food for animals in the forest.
- Regulate fragmentation of wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors to ensure connectivity through wildlife corridors is not disturbed.
- Providing LPG to villagers: It will ensure that they won't have to fetch fuel wood for their chullahs.
- Farmers should be empowered and subsidised to better protect their land rather than wait for compensation or be forced to resort to these extreme, illegal measures.

Mental Health

Syllabus: GS 2:

- Social Justice- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Why is it in the news?

- The stress caused by the COVID-19 disease and the lockdown has led to spike in Mental Health challenges.
- As per the Indian Psychiatry Society, the number of mental health cases including anxiety and depression has risen 20% during the lockdown.
- Recent episodes of well-known persons committing suicides has also brought back the focus on Mental Health.

Introduction:

- WHO defines mental illness as a health issue that is associated with changes in thoughts, behaviour and relationships.

Following are the causes of Psychosocial stress:

1. Hopelessness and Helplessness.
2. Negative life events such as loss of a loved one.
3. Getting fired from a job/ Fear of the future.
4. Experiencing trauma relationship conflicts.
5. Alcohol and drug use.

Recent events that are likely to push people towards mental illness:

1. People have lost touch with Friends and family members.
2. Increasing accounts of alcohol abuse, domestic violence, unemployment, depleted social safety nets, starvation, homelessness, loan defaults etc.
3. Millions slipping into poverty.

Issues/ Challenges:

1. Intangibility and Stigma associated with the issue of mental illness make it slightly more
difficult to be addressed.

(2) **Lack of awareness about the Issue:** There is lack of awareness of common symptoms of mental illness and when to seek help. Nearly 80% of people suffering from mental disorders had not received any treatment.

(3) **Exposure of most vulnerabilities:**
   (a) People who already have mental health issues.
   (b) Countries with the highest number of poor and malnourished.
   (c) Rural India due to the influx of migrant workers, and also it is home to the at-risk farmer community.

(4) **Low investment in Mental health:**
   (a) The last Union Budget slashed the funds for mental health by 20% from Rs 50 crore to Rs 40 crore (far less than 0.1% of the budget).
   (b) Most of the funding is utilised to address solely biological vulnerabilities rather than social stressors.

(5) **Lack of Infrastructure and Human Resources:**
   (a) There exists lack of medical facilities and skilled mental health professionals.
   (b) The average number of mental hospitals globally is 0.04 per 100,000 while it’s only 0.004 in India.
   (c) There is lack of trust and faith in psychiatric treatment.

**Government Initiative:**
- **Mental Healthcare Act 2017 (Key features):**
  (1) The person have the right to specify how he would like to be treated for mental illness.
  (2) Individual to have affordable, easy accessible and good quality services.
  (3) Individual to have the right to equality of treatment and protection from inhuman and degrading treatment.
  (4) There will be Central Mental Health Authority at national level and State Mental Health Authority at state level.
  (5) Decriminalisation of suicide.

**Way Ahead:**
- **Ground Implementing the Mental Healthcare Act:**
  (1) The Act promises mental health care to all and introduce a suicide prevention policy.
  (2) Mental health and suicide should be treated as a public health crisis that needs immediate fixing.
- **Awareness/ Sensitisation:**
  (1) There should be a large public engagement campaign to increase help-seeking.
  (2) Mainstream and social media can be roped in to create and spread awareness.
- **Higher Investment:**
  (1) Government needs to drastically increase the allocation for mental health programs, especially during the time of pandemic.
  (2) The resources could come from the PM Cares Fund, CSR initiatives, private equity etc.
- **Involve all the Stakeholders:**
  (1) Involvement of psychiatrists, social workers, anthropologists, psychiatric, NGOs, and local volunteers is vital.
  (2) The mental health crisis in India needs to be addressed collectively.
- **Helpline Platforms:**
  (1) Government should create and circulate a number to offer 24x7 free online call and chat sessions to aid the mental wellbeing of everyone.
(2) Digitally-mediated therapy and telepsychiatry (NIMHANS runs a successful telepsychiatry intervention in Karnataka) should be scaled up.

- **Other Suggested Measures:**
  1. Staying physically active.
  2. Healthy parenting.
  3. Eating healthily.
  4. Stay away from negative narratives on social media.
  5. Spend more time with your loved ones than being alone.

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**Domestic Violence**

Syllabus: GS 2:
- **Social Justice**—Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection of vulnerable sections.

**Why is it in the news?**
- Cases of domestic violence witnessing a surge during the coronavirus-mandated lockdown.
- The National Commission of Women (NCW) has indicated an increase in incidents of domestic violence as more and more people are staying at home or working from home.

**Background:**
- Violence against women and girls has been defined as “any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women.

**NCRB data:**
- As per the latest NCRB report for 2017, about 3,59,849 cases of crime against women were reported in the country.
- Majority of cases registered under ‘Cruelty by Husband or his Relatives’ (27.9%) followed by ‘Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her Modesty’ (21.7%).

**As per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4),** every third woman in India, above the age of 15, has faced domestic violence of various forms.

**According to the Crime in India Report 2018:**
- Every 1.7 minutes a crime was recorded against women in India.
- Every 16 minutes a rape was committed.
- Every 4.4 minutes a girl is subjected to domestic violence.

**Globally:**
- According to WHO, one in every three women across the globe experience physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner.
- Domestic Violence has increased globally given the mandatory stay-at-home rules, economic uncertainties and anxieties caused by the pandemic.

**Causes of Domestic Violence:**
- Women’s economic dependence on men.
- Poverty and the resulting early marriages often gives rise to sexual violence.
- Patriarchy and the social norm that it is alright to beat or abuse a woman.
- Cultural beliefs, illiteracy or ignorance.
**Issues/ Challenges:**

- **Low Reporting:**
  1. As per 2016 NFHS, one-third of women said they had experienced domestic violence, but less than 1% of them sought help from the police.
  2. Reporting the violence comes with risks – Lack of acceptance by families to retaliatory escalation of violence.

- **Poor Rehabilitation:**
  1. The authorities are unable to provide appropriate referrals including to the shelter homes.
  2. The shelter homes neither have basic amenities nor a safe environment for the victim and her children.

- **Most women in India are supportive of domestic violence:** Data from the survey shows women between the ages of 40 to 49 were most supportive of domestic violence.

- **Harassment by Authorities:** Women and girls who survive rape and other sexual violence often suffer humiliation at police stations and hospitals.

- **Lack of trained counsellors** who can help domestic abuse victims.

- **Little access to legal aid** also adds to the misery of victims.

- **Laws against Domestic Violence:**
  - **Section 498A of IPC:** It made ‘cruelty by husband or his relatives’ a cognizable and non-bailable offence.
  - **The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 (PWDVA):**
    1. It provides a definition of domestic violence that is comprehensive and includes all forms of physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, and economic violence.
    2. The Act recognizes marital rape and covers harassment in the form of unlawful dowry demands as a form of abuse.
  - **Section 375 of IPC** considers forced sex in marriage as a crime.

- **Way Ahead:**
  - **Awareness and Education:** Experience of domestic violence, including physical and sexual violence decreases sharply with schooling and education.
  - **Reporting:**
    1. Reporting is the first step towards ending the silence around domestic violence.
    2. It is also an act of resistance and an exertion of female agency.
    3. Responses of friends, family and neighbours can influence the decision to report domestic violence to institutional sources.
  - **Institutional mechanisms for reporting** domestic violence must be strengthened and made more responsive to the needs of victims.
  - **Counselling:** Need to come up with the mechanism that helped to grasp the mental status of the victims with the assistance of psychologists and activists.
  - **Role of Civil Society:**
    1. The civil society organisations needs to strengthen linkages with other units such as legal, financial, medical and psychological.
    2. After all, how domestic violence is addressed is a critical barometer of India’s commitment to gender equity.
H1B Visa Suspension

Syllabus:
- **GS 2: International relations** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian diaspora.

**Why is it in the news?**
- US President Donald Trump suspended H-1B, L and other temporary visas for about six months.
- The restrictions will apply only to new work visas and not to existing holders who are in the United States currently.

**Introduction:**
- **H1B** is a non-immigrant visa, which allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations.
- The H-1B remains the most popular among Indian IT companies.
- The US government has a cap of 85,000 (65,000+20,000 Masters quota) visas each year.
- Indian nationals have been receiving about 70% of these work permits.
- **Duration of H1B**: 3 years and is extendable up to 6 years.
- **L-1 visa**: for managers transferring within their companies.
- **H-2B visas**: for non-agricultural temporary workers.

**Benefits of H1B:**
- **High profile job opportunities to Indians**: H1B is widely used by Indian IT companies to place skilled workers in US to serve their American clients.
- **Overseas growth opportunity to Indian companies**: Service export has enabled many Indian IT companies grow their US business including Indian IT majors such as TCS, Infosys, Wipro, etc.
- **U.S. permanent residency**: H-1B visa holders are allowed to apply for U.S. permanent residency after five years.
- **Remittances**: H1B visa workers who later applied for US citizenship became Indian diaspora and contribute significantly to Indian economy through remittances.
- **Reasons behind the Suspension of H1B and other Immigrant visas:**
- **Protecting local workers:**
  (1) According to Trump, between February and April of 2020, more than 20 million US workers lost their jobs.
  (2) The entry of additional workers through various visa programs presents a significant threat to employment opportunities for Americans affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Election year:**
  (1) The Presidential election in US is due in November.
  (2) Immigration issue has been his major agenda since his first election campaign where he promoted “Hire American, Buy American”.

**Criticism of the Move:**
- The decision is criticised by the US tech industry, which said it would hurt innovation and delay the recovery of the US economy.
● H1B is important because it fulfil a very critical skill gap that exists in the US for all companies.
● The visa restrictions could impact 2.4 lakh people from different parts of the world looking to fulfil the 'Great American Dream'.

**Impact on Indians:**

**Negative impact:**
1. Indians could be the worst affected as Indian IT professionals dominate the list of successful H-1B visa applicants.
2. H-1B is the most coveted foreign work visas for technology professionals from India.

**Positive Impact:**
1. Suspension will help existing Indian H-1B visa holders in US earn better remuneration.
2. It will also help India retain high-skilled workers planning to go to US. These workers are in high demand in the science and technology sectors in India.

**Way Ahead:**

**Engagement with US Administration:**
1. India should keep using its diplomatic channels to pursue US for beneficial H1B policy without hampering its core national interests.
2. Many reports indicate that H1B has been net positive for US economy and for US jobs.
3. India’s software lobby group Nasscom has asked US government to reduce the time to 90 days instead of till the year end.

**Diversification of IT exports:** India exports 60% of software technology to US which made it highly dependent on US for it. Thus, there is need to diversify our software exports and need to look for alternatives.
Vizag Gas Leak

Syllabus: GS 3: Security and Disaster Management

Why is it in the news?
- The incident of toxic gas leak from a chemical plant of a company LG Polymers Plant took place in Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh recently.
- The incident left more than 10 people dead and many injured. About 1,000 people were shifted to the hospitals.
- The people and animals died due to inhaling toxic styrene gas that leaked from the Chemical plant.
- There were just a few employees- maintenance personnel and security guards at the time of the incident.

Background of the Company:
- Hindustan Polymers was set up in 1961 and later taken over by South Korea’s LG Chem and renamed as LG Polymers India in 1997.
- The plant produces polystyrene and expandable polystyrene which is a plastic used to make multiple items like toys and appliances.

What is the Styrene Gas:
- A flammable liquid that is used in the manufacturing of polystyrene plastics, fiberglass, rubber, and latex.
- It is colourless, toxic and organic compound.
- It could become deadly when it mixes with air and is considered a 'possible carcinogen'.
- Exposure to styrene can affect the central nervous system, causing fatigue, headache, weakness, and depression.
- Owing to its nature, it needs to be stored in a temperature-controlled tank.
- The temperature should be 20 degree Celsius as per the norms.
- The boiling point of styrene monomer is between 135 and 145 degree Celsius.

What caused the leak?
- Human Error and Lockdown Effect:
  1. The preliminary findings revealed that the accident was due to human error.
  2. The plant was not operating due to lockdown for almost 40 days.
  3. The difference in temperature at the bottom and top portion of the tank has caused the vapour formation.
- Temperature Imbalance:
  1. The temperature of the storage tank containing styrene was not maintained below 20 degree Celsius.
  2. Auto-polymerisation of the liquid styrene is said to be the cause for formation of the vapour.
- Other Issues:
  2. Mismanagement in the handling of the hazardous chemical.
  3. Lack of onsite and offsite emergency plans to control the after-effects of the accident.
**Action by NGT**
- National Green Tribunal formed a committee under a retired judge to inspect the site and determine the cause of the incident.

**What are the Issues/ Concerns involved?**
- **Long term Impact Unknown:**
  1. While acute symptoms were instantly shown by the affected, the long term effects of the exposure are yet to be identified.
  2. The CSIR-NEERI is to continue long term study of the area for assessing the effect of the gas on the environment.
- **No Valid Environment Clearance:**
  1. The plant was operating without a valid environment clearance under the provisions of EIA notification 2006.
  2. It only had consent for establishment and consent for operation from the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board (APPCB).
- **Relaxations to Promote Industries:**
  1. The Government of India has consistently been relaxing restrictions to promote industrial activity.
  2. It comes at the cost of environmental and ecosystem damage as government is trying to regularise industries operating without environment clearance.

**Lessons from Bhopal Gas Tragedy:**
- The Bhopal tragedy had occurred in 1984, which had killed more than 15,000 people and affected over 600,000 workers.
- The accident was caused by a leak of methyl isocyanate (MIC) at a pesticide plant owned by US company Union Carbide.
- **Administrative Failures:**
  1. The decision to turn off the safety systems, turned out to cause more destruction than it should have.
- **Justice not delivered to Victims:**
  1. The legal system does not always work to protect victims.
  2. Many people did not get their due as compensation because of the poor bureaucratic condition in the country.
  3. The affected people protested for decades against the injustice being done towards them.
- **Liability Issue:**
  1. Bhopal has shown that sometimes corporations do not have to pay for the crimes they commit.
  2. The Supreme Court in its verdict after 26 years convicted only 2 of the 7 for 2 years only. Immediately after that they got bail.

**Way ahead**
- **Strict Compliance of Safety Measures and Audits:**
  1. The plants need to follow standard safety procedures.
  2. Safety audits are must whenever a plant resume operations after a gap.
- **Study to Assess various Impacts:**
  1. A study needs to be set up as to assess the long term impacts of gases like styrene on humans and on environment.
  2. It also needs to assess if pregnant women and their embryos were affected due to the incident.
  3. The high-level committee must also make recommendations to prevent such tragedies in the future.
- **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Guidelines:**
  1. Factories should ensure 24-hour sanitisation.
(2) Employees to be made aware of the need to identify abnormalities like strange sounds or smell, vibrations, leaks, smoke etc.
(3) For accommodation, sanitisation needs to be performed regularly to ensure worker safety and reduce spread of contamination.

- **Enforce Liability and Ensure Compensation:**
  (1) The Government should undertake every effort to prosecute the people responsible for the tragedy.
  (2) Generally, in such cases, the people from the Indian company will be tried but the parent company will be absolved from any liability.
  (3) The aggrieved people must get compensation easily and they don’t have to face hassle.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express, Live Mint, Scroll.

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### Online Education: Opportunities and Challenges

**Syllabus**
- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

**Why is it in News?**
- Covid-19 Lockdown has triggered huge demand for online education in India. As an immediate response, Massive Online Open Classrooms in schools and first-time full online degree courses in universities are being imitated.

**Background**
- India has a massive number of technologically driven citizens with access to high-speed internet and smartphones.
- Online education market in India is expected to grow about $1.96 billion by 2021.
- In the context of lack of capacity to absorb 50 percent increase in students over the next 15 years, online courses might be logical solution.

**Advantages**
- **Cost effective:**
  (1) It will be cost effective education as there is a possibility of a 175% increase in the cost of classroom education.
- **Flexibility in learning:**
  (1) Students can learn anywhere at any time.
  (2) Working professionals can pursue new courses without giving up jobs.
  (3) Enables learning at one’s own pace which is not possible in traditional education.
- **Active participation:**
  (1) Public speaking fear restricts participation in classroom. Online education fosters active participation.
- **Quality:**
  (1) Non-verbal and pictorial teaching helps to focus on ideas.
  (2) It enables to review/revisit lectures any number of times to improve quality.
  (3) Student can take diverse courses from best teachers in the world.
(4) Entry on global players might increase competitiveness.

Disadvantages

- **Distraction:**
  1. Students can easily lose track due to lack of physical monitoring and discipline.

- **Fraudulent Online courses:**
  1. Course without accreditation or fake authorization will be increased.

- **No help for practical workshops:**
  1. Online education cannot be provided in which there is a requirement of labs or practical workshops.

- **MNC monopoly:**
  1. Global players such as Coursera and edX might provide more Massive open online courses and create monopoly in Indian market.

Challenges

- **Digital divide:**
  1. Geographical disparity might increase as less penetration in tier II and tier III cities.
  2. State-wise disparity will increase due to access to computer and internet, e.g. only 4.6% in Bihar has internet access and 35% in Delhi.
  3. Gender divide will be the result of unequal access to internet.

- **Physical infrastructure:**
  1. The major challenge is disparity in access – from electricity and internet connections to devices like computer or smartphones.
  2. Quality of electricity and the number of hours for which it is available every day is poor in nature. viz. only 47% receives more than 12 hours a day.
  3. Only a little over 15% of rural households have access to internet services.

- **Cost:**
  1. Students have to bear the cost of internet services.
  2. Many students may not afford this cost as Loss of livelihood in corona crisis.

- **Quality:**
  1. One-to-one interactions are very important for learning.
  2. In online education, onus of learning is more on students.
  3. Large number of teachers are not equipped with online teaching methods.
  4. While 37% of households in India live in single room, conducive environment for study will not be achieved.

Government approach & initiatives:

- **Cautious Covid-19 approach:**
  1. The government’s approach is still cautious as only top 100 institutions in National Institutional Ranking Framework can apply to offer online degrees.
  2. There will be no online medical or law degrees from the country's universities in the foreseeable future.

- **Budgetary allocations:**
  1. There has not been enough expenditure on improving the digital infrastructure for remote learning.

- **Initiatives till date:**
  1. **SWAYAM** - 'Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds' is an integrated platform for offering online courses.
  2. ‘**SWAYAM Prabha**’ is an initiative to provide 32 High Quality Educational Channels through DTH on 24X7 basis.
(3) ‘National Digital Library of India (NDL)’ is a project to develop virtual repository of learning resources with a single-window search facility.

(4) ‘Free and Open Source Software for Education (FOSSEE)’ is a project promoting the use of open source software in educational institutions.

(5) The Virtual Labs Project is to develop a fully interactive simulation environment to perform experiments.

(6) ‘E-Yantra’ is a project for embedded systems and Robotics.

(7) ‘Digital India’ launched to promote digital services including online education.

Way forward

- **Invest in physical infrastructure:**
  1. India need to ensure equitable, stable and predictable electricity.
  2. India should speed up the pace of broadband penetration with high spectrum bandwidth through private sector participation.

- **Increase Budgetary allocations:**
  1. India need to increase allocation, particularly for government schools to access computers.

- **Pedagogy improvement courses:**
  1. We need to launch courses for our teachers to train them in online teaching.
  2. Teachers should be encouraged to increase their basic computer literacy.

- **Pilot study should be conducted to assess performance & challenges.**

- **Industries should be encouraged to acknowledge online courses for jobs.**

- **On other hand, online cannot replace offline classroom education. Government should strengthen classroom education by creating hybrid model.**

- **Regulation:**
  1. Regulatory mechanism to prevent malpractices, fraudulent courses and control over fees as education is non-profitable business in India.

**Sources – Indian Express, The Hindu, Livemint, PIB, The Week**
1. Rajya Sabha Polls

Why is it in news?
- Recently Rajya Sabha Elections were held for 19 seats.

What is peculiar to the Rajya Sabha polls as far as the electorate is concerned?
- Only elected members of the State Legislative Assemblies can vote in a Rajya Sabha election.
- Voting is by single transferable vote, as the election is held on the principle of proportional representation.
- A single transferable vote means electors can vote for any number of candidates in order of their preference. A candidate requires a specified number of first preference votes to win.
- This is to avoid the principle of majority, which would mean that only candidates put up by ruling parties in the respective States will be elected.
- Candidates fielded by political parties have to be proposed by at least 10 members of the Assembly or 10% of the party’s strength in the House, whichever is less. For independents, there should be 10 proposers, all of whom should be members of the Assembly.

Why is there no secret ballot in the Rajya Sabha elections?
- The Rajya Sabha polls have a system of open ballot, but it is a limited form of openness.
- As a measure to check rampant cross-voting, which was taken to mean that the vote had been purchased by corrupt means, the system of each party MLA showing his or her marked ballots to the party’s authorised agent, before they are put into the ballot box, has been introduced.
- Showing a marked ballot to anyone other than one’s own party’s authorised agent will render the vote invalid. Not showing the ballot to the authorised agent will also mean that the vote cannot be counted.
- And independent candidates are barred from showing their ballots to anyone.
- However, party whip is not applicable here.

Why does not ‘None of the Above’, or NOTA, apply to the Rajya Sabha polls?
- In 2018, the Supreme Court of India struck down the provision, holding that the ‘none of the above’ option is only for general elections held on the basis of universal adult suffrage, and cannot be applied to indirect elections based on proportional representation.

2. Institution in news: National Human Rights Commission

Why is it in news?
- National Human Rights Commission is established under Protection of Human Rights Act 1993, which was amended in 2019.

| Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 | Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Act, 2019 |
## Composition of NHRC

1. Chairperson to be Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.
2. Two other members knowing human rights.

## Composition of NHRC

1. Chairperson to be Chief Justice or Judge of the Supreme Court.
2. Three members of which at least one to be women.
3. Other Members of the Commission.
   - National Commission for Scheduled Castes.
   - National Commission for Backward Classes.
   - National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.
   - National Commission for Women.
   - Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities.

## Chairperson of SHRC: Chief Justice of a High Court.

## Term of office: Chairperson and members of both NHRC and SHRC will be five years or age of seventy years, whichever is earlier.

## Term of office:

1. Three years or till the age of seventy years, whichever is earlier.
2. Reappointment of members of the NHRC and SHRCs for a period of five years.

## Secretary-General of NHRC and Secretary of a SHRC to exercise powers as delegated to them.

## Secretary-General and Secretary to exercise all administrative and financial powers (except judicial functions), subject to the respective chairperson’s control.

The Central government may confer on an SHRC human rights functions being discharged by Union Territories.

Functions relating to human rights in the case of Delhi will be dealt with by the NHRC.

### 3. Institution in news: National Investigation Agency (NIA)

**About NIA:**

- NIA is established under NIA act 2008, enacted after Mumbai terror attack.
- It functions as the Central Counter Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency in India.
- **Scheduled offences:** The schedule to the Act specifies a list of offences which are to be investigated and prosecuted by the NIA.
  1. These include offences under Acts such as the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967.
  2. 2019 amendment to NIA act 2008 added the following offences (i) human trafficking, (ii) offences related to counterfeit currency or bank notes, (iii) manufacture or sale of prohibited arms, (iv) cyber-terrorism, and (v) offences under the Explosive Substances Act, 1908.

**Jurisdiction of the NIA:**

1. The officers of the NIA have the same powers as other police officers in relation to investigation of above mentioned offences,
across India.

(2) 2019 amendment increased the jurisdiction scheduled offences committed outside India, subject to international treaties and domestic laws of other countries.

(3) The Special Court in New Delhi will have jurisdiction over these cases.

4. Secrecy of Ballot is cornerstone of free and fair election

Why is it in news?

◆ The Supreme Court Held that Secrecy of ballot is the cornerstone of free and fair elections.

SC Judgement:

◆ It is the policy of law to protect the right of voters to secrecy of the ballot.

◆ Even a remote or distinct possibility that a voter can be forced to disclose for whom she has voted would act as a positive constraint and a check on the freedom to exercise of franchise.

◆ The principle of secrecy of ballots is an important postulate of constitutional democracy.

◆ Section 94 of the Representation of People Act, which upholds the privilege of the voter to maintain confidentiality about her choice of vote.

◆ A voter can also voluntarily waive the privilege of non-disclosure.

5. HC allows unmarried woman to terminate 23-week pregnancy

Why is it in news?

◆ The Bombay High Court has allowed a 23-year-old unmarried woman to terminate her 23-week pregnancy and observed that continuing it will lead to a risk of “grave physical and mental injury to her”.

Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971

◆ A pregnancy may be terminated by a registered medical practitioner:

(1) Where the length of the pregnancy does not exceed twelve weeks, or.

(2) Where the length of the pregnancy exceeds twelve weeks but does not exceed twenty weeks.

◆ In this case, the abortion will take place, if not less than two registered medical practitioners are of opinion, that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the pregnant woman (her physical or mental health); or there is a substantial risk that if the child were born, it would suffer from some physical or mental abnormalities to be seriously handicapped.

(1) Beyond 20 weeks the courts have to decide.

6. Centre pitches for Rs. 10 lakh crore for panchayats from 15th Finance Commission

Why is it in news?

◆ The Panchayati Raj Ministry has pitched for a fivefold increase in Finance Commission funding for rural local bodies.

Details:

◆ In a meeting with the 15th Finance Commission, the Ministry asked for Rs. 10 lakh crore to be allocated for the 2020-21 to 2025-26 period, in comparison to the Rs. 2 lakh crore allocated under the 14th Finance Commission.

◆ It noted that allocations had tripled between the 13th and 14th Commissions as well.

◆ The 2.63 lakh panchayats across the country have 29 functions under their ambit, according to the 11th Schedule of the Constitution.
Road construction and maintenance, as well as drinking water supply have been the major projects carried out by panchayats using FC grants.

7. **OBC sub-categorisation commission gets six-month extension**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Union Cabinet approved a six-month extension to the commission appointed to examine sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes.

**Details:**
- The Central government had established commission under the chairpersonship of retired Delhi High Court Chief Justice G. Rohini.
- The commission is established to look into the issues of communities that were not getting the benefits of reservation under OBC category.
1. Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF)

Why is it in news?
- The RBI has created a Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF) to encourage acquirers to deploy Points of Sale (PoS) infrastructure.
- The acquirers will be encouraged to deploy both physical and digital modes in tier-3 to tier-6 centres and North - Eastern states.
- The PIDF will be governed through an Advisory Council and managed and administered by RBI.

Importance:
- To provide fillip to digitisation of payment systems, it is necessary to give impetus to acceptance infrastructure across the country, more so in under-served areas.
- Most of the POS terminals in the country are concentrated in tier 1 and 2 cities and towns and other regions have been left out.

Funding:
- RBI will make an initial contribution of Rs. 250 crore to the PIDF, covering half of the fund.
- The remaining contribution will be from card-issuing banks and card networks operating in the country.
- PIDF will also receive recurring contributions to cover operational expenses from card-issuing banks and card networks.

2. Operation Twist

Why is it in news?
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has scheduled another round of bond sale and purchase auction of Rs. 10,000 crore each on July 2.

Details:
- RBI will purchase longer tenure government bonds, that are maturing in 2027, 2029, 2031 and 2033, while selling four securities of shorter maturity, two of them maturing this year and two next year.

More about Operation Twist:
- It refers to purchase and sale of government securities under Open Market Operations.
- Operation Twist is primarily aimed at managing yields.
- The move will help soften the yields on long tenure bonds that have stayed elevated and help the government in borrowing funds at a lower rate.
3. RBI to supervise cooperative banks

Why is it in news?
- The Centre has decided to bring all urban and multi-State cooperative banks under the supervision of the RBI, in order to protect depositors.
- The Union Cabinet approved an ordinance to this effect.

Details:
- The number of urban cooperatives and multi-State cooperative banks is 1,540.
- They have a depositor base of 8.6 crore, who have saved Rs. 4.84 lakh crore, a huge amount.

Background:
- The move to bring the urban and multi-State coop. banks under the supervision of the RBI comes after several instances of fraud and serious financial irregularities.
- In September, the RBI was forced to supercede the PMC Bank’s board and impose strict restrictions.

Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana:
- The Cabinet approved a scheme to provide interest subvention of 2% for a 12-month period to small borrowers with loans up to Rs. 50,000 under the Shishu category of the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana.
- This relief had been announced as part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat package last month.

4. NPCI denies breach of BHIM app data

Why is it in news?
- The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has denied the claim of data breach in BHIM app.
- The security researchers had alleged leak of personal data of millions of users of the BHIM payment application due to a website breach.

About National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI):
- NPCI is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India.
- It is an initiative of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Indian Banks’ Association (IBA).
- It was established under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, for creating a robust Payment & Settlement Infrastructure in India (for both physical as well as electronic payment and settlement systems).
- It has been incorporated as a “Not for Profit” Company under the provisions of Companies Act.
- Headquarter- Mumbai.

Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In):
- CERT-In is an office within the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- Operational from 2004, CERT-In is a nodal agency to deal with cyber security threats like hacking and phishing.
- Its objective is to protect Indian cyberspace and software infrastructure against destructive and hacking activities.

Government Policies and Taxation

5. Street vendors to get credit without collateral
Why is it in news?
- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs launched a micro-credit scheme for street vendors.
- The scheme was announced by Finance Minister in May as part of the economic package for those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown.

About Pradhan Mantri Street Vendor’s AtmaNirbhar Nidhi Scheme:
- Under the scheme, vendors will be able to apply for a working capital loan of up to Rs. 10,000, which is repayable in monthly instalments within a year. The loans would be without collateral.
- It will benefit over 50 lakh vendors who had their businesses operational on or before March 24.
- The scheme is valid till March 2022.
- On timely/early repayment of the loan, an interest subsidy of 7% per annum will be credited to the bank accounts of beneficiaries.
- An online portal and mobile application were being developed to ensure speedy implementation of the scheme.

6. SWADES scheme

Why is it in news?
- The government launched a new initiative SWADES (Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support) under the Vande Bharat Mission.

More about the scheme:
- The scheme has been launched to conduct a skill mapping exercise and provide employment opportunities to the returning citizens.
- This is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Ministry of External Affairs.
- **Aim:** To create a database of qualified citizens based on their skillsets and experience to tap into and fulfil demand of Indian and foreign companies.
- The collected information will be shared with the companies for suitable placement opportunities in the country.
- The data will help the citizens with job prospects and bridge the demand-supply gap.

7. TULIP Scheme

Why is it in news?
- The Central government launched a scheme to provide internship opportunities with smart cities and urban local bodies for 25,000 fresh graduates, mostly from technical courses.
- However, there is no guarantee that these interns will get paid any stipend.

More about TULIP:
- TULIP (The Urban Learning Internship Programme) scheme is a five-year joint venture between Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and the All India Council for Technical Education.
- City administrations can register available opportunities on the portal, ranging from positions in urban planning or water supply and waste management to slum improvement and digital governance.
- Applicants must be Indian citizens who have completed their final year of college within the last 18 months.
- Internship durations can range from eight weeks to one year.
- The programme does not have any budget of its own.
8. ‘Country of origin’ must on GeM platform

Why is it in news?
- The Union government has made it mandatory for all sellers on the Government e-Marketplace (GeM), to list the country of origin while registering new products.
- GeM is a platform for public procurement.
- The move is said to be a push to promote local products.

Local content:
- The changes to the GeM are in line with Centre’s Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India policies.
- Buyers on the platform can now see the percentage of local content in various products.
- They can also switch on a new Make in India filter to see products that match their preferences on local content.

About GeM:
- GeM is a one stop portal to facilitate online procurement of common use Goods & Services required by various Government Departments / Organizations / PSUs.
- It is a Special Purpose Vehicle under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- **Aim:** To enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement.

9. MSP Hike for Kharif Crops

Why is it in news?
- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved an increase in the minimum support prices (MSPs) for all mandated kharif crops like paddy, pulses etc. for the 2020-21 marketing season.
- The crops includes, cotton, nigerseed, sesamum, urad, tur, maize.
- The increase is based on the principle that MSP should be at least 1.5 times of the all-India weighted average cost of production.
- The Union Cabinet also extended the repayment date for standard short-term loans upto Rs. 3 lakh for agriculture and allied activities, till August 31, 2020.

About MSP:
- MSP is recommended by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), a decentralised agency under Agriculture ministry, government of India.
- MSP is price fixed by Government of India to protect the farmers against excessive fall in price during bumper production years.
- MSP announced for both RABI and Kharif SEASONS.
- CACP has categorised three types of cost of production (CoP): A2, A2+FL and C2.
  1. A2 represents actual cost of farming including seeds, fertilisers and hired labours.
  2. A2+FL represents family workers in addition to A2.
  3. C2 represents the cost of land rentals or interest on invested capital in addition to A2+FL.

10. Equity infusion for MSMEs

Why is it in news?
- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved Rs. 50,000 crore equity infusion for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).
- **Aim:** To help MSMEs to enhance capacity and encouraging them to get listed.
- The MSME Minister said that big industry people buy and sell stocks in the share market, but the
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facility was not available for MSMEs.

New MSME Definition:
- The Cabinet Committee also approved the new definition of MSMEs by increasing the limits.
- **For micro enterprises:** The investment limit will be Rs. 1 crore and turnover Rs. 5 crore.
- **For small enterprises:** The investment limit will be Rs. 10 crore and the turnover Rs. 50 crore.
- **For medium enterprises:** The investment limit to Rs. 50 crore and turnover to Rs. 250 crore.

Previous MSME Classification:
- A micro enterprise is an enterprise where investment in plant and machinery does not exceed Rs. 25 lakh.
- A small enterprise is an enterprise where the investment in plant and machinery is more than Rs. 25 lakh but does not exceed Rs. 5 crore.
- A medium enterprise is an enterprise where the investment in plant and machinery is more than Rs. 5 crore but does not exceed Rs. 10 crore.

Significance of MSMEs in India:
- The sector accounts for about 45% of manufacturing output.
- It accounts for more than 40% of exports, over 28% of gross domestic product and employs about 111 million people.

11. Empowered group of secretaries (EGoS)

Why is it in news?
- The Union Cabinet approved the setting up of an empowered group of secretaries (EGoS) for attracting investments to India.
- The group is formed in context of COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that investment is enhanced in India.
- Simultaneously in every Ministry, there will be a project development cell.

Composition of EGoS:
- The EGoS would be chaired by the Cabinet Secretary.
- It would include the Secretary of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade as member convenor.
- **Other Members:** NITI Aayog CEO, the Commerce Secretary, the Revenue Secretary and the Economic Affairs Secretary as members.
- The Secretary of the Department concerned would be co-opted, depending on the project.

The Anticipated benefits of EGoS and Project Development Cell:
- It will make India a more investor-friendly destination.
- It would help domestic industries and lead to direct and indirect employment.
- It would reinforce India’s vision of becoming a $5 trillion economy by 2024-25.

12. Cabinet nod for Agriculture Marketing Reforms

Why is it in news?
- The Union Cabinet has approved three important ordinances in a move towards agriculture reforms.
- The first is an amendment to the 65-year-old Essential Commodities Act. The amendment removed cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from the list of essential commodities.
- Cabinet approved the second ordinance to remove restrictions on farmers selling their produce
outside notified market yards (APMCs).

- The third ordinance is to facilitate contract farming and allow farmers to engage in direct marketing.

**The Essential Commodities Act (ECA):**

- It was enacted way back in 1955.
- It has since been used by the Government to regulate the production, supply and distribution of a whole host of commodities it declares ‘essential’ in order to make them available to consumers at fair prices.
- The list of items under the Act include drugs, fertilisers, pulses and edible oils, and petroleum and petroleum products.
- If the Centre finds that a certain commodity is in short supply and its price is spiking, it can notify stock-holding limits on it for a specified period.
- This improves supplies and brings down prices.

**Why was it important?**

- The ECA gives consumers protection against irrational spikes in prices of essential commodities.
- The Government has invoked the Act umpteen times to ensure adequate supplies.
- It cracks down on hoarders and black-marketeers of such commodities.

**But there is another side to the story:**

- Given that almost all crops are seasonal, ensuring round-the-clock supply requires adequate build-up of stocks during the season.
- Also, there can be genuine shortages triggered by weather-related disruptions in which case prices will move up.
- So, if prices are always monitored, farmers may have no incentive to farm.
- With too-frequent stock limits, traders also may have no reason to invest in better storage infrastructure.
- Also, food processing industries need to maintain large stocks to run their operations smoothly. Stock limits curtail their operations. In such a situation, large scale private investments are unlikely to flow into food processing and cold storage facilities.

**Amendments to ECA 1955:**

- The amendment to the ECA will deregulate the production, storage, movement and distribution of these food commodities.
- By removing the private sector’s fears of “excessive regulatory interference,” the Centre hopes to increase private and foreign investment, especially in cold storage facilities and the modernisation of the food supply chain.
- Adequate processing and storage facilities will reduce wastage and increase income for farmers of perishable commodities.
- **Protection of Consumer is ensured:** The amendment allows regulation during war, famine, extraordinary price rise and natural calamity.

**The Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020:**

- It aims to open up agricultural marketing outside notified mandis for farmers, and also remove barriers to inter-State trade.
- By allowing the farmer more choices, it will raise his income and also reduce wastage and improve quality.
- Centre hopes that farmers will benefit, rather than middlemen.

**States may object:**

- Not all States have been on board with these reforms, especially as State governments will not be
allowed to levy fees on these sales.

- While both agriculture and markets are State subjects, the Centre is counting on the fact that trade and commerce in foodstuffs is part of the concurrent list to push through its ordinance.

**The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020:**

- It is aimed at facilitating contract farming, where a private buyer contracts to purchase a crop at a certain price at the beginning of a season.
- It transfers the risk of market unpredictability from the farmer to the corporate sponsor.

### 13. Jal Jeevan Mission

**Why is it in news?**

- The Jal Shakti Ministry has written to various States that returning labour, especially those working in the construction sector may be deployed to expedite the completion of works under the Jal Jeevan Mission.
- The arrangement could provide employment to the currently unemployed workers.

**Details:**

- A huge demand for work has been created because of returning workers.
- The allocations under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) have already been hiked by Rs. 40,000 crore over and above the Rs 60,000 crore already allocated.
- While the MGNREGA is an old programme, the new Jal Jeevan Mission also has funds on its part.

**About Jal Jeevan Mission:**

- Jal Jeevan Mission, is envisioned to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India.
- Jal Shakti Ministry is the nodal ministry for the implementation of the scheme.
- The programme will also implement source sustainability measures as mandatory elements, such as recharge and reuse through grey water management, water conservation, rain water harvesting.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission will be based on a community approach to water.

### 14. Van Dhan Yojana

**Why is it in news?**

- The hill broom project in north-east is one of the biggest success stories of the Van Dhan Yojana.

**Details:**

- Pradhan Mantri VanDhan Yojana(PMVDY) was launched to strengthen tribal producer companies.
- It ensure that forest wealth, stays in the hands of forest dwellers, by providing local platforms for processing, value addition, marketing and sale of minor forest produce.

**Tech for Tribal Initiative:**

- The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) recently launched the “Tech for Tribal” project.
- It is a tribal entrepreneurship and skill development program.
- The initiative is supported by Ministry of MSME.
- It aims at capacity building and imparting entrepreneurship skills to tribal forest produce gatherers enrolled under the Pradhan Mantri VanDhan Yojana(PMVDY).
- TRIFED is a national-level apex organization functioning under the administrative control of
15. Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan

Why is it in news?
- Prime Minister will launch Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan on June 20.
- The scheme is to offer immediate employment opportunities to migrant workers who have returned to their villages because of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Details:
- As per official statement, out of an estimated 1 crore migrant workers who have returned to their villages, 67 lakh workers are expected to benefit from this scheme.
- Public works worth Rs. 50,000 crore would be carried out in these districts to provide immediate relief to these workers.

Skill Mapping:
- As per the Finance Minister, the Central and State governments have mapped the skill sets of the migrant workers who have returned in large numbers to the 116 districts in 6 States.
- Workers will be employed in rural housing, rural connectivity, national highways, railway works, community sanitation etc.
- The scheme will see a coordination between 12 different Ministries/Departments.

16. Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana

Why is it in news?
- Ten Chief Ministers have demanded an extension of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana.
- The scheme was announced by Union Finance Minister as part of the first rescue package to deal with the economic crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- According to sources, an extension of three months will cost the government Rs. 46,000 crore.

State’s Argument:
- The purchasing power of people, those who returned to their villages have reduced drastically.
- They are now largely dependent on 100 days of work promised under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

About Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana:
- Under the scheme, 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 i.e. Each one of them would be provided double of their current entitlement over next three months.
- Roughly about two-thirds of India’s population would be covered under this scheme.
- This additionality would be free of cost.
- Also the total of 20.40 crores PMJDY women account-holders would be given an ex-gratia of Rs 500 per month for next three months.

17. Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund

Why is it in news?
- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved setting up of Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) worth Rs. 15000 crore.
- Setting up of new fund is in pursuance of recently announced Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package for ensuring growth in several sectors.
More about AHIDF:
- AHIDF would incentivise investments in dairy and meat processing infrastructure and value addition infrastructure.
- The eligible beneficiaries under the Scheme:
  1. Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)
  2. MSMEs
  3. Section 8 Companies
  4. Private Companies and individual entrepreneur with minimum 10% margin money contribution by them.
- The balance 90% would be the loan component to be made available by scheduled banks.
- Government of India will provide 3% interest subvention to eligible beneficiaries.
- There will be 2 years moratorium period for principal loan amount and 6 years repayment period thereafter.

Miscellaneous

18. Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)

Why is it in news?
- Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) is released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Findings of the Survey:
- India’s unemployment rate decreased to 5.8% in 2018-19 compared to 2017-18.
- Unemployment rate is increased in Scheduled Caste population from 6.3% to 6.4%.
- Unemployment rate is increased in Scheduled Tribes population from 4.3% to 4.5%.
- Unemployment rate is decreased in OBC population from 6% to 5.9%.
- Youth in age group 15-29 – unemployment rate moderated but remained high – from 17.8% to 17.3%.
- Unemployment for urban females remained high at 25.7%, but decreased compared to last year
- Unemployment rate in both urban and rural areas – moderately decreased.
- Labour participation increased from 36.9 to 37.5%.

About Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS):
- The objective of PLFS is primarily twofold:
  1. To estimate the key employment and unemployment indicators in the short time interval of three months for the urban areas only in the Current Weekly Status (CWS).
  2. To estimate employment and unemployment indicators in both usual status (ps+ss) and CWS in both rural and urban areas annually.

19. India–China Trade Deficit

Why is it in news?
- According to a research study, India can potentially reduce its trade deficit with China by $8.4 billion over FY21-22.
- $8.4 billion is equivalent to 17.3% of the deficit with China and 0.3% of India’s GDP.
More from the Study:
- The reduction in the deficit can be achieved by the rationalisation of just a quarter of India’s imports from China.
- Rationalisation of select sectors where India has well-established manufacturing capabilities.
- The domestic manufacturing sector can substitute 25% of the total imports from specified sectors in the first phase.

India- China Trade Scenario:
- India’s import from China stood at $65.1 billion and export of $16.6 billion in FY20.
- India recorded a trade deficit of $48.5 billion with China in FY20. In the past 3 decades, India’s exports to China grew at a CAGR of 30% but its imports expanded at 47%, leading to lower capacity utilisation of domestic players in a few sectors.

20. Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS)

Why is it in news?
- The Finance Ministry said public sector banks have disbursed Rs. 16,031.39 crore till June 12, under the Rs. 3-lakh crore Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) for the MSME sector.
- The scheme is the biggest fiscal component of the Rs. 20-lakh crore Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package.

More about Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS):
- ECLGS has 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.
- **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.

21. Too many aspirants for MGNREGS jobs

Why is it in news?
- The COVID-19 induced reverse migration has brought many families to their native places.
- The onus is now on creating more person days under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).
- The sheer magnitude of reverse migration makes it very tough for the administration to create jobs for all under a single scheme i.e. MGNREGS.

About MGNREGA 2005:
- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), guarantees 100 days of unskilled manual work to all rural households in India.
- **Aim:** To enhance the livelihood security of people in rural areas.
- **Applying for a job card:**
  1. A household has to apply for a MGNREGA job card from their Gram Panchayat (elected village council).
  2. Each household is entitled to one job card. However, each card can have any number of names on it from that household.
Work under MGNREGA:
(1) Under the Act every Gram Panchayat (village council) should have an annual MGNREGA plan.
(2) The types of unskilled work which households are eligible to undertake under the MGNREGA could include constructing roads, dams, wells, plantations or developing land.

22. Foreign Exchange Reserves

Why is it in news?
- India’s foreign exchange reserves crossed $500 billion for the first time as the Reserve Bank of India builds up a war chest.
- India’s forex reserves surged by $8.2 billion during the week ended June 5.
- It is the biggest weekly jump since September 2007.
- The increase in reserves was mainly due to a rise in foreign currency assets.

About Forex Reserves:
- Foreign exchange reserves are reserve assets held by a central bank in foreign currencies.
- The forex reserve is also kept as a cushion against any potential balance of payment related crisis.
- India’s foreign exchange reserves comprises of (i) Foreign currency assets (FCA), (ii) Gold, (iii) Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) and (iv) Reserve tranche position (RTP) in the International Monetary Fund.

23. AIIB clears $750-mn loan to India for COVID-19

Why is it in news?
- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has approved a $750-million loan to India to help strengthen its response to the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB): 
- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a multilateral development bank headquartered in Beijing.
- Mission: To improve social and economic outcomes in Asia, and beyond.
- The bank opened in January 2016 and now has 86 approved members worldwide.
- Its purpose is to provide finance to infrastructure development and regional connectivity projects in Asia-Pacific region.
- China is largest shareholder of AIIB with 31.02% voting shares. India with 8.72% vote share is second largest shareholder followed by Russia, Germany and South Korea.
Bilateral and Multilateral Relations

1. India-Australia meet strengthens ties

Why is it in news?
- India and Australia held virtual summit.

Key Takeaways:
- India and Australia raised their relationship to a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.”
- India and Australia concluded a Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) and issued a joint declaration on a “Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.”
- MLSA will allow both militaries the reciprocal use of bases, humanitarian and disaster relief cooperation, port exercises, and passage exercises.
- The two countries agreed to take the “2+2” format of bilateral meetings to the level of Foreign and Defence Ministers, who will meet to “discuss strategic issues” at least every two years.
- The two leaders had not discussed China-India border dispute and Australia for “Malabar” or quadrilateral maritime exercises.
- Other agreements announced included:
  1. A framework arrangement on cyber technology.
  2. MoU on mining and processing critical and strategic minerals including Australian rare earth metals used for electronics.
  3. Governance, vocational training and water management.
- Join statement on Indo-Pacific: Both India and Australia share a vision of a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region.

2. India- Bhutan

Why is it in news?
- India and Bhutan signed a pact for the construction of the 600 MW Kholongchhu project.

About Kholongchu project:
- It is the first time an India-Bhutan hydropower project will be constructed as a 50:50 joint venture, not as a government-to-government agreement.
- The Kholongchhu project is one of four additional projects agreed to in 2008, as a part of India’s commitment to help Bhutan create a total 10,000 MW of installed capacity by 2020.

MoU between India and Bhutan for Environment Cooperation:
- The Union Cabinet approved the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bhutan for cooperation in the field of environment protection and management of natural resources.
- The MoU will enable establishment and promotion of closer and long-term cooperation in
environment protection and management of natural resources on the basis of equity, reciprocity and mutual benefits.

- It will cover air, waste, chemical management, climate change and other areas and will remain in force for 10 years from the date of signing.

### 3. India to take part in meeting of RIC grouping

**Why is it in news?**
- India will participate in the virtual meeting of the Russia-India-China (RIC) grouping, the Ministry of External Affairs confirmed.

**Details:**
- This meeting can help in de-escalation of tensions between India and China.
- RIC as a strategic grouping first took shape in the late 1990s under the leadership of Yevgeny Primakov, Russian diplomat and politician, as “a counterbalance to the Western alliance.”

### 4. Who does Galwan Valley belong to?

**Why is it in news?**
- China has claimed sovereignty over Galwan valley which has been refuted by India.

**Where is Galwan Valley?**

- The LAC lies east of the confluence of the Galwan and Shyok rivers in the valley, up to which both India and China have been patrolling in recent years.

**What do maps tell us?**
- The 1956 map showed the entire Galwan Valley as a part of India. However, in June 1960 China put out a map claiming sovereignty over the valley.
- A Chinese map from November 1962 also claims the entire valley, but subsequent maps have not shown the western tip of the river as a part of China.

**About Pangong Tso lake:**
- Pangong Tso lake is endorheic (Landlocked) lake situated in the Himalayas, extending from India to China.
- Around 60% of the length of the lake lies in Tibet (China).
- The one factor that makes this Lake so popular is the fact that it keeps changing colors.
The name of the lake Pangong was got from a Tibetan word Banggong Co that means a narrow and enchanted lake.

The brackish water lake freezes over in winter, and becomes ideal for ice skating and polo.

5. **India pledges support to Nepal temple**

**Why is it in news?**

- India has pledged to construct a Rs. 2.33 crore sanitation facility at the Pashupatinath temple complex to improve the infrastructure in the holy shrine for pilgrims.

**Details:**

- The project would be constructed under the Nepal-Bharat Maitri: Development Partnership as a high impact community development scheme by India.
- The Pashupatinath temple, is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

6. **India, China nuclear arsenals grow’**

**Why is it in news?**

- All nations that have nuclear weapons continue to modernise their nuclear arsenals, while India and China increased their nuclear warheads in the last one year, according to a latest report by Swedish think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

**Details:**

- According to report:
  1. China is in the middle of a significant modernisation of its nuclear arsenal. It is developing a so-called nuclear triad for the first time, made up of new land and sea-based missiles and nuclear-capable aircraft.
  2. India and Pakistan are slowly increasing the size and diversity of their nuclear forces.
  3. The nuclear arsenals of the nuclear-armed states other than the United States and Russia were considerably smaller but all these states were either developing or deploying new weapon systems or had announced their intention to do so, it noted.
  4. **Decrease in number**: Together the nine nuclear-armed states, the U.S., Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea, possessed an estimated 13,400 nuclear weapons at the start of 2020, which marked a decrease from.

7. **India, China press ahead with aid**

**Why is it in news?**

- Nepal has decided not to accept medical teams from either India or China.

**Details:**

- As cases of coronavirus increase in countries across South Asia and some of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) countries, both India and China are pressing ahead with medical supplies, including medicines and protective gear, as well as offers of medical teams to be stationed there.

**SAARC countries**

- With nearly 6,00,000 cases now, the eight SAARC countries (India, Pakistan, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan) account for about 7.5% of the world total of 7.9 million COVID-19 cases, and about 3% of global coronavirus deaths.
- According to its “Health Silk Road” initiative, China has sent 29 medical expert teams to 27 countries, including military medical teams to Pakistan, Laos and Myanmar.
8. **China disregarding historical commitments on Naku La, say defence experts**

*Why is it in news?*
- There skirmishes at Nathula pass between India and China last month, which is considered as settled territory.

*Sikkim – Tibet Conventions 1890:*
- According to the Convention, the boundary in the area is based on the watershed principles.
- The treaty clearly mentions names of mountains and rivers. The geographic alignment of the features are so prominent that it could easily be identified and recognized.
- Besides Sikkim’s merger with India 1975, China accepted this as border between Tibet and Sikkim.
- But recent claims by China are contrary to this.

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**International Events**

9. **China to join UN arms trade treaty**

*Why is it in news?*
- China announced that it will join a global pact to regulate arms sales and that it is committed to efforts to “enrich peace and stability” in the world.
- It comes after U.S. President Donald Trump announced plans last year to pull the U.S. out of the agreement — which entered into force in 2014.

*About UN Arms Trade Treaty:*
- It establishes common standards for the international trade of conventional weapons and seeks to reduce the illicit arms trade.
- The treaty aims to reduce human suffering caused by illegal and irresponsible arms transfers, improve regional security and stability, as well as to promote accountability and transparency by state parties concerning transfers of conventional arms.
- The ATT does not place restrictions on the types or quantities of arms that may be bought, sold, or possessed by states. It also does not impact a state’s domestic gun control laws or other firearm ownership policies.

10. **Intra-Afghan talks to begin soon: Abdullah‘Khalilzad is talking to Taliban delegates’**

*Why is it in news?*
- The Afghanistan government is preparing for the first round of intra-Afghanistan talks with the Taliban “soon”, said Abdullah Abdullah.

*Details:*
- The intra-Afghan dialogue will also see more calls for the Indian government to engage the Taliban.
- In the past few weeks, both Russia and USA envoys in, have said in separate interviews that they...
feel it is time for India to give up its opposition to talks with the Taliban which New Delhi has thus far seen as a terror group allied to Pakistan.

11. India attends FATF group meet online

**Why is it in news?**
- Indian attended the online of the 32nd special Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (EAG) plenary meeting, under the aegis of the Financial Action Task Force.

**Details:**
- The EAG is a regional body comprising nine countries: India, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus.
- It is an associate member of the FATF.

**About (Financial Action Task Force) FATF:**
- It is the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog.
- As a policy-making body, the FATF works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in these areas.
- The FATF has developed the FATF Recommendations, or FATF Standards, which ensure a co-ordinated global response to prevent organised crime, corruption and terrorism.
- The FATF monitors countries to ensure they implement the FATF Standards fully and effectively, and holds countries to account that do not comply.

12. IAEA begins meet over Iran’s n-programme

**Why is it in news?**
- The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) expressed “serious concern” in a report earlier this month that Iran has been blocking inspections at the sites.

**Details:**
- Iran has reportedly started its enrichment facilities after USA pulled out of Nuclear deal and put sanctions on it.
- Under the deal, Iran agreed to limit its sensitive nuclear activities and allow in international inspectors in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions.

**About IAEA:**
- The International Atomic Energy Agency is the world's central intergovernmental forum for scientific and technical co-operation in the nuclear field.
- It works for the safe, secure and peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology, contributing to international peace and security and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

13. Israel’s annexation plans are illegal, says UN human rights chief

**Why it is in news?**
- Israel has announced to annexed the 30% part of West Bank.

**More on News:**
- Israel’s plan is in line with proposed Middle East plan by USA President.
- United Nations Human Rights Chief called this annexation as illegal.
- This move by Israel has been condemned internationally.

Why is it in news?

- The alleged custodial death in Tamil Nadu jails has triggered the debate about need for India to ratify United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT).

About UNCAT:

- India has signed UNCAT in 1997 but not yet ratified it.
- The Convention is an international human rights treaty which mandates a global prohibition on torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment and creates an instrument to monitor governments and hold them to account.
- The UNCAT was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1984 and came into force on 26 June 1987.
- The absolute prohibition on torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment is also accepted as a principle of customary international law.

15. India- a Non-Permanent UNSC Member

Why is it in news?

- India formally elected as non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC), for a two-year term starting January 1, 2021.
- India secured 184 of the 192 votes.
- This is the eighth time India occupied a non-permanent UNSC seat. The last was in 2011-2012.
- Along with India, Kenya, Ireland, Mexico and Norway obtained the requisite two-thirds majority in the General Assembly.

More about the process:

- The UNSC is composed of 15 members: five permanent members and 10 non-permanent members.
- The non-permanent members are elected are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms.
- So every year, the General Assembly elects five non-permanent members out of the total 10.

Distribution of the seats:

- The 10 non-permanent seats are distributed among the regions of the world.
- India was the only candidate for the vacancy from the Asia Pacific.
- India’s candidature for the seat was endorsed unanimously by the Asia Pacific group (55 countries), including Pakistan and China, last year.

India’s Agenda as Non-permanent member:

- Highlighting International terrorism.
- United Nations reforms and Security Council expansion.
- Streamlining the UN’s peacekeeping operations and technology initiatives.
- India’s overall objective: Achievement of N.O.R.M.S: a New Orientation for a Reformed Multilateral System.
16. **Govt. considering universal basic income, says NHRC**

**Why is it in news?**
- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has informed the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) that the recommended implementation of a universal basic income was “under examination and active consideration” of the Centre.

**Details:**
- As a part of the third round of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, which is done every four-and-a-half-years, the NHRC submitted its mid-term report to the UN agency recently.

**Universal Periodic Review**
- It involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States.
- The UPR is a State-driven process, under the auspices of the Human Rights Council, which provides the opportunity for each State to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to fulfil their human rights obligations.
- As one of the main features of the Council, the UPR is designed to ensure equal treatment for every country when their human rights situations are assessed.
- The ultimate aim of this mechanism is to improve the human rights situation in all countries and address human rights violations wherever they occur. Currently, no other universal mechanism of this kind exists.

17. **Trump targets ICC with sanctions**

**Why is it in news?**
- U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday issued an executive order authorising sanctions against individuals involved in an International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation into whether U.S. forces committed war crimes in Afghanistan.

**About International Criminal Court:**
- Governed by an international treaty called the Rome Statute, the ICC is the world’s first permanent international criminal court.
- The International Criminal Court (ICC) investigates and, where warranted, tries individuals charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression.
- The Court is participating in a global fight to end impunity, and through international criminal justice, the Court aims to hold those responsible accountable for their crimes and to help prevent these crimes from happening again.
- The Court cannot reach these goals alone. As a court of last resort, it seeks to complement, not replace, national Courts.

18. **Trump invites Modi for G-7 summit**

**Why is it in news?**
- U.S. President Donald Trump invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the next G-7 summit to be hosted by the U.S.
  (1) Trump also wants expand the list of invitees to include Australia, Russia, South Korea and India.
  (2) It was unclear whether Mr. Trump’s desire to invite the additional countries was a bid to permanently expand the G7.
(3) On several occasions, Trump had suggested Russia be added, given what he called Moscow’s global strategic importance.

About the G7 Group:
- The G7 (or Group of Seven) is an organisation made up of the world's seven advanced economies: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- The G-7 has its roots in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis.
- The group regards itself as "a community of values".
- **Principles of the group:**
  1. Freedom and human rights.
  2. Democracy and the rule of law.
- Each member nation takes over the G7 presidency for a year on a rolling basis and hosts the annual centrepiece two-day summit meeting.
Environment

1. LG polymer gas leak

Why is it in news?
- National Green Tribunal held that company has total liability for loss of life due to gas leak.
- Constituted committee for restoration plan.
- Leakage due to improper care of storage tank which led to auto polymerization of styrene releasing excess heat and get released as a vapour.

About Styrene Gas:
- It is poisonous and inflammable gas.
- Used for production of polystyrene plastics and resins.
- Short term exposure leads to mucous membrane and eye irritation, gastrointestinal effects.
- Long term exposure affects nervous system and might result into fatality.

2. Lockdown improved coastal ecosystems of Gulf of Mannar

Why is it in news?
- According to one study, covid-19 lockdown improved Gulf of Mannar coastal ecosystem.

Details:
- Study done by Suganthi Devadason Marine Research Institute (SDMRI).
- Reduction in the macro and meso-plastic pollution by 51% and 28% respectively.
- Increase in number of species of coral reef fishes at islands of Gulf of Mannar - Vaan, Koswari, Kariyachalli and Vilanguchali.
- Coral reef fish species - Scarus ghobban, Lutjanus, Lethrinus and Siganus.

- Scarus ghobban:
  - Also known as parrot fish.
  - Herbivorous reef fish.
  - Feeds on seaweeds.

3. Desert Locust Swarms

Why is it in news?
- Locust swarming in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Recent Developments:
- India is suffering one of the worst locust attacks in its history.
- Desert or yellow locusts have raided several districts in Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- Pakistan and Somalia have declared emergencies to control the pests.

About Locusts:
- Locusts are short-horned grasshoppers belong to the family Acrididae.
- Locusts differ from grasshoppers in that they have the ability to change their behaviour and habits.
and can migrate over large distances.
- They feed on green, leafy plants and always travel during the day time.
- When conditions are favourable for reproduction, locust numbers increase 20-fold in three months.
- It restricts itself to the semi-arid and arid deserts of Africa, west and south Asia that receive less than 200 mm of rain annually.
- Locust swarms devastate crops and cause major agricultural damage and attendant human misery such as famine and starvation.

4. Ozone and Safety of our Planet

Why is it in news?
- Scientists recorded the smallest ozone hole since 1982 above Antarctica in September 2019.

Details:
- **Ozone (O₃):**
  1. Allotrope of Oxygen.
  2. When chemical exists in more than one form due to arrangement or number of atoms, they are called as Allotropes.
  3. Made up of 3 oxygen atoms and extremely reactive gas.
  4. Naturally occurred in stratosphere.
  5. Formed through reaction between solar ultraviolet (UV) radiation with molecular oxygen (O₂).
- **Ozone Hole:**
  1. Term for are where ozone layer is damaged.
  2. Visible in stratosphere above Antarctica and Artic.
  3. Damage happened due to ozone reaction with compounds containing gaseous chlorine or bromine.
  4. All the coolants (used in refrigerators, air-conditioners) and aerosols in products like deodorants and aircraft fuel, release chloro-fluoro carbon (CFC) gases.
  5. Active forms of chlorine and bromine on the surfaces of cloud particles form in cold stratospheric layer which results into hole in polar regions.
- **Why smaller hole now?**
  1. Warmer Antarctica lowers stratosphere which minimize the formation of polar stratospheric clouds. It reduces damage to ozone.
  2. Strong weather systems had brought ozone rich air from higher latitudes.

5. Earthquakes in Delhi

Why is it in news?
- 11 mild earthquakes in Delhi since May.

Details:
- Most powerful of the 11 earthquakes was of magnitude 3.4.
- Area around Delhi - most dense concentration of seismometers anywhere in the country - even more than the Himalayan region.
- 16 out of 115 detectors in country are in Delhi.
- Delhi region does not lie on any fault lines or any plate boundary. So, prediction of earthquake is
difficult.

- In Delhi region occurrence of earthquakes is due to ‘internal deformities.

**Measurement of Earthquake:**

1. Magnitude of earthquake is measured on logarithmic scale.
2. Magnitude 6 – release of energy is equivalent to atom bomb of Hiroshima.
3. Magnitude 7 – 32 times more powerful compared to magnitude 6.
4. Magnitude 8 – 1000 times more powerful compared to magnitude 6.

- National Centre for Seismology in Delhi.
- National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI), Hyderabad.

6. **Challenger Deep - Kathy Sullivan has descended to the deepest known spot in the ocean**

**Why is it in news?**

- Astronaut and oceanographer Kathy Sullivan became first woman to descend into deepest spot in Mariana trench – ‘Challenger Deep.

**Details:**

- She was the first American to walk in space in 1984.
- Challenger Deep – 7 miles below the surface of Pacific Ocean.
- She is only person who walked in person and reached deepest point on ocean.
- Submersible named as ‘Limiting Factor’.
- **Challenger Deep:**
  1. Located in western Pacific Ocean.
  2. Approx. 36200 feet deep (average depth of ocean is 12100 feet).

7. **Asiatic lions**

**Why is it in news?**

- Gujarat witnessed rise of Asiatic lions to 674 in Gir forest- 15\textsuperscript{th} lion census in 2020.

**Details:**

- Grown by 29% since last census in 2015 – 523 lions in 2015.
- It is highest rise between two census years.
- 674 includes male, female and cubs.
- Distribution of lions expanded from 22000 sq. km in 2015 to 30000 sq. Km in 2020. That is Geographical area increased by 36%.
- **Strategies:**
  1. Community participation and habitat management.
  2. Increase in prey base, human-lion conflict mitigation.
  3. Use of technology.
  4. Healthcare including import of vaccines against infection of Canine Distemper Virus (CDV).

- In 2018 outbreak of CDV and babesiosis resulted into death of 36 lions.
- Male-female (ratio 161 males vs 260 females) considered as healthy.
- ‘Lion observation’ is an in-house exercise, conducted only by forest staff.
- First Lion Census was held by the Nawab of Junagadh in 1936.
● Since 1965, the Forest Department has been regularly conducting the Lion Census every five years.
● 6th, 8th and 11th Censuses were each delayed by a year, for various reasons.

**Criticism:**

- **Flaws in used method:**
  1. Method used in Direct Beat Verification or Block Count method.
  2. It involves observation of animals around water bodies/lakes in lions territorial area.
  3. Scientist at wildlife Institute of India – “it is 100 year old method – and cannot stand today’s scientific scrutiny”.
  4. Earlier, exercise includes officials, independent experts and observers from non-governmental organisations. But this year officials only were involved.
  5. Reduction of number of participants: Earlier 2000 officials used to be part of it. This year it involved 1400 officials.

- **New methods are scientifically more precise.**

- **Stand of ministry:**
  1. Wildlife is the domain of States.
  2. Organisations such the WII aided the National Tiger Conservation Authority in analysing tiger numbers, and in ensuring actual sightings and raw data were collected from the States.
  3. In case of lion, its single State Gujarat and it follows prescribed protocol.
  4. Camera traps are not suitable for lions as they don’t have distinguishable unique marks on body like tigers.
  5. CDV cases not reported in this year which has resulted into rise in number of Asiatic lions.

- **Increasing number a challenge:**
  1. According to expert of Gir lions 60% population is outside protected area.
  2. It resulted into underestimation of lions.
  3. If higher numbers of lions found it may force government to send some lions to alternate sanctuary of Kuno-Palpur in Madhya Pradesh.
  4. Lions Translocation is political issue and Gujarat is not ready to send lions to MP.

**8. MOSAiC Expedition**

**Why is it in news?**

- 390 day MOSAiC expedition is delayed due to outbreak of corona epidemic. The expedition has begun in September 2019.

**More about MOSAiC Expedition:**

- **MOSAiC** (Multidisciplinary drifting Observatory for the Study of Arctic Climate) is the largest polar expedition in history.
- The German research icebreaker *Polarstern* has set to sail from Tromsø, Norway, to spend a year drifting through the Arctic Ocean is trapped in ice.
- The goal of the MOSAiC expedition is to take the closest look ever at the Arctic as the epicenter of global warming and to gain fundamental insights that are key to better understand global climate change.
- Hundreds of researchers from 19 countries take part in this exceptional endeavour.
- Four icebreakers from Russia, China and Sweden will resupply the expedition with fuel and exchange personnel.
- MOSAiC is spearheaded by Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research (AWI).
The Indian fellow Vishnu Nandan will be among 300 scientists from across the world aboard the multidisciplinary drifting observatory.

Significance:
- The data gathered will be used by scientists around the globe to take climate research to a completely new level.
- MOSAiC will provide a more robust scientific basis for policy decisions on climate change mitigation and adaptation and for setting up a framework for managing Arctic development sustainably.

India in the Arctic region:
- The underground observatory ‘IndARC’ located between Norway and the North Pole and the ‘Himadri’ station which serves as a hub of Indian scientific investigation is located at Spitsbergen Island, Norway.

9. Pavagada solar park

Why is it in news?
- Environment and farmer welfare organisations of Karnataka has raised multiple concerns about project.

Details:
- Unscientific disposal of waste generated.
- Solar Panels consists of heavy metals like mercury, lead, zinc, and cadmium.
- Some companies bury them or some companies burn them. It contaminates soil, water and air.
- Increase in temperature in nearby villages due to reflection of light by panels.
- As park is spread for 13000 acres, people have to walk long distances for fetching water and firewood. Simultaneously, grazing ground is not existed for sheep.
- Lack of compensatory afforestation activities.

10. Mutation in Nilgiri wildlife

Why is it in news?
- Rare genetic condition has been developed in Nilgiri wildlife in last few years.

Details:
- Leucism is a condition which causes partial loss of pigmentation and manifests itself in a change in the skin pattern of the animal.
- Recently, Indian Gaur manifested Leucism.
- Previously, two tigers, a Sambar deer, and even a three-striped palm squirrel manifested Leucism in Nilgiris.

Environmentalists stand:
1. Fragmentation and isolation of wildlife populations are reasons for such condition.
2. Genetic mutation that causes leucism, albinism and melanism among wildlife populations.
3. Such mutations due to a number of underlying factors including in-breeding, pollution, environmental alterations, low-quality diet or follicular damage.
4. It might reduce immune system and consequently chance of survival.
- The upper Nilgiris is primarily comprised of 80% grassland and 20% Shola forest. Destruction of grasslands is responsible for isolation of animals.

11. Forecasting model predicts more hotter and rainy days
Why is it in news?

- India’s forecasting model visualized that subcontinent will witness increase in rainfalls and droughts.

Details:

- India’s first ever national forecast on the impact of global warming on the subcontinent.
- Model is developed by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune.
- These predictions will be part of the next report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).
- From 1986-2015, the hottest day and coldest night have warmed 0.63°C and 0.4°C, respectively.
- Report (compared to reference period of 1976-2005):
  1. By end of 21st century, hottest and coldest day is projected to rise by approx 4.7°C and 5.5°C, respectively.
  2. Above are hypothetical predictions if no steps taken to control GHG emissions (Also called as RCP8.5).
  3. Frequencies of future warm days and warm nights may rise by 55% and 70% resp.
  4. By end of 21st century, Summer hot waves will be increased 3-4 times.
  5. Recognized increase in aerosols due to fossil fuel burning, fertiliser use and natural processes.

- Role of aerosols:
  1. Absorb sunlight.
  2. Reduce to some extent the heating of the land and ocean surface due to global warming.
  3. Also promote clouding and increased intense rainfall over smaller areas.

12. Bombay HC seeks report of colour change of Lonar lake

Why is it in news?

- Nagpur bench of Bombay HC demanded Environment Impact Assessment report from NEERI and Geological Survey of India.

Details:

- Samples collected from lake sent to NEERI, Nagpur and Agarkar Research Institute, Pune.
- As per NASA expert, there is a glass formation on bedrock of Lonar crater and this feature not anywhere on the Earth, but exists only on beds of craters of moon.
- Lonar lake:
  1. Is made up of Basalt rock.
  2. Area is eco-sensitive zone.
  3. Large quantity of a unique material called ejecta blanket, which contains is a substance found on the moon.
- Forest department told court that Lonar-Kinhi road construction might threaten ejecta blanket.
- Court accepted this argument and ordered collector to take steps to protect material from possible theft and pilferage.
- It also ordered to prohibit construction of road till further notice.

13. Tripura to radio collar elephants to minimize man-animal conflict

Why is it in news?

- Tripura decided to tag elephants with radio collar to reduce man-animal conflict.

More on News

- Increased human interference in forests and illegal encroachments resulted into elephants in
habitations and destruction of crops.
- West Bengal, Assam, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, earlier took similar initiatives.
- Proposal to the National Highway Authorities of India (NHAI) authorities to make elevated roads in certain patches prone to elephant movement and leave underpasses beneath to allow the jumbos continue their ‘walk’.

14. Golden Langur and forced abortion

Why is it in news?
- Forced abortion due to electrocution of female golden langur.

Details:
- Ghee’s golden langur found in semi-evergreen and mixed-deciduous forests between India and Bhutan.
- In Assam, generally found at the confluence of 3 rivers – Brahmaputra, Manas and Sonkosh.
- Mostly use upper canopy of trees for travel.
- The groups are primarily of two types — one is all-male and the other is bisexual.
- Golden langur females maintain a gap of at least two years between babies. This gap can increase to three years depending on habitat conditions.

15. DRI busts syndicate smuggling exotic macaws from Bangladesh

Why is it in news?
- Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has busted a wildlife smuggling syndicate and seized consignment of exotic macaws which had been smuggled from Bangladesh to Kolkata.

Details:
- Joint operation by Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) and the Customs Department at the Kolkata airport.
- Birds identified as Hacinth Macaw, Pesquet’s Parrot, Severe Macaw and Hahn’s Macaw.
- Seized Macaws are protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
- Hyacinth macaw being accorded the highest protection.

Legal provisions:
1) Illegally imported birds are confiscated under Section 111 of the Customs Act, CITES provisions and the Foreign Trade Policy.
2) Sections 48 and 49 of the Wildlife Protection Act prohibits trade or commerce in wild animals, animal articles or trophies.
3) The accused can be sentenced to seven years of jail for the offence.
- Illegal wildlife trade was ranked the fourth largest transnational organised crime globally, after the smuggling of narcotics, counterfeit goods and human trafficking.

16. Heat waves in Arctic region

Why is it in news?
- Temperatures recorded over 38 degree Celsius in Siberian town Verkhoyansk in Arctic circle.

Details:
- Temperatures seem to have been 18 degree Celsius higher than normal in June.
- Earlier in June – Russia oil spill in into a local river called Ambarnaya.
Siberia has been recording higher-than-average surface air temperatures since January.

While the planet as a whole is warming, regions like Western Siberia stand out, since they are warming faster than average.

Another concern in region is wildfires.

Last heat waves in 2016 when temperatures above normal temperatures exceeding 16 degree Celsius in occurred at some locations.

**About Arctic circle:**
1. Climate inside the Arctic Circle is generally cold.
2. Gulf stream makes ports of Northern Norway and Northwest Russia ice free all year.
3. In the interior, summers can be quite warm, while winters are extremely cold.

Heat waves might melt frozen 'lid' of seabed permafrost and releases methane clathrates.

### 17. Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) draft notification 2020

**Why is it in news?**

Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar set the new deadline on June 30, limiting the extension to only 20 days for public feedback.

**Details:**

- Under Rule 5 (3) of the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986, the 60-day public notice period comes into effect “from the date on which copies of the Gazette containing this notification are made available to the public.

- Since the draft was published on April 11, the mandatory 60-day public notice period would end on June 10.

- Officials were seeking for the 60-day public notice period be extended by another 60 days due to lockdown.

- By setting June 30 as the new deadline, ministry settled for an extension of 20 days.

**Background:**


- Environment Protection Act (1984) was enacted after Bhopal gas tragedy.


- Norms to regulate activities that access, utilise, and affect (pollute) natural resources.

- EIA 1994 was replaced by 2006 EIA notification.

**Concerns of draft**

- Increased government’s discretion:
  1. Limited public engagement by providing lot of exemptions.
  2. No remedy for the political and bureaucratic stronghold on the EIA process and speeding up of process.

- Exemption to Projects of national defence and security:
  1. Such projects will be decided by government.
  2. Such projects’ information will not be put in public domain.

- Linear projects in border area:
  1. Linear projects such as roads and pipelines in border areas will not require any public hearing.
  2. The ‘border area’ is defined as “area falling within 100 kilometers aerial distance from bordering countries of India.

- Projects and national highways:
(1) Exemption from prior clearance to all inland waterways projects and expansion/widening of national highways.
(2) These include roads that cut through forests and dredging of major rivers.

**Construction projects:**
(1) Exempts most building construction projects of built-up area up to 1,50,000 sq m.
(2) This is a reiteration of the Environment Ministry’s December 2016 notification that was set aside by the National Green Tribunal in December 2017.

**Post-facto clearance:**
(1) Projects operating in violation of the Environment Act or without clearance will now be able to apply for clearance.
(2) In an order on April 1, the Supreme Court held “ex post facto environmental clearances” contrary to law.
(3) There is no scope for any public complaint about violations. Instead, the reliance is on the violators to disclose, suo motu, that they broke the law.

## 18. New rules to regulate exotic animals trade

**Why is it in news?**
- Environment ministry’s forest division introduced new rules to regulate import & export of ‘exotic wildlife species’.

**Details:**
- Currently, it is the Directorate-General of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce, that monitors such trade.
- The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau is an organisation that is tasked with monitoring illegal trade

**New rules:**
(1) Owners and possessors of such animals and birds must register their stock with the Chief Wildlife Warden of their States.
(2) Officials of the Wildlife Department will prepare an inventory of such species and have the right to inspect the facilities of such traders to check conditions of these plants and animals.
(3) Stockists will have six months to declare their stock.
(5) It will not include species from the Schedules of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

**CITES:**
(1) The CITES is part of a multilateral treaty that includes plant, animals and birds under varying categories of threat of extinction.
(2) It will be jointly protected by members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

**Financial Action Task Force (FATF)**’s first global report on the illegal wildlife trade described wildlife trafficking as a “global threat”, which also has links with other organised crimes.
1. Global Education Monitoring Report by UNESCO

Why is it in news?

- According to a UNESCO report, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in education systems across the world.

More Findings of the Report:

- About 40% of low- and lower-middle-income countries have not supported learners at risk of exclusion during this crisis, such as the poor, linguistic minorities etc.
- Efforts to maintain learning continuity during the pandemic may have actually worsened exclusion trends.
- During the height of school closures in April 2020, almost 91% of students around the world were out of school.

Distance Learning:

- Education systems responded with distance learning solutions, all of which offered less or more imperfect substitutes for classroom instruction.
- India has used the television lessons and online learning platforms for primary and secondary education.
- However, the digital divide lays bare the limitations of this approach.
- Not all students and teachers have access to adequate internet connection, equipment, skills and working conditions to take advantage of available platforms.

Disadvantage to Disabled:

- Resources for blind and deaf students may not be available outside schools.
- Children with learning disabilities may struggle with independent work in front of a computer.

Hampering Poor:

- The poor students depend on school for free meals or even free sanitary napkins.
- Cancellation of examinations may result in scoring dependent on teachers’ judgements of students instead, which could be affected by stereotypes of certain types of students.
- Higher drop-out rates are also a concern.

2. Slum population most at risk: ICMR

Why is it in news?

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) released the results of the first sero-survey on COVID-19 spread.
- The sero-surveillance study is been conducted in 83 districts covering 28,595 households and 26,400 individuals.

Outcomes of the Survey:

- The urban slum population was most vulnerable to the spread, followed by urban settlements.
- The ICMR clarified that the country is not in the community transmission phase.
• Compared to rural areas, the risk of spread was 1.09 times higher in urban areas and 1.89 times higher in urban slums.
• The infection fatality rate is very low at 0.08%.
• About 0.73% of the population surveyed showed evidence of past exposure to SARS-CoV-2.

About Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR):
• It is the apex body in India for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research.
• It is one of the oldest and largest medical research bodies in the world.
• The Government of India had set up the Indian Research Fund Association (IRFA) in 1911 with the specific objective of sponsoring and coordinating medical research in the country.
• After independence, it was redesignated the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in 1949, with considerably expanded scope of functions.
• The Governing Body of the Council is presided over by the Union Health Minister.
• The ICMR is funded by the Government of India through the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

3. Anti-drug plan

Why is it in news?
• On the 'International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking', an annual anti-drug action plan for 272 vulnerable districts was launched by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Details:
• The ‘Nasha Mukt Bharat’, or drug-free India campaign will focus not just on institutional support but also on community outreach programmes.
• The programmes would be conducted in the districts identified in coordination with the Narcotics Control Bureau.
• The Ministry would launch campaigns in schools and colleges to prevent drug abuse among youth.

Way out:
• Integrated Rehabilitation Centre for Addicts (IRCAs) should reach out to their communities to help those affected by addiction.
• It is important to sensitise parents and involve schools in, prevention of drug abuse.

4. Monuments with places of worship set to open

Why is it in news?
• More than 800 monuments across the country that double up as places of worship will be opened to the public from 8th June 2020.
• These places were being closed since March due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown.

Details:
• The Ministry of Culture had decided to open certain monuments with the safety procedures announced by the Union Health and Family Welfare and Home Ministries.
• The Archaeological Survey of India functions under the Ministry of Culture.
• The remaining monuments of the ASI’s total 3,691 protected sites, including the Taj Mahal in Agra, will remain closed to visitors for now.

Act for the protection of Monuments:
• The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (or AMASR Act) was passed in 1958.
The Archaeological Survey of India functions under the provisions of this act.

- The Act provides for the preservation of ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance, for the regulation of archaeological excavations and for the protection of sculptures, carvings and other like objects.

5.  **Adultery**

Why is it in news?
- The Supreme Court has refused to review its 2018 judgment which decriminalised adultery.

Details:
- The original judgment in 2018 had found that Section 497 (adultery) of the Indian Penal Code cannot “command” married couples to remain loyal to each other for the fear of penal punishment.

What is Adultery?
- Adultery means voluntary sexual intercourse of a married person other than with spouse.
- The legal definition of adultery however varies from country to country and statute to statute.
- In India the offence of adultery was punishable under Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). However, Supreme court struck it down in 2018.

6.  **National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)**

Why is it in news?
- The results of National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) have been released recently.

Outcomes of the Report:
- The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, is the country’s best in the field of higher education.
- The Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, stands at the second place, followed by IIT-Delhi.
- Under the universities category, the IISc topped the list, followed by Jawaharlal Nehru University and Banaras Hindu University.
- The three best engineering institutions are all IITs, with the Madras, Delhi and Bombay.
- The Indian Institutes of Management at Ahmedabad, Bengaluru and Kolkata took the top positions in the management category.
- National Law School of India University is the best for studying law, while the IIT-Kharagpur is the best place to study architecture.

About NIRF:
- It was launched by the HRD Ministry in 2016.
- It gives higher weight to parameters such as teaching and learning, student and faculty strength, use of financial resources, research papers and graduation outcomes.
- It also take into account the inclusivity and outreach measures, including gender, geographical and socioeconomic diversity and the welcoming of differently abled students.

7.  **1 in 5 people globally at risk of severe COVID-19: study**

Why is it in news?
- In just six months, nearly 8 million people worldwide have been stricken with confirmed cases of COVID-19, and at least 4,34,000 have died.

More from the Study Report:
- The deaths due to COVID-19 have not been distributed evenly.
Among the most vulnerable are people with underlying health conditions, such as diabetes and diseases that affect the heart and lungs.

According to a new modelling study, roughly 1.7 billion people around the world- 22% of the global population fall into that category.

Such data could help health officials focus containment efforts on people vulnerable to the virus.

About 4% of the world’s population, around 349 million people, would require hospitalisation if they became infected.

8. Puri Jagannath Rath Yatra

Why is it in news?
- A three-judge Bench, led by Chief Justice of India had stayed the yatra scheduled for 23rd June 2020.
- Chief Justice had cited public health and the safety of citizens as the reason, saying the event would attract a large gathering amid the pandemic.

About Jagannath Temple:
- The Jagannath Temple located in Odisha’s Puri, is one of the Dhamas (Holiest of the holy place) out of four Dhamas i.e. Puri, Dwarka, Badrinath & Rameswar, in India.
- Lord Jagannath, Devi Subhadra and elder brother Balabhadra are being worshipped in Puri (The Purusottama Kshetra).
- The Jagannath Puri Temple was constructed by a famous king of Ganga Dynasty Ananta Varman Chodaganga Deva dating back to 12th century at the seashore Puri.
- The main temple of Jagannath structure is constructed in Kalinga architecture.

Rath Yatra:
- The Rath Yatra is an annual parade in which the deities are carried outside the temple on 2 set of chariots (3 each).
- In the Jagannath Rath Yatra, three chariots for the deities - Lord Balabhadra, Lord Jagannath and Devi Subhadra are built every year.

9. Ambubachi Mela

Why is it in news?
- The Ambubachi festival began at the Kamakhya temple on June 22 without mendicants, hermits and devotees for the first time in almost 500 years.

More about the Mela and Kamakhya Temple:
- The Ambubachi Mela is one of the prime attractions of Guwahati's Kamakhya Devi Temple.
- The 3-day festival takes place in the Assamese month of Ahaar, and it usually attracts people from across the country and abroad.
- The Kamakhya temple is one of 51 Shaktipeeth centres in India.
- It is believed that the temple’s presiding Goddess Devi Kamakhyā – the Mother Shakti – goes through her annual menstruation cycle during this time stretch.
- The Kamakhya Temple is situated at the Nilachal hills in the western region of Guwahati.

10. Keeladi excavations

Why is it in news?
- Skeletal remains of a child were excavated from Konthagai village, part of the sixth phase of ongoing excavations in the ancient site of Keeladi.

Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs June - 2020 (Study Material)
More about the Findings:

- Tamil Nadu Archaeology Department (TNAD) came up with new findings.
- It has stated that the cultural deposits unearthed during excavations at Keeladi in Sivaganga district could be safely dated to a period between 6th century BCE and 1st century CE.
- The new findings place Keeladi artefacts about 300 years earlier than previously believed — 3rd century BCE.
- The “second urbanisation [the first being Indus] of Vaigai plains happened in Tamil Nadu around 6th century BCE as it happened in Gangetic plains.
- The recent scientific dates obtained for Keeladi findings push back the date of Tamil-Brahmi script to another century, i.e., 6th century BCE.
- The finding indicates the presence of cow/ox, buffalo, sheep, goat, nilgai, blackbuck, wild boar and peacock.
- This finding suggests that the society in Keeladi had used animals predominantly for agricultural purposes.
- While three excavations were undertaken by the Archaeological Survey of India, the fourth excavation was undertaken by the TNAD.
1. Scientists find second most common coronavirus type in India

Why is it in news?
- CSIR labs identified second most prevalent type in India.

Details:
- Most dominant type is A2a.
- Second most dominant is named as A3i.
- With this, total 11 SARS-CoV-2 types identified globally and 6 out of them found in India.
- Virus type based on evolutionary similarities, characteristic mutations and similarities in Genome
- Mutation in A2a type can penetrate easily into lungs.
- Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology and Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology are labs of CSIR.
- A3i type is dominant in Telangana, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Delhi.
- A3i type mutation is slow compared to A2a type.

2. Homoeopathic drug and Arsenicum album 30 – Debate

Why is it in news?
- Several states recommended it for prophylactic (preventive) use against Covid-19 after AYUSH ministry advisory.

Details:
- Debate over it started as there is no scientific evidence for its effectivity against covid-19.
- Arsenic Album:
  (1) Made by heating arsenic with distilled water.
  (2) Process is repeated for 3 days.
  (3) It has less than 1% arsenic.
  (4) It is normally used for correcting inflammation of body — for treatment of diarrhoea, cough and cold.
  (5) Also used to treat anxiety, restlessness, ulcerations, burning pains.
- Effects: long exposure lead to skin cancer, pulmonary and cardiovascular diseases.

3. SpaceX Crew Dragon

Why is it in news?
- SpaceX’s Dragon spacecraft with two NASA astronauts successfully docked with the International Space Station (ISS).
- Dragon spacecraft lifted off atop the SpaceX’s Falcon 9 rocket in a historic launch from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

More about the Mission:
- Elon Musk’s SpaceX has become the first private company to launch human beings into orbit.
- The mission was originally scheduled for Wednesday, May 27, but was postponed due to bad
weather caused by the Tropical Storm Bertha.

- This is the first time that astronauts (Nasa astronauts Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken) have been launched from US soil since the STS-135 mission on July 8, 2011.
- After STS-135 mission, all astronauts were flown to the International Space Station in Russia’s Soyuz Capsule.

About Falcon 9:

- Falcon 9 is a reusable, two-stage rocket designed and manufactured by SpaceX for the reliable and safe transport of people and payloads into Earth orbit and beyond.
- Falcon 9 is the world’s first orbital class reusable rocket.
- Reusability allows SpaceX to refly the most expensive parts of the rocket, which in turn drives down the cost of space access.

4. Gas leak in Vishakhapatnam

Why is it in news?

- National Green Tribunal intervened into it suo-motu and appointed a committee to investigate it.

Details:

- Committee findings
  1. Vapour leak due to self-polymerization of styrene monomer.
  2. Constant Circulation of styrene needs to be done to keep its temperature under control.
  3. Lockdown resulted into halt of operations. It lead to stagnation of 1800 tonnes.
  4. Resultantly, it led to Diels-Alder reaction and resulted into self-polymerization.
  5. Onset temperature for styrene is 66 degree Celsius.
  6. Onset temperature is a temperature at which heat generated by reaction cannot be removed completely from vessel and resulted into detectable temperature increase.
  7. At Vishakhapatnam, there was no apparatus to record onset temperature which lead to increase in temperature till boiling point (145 degree Celsius for styrene).
  8. Consequently, vapour formed and resulted into leak of gas.
  9. Company didn’t have Tertiary Butyl Catechol (TBC) which controls the temperature and self-polymerization.
  10. Ideal temperature for storing styrene is 15-18 degree Celsius and should exceed 25 at any point of time.
  11. No mechanism present to monitor dissolved oxygen levels.
  12. If oxygen falls under 6%, It is a clear indication of self-polymerization.

- Claim of activists:
  1. Report doesn’t mention styrene oxide (which is result of styrene and oxygen mixture) which is very toxic.
  2. National Environmental Engineering Research Institute will investigate whether water from Meghadrigedda reservoir is safe for consumption or not.

5. Cheaper and more effective RT-PCR method to test COVID-19 samples

Why is it in news?

- Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) suggested RT-PCR (Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction) test for COVID-19.

Details:
Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) is located in Hyderabad.

RT-PCR (Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction) test is based on dry swabs.

This bypasses RNA isolation stage less time consumption and less expensive.

**Usual method of testing:**
1. Nasal swab taken and place in viral transport medium (VTM).
2. Viral RNA extracted from part of liquid of viral transport medium (VTM) which consumes more time and it is expensive.
3. Then RT-PCR test carried out.

**Procedure:**
1. Virus in dry swabs can stay for several days at 4 degree. Then, Dry Swab immersed into vial containing Tris-EDTA (TE) buffer solution, protected by ice (Not in VTM).
2. Small part of the dry swab-TE extract was taken in a new vial and heated to 98 degree C. It destroys the protective wall of the virus particles and lead to releasing its RNA means RNA isolation.
3. Heating at 98 degree Celsius results into virus inactivation.
4. RNA isolation followed by RT-PCR.

### 6. Lancet and HCQ

**Why is it in news?**

- Lancet published article on non-effectivity of HCQ to treat COVID-19 and later it retracted it.

**Details:**

- Original study of Lancet publish about Non-effectiveness of HCQ to treat COVID-19 which lead to suspension of solidarity trial by WHO.
- Solidarity trial - an international clinical trial on possible Covid-19 treatments, including HCQ.
- Later Lancet retracted the study due to inability to complete independent audit by 3 among 4 authors. So, WHO reinstated solidarity trial.

- **HCQ and chloroquine:**
  1. Oral drug Used for autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and for malaria.
  2. Chloroquine is different from HCQ and chloroquine is used as anti-malarial drug.

- **HCQ is currently under investigation and used for symptomatic covid patients only by registered medical practitioners.**

### 7. GM seeds debate

**Why is it in news?**

- Possibility of mass sowing of GM seeds for Maize, Soybean, mustard brinjal and herbicide tolerant (Ht) cotton.
- Part of sowing agitation by Shetkari Sanghatana.

**Details:**

- Genetic Engineering is introduction of foreign gene into seeds to get desired results.
- Foreign gene could be from a plant, an animal or even a soil bacterium.

- **Bt cotton:**
  1. Only GM crop that is allowed in India.
  2. Aims at common pest pink bollworm.
  3. Foreign gene from soil bacterium Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt) – develop protein toxic to bollworm.

- **Herbicide tolerant (Ht) cotton:**
(1) Foreign gene from another soil bacterium.
(2) Aim to develop resistance to common herbicide glyphosate.
• Bt Brinjal is created by additional gene to resist attacks of fruit and shoot borer.
• Legal side in India:
  (1) Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) is apex body for approval for commercial GM crops.
  (2) In 2002, (GEAC) approved Bt cotton.
  (3) Punishment for unapproved GM crop is jail term of 5 years and fine of Rs 1 lakh under the Environmental Protection Act, 1989.

8. ICMR widened the range of options for testing

Why is it in news?
• ICMR approved ELISA test kits by 2 companies in addition to its own technology.

Details:
• ELISA
  (1) Stands for Enzyme-Linked Immuno-Sorbent Assay.
  (2) Developed in 1974.
  (3) It detects whether a person's immune system has produced antibodies against a particular infection such as HIV.
  (4) Use of enzymes to detect presence of antibodies in blood sample.
  (5) ELISA test types depending on antibodies tested for.
    (a) Immunoglobulin G (IgG) for later stage of infection.
    (b) Immunoglobulin M (IgM) for early stage of infection.
  (6) ELISA test for Covid-19 is only approved for serosurveys – to estimate proportion of population exposed to infection.

<table>
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• RT-PCR (Real Time-Polymerase Chain Reaction):
  (1) Test For individual diagnosis and treatment of Covid-19.
  (2) It was used for Ebola and Zika diagnosis earlier.
  (3) Final confirmatory test for covid-19 in India.
  (4) It is based on oral and nasal swabs and extraction of RNA.
  (5) Other option to swab is bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL) method. Fluid from sputum or lungs which has higher viral load creates higher chance of detection.

• Rapid Antibody test:
  (1) Tests blood from finger.
  (2) Plasma or serum can also be used instead of blood.
  (3) Less accurate. So used for population survey only.
  (4) ELISA is more accurate than Rapid test.

• TrueNat:
  (1) Designed by MolBio Diagnostics Pvt Ltd, Goa, is commonly used for tuberculosis and HIV
The Unique Academy

9. **China postpones Beidou satellite launch**

*Why is it in news?*
- China Postponed final satellite of its Beidou Navigation network due to technical problem.

*Details:*
- Beidou is 35 satellites navigation system developed by China.
- It’s an alternative to USA’ Global Positioning System (GPS).
- It will help to keep military communications secure and improve weapons targeting, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.
- It has civilian applications too as 70% mobile are Beidou enabled.

10. **NASA’s Next Mars rover to honour medical community**

*Why is it in news?*
- NASA will attach a commemorative plate to rover to honour medical community in the background of work done during covid-19 crisis.

*Details:*
- Rover’s name is Perseverance.
- Plate symbol shows that earth at the top with spacecraft path and staff with serpent (which is a symbol of medical community).

11. **What is dexamethasone?**

*Why is it in news?*
- WHO Recovery trial reported that dexamethasone reduces death rates in certain covid-19 patients.

*Details:*
- It is anti-inflammatory drug which is used to reduce activity of immune systems.
- It falls in a category called corticosteroids.
- It is used in treatment for rheumatological inflammatory conditions: inflammations of muscles, inflammation of blood vessels, chronic arthritis, and lupus.
- It is used in lung diseases, kidney inflammation and eye inflammation, and to reduce swelling associated with tumours of the brain and spine.
- In cancer patients, it is used to treat nausea and vomiting caused by chemotherapy drugs.
- Drug found to have reduced deaths by one-third in ventilated patients and by one-fifth in patients receiving only oxygen.
- Clinical management protocol for Covid-19 released by the Health Ministry of India allows the use of the corticosteroid methylprednisolone.
- Health Ministry protocol says a larger dose of glucocorticoid will delay the removal of coronavirus due to immunosuppressive effects.

12. **IN-SPACe:**

*Why is it in news?*
- The government approved the creation of a new organization ‘Indian National Space Promotion
and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe)’ to ensure greater private participation in India’s space activities.

- IN-SPACe will assess the needs and demands of private players, including educational and research institutions, and, explore ways to accommodate these requirements in consultation with ISRO.

Data:

- Indian industry had a barely three per cent share in a rapidly growing global space economy which was already worth at least $360 billion.
- Only two per cent of this market was for rocket and satellite launch services, which require fairly large infrastructure and heavy investment.
- The remaining 95 per cent related to satellite-based services, and ground-based systems.

Limits of Indian Industries:

- Indian industry is unable to compete, because till now its role has been mainly that of suppliers of components and sub-systems.
- Indian industries do not have the resources or the technology to undertake independent space projects of the kind that US companies such as SpaceX have been doing, or provide space-based services.
- Additionally, the demand for space-based applications and services is growing even within India, and ISRO is unable to cater to this.

Other Organisations:

- IN-SPACe is the second space organisation created by the government in the last two years.
- In the 2019 Budget, the government had announced the setting up of a New Space India Limited (NSIL), a public sector company that would serve as a marketing arm of ISRO.
- Its main purpose is to market the technologies developed by ISRO and bring it more clients that need space-based services.
- The same role was already being performed by Antrix Corporation, another PSU working under the Department of Space.

13. **10 year Sun time-lapse by NASA**

Why is it in news?

- NASA published pictures of 10 year time-lapse of Sun.

Details:

- It is derived from data collected by Solar Dynamics Observatory (SDO).
- SDO captures an image of the Sun every 0.75 seconds.
- SDO mission of NASA was launched in the year 2010 to understand the origin of Sun’s energy, how the inside of the Sun works, and how energy is stored and released in the Sun’s atmosphere.
- SDO is the first satellite under the Living with a Star (LWS) program at NASA.

14. **Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome**

Why is it in news?

- Kolkata woman found with rare disorder ‘Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome’.

Details:

- It is a condition in which a person is born genetically male, but has all physical traits of a woman.
- Starting from her voice, developed breasts, normal external genitalia, everything is that of a woman.
- However, uterus and ovaries have been absent since birth. She has also never experienced
menstruation.

- Karyotyping test revealed that her chromosome complement was ‘XY’ and not ‘XX’, as found in a woman.
- Clinical examinations found out she has testicles inside her body.
- She was diagnosed with testicular cancer which is called seminoma.

15. Lunar Loo challenge

Why is it in news?
- NASA launched Lunar Loo challenge.

Details:
- It was launched to attract innovative solutions to solve the problem of human waste management in space.
- Expects model of a toilet which will work not just in microgravity, but also lunar gravity.
- Lunar gravity is 1/6th of Earth gravity.
- The challenge, in partnership with HeroX, is a part of NASA’s Artemis mission.
- Artemis mission plans to take the first woman and the next men to the moon by 2024.

16. Black hole merges with unusual compact object

Why is it in news?
- LIGO Scientific and VIRGO Collaborations detected merging of black hole with unusual compact object.

Details:
- Compact object means its mass falls between typical black hole and neutron star.
- Unusual due to mass ratio which was 1:9. This is highest disparity in masses observed till date.
- Black hole
  (1) Region of spacetime where gravitational force is too high that nothing including light can escape from it.
  (2) Formed after supernova explosions of massive stars.
  (3) In his general theory of relativity, published in 1915, Albert Einstein was the first to suggest that our universe contains such strange, dense, massive objects.
  (4) Theoretical physicist John Wheeler first coined the name black hole many years later, in 1967.

17. Rare syndrome linked to COVID-19 found in USA kids and adolescents

Why is it in news?
- Life threatening Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C) found in 300 USA kids and Adolescents.

Details:
- MIS-C:
  (1) Symptoms are similar to symptoms with toxic shock and Kawasaki disease.
  (2) Symptoms include fever, rashes, swollen glands and, in severe cases, heart inflammation.
  (3) Trend is emerging of the syndrome occurring two to four weeks after infection by the coronavirus.
  (4) It is not clear why MIS-C develops in some children and adolescents and not in others.
Internal Security

1. Hardship may push people into making drugs for a living: UNODC

Why is it in news?
- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has published 2020 World Drug Report.

World Drug Report 2020:
- It has highlighted a wide range of possible consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on illegal drug production, supply and consumption.
- During the 2008 economic crisis, there was reductions in drug-related budgets of the governments which resulted in overall increase in drug use, with a shift towards cheaper and more harmful drugs.
- Countries fighting pandemic have overlooked drugs related illegal activities which have diverted their attention to other illegal activities, including cybercrime and trafficking in falsified medicines.

2. India looks to deploy Naval Liaisons

Why is it in news?
- After joining the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) as Observer in March, India is looking to post Navy Liaison Officers at the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar and also at the European maritime surveillance initiative in the Strait of Hormuz for improved Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).

Details:
- This will be in the overall realm of improving linkages of the Navy’s Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram with other IFCs and become the repository for all maritime data in the IOR.
- The RMIFC functions under the aegis of the IOC, of which India became an Observer in March 2020 along with Japan and the United Nations.
- The IOC is a regional forum in the Southwest Indian Ocean, comprising five nations — Comoros, France (Reunion), Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles.
- China and the European Union (EU) have been Observers in the IOC since 2016 and 2017, respectively.

Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)
- The Navy set up the IFC-IOR in December 2018 within the premises of the Information Management and Analysis Centre in Gurugram to track maritime movements in the region.
- France became the first country to deploy a LO at the IFC-IOR, followed by the U.S. and several other countries including Australia, Japan and the United Kingdom have announced their intention to post LOs.

3. BEML’s internal data, staff email IDs hacked, leaked on dark web

Why is it in news?
The official email ids of seven employees of an Indian Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) working in the defence industry were found to be hacked, and internal data dumped on the dark net.

About dark net:
- The dark net, also known as the "dark web," is a component of the greater "deep web," a network of encrypted Internet content that is not accessible via traditional search engines.
- The dark net is most often used for illegal activities such as black markets, illegal file sharing, and the exchanging of illegal goods or services (including stolen financial and private data), and the anonymity of the darknet attracts drug-dealers, hackers, and child pornography peddlers.
- Dark net markets have been instrumental in the development of cryptocurrencies because transactions completed on dark net markets using cryptocurrencies protect both the buyer and seller.

Source: The Hindu, Investopedia.

4. Tablighi activity now a specific visa violation

Why is it in news?
- The Union Home Ministry has included “indulging in Tablighi activities” as a specific visa violation that will attract a fine of $500.

Details:
- **General policy guidelines relating to Indian visa:** The guidelines provide details of 24 categories of visas and the various conditions under which they could be granted online or by missions abroad.
- MHA has added a new category—“restriction on engaging in Tabligh activities” in the “general policy guidelines relating to Indian visa”.
- **Amended guidelines:**
  1. Foreign nationals granted any type of visa and Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) cardholders shall not be permitted to engage themselves in Tabligh work.
  2. There will be no restriction in visiting religious places and attending normal religious activities like attending religious discourses.
  3. However, preaching religious ideologies, making speeches in religious places, distribution of audio or visual display/ pamphlets pertaining to religious ideologies, spreading conversion etc. will not be allowed.

5. Govt. to boost infrastructure in areas along China border

Why is it in news?
- To ramp up infrastructure along the China border, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has decided to spend 10% funds of a Centrally sponsored scheme only on projects in Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim.

About Border Area Development Program:
- **Implementing Ministry:** Department of Border Management, Ministry of Home Affairs has been implementing through the State Governments as part of a comprehensive approach to Border Management.
- **Aim:** To meet the special development needs of the people living in remote and inaccessible areas situated near the international border and to saturate the border areas with the essential infrastructure through convergence of Central/State/BADP/Local schemes and participatory approach.
1. **Tropical storm ‘Christobal’ formed near Mexico**

**Why is it in news?**
- Threat of flood in Mexico increased due to tropical storm formed near Mexico.

**Details:**
- It is a remnant of Eastern Pacific’s Tropical storm ‘Amanda’.
- Christobal formed in Southern Gulf of Mexico.

2. **World Environment Day 2020**

**Why is it in news?**
- The day is observed on 5 June every year (Designated by United Nations).
- Conservation efforts during lockdown by organizations.

**Details:**
- It is celebrated since 1974.
- World Environment Day is also known as Environment Day, Eco Day.
- Theme for 2020 was ‘Time for Nature’.
- World Environment Day 2020, hosted by Colombia.

3. **With Monsoon, African Snails came back to Kochi**

**Why is it in news?**
- With coming of monsoon, African Snails have been spotted in areas near Kochi.

**Details:**
- Also known as Achatina Fulica.
- Rated among 100 most invasive species by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- Earlier residents used chemical Metaldehyde to kill snails – later replaced by mixture of copper sulphate and tobacco decoction.
- It is hermaphroditic - each snail having both male and female reproductive parts.
- Each individual snail can lay up to 500-900 eggs, twice a year.
- An adult snail lives for 5-7 years and can start laying eggs within a year.

4. **Dragonfly endemic to Western Ghats**

**Why is it in news?**
- Dragonfly endemic to western ghats has been photographed for the first time.

**Details:**
- It belongs to gomphidae family which has six dragonflies.
- Out of 6, two in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, one in Sri Lanka and three others in the North-East are spotted.
- Megalogomphus hannyngtoni is seen in Kerala.

5. **U.S. report takes note of CAA, NRC**
Why is it in news?

- The U.S. State Department has released its annual International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report, a survey of the state of religious freedom across the world, submitted to the U.S. Congress.

Details:

- The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent bipartisan commission and separate from the State Department’s Office of International Religious Freedom.
- It has, in April, recommended to Secretary of State that the State Department downgrade India’s religious freedom to the lowest grade — Country of Particular Concern (CPC).
- The Secretary of State is not obliged to accept the recommendation and has not always done so.
- The country report for India, which looks back on the developments in 2019, takes note of the change in the status of Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

6. Japan to rename islands disputed with China

Why is it in news?

- A local council in southern Japan voted to rename an area, including islands disputed with China and Taiwan.

Details:

- The local assembly of Ishigaki city approved a plan to change the name of the area covering the Tokyo-controlled Senkaku Islands — known by Taiwan and China as the Diaoyus — from “Tonoshiro” to “Tonoshiro Senkaku.”

7. S. China Sea rights should be rooted in UN treaty: ASEAN

Why is it in news?

- ASEAN leaders asked China to follow UN treaty in South China Sea.


- It is an international agreement that defines the rights of nations to the world’s oceans.
- It is the basis for determining maritime entitlements, sovereign rights, jurisdiction and legitimate interests over maritime zones.

8. Border Adjustment Tax (BAT)

Why is it in news?

- NITI Aayog member V.K. Saraswat on Wednesday favoured imposing a border adjustment tax (BAT) on imports to provide a level-playing field to domestic industries.

What is BAT?

- BAT is a duty that is proposed to be imposed on imported goods in addition to the customs levy that gets charged at the port of entry.

Argument od Mr. Saraswat:

- U.S.-China trade tensions are currently at historically high levels.
- In the post-COVID world, it is expected to rise further.
- So first we have to do a border adjustment tax to provide the domestic industry a level-playing field vis-a-vis imports.